

The University of San Francisco

## USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center

---

Doctoral Dissertations

All Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and  
Projects

---

1-1-2022

### ¿TÚ QUÉ SABES?: LATINA DOCTORAL WOMEN DISRUPTING AND RESISTING DOMINANT KNOWLEDGE

Sendy Ramos Madsen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/diss>



Part of the Education Commons

---

The University of San Francisco

**¿TÚ QUÉ SABES?: LATINA DOCTORAL WOMEN DISRUPTING  
AND RESISTING DOMINANT KNOWLEDGE**

A Dissertation Proposal  
To  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of the Degree  
Doctor of Education

by

Sendy Celina Ramos-Madsen

Summer 2022

## ABSTRACT

Education environments have systematically excluded, silenced, and erroneously spoken on behalf of Women of Color. Linear forms of scholarship and research practices propagate the dominant perspective and fail to address systems of oppression that result in epistemic suppression and academic hostility towards brown minds. Historically, Latina women have not been seen as creators of knowledge, and their access to educational spaces has been restricted. According to census projections, in 2036, Latinas/os will account for the largest minority group in the United States and one-third of the American educational system. Therefore, academic spaces must establish practices to include Latina women as knowledge sources.

Through individual *pláticas* and a narrative inquiry approach, this study explored how Latina women use their knowledge and cultural ways of knowing to disrupt, resist, and navigate traditional, hegemonic, and Eurocentric educational settings. Participants' *testimonios* were collected and analyzed using narrative analysis. Grounded in Chicana Feminist Epistemologies (CFE) and Community Cultural Wealth framework (CCW), challenge dominant Eurocentric epistemologies and move away from deficit-based narratives to asset-based methodologies.

The findings of this study illustrate the problematic nature of the prevailing patriarchy within family, community, and society at large. Women face marginalization across academic and professional environments through ascribed gender norms that are imposed and enacted. Latina women navigate multiple sites of oppression by negotiating culture, language, and identity. The influence of familial knowledge was evident, and participants employed various forms of community cultural wealth to resist normative hegemonic ideologies. Additionally, mentoring and sisterhood were a way that Latina women sought to support their academic and life journeys. Participants challenged existing gender roles and power relations by balancing

relationships and family expectations and continuing to invest in their own professional educational growth.

The results suggest that current institutional academic support structures available to women are not necessarily the most appropriate for facilitating equality, access, and visibility, because these so-called support structures have been created without considering Latina women's needs. Moreover, institutions have an obligation to review current policies and implement processes that ensure equal representation and opportunity. Additional research is needed by and of Latinas/os to mitigate the skewed information that has previously been published. Future research must be approached with an inclusive mentality and should consider whose voice and knowledge is centered and what purpose scholarship will serve.

## SIGNATURE PAGE

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Sendy Celina Ramos-Madsen  
Candidate

8/26/2022  
Date

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Rosa Jimenez  
Chairperson

8/26/2022  
Date

Dr. Ursula Aldana  
Committee Member

8/26/2022  
Date

Dr. Emma Fuentes  
Committee Member

8/26/2022  
Date

## DEDICATION

To women who were denied entry into institutions of higher education and have not been allowed to theorize.

To Latina women whose stories have not been told and have not been seen as those who create data, information, and knowledge, I see you.

To young ladies called *vagas*: others might not agree with your choices that defy patriarchal systems. Do not waste your time trying to conform to the notion of what others think; focus your energy on continuing to be a *vaga*, so that together we empower the next generation of *vagas*.

To Caleb, Emma and Genesis, do not let the world hold you down. Be defiant, refuse to be silenced, and use your voice to tell your story. Acceptance into the academy is not everything, but you have the strength and knowledge to survive here. Understand that you belong here.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Gracias*, to the courageous *pensadoras*. It was an honor to share this journey with you. I extend my deepest gratitude to each of you for your vulnerability, time, and support. I acknowledge that these pages are not enough to hold the entirety of your knowledge and narratives. I look forward to our continued *pláticas*, karaoke nights, drag shows, and coming together in community to theorize.

*Con respeto*, thank you to my chair, Dr. Rosa Jimenez, for the guidance, feedback, and words of encouragement. Your empathy, patience, and words of wisdom kept me grounded in my own truth and helped me to find my voice. Most of all, thank you for the tough love and knowledge, without this, the research would not have been possible. I would also like to show gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Emma Fuentes and Dr. Ursula Aldana. Thank you for creating a community of people who empowered me as a Latina scholar.

To my partner, thank you for your unconditional love and support. I am grateful that you were able to put up with my chaos. For understanding the value and importance of this academic adventure and for all the meals that kept me writing. You kept me going when I wanted to sleep in, procrastinate and give up.

Most importantly, none of this could have happened without my family. To my parents, brothers, and sisters, I am thankful for your endless love. To my parents, I see the sacrifices you made to forge a path for your children. I see your strength, courage, and persistence. I am driven by the hope that I can honor our history and culture through this document. To my brothers and sisters, I have been in school for far too many years, and this journey has reminded me that I am fortunate to be surrounded by a community of people that will stand by my side.

I would also like to recognize the invaluable assistance of individuals who read and edited drafts. This dissertation stands as a testament to the invaluable knowledge Latina women add to academic research and discourse.



## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	ii
SIGNATURE PAGE	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
<b>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
Inspiration and Rage: Introduction to the Problem	1
Research on the Problem	6
Purpose Statement	9
Research Questions:	11
Theoretical Framework: Chicana Feminist Epistemology	11
Educational Significance	16
Definitions of Terms	16
<b>CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>19</b>
Coffee Analogy: Reflections and Musings	19
Decolonization of Higher Education	22
Knowledge Production: History and Hierarchy	26
Hierarchy of knowledge	28
Mentorship	31
Latinas/os in Higher Education	35
Academic Preparedness	39
Funding Inequalities	41
Belonging	42
Microaggressions	44
Summary	46
<b>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>48</b>
Introduction	48
Methodology	49
Method	50
Context and Site	50
Setting, Access, and Recruitment	51
Participants	53
Data Collection and Analysis	63
Data Analysis	65
Ethical Considerations	66
Positionality	66
Limitations of the Study	68
<b>CHAPTER IV: TESTIMONIOS</b>	<b>69</b>
Dr. Alejanda, Academic Mama	70
Eliana, The Counselor	73
Grace, Student Advocate	78
Jenny, The Educator	83
Dr. Olga, Student Dean	87
Dr. Pilar, Social Justice Warrior	91

Dr. Valeria, Chicana Mama	96
Self/Researcher, La Vaga	101
Summary	104
<b>CHAPTER V: FINDINGS</b>	<b>106</b>
Introduction	106
Finding 1: Femtorship and Sisterhood	107
Analysis of femtorship and sisterhood findings	111
Finding 2: Community	113
Analysis of community findings	116
Finding 3: Latina Grit	116
Analysis of Latina Grit	122
Finding 4: Representation	127
Analysis of Representation	133
Conclusion	136
<b>CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION</b>	<b>139</b>
Introduction	139
Summary of the Study	141
Recommendations for Higher Education	142
Recommendations for Faculty	143
Recommendations for Research	144
Recommendations for Latina Women in Graduate Schools and Beyond	144
Concluding Remarks	146
References	150

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### **Inspiration and Rage: Introduction to the Problem**

I have always admired my mother's strength and her ability to smile through the pain of oppression, racism, and unjust situations. I witnessed her physical pain from hours of standing and working backbreaking physical jobs. I can only imagine the emotional pain she underwent, fearing that she might be unable to provide the bare essentials for her family. My mother, an immigrant, and submissive wife in a patriarchal social structure, was a self-taught doctor, an after-school tutor, an accountant, a businesswoman, and a hustler. She is an individual who never conveyed her frustration, fear, or anger towards the oppressive systems she experienced. My mother is humble and has never asked others to praise her for her accomplishments, courage, and knowledge. Unfortunately, like many Women of Color, her patience, strength, and resilience tend to go unnoticed or are overshadowed and forgotten. I recall stories of how she worked the fields with other women, taught herself English, learned how to drive, and daily navigated systems in a country that kept trying to hold her down.

Like many other farmworkers, she slept under trees in trailer homes and places most people would not even consider falling asleep. For many years my mother and family followed the harvest seasons. One crop season in California, the next one in Washington, then back to Oregon, and on to the next crop season. Each season, you gather your belongings, uproot, and move to the following location. They could be considered early adopters of what we now see as traveling nomads. In all seriousness, undertaking these journeys was not simple when you factor in traveling, working while nursing, and raising young children. I do not recall many of these journeys because my parents shifted to more secure and stable jobs. To better understand our

family's experiences and history, a few cousins and I once adventured on a trip from California to Washington. Our intention for this trip was to understand the context and landscape of working in the fields. It is important to note that the following example is my personal experience.

In Washington, our destination was a cherry field, and I did not manage to pick cherries. I remember being cautious not to fall off the ladder; apart from that, I could not figure out how to pick cherries and carry a bucket simultaneously. The pace of my so-called picking of cherries was painfully slow in comparison to the experts around me. As I watched their balance and efficiency, I saw their years of experience and expertise reflected. Just imagining if I was getting paid for that work, I would have probably made the bare minimum. That night several people gathered around a fire, and in community, they shared stories about their past and journeys to Washington. In that group, there were individuals from all over the country; for some, this was their first time at the cherry farm, while others were regulars who made the trek each year. At night we slept in a small basic cabin, and to call it a cabin is a stretch. They were small shelters with four walls with no insulation and intended to host as many people as possible.

Sleeping in small cabins or on the ground did not bother me because I grew up camping and watching the stars. That particular night in Washington, on that cherry farm, I did not manage to get much sleep. The reason I was not able to sleep was not due to the stiff beds; it was because rats kept running past my feet. At first, I thought I was dreaming, or rather having a nightmare. I told myself there was no way a rat had just rushed over my feet. I have never wanted to be so wrong in my life, but that is just one of the things you have to overcome when you are in a field and when you only have the option to sleep in what barely can be called a shelter. As I was lying in bed, I could only think of getting out of this place, but in the morning,

some of my family members stayed back as we left. I acknowledge that I had the privilege to walk away from that space without negative consequences. However, for many farmworkers, daylight meant another day of work, hustling under the sun to fill as many buckets with cherries before their back, feet, and hands hurt so much that they slowed down. And yet even as their body ached, they continued to work. This work is challenging, physically demanding, and destroys the body and I respect each farmworker and have always admired their continuous sacrifices to better their future and that of their communities.

I come from a long history of immigrant workers, survivors, and powerful, wise women who worked the fields while they were sick, tired, and pregnant. My mother retells stories of how she picked fruit while pregnant with my brothers, and when she gave birth and they were young, she took my brothers to the field with her. She and other women laid blankets under the trees for their children to lay on and continued to work. As these women worked, they talked about life lessons, retold their hopes and dreams, and shared knowledge. There are schools of thought that have created narratives that claim many Latinas/os become field workers and hold blue color jobs because we all know that they are naturals at this type of labor or because we are criminals and this is the best we can get. However, why most immigrants lean on this particular industry is not often mentioned. It is not due to our “lack” of qualifications but rather that the United States failing to recognize specific international documentation and certifications and systematic “racial and class classifications” (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 290). Immigrants, just like any other humans, have financial obligations. When offered minimal opportunities, they work with what is available, even if that means working the fields with a law degree.

My mother was one of those individuals, she was educated in cosmetology, but her license was not accepted in California when she came to the United States. So, while she studied

English and learned to navigate the systems, she worked with what was available, and many times, working in the fields was the only option. Society often overlooked my mother's knowledge and experience; her story was untold, and her silence was taken as resignation. Yet, resignation was never an option. My mother suffered in silence when faced with oppression and barriers but resisted, endured, and carried her emotional and work-induced scars with honor. She worked with her hands in the fields and hustled but never had the opportunity to finish school. Yet, she holds vast knowledge. I grew up hearing phrases such as: “*en la vida uno tiene que trabajar*”, “*mija echale ganas*”, “*asi es la vida, no tengas verguenza*” (in life one has to work, daughter keep at it, this is life, do not be ashamed). My mother's struggle was a constant reminder that life was not easy, but she took pride in her work regardless of her work.

I, like many others, was encouraged to seek formal education to break the cycle of working in the field and end poverty. But I have seen first-hand the hostility towards Women of Color that still exists at all levels of everyday life and is visible in higher education institutions. Macias and Redondo (2012) indicate that hostility continues to be prevalent at the research level and is reinforced by higher institutions. Women of Color struggle because they are often excluded from entering into academic discourse as they are not seen as knowledge producers. The very few times they are admitted into this space, their contributions are often dismissed as “irrelevant to the production of real knowledge” (Moya, 2011, p. 79). Historically, we have seen discrimination against people of color, and their histories and knowledge were colonized and silenced (Collins, 1986).

In ways and matters of importance and small things in everyday life - colonization defines social norms, knowledge, and valid cultural practices. An everyday example of walking into Starbucks is similar to my experiences in American society, K-12, and higher education. If

you have experience and prior knowledge of coffee, you can probably walk into Starbucks and feel quite comfortable. On the other hand, like many others, I walk into Starbucks and immediately feel overwhelmed. At times there are too many options with names I struggle to pronounce. If I am being honest, I often feel out of place. In large part, because I did not grow up drinking lattes at home, partly because they are overpriced coffees but mainly because this is a space I am not accustomed to. While in this space, another aspect that reminds me that I have walked into a different space is that I have a unique name, and employees can never pronounce or write it correctly. I walk away with a Westernized name on a cup, "Sandy," and I am too timid to correct them. But that is not it; timid is not the right feeling. Instead, I am tired of correcting others on the spelling and pronunciation, of having to smile after the slaughter, and spelling or mispronunciation of my name. I am tired of feeling ashamed of my name because others have made me feel this shame. Yet, I smile.

I am exhausted from being afraid to voice my discontent, of blaming the system and being told that I am making excuses by blaming the system and not working hard enough, long enough, or not wanting it enough. Our voices have been silenced, similar to what has happened in many academic spaces, where academia has failed to properly include the voices of those that look, speak, think, and write differently than what is considered the norm. Academia has systematically excluded Women of Color, their agency, and knowledge from books, curricula, and many more aspects of higher education. To a large extent, Western academics have assumed they can speak on our behalf (Spivak & Said, 1988). The ivory tower has taken our forced silence as an invitation to theorize about our experiences, our knowledge, and my knowledge. Yet, they ignored and failed to address that their systems of oppression are responsible for silencing our knowledge. Quijano (2000) refers to this as epistemic suppression. Communities of

Color and Women of Color are tired of constantly navigating systemic racist structures within higher education, and these oppressive structures are psychologically and emotionally taxing (Arday, 2018). My experience with Starbucks is not unique, nor is it an isolated event of being somewhere where I do not feel like I belong. As previous research shows, academic spaces are often spaces where Women of Color and their experiences are rarely front and center. Society has used education as a weapon to normalize the white male narrative perspective, and there is no way to quantify the loss of knowledge that has been displaced and not allowed to theorize. It should not be taken for granted that you see yourself reflected in policy, the curriculum, books, and other spaces. Latina women have not been seen as creators of knowledge, and structural factors limit their access and visibility.

### **Research on the Problem**

According to census projections, in 2036, one-third of the American educational system will constitute Latinas/os (Gandara & Aldana, 2014), accounting for the largest minority group in the country (Delgado Bernal, 2001), representing 18.5 % of the total population of the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). In 2018, one in two children under the age of 18 were Latina/o, and in 2015, there were an estimated 15 million Latinas/os in the state of California (College Opportunity, 2018); in other words, 40% of California's residents are Latinas/os. That said, it is alarming that only 12% of Latina/o students attain a Bachelor's degree or higher. Of that 12%, only 6% of baccalaureate degrees are awarded yearly to Latinas/os in the United States (Aguayo et al., 2011; Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010). In 2016, Latina/o's still had the highest dropout rate. However, in 2017 there was a 24% decrease in dropout rates; additionally, about 3.6 million Latina/os are enrolled in colleges and universities across the country (Gramlich, 2017). Although there is pride to be taken from these new statistics, much work still needs to be



done. According to Krogstad (2016) and other scholars, Latina/o students continue to fall behind in completion rates (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Ponjuán & Hernández, 2016), and even fewer pursue doctorate degrees (Segura, 2003). According to Horsford and Grosland (2013), Latinas/os students are made to feel as if they “lack the right to be considered intelligent, academically successful, and high achieving” (p. 159).

Anzaldua (1983) reminds us of our true liberatory path. Latina Women of Color have learned to “leave behind the defeated images” (p. v) and have reclaimed the knowledge that has emerged from their experiences of oppression. As a Woman of Color, amid chaos, darkness, and destruction, my light source has been the knowledge, experience, and strength given to me by other Women of Color. The ability to resist oppression, endure hardships and withstand marginalization are rich sources of knowledge. Women of Color continue to resist the silencing of our survival knowledge. This unapologetic resistance by Women of Color to oppression via knowledge creation is needed to address the vast Latina knowledge exploitation that is continuously present in academia. Through counterstories, Latina women challenge and criticize conventional academic paradigms (Calderón, 2008; Cruz, 2008; Elabor-Idemudia, 2001) and engage in the deconstruction and decolonization of academic spaces. Dominant knowledge, linear forms of scholarship, and research are deeply embedded with preconceptions of knowledge that are wielded as a weapon to silence and render Women of Color invisible (Brittan & Maynard, 1984; Collins, 1986; Elabor-Idemudia, 2011).

Society thinks of formal academic settings and institutional structures as primary spaces where knowledge is constructed, researched, passed on, and validated. Yet, it continuously fails to address the history of what constitutes valid knowledge (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1988), by whom, and how knowledge relates to power in these formal education settings (Elabor-Idemudia,

2011). Eurocentric academic institutions and structures propagate the dominant perspective, where Eurocentric knowledge is constructed (Tom et al., 2017). These spaces often reproduce and inflict hostility because brown bodies, especially women's, are not fully respected (Sánchez & Ek, 2013). Unsurprisingly, "some of these knowledges have been kept from us, entry into some professions and academia denied us" (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv).

The dominant narratives reproduced in higher education institutions serve hegemonic structures and should not be seen as the primary or single space through which knowledge is produced or created. We must rethink educational spaces and re-envision educational practices and research (Sanchez & Ek, 2013). We must call "into question what constitutes official knowledge and by whom" (Gonzalez, 2001, p. 653) to ensure that they are not detrimental to the advancement of Communities of Color but, more importantly, that these spaces are accepting and represent the multiplicity of knowledge systems (Sandoval, 2017). After all, through these multiplicities of knowledge systems, brown bodies construct, maintain and transform knowledge, to address educational inequalities that Women of Color face in traditional academic spaces where the dominant narratives serve hegemonic structures. Reframing how we have been taught to see these systems of knowing and learning is imperative. The need to question white mainstream thinking and educational methods of oppression has not ended; in fact, quite the opposite. Latina women are sources of knowledge. For far too long, Women of Color have been fighting against hierarchical structures of academic credibility (Galvan, 2014). Women of Color and their knowledge has been designated as second-class citizens. Therefore, several scholars have called for the oppression of Latina knowledge to be dismantled (Cordova & Knecht, 2019; González, 2006) and to question Western dominance over what constitutes valid knowledge (Dei, 2004).

We must understand who holds power to categorize knowledge as “real,” “valid,” or “significant,” and by doing so, whose interest this labeling is going to serve and what communities it leaves out. Moya (2011) adds that Latin American and minority Scholars of Color have never been situated as knowledge producers. Therefore, their knowledge is judged to be less significant if at all accepted, seen, or even considered as knowledge. In other words, those who hold the economic means to institutionalize their views in academia have the resources to judge the knowledge. Hence, their thoughts and opinions are predominantly accepted and viewed as ‘commonsense,’ thus maintaining an academic hierarchy.

### **Purpose Statement**

This research aims to provide a critical analysis of the ways Latina women utilize their alternative systems of knowing to disrupt, resist, and navigate traditional, hegemonic, and Eurocentric educational settings. Throughout K-12 and higher education, the lived experiences of Latina women are often judged as primitive, exotic, and elaborate tales. The academy demands and dictates what, how, and to what extent Latina women share their lived experiences. Educational institutions impose on Latina women to delete, omit, and modify their stories. Academic discourse requires that Communities of Color verbalize, articulate, and compose their experiences in specific tones and grammatical structures. Scholars maintain that by having these said requirements, the experiences of Communities of Color are given access to academic spaces, research, and scholarship. Obedience means that the knowledge and research scholars produce can be classified as proper research of the ‘other’ and not merely created by the ‘other.’ Additionally, the study explored how and what knowledge is considered critical and legitimate scholarship within Latina/o communities. It further delved into how Latina women utilize alternative systems of knowing to disrupt and resist traditional hegemonic frameworks.

Interviews were utilized to document women's *testimonios*, a form of narrative used to record the stories of individuals who have overcome systems of oppression. By sharing their own experience through *testimonios*, these narratives can become a voice for others who have suffered similarly (File-Muriel, 2013). "Objectivity is a myth, a colonial imposition, a prerogative of the privileged" (de Alba, 2014, p. 4). In other words, when data is collected, reviewed, and analyzed by individuals, it is not neutral, linear, or free of bias. Research should not be about collecting all data only via quantitative methods. Thus, to capture the complexities of the collective lived experiences of Women of Color and honor their individual stories, *testimonios* will be included as part of the qualitative data collection. *Testimonio* incorporates cultural, social, and historical narratives that accompany one's life; therefore, with this in mind, as a *testimonialista* (Cervantes-Soon, 2016; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012), I made use of *testimonios* as a methodology to address systemic inequities, oppression and hierarchical forms of knowledge. *Testimonios* are counterstories, not only a defense strategy but a form of political resistance. It is an effective strategy to describe a story from a different perspective and does not sacrifice the authenticity of the research. In other words, *testimonios* will be a tool to give voice to those who are usually invisible in academia. *Testimonios* in academic spaces challenge the deficit framework and bring to light the numerous inequalities Latinas/os encounter in our current educational system. More importantly, they are a tool that brings to light the power, resilience, and knowledge Communities of Color contribute to academic discourse.

This research analyzed how a group of women who have self-identified as Latina Women of Color have navigated educational structures. The participants ranged from 34 to 38, of mixed social and academic backgrounds. In addition to these participants, it is essential to note that the researcher's *testimonio* and reflections are presented as an educator, student, and Latina. The data

for this study was collected in 2021 and 2022 in California. The *testimonios* included in this paper resulted from informal interviews and written narratives. This study showed that Women of Color are constantly fighting to earn a spot in academic spaces. Their knowledge is dismissed or encouraged to be documented through a Eurocentric perspective so it can be easily digested and be classified as valid research in academic disciplines. It is essential to address the irony of using English to disrupt the system of knowledge production and the privilege that being academics afford us the space to question, critique, and resist from within. I interviewed seven Latina women and developed an autoethnography to analyze three research questions and responses.

### **Research Questions:**

1. What are Latina women's perceptions of academic knowledge and alternative knowledge systems in higher education?
2. In what ways do Latina women utilize their alternative systems of knowing to disrupt, resist, and navigate higher education?
3. What are their familial/cultural knowledge systems composed of? How do these systems challenge dominant knowledge?

### **Theoretical Framework: Chicana Feminist Epistemology**

I have structured the theoretical framework, to begin with an overview of Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE), guided by influential Chicana scholars' commitment to decolonizing research, the academy, and academic discourse. Scholars of Color embrace and bring forward alternative knowledge systems, voices, and experiences, demanding that traditional methodologies no longer suppress our silenced voices. Next, I provided an outline of Critical Race Theory (CRT), a lens needed to identify structural racialized systems within our

education system that continue to negatively define and oppress Students of Color. CRT challenges educational policy and practice while confronting traditional concepts used by dominant groups in society to disguise and maintain power and privilege. Critical race theorists acknowledge that multiple layers within education continue to be influenced by discrimination and oppression (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) guides this research (Delgado Bernal, 1998) to disrupt Eurocentric modes of thinking, which recognizes the wisdom of our elders (Calderón et al., 2012) and those on whose shoulders we stand. Sandoval et al. (2016) state that by sharing our knowledge, we: a) challenge Western academia, b) awaken and validate knowledge traditionally not valued by academics, and c) honor our knowledge through our voices and language. In addition, “Chicana feminist frameworks in education are unique sources of knowledge and valuable contributors to theory, methodology, and pedagogy” (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 514). Also, CFE is concerned about who generates and understands the Latina experience and how their knowledge is validated (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). Within CFE, Latinas become knowledge agents (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). There is still a need to continuously question who is served by the dominant culture and accessible knowledge and why knowledge by certain groups, especially Women of Color, is left out (Biermann, 2011). Lastly, by using CFE, I hope to address the failure of traditional research paradigms, which continue to omit the knowledge of Latinas (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Women of Color have had their complex stories oversimplified, rewritten, and shared in voices not their own; however, CFE acknowledges Latina participants as foundations of knowledge and essential to scholarship (Huber, 2009; 2017). Thus, there is a need for this type of research in our field,

and by choosing to use a CFE in educational research, one is resisting epistemological racism (Scheurich & Young, 1997).

Given our continuous, systematic racial discrimination practices and the continued struggle of women, especially Women of Color, it is imperative that we not only understand how and why race as a construct was created; but also how race categories remain accepted and thus perpetuate racial inequalities. Sanjek (1994) defines race as a framework constructed by Europeans in which categories rank individuals. In other words, one racial category will always be superior. If Europeans built the framework of race, then that meant that their race would be the superior one. According to Smedley (2007), race was a social construct for social, political, and economic purposes. Therefore, the creation of this construct resulted from a financial crisis, and those who held power at its creation wanted to ensure power was maintained and in their control. Sadly, this racial system of ignorance continues to be the tool used to oppress Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005). Thus, when I speak of race, I refer to the ideology created as a means to rank, divide, and ultimately colonize people (Omi & Winant, 1993; Templeton, 1998). What was colonizing but the eradication of all things which are not Eurocentric? This is seen in the field of education when those in power thought education should be universal, but the lived experiences of local people were never included in the curriculum (Wane, 2009). What is universal is the Eurocentric dominance of all systems, through which the ranking of knowledge is perpetuated, and race has been its deciding factor. Additionally, Fields (2001) suggests that whiteness is a racial identity, and according to Rabaka (2007), whiteness did not exist before imperial expansion and was invented to maintain white supremacy. Therefore, there is clear evidence that race has no genetic or biological basis (Arnesen, 2001), and it is a fact that race was socially constructed. So why does race continue to play a role in the hierarchy of

knowledge? According to Lewis (2004), racial categories are negotiated, challenged, and reinforced daily. This creation of race, this systematic discriminatory ideology, was created to colonize and continues to encourage intolerance and deficit thinking toward People of Color. The notion of deficit thinking is rooted in our nation's racial colonial period (Gutierrez, 2004). Deficit thinking refers to the belief that Communities of Color possess variants that obstruct the learning process. Therefore, through the creation of race, knowledge created by Communities of Color is automatically assigned to be deficient and disregarded.

Critical race theory (CRT) situates race at the center of societal examination. Differences are acknowledged, and through a racial lens, everyday life can be analyzed. CRT can be seen in earlier writing in the '70s; however, in 1989, CRT was born after twenty-three legal Scholars of Color met in Madison, Wisconsin. To understand and respond to current events, these legal scholars developed CRT. These Scholars of Color taught at predominantly White institutions and felt that no current movement adequately addressed the issues that People of Color faced. This was a time of crisis, and there was a need to understand how the subordination of minorities in the United States had not only been developed but also continued.

I utilize CRT as an essential tool to effectively identify and analyze structural racialized systems within systems of knowledge that continue to negatively define and oppress Women of Color. CRT challenges policy and practice (Yosso, 2005) by questioning these systems, which continue to marginalize particular racial and ethnic groups. We need CRT to confront traditional conceptions used by the dominant groups in society to disguise and maintain power and privilege (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Among these traditional conceptions are meritocracy, equal opportunity, color blindness, and neoliberalism, which are the driving forces of these hegemonic concepts (Giroux, 2004; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Teranishi & Pazich, 2013). Critical race



theorists acknowledge that multiple layers within various systems are influenced by discrimination and oppression (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001) and therefore situate race at the center of societal examination. Therefore, CRT challenges power, rights, and justice to understand how race and racism influence these (Solorzano, 1998). Additionally, the theory requires the act of transformation through challenging the deficit framework and bringing to light the inequalities which oppress Communities of Color.

Another theory developed from CRT that I draw on, in conjunction with CFE, is Yosso's (2005) asset-based framework of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). Yosso identifies six forms of capital that students of color bring as assets into the academy and challenge the traditional interpretation of capital. These six forms of capital include aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. By building on Yosso's framework of CCW, recent researchers have identified other sources of capital that Students of Color employ in academic spaces. For example, Ayala and Contreras (2019) identified an additional source of capital, which they indicate as racial and ethnic empowerment capital. In her work Jimenez (2020) employs CCW and advances *migration capital* as pedagogical tools to counter deficit narratives with Latina/o immigrant youth.

Latina/o students and their families possess noteworthy cultural and social capital that our current education systems fail to activate, use, and value. One method which can capture social capital within Communities of Color is Critical Race *Testimonios* which seek to document and validate the experiences of People of Color and work to dismantle all forms of oppression perpetuated by the apartheid of knowledge. They are a way to empower, reflect, and validate both the participant and the researcher. When using this research process, researchers incorporate four cultural sources: 1) the researcher's personal experiences, 2) how research and related

literature are understood, 3) professional experiences, and 4) the analytical research process of data and larger study. Above all, *testimonios* should be a humanizing and liberating research process as it embraces new ways of theorizing and knowledge production to emerge. In this study, I weave together the use of CFE, CCW, and *testimonios* as a framework for the design and methodological approach.

### **Educational Significance**

Latina women have challenged the dominant notions of who constructs knowledge. As Elenes (2000) points out, there is a need to place women at the center of knowledge construction so that traditional male-centric and Eurocentric paradigms can be displaced. There is a clear distinction between different types and sources of knowledge and power dynamics determining what counts as knowledge. Knowledge production and validation are dominated by Western philosophical thought (Elabor-Idemudia, 2011). Brown minds are regulated, academically oppressed, and indoctrinated to follow and replicate, rather than encouraged to resist, rewrite, reform, and create new forms of thinking and knowing. We must recognize who holds the power to dismiss knowledge as real, valid, or significant. We rise against this first-world Eurocentric linear hegemonic academic enlightenment that continues to make the knowledge of Women of Color invisible.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Throughout this paper, I use various terms in reference to racial identities. I understand the tension, debate, and significance of using these terms. I opted to use Latina when referring to all participants. I acknowledge that this term does not fully capture the vast differences and complexities of the identities the participants represent. Additionally, I am aware that Latina

does not encompass gender fluidity. I have also intentionally selected to use Latina/o, as/os, Chicana/o, as/os to defy male-dominated gender norms. Regarding referencing a study, I have opted to use the ethnic labels each author uses. When it comes to capitalizing terms, and more specifically to the following terms: Communities of Color, Scholars of Color, Students of Color, and Women of Color, these are intentionally capitalized as a means to resist and reject standard hegemonic grammatical norms. Spanish is used throughout this study, at times, it is translated into English, and other times the word is italicized. In the section below, I define the terms that will be referenced.

1. **Femtor** is a term coined by Chicanas to challenge the male-centered western etymology of mentor and give visibility to women within the mentoring praxis (Gonzalez et al., 2015).
2. **First-generation** is a student whose parents/guardians completed higher education past the equivalent of a bachelor's degree.
3. The government defines **Hispanic Serving Institutions** as accredited, degree-granting, nonprofit public or private institutions of higher education with at least 25% or more full-time equivalent undergraduate Latina/o students (*Excelencia in Education*, 2016).
4. **Latina** is an umbrella term that encompasses diverse women, regardless of their immigration and citizenship status, who are themselves or descendants from any Latin American country.
5. **Latinx** is used to recognize gender fluidity and move away from binary gender pronouns inherent in Spanish.
6. **Pensadoras** are women who question the social order and give meaning to learning, knowing, and power (González, 2001).

7. *Pláticas* are grounded in Chicana feminism as a decolonizing methodology (González, 2001); more than a tool to collect data, pláticas are an extension of ways of knowing (Fierros & Bernal, 2016).
8. **Predominantly White Institutions** are not an official designation by the government for any institution in the United States. For the purpose of this study, it is used to refer to institutions in which whiteness maintains a place of supremacy with an overwhelmingly white student, faculty, and staff population throughout their history (Bourke, 2016).
9. **Sisterhood** is solidarity between women with shared beliefs and goals (hooks, b. 1986).
10. *Testimonios* are rooted in Latin America as a way to decolonize methodologies. Embraced as a critical qualitative research method (Huber, 2009), individuals share collective life experiences (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012) and challenge dominant perceptions of theory and knowledge (Saavedra & Perez, 2012).
11. *Testimonialista* is a term used to describe someone who is giving a *testimonio* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012).

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter describes research on the history of how existing knowledge emerged and situated the criteria that have been utilized to advance and understand inequality in higher education. This requires that we situate knowledge production but also that we situate women within education and knowledge production. Examining how gender is interpreted and enacted in knowledge systems is important. To provide the context concerning higher education, I offer a brief historical overview exploring the history and distinctive dynamics of knowledge. This literature review is focused on three broad areas of scholarship: a) the decolonization of higher education, b) knowledge production, and c) Latinas/os/x in higher education. As an entry into this literature review and to illuminate the issues, I offer reflections on the topic with a narrative analogy.

### **Coffee Analogy: Reflections and Musings**

There is a sense that knowledge is limited. As if it could run out, it is treated like a commodity or good that can be bought and sold like a cup of coffee. You can order at your local coffee shop, city-based coffee roasters, national chains, or buy one from a multinational roastery. Make it a single espresso (one major), a double, or a triple shot (double major with a minor). Coffee brands have different price tags, as does knowledge. The brands are just university names, where knowledge is seemingly housed, lives, and is produced. Add two pumps of caramel, a minor in journalism, and please only soy milk. The more expensive the coffee, the higher the quality, right? So, an elite, highly ranked (aka expensive) university should yield the highest quality education. Well, not always, but I am sure plenty of individuals are convinced that a higher price tag is directly linked to quality.

When coffee is seen as a commodity, it can also be controlled. It is woven into the economy; it can be marketed as a source of power. If one group controls knowledge, they have power and influence in the economy. If knowledge is power, whoever controls knowledge production can influence and dominate thought, the logic of reasoning, and worldviews. Knowledge then becomes something that is exercised rather than possessed. The question then becomes how much knowledge can you exercise over others, and where do you stand concerning the knowledge exercised by others?

Is there a correlation between price and quality? And who or what entity decides the scale of quality and its measurements? Once consumed, is this scale based on texture, color, effect, or lack of? I do not have a palate for coffee, nor do I dislike coffee. In fact, I have had many cups during this process. However, I have been privileged to have had some expensive coffee, that is my opinion (not being a coffee expert by any means), and if I am being honest, it tasted like dirt. And yes, I do know what dirt tastes like. To the dismay of my mother (and many others), I tend to skip washing fruits and vegetables. The taste of dirt is fine, the added pesticides, perhaps, are another story. But back to the connection to higher education. Unfortunately, I have observed university classes with high price tags, in which the knowledge being shared and ‘given’ to students can also be compared to dirt. However, let us continue a bit further with our coffee analogy. Coffee is exported from many locations. Those who “pick it” are paid next to nothing, nor are they ever really given the recognition they deserve or the validation. The same can be said for knowledge. On many levels, legitimacy and recognition are not given to those who produce it, and more than often, those in power expropriate knowledge from those they have colonized (Quijano, 2007).

Similar to coffee, Western hegemonic knowledge has also been monopolized. In other words, those who hold more power, are in control of knowledge production, dissemination, and full circle, and we come to the game Monopoly. Simply put, the concept is to purchase all property, build on each property, and force others to pay for using them. Other players that happen to land on your property do not get a choice to opt-out of staying at your property. The winner or concept of the game is one individual that can force other players into bankruptcy. It seems as though the more property you buy and the more you can control, the easier it becomes to purchase more property. In other words, the domination of a market by a single entity. Taken one step further, a monopoly market is defined as an economic market or structure where a specific person or enterprise is the only supplier of a particular good. In a monopoly market, the specific seller faces little to no competition because there are no close substitutes. High entry barriers and price discrimination also characterize a monopoly market. Like Starbucks' attempted monopolization of coffee, this has been happening with knowledge. This is a necessary reminder because while we enjoy a cup of coffee, there is still a need to address academic imperialism, systemic racism in academia, and the decolonization of higher education.

The coffee analogy helps us understand how knowledge production in higher education functions. Capitalism and colonization have deceived our understanding of *knowledge* and *knowledge production* as limited, a commodity, and housed in elite spaces; in fact, knowledge is limitless, unbounded in every being and community. In the following section, I review current scholarship to understand how coloniality/decoloniality functions in the U.S., the history and hierarchy of knowledge production, and the state of Latina/os in higher education given these conditions.

## **Decolonization of Higher Education**

Eurocentrism has dominated the discourse and what constitutes valid knowledge (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1988). Calls to decolonize dominant discourse and their hegemonic paradigms of what counts as legitimate knowledge have been from the “margins of the planet for quite some time” (Reyes Cruz, 2008, p. 653). These scholars work toward decolonizing knowledge practices and seek to understand how knowledge is constructed, reflects subjectivity and objectivity, and relates to power. Calls to decolonize knowledge are being made worldwide, and much has also been said about U.S. higher education as a reflection of colonized knowledge, described by Tuck and Yang (2012) as being preoccupied with upholding settler supremacy.

The following section offers a brief but not exhaustive overview of various scholars from the last 50 years who have led the way in the intellectual decolonization of academia. That being said, this push for intellectual decolonization is not a new fad that has recently emerged in the last five decades; rather, this push emerged long before that, in many places around the world and in various languages, though we are limited by what has been written or translated to English and what researchers and scholars have been allowed to publish. As stated by Mbembe (2019), these scholars, among many others, have focused on reclaiming their voices and dismantling the “global Apartheid in higher education” (38).

The intellectual decolonization of academia is required since many scholars continue to enact intellectual colonization rather than work towards its dismantlement by choosing what is researched, published, and cited (Mosavi, 2019). Scholars implicitly impact how academia is experienced, digested, understood, and reproduced. That being said, I am conscious that the scholars outlined below have been purposefully selected to highlight their work, and while these voices are being brought forward, other voices have been silenced from this summary of



decolonial scholarship due to the fact they remain unknown or difficult to find, as they do not adhere to traditional academia boundaries or due to funding limitations or censorship.

Have you ever wondered how JSTOR, EBSCO, or ScienceDirect, all of which are academic search engines of research, select which articles and books are available? More importantly, these databases are a barrier to access and distribution of information. Most sites allow a person to access less than ten monthly articles on free accounts. Once again, these resources are not accessible to the public and sit within the ivory towers of research. Why do certain universities subscribe to 75 databases while others can subscribe to over 200? On what basis are these subscriptions selected? And within these subscriptions, the articles, books, and magazines are all written with an audience in mind. Who are they written for? While some are written with simple language, most scholarship and research are written with terminology or jargon specific for scholars who are assumed to have academic backgrounds and specialized knowledge. By prescribing the use of these databases, universities remain complicit in ethnocentrism, elitism, and exclusion (Moosavi, 2020). The decisions about which knowledge is accessible, accepted, and distributed within academia must be addressed, explored, challenged, and rewritten.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the concept and nature of knowledge, the various formats in which knowledge might be represented, and its limitations. Various philosophers have studied the complexity of knowledge over decades, and it has been “difficult to achieve an intellectually satisfying understanding of it” (BonJour 2010, p. 2). After all, what does it mean when we say we are knowledgeable about a subject? What measurement or standard are we using to hold this knowledge true? What was the source of knowledge, and more importantly, what was the origin or basis of the standard we are using to measure our

understanding of knowledge? How did this become a source? Is this source reliable? How is validity measured? What basis is used to measure the given validity of the measurement of truth? And more importantly, why should we care about knowledge, and when should we question what we know?

If we can choose the source from which knowledge is derived, I will begin with the 16th-century French philosopher René Descartes. In doing so, I acknowledge that his work was labeled as a knowledge source in the 16th century. In 1641, Descartes published *Meditations on First Philosophy*, admitting that he realized his previous conception of knowledge had been false. In this book, Descartes goes on to outline how he came to this realization and his process of identifying the stages of belief which might be wrong. However, for the purpose of this paper, we are not interested in the various hypotheses created by Descartes, rather, we are interested in the process of systematic doubt. In other words, Descartes questions the concept and nature of the knowledge he had attained and described perfect knowledge in terms of doubt. In other words, according to Descartes, “knowledge is a belief held with no doubt for which the person has a reason that guarantees truth” (BonJour, 2010, p. 21). As doubt increases, certainty decreases, which, in turn, is a belief that is wrong, also referred to as the Cartesian doubt. In other words, Cartesians use doubt as a route to specific knowledge by identifying what cannot be doubted.

Others have considered the importance of dismantling the system of knowledge. Anibal Quijano was a Peruvian sociologist who denounced Western European and Euro-North American dominators and their continued colonial domination and exploitation of Latin America and Africa. He argues that Western dominators have been able to keep their power due mainly to the genocide of natives and the extermination of their society, culture, and intellectual

knowledge. Thus began the systematic repression of beliefs and knowledge, an imposition of their superiority, and the deprivation of legitimacy and recognition. But instead, Latin America and Africa were considered “primitive” and were later “civilized” by those who created their “primitive” state and went on to produce “distorted paradigms of knowledge” (Quijano, 2007, p. 178). Western and European knowledge holders saw themselves as superior to others, a perception Europeans fueled to dictate that their culture, language, and knowledge were the only rational perspectives. Quijano (2007) also highlights the linear thought that knowledge is created by the subject about the object, where the subjects are European, and the objects are from other non-European cultures. Therefore, these different cultures considered objects of knowledge are incapable of being the subject. In other words, these cultures are the object of studies. Anibal Quijano does not discuss the colonization that took place in Asia or the knowledge that is produced in this location.

Additional research on decolonization was written by Achille Joseph Mbembe (2016), born in Cameroon. His work focuses on the decolonization of the university and not simply concerning the architecture or classroom settings but, more precisely, its intellectual horizons; the content of what is being taught, and the extent to which dominant knowledge is taught. Mbembe questions the investment of faculty to encourage students to think past boundaries and, therefore, their loyalty to what he calls a bureaucratic regime whose sole interest lies in preserving systems of oppression via academic imperialism rather than the free pursuit of knowledge (Mbembe, 2016). In summary, what he finds to be one of the most significant issues with universities is that higher education institutions are Westernized; in other words, they disregard other forms of epistemology by ascribing Western modes of knowledge production to be universal. Besides, neoliberal globalization has led to knowledge capitalism, where

knowledge has become a commodity. Students are less interested in the knowledge they gain but rather in what their degree is valued aftermarket. Mbembe (2016) calls for epistemic diversity but goes on to say that “we can no longer assume that there are incommensurable differences between us” (p. 43), how is it possible to call for different epistemologies to exist but at the same time want not to highlight the differences? Unfortunately, “people of color as well as peoples from the developing and colonial world are often shown to be architects of their own disadvantage” (Elabor-Idemudia, 2011, p. 147) and therefore unable to produce knowledge.

### **Knowledge Production: History and Hierarchy**

Knowledge production and validation are dominated by Western philosophical thought (Elabor-Idemudia, 2011), and far too many times, I have heard that Communities of Color are not educated, sophisticated, or cultured, and their knowledge is not respected or valued in the same manner as those ‘taught’ in educational systems. Many times, their intelligence and authority are questioned for their language skills and perhaps not being able to speak English (Jimenez, 2016). I have seen my parents be dismissed when simply asking follow-up questions for clarity, as well as the lack of respect they have been shown when going to a place that did not provide translators. It is infuriating to hear that the knowledge produced by Women of Color is not valid because it has not been written in a particular academic language or backed by specific theories or qualitative studies. It is disheartening to note that educational structures and spaces validate that immigrants and Communities of Color simply “drain the social service system, contribute to crime, and show little prospect of assimilation” (Suárez-Orozco & Quin, 2005, p. 142). These communities are made to feel that their knowledge lacks the right to be considered intelligent and sound (Horsford & Grosland, 2013), and hegemonic knowledge promotes the interest of powerful, elite groups (Elabor-Idemudia, 2011). We must challenge and dismantle our

hegemonic academic system and change the traditional views of academia, formal schooling, and what is viewed as knowledge. Validating and providing a space for the everyday survival strategies of Women of Color is one of several methods we can utilize to change Eurocentric thought.

Additionally, there continues to be a need to resist “traditional paradigms [methodologies] that often distort or omit the experiences and knowledge of Chicanas” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 555). To resist, we must first understand that dominant groups create their own specialized thought (Collins, 2002) to oppress other groups. Women of Color and Latina women are conscious and continuously reminded of the irony that we strive to deconstruct Eurocentric discourse through academia and English. Our ways of knowing, teaching, and creating knowledge have been denied to us and have been classified as third-world developing capital. The term third world is derived from colonialism and the Western classification of norms for classifying countries. These classifications are insulting because third-world refers to poverty and assumes hierarchy in knowledge. In other words, our knowledge is classified as third-world and developing. This institutionalized perspective of degrading the knowledge created within, by, and for Women of Color must be dismantled. Previous research has been conducted on this matter, yet Women of Color and their knowledge are silenced in academia. Trinidad Galván (2001) points to the necessity to “untangle how inclusive or exclusive the discourse on pedagogy has been” (p. 606) and to deconstruct the “hierarchical structures of credibility” (Galvan, 2014, p. 81).

Despite being oppressed, Women of Color navigate broken systems by negotiating complex societal and economic structures. Moreover, many Women of Color navigate these and many other oppressive systems with little to no understanding of the official language of a

country. Yet, despite overcoming numerous obstacles, including a language barrier, Women of Color continue to be considered, in some circles of society, uneducated and socially deficient. Their skills, knowledge, and lived experiences are taken for granted if at all noticed. When and if these abilities are acknowledged, it is not unusual for them to be viewed as inferior to those exhibited by the dominant class. Societies have created a hierarchy of knowledge in which lived experiences are subordinate to academia. How can we stand by and watch this happen? McKenna (1990) cautions that “we internalize and perpetuate old systems by not asking questions, by accepting a situation as if it were the natural order of things” (p. 36).

### *Hierarchy of knowledge*

The term hierarchy refers to the classification of items according to relative importance. In other words, a system of order to perpetuate inclusiveness. Our society has created a hierarchy of intellectual knowledge that dictates that formal schooling is superior to lived experiences or knowledge created in non-formal education settings (Sanchez, 2009). This hierarchy of knowledge is perpetuated through our hegemonic systems, media, and political arena. Women of Color are not encouraged to share or voice their expertise in these spaces, and the experiences of white men are perpetually repeated. Western academic discourse needs to view Latina knowledge and lived experiences as critical and legitimate scholarship. Why consent to academic hierarchies of power knowing that a biased system continues to exploit and belittle Communities of Color? The fact that Women of Color are yet to be accepted in all academic spaces sheds light on the oppressiveness of academia and the pressing importance of building a presence in education to be recognized and positioned as knowledge producers.

Additionally, if knowledge is not created via approved data or grounded on a specific theory, it is of lesser importance (Villenas et al., 2006) and dismissed. Saavedra and Perez (2014)

note that our current linear world views label Brown bodies invisible. The problem is that specific research methods oppress different world views if not based on or representative of dominant Western Eurocentric views. By allowing biased dominant structures to continue to control access, we allow the oppression of and power over Communities of Color to grow. Of course, this is an easy task because the decolonizing movement does “not resonate with the imperial masters” (Urbina & Wright, 2015, p. 215). The point is to change the standards of academia by accepting and understanding that the rigid, single-sided, old-school Western Eurocentric views have overlooked Communities of Color, silenced them, and left them out of spaces. These structural assumptions and systems of knowledge derived from European thought (Calderon, 2008) are seen as unchangeable and are the underlying force of the hegemonic “world of sense” (Moya, 2011, p. 86), where those who have the economic means control knowledge production to foster intellectual complacency and uphold settler supremacy (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In other words, as Tom et al. observed (2017), we are taught the white perspective in academia, and that perspective is static, not to be questioned, and should be accepted as the most credible. Yet, there are many ways of knowing, learning, thinking, passing, and creating knowledge from experience, stories, dreams, and more, not just simply academic settings.

Therefore, it is essential that we teach, accept and bring to light that “pedagogical practice takes place in a multiplicity of institutions and spaces, not only formal school settings” (Elenes et al., 2001, p. 596). These alternative perspectives, ways of knowing, and knowledge creation are not typically included in academia and, if included at all, are at the bottom of the current hegemonic academic hierarchy. Largely, marginalized Communities of Color create these unique and different types of knowledge and ways of knowing. This is at the expense of these Communities of Color who are left absent; however, other communities are also missing

out on the vast knowledge that is not being gathered, showcased, and validated. We need to rethink these educational structures and spaces, where personal experiences are not denied, left out, and not seen as knowledge creation.

Funds of knowledge is a framework that describes the importance of prior knowledge that students bring into the classroom (Gonzalez et al., 1995). Each student is seen as an asset because students have unique cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. Funds of knowledge have also been referred to as cultural capital, and educators should activate this knowledge so that students become agents in learning. It is essential that school and home experiences are bridged and that skills learned at home are incorporated into lessons and not diminished for not being academic. It is vital that educators not only teach from the curriculum but also create a space that is inclusive and welcoming of all types of knowledge.

Our education system is currently hierarchical, and students are not able, encouraged, or permitted to reach their full potential. Students are limited, pushed out, and deprived of knowledge. Our society has created a hierarchy of intellectual ability that dictates that formal schooling is superior to lived experiences. This hierarchy of knowledge is perpetuated through our hegemonic school systems, media, and political arena. When the experiences of white male students are the standard, Students of Color are held to lower expectations, often ignore, and made to feel unwelcome. Therefore, we must critically analyze how intellectual value is assigned, perpetuated, and viewed in academia.

“Who we are and from where we speak matters for the kind of knowledge we produce” (Moya, 2011, p. 79). Unfortunately, there are still spaces that would argue that my mother’s knowledge which was primarily based on her life experiences, thoughts, and struggles rather than data or theory (Elenes, 2000), is of lesser value, unsophisticated, and thus dismissed and



excluded as the production of actual knowledge. And it does not stop there because physical and cultural behaviors, styles, and ways of being are also used as knowledge markers or lack thereof (Hatt, 2007; Oakes, 2005). According to Smitherman and Smitherman-Donaldson (1986), written documents are limited in what they can teach about life and survival. Thus, more attention needs to be given to other forms of knowledge.

### *Mentorship*

The construction of the word mentor dates back to Greek mythology. To properly contextualize what mentorship means, it is necessary to establish a working definition; at its most rudimentary level. Mentorship is guidance from another individual with experience and knowledge of an industry or organization, and in the context of this research, an educational institution or academic space. Research into mentorship has a long history and typically emphasizes mentorship as a teaching and learning process, but this relationship is constrained by power relationships and practices of mainstream educational settings; these normative practices prioritize certain ways of learning and specific forms of knowledge.

In other words, traditional mentorship methods can be defined as “a person in a position of power that can teach, encourage, and facilitate the advancement of a protégé” (Mendez-Morse, 2004, pp. 562-563); helping a younger person to learn the ropes (Kram & Isabella, 1985); career advancement (Kosoko-Lasaki et. al, 2006); professional and academic support (Crisp & Cruz, 2009); the relationship between a more experienced individual (Tillman, 2001). The traditional method is set up as teaching and learning, or what is referred to as the master-apprentice model (Phruksachart, 2017). In other words, a more knowledgeable individual supports a less experienced and knowledgeable individual (Roberts, 2000). Overall, mentorship definitions imply a hierarchy of power, defined roles, and functions. These views of traditional

mentorship indicate that the person in power would be the teacher, whereas the role of the student is to listen and learn.

Alarcón and Silvia (2017) call for academic spaces to reconceptualize traditional mentoring frameworks and embrace mentoring practices that draw upon the knowledge and skills of Women of Color. This practice allows mentors and mentees to work together while they co-construct knowledge and gain mutual value and professional development. In other words, this mentoring practice places value on cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 2001); asserts that Women of Color hold and create knowledge (Calderon et al., 2012); and considers the lived experiences of Chicana women as pedagogy (Saavedra & Salazar Perez, 2012). Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) refer to this type of mentorship as transformative mentors. As indicated, it is clear that a critical aspect of mentorship is that those involved embrace the co-construction of knowledge. Salas et al. (2014) highlight the importance of a supportive mentorship environment that empowers women and provides opportunities.

Many Latina women struggle with not wanting to overburden Latina mentors and thus turn to each other for guidance and support (Patterson-Stephens & Hernandez, 2018). Peer mentorship is a space where women share resources, not just those related to the doctoral journey. In Esposito et al. (2017), seven doctoral students and their Latina advisor reflected on their mentorship experience using autoethnography. Their experiences affirm that doctoral students utilize group mentorship for guidance, support, and encouragement. Authentic participation in these peer mentorship groups has helped many participants deal with feelings of isolation. Their narratives demonstrate the need to surround themselves with other like-minded scholars that understand the path they walk. In their group meetings, participants incorporated cultural knowledge and pedagogies of the home as a means to navigate through academia. Of

course, this community within their mentoring group was not just something that arose simply because their mentoring group was composed primarily of Women of Color. This space was possible because group members were willing to be vulnerable, invest in each other, and put in the work. Furthermore, they had a mentor that believed in them, brought them together, held them accountable, and was willing to make space for other forms of knowledge.

At the center of mentorship are vulnerability, mutual trust, and community. Participants valued the opportunity to learn about other women's experiences in their program. The data in previous research captures the impact that women have on other women. In recent work, Squire and McCann (2018) have offered that "connections with peers functioned as a site of resistance for the Women of Color (WoC)" (p. 414). Aside from having someone ask for advice, mentorship celebrates resistance within academic spaces. One study by Howard-Hamilton et al. (2009) examined the trend of doctoral students of color, their access, and their choice in advanced degree programs. It can be seen from the results of this particular study that diversity was essential to students of color, and participants indicated they sought support from one another to succeed in their programs.

Not all women find the support needed to navigate the academy within the academy and thus seek out other avenues of support and cultivate outside academic relationships and opportunities (Squire & McCann, 2018). By establishing mentors beyond the classroom walls, graduate students can tap and engage with other sources of knowledge. The exchange of learning in sites beyond formal academic settings can counter feelings of isolation, not fitting in, imposter syndrome, and more.

Despite entering a space that can sometimes be hostile with embedded systems of oppression, Women of Color continue to resist these environments because they have developed

a critical consciousness and have become aware that all opportunities are provided or available to certain racial groups. Establishing peer relationships for Women of Color in their doctoral study enriches their campus experience. Still, more importantly, it allows for a collective community that together can resist and navigate the academy (Calderon et al., 2012). Consequently, Women of Color have developed adaptive strategies, such as self-accountability, by searching for the resources they need to be successful.

Women of Color must have mentors committed to long-term mentorships, especially at the doctoral level. Faculty who have completed a doctorate program understand how demanding and taxing the journey can be. Equally important is that faculty mentors know that this journey is not the same for every student because not every student enters this space with the same systemic privileges. It can therefore be argued that mentoring approaches need to be modified. Since mentors are at the forefront, they must be aware that they can reproduce inequalities or disrupt them through their practice.

Considering that not all Women of Color have the opportunity to have a mentor that looks like her, cross-cultural mentorship is still of value. However, research suggests that White mentors are not equipped to provide mentees of color with psychological and social support (Ghosh, 2015; Phillips et al., 2016; Yip & Kram, 2017). It is also important to note that Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) point out that research indicates White mentors engage in colorblind mentoring. Faculty need to be willing to “affirm the identities of the WoC and support their critical epistemologies and research interests” (Squire & McCann, 2018, p. 417) and avoid trying to impose on Women of Color the need to perform a white academic identity (Alarcón & Silvia, 2017). Developing a scholarly identity is not the issue; the issue lies in a Whiteness academic identity that embraces and replicates systems of oppression. It is equally important to note that

Santa-Ramirez (2022) identified that not all faculty mentors of color could humanize the experience of Students of Color.

Many Latina women feel responsible for protecting faculty mentors who are Women of Color because they understand the pressure they undergo and the multiple projects they are being pulled toward, as well as, the institutionalized racism and microaggression they face. We do not wish to overload them as so few of them are available to offer their guidance and support. Patterson-Stephens and Hernandez (2018) point out that although there is an increased presence of Women of Color in doctoral degrees, white men still primarily occupy the space. The academy has made little progress in validating Women of Color's knowledge. Having a mentor who can authentically share their experience and how they overcame challenges normalizes Latina scholars' experiences and validates lived experiences. Mireles-Rios and Garcia (2019) studied 25 Latina/o undergraduate students and their perceived ideal mentoring program. The evidence demonstrated that mentoring was instrumental in enhancing their persistence. One of the main reasons mentoring was considered instrumental was that participants expressed that having a mentor made them feel welcomed and heard.

### **Latinas/os in Higher Education**

According to census projections in 2036, one-third of the American educational system will constitute youth Latinas/os (Gandara & Aldana, 2014), representing the largest minority group in the country (Delgado Bernal, 2001), and 18.5 % of the total population of the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). In 2018, one in two children under the age of 18 are Latina/o, and in 2015, there were an estimated 15 million Latinas/os in the state of California (College Opportunity, 2018). In other words, 40% of California's residents are Latinas/os. It is alarming that only 12% of Latina/o students attain a Bachelor's degree or higher. Of that 12%, only 6% of

baccalaureate degrees are awarded yearly to Latinas/os in the United States (Aguayo et al., 2011; Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010).

In 2016, Latina/o's still had the highest dropout rate; however, there was a 24% decrease in dropout rates. Additionally, about 3.6 million Latina/os are enrolled in colleges and universities across the country (Gramlich, 2017). Although there is pride to be taken from these new statistics, much work is pending. According to Krogstad (2016), Latina/o high school dropout rate saw a decline, and college enrollment increased. However, more recent data reveal that they remain lower than that among other groups (Noe-Bustamante, 2020) and continue to fall behind in completion rates (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Ponjuán & Hernández, 2016) and even fewer pursue doctorate degrees (Segura, 2003). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2012, only 8.8% of Latinas/os had a bachelor's degree or higher.

Countless Latina/o students are not receiving adequate support from public schools and thus, continue to be limited in their ability to pursue, receive, and graduate from post-secondary education. Public schools in the U.S. have failed these students because they fail to see the importance of social and cultural resources, and if these schools fail to activate these resources, this crisis will increase. Despite these projections, U.S. schools continue to foster racial inequalities through exclusionary practices and policies and fail to consider that Latina/o students carry challenges beyond their control and educational opportunities, and gender discrepancies continue to prevail.

The following section is a critical outline of the various restrictions and barriers which limit, deny, and obstruct equal access and educational opportunities for Latina women and an effort to situate the current state of Latina women via access and achievement in education. Our

education system continues to foster racial inequalities through exclusionary practices and policies. The system fails to consider that Latina/o students carry challenges beyond their control and encourage deficit thinking, which is the belief that students and parents of color with low socioeconomic systems possess variants that obstruct the learning process. In other words, this notion proclaims that Latinas/os students and parents do not value education, so students fail. Rather than examining the political systems and education structures failing Latinas/os, deficit thinking positions the blame on the victim. Several research studies seek to explore, define and address the complexities and barriers to entry and how Latinas/os resist the silencing of deep-seated academic ideologies, assumptions, and images at the intersection of our gender, race, and identity.

Berg and Tollefson (2014) analyzed the complexities involved in Latina/o student perceptions of post-baccalaureate education. The authors identified several challenges that need to be addressed to increase Latina/o participation and completion of a degree. Their research collected data via surveys distributed to current Latina/o students and alumni at California State University Channel Islands, California State University Humboldt, and California State University Monterey Bay. The study concluded that Latina/o students face many complexities such as parental income. Additionally, students considered the value proposition of a graduate degree, in other words, how this degree would improve their problems or what benefits they could attain from the degree once they had graduated. The authors pointed out that Latina/o students did not experience the feeling of being accepted or understood when they were on campus. Berg and Tollefson (2014) concluded that over 50% of participants in the study indicated that they wanted to pursue a higher degree, regardless of the challenges outlined.

Therefore, the primary challenge is for educational institutions to increase the actual value of post-baccalaureate programs for students.

Morgan-Consoli et al. (2020) asked participants about a discriminatory event experienced in college and highlighted the advantages Latina/o students acquired while dealing with discrimination. Ten undergraduate participants, all self-identified as Latina/o students, enrolled in a Midwestern U.S., medium-sized private university. The researchers recruited participants via student organizations and flyers posted throughout campus. Face-to-face, one-on-one, and semi-structured interviews were conducted and later transcribed. All participants reported having experienced ethnic discrimination at some point in their life. Although painful for participants to admit, the results showed that one common factor they encountered was the daily reaffirmations that Latinas/os in college faced ethnic discrimination. However, this pain was also a source of growth, one that, once embraced, fostered a stronger sense of belonging and critical consciousness. The researchers took it one step further and described this as thriving; it is growth that happens after adversity due to overcoming adversity. The research concluded that participants experienced some degree of development or change, awareness, and tolerance for individuals having different perspectives. However, I would argue that a shortcoming of the research is highlighting the need for Latina/o students who are being discriminated against to feel responsible for learning awareness and tolerance, rather than heightening the need to not place more burden on the oppressed.

Pecina and Marx (2020) delve into the discrepancies between increasing enrollment numbers and low graduation rates of Latina/o students. The study examined the experiences of 34 participants from the Midwest, currently working in a professional setting defined by the researchers. To better understand and explore the experiences that contributed to their successful



undergraduate degree completion, participants were emailed an electronic interview consisting of 32 questions. The research collected data from graduates from a Midwestern urban Latina/o community. The study reinforced the importance of *familismo*; all participants in the study gave credit to *familismo* as a reason behind their success. Additionally, the study concluded that participants need to feel a sense of belonging. If students do not feel welcomed, there is a lower chance that they will graduate. Therefore, it is essential that staff and faculty value Latinas/os way of knowing to permit belonging.

This population continues to be an understudied population from the lens of Latinas/os to gain a more comprehensive understanding of barriers to academic success. However, based on the currently available research, the following themes have been identified a) academic preparedness: deficit thinking, b) funding inequalities, and c) belonging.

### *Academic Preparedness*

Valencia (2002) draws attention to the notion of “deficit thinking” to unmask a myth created to elude attention from institutional structures and inequitable systems and blames Latinas/os families for not striving to achieve academic competence. Thus, ranking education of low importance in their hierarchy of values. Evidence from Horsford and Grosland’s (2013) critical race ethnographic study indicates that Latina/o students are made to feel inferior by teachers who have failed to believe in their academic success. The notion of deficit thinking is rooted in our nation’s racial Colonial period (Gutierrez, 2004). Deficit thinking is the belief that students and parents of color with low socioeconomic systems possess variants that obstruct the learning process. In other words, this notion proclaims that Latina/o students and parents do not value education, which is why students fail.

Rather than examining the political systems and school structures that are failing Latinas/os, deficit thinking blames the victim. It is essential to understand that this type of institutional racism is not simply in place to ensure that the victims continue to be victimized but that these embedded societal systems remain to ensure that those in power maintain the power. The deficit perception is utilized to ensure “people are socialized and educated to believe that Brown, Black, and Red people do not get ahead because they do not value education and because they are lazy” (Urbina & Wright, 2015, p. 211). It is crucial that instead of blaming the victim, we analyze the broader system and identify the current education obstacles that hinder Latina/o parents from conveying their value of education. It is reasonable to conclude that various other serious problems can conceivably camouflage Latina/o parental educational disengagements, such as economic burden, the need for children to contribute financially, and language barriers. Schools are not equipped with translators to ensure parents understand policies, systems, and regulations or actively participate in parent-teacher-association meetings (PTA’s). Educational systems are embedded with deficit thinking, and one prime example of this is who is written into the curriculum and what accomplishments are minimized, and even worse, who is omitted?

I critique the notion that intelligence should only be measured in terms of academia and certain forms of intellectual knowledge are above all others. This form of thinking can be seen all around us, and research is no exception. We are taught to think in APA style, to write structured paragraphs, and that the library should be our only source of information. When we write about our culture, why should resources be the encyclopedias and books written by people who probably have never experienced our culture firsthand? According to Kuntz (2015), these sources would be disengaged researchers and distant from reality. Should we then conform to the standards dictated by a few in power and desire their approval and validation? If we choose not

to conform, am I taking the easy way out, doing exactly what they expected and being deficient? If I decide to cite my mother and her *testimonio*, is this not valid research? Or will it be received with biased feedback? Hantzopoulos (2016) draws our attention to how students are often depicted as disengaged and uninterested in school.

### ***Funding Inequalities***

Schools with more Latina/o students receive less financial support than schools with high white student ratios. That is to say, better-funded schools can provide more educational opportunities, challenges, and support for their students. Most Latina/o students cannot enroll in advanced placement (AP) classes or take extra language classes because these classes are rarely offered in underfunded schools. Due to the lack of AP classes in many Latina/o communities, Latina/o students are tracked into courses that do not push them to reach their full potential. Historically, Latina/o communities tend to be concentrated in poor neighborhoods and attend schools with minimal funding to prepare them for college adequately (Segura, 2003). They continue to be left in remedial language classes, and school systems have failed to prepare Communities of Color for college. Many Latina/o students are not allowed or are strongly discouraged from participating in AP classes, and thus, their opportunity of attending university is impacted. Latina/o students face individual obstacles, and yet they still have to prove that they are worthy at school. Teachers and educators need to ensure that the tracking system is eradicated. Latina/o students need not be separated or “sheltered” from difficult classes. They are more than capable of succeeding; they need to be given the right tools and support.

Not to mention that these schools typically have less experienced teachers, and therefore Latina/o students receive a mediocre education. This, in turn, has resulted in high dropout rates. Yet if all schools were funded equally, Latina/o students would still not have a leveled playing

field, but our education system would at least be headed in the right direction of progress. Communities are racially segregated, and Latinas/os tend to be concentrated in poor neighborhoods, forced to attend schools that fail to prepare them for college (Gonzalez, 1996).

As a result, students describe that these sites often lack and fail to support struggling students, encourage a depersonalized environment, perpetuate inequalities between students and teachers, and maintain the dichotomy of “oppressed and oppressor” in society at large (Hantzopoulos, 2016). Schools should be more than economic engines and provide a space where critical dialogue is encouraged and accepted. Through these spaces, transformative experiences should be possible. Additionally, transformative spaces give students agency and provide a space where students feel acknowledged and understood. We know that these are sites where knowledge is not only produced but also labeled legitimate. However, only if you have access to these sites (Cruz, 2008) can you have a say on the reproduction of the knowledge and influence what is deemed valid.

### *Belonging*

How can one feel a sense of belonging when your knowledge and experiences are marginalized within and by the education system (Elabor-Idemudia, 2011) and made illegitimate? And if educational institutions are considered the only valid sources of knowledge, it would be inappropriate for anyone to raise questions regarding the relationship between power, race, and knowledge production. Higher education spaces have long deprived the Latina/o community of voicing their truths and realities, showing off their history, and contributing to the knowledge being taught. Latina students do not see themselves in the research or the curriculum, how can they feel like they belong there? If even “academicians have expressed fears that the United States cannot continue to permit immigration” (Urbina & Wright, 2015, pp. 204-205),

how can they feel like they belong there? Other scholars have stated that “the university is a plantation run by white overseers who are increasingly defensive about their illegitimacy” (Acuña, 2013, p. 3); how can they feel like they belong there?

The feeling of isolation can result from not seeing others that look like themselves or not being surrounded by individuals who understand their experiences. In a similar case, Ramirez (2014) identified that Latina women remained underrepresented in doctoral programs, and participants reported: “feeling isolated and alienated by the overwhelming whiteness of their graduate programs” (p. 176). The study also explained that participants disclosed that white faculty members perpetuated Eurocentric curriculum ideas and refused to incorporate scholarship by academics of color. Similarly, in another study by Pecero (2016), Latina participants reported that at PWIs, they were predominantly exposed to Eurocentric modes of thought throughout their doctoral program curriculum.

Espino et al., (2010) noted a need to increase the Latina/o presence in graduate programs. Research has shown that Latinas/os continue to be underrepresented at a graduate level in terms of students and faculty. Sanchez (2019) explained that students enrolled in Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) with a higher Latin enrollment population reported a heightened sense of belonging. In terms of increasing the number of faculty of color, scholars have observed that faculty of color bring other Scholars of Color and culturally relevant histories into the curriculum, often left out by white professors (Von Robertson et al., 2016).

A more recent study of ten white higher education leaders by Evatt-Young and Bryson (2021) found that whiteness continues to be deeply embedded within institutional culture. All participants in the study self-identified as white and held leadership positions at various public and private research institutions, small liberal arts, and community colleges. Evatt-Young and

Bryson examined how whiteness manifested through white leadership and concluded an overwhelming presence of whiteness in higher institutions, specifically at the leadership level. When leadership is predominantly white, the institution is prone to embed white-norm policies; thus, white becomes the default norm.

Yet, counterstories, counter-hegemonic knowledge, community cultural wealth, art, storytelling, and *testimonio* are burgeoning (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Fuentes & Perez, 2016; Jimenez, 2020; Tellez, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Fuentes and Perez (2016) remind us that “our stories are our sanctuary” and our “testimonios as a sacred of belonging.” Jimenez (2020) leverages our family histories as migration capital with elementary Latina/o youth, and Delgado Bernal et al., (2012) have mapped the pedagogical, theoretical, and political tenets of *testimonio* work.

### ***Microaggressions***

Microaggressions are defined as subtle verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual acts of racism directed at People of Color (Solorzano et al., 2000; McCabe 2009). Previous research indicates that microaggressions tend to be brief and subtle and are generally labeled as unintentional and or unconscious forms of racial insults (Dixson & Rousea, 2006; Sue et al., 2007).

Microaggressions are deep-rooted in institutional and systemic policies across many U.S. institutions; they are embedded in the notion of White superiority and can seep into academic environments. The current educational landscape is a minefield of microaggressions, especially toward students of color. For example, to determine the effects of microaggressions on campus climate, Sanchez (2019) compared results from 40 Latina/o undergraduate participants from three HSI institutions and observed that participants reported microaggressions most often as indirect verbal comments during classroom discussions. The study also highlighted that most faculty failed to address microaggressions, and Latina/o students were questioned on their

intellectual ability and told that their acceptance into higher education institutions was based on a need to fill quotas. In the analysis of where microaggressions take place, Sanchez (2019) points to the alarming fact that these examples “further speaks to an environment that allows the white majority to feel comfortable in verbalizing racist assumptions openly” (p. 246). When higher education institutions allow the white majority to verbalize and attack Communities of Color openly, Students of Color become physically and emotionally drained (Cueva, 2014). Imagine sitting in a classroom where your community and their experiences are minimized or walking into a classroom, aware that verbal attacks on Communities of Color are normalized and something you will be exposed to constantly as a student in this institution.

However, from the perspective of People of Color, microaggressions are lasting and have social and academic consequences. Microaggressions occur frequently, usually carried out by the dominant racial group, and Students of Color are called oversensitive for pointing out when these occur. Consequently, microaggressions have gone undocumented, and the perpetrator can claim that they did not intentionally try to be offensive (Solarzano, 1998). It is paramount that aggressions do not go unnoticed and forgotten. More importantly, studies show that Students of Color who face daily microaggressions struggle with feelings of frustration and self-doubt and face health problems (Sue et al., 2007). These aggressions are considered micro, but the reality is that they have become macroaggressions. Among other things, racial microaggressions can be overwhelming and isolating. Students of Color navigate and resist these psychological attacks while also surviving hostile environments. It is no surprise that microaggressions and these comments can make Students of Color feel that they do not belong in these spaces. Also relevant to the issue of the campus environment, the following section provides insight into feelings of isolation.

In a qualitative study by Von Robertson et al. (2016), consisting of semi-structured interviews of 23 Latina/o students in higher education at a PWI, participants were asked about their perception of the campus environment. This study highlighted that “racial microaggressions negatively impact the participants’ psychological, cultural, and social adjustment” (p. 732). In another study that surveyed 1,533 graduate students, Scholars of Color reported that they were more likely to experience microaggressions than their peers who did not identify with underrepresented minority groups (O’Meara et al., 2017). However, it is also crucial to mention that the results of this study also point to the resilience of Students of Color and their ability to be successful while frequently facing discrimination.

### **Summary**

Latinas/os are the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States, yet they continue to be underrepresented; thus, evident disparities in educational access persist. There are numerous reasons for these continuous disparities; however, due to the limitations of this study, only a handful have been addressed. Our education system is not yet equipped to handle rooted racist and colonial structures. Still, the system must examine this area to positively influence the educational development of Latinas/os students. The section above briefly reviews some literature on barriers to Latina women in higher education to contextualize their access and opportunity (or its lack thereof) in higher education. Knowledge is used to silence people's voices, and we need to rethink theory development with Chicana/Latina women instead of just writing about them (Reyes Cruz, 2008).

Our current knowledge systems ignore and discredit other forms of alternative knowledge creation. It is worth noting that despite facing numerous obstacles in accessing higher education programs, Latina women have been able to enter the academic sphere successfully. Latina



women's knowledge, experience, and different points of view contribute to classroom discussions, and the educational learning environments are enriched by their voices. Urbina and Wright (2015) state that these academic systems are full of books that hold vast knowledge that “tend to paint the white experience in a positive light, while painting the brown and black experience in a negative light” (p. 213). Thus, the challenge is recognizing and understanding Latina experiences. And how traditional Eurocentric Western academic paradigms should recognize their knowledge. To conclude, Latina/o students still do not have an equal opportunity to pursue post-secondary education because structural systems within the university fail to address the ingrained assumptions about the sources of knowledge.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This study addresses a significant social problem – the low educational achievement of Latinas/os and their social and cultural alienation from academic spaces. The growth of the community and size of the Latinas/os population makes this issue an even greater educational imperative (Gandara & Aldana, 2014). While research suggests that Latina women are more present in higher education, many Latina women continue to navigate academic spaces of oppression where they are deemed incapable of higher-level intellectual thought. Their alternative sources of knowledge are questioned and condemned as inadequate sources of scholarship. Dominant ideologies oppress their educational journeys. Women and Scholars of Color are made to feel unwelcome but expected to fit in. Mbembe (2016) stated that it is a perverse act to continue to engage “in this ritual of self-humiliation and self-debasement every time we happen to find ourselves in such an environment” (p. 36). Although, he is referring to the act of bowing to a statue of a person who did not consider Africans human. Mbembe’s words resonated with me because this ‘ritual’ is what many Latina women go through in academic spaces with their prescriptive ideological proper views of academic language. Yet, by many, they are still viewed as other.

Delgado Bernal (2002) states that Latinas/os students feel that their cultural knowledge and practices are not academically valuable. And that they have no right to be considered intelligent, academically successful, and high achieving (Horsford & Grosland, 2013). Eurocentric academic institutions and structures propagate dominant perspectives of what counts as knowledge and who is capable of being knowledgeable (Tom et al., 2017). This study emphasizes honoring the knowledge, knowledge systems, and knowledge production of Latina

women. The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning and implication of knowledge as seen through the lens of each woman; their views, experience, and interpretation of what it means to create knowledge. As members of the academy where our bodies are positioned in academic spaces, we question what constitutes official knowledge and by whom.

It is a bit ironic that only at this stage of academia are we encouraged to question theory, and I am allowing myself the freedom to question every aspect of knowledge. It is a privilege to be in a position, a state of mind, of some sort of rest, to be able to question what we have been taught to believe and accept as knowledge. Given that, we are encouraged to embark on an ongoing inquiry process with these parameters, I follow in the steps of women that came before me. Like them, I see the need to continue to fill a gap in Latina research by expanding on traditional research strategies and norms.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative research study. Semi-structured *pláticas* of seven Latina doctoral students to document their lived experiences and the complexity of oppressions experienced in their journey as they navigated higher education systems. Using *pláticas* as a Latina feminist methodology was an intentional decision in this research design, derived from resistance against systems of oppression to give voice to the silenced experiences of Latina women. Bourdieu's (1977) definition of social capital is substantially incorporated in this research, in which capital should not be limited to social and material capital but also include human and cultural resources and, more recently, Yosso's (2005) framework and scholarship on community cultural wealth (CCW). The following chapter outlines how these Latina women have manifested their CCW to challenge, resist and create space in academic environments that were believed not to be meant for them.

In my research, it is essential to note that *testimonios* challenge and deconstruct dominant perspectives and Eurocentric paradigms of research methods and knowledge production. They do so by honoring the experiences of those oppressed, validating and legitimizing their sources of knowledge.

## **Method**

### ***Context and Site***

The study was conducted at a private Jesuit university in California. In 2022, according to the U.S. News and World Report, it was listed in the top 10 in student diversity among national universities. Data provided on the University's website reflect data collected and reported on November first of each year based on guidelines and definitions by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). In 2021, a total of 25 doctoral degrees and 177 professional practice postgraduate degrees were awarded by the institution. Doctoral enrollment rates by racial and ethnic categories were unavailable. In Fall 2021, the university reported 1,100 instructional faculty, of which 114 full-time identified as minority faculty. Per the university's definition, minority includes faculty self-identifying as Black, non-Hispanic, Hispanic, American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander. And 249 full-time faculty identified as women. In 2019, the university also reported that 47 full-time faculty members self-identified as Hispanic.

More specifically, participants were all pursuing a doctorate in education in a program that engage in justice work and addresses social inequalities. Inspired by Paulo Freire's work on critical pedagogy, the program is rooted in critical social theory, linked with the essential day-to-day practice of pedagogy. The programs aim to equip students to become better-informed leaders who actively engage in critical thought and change. The curriculum focuses on how the

intersections of race, class, nation, language, gender, and sexuality are experienced in the classroom and the larger community.

In the most recent self-published academic program assessment, the School of Education noted their faculty to be ethnically and racially diverse with representation from the following communities: African American, Chicana/Latina, South Asia, Filipina/o, and European American. In 2016, about 60% of students in the programs were People of Color. This data includes both master's and doctoral students, without a specific breakdown for postgraduate programs. The graduate program appeals to working professionals as it offers flexible weekend and evening courses. As working professionals, most students enrolled in the program work full-time, are caretakers and parents and often commute.

At the time of the study, the School of Education was led by several dedicated women, leaders, researchers, mothers, partners, and community organizers. In addition, at least three faculty identified as Chicana/Latina and created a strong sense of belonging through critical pedagogy. As members of marginalized groups, faculty of color embodied critical consciousness and were intentional when engaging with students. Faculty and staff in the School of Education collectively fostered a community of hope and humanized scholarship. This space is unique and not reflective of the university at large. It is also worth noting that the program and its goals are derived by full-time faculty and deans who support and practice critical pedagogy.

### ***Setting, Access, and Recruitment***

Participants were recruited through researchers' social networks and snowball sampling, where participants recruited others who fit the criteria. Participant invitation emails had a disclosing message explaining the purpose of the study, criteria for participation, and how to get in touch with the researcher. Interested participants were sent a copy of the consent form and

asked to read and sign the document before the interview took place. Locations and names of institutions are omitted to keep the anonymity of participants.

Participant criteria included identifying as a Latina woman and a doctoral Student of Color. Participants could also come from any program but must have completed their doctoral degree or currently be enrolled in a doctoral program. One-on-one interviews and *pláticas* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2008) were held online via Zoom (a video conferencing tool). *Pláticas* are not a new way of gathering information or experiences; by using and embracing *pláticas*, I am accepting this form of research as valid. Through this lens, I wish to honor the participants' epistemological position (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). In other words, via *pláticas*, the researcher brings validity to various viewpoints of how we acquire knowledge and question the dominant systems embedded in our education that control meaning and validation (Kuntz, 2015). However, Kuntz (2015) also argues that we need to change how we think and conduct research and by doing so, we can change how we act within society. Still, most importantly, we have the opportunity to identify where dominant views fall short and craft space for a different form of knowledge to be acknowledged.

Due to COVID-19 guidelines and shelter-in-place orders for the state of California during the time of this research, all *pláticas* were conducted over Zoom. This allowed for each *pláticas* to be digitally recorded and transcribed. Participants had the choice to have their camera turned on or off to facilitate their comfort. All participants but one participant agreed to have their cameras on but were reassured that the video recording would not be shared with others. Participants had the opportunity to access their recordings and provide any additional information based on their interviews. Each participant took part in a one-on-one *plática* that lasted between 60 to 137 minutes.

### *Participants*

The sample for this study consisted of seven participants. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who self-identified as Latina and met the following criteria a) currently enrolled in a doctoral program or have attained a doctoral degree in a U.S.-based institution and b) identify as a Latina woman. The study encouraged participants to reflect on their family history, ways of knowing within their communities, perceptions of academia, and experiences before, during, and after their doctoral program. Additional questions addressed endurance, mentorship, and navigation within the higher education system. Participants were informed that they were not required to answer all questions and that answers or lack thereof would not result in any negative consequences.

Two participants identified as Chicana, one identified as Xicana, one identified as Nicaraguan, one as Salvadorian, and two identified as Latina. At the time of the study, four participants had obtained their doctorate degrees, and three participants and the researcher were at the dissertation stage as doctoral candidates. The participants' ages ranged from 34 to 38. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of all participants and keep the information they shared private. Information is presented in table 1.

**Table 1**

<b>Name*</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Self -Identified</b>	<b>Migration Identity</b>	<b>Birth Place</b>
Dr. Alejandra	37	Xicana	First Generation	U.S.
Eliana	37	Nicaraguan Latinx	First Generation	Nicaragua
Grace	37	Salvadorian	First Generation	El Salvador
Jenny	37	Chicana	First Generation	U.S
Dr. Olga	38	Chicana	First Generation	U.S.

Dr. Pilar	37	Chicana	First Generation	U.S.
Dr. Valeria	37	Latina Xicana	Second-generation Mexican immigrant	U.S.
Self/ researcher	34	Latina Mexican-American	1.5 Generation	Mexico

All participants reported working full-time while enrolled in their doctoral program.

Three participants disclosed they had children, and two of those participants had children while in the program. Participants live in various geographic areas. Most participants reported currently residing within a 100-mile radius of the Bay Area. Three participants worked in a high school setting, two as teachers and one as a counselor. Two participants were adjunct professors at local community colleges. Two participants taught ethnic studies classes, one in high school and one at college. Two participants were university administrators, and one participant worked with her community in human resources. Seven participants were in the field of education, and one was in leadership. All participants were considered first-generation college students. They are mothers, sisters, partners, community activists, and *pensadoras* (González, 1998). Information is represented in table 2.

**Table 2**

<b>Name*</b>	<b>College Designation</b>	<b>Employment Status will in program</b>	<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Employment</b>
Dr. Alejandra	First Generation	Full-Time	Doctorate in Education	Community College Adjunct Professor and Human Services Coordinator
Eliana	First Generation	Full-Time	Doctorate in Education	High School Counselor
Grace	First Generation	Full-Time	Doctorate in Organization Leadership	Therapist Supervisor



Jenny	First Generation	Full-Time	Doctorate in Education	Ethnic Studies Adjunct Professor Community College
Dr. Olga	First Generation	Full-Time	Doctorate in Education	University Dean
Dr. Pilar	First Generation	Full-Time	Doctorate in Education	English High School Teacher
Dr. Valeria	First Generation	Full-Time	Doctorate in Education	English and Ethnic Studies High School Teacher
Self/ researcher	First Generation	Full-Time	Doctorate in Education	Director of Operations in Higher Education

### *Dr. Alejandra*

Alejandra is the daughter of a Mexican immigrant father. Her grandmother raised her as a daughter, and her childhood was both migratory and transnational. She was the first in her family to be born in the U.S., but her family moved back to Mexico when she was five years old, and she lived there until the age of fourteen when she moved back to the United States. Alejandra identifies as a first-generation college student and Xicana. Alejandra is married and has one child. She is an educator and has completed an EdD degree at a private liberal arts university.

During her childhood, when she was in the U.S., her dad was in prison, and she spent a lot of time with her dad's siblings and her grandmother. While everyone in the family worked during the day, she learned English through T.V. and music. Over time, she developed an affinity for books and the library. Riding the bus frequently to the library and learning from the books became a huge part of her life. For her, knowledge is about what one has acquired in their brain through experiences and how one feels comfortable about it. In the process of acquiring knowledge, demystifying has more value for her. She believes knowledge does not necessarily

come from academics but can also be derived from one's life experiences and self-discoveries throughout various stages of life.

She self-discovered and felt curious about her culture while in Paris for a study abroad program. When asked, she identified herself as an American, but people there did not accept that. That is when she understood that it was much deeper than just being born in America. She realized her roots are Mexican, which made her want to learn more about her culture, history, and how identity was formed. To dig deeper and be more involved in college, she took social movement and ethnic studies classes. She was drawn to pop culture and is also proud of being a Latina. To stay connected with her community and embrace both cultures, she volunteered, became a VP of the Latina sorority, conducted orientations, etc.

Fast-forward to her doctorate program journey, she assessed her journey of how academia is a space in that everyone wants to fit into. Society makes it look like such a prestigious place where you can gain knowledge and learn things from. However, she now feels like academia is not a suitable space for her. Alejandra mentioned she felt disconnected from her community, and during her dissertation, she realized her role is to instead connect with her community. She defines her academic success as being passionate and researching topics she cares about, being able to write and speak about them, and most importantly, living the experience.

Alejandra wants to advise other Latinas and not just Latinas but every woman wanting to break the barriers and who does not doubt herself. It is important not to compare yourself with others; live through your journey and in your own timeline. Along the way, build connections and nurture those relationships because they will come back and be your support pillar.

### *Eliana*

Eliana's parents and older brother immigrated from Nicaragua in the early 80s during the Nicaraguan revolution and civil war. She was the first in her family to be born in the United States and was raised in California, surrounded by her father's side of the family. She identifies herself as a Nicaraguense and Latinx. In Nicaragua, both her parents were dentists and valued education very much. They made it a point that for Eliana and her older brother, going to college was required. She was the youngest child, so she relied on her older brother for information about college enrollment, the requirements, the steps to apply, and how to navigate once she got in. She attended a high school with a largely white student population, and school counselors could not support all students. Due to lack of support, students could get lost if they did not have other support systems. Fortunately, she also joined Upward Bound's college preparation program, which helped her prepare for college. She felt so much appreciation for the program that after graduating with her bachelor's degree in psychology, she chose to work for the program in various roles. While working with Upward Bound, she realized that she wanted to bridge the gap between academia and the social-emotional aspect of psychology and help young people. She thus decided to pursue a master's degree in counseling.

Eliana's parents instilled in her a sense of responsibility for others, primarily through storytelling. As they sat around the dinner table and discussed politics, her parents always ensured she understood that her actions impacted others. Her ways of knowing were informed mainly by the community and city she grew up in. Cultural groups shared history and knowledge through dancing, drumming, murals, the cultural center, and other groups she was part of. People from various generations would talk about history, sing and learn together. As a Person of Color, she knew that she needed to code-switch between languages but also between vastly different

cultural worlds. Eliana entered a doctoral program to gain the knowledge and skills required to impact educational policies and make improvements that will help her community grow. She continued in the doctoral program for many reasons. She understood that completing a doctorate and having this title would further establish her credibility, and others would take her ideas and suggestions more seriously.

### *Grace*

Grace was born in El Salvador and immigrated to the United States when she was ten. Her family moved to the Bay Area, where some family members had previously set roots. Spanish was her first language, and through school, she learned English. In her first years of schooling, she was in classes for English Learners (EL), which are specific classes for students whose native language is not English. Several terms have been used to refer to these classes in the last three decades, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Language Learner (ELL). The terminology is trying to describe students whose first language is not English but has been criticized because such terms have negatively and inaccurately labeled students. Therefore, Grace recalls being in these classes and not being allowed to join advanced placement (AP) classes.

In high school, she joined Upward Bound, which prepares students for college. As a first-generation college student, Grace stayed local in California and became a licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT). Her site was in a local school district that struggled to provide services to families. She often witnessed her parents not getting all the necessary information to make informed decisions offered by the mediocre translation services. Seeing these inequitable scenes made Grace want to learn more about special education and what steps she could take to bridge the gap between mental health, special education, and communities. Grace pursued a doctoral

program in special education (SPED) to better serve her community and become a resource for families who do not have the resources or language fluency to advocate for their children.

### ***Jennie***

Born and raised in Southern California to Mexican immigrant parents, Jennie has fond memories of crossing the border into Mexico over the weekends to meet her extended family. She grew up in a working-class neighborhood known for its diversity, with mostly Latino, Black, and Asian populations. However, in K-12, her teachers were predominantly white, and it was not until high school that she was exposed to a Latino teacher. This one teacher had a significant impact on Jennie. So much so that she gives him credit for her pursuing a college degree. He was a mentor and helped guide Jennie through high school and beyond. In high school, Jennie also joined an academic program that grouped students into cohorts to allow them to form a community and provide college guidance. Although her parents were not actively involved in her schooling, they were very supportive and played a significant role in her career decisions. For her undergraduate studies, Jennie selected a college in central California where she also had a support system. Her extended family that lived in the same area ensured she was never alone.

In college, Jennie met her partner and became pregnant at 19 with her first child. People around her did not warmly welcome this life event, and everyone began to doubt if she would even finish college. She experienced shame and felt judged for being so young and having a child. As a college student and a mother, finances were always tight. She navigated the government's financial support systems. However, she was determined and sought support from various communities and networks. Having a child at that age and continuing her education was difficult, but she managed to tap into community knowledge and complete her degree. Jennie was resilient; ready to find support elsewhere if she didn't find support at home. She pursued a master's degree in Anthropology and became an Ethnic Studies professor. Today, she continues

to teach as an adjunct professor at two community colleges and is currently working on her doctorate.

*Dr. Olga*

Olga is intentional about describing herself as the daughter of Juan and Lupe. Her parents and grandparents are from the land that is referred to as Mexico. Her parents migrated to the states when they were young, and Olga was born in the Midwest. She refers to herself as a midwestern kid but never really identified with that region as her identity. Her family worked in sugar beet fields and picked strawberries, cucumbers, and pickles. When describing her family history, Olga highlighted the socioeconomic turning point for her family, such as their ability to find employment in manufacturing automotive plants. With this stable employment, her family bought homes and put down roots in the Midwest. However, Olga disclosed that her family was still poor, even with a steady job. She's the oldest of five children and grew up in a predominantly black neighborhood in a predominantly black city. Thus, her early life and background rooted in African American and Mexican culture.

As a first-generation student, she earned an undergraduate degree in journalism and was a reporter for the Associated Press. To cover the agriculture sector as a reporter, she moved to California. While reporting, she continued to study and earned a master's degree in fine arts and creative writing. However, Olga missed being in the community and was passionate about working with students. She, therefore, transitioned from being a reporter to an administrator in higher education, facilitating more opportunities for her to be part of a community and allowing her to work with students. As an administrator, she worked with college students, and working with young adults brought her joy. Olga completed her doctorate program at a private liberal arts university in California. Currently, Olga continues to hold a position as an education

administrator, and more specifically, she holds a position as the Dean of Students at a Northwest private university.

***Dr. Pilar***

Pilar is a fourth-generation Mexican born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona. She identifies as Chicana, Mexican-American, and her roots are deep in Phoenix. She has a rich history of resistance and survival; her family fought segregation and fought to make Phoenix a more inclusive city. She understands that her privilege to be in specific spaces results from the defiance and strength her family endured. Her family history has inspired her to continue advocating for those unable to do so for themselves. Her father was a Chicano art advocate and collector who shared his passion for the arts with her. He was also one of her support systems while she worked full-time as an English teacher and undertook a doctorate. Her parents exposed her to different forms of knowledge and understood that social, cultural, and spiritual knowledge also held value. Individuals can accumulate learning, but to Pilar, it does not have vast value if one cannot apply it in the real world. Unfortunately, Pilar's father passed before she completed her doctorate, but even in his passing, he was a pillar of support. His words of encouragement powered her persistence and determination. Pilar completed her doctorate at a private liberal arts university and is currently an English teacher at a public school. Pilar is a lifelong learner enrolled in an administrative program to continue her transformative education.

***Dr. Valeria***

Valeria was born and raised in a city located in the center of Santa Clara Valley, California. Valeria is a second-generation Chicana and is the proud granddaughter of migrant and field workers. Valeria is a high school teacher whose focus is ethnic studies, where she can bring her own life experiences into the classroom and create a space for students to share their

lived experiences. She is a first-generation college student, and her knowledge is informed by the teachings and stories of her parents, grandparents, and community. Her mother had her at 21 and Valeria fondly refers to her mother as her first teacher. She really supported Valeria and helped guide her through college aspirations and educational goals. She referenced her ways of knowing from music and early 90's pop culture, including R&B and hip-hop. Valeria is the mother of three young children, all under the age of six and she became a mother three times during her dissertation journey. She identifies as a Chicana mama of black and brown children.

### ***Researcher***

I am the proud daughter of Mexican parents and self-identify as a 1.5-generation immigrant who moved to the United States from Mexico as a child. I am Latina and Mexican-American, depending on who you ask and who wants to know. My identity shift is a form of survival because I understand that specific communities do not entirely welcome immigrants. I am a proud first-generation college student and understand that those that came before have sacrificed more than I will ever know. I am the fourth of five children and grew up surrounded by family. I have seen my community overcome generational poverty by working the fields and backbreaking jobs so that the next generation might be better off. I grew up translating and interpreting in broken English and Spanish at parent conferences, doctor's appointments, the airport, and government offices. For many years, I thought all teenagers booked tickets to Mexico and helped translate unemployment applications. My parents encouraged us to study to get desk jobs and not spend a lifetime working in the fields.

I cannot recall a time when I was not in school, and although not every learning opportunity was positive, for the most part, I enjoyed it. In college, I was unprepared for what a cultural difference that environment would be, but I understood how to persist, and persist I did.



I graduated with three bachelor's degrees and continued to pursue a master's degree in education. Accounting and finance were my passion until I found education management, which provided a balance between finance and my love for learning. Learning and education are passions of mine outside of the classroom as well; therefore, I am currently the Operations Director of an international business university. As a doctoral student at a private liberal arts university, I continue to absorb practical knowledge of the academy.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Chicana Feminist researchers should be given credit for introducing *pláticas* into research (Delgado Gaitan, 1993; González, 1998; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Francisca González (1998) advanced this work in her pivotal dissertation with young Mexican students. She designed a qualitative research methodology coining it *trenzas y mestizaje*, a multimethodological approach in her study. As part of her methodology, she included *pláticas* and brought validity to the experiences and stories of her participants, who were all Latinas. For Gonzalez (2001), *pláticas* are more than data collection. In her view and the view of other research, *pláticas* authorize a space where knowledge can be shared, constructed, and theorized (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Additionally, *pláticas* allow Latinas researchers to resist the concept that scientific knowledge is the only legitimate knowledge (Saavedra et al., 2009). Using this approach, researchers have been able to make meaning of lived experiences, identify sources of knowledge and take the narratives of Women of Color as a form of resistance and agency (Patterson-Stephens & Hernandez, 2018).

To effectively use *pláticas* as part of the methodology, Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) emphasize the importance of five fundamental principles.

1. Must be research that draws upon Latina feminist theory

2. Research views participants as both contributors and co-constructors of knowledge
3. Draws on lived experiences as part of the research
4. Provides a potential space for healing
5. Relies on relations of reciprocity, vulnerability, and researcher reflexivity

The fifth key principle of *pláticas* is the braided facets: reciprocity, vulnerability, and reflexivity. What does this mean exactly? The first facet is that the researcher must also be willing to share (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). This is reciprocity; exchanging a conversation between researcher and participant creates a mutual benefit. The second facet involves vulnerability; *pláticas* cannot be a one-way conversation, and the researcher must be vulnerable and willing to answer any questions posed by the participants. The third facet, reflexivity is necessary to identify the basis of knowledge production. Furthermore, reflexivity “involves recognizing the presuppositions, the ideas, interests, and values we invariably enter into research” (Elabor-Idemudia, 2011, p.141). Using *pláticas* in my methodology will help “reclaim neglected voices as well as overlooked sources of everyday knowledge” (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, pp. 115-116).

In *plática*, the researcher helps guide the *plática* with their interests and themes. Rather than a prescribed interview, *pláticas* is a two-way conversation; researchers resist imposing their agenda on participants. Instead, participants are contributing with freedom and are encouraged to ask questions and discuss their interests. As noted by Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016), *pláticas* become “an extension of particular ways of knowing” (p. 102). That being said, they require vulnerability, and when used as a methodological approach, the researcher and co-creator of knowledge, or participant, are moved to reflect on their experiences. In summary, *pláticas* analyze and deconstruct power relationships; they convey respect and honor for the

participant's knowledge and the creation of such knowledge through a collaborative process that validates the lived experiences.

### *Data Analysis*

After the interviews were transcribed, each was read and checked for accuracy against the audio as a preliminary stage before coding. The interviews were then read once more to become more familiar with the narratives. During the first round of analysis, all interviews were listened to with an open coding mindset, and all transcripts were coded individually. The themes and patterns from those individual narratives were noted in a list format. The data sources were coded inductively (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Thomas, 2006), and themes emerged from the data with attention to the voices and experiences of the *testimonialistas* (Delgado Bernal et. al, 2012).

Data sources were organized via a spreadsheet system to identify patterns and emergent themes. In the second round of analysis, transcripts were read, keeping the themes from the spreadsheet in mind. While reading the transcripts and coding, it became apparent that the larger list of individual codes could be narrowed down into broader categories. This process required sorting and reducing emergent themes (Willig, 2003). In the final round of analysis, the themes were reduced to what is presented in this study. Using this final list of themes, the transcripts were read several times to highlight where each categorical theme emerged in the transcript. As the data was analyzed, patterns were examined within and across data sources and compared to notes taken during each *plática* about what the participants were trying to convey.

As the researcher and participant in this study, I seek to document my *testimonio* alongside the participants. In this way, I will analyze each *testimonio* with the community collective (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Delgado Bernal, 2008; Flores Carmona, 2014; Hurtado, Hurtado, & Hurtado, 2008; Jimenez, 2016; Russel & Rodríguez, 2007; Turner, 2008). I will

build upon other *testimonialistas* to (re)claim *testimonios* written for and by Latinas to theorize oppression and resistance (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Participants were provided with a detailed summary of the research and the opportunity to ask further questions for clarity. This allowed participants to make an informed decision as to whether they would continue to participate in the study. All participants in this study signed a consent form ensuring their identity would be protected, and participants had the choice to use a pseudonym. Participants received a written explanation of the purpose of the study, their participation, and their role as *pensadoras*. If participants had not had prior opportunities to embrace *testimonios*, it was further explained to them how their *testimonio* would be used in the study. Participants in the target group for this study were already vulnerable in the academy and faced many hidden systemic obstacles. The researcher was acutely aware that speaking openly about their experiences within academia can be seen as throwing rocks at your own glass house.

Participants were also allowed to read transcripts of their *pláticas* and had the choice to redact any information at any time. Approval from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of the West (name has been changed) was obtained to ensure that the study will be performed ethically. All materials gathered during the research process were strictly kept confidential, and recordings were only kept on the researcher's computer.

### **Positionality**

I am part of the immigrant group scholars referred to as 1.5 generation immigrants. However, when I introduce myself to others, this isn't necessarily how I self-identify. I continue to struggle with labeling my racial and ethnic identity, more often than not embracing my dual

identities, and as Anzaldúa (1990) expressed, I am a “synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness” (p. 1029). Although there is much debate and skepticism about individuals culturally and linguistically fully embracing dual identities, I consider myself a transnational who is always connected to two places (Sánchez, 2009), even if I spend the majority of time in just one. I pride myself on having the opportunity to watch my parents, grandparents, family, and friends work the fields, construction, and jobs considered blue-collar with dignity. I have seen the blood, sweat, and tears that go into earning each dollar and being unable to speak up about the working conditions out of fear of being discriminated against. I have witnessed first-hand discrimination that individuals can face for not knowing the language of the country they live in, as others do not realize that language is one of many struggles immigrants face. Unfortunately, I have also heard that these “people” are considered not educated, sophisticated or cultured because society has created a hierarchy of knowledge that dictates that formal schooling is superior to lived experiences (Sánchez, 2009). I have to disagree with this notion and believe these communities should be praised by society for their vast knowledge, well-rounded education, and multifaceted contributions to our commonwealth. I align with Wise and Stanley (1983) in that the researcher is a subject in her research and thus am aware that my personal history will be part of the analytical process. Without this knowledge, we as a society will never be great. We will never learn to work together, and there will always be those who consider themselves superior. Now more than ever, there is a need to validate knowledge produced by Women of Color and tear down the hegemonic hierarchy of knowledge that fogs academic structures and limits the advancement of Communities of Color.

This study provides the opportunity to understand the process of knowledge construction and legitimization. Maher and Tetrault (1997) reminds us that we must be aware and realize

those who produce such knowledge are ready to impose views to silence Women of Color and assume “that the experience of White men is the norm for the entire population and is the only experience that counts” (Elabor-Idemudia, 2011 p. 147). This study does not represent the experiences of all Women of Color, nor is it research about them, but rather for us, Women of Color. Most importantly, it is written for and by Latinas to challenge and resist dominant notions of knowledge creation that have invalidated us as agents and creators.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this study is that *pláticas* were conducted over Zoom because *pláticas* can differ based on various factors such as the location of the conversation, trust in the relationships, and language used. There were a few sections in one particular *plática* where the audio cut off due to a poor Wi-Fi connection. This challenge required additional follow-up clarification questions between researcher and participant to ensure accuracy.

Building on the scholarship of Feminists of Color, this review calls into question what constitutes official knowledge and by whom. Although data suggest more Latinas are seeking to pursue higher education, completion rates remain lower than in other groups. The literature review outlined various scholars challenging Eurocentric approaches to research and the academy. In addition to the decolonization process of hegemonic structures within higher education, chapter three outlines the methodology and methods of *pláticas* and *testimonios* utilized in this study. By actively not using Eurocentric methodologies and instead embracing and employing *plática* and *testimonios* as methodological approaches, I made a deliberate conscious effort to understand, validate, and bring light to the various ways Latina women navigate, negotiate, and resist hegemonic academic structures within higher education.

#### CHAPTER IV: *TESTIMONIOS*

*Testimonios* are included as part of the qualitative data collection to capture the complexities of the collective lived experiences of participants and honor their individual stories. *Testimonios* are a form of living narratives used to resist heteronormative ideologies (Cruz, 2012) and violent systems of oppression (Ybarra, 2020). They center the voices and experiences of Latina women and allow space for women to share their own stories, which are valid and vital. In line with the traditions of critical race scholarship and *testimonio*, I include my *testimonio* and experiences. In addition to the decolonization process of hegemonic structures within higher education, *testimonio* can contribute to the growing methodologies that seek to disrupt research. Therefore, this research's utilization and sharing of *testimonios* is part of our collective Chicana knowledge process of solidarity (Galvan, 2001). Through *pláticas* and the use of *testimonios*, the participants and I can share our journeys of healing, power, and resistance. It is not my intention to speak for the women in this study but to co-construct knowledge about their experiences; therefore, each participant was able to review their *testimonio* and edit as they saw best reflected their voice, story, and experiences. As a co-structor of knowledge, my role is not to determine what is true but to understand and honor their lived experiences and expertise.

The following *testimonios* speak to participants' backgrounds, shifting identities, academic tensions, and paths to higher education. A total of eight *testimonios* are in this study, and each participant had access to their *testimonio* and was allowed to verify content, check for accuracy, and edit. All participants self-identified as Latina and first-generation college students, meaning neither parent had attained a college degree. While pseudonyms are used throughout the *testimonios*, participants' cultural background, education history, employment, and other factors have not been modified to provide additional context for understanding participants' experiences.

*Testimonios* are presented in participants' own words, in line with the traditions of *testimonio*, and to honor women's voices.

**Dr. Alejanda, Academic Mama**

*I was the first in my family to be born in the United States. My mother and father ran away together from Mexico to California. My mother had another life with two kids and another family before meeting my father and wanted to terminate her pregnancy when she found out she was carrying me. However, my father, who was 19, begged her not to do it and insisted that he would raise me. After I was born, my mom left, and I did not meet my mom until later, when I was 22. My father tried to raise me in the U.S. independently, but like many immigrants, he had to work challenging shifts and did not have immediate family support to balance work and raise a young child. After a few months, he realized he could not do this alone and sought help from my grandmother in Mexico. So I was raised by my grandmother in Mexico.*

*After a few years, my family decided to move back to the U.S. I was about five years old then, too young to be in school, so I remember spending a lot of time alone while my family members were at school or work. My dad, at that time, was also serving time. I would watch TV, hear English, and create my own language. So I was super excited when my grandmother figured out how to enroll me in school. My favorite storytime book was *Rainbowfish*; I was captivated by its story.*

*At the time, my grandmother cleaned houses, and the women she worked with gave her information about the library. I was amazed by the number of books and an entire section of kid books. The first book I checked out was *Rainbowfish*. The librarian told us we could check out several books and return them later. I remember carrying all these books and my grandma*



telling me, “Regresa todos esos libros nomas agarra tres, no tantos<sup>1</sup>.” I grew up in an immigrant household, and the fact that books were free was so valuable. That was my first exposure to literacy. I loved and enjoyed reading, and my family would always say “Oh siempre se la pasaba debajo de la mesa, o aya en sofá leyendo libros, no la podías dejar que soltara el libro.” My grandmother was the person I looked up to the most. As the matriarch, she would navigate a lot for us and find resources through women she worked with. There's a saying, “Preguntando se llega a Roma,” if you ask, you can even go to Rome. I think that is what my grandmother and my family employed. Everyone has their way of knowing things, and I define knowledge as more than just what you know. Knowledge is people's life experiences and the knowledge gained growing up and their relationships, which holds as much value as a degree. Coming from an immigrant family and community, during my high school, I always felt I needed to be Americanized to fit in. My family also reminded me that I was born in the U.S. and not one of them; they meant not Mexican and not an immigrant. I grew up watching Telenovelas, but I was also drawn to pop culture as a means to fit in. I enjoyed punk rock bands and became a punk rocker.

During my undergrad, I remember feeling like it was a big deal to be in college, especially being the first in my family to attend a four-year university. I did not know anyone, and it felt like a fresh start. In high school, I was shy, so I wanted to be more involved. Undergrad was a journey of self-discovery. As part of this self-discovery journey, I joined a Latina sorority and studied abroad. While studying abroad in Paris, people there questioned my identity, and I was asked on more than one occasion, “what are you?” I would reply American, and they would say no, you are not American. They are blonde and have blue eyes”. These

---

<sup>1</sup> Take back all those books...just grab like three, not so many.

*questions taught me more about my history, culture, and identity. After studying abroad, I took ethnic studies and social movement classes and enjoyed the content, so I switched my major to ethnic studies. As another part of this self-discovery journey, I learned I did not have to have a fixed identity, and I could be a punk rocker and still love Banda. As a result, I embraced my Latinidad with more confidence.*

*I did my master's at San Jose State and majored in Mexican American studies, and I loved it. San Jose State was far enough to live there but not too far that I could still come home if needed. They were the best two years, and I found some of the most intelligent people I have met, and they were all brown Latinx folks. It was awesome just being around those people and making solid connections. Many of the friends I made went on to be professors and/or continued to their doctorates. After finishing my master's, I knew I wanted to enroll in a doctoral program, but I was broke and needed to work. I also met my partner and wanted to explore that relationship. I felt torn between going into a career or getting my doctorate. It all came down to managing finances, and I needed money, so I decided to work. A few years later, I got married and subsequently began my doctorate. I wanted to fit into academia and be a part of it, but now, after all these years of being in it, I feel it is not a place for me. Not everyone gets to be a part of it, and sometimes you are made to feel like you are not good enough. All these barriers exist, making it challenging for a person to become a professor and publish their work. It is also expensive; the books, memberships, and conferences add up to a lot.*

*Due to all these obstacles, very few of us Latina women are in these spaces. There is also just a lack of support. I am sure Latina/o faculty would love to make stronger connections with their students, but they too have their struggles and time restrictions not allowing them to engage with their students. In my first semester of the doctoral program, I had moments of doubt when I*

*was not getting the proper feedback but realized that no one else knew my research more than I did. Therefore, that made me an expert in my area of study. During the program, I also got pregnant, continued working full-time, and felt I was falling behind because other folks were already becoming professors. It was not easy to recognize that everyone has their timeline. A few things I learned from this program are that it is never too late, and you can still have a life while pursuing something you are passionate about.*

*One of the things that made me a successful student was looking for people I could turn to if I needed help. One aspect I continue to struggle with is nurturing relationships, especially with mentors. I advise building connections along the way and nurturing those relationships because they will come back and be your pillar of support. In the future, I want my dissertation published as a book on Chicana/Latina stories in Redwood city and to continue working on having more Latina women at conferences, whether presenting or showing up for your community.*

### **Eliana, The Counselor**

*My family came to the U.S. from Nicaragua in 1984 after the revolution in Nicaragua. They came here with my brother, who was four, and I was the first child in my family born in the United States. They relocated to San Francisco, where I was born, and my brother and I did all our formal schooling in the city. Unfortunately, I did not have my grandparents around because they were in Nicaragua. Still, some of my dad's family was already in the U.S.; therefore, I grew up surrounded by many cousins from my dad's side. I grew up in the Mission district, where culture, art, and knowledge were readily available, and stories were told through music, dancing, and drumming. This form of activism (art activism) is absorbed emotionally, mentally, and spiritually through my body. I was surrounded by people from different generations and*

would hear other immigrants talk about their experiences. The mission and its community have always embraced art and oral histories; that is an incredible way to learn. My parents had a Spanish-only rule in the house, which ensured we would not forget Spanish.

My parents made it a point that we knew where we came from, that we were proud to be Nicaraguenses, why our family was in the US and the politics of it, and also to care about the politics in the US. I have fond memories of sitting at the table and eating as my parents shared the same stories of their time in Nicaragua. I recall sitting at the table and my dad speaking about what happened when he was chased after the civil war. My dad's stories explained why my family moved to the states and why they had family in Canada, Los Angeles, and also back in Nicaragua. Through storytelling, my parents wanted to ensure that we understood not only where we came from but that we understood our actions had an impact on other people as well. They taught us that if we walk on this earth, we must influence other people. For example, in Nicaragua in the 80s, the uprising turned into a dictatorship due to greed and corruption. That impacted everyone and was also powerful because of the people fighting for a cause; understanding the ripple effects of their actions led to a great migration of people. We were aware of our parents' sacrifices to come to the U.S. My parents did not always bring it up, but we could see it. We saw what they were going through.

Both my parents were dentists in Nicaragua. My dad studied a little to be a surgeon before the civil war started, so education was not optional for my brother and me, and it was expected of us to do good in high school and at the very least attain a bachelor's degree. Growing up, I heard stereotypes that supposedly Latino parents did not care about education, which I never understood because I always found that to be the opposite.

*During my first eight years of school, I went to a private school that did not encourage independent thinking or asking questions. My high school had a large population of low-middle-income working-class families. They taught me that to be Latina is beautiful and to love our culture but also to understand that society would put roadblocks in front of us. Some classes did not follow the “proper” curriculum; instead, we talked about the black panthers and the brown berets. Teachers in these classes understood the need to educate students about how they would be treated in the real world. While in high school, I remember an advisor with a shirt that said, “do you have a plan because the system has a plan for you.” If you were fortunate enough, you would be surrounded by folks who taught you the tools to succeed after high school. I understood that some folks could not just pursue art and poetry because choosing that as a career might not lead to employment. Growing up in San Francisco, people say you get raised differently, which is a stereotype, but it is true. At least in my schooling experience, conversations around white privilege were encouraged and fostered. We were kids when we all saw what happened to Rodney King, and those conversations would happen in the schools in San Francisco.*

*As my brother had already experienced the schooling system, I relied a lot on him for the knowledge of applying to college and surviving that environment. My brother was in the Trio program, Upward Bound, in high school, which helped him understand how to navigate college, and what classes were required. I, too, later joined the Upward Bound program while in high school. While in college first, I did not feel like I had the luxury of picking random “fun” classes like art. Second, I was taking out loans, so I thought I could not afford to choose a major that might not lead to a good-paying job. Third, I was keenly aware of the obstacles I would face as a female Latina, a first-generation student, and coming from a low-income family, so I absolutely could not waste my time. I pursued a sociology major, and within my first year, I realized I*

*needed to be realistic even though I loved these classes. However, I made the difficult choice to minor in sociology, but I decided to double major in psychology and behavioral sciences.*

*In undergrad, I took classes that discussed social justice, being a person of color and code-switching. How you present yourself is essential because people already expect less of you, it was a special kind of knowledge that was not necessarily in the curriculum. That was the professor telling us on the side what would happen, and this is how you have to be ready for that. Especially for Women and Women of Color, society looks at us differently, and expectations are very low for us. I was so grateful to the Upward Bound program that when I graduated from undergrad, I went back and worked for them. I started as an after-school tutor, later became a tutor coordinator, and was a summer residential advisor at one point. As a residential advisor, I found that school counseling fused academics and socio-emotional development, and I wanted to pursue this as a career. Afterward, I enrolled in a counseling Master's program and began working as a high school counselor.*

*I entered the doctoral program being a little idealistic. I thought I could use it to change or influence education policy. However, now that I am in the final dissertation stages and have been at my current site for ten years, I understand the information I gather. I want to apply it at my place to help improve things first and hope it has a ripple effect. I want to collaborate with other directors and administrators, or even on a micro-level. Then these last few years of blood, sweat, and tears were all worth it. I have become more cynical along the way because I have spent more time in the education system, and I see it takes a lot of time to change current processes and procedures. To be honest, what keeps me going is trying to figure out how to plant positive seeds within my site; this will be a challenge unless I have those letters behind my name.*

*Unfortunately, some folks in leadership positions will not take your suggestions and ideas seriously if you do not have those three little EdD letters after your last name.*

*The role of the patriarchy is still alive. Sure we are in 2022, and we have made progress, but the expectation for Latinas is still very hetero normative and patriarchal. There continues to be this pressure of marriage and kids, and if we do the opposite, we are rebels. Why should I be considered a rebel for putting more interest in education and higher education rather than having baby fever? Recently, I heard a podcast about women entering higher education affecting the family. In that narrative, women are told their happiness and success in life equates to marriage and children. I know several women in my life who have made sacrifices because they have put their own careers or education on hold to nurture their boyfriend's career, which is self-sabotaging. Interestingly, people want people to save the date for your wedding, not your graduation.*

*The importance of Latinas being visible in higher education and doctoral programs is powerful for our youth. I struggled with the idea of telling people to refer to me as Dr., but our kids of color and young Women of Color need to see that they can do it too. As Latinas, we must go back and not just complete the program but move forward doing some things. We cannot forget to give back to our community; let them know you are still available and did not enter this high academic level where you are now not reachable because we did not get to this point alone. We want to bring more of our communities with us. I think it goes unsaid with Latinas; the game has to be played; we must learn to survive, be taken seriously, and not let people question our credibility. If I was a white man, I could show up and be respected, and people would assume that I knew what I was talking about. There are so many layers to being a person of color and*

*female, and I do not think this will change in my life, so we need to learn how to work within those standards, not lose our authentic selves and force the standards to change.*

### **Grace, Student Advocate**

*My parents are from El Salvador, and we moved to the U.S. when I was ten. I was born in El Salvador but grew up in San Francisco. As my mom's family was in the Bay Area, we moved to the area and stayed. Culturally, it has been challenging because I have had to balance two cultures and two languages. For example, when I travel back, I am often asked where I am from, and when I say El Salvador, people usually say that I do not sound Salvadorean. I get that a lot, and they do not believe that my parents and I are from here. There were many obstacles to learning a new language in a new country. The education system in the U.S. is very complex, and my parents did not fully understand it, partly because of the language barrier and because they were new to the American education system. That was a challenge that left me to navigate this system on my own, not because my parents did not want to be part of it but because they did not fully understand what they needed to do. My parents had medical careers in El Salvador, but these did not necessarily transfer once they came to the U.S.: they had no choice but to start over. My parents were there for my sister and me, trying to provide for us children and learn to adapt to this new culture.*

*In El Salvador, my mom used to sit with me, help with my homework, and spend hours teaching me other things. My dad would teach me random facts about life; he exposed us to realities that formal education settings did not teach, like how to navigate life, because he saw that as a way that you could defend yourself. Primarily as a female, he taught us about cars so we would understand automotive terminology so mechanics would not take advantage of us. Since my mother could not understand what they were teaching me in school, she was not*



*involved as much and left it up to the teachers. However, my parents continued to teach me life morals and culture at home. Since Spanish was my first language, the school placed me in ESL classes, and I find these classes are supportive and familiar but can also be very limiting. Unfortunately, students in these classes were sometimes forgotten and not exited. The same happened to me; I was in middle school and still in this ESL class, so I could not take AP classes.*

*Within my community, knowledge parallels how much academic education you attain, and you are considered educated by how many degrees you have or whether a master in that field. That is the reason my family was always persistent and supportive of college. There were no if's or but's about it. It is also generational because no one in my family was not allowed not to attend a four-year college program, and we all decided to go beyond a four-year degree.*

*I feel that Latino communities view education as necessary, and there is a sense that if you do not have any education or did not at least go to college, you limit yourself. Education opens some doors and creates some validity within communities, but it can also create a barrier and mistrust in your community. In my current role, I often speak Spanish with Latino families and am conscious of how I present myself. As a therapist, we often need to talk to parents. I recall speaking to a mother; she looked at me and said well, it is nice that you could be sitting in an office doing your job. I am on my knees doing my job cleaning. So at times, there is tension because people might feel that you do not understand their situation. Multiple times, I have gotten confused with the interpreter or the parent and not as a team member because of my last name or skin color. Five years ago, I would have just politely said no and introduced myself. However, now I question and ask folks what made them assume my role. I challenge them because that is the way I push back at microaggression and for folks to stop assuming.*

*The more I learn, the more I question what I knew before. For example, everything I learned in K-12 was to meet a standard or what society wanted us to understand. Schools are different; their teaching varies from upper-class private to public schools. Knowledge shapes how we see the world but can also help liberate us from societal limitations. I have learned in academia that you have to question everything you have learned.*

*I went to a high school with the word academic in its name and was supposedly one of the better public high schools because of its term academic. The reality was that teachers were not great, and we did not have consistent counselors that would check in with students. I remember this program called Upward Bound that I wanted to attend because it was supposed to prepare students for college. So a friend and I went to the counselor to ask about this session, but she told us this session was for kids that wanted to go to college. Without knowing anything about me or looking over my transcripts, she assumed I could not be a part of higher education. This moment made me question how staff sees kids and their future. Do they think my knowledge is not good enough to apply for college? I did not listen to that counselor, so I went to the session and got accepted into the program. While in the Upward Bound program, I was part of a community that invested in helping students. There is a misconception that kids like us do not want to attend college or stay longer after class than we need to. Upward Bound is different because they see the potential in first-generation students and help them achieve their potential by taking them on college campus tours to see themselves in higher education.*

*Access is granted or denied, depending on the neighborhoods. I have worked across several San Mateo County districts and see that other communities offer different opportunities. Unfortunately, not much is invested in them, especially in minority neighborhoods. In East Palo Alto and some parts of Redwood City, where it is predominantly Latinas/os, kids are put into*

*bubbles of what they can and cannot do. It trickles down to how or what students see in their future; some students feel that nobody cares if they graduate or not. And I think many kids feel they cannot go to college if they have a disability, especially a mental health disability. Many students see that they cannot afford college and do not know about grants or financial aid.*

*After undergrad, I started working as a school-based therapist in East Palo Alto and worked with kids that had an Improvement Plan (IP) and needed counseling services. I directly work with (Special Education) SPED students in a struggling school district known for its struggles to provide services to families. I was working with kids and saw that translation services were not excellent, and they did not give enough information to parents to make informed decisions. This experience made me realize that I wanted to help bridge the gap between mental health and SPED requirements to help families that do not have the resources or language capacity to advocate for their children. In addition, I wanted to help improve their advocacy and knowledge of the system because they could not familiarize themselves with the school system. Instead of addressing the issues, the district started moving kids to more restrictive settings that sometimes were more traumatizing than helpful. That played an essential part in wanting to go back to school and learn more about the system or how to navigate it. I had a good grasp of mental health but did not understand SPED well and wanted to gain more knowledge in that area. So I began my doctoral program in Special Education. Unfortunately, in the middle of the program, there was some internal dispute and the program crumbled, so I had to take courses in other programs.*

*There were other challenges, and I questioned myself about pursuing a doctorate. I was not confident that I would have the mental capacity to continue to help parents within my community, all while completing the coursework required and working full-time. To overcome*

*these moments of doubt, I focused on my research and saw how the system continuously violated parents' rights. For my dissertation, over eight weeks, I hosted sessions with mothers. Just knowing these parents worked long hours and still managed to log in to zoom after work to learn. They showed up, asked questions, and wrote notes. The coordinator that helped me run the groups would tell me how significant the change was for the participants in the sessions. After participating in these sessions, parents got out of their cars, asked questions, and were more active with teachers. The study I am focusing on is very personal; the experiences I witness parents having are personal because those were my parents at some point. I remember my parents struggled because they were not familiar with the systems, and there was nobody to help them figure that out. That meant that most of the time, this fell on me as a kid, which was overwhelming. You feel like you have a lot of responsibility, and sometimes kids are not able to conceptualize why parents are not able to help. It can feel like parents do not care, thus creating a barrier between generations. If an adult sometimes has difficulty navigating a system, how can we expect a kid to navigate a system? Even more disappointing is that 20 some years later, I still see parents struggling.*

*Being in a doctoral program and working full-time has been challenging but highly satisfying. I continue to see the importance of bridging the gap between mental health and SPED. This journey is challenging for women, specifically Latina women. So many spaces and people in academia question you, and there are moments when we doubt ourselves. Being in a doctorate program is not easy; it can be intimidating, but we must stick around and graduate. We should celebrate that we have made it to this point which means we have already broken many barriers and overcome numerous obstacles.*

## **Jenny, The Educator**

*My parents are both immigrants from Jalisco, Mexico. I was born and raised in Los Angeles (LA), California. LA is very close to the border, so we often traveled to México. I had family there that lived in Tijuana, which was only about a two-hour car ride. The border crossing back then did not have as many restrictions, and it felt effortless to cross; we went back and forth between México and the U.S. My grandmother and a few other family members lived with us, so family always surrounded me. I have two older siblings, but I always felt like I was an only child because of the age difference. We took family trips to other parts of Mexico and learned about our family history. I speak Spanish because my parents taught me. Still, it is a little limited because my parent's Spanish vocabulary is more conversational than academic. Still, I completed all my secular education in the US, where all classes were in English. My parents never tried to hide their culture because it was something they were proud of, and being proud of my culture is one of the many things I learned from them.*

*I grew up in a working-class neighborhood and went to school with a diverse student population and not too many white students. The teachers, on the other hand, were primarily white. It was not until high school that I had a Latino teacher. One of the main reasons I went to college was that this Latino teacher became my mentor. Another reason was that I was fortunate enough to be part of an academic program that promoted college. Students were placed in cohorts and completed classes geared toward four years of college preparation.*

*I became pregnant young while I was in college at 19, and my parents were scared and not very supportive. They did not think I could graduate and keep the child. I had always been a good and independent student, but facing this new situation, I had to seek support from other Chicanas. I did not stop there, and I sought different types of support and networks that I could*

*tap into. Once you have a kid, you need additional financial resources. As a young college mom, I sought help for welfare services, and you feel that they interrogate you just to get basic needs such as medical, food, and housing. Sometimes we were very fortunate, and some caseworkers would help us, but other times we had to learn to navigate the system independently. Having been through the system, I see a lot of students in the Chicana/o community colleges and universities who just do not have that support. My purpose since then has been to create spaces for pregnant women and support them through their journey by providing support and resources. Women can receive this support through a women's circle that I co-facilitate, and we discuss issues women face such as shame, mental health, sexism, and what it means to be a woman. This group is not necessarily part of the community college I work for, but I have received some financial support, and before Covid-19, we met on campus. Our meetings are currently on zoom due to the pandemic, but we hope to resume in-person once we can safely do so.*

*My dad finished third grade, and my mom finished fifth grade, they could not continue their education due to financial hardship, and as children, they needed to prioritize work over school. Even though my parents did not complete their formal education, they have taught me so much, and I often call them for their advice and guidance. My grandmother cooked a lot for her small business, and food has always been a central part of me. After I had my daughter, I felt connected to my culture through food and learned how to cook more traditional recipes from my grandmother. In addition to being agile in the kitchen, she was loving and supportive, and that too, she would share with me.*

*For my master's, I followed anthropology, a traditional discipline. The folks in the program were primarily white except for a handful of Latinas/os. That experience is probably the whitest space that I have had to navigate. Some teachers in the program believed in a*

*traditional approach but also wanted anthropology to be part of the corporate world, which was quite the opposite of my values. Nevertheless, I stayed firm with my values by working closely with faculty and other students doing work that aligned more with my values.*

*Being first-generation, I did not know if I wanted to get a doctorate. After high school, I aspired simply to earn a bachelor's degree, but while in college, I learned about master's degree programs and decided to continue my education. I was not planning on getting a doctorate, but my husband heard about the program, and we went together to visit the campus and sit in a class. His interest sparked my interest, and we found the content of great interest, so we both applied. My husband and I are probably one of few couples completing the doctoral program together. Having classes together holds us accountable, and we always discuss course readings and topics. It is nice to have those conversations with a thought partner who is also your life partner. We both support each other because there have been a lot of challenges with Covid during our academic journey. On the days we had class, we would be out for 12-hour days when we met in person. One semester, in particular, our youngest daughter had health issues, and we were unsure of what was wrong with her; that semester, we both did not sleep well, but we had classes and assignments, and we hung in there. There have been times when I am so tired because I am a mother full-time, working multiple part-time jobs, and in school full-time that I do not know if I have the capacity to finish this degree. I just try to stay motivated by thinking of the possibilities of when I do complete the program.*

*On top of that, my work situation is complicated as a part-time adjunct faculty, and it has been cumbersome not having employment stability. We are undervalued as professionals because part-time faculty are seen as if we simply teach and leave. However, I have never been that type of teacher; I teach ethnic and Chicano studies at a community college and have been*

*there for six years. I am committed, and it has been disappointing to feel that adjunct faculty are not valued. Feeling this disappointment towards the academy has been discouraging, but at the same time, it has fueled me to complete a doctoral degree. My goal is for our entire family to graduate simultaneously; my oldest daughter graduates high school while the youngest graduates elementary school. It is also motivating that my husband and I will graduate together and that motivation helps me not slack off, but it is indeed tricky.*

*We had to tell our kids that we would embark on this journey as a family and that the next few years would be difficult for all of us. As a family, we had to understand that we would have to make sacrifices and our time would be spent differently, and as a family, we committed. Our weekends are typically family day, reading day, or work. It continues to be challenging to balance it all. Luckily, my husband and I have been teaching for a while, so we have experience preparing for classes. In the long run, the degree will be worth it, but we still need to pay bills, our kids have to eat, tuition is not cheap, and you factor in tuition for two.*

*If I were to talk to someone considering pursuing a doctorate, I would encourage them to ask themselves why they are pursuing this degree and explore what they hope to get from the program. I think it is essential for people to begin this journey with a clear mindset. As I said before, it is a costly commitment, but a degree and education are tools people cannot take away from you. I encourage folks to get an education, and it is essential because we do not see many people of color, especially Chicanas, who have been able to get their doctorate degrees. It is a competitive market, and the market demands that we have those titles and degrees. I never imagined that I would be where I am today. Some things were accidental, and other things just worked out. It is important to sometimes just live in the moment and enjoy the process.*



*As a Chicana, there is a lot of pressure, stereotypes, and shame about being pregnant while in college. There was also this assumption that I would not be able to graduate because I was pregnant. We do not need this added pressure; we need acceptance and validation to continue our education. Many women in academic spaces do not have kids, and motherhood expectations can be overwhelming for women. Added pressure includes folks in higher education who are new to academia, who feel imposter syndrome and do not deserve to be in those spaces. There is an internal dilemma that many Chicana women battle with that we often think we are not smart enough, but we have fought to be in these spaces, so we are deserving and worthy of having a higher education degree.*

**Dr. Olga, Student Dean**

*I am Juan and Lupe's, daughter. My grandparents, great-grandparents, and ancestors are all from what we now call Mexico. I was born and raised in Michigan and am a Midwestern kid. Although I never really identified with that region as an identity, I had a great childhood and loved where I grew up. My family ended up in Michigan because they came to work in agriculture and were farm workers who worked in the sugar beet fields, picking strawberries and cucumbers and planting peppers. They did not have to do that for too long; after a few years, they could work in factories. Still, the social-economical turning point for our family was in the 80s when many family members could get jobs in auto manufacturing plants. With a more stable income, they could buy homes and cars and set roots in Michigan. The Mexican diaspora is more widespread than people realize; we are not just all in Texas, Arizona, and California.*

*I grew up the oldest of five kids, and education was always essential to us. My parents were straight-up nerds, and they would take us to museums. My mom loves to meet people and learn about their cultures. She went to English classes and met people from different parts of the*

*world. And with her rudimentary English, she would ask people basic questions because she wanted to know people's traditions. As a family, we also kept our Mexican traditions alive through family events. My dad focused more on architecture and cars, and my parents understood education as a vehicle for our social mobility.*

*My dad came to the U.S. as a kid. While in community college, he joined several student organizations focused on keeping tradition and knowledge intact from Mexico. He grew up poor, but it was American poor, so he still had access to food. In Mexico, he would sleep on the ground and beg for food. However, one of the few things he brought from Mexico were his history or social studies school books, and he held on to them dearly. We had access to those, and he would point out the different historical narratives written in those books compared to the ones from the U.S. He would highlight that people had different perspectives on world events and that this was intentional.*

*On the other hand, my mom came to the U.S. as a young adult. She is a social person and always connected with people. In the U.S., she was poor, but in Mexico, she was upper middle class and studied to be a legal secretary. She had worked for a law firm and knew how to type. She brought her typewriter with her, and as young kids, she taught us how to use the machine. She used every opportunity to teach us what she knew. For example, she would be washing dishes and spelling out loud Spanish words for us to repeat. She had a bigger world in Mexico than she did here and shared that world with her children. My parents taught me resilience and persistence; I am sure they did not want to wake up at 4:30 am every morning to pick cucumbers, but they still did. My parents' work ethic and persistence were tied to survival.*

*College was a culture shock, to say the least, because I went to a predominantly white school, not on purpose, but I opted to attend a big state school since that state school offered me*

*the most financial aid, and financial support was essential. I was unsure how I would pay for college, and having this aid helped. That is how I found myself in central Michigan and studied journalism as a major and art minor. Most of my classmates were white, so I found my people outside the classroom and was fully involved in college as the President of my Latina sorority. After I graduated, I worked as a reporter for the Associated Press (AP), which is how I ended up in California. I came to Fresno, California as an AP reporter to cover agriculture in the state. Being a reporter is very isolating, and you work long hours, so it is challenging to be involved with the community. I also felt that I could not be connected to the community because, as a reporter, you need to maintain neutrality, but this is impossible if you are part of a community. I was conflicted because I still wanted to write, but I also missed being an activist and part of a community. I decided to pursue a master's degree in creative writing and received my master's in Fine Arts and Creative Writing from Fresno State. While in grad school, I worked as a resident advisor director, which is how I started in administrative positions. I continued to work in a college setting as an administrator because I loved working with college students, they are so lovely and passionate, and there is never a dull day. I continued to pursue higher education administration as my career and received a doctorate in International Multicultural education.*

*Critical race theory was not new to me in college, formally, yes, but as a kid, I was always interested in race and the structural ways that white supremacy was embedded in the culture. My family values knowledge and is not super snobby about where it comes from; a degree equals high status and expertise. However, they assign more value to formal education and degrees, and my mom will undoubtedly tell anyone who will hear her that I am a doctor. However, they also respect that kind of old-world expertise and pay attention to formal degrees.*

*I love learning, education, knowledge, and writing, but I have experienced the ivory tower producing insular knowledge.*

*When I was a bright-eyed fresh high school student and a new undergrad, I thought it was cool that a person could teach, read and write as a career. However, after being in the academic environment for some time now, I see why many individuals, including myself, have chosen administrative careers. I see the politics that faculty face and how many Faculty of Color have to move and chase down that next job. It is tragic, and I sound pessimistic and hopeless, but I know that there are little corners that are better, and there are possibilities but very few of them. I never thought about pursuing a doctorate; I was good with my bachelor's degree, but then I got a master's degree, and when I graduated from that degree, I found out that as an employee of the institution, you get tuition remission. I am practical, and free is free. Still, if I wanted to continue working in higher education institutions, I needed to obtain a degree more aligned with higher education. I attended a prospective student night event and was pleasantly surprised that several brown people were in the program; it was not what I had expected.*

*While in the program, I had a lot of thoughts that I am sure others also had. It made me feel dumb, which I know is imposter syndrome, but being in that space could be intimidating. There were moments when I started second-guessing myself, such as that I had always been proud of being a good writer. I enjoyed the interview process and loved my topic because it researched undocumented students and their artwork. I worked full-time while in the program, would force myself to be on a schedule, and would write after work and on weekends. I flex my degree primarily because I work in a university setting but also because I want Students of Color and their families to see that there are brown doctors and that Latina women can also hold leadership positions. It is equally important to point out that we are knowledge makers and*

*should be honored. I hope we are to be a drop in an even more giant bucket and that we uplift more folks. There are a lot of reasons that have kept Latina women out of academic spaces. Primarily structural barriers and that we either don't see ourselves in these spaces or think it's not for us. For so many of us, we come from school districts that aren't setting us up for academic success, districts are underfunded, and it is a system that is not equitable for immigrants, low-income, People of Color, and rural communities.*

*My advice for Latina women who might feel guilty for not going to a baby shower or not seeing friends is to recognize that it does not mean you do not care about the people in your life. You are a human and need to get back to your grind. We are not doing it just for ourselves. We are doing this as a manifestation for people and folks looking to us for inspiration. Now is the time to trust yourself; you have been in courses and learned different ways of learning, writing, and questioning. More than ever, this is a time to lean into trusting yourself. It is essential to not just come into academia or higher education and make claims. It is crucial not only to bring the knowledge we have back to our communities but bring our communities into academic spaces. I encourage students, faculty, and scholars to think about how we are dismantling the barriers that academia insists on putting between us.*

**Dr. Pilar, Social Justice Warrior**

*My folks were super young when they got together, and the reason they got together has to do with a part of Arizona's history. I am originally from Arizona, and my family's originally from Arizona. Thus, I am a fourth-generation Phoenician. Those are my people for generations on both sides of my family. My mom had a baby with down syndrome when she was 19 and was looking for someone stable that she could depend on. My dad was one of the first members of the*

*Movimiento Artístico Río Salado (MARs). This Chicano art gallery set up gallery parties in downtown Phoenix and focused on Chicano artists.*

*My mom went to one of these showings and knew who my dad was and the family name. Back in the day, the Latino Community was small, and everyone knew everybody's business. My mom knew that my dad's family was dependable and came from a good family, so my mom hit on him. My dad, on the other hand, was struck by her beauty. My mom became pregnant while dating my father and asked him if he wanted to continue to be part of their life. She was going to leave him if they had not gotten married. My father was 26 at the time and was excited to be a father, and they married. I understood why my mother was so adamant about finding a partner like my dad; it was about love but also because it was a form of survival. Their marriage did not last forever, but my parents both taught us valuable life lessons and gave us all the love they had.*

*I am the way I am because of an artistic dad who was a social justice advocate and a strong mother. I am proud to come from generations that resisted and learned to thrive in Phoenix. My great-grandfather, Adam Diaz, is one example. He was the first Mexican American to be elected as a city council member and was famous back in his day. That meant he was the first Mexican American to work in the Phoenix government and made a tremendous impact. I grew up hearing how he lived in the barrios and was kicked out of affluent white neighborhoods in the late 50s. He and his family decided to move from the barrios into a wealthy northern Phoenix neighborhood after he was elected. However, when they arrived in the neighborhood, a welcome wagon came, which meant the racist white people did not welcome him and his family, and either he needed to get out of the neighborhood on his own or they would help get him out. So he decided to raise his family back in the barrios. My grandparents were segregated from movie theaters and swimming pools in Phoenix, but they organized, raised money, and fought so*

*that the next generations could be in these spaces. Hearing their stories and seeing the difference my ancestors made is one of the reasons my passion for social justice began.*

*In addition to that, my older sister has a disability and became very aware of learning differences. This experience helped me understand that we must advocate for others who cannot speak up for themselves. My parents valued education and encouraged us to continue learning and developing academically. Education was a priority in our family, a right my ancestors fought to obtain, and I was constantly reminded of this privilege. Being reminded of this privilege added pressure, and I did not want to disappoint my family.*

*My dad loved to read and always consumed knowledge by listening to the radio or reading books. He had an extensive library and would take us to bookstores and the public library. His knowledge also came from exposure to Chicano art, museums, family gatherings, and lived experiences. After work, he would come home, maybe angry sometimes, and tell us the story of what happened to him that day. He would point out that life was challenging and complicated for a brown man in a conservative state.*

*Knowledge is exposure to new concepts, such as academic and socio-cultural knowledge, but I believe there are many facets to knowledge. Just because someone is an expert in one specific area or topic does not mean they hold extensive knowledge in all other areas. Many forms of knowledge are not recognized, such as spiritual, social, and cultural knowledge. People express their knowledge, expertise, and understanding of something through written expression, dance performances, or art. Yet not everyone understands how love, compassion, and knowledge comes from family and your community. In my family, we value understanding and believe that accumulating academic knowledge does not mean much if you can not apply this knowledge in a real-world context.*

*My grandmother shared stories of when her knowledge was not valued because she did not have a degree or was seen as something less because she was a woman. Her personal lived experiences show that patriarchy and misogyny are still present in the Latino culture. However, she did not let these comments or experiences stop her. Over the years, we have seen that women have organized to gain more independence and step into leadership roles that legitimize women's experience and homemade knowledge.*

*I was involved in clubs, sports, and student councils in high school. Scholarships were introduced to me by one of my tias. The process for these scholarships varies, so I spent a lot of time writing and completing applications. One scholarship I was awarded was the Gates Millennium scholarship, and this particular scholarship gave you financial support but had many stipulations you had to follow. Many Women of Color do not have access to resources, are not able to access financial resources, or simply do not trust the education system that has failed them. Three generations of my family have attended Arizona State University (ASU), and I wanted to be part of this legacy; I also decided to attend ASU. I never imagined moving out of state, I was scared, but towards the end of my degree, I started to regret my degree choice.*

*College classes were challenging with over 300 students in lecture halls. It was easy to fall behind, and I did not do well. Another reason why I fell behind was that I struggled with my identity. To help me figure out my identity, I joined a sorority, and Greek life was an exciting experience. While in that social community, some people said racially charged comments, and to avoid these comments, I dyed my hair blond. Even with blond hair, I did not know where I fit in because I did not fit in. Not fitting in with the Chicana or white kids always made me feel out of place. I was not considered Mexican in some circles because I could not speak Spanish. This would bother me because Mexicans are a product of forced assimilation in many areas and were*



*forced to speak English and punished for speaking Spanish. My limited Spanish language abilities result from generations denied access and reproduction of their language.*

*Higher education institutions have a history of having an elitist mentality that there is a specific type of person who holds academic knowledge. The academy and ivy league universities are designed to enhance spaces where white academic folks learn. As an educator, I have been teaching little ones for a long time, working with educational leaders and folks from all different backgrounds. I joined a doctoral program to be among like-minded individuals who value social justice and to be surrounded by folks who are socially aware. Through this program, I wanted to tap into that knowledge and further understand how to take this back to the classroom. I remember my dad telling me there are not many brown Latina women in academic spaces, and if you look at the percentage, he was right. Less than 5% of Latina women have a doctorate. He would always tell me that I needed to be part of that number and change it. Knowing that a lot was resting on my shoulders was a huge reason I could accomplish what I did. I remember his words and encouragement “you can do it, and I am proud of you.”*

*The journey was difficult, and I would not have been able to do it without much support. My husband is also a big part of why I was able to finish, he sacrificed a lot, and he could step away from me and let me work every night while he made me dinner. He ensured that I was well-fed and there to listen to me when I wanted to vent. There is a lot to be said about the human spirit, and you know, right before completing my dissertation, my dad passed, but I kept hearing his voice, “get your stuff done kid, just get it done.” In Spanish, there is a saying that says, “no hay mal que por bien no venga” meaning that every cloud has a silver lining. The doctoral journey is long and complicated, especially working full-time and attending school. But, in dark times, there was light to keep me going, and knowing that Latina women are breaking down*

*barriers is beautiful. Latina women are changing how education looks, feels, and is understood. We need to become leaders who can make changes and pave the way for people who look like us also to be part of these spaces.*

*I am continuing to invest in my professional development and working on my administrative credentials for a leadership position. I have seen that public institutions need to be rebuilt to be more inclusive and equitable, and I want to be part of that change. At school, I was exposed to math, reading, and writing but what I find helpful today as far as connecting with people is the social and cultural knowledge that I learned from interactions with family and lived experiences. This is the type of change that institutions need to embrace in which student experiences are brought into the classroom as learning tools. There is not enough emphasis on Chicana/o art, and we need to emphasize Chicana/o arts as a primary source of knowledge.*

**Dr. Valeria, Chicana Mama**

*I identify as a Chicana mama of black and brown children. As a mother of three young children, I learn and unlearn through them. My partner and I are healing together so our children do not carry the same heavy burden. I hope to do the best we can and heal, love and love more every generation. My parents are very loving, supportive, and nourishing in my family. I was born and raised in East San Jose. My dad is a first-generation San Jose Chicano. My mom was also born and raised in San Jose. Her mom, my grandmother, was born in Colorado, and her father, my grandfather, was born in Nuevo León. All of my grandparents were migrants and worked in the fields. My maternal grandmother birthed 12 children, and 11 survived. She would carry a box with her babies when she worked in the field. I think of the journey of having a basket and going to work and taking your children with you, caring for them, and working to make ends meet and it reminds me of the journey through generations of what my*

*mom and grandmother went through. When I started teaching, I took my baby in a basket to my classes. It brought me joy to connect my experience with my grandmother's. I work with young people as a high school teacher in the Eastside of San Jose, where I teach ethnic studies. My classes encompass elements of my life journey, hip hop, traveling, and creativity.*

*As a child, I understood that my family was wealthy and abundant in cultural and familial wealth. My grandparents informed my ways of knowing, they taught me Spanish. My grandmother wanted to make sure her grandchildren could speak Spanish, and my grandfather worked hard to achieve what he referred to as the American Dream. He would always say, adelante. I also learned through dichos, homemade recipes, along with the dresses and blankets hecho a mano. These were the foundation, but I later learned that I, too, could form my own ways of knowing new people and new communities. Later in life, I realized I did not have to subscribe to one particular way of knowing.*

*My mother had me at 21, and she was always my first teacher. She always supported me and guided my educational goals. I understood what was possible by seeing her go to Community college. My mother had a Chicana friend who also significantly impacted my formation and Chicana journey. She was the first Chicana graduate I knew; on top of that, she was doing community activism. She took the time to take me to San Jose State and shared how to navigate this environment as a Chicana and, more specifically, as a large-body Chicana. She would laugh in the face of men who would comment on her body and always found a way to live authentically with her truth. I am thankful to my mom for maintaining that friendship and fostering those growth opportunities.*

*My elementary school experience felt like a community. Teachers created a space that accepted different cultures and provided support. However, in middle school, I took a bus with*

*all these eastside kids to a more affluent white community and joined a new school district. They placed me in honors classes and a gifted program. In honors English, I started reading Seventeen magazines, and in creative writing assignments, I would mirror and write the white narrative of teenage experiences in these magazines. My life was not like this, and I did not want to share my life with others. I figured that to navigate this space; I needed to learn to perform. High school was a bit different because I wanted to be out as soon as possible. I was in an Avid Program that helped and supported first-generation college students navigate the college admissions process. In my senior year, I could leave school in the afternoon to work for the city of San Jose. In undergrad, I performed even during my application to go into business school and in that one year of business classes where I was the only one of three Latinas/os. I remember very few Students of Color, and the professor did not really know how to engage with us or provide support. They even used to be surprised when we passed our exams and completed our projects. My sophomore year at Santa Clara University was more empowering as I learned to reclaim myself and engaged in ethnic studies.*

*We hold such an abundance of knowledge in our body, mind, and spirit. How incredible would it be if high school students were aware of tapping into the energies they hold and popularizing the idea of mindfulness. Instead, society forces us to navigate a system of schooling that tells us knowledge does not look this way, which is spirit murdering. When asked to engage in and with various forms of knowledge, there is a tremendous vulnerability. This knowledge brings joy through sharing stories, photography, creative writing, creative businesses, dance, and song. Knowledge does not have to be given from behind a desk or in a classroom. Knowledge is revolutionary when we hold space for others to share.*

*I remember doubting myself when I first started the master's program because of the heavy and daunting oppressive systems. The weight of these structures felt too heavy, on top of commuting to class and tuition payments. However, I found the strength to continue from my community and ancestors. In 2014, I graduated with my master's and began the doctoral journey; that same year, we found out we were expecting. A particular Latina faculty member encouraged me to pursue a doctoral degree, and her intentions moved me as she conveyed in her courses. Additionally, some courses in the program were combined with doctoral classes, and I was learning alongside postgraduate students. I understood that the doctoral program was more demanding and would require more commitment, but that is what I wanted to pursue.*

*My first class within the doctoral program was with two faculty members that taught as a family. They had their children in the class, and I saw what was possible regarding teaching as a family. After this class, my perception of what prescribed roles a professor needed to ascribe changed after this class. Their incorporation of family in the classroom demonstrated that having a young visitor in the classroom was a blessing. Parents who bring their children to the classroom show they are committed to their children and continuing their own education. Still, I had moments of doubt while in the program of becoming pregnant; however, that doubt came from fear of judgment, and I felt like I would disappoint my advisor. However, when I informed my advisor that I was pregnant, she was reaffirming and loving. I would show up to class pregnant, but being amongst a sisterhood of other folks in this shared space, I realized how humanizing the program was. I was zooming before zoom became popular during COVID; when I gave birth to my child, I was able to zoom into class. I want to say that if the program was not supportive of mothers and caretakers, I do not think I would have been able to complete the program.*

*I had to say no to my family events and celebrations during my doctoral journey. My son's birthday was in September, and I was not a student celebrating my child's birthday for the first time. I realized I did not have an anxiety attack and was not worried about an assignment or having to split my time. I could listen to my family, be present, and celebrate. I realized that I did not have the opportunity to be entirely present between school and my children because I was always thinking about school. I know some folks do not understand why I began this journey or the focus of my dissertation but to be able to share and present my work felt very validating. The writing portion of the dissertation is rewarding but a difficult period. I woke up at midnight or early in the morning to write. I had to learn to listen to my writing style because I am not someone who plans out their writing schedule. I enjoyed writing in my mom's backyard. During quarantine, coffee shops were closed, so I had to adapt and write on a messy bed listening to my kids and husband outside. Sometimes I would give myself a break and listen to webinars, and they would give me a fresh start.*

*This title and identity of being a doctor, or Doctora more precisely, and being first-generation, in addition to my time, space, and energy, is a lot to consider. I am still figuring out how to be part of this space, but I know that we need more folks who are in academic areas. And will be intentional about not positioning themselves to continue the status quo because people who look like me have harmed me. People who are Chicanas/os have harmed me and have harmed other Chicanas/os. I have met folks who are gatekeepers that can essentially derail someone from their educational aspirations. I remember being disgusted with the lack of representation of Women of Color across academia and Chicanas in higher education. I am tired of the patriarchy within academia and how it emerges in the classroom. I am navigating*

*this obstacle because I want to teach at higher education institutions. Still, at the same time, I do not want to be part of this academic environment that is not accepting of Chicana women.*

*As Chicana women, I do not think we should put our life on hold and do not need to subscribe to a particular timeline. There is no template for your dissertation; your dissertation is uniquely your own, and life is part of this process as it informs. Perfection is a colonial standard that we need to fight. I have moments when I realize I am a doctor, a Doctora, but I am also allowing myself time to engage with how I carry the new title. I have had students call me Doctora, and it is so sweet. It has also come up with my children recently; they said, "I want to be a doctor, like my mom, when I grow up," which made the entire journey worth it.*

### **Self/Researcher, La Vaga**

*I am part of the immigrant group academic scholars refer to as the 1.5 generation, which means that I immigrated to a different country as a child. When I was eight, my family traveled to the United States because my parents sought better opportunities for their children and followed the American dream. My family was of mixed status, and while most of my family were U.S. citizens, my older sister and I were non-U.S. citizens. A few years later, after several visits to various immigration offices, we were sworn in as naturalized citizens. At the time, I was too young to understand the significance of these documents and the opportunities afforded to U.S. citizens.*

*Therefore, when I introduce myself, I struggle with labeling my racial and ethnic identity, primarily because my identity has been under constant transformation. We moved to a city in northern California with a population of less than five thousand people. We would joke that if you blinked while driving past our town, you would miss it. Fields surrounded the city, and the economy was directly influenced by agriculture; as a result, the town's population faced constant*

*changes. My parents came from small towns in Mexico and entered the workforce young. Unfortunately, neither of them had the opportunity, time, or financial stability to attend school after elementary. However, they are two of the most intelligent, caring, and self-reliant humans I know. They learned from others, the world, and their own lived experiences. While in the U.S., my parents and many other family members worked in agriculture and were proud farmworkers. After some time, my father secured employment with the California transportation department, where he maintained roads until he retired. My mom, a stay-at-home mother, was a hustler and attended English classes at night to pass the California cosmetology test to make extra income as a licensed hairdresser.*

*As an immigrant student who did not speak English, I took English remedial classes; and during these classes, I felt most at home. Similar individuals in similar situations surrounded me, and we were all going through change together. We became a small family inside those four walls, in which we did not fear being laughed at for mispronouncing words. Instead, we were all trying to figure out where we fit in, how to fit in, and debating if we should assimilate. In other classes, I was often mute, careful how I spoke, and felt like I did not belong. Unfortunately, imposter syndrome has never entirely disappeared.*

*In school, I was categorized as an English as a Second Language (ESL) student, and I remember constantly being pulled out of classes to be tested. The administration was highly interested in test scores, and I want to believe administrators were unaware of the stress and academic setbacks testing sessions had on ESL students. Testing sessions were stressful, and we missed classes and content while in them. Additionally, being singled out and constantly tested on your language abilities was embarrassing. Our community consisted of primarily low-income families, and the district lacked the funding to provide adequate support for ESL students. Our*



*classrooms were crowded with students of different ages, nationalities, levels, and education needs. For one reason or another, some students never tested out of remedial classes and were rarely provided opportunities for growth and change. I urged for the days when I no longer needed to be tested and was allowed to attend regular classes without interruptions. Finally, the administration pulled me from remedial English classes in fourth grade. I was excited because I thought this would stop the alienations and labeling associated with the ESL classroom. But unfortunately, I was wrong, and I lost much more. As I transitioned into a new space, I became more distant from the community I called my family.*

*I recall a set of textbooks we followed in middle school and those 5th-grade state projects. We launched rockets in science to explore gravity, built bridges to study engineering, and memorized the constitution. However, I do not recall learning much about other cultures, and my culture was never explored, recognized, or valued in the classroom or curriculum. My high school experience was not all that different. As a freshman in high school, I never imagined that I would continue with my education. My parents valued education, but with five children and limited financial resources, we never expected our parents to help pay for college financially. As a first-generation low-income student, I joined Upward Bound, a program that supports students enrolling in secondary education. With this program's support, I built confidence and became a "well-rounded" student or an ideal candidate for secondary education. I had to become the person colleges and scholarships wanted to see on paper. But who exactly was this? Therefore, I embraced different identities and, to this day, continue to navigate two worlds.*

*Long hours of writing and rewriting my story produced results, and I received numerous scholarships and acceptance letters from various prestigious universities. However, after visiting*

*several universities, I chose to attend a less prestigious university. Unfortunately, this decision did not fare well with several peers and teachers who became less supportive. According to them, I was wasting my potential, avoiding new challenges, and being held back by my family and community. They failed to understand that I made a conscious effort to attend a university with a diverse population that embraced community over individual success and had the added benefit of being close to my family meant I had a support system. My family has not always understood my passion for education, but they have always been supportive.*

*Although the Latina/o population has grown within higher education, representation in academic spaces remains sparse. I look back at the first business class in college and how I was one of five women and the only Latina in the classroom. Colleges and universities have long been spaces with considerable ethnic and gender gaps. It is alarming that about 95% of my teachers were white, and Women of Color are underrepresented in higher education. It was not until I entered a doctoral program led by Latina faculty that I felt my language and culture were affirmed by the academic world. Being in this space made me realize the need for colleges and universities to intentionally serve and support Latina students.*

### **Summary**

*Testimonios* as a methodological approach empowers researchers to engage in knowledge production outside the academy. It builds on the strength and expertise of Women of Color, acknowledges their experiences, and affirms their language and culture. Our collective stories withstand and challenge the validity and perceived superiority of Eurocentric beliefs, values, and knowledge. *Testimonios* by participants inform research and provide an alternative to Eurocentric, white, male perspectives. Our *testimonios* reveal that even though our individual experiences are different, our reflections and responses to these experiences are similar in that

we continue to challenge dominant ideologies by successfully navigating the educational pipeline. The following chapter presents the findings from participants' *testimonios*, central themes, and their relation to the Community Cultural Wealth framework (CCW).

## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

### Introduction

The following chapter presents the findings from participants' *testimonios*. Through individual *pláticas* and a narrative inquiry approach, this study explored how Latina women use their knowledge and cultural ways of knowing to disrupt, resist, and navigate traditional, hegemonic, and Eurocentric educational settings. Participants' *testimonios* were collected and analyzed using narrative analysis and theoretical lens of Chicana Feminist Epistemologies (CFE), as well as Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework (CCW). Through a critical lens, CFE and CCW challenge dominant Eurocentric epistemologies and anti-deficit narratives. Grounded in CFE, the research questions primarily focused on a) perceptions of academic knowledge and cultural knowledge systems of Latina women in higher education, b) the forms in which Latina women utilize their systems of knowing to disrupt, resist, and navigate higher education and, c) their familial and cultural knowledge systems and how these systems challenge dominant knowledge. Participants reflected on family history, cultural knowledge, and their academic journey. In addition, *testimonios* addressed challenges, mentorship, and strategies to navigate higher education institutions. The answers participants shared provide institutions the opportunity to challenge how race, gender, and social status implicitly and explicitly impact Latina women. Additionally, as this research shows, Latina women can inform structural systems that deny their subjectivity and provide a guide to increasing academic representation. The findings of this study have been categorized into four overarching themes (1) Femtorship and sisterhood; (2) Community; (3) Latina Grit; (4) Representation. In each of these, Latina women disrupted, questioned, and/or transformed dominant ideas of who they were, what they knew and could know, and what they experienced.

### **Finding 1: Femtorship and Sisterhood**

As this research shows, femtorship and sisterhood were survival systems Latina women sought to navigate their academic and life journeys. Findings indicate that pedagogical spaces that see Latina voices as sites of knowledge allow for a more authentic experience. Additionally, Latina femtors helped participants understand the importance of building community and listen to each other through culturally relevant knowledge systems. This section further details participants' experience with various knowledge systems that each participant sought, nurtured, and capitalized on. They shared example after example of women uplifting other women. Some women focused on sisterhood and defined sisterhood through peer and elder relationships; others specifically used femtoring as part of their definition. All participants interviewed expressed gratitude towards other women in their families.

In moments of doubt and when feeling that a higher education degree might not be attainable, participants drew strength from their sisterhoods. For example, Valeria recalls when she started the master's program, she felt the heaviness of oppressive systems and structures of inequity. She thinks back to the financial burden of paying tuition and commuting, remembering that she cried and did not want to continue and yet found the strength to do so after speaking with her aunt. Valeria and her aunt had built a relationship of trust. When Valeria was uncertain about continuing, her aunt reminded her of the internal willpower she possessed to continue her academic journey. Although Valeria knew she had the will to continue, she warmly recalls the support and femtorship she received from her aunt. Valeria talks in more detail about another femtor within her community who played a significant role in forming her Chicana journey:

She was the first Chicana graduate I had countered in my life. Seeing her engaged within the community played a role in forming my Chicana journey and seeing myself also

going into community outreach. She always found a way to live authentically, with her truth, and as a large body Chicana who laughed in the face of men who would comment on her body. She took me to San Jose State, and I could see myself in that space and its possibilities. I am grateful to her and my mom for sharing with my sister and me that there is another way. It is important; again, you cannot be what you cannot see (*plática*/interview).

In this quote, Valeria explicitly expresses her gratitude for having a femtor who understands and reflects her Chicana experiences. Her femtor mirrored Valeria's cultural upbringing and elements of her lived experiences, providing Valeria with a model for how to live with courage and authenticity. In addition, she learned to navigate and occupy spaces that have excluded Latina women. She further notes that exposure to a college campus enabled her to see herself in that space and consider other career and educational options. Pilar also shared similar gratitude towards her grandmother, and although she does not name her grandmother directly as a femtor, Pilar describes the lessons she learned from her:

My grandmother shared various stories of her knowledge not being valued because she did not have a formal degree or was seen as something less because she was a woman. However, she did not let these comments or experiences stop her. She would encourage me to continue my education and remember my family's history of resistance. I come from a lineage of strong women with a history of resistance, who faced various struggles but survived. I am here today because, through storytelling, women in my family have shared their experiences and homemade knowledge (*plática*/interview).

Pilar referred to her family's history of resistance and the role that women in particular played. She spoke of her grandmother's knowledge and the vital role such knowledge played in her

personal and professional development. Pilar's determination and ability to fight, directly result from the mentorship she received from women in her family. Pilar recalled her family's rich history of resistance when feeling pressure or uncertainty.

While some participants acknowledged women in their families and communities as femtors, others shared their disappointment with the lack of female mentors in higher education. Alejandra, for example, shared:

I still feel like the academy is a space that feels too prestigious, and not everyone gets to be a part of it. There are still a lot of processes that prevent you from getting in and published. Additionally, there are not a lot of femtors. Faculty do not have time. I am sure faculty would love to make stronger connections with their students, but they must write, meet deadlines, teach and publish to reach tenure in addition to their lives and families. However, the few femtors I have had will always be there for you and rally behind you. Not just while you complete your dissertation or program but even after you finish (*plática/interview*).

Alejandra emphasizes that despite having few femtors in higher education, in her personal experience, femtors will continue to advocate for women and provide support when needed. Unfortunately, Alejandra calls our attention to the limitations Faculty of Color confront; tenure, publishing research, and balancing epistemic exclusion, just to name a few. In addition, within the dominant culture, Women of Color face multiple forms of oppression, advocating for recognition and a seat at the table. Participants gained knowledge, self-confidence, and navigational skills through various forms of femtorship. Furthermore, they highlighted the importance of seeing themselves reflected in educational spaces and the validation that being

reflected in academic areas provided. Not all participants mentioned femtorship, but several participants pointed to sisterhood as a source of power and nourishment.

Sisterhood, a community or relationship amongst women, similar to femtorship, was mentioned by several participants as a means of knowledge and navigation tool. Olga provides an example of sisterhood when she speaks about her cohort and friends who were also part of the doctoral program:

My informal cohort and my friends were a community I could rely on because we were going through this journey simultaneously. That community was one of the most fruitful outcomes of the doctoral program. Of course, I love doing my dissertation, and I loved doing that work, but the folks that I met through the program and who are now my colleagues, I still turn to them for advice (*plática*/interview).

Olga found the strength to carry on her research by harnessing the knowledge shared among her cohort's sisterhoods, friends, and community. She describes how she continues to seek advice and support from these communities. Formal and informal mentorship from communities and sisterhood was how knowledge was gathered and shared. Valeria also describes sisterhood as a support system. She recalls that she made the same commuting journey at seven or eight months pregnant while in her doctoral program and felt the joy of being in sisterhood:

I found joy and nourishment amongst a sisterhood in this shared thinking space, which made it difficult not to return to that space. There was one time in particular when I felt that I was drowning trying to figure out how to come up with the money to continue to pay for tuition. But I made the commute to class and attended an event. As I walked in, I saw advisors, professors, graduates, and other folks, and being in that community was the nourishment and support I needed. If the program and its community were not



supportive, I am not sure I would have completed a doctorate because I did that (expecting a child) three times. (*plática/interview*).

Valeria shared the support and power she received from sisterhood. She highlights the importance of being around other like-minded folks and the support faculty and peers showed by facilitating alternative forms of classroom instruction after giving birth.

### *Analysis of femtorship and sisterhood findings*

Women and Scholars of Color continue to face exclusion from higher education and report experiencing tension while occupying this environment. To be clear, the stress reported stems from historic epistemic exclusion and oppression. Therefore, these findings are vital for the academic world and institutions seeking to eliminate epistemic exclusion. For many participants, sisterhood was building community and resisting. However, the data from this study indicate that the concept of femtorship represents more than employing academic support; it could embody a form of mentorship manifested in nonacademic settings. For example, although Olga does not name her informal cohort and friends as a form of mentorship, her experiences of seeking support from the community confirm that “doctoral Women of Color engage in specific strategies and techniques to navigate marginalizing systems and encounters” (Ramos & Yi, 2022, p. 21). Seeking support from friends in the program was a technique Olga utilized to harness social capital and continue in the program. Participants sought guidance and support to survive and thrive in educational spaces from femtors, sisterhoods, and, as Yosso (2005) describes, networks of people. Through sisterhood, women uplifted each other and provided critical validation.

Valeria and Pilar recounted the importance of familial capital and their rich histories. Pilar describes the roles that women, in particular, played in building her self-confidence and

power to continue resisting. She describes how she draws strength from her rich history of familial capital and her family network. Similarly, other participants described the strength they employed as minorities in academia. I stress the importance of mentorship, particularly for Women of Color, because Students of Color use mentorship as a tool that helps them overcome the marginalization they face in the academy (Grant & Simmons, 2008). Mentorship requires a harmonious environment, and in tumultuous academic spaces, it can create lifelong communities if found and nurtured. Eliana and Alejandra both stress the importance of finding community, mainly because the dissertation stage of a doctoral program can be very lonely and isolating. Latina women found energy and support from their communities during these moments of isolation. They utilized social and familial capital to persist in moments of isolation. Femtoring is not to be confused with advising. Femtors are responsible for guiding others to create spaces where more than one type of knowledge is accepted but, more importantly, for providing mentees with the tools to navigate and critique the spaces they walk.

How does one make sense of academic spaces when educational areas have outdated traditions that neglect to understand the needs of Women of Color? I urge you to find a mentor and a group of other doctoral students, not just to build accountability but a network, a community that will be there when it feels lonely and impossible. Building these support systems is essential to the success of Scholars of Color. Still, it is also vital that “collectively, we continue to chip away at academic conventions that work to exclude us” (Calderon et al., 2012, p. 410). Higher education institutions are responsible for creating opportunities for Women of Color to build and foster authentic relationships with Latina scholars. By ignoring the struggles in mentorship, institutions of higher education not only create an additional entry barrier but unknowingly or knowingly allow repressive structures to continue to take root. Personal

relationships and networks allow Latina women to work with other professionals with shared goals and collaborate to succeed.

### **Finding 2: Community**

Telling different stories, each participant explained that personal relationships forged in academic spaces were imperative for Women of Color. They took pride in finding collective joy in a male-dominated environment and forming intentional communities. Several women expressed the struggle to find a supportive community that respected their Latinidad. Forming a community was necessary, and finding a community that is affirming brought collective joy.

When referring to her experience in the doctoral program, Alejandra explained the doctoral program held classes on the weekends aimed at working professionals. She explains:

I would say that finding a group of friends and community is important because it feels lonely in the program when you only go every other weekend and you are working Monday through Friday. Nobody knows what you're doing. It felt like I was driving down to my community of scholars and a space where I was making something happen and finding other scholars with the same experience. We all went through different life journeys, seeing other people get pregnant and have kids yet continue with the program. I never thought I would get pregnant, and then I did. But also seeing others get married and meeting other Latinas all working full time; I felt like they were my people because I had a strong community of support (*plática/interview*).

Commenting on the importance of community and other Latina scholars, Alejandra welcomed life milestones while attending doctoral courses. Noting that other Latina scholars successfully had children and continued their education reinforced Alejandra's tenacity to continue the program while pregnant. Alejandra called attention to the counter-narratives that she and other

women were rewriting, especially that women do not need to choose education over having a family or vice versa, but that these two milestones, both challenging in their way, can exist harmoniously.

All participants in the dissertation stage reported that this specific stage of the doctoral program could be lonely and isolating, particularly when participants felt challenged. The self-discipline required to write did not always come with ease, and what helped many participants maintain their discipline was the communities they had previously formed. Like most participants, Eliana developed a community with others and stressed the gravity of intentionally seeking a community of support with individuals who will be present when you genuinely need them. Intentional sisterhood emerged as a survival mechanism for Eliana:

I tell my students to form a community with other people they click with and not to waste other people's time by making fake friendships or using people. For example, in our doctoral program, the classes at some point end, and then we are on our own. You do not want to feel like you created fake relationships just to get something out of it. Building community is tricky because sometimes people want to be friends with everyone, but for me, it was a means of survival. I tried to focus on what I was doing in class; if I clicked with someone, I clicked naturally. And if I do not, that too was okay. That community and connection with people is super important because you have an outlet to vent with others who are going through the same process. After all, they get the challenges (*plática/interview*).

Eliana offered her perspective on forming a community and being intentional with the community you create. She stressed that bonds should not be taken for granted and made just for one's temporary benefit. In her view, some individuals seek fake relationships in class. Still, the

test of sisterhood will come after all classes have ended and doctoral students are on their dissertation writing journey. When postgraduate students no longer take classes, it can be a very lonely and isolating experience. However, as Eliana pointed out, a person can foster real friendships, which can serve as an outlet and support system because they understand the challenges and implications of what is at stake during the final stages of the dissertation. Through sisterhood, doctoral students build and grow their self-discipline. Alejandra also described making connections with purpose and nurturing those relationships.

Pilar also referred to struggles with her identity in a white environment while she was an undergraduate student; she took a different approach. Like Alejandra, Pilar sought community by joining a sorority:

Classes were huge, with around 300 students in a lecture hall, and it was easy to get lost in a sea of all of these people, and it was incredibly white. My elementary through high school years were a pretty diverse group, and these spaces reflected the population in that community. But in college, it was all blonde women and men. I was just so lost because I was struggling with my identity. And my sophomore year, I did rush and got swept up in Greek life. People made racially charged comments toward me, and I tried to hide that part of me. I dyed my hair blonde, and with Greek life, all my college friends were white, except for my friends outside of college and my family. It was a challenging time. After all, I did not know where I fit in because I did not fit in. Nine months later, I quit that sorority because I realized a lot of that white culture and white community were racist. The academy is this elite space, and universities are designed to enhance spaces where white academic people learn. Many people might agree that academia is rooted in traditionally white spaces (*plática/interview*).

Pilar's example illustrates the taxing relationship between one's identity construction and the dominant society that questions our identity and what is considered the norm. To avoid being cast out of the dominant culture and not feel like an outcast at university, Pilar joined a sorority and dyed her hair blond. In this predominantly white environment, she was making sense of her social position and highlighting discrimination's associated struggles based on visible physical appearance. At first, Pilar leaned towards assimilation as a form of survival inside the boundaries of academia. However, she later acknowledged and made sense of her situation; that academic spaces have an embedded history of racism. Several other participants noted joining Latina campus organizations and finding communities that understood their struggles and celebrated their academic success.

### *Analysis of community findings*

Continued survival for participants meant purposefully finding and nurturing community. Participants helped us better understand women's experience in U.S. higher education institutions, specifically Latina women, and how they resist and navigate gendered norms, power structures, and institutional violence. Participants sought and found communities of like-minded individuals that understood the challenges and burdens of balancing work, life, and academic career. They valued a community that embraced their language and culture. Actively seeking supportive peers, participants spoke of the benefits of building these relationships.

### **Finding 3: Latina Grit**

Historically, higher education institutions have been considered environments where the dominant white culture is constructed and valued. Dominant educational spheres have been influential in deficit-based narratives, and knowledge of non-dominant cultures has been termed as culturally and socially inferior. Many participants described physically, academically, and

emotionally resisting the theories and ideologies that stand in the way of the educational advancement of Latina women. Central to their struggle was resisting assimilation, constructing alternative identities to navigate Eurocentric spaces, and refusing to conform to the margins that academia seeks to confine People of Color. The following section explores the intersection of identity, how brown bodies are positioned in academic white spaces, and the role grit (the power of perseverance and determination) played in navigating institutions long dominated by men. Their narratives provide insight into the means Latina women use to access, control, and ignite their perseverance. The management of failure and what can be learned from failure are skills many Latina women have developed. They have not been coddled, and their courage to enter spaces where their experiences, perspectives, and approaches might not be accepted fuel their grit. Motivated to pursue their long-term goals, most participants noted several strategic choices they have engaged in.

Valeria described how in elementary school, she felt that she was part of her community and did not have to perform because her teachers were culturally accepting. However, later in middle school, she switched to a different school in another district, and in this new district and space, she had to learn how to perform. Her ability to navigate spaces that require purposeful identity and language shifting demonstrates the self-discipline and grit Valeria embodied:

I did not feel I was performing in elementary school because we had teachers who poured love into us, and it felt like a culturally accepting space and community. But in middle school, I had to take a bus to another district that was more affluent and more white. Not more white, but white. In English honors class, my writing would mirror the Seventeen magazine column because I did not want to tell others about my life. In this white school, I learned to perform. I would analyze the story I had to know in each space,

and I did not like to exploit my culture. I figured out how to navigate that space and understood they wished for a narrative of a white teenager's life, so I gave them that. In my first undergraduate year at Santa Clara, I also performed in business classes, and I was one of three People of Color in the class. I remember we looked misplaced, and the professor did not know how to engage with or support us. Also, the faculty was surprised when we passed our exams and final projects, so I continued to perform until my sophomore year. That second year, I took ethnic studies classes and began to see that I could reclaim my identity (*plática*/interview).

In the quote above, Valeria depicts her experience with performing as a means of existence within a space that was not created for or affirming her identity, knowledge, or lived experiences. The spaces where she had to perform were predominantly white and, as she put it, “Not *more white*, but white.” Valeria’s example of navigational skills and performing to withstand new environments demonstrate her grit and resilience. In middle school, she navigated and adapted by taking control of her narrative. In college, she overcame low expectations and excelled academically. Valeria later took ethnic studies classes and felt more empowered. Ethnic classes embraced different forms of identity and drew upon various cultural practices. Valeria and Alejandra point to ethnic studies as a means by which these two women could reclaim their subjectivity, embrace their identities and develop multiple forms of resistance and abilities to fight systemic academic oppressions.

During her doctoral degree, Pilar was encouraged to further unpack whiteness and its deep-seated ties to the academic world. She describes being in a class centered around whiteness and the emotions that emerged while in this course during graduate school:



I took a course called Whiteness and Privilege, and in that class, we could unpack all of how whiteness and white supremacy had infiltrated our lives. It was humbling; I started connecting the dots and broke down. I connected how my life had been impacted by many events and the harm of white supremacy. And that was a big deal for me, even if it was challenging. Honestly, it's taken a lot of healing to unpack why and how white supremacist ideologies have infiltrated systems that have silenced the voices of marginalized people in academic settings. That makes me feel emotional when I think about the generations before me of women who were allowed to consume knowledge by gatekeepers. And told that their knowledge is not acceptable, nor rigorous enough, for purely existing as a brown person in a world that does not think that your experience is a form of knowledge (*plática*/interview).

Pilar disclosed the pain and healing she encountered from unpacking white supremacy in education systems and the extent to which these systems of oppression have silenced the voices of marginalized communities such as women and brown bodies. Yet, Pilar's grit and strength of mind demonstrate that marginalized communities persevere. In addition to silencing the voices of brown women, many white environments have deemed that the knowledge women bring to academia is not rigorous enough and therefore not accepted. Although Latina women are underrepresented in doctoral programs, those in these environments have shown the willpower to dismantle oppressive academic environments by embracing their cultural backgrounds and identities.

Several participants discussed how they understood their identity and position in the world and expressed how their culture sometimes collided with academia. While some participants embraced their cultural identity early on, others welcomed parts of their identity later

in life. Alejandra, for example, joined a Latina sorority while in her undergraduate program to learn more about her identity. Although she was born in the U.S., she lived in Mexico while she was young and was often called “Pocha” and Chicana by others, which means that others identified her as more American than Mexican. However, while in her study abroad program in Paris, her identity was questioned again for not resembling what others thought an American should look like:

I decided to study ethnic studies in college after my study abroad experience in Paris. While abroad, I was constantly asked if I was American but would usually answer their question and say, ‘but no, Americans are blonde and have blue eyes’. I would tell them I was Mexican and ask myself, ‘what am I, what am I?’ That experience made me want to learn more about my history and culture and unpack my identity. I also joined a Latina sorority and made many friends, but joining this sorority was really about finding my identity and being proud of being a Latina. When I was in high school and growing up here, I always felt like I needed to Americanize within an immigrant community and an immigrant family. Many people always reminded me that I was born in the U.S. and would tell me, ‘you’re not one of us, you’re not Mexican, you’re not an immigrant. And so, I internalized that and wanted to be more American, and I mostly watched American tv. I watched Telenovelas but would be more drawn to pop culture because I wanted to fit in. I started to like punk rock bands and was a punk rocker. College was about discovering that I could be a punk Rocker and love Banda. I realized that it did not have to be one or the other. I embraced my Latinidad and continued to get a master's degree at San Jose State in Mexican American studies (*plática/interview*).

Here Alejandra disclosed her personal experience with coming to terms with the dualism of her own hybrid identity. She depicts the internal identity struggles that arise from living in the U.S., not looking American enough, and living with a community that sees her as an outsider because of where she was born. Further, she adds that the experience of traveling abroad reinforced her desire to learn more about her history, culture, and identity. By switching her major to ethnic studies and joining a Latina sorority community, Alejandra was able to fight the erasure of her Mexican and Chicana identity. In her pursuit to better understand her Latinidad, she became aware of her agency and found her voice. Through these cultural connections, she also explained that she became more confident in who she was and wanted to be and continued to pursue higher education. Alejandra's experience raises the problematic struggle that many Latina women face around identity and the false notion that one needs to assimilate rather than be able to embrace two cultures. We cannot escape how others see us, but we can redefine how we see ourselves. There is power in seeing our communities as resilient and focusing on our assets. Participants found that although they struggled with identity in some communities, there were many parts of their identities that they embraced. Specifically hard work and resilience.

Grace and Olga describe the skills and values their parents displayed and the impact their parents' resilience played in their understanding of knowledge and personal grit. Grace highlights how her parents navigated complex education systems. On the other hand, Olga notes the lessons of resilience she took away from seeing her parent's work ethic:

My parents are from El Salvador, and the education system in the U.S. was very complex, and they did not fully understand what they needed to do. They were in a new country, learning a new language and adapting to a new culture. They left their careers in

El Salvador and had to start over. I remember my parents' struggle, but they stuck through it, and I learned from their strength (*plática/interview*).

Similarly, Olga highlights her parents' resilience and persistence:

My parents woke up every morning at 4:30 am to pick cucumbers. I admire their work ethic and persistence. Their lessons of survival certainly helped while I was writing. My family worked hard, yet they still found joy and carved out ways to celebrate (*plática/interview*).

Participants noted the values and skills learned from their communities and, through their examples, found their purpose, self-discipline, and power to resist. Despite being in hostile academic environments, participants overcame adversaries and accomplished their educational aspirations by employing Latina grit. Systemic inequalities and disparities embedded in education systems result in inequality in access, resources, and professional development. Thus examining how participants cultivate skills demonstrates the importance of social capital.

### ***Analysis of Latina Grit***

Institutions of higher education are responsible for building and growing individuals and communities. Yet historically, institutions and academic spaces have shown to hinder progress by creating spaces that isolate Students of Color by reproducing white spaces and making People of Color feel alienated. Although academics and intellectuals claim that the academy is a space that welcomes new knowledge, this is not always the case. If knowledge veers too far from the norm, it is not accepted and, in many cases, questioned. Moreover, it is labeled as new or alternative. However, this knowledge is not new and has simply not been allowed to develop in specific spaces. Latina women navigate these academic and professional spaces where others are surprised they hold knowledge. Olga shared an instance at work where her colleagues praised her

for having innovative ideas: “they told me my idea was innovative. That is what our people do; if you allowed us within these walls, you would see you could still be here, and we could bringing new ideas”. Our ideas and knowledge are not new; we draw on the wisdom from our people, homes, and community, all sources of familial capital. It simply has not been seen or allowed in spaces, which is why people are surprised when we are allowed to share it.

In my findings of this study, we hear from several Latina women who discuss their ways of knowing or experiences being dismissed, minimized, or rejected. As Olga stated, “they do not see us as thinkers; they do not see us as innovators.” Olga shares the structural barriers that hinder the creation of knowledge by Latinas/os. She adds, “we come from communities and districts that are not setting us up for academic success.” Nevertheless, there is a pipeline of knowledge; some communities receive more opportunities to be thinkers and innovators, while others lack investment in their ways of knowing.

The knowledge that governs the academy is and has been stuck in its ways, and “what is wrong is the imposition of this mode on all people and the dismissal of modes of thought that conflict with it as untrue” (Ladson-Billing, 2003, p. 6). This imposition of knowledge on others has allowed higher education institutions to be profusely occupied by Westernized thought. As a result, much of the validated sources of knowledge are bound to methods, epistemologies, ideas, and experiences that center on whiteness.

When asked why there were so few Latinas in academic spaces Salinas (2017) draws our attention to the historical context of education. In his review of various legal cases which involve the U.S. education system and Communities of Color, he traces the continuous marginalization of Latinx students and the ongoing struggle for equal educational opportunities. Through the analysis of these legal cases, it becomes notable that Communities of Color have long been

marginalized and pushed out by the U.S. education system mainly because the system has built historically white institutions that serve white communities and promote white culture. In examining the historical context of the U.S. education system, it becomes apparent that higher education institutions warrant additional in-depth analysis. In particular, there is a need to move away from deficit research models on Latina communities and explore systems of oppression within education environments.

Given the growing representation of Latinas/os in higher education, there is a pressing need to create culturally validating environments that affirm the various experiences and pedagogies brought to the landscape by Women of Color. An example of seeing more representation in higher education can be seen in Olga's personal experience. Before enrolling in a doctoral program, Olga attended a prospective student night, although she was unsure what to expect. She was delighted when she noticed there were more People of Color enrolled than she anticipated and, in her words, describes, "oh shit, there are a bunch of brown people here, it was nuts, it was not what I expected, and so I enrolled in the program, and the rest is history." For Olga, it was essential to see People of Color in these spaces and serve as a form of validation of their knowledge and expertise to which she belonged.

In addition to facing microaggression, the literature also illustrates that isolation within the academy is not uncommon for Latinas/os. For example, Salas et al. (2014) demonstrate this point in their phenomenological study, through which Latina/o participants share aspects of their personal experiences and reflect on their struggle with their academic transition. Participants feel isolated partly because they are away from their family and community, but most significant is their direct naming of feeling that they do not belong in academic spaces. Students need to feel connected; they need to feel that they belong so that they can thrive. Belonging encompasses

seeing your community reflected in the curriculum and the academy seeing your knowledge as an asset, not a threat. Olga, currently a Dean at a university, noted that when it came to Women of Color seeing themselves reflected in academic spaces, “we either do not see ourselves there or think it is not for us.” These feelings of not belonging in these spaces are perpetuated by institutions failing to incorporate the background and lived experiences that diverse students bring to the classroom. Students of Color often feel that their histories, experience, or knowledge does not matter in academic settings.

Several previous studies have established that for Women of Color to perform in white academic settings, they are expected to uphold mainstream white normative institutional values and policies (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Gonzalez, 2006; Patterson-Stephens & Hernandez, 2018). From the findings, we saw that Pilar dyed her hair, which was her way of performing. But also, Valeria discusses how she performed during her first year of college. Both were in PWI, where they had to learn to navigate the environment. Participants used their navigational capital to move in and out of spaces. Scholars of Color and marginalized communities have “been the objects of assimilation policies, and because their culture, language, and customs have been considered inferior” (Elenes, 1997, p. 365). We cannot accept when the academy tries to erase our history and knowledge through assimilation policies. Nor can we be erased by allowing our needs to act and conform to some degree. Women of Color are stereotyped as underqualified and made to feel unwelcome; therefore, they work and conform as a means of resistance and survival. By weaving in and out of the dominant culture, we might not fit the norm and have been considered inferior. However, this maneuvering of spaces, cultures, and environments demonstrates that our bodies and minds are not inferior. Instead, they are strong, resilient, adaptable, and powerful.

Most participants discussed their transition into higher education institutions and noted that they felt the shift into a white space. For example, Olga mentions: “going to college was a culture shock, to say the least. I went to a predominantly white school, not on purpose. I went to the big state school that gave me the most aid.” Pilar also noted feeling like she was lost in a sea of people at a white school. One method institutions use to normalize whiteness is disproportionately high enrollment rates of white students (Brown et al., 2003). Students who do not see their communities on college campuses might begin normalizing that they do not belong within those spaces. According to Patterson-Stephens and Hernandez (2018), “a cornerstone of a Chicana feminist epistemology is the recognition that Chicanas are holders and creators of knowledge, fully belonging within the walls of academia” (p. 541). Yet, Women of Color continue to be underrepresented in academic spaces and, more specifically, in doctoral programs (Perna, 2004; Turner, 2002). Such low representation means that there are spaces within the academy that continue to assume the white male experience is typical. Participants in these white spaces resisted by drawing on the capital of resistance from history and communities. More specifically, in the case of all participants, they continue to fight by researching and creating new knowledge with a critical Chicana/Latina feminist lens. Valeria, for example, centered women as theorists and creators of knowledge.

Within the context of the academy, previous research has shown that Women of Color resist systems that try to erase their identity. For example, Patterson-Stephens and Hernandez (2018) address their experiences as Women of Color in a doctoral program at a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the Southeast and the constant battle with academic spaces pressuring Women of Color to hide their authentic identities. Esposito et al. (2017) give rise to the paradox that Women of Color face on the one side, the need to conform to belong and reflect the status



quo of academia, and on the other hand, the academy tokenizing them for their identities that they are urged to change. In other words, Scholars of Color are encouraged to keep and exhibit selective parts of their diversity, and by doing so, they continue to be excluded from academic spaces. In another qualitative multisite case study that sought to explore the perceptions of white faculty, data indicated that faculty deemed that Students of Color needed to assimilate to be successful (McCoy et al., 2015). Historically, it was believed that students would not be able to straddle two cultures and should adopt the mainstream normative white culture. The white identity is imposed and asserted on Latina/o communities. At the same time, some participants mentioned that for some periods, they did not resist and conformed to white norms; these same participants later described their journey towards resisting and reclaiming their space in the academic community.

#### **Finding 4: Representation**

The Women of Color in this study traversed various structural and systemic systems of oppression and discussed several aspects that impede women's access and success in postsecondary education. Interviews revealed participants shared everyday experiences across their educational journeys and challenged existing gender spaces. They see the power in bringing a distinctive approach and perspective by voicing their gendered, racial, and ethnic experiences. Numerous participants point to gender and societal roles, and these identities influence their work. Previous research has pointed out that "academia is an individualistic and isolating structure" (Aronson et al., 267) with an established system of knowledge production. Latina women depend on and support each other.

Eliana responded with the notion that patriarchy continues to be ingrained in societal structures. Contrary to what we might think that patriarchy is in the past, Eliana still sees it as

very prevalent in her circle of friends and community. In her experience, Latina women continue to be exposed to heteronormative traditions, explicitly getting married and having children. At the time of the interview, Elina was not married and did not have any children. However, she does note that she understands that breaking away from these traditions is not always positive. Following these deep-rooted traditions, Latina women might prioritize having a family over their educational goals. While women can make their own choices, there is a tendency for communities to add pressure by always asking women when they are going to get married and have children. If women choose a different path, they will destabilize the family unit. Elina speaks to the need for more significant structural changes that have held women from holding leadership positions and their continuous development.

The role of the patriarchy is still alive. We are in 2022 and have made progress and positive changes, but the expectations for Latinas are still very heteronormative. Even if you are second or third generation, there are all these assumptions about marriage and kids. If we do the opposite, we are seen as rebels. Why am I a rebel for putting more interest in higher education? Our generation still puts more emphasis, time, and mental energy into dating rather than goals and career progression. I heard a podcast that mentioned women getting degrees in higher education is affecting the family unit because they do not want to have children. If that is the narrative and growing up, you are being told that is one of the ultimate goals, then subconsciously, you might make decisions that stray away from higher education. Feeling that success equates to marriage and children. I see it with friends that are moms that are in higher ed. They have an internal battle where they feel guilty. That word comes up a lot with moms in higher education; they

feel guilty. People save the date for your marriage and not for your graduation; that says a lot in itself (*plática/interview*).

It is important to note that many women have difficulty getting pregnant, and when you are constantly being asked about children, it feels like an invasion of privacy. First, why do other people need to know if you and your partner are sexually active? Why do some individuals equate having children with happiness? On top of the added pressure of having a child, seeing it to term, and raising a child, there is then an added pressure that you should have a partner. Think about how often the question about children and marriage go hand in hand. How often have you heard a single man or woman ask if they would have children? Forget about it being out of wedlock; that is where some people draw the line. The issue stems from how these milestones in life are elevated above other milestones and the face value we tend to assign them. People's way of thinking about marriage and children is shifting, but we must continue to confront these narratives that women must prioritize marriage and children. Our communities should reward Latina women who choose to invest in themselves and their professional growth. We as women understand and are aware of our bodies, but we need to also call out these unjust systems within our communities that significantly help maintain the patriarchy. Equally important is not to generalize that all women want children and to get married.

Latina women do not need to choose marriage and children over an education. Valeria and Alejandra are Latina women who split their energy on fostering relationships, having children, and continuing to invest in their own professional educational growth. Their narratives are a testament that education is critical and necessary to the advancement of Latina women. They also both have daughters and are now examples to their daughters that being a *doctora* is attainable.

In terms of representation, several participants noted concerns that representation of Women of Color in postsecondary education is sparse. Valeria recounted an article she published during her doctoral degree for a course about Women of Color in higher education, in which she critically analyzed the context of university systems. The implications of her research indicate that Women of Color have been systematically excluded from higher education institutions. Historically, policies have been written to benefit white students and, more precisely white male students. Valeria also called attention to the patriarchy and alluded that it is still very present in many aspects of everyday life and results in the continuous marginalization of Latina women.

I remember being disgusted with the limited representation of Women of Color across academia. To be quite frank, I am tired of the patriarchy within families, the workspace, and academia and the toxicity of that. Then I recall being intentional about not having men on my defense committee (*plática*/interview).

As indicated in Valeria's experience, one of the reasons that Women of Color continue to be underrepresented in academia is that patriarchy continues to be embedded and reproduced in many aspects of our communities. One very specific way that Valeria confronted the male-dominated research arena was by intentionally selecting only Latina faculty for her dissertation committee. It is worth noting that all seven participants intentionally selected only Latina faculty as part of their dissertation committee. This data illustrates what has been previously discussed in the section on mentorship. Latina women see other women as crucial to their educational and professional development; therefore, they seek femtors. As such, representation in academic circles is essential. Valeria also called attention to representation when referring to the Chicana mentor she had growing up "you can't be, what you can't see." Representation should encompass the intersectionalities of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Unfortunately, several participants reported not seeing this representation throughout their secondary or post-graduate degrees. For example, according to Eliana, the first time she had a Latina professor was in her master's degree. That equates to roughly four years of undergrad, two years of graduate, at least 40 courses, and only one Latina professor.

Growing up, I was exposed to Latinos in higher education, such as speakers that came into class or professors in undergrad, but they were all male. To be honest, I was excited the first time I had a Latina professor in my master's program. Later in the doctorate program, at one point, I had three Latina professors. But that is still a total of only four Latina professors throughout my school years. That is unfortunate, and we need to give more props to Latinas in these spaces because they are taking others with them. For example, my Latina advisor took me under her wing. She reminds me, “we gotta get you there too.” I know it is also my responsibility to help somebody else also. Together we each bring up more Latinas and can continually grow our numbers within this space (*plática*/interview).

While Eliana's experience is not new, it does illustrate how little representation is available for Latina women and Women of Color. For the most part, participants did not mention having many Latina professors, which is problematic. There needs to be more emphasis on hiring women, promoting tenure, and retaining. Eliana recognizes that with so few Latinas in this space, it is the responsibility of other Latinas to elevate and support each other. When she explains that she received support from her mentor, she also situates the benefits of the collective community to advocate for more brown bodies in academic discourse. At the same time, Eliana understands the implications that just because she is one of the few Latina women in this space, this does not afford her the same opportunities as if she were a white man. In Eliana's personal experience as a

Latina woman, she is acutely aware that “the game needs to be played” to navigate structural forms of oppression.

Especially women and Women of Color, in how we are looked at, especially with the expectations being very low for us. The game has to be played; as Latina women, we must learn to survive, which is unfortunate. For example, my colleague can show up to work in sweatpants and a long T-shirt and look like he just rolled out of bed in his pajamas. But if I showed up like that, people would question my credibility (*plática/interview*).

As exemplified in the quotation above, Women of Color are constantly negotiating spaces. Even in everyday mundane practices such as choosing what to wear, Latina women are aware of how they are perceived and therefore intentional about how they present themselves. In these shared educational spaces, women code-switch and negotiate their identities by negotiating how and when to show up. Women of Color are aware of the many perceived assumptions and contradictions embedded in societal norms that marginalize their brown bodies. Latina women implement several strategies for survival. One approach is understanding situational knowledge; in other words, Latina women contextualize how they articulate depending on the space and community they find themselves in. Women have understood the boundaries and navigated the margins of public, corporate, and academic spheres. Crucial for resisting is that more Women of Color are brought to these contested spheres. Several participants noted that being in an educational environment allowed them more significant opportunities to question traditional education, knowledge, and power dynamics. Representation in these spaces is part of the solution, but women also need advocates to engage in discourse. Many participants vocalized that their families always encouraged them to participate in scholarship.

For Pilar, encouragement manifested through the words of her father. He understood that very few Latinas attained doctorate degrees and encouraged Pilar to persist so she could change those statistics. Unfortunately, Pilar's father passed away while she was in the final stages of her dissertation, but she recalls his words:

I remember my dad telling me that there were not many brown Latina women in academic spaces. He would say, 'If you look at how many Latina women in the U.S. have doctorates, it is less than 5%. So you need to be part of that number; you need to change it, and I'm so proud of you.' So knowing a lot was resting on my shoulders was a huge part of why I could accomplish what I did. But I remember his words, "there are not many women like you in those spaces who have that kind of degree, and you can do it, and I'm proud of you (*plática*/interview).

Pilar's father understood what was at stake and the importance of supporting her daughter's achievements. His words of encouragement were paramount in her success and educational attainment.

### *Analysis of Representation*

The previous section described how participants made sense of navigating professional settings, academic spaces, and gender expectations. Unfortunately, research indicates that only a handful of Chicanas/Latina women who complete higher education continue to pursue doctorates (Segura, 2003). Faced with patriarchy and other forms of exclusion, many participants drew on the voices and strength of other women, mothers, sisters, and mentors. As Valeria shared learning from her grandmother and mother. And Olga learned from her mother that even though she did not speak fluent English, she could still ask questions and learn about other cultures. Olga's mother did not let language limit her access to knowledge. Although she did not speak the

language, as Olga put it, “she would teach us everything she knew. We knew how to type as kids because she had her typewriter and she taught us to type”. Olga’s mother did not miss an opportunity to impart knowledge to her daughter. CFE and CCW value knowledge of the home and acknowledge that it transcends. When Olga faced challenges, she drew on the knowledge she was taught at home. Alejandra’s grandmother also learned to navigate systems without mastering a language, and she figured out where the library was located and how to get Alejandra exposure to knowledge.

It is evident that Eliana sees heteronormative and ascribed gender roles as one of the many reasons why there are few Latina women in academic spaces. When referring to women's experience in educational spaces, Collin (1990) notes that linked to their position within society. If you consider the position of Women of Color in society, Segura (2003) would argue that white men continue to be at the top, followed by white women, and Women of Color are at the bottom. Many participants stated they did not experience having Latina professors until their doctoral program. Eliana and Valeria describe having one Latina professor in their master's program. Visibility in post-secondary education is essential, primarily if ideas are constructed and reinforced within those spaces. Anzaldúa (1990) wrote, “it is vital that we occupy theorizing space, that we do not allow white men and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space” (p. xxv). Participants bring their methodologies and knowledge to create new narratives and reclaim their identities. By being in academic spaces not intentionally designed for Women of Color and theorizing, participants are normalizing Chicana/Latina feminist epistemologies. Alejandra and Valeria challenged gender norms by balancing family and professional growth. To reclaim narratives,



participants made use of their familial capital. Pilar drew on her father's words of encouragement and Olga on her parents' determination.

Gender roles and expectations of Latina women are changing but knowing what it requires for a Woman of Color to question the hierarchy and white normative culture, I introduce one additional form of capital, which I refer to as *vaga capital*, which further challenges the male-dominant culture and offers a counter-story for women to name their *vaga* ways of knowing. Other theorists have built upon Yosso's framework; for example, Ayala and Contreras (2018) identified an additional source of capital, which they indicate as racial and/or ethnic empowerment capital, and Huber (2009) introduced spiritual capital.

The term *vaga* is derived from the verb *vagar* which means to wander without a destination. Consequently, the term *vaga* has been used to describe women who leave their homes or part from what is considered the norm. In addition, it is a term used to refer to women that others feel are being rebellious. However, I aim to change this negative connotation and empower women by showing that a *vaga's* experience is more than wandering aimlessly, but rather that their path and actions are purposeful. Growing up, my family used to use this term with me lovingly. They would always say: "No seas *vaga*." I did not want to be a *vaga*, and I wanted to be the perfect daughter. However, when you explore why one might be called a *vaga*, it is often a term for women following a path that is not considered appropriate, too high risk, or might not be seen well by others.

As I grew older, I learned to embrace this term. I looked for situations that would make others call me this, and I wanted to defy them. At the time, defiance meant being *vaga*, but I have realized that what women do when called *vagas* is breaking cultural norms and gender biases. I was a *vaga* when I studied abroad and traveled the world. The *vaga* capital aims to

empower women for being women and for their knowledge as they break gendered cultural and societal norms. The findings in this study support its relevance. Olga discusses that women are often not encouraged to attend college because they will leave their homes. Eliana describes women as being called rebels because they choose not to have a family and invest in their education. We need to stop calling women out for wanting to be educated and not following paths others deem normal.

While more Women of Color earn doctoral degrees, they continue to experience marginalization due to their brown bodies. Despite numerous conventions worldwide to raise awareness concerning gender and inequalities, women face, being born female continues to be perceived in some spaces as a deficit identity. Research suggests that little progress has been made since 1997 when UNICEF released a pamphlet that stated, “to be born female is not a crime, but you would never know it based on the deplorable conditions of girls in many parts of the world” (Khan et. al, 2015). Two decades later, gender biases continue to exist in the academy, and if your body is brown, you face additional entry barriers and academic pressure from dominant perspectives. Academic literature on the significance of creating academic spaces for Latina women has revealed that educational research “make our black/brown and gendered voices/bodies invisible” (Saavedra & Perez, 2014, p. 78). The following section is to better understand women’s gendered experience in U.S. higher education institutions and, more specifically, Women of Color and how they resist and navigate gendered norms, power structures, and institutional violence.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I developed upon the three findings by highlighting how Latina Women of Color navigate and resist hegemonic and normative structural norms that manifest within

higher education institutions. The findings were integrated with relevant literature for additional support. As previously discussed, CFE is grounded in women's lived experiences and situational knowledge that stemmed from the need to decolonize scholarly thought and academic research, exposing linear world views created by Western tradition and white patriarchy. The findings of this study help situate the current state of Latina/o access to education. The use of *plática* as a research method is culturally appropriate to engage with the Latina/o community and publicly promotes the expansion of research strategies beyond the traditional interview process. In other words, *pláticas* disrupt normative and oppressive systems of conventional data gathering. *Pláticas* foster more fluid discussions, allowing the researcher and participant to engage in deeper, more thoughtful, and meaningful conversations. By engaging in the sharing of knowledge, participants and researchers theorize and resist together. *Pláticas* are necessary tools to advance Latina intellectual pedagogy and methods (Gonzalez & Portillo 2012).

All participants interviewed expressed wanting to see more women join doctoral programs. Participants have demonstrated they are undeterred by their challenges and are determined to succeed and bring more women with them. Participants strive to create opportunities to elevate more women to leadership positions and noted the vital role of femtors in creating opportunities for them. Several women expressed gendered standards and conflicting demands of family and professional development. Additionally, they emphasized the complexities of identity. While, at some point, a few women gave in to gendered norms, others note their frustration when they do not conform. It is also worth noting that several participants highlighted and discussed their families' valued education. Olga, for example, mentioned "Education was always really important to us, and I think it is for many immigrant families. My family values knowledge, and education was seen as a vehicle for our social mobility. Similarly

for Grace, “there were no ifs or buts, and we were expected to attend college. Knowledge was parallel to how much education you have. If you don't have any education or at least go to college, you limit yourself and where you could go in life”.

The findings have named and critiqued oppressive educational structures, but more importantly, the results have documented and highlighted participants' ability to fight and withstand collectively. Moreover, participants' collective experiences of self-discipline, determination, and rebelliousness to conform, whether in a formal classroom or other environments, offers guidance to others also entering the world of educational inequities and systemic oppressions.

## CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

While there is a growing body of research shedding light on Latina/o student college experiences, research studies that explore Latina postgraduate students' experiences are limited (Cook et al., 2012; Pino et al., 2012); consequently, this gap in research has deprived the Latina/o community of documenting and sharing Latina/o-based knowledge. Furthermore, studies overlook discriminatory practices and continue to silence Women of Color (Collins, 1986). Research focusing on the deficit narrative claim that marginalized communities are lazy and illiterate (Elabor-Idemudia, 2011) rather than highlighting how Latina students successfully navigate higher education settings (Garcia, Nuñez, & Sansone, 2019). Finally, the underrepresentation of Latina scholarship highlights the lack of current institutional support structures available to Students of Color. Educational systems are not necessarily the most appropriate for facilitating equality, access, and visibility because support structures have been created without the needs of students of color in mind. Additional research is warranted by and of Latinas/os to mitigate the skewed information previously published.

Chicana Feminist research is a tool to contest hegemony and deficit-based narratives by calling out structural practices and institutional policies that impose limitations on Communities of Color. The decolonization of history and knowledge warrants that scholarship stop silencing and systematically excluding intellectual knowledge that calls into question dominant ideologies. Therefore, I purposefully and intentionally harnessed the power of *pláticas* and testimonios as methodological approaches to provide and validate Latina women's theories and knowledge and bring to light their own accounts, perspectives, and experiences. The Chicana feminist lens understands *pláticas* as giving meaning to experiences and legitimate forms of knowledge. In

other words, *pláticas* are a form of resistance against westernized norms and Eurocentric methods.

Data presented in this study draws specifically on the experiences of Women of Color who have either completed a doctoral program or are near completion. Still, theorizing goes beyond this particular setting and the limitations of this research. Also important to note is how Scholars of Color continue to conduct research and theorize in hostile environments. To make changes, together as a community, Scholars of Color must continue to use their research to break down deficit myths and narratives. Counter-stories challenge dominant ideologies and combat racialized inequalities. Through asset-based narratives, we dismantle knowledge hierarchies that maintain structured power.

As Chicana feminist scholars, we must keep our pedagogies and practice at the forefront of research to challenge hegemonic educational structures. In transformative research, Latina voices are central and legitimate creators of knowledge; their expertise, resilience, and power are given voice. We continue to work to help guide and support the next generation of Latina scholars, practitioners, mothers, and *doctoras*. Oppressive environments require that scholars do a better job of ensuring Women of Color are not excluded from the policy, curricula, or academy. Taking it one step further, higher education institutions must foster a culturally affirming environment to recognize Latina voices, experiences, and pedagogy. Cultivating a culturally affirming environment means acknowledging and addressing oppressive and dehumanizing educational policy.

Education policy and practice are significantly influenced by leadership. Therefore, if administrations are controlled by white leaders who do not accept multiple forms of knowledge, education policy will continue to mirror white oppressive viewpoints. Similarly, the curriculum

will continue to center and validate the male experience and perspective when only men hold leadership positions. Racist, sexist, and classist policies impact Latina enrollment, retention, and experience. Historically, Latinas are underrepresented in all levels of formal education, including faculty in colleges and universities (Crumb, 2022; González, 2007; Ramirez, 2017). Additional studies are needed to learn how to best address these shortfalls.

### **Summary of the Study**

Intentionally, I have chosen to use the lens of a Chicana feminist epistemologist. Grounded within this theory is the practice for research and participants to co-construct knowledge. This form of creating knowledge is intentional, derived from resistance against systems of oppression and the pressure that Scholars of Color face assimilating to whiteness to succeed in academia. Further, Chicana feminism threads together the lived experiences, stories, and wisdom from land and ancestors, gives voice to their silenced experiences and serves as a tool to represent Communities of Color that often go overlooked.

In my study of Latina women disrupting and resisting dominant knowledge in graduate schools, I examined their experiences through *testimonio pláticas* and found three overarching themes (1) Femtorship and sisterhood; (2) Community; (3) Latina Grit; (4) Representation. In each of these, Latina women disrupted, redefined, and/or transformed dominant notions of who they were, what they knew, and what they experienced. This study speaks to the continued need to support and nurture culturally responsive ways of mentoring/femtoring Latinas in higher education, navigating and resisting white spaces, and cultivating transformative cultural and gender identities. This study has important implications for higher education, faculty, research, and Latina women.

### **Recommendations for Higher Education**

For far too long, education systems have permitted the erasure of Latina voices and have failed to take a critical look at the structures that uphold dominant ideologies. Institutions have a vital role in disrupting racist, sexist and classist practices. Therefore, institutions must invest and extend opportunities to increase the representation of People of Color in the academic landscape. One approach would be strategically reviewing current policies and implementing a hiring process ensuring equal representation and opportunity. Institutional committees should review policies and develop a hiring process not based on white, westernized hegemonic norms to ensure that hiring practices are inclusive. It is crucial that leadership consciously invest in hiring but also in developing and retaining faculty of color. New methods must encompass more than pairing new faculty with a mentor; they should include investing in professional development, paid research opportunities, and research and academic publishing resources. Higher education institutions must understand the disparity in funding and provide additional financial support if needed to support equal access.

Important to retainment is addressing the “existence of a racially gendered glass ceiling beyond which few may advance” (Segura, 2003, p. 48) and providing equitable opportunities and resources that will enable Women of Color to break the glass ceiling. In addition to tenure support, retaining and investing in Faculty of Color means that institutions should provide health and wellness support. Navigating hostile environments can be mentally, emotionally, and physically taxing. Higher education institutions have a shortage of Faculty of Color (Turner & González, 2015; Patterson-Stephens & Hernandez, 2018). Women Faculty of Color are scarce, accounting for only 4% of all faculty (Ramirez, 2017). Therefore, additional institutional



financial support should be allocated to reconstruct policy and practices that perpetuate hostile, oppressive environments and support women's professional and academic development.

### **Recommendations for Faculty**

First, faculty should seek to understand the politically charged history of higher education and its structurally problematic racist policies of oppression, dare to change the present landscape, and be a part of changing the future. Although it is easy to accept past patterns, the real challenge is when one tries to imagine how a renewed process can become a reality. Second, faculty should recognize their positions in academic spaces and use them intentionally to give voice to those who have not been afforded such privilege. Faculty should review the narratives and voices they choose to highlight or privilege. Is it the male experience or the experiences of middle-class citizens? Or those with heterosexual identities? Faculty need to review their course content intentionally, and it is recommended they integrate more diverse voices, narratives, and experiences. Third, faculty should identify and reframe deep-rooted ideologies, assumptions, and images of Students of Color. It is time that higher education institutions see Students of Color as role models, mentors, and academically extraordinary. Faculty have the responsibility to dismantle preconceived notions about Students of Color. They can do so by adopting an open mind and educating themselves on the challenges Students of Color face.

Finally, faculty should understand how the curriculum is shaped by educational policy and analyze what they deem as the norm. For example, is the curriculum exclusive? Does it draw on the voices of Communities of Color or the cultural wealth of students' experiences? By developing a culturally inclusive curriculum, faculty expose students to a more diverse curriculum and provide more welcoming environments for Students of Color. One example would be integrating content, articles, and research that reflect students' lived experiences in the

classroom. By critically analyzing perceived notions of what is the norm, faculty can avoid becoming complicit and colonizers themselves. Instead, faculty can cultivate liberating learning spaces and disrupt dominant ideologies and practices.

### **Recommendations for Research**

Research should be conducted critically with an inclusive mentality and a desire to dismantle dominant ideologies. Given these points, researchers should be intentional concerning whose voice and knowledge will be centered. It is essential to note the preconceived assumptions the researcher holds. I recommend that the researcher register their positionality and name their privilege to decrease discriminatory analysis. By understanding the researcher's positionality and privilege, the reader can better access claims that are being made about specific communities. For example, a white man should be aware of the implications of how his researchers position women and give voice to brown bodies. Scholars should criticize the intention of scholarship and what purpose research will serve. Research should draw on different perspectives, especially those of Women of Color and marginalized voices. Scholars should be intentional about the approach and interpretation of research, not reinforce ethnic, racial, and gender inequalities. Finally, researchers should question what constitutes knowledge and knowledge production and extend the scope of research to encompass knowledge systems of those on the margins.

### **Recommendations for Latina Women in Graduate Schools and Beyond**

Given the historical and current landscape of higher education, the fight to control knowledge continues to be present. Our progress is progress for our communities and progress toward decolonizing institutions of higher education. Navigating oppressive and dehumanizing landscapes requires a community; we are not alone. We must collaborate and strategically share

our stories, history, and knowledge to highlight our strengths, validate our experiences and give voice to our pedagogies. As agents of knowledge, I urge us to question what is idealized as educational achievement and models of success. Call to decolonize what counts as knowledge and is deemed as truth. We must proactively ask for representation and demand that the seats of power are occupied by individuals who adequately reflect our communities.

Build on the scholarship of Women of Color and stand in solidarity with them. We build solidarity and validity by 1) citing their scholarship, 2) centering women as the subjects of knowledge creation, and 3) humanizing research. Humanizing research requires scholars to incorporate our knowledge, lived experiences, and wisdom into our research. Do not be afraid to veer from traditional research standards; it is necessary to decolonize research and knowledge. Join the fight against institutional structures that fail to celebrate our achievements and worth. Know that there are communities committed to your success, and do not be afraid or too proud to ask for support. I understand the feeling of not wanting to overburden others and being too scared to ask for help. However, not finding support to navigate the academy hurts progress towards degree attainment. Asking for help is a lesson I wish I had learned earlier in my career. To persist in the academy, create genuine support systems that add value to your work and professional growth. And be willing to give support back. Engage with others on a human level; there is more to life than a dissertation. Cultivate and nurture relationships that become your family and continue to be accessible to students just beginning their journey.

Lastly, engage in self-reflection and remember that your individual experiences are valid; honor them by including them in your academic writing. Do not subscribe to preconceived notions of what your research should look or sound like, but give into that discomfort and learn to harness it. Allow yourself to appreciate the expertise you bring into the classroom, and let that

guide your conversations and future research. Embrace the space you hold and know you are deserving of your accomplishments. Know that your time and energy are valuable, and your love/hate relationship with the academy is one that others share. Do not be intimidated by others that have letters after their names, and understand that you belong in this space. Finally, stay committed to your community, and remember that we are stronger together. Let us continue collaborating and dismantling the ivory tower.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In writing this study, I reflected on the many ways Latina women navigate the world despite oppressive spaces. The subtle and the not-so-subtle messages that insist we accept our place in the hierarchy of ivory towers. I have witnessed situations in class and offices undermining women's intelligence and power. Whispers as we walk down the hallways and those in our heads encouraging us to be silent and keep our thoughts and ideas to ourselves because we do not want to create more work or issues for our people. I reflect on the microaggressions that tear us down, the anger we hold back, and the invisible scars we continue to heal. More importantly, I remember the self-discipline women display when they hold back anger and the ability to fight internal and external conflict. I admire the healing of scars due to microaggressions, racist policies, and exclusionary practices. I witness determination and women not giving into the silence but instead their bravery and defiance by speaking their truths. I observe women supporting other women and lifting each other, persisting together.

I am thankful to the courageous women who shared their time and knowledge with me, and I am honored to share their *testimonios* with the academic world. Reading their work, I am grateful for their commitment to change. Our persistence paves the way for more critical

scholarship and culturally validating environments. As Scholars of Color, we must continue to learn and listen to the knowledge of our communities.

The findings in this study illustrate that Latina women face multiple sites of oppression. Women negotiate culture, language, and identity to navigate systems of inequality across academic and professional structures. Their subjectivity continuously denied and ascribed gender norms imposed and enacted. Participants often felt the burden of being the only female in men-dominated spaces; yet, they recognized the importance of women occupying these spaces. Latina women use their voices and employ self-discipline to resist normative hegemonic ideologies. The influence of familial knowledge is evident, and participants used various forms of community cultural wealth and knowledge as survival strategies. When recognized by academic programs, cultural knowledge is a source of strength. Additionally, participants found mentorship and support systems via mentors and sisterhood communities. Participants also relied on supportive peers and community building. Many also felt that representation mattered and higher education institutions did not adequately support underrepresented groups.

This study focused on the understudied population of Latina doctoral students with the intention of building on the scholarship of Women of Color. Previous research primarily focused on Women of Color in graduate programs and rarely highlighted the experiences of Latina postgraduate students (Espino, 2014). Based on previous studies, we know that Latina scholars have historically been marginalized by the academy, stereotyped as underqualified, lacking intelligence, and made to feel invisible (Hill Collins, 2002; Huber, 2008; Squire & McCann, 2018, Urrieta & Villenas, 2013). During my research design and data collection process, it was vital to incorporate an anti-deficit framework and honor the lived experiences of my collaborators. Future studies must move away from deficit-based designs to asset-based

methodologies. A comprehensive examination of systemic oppressions within higher education institutions is warranted to address Latina women's deep-seated ideologies, assumptions, and narratives. Additional research regarding Women of Color and their experiences in higher education is justified for institutions of higher education to better understand how to decolonize educational research, create spaces that humanize experiences, and how best to support these communities.

More specific research should focus on the experiences of doctoral Women of Color that draw on Chicana/Latina feminist perspectives and “call into question what constitutes official knowledge and by whom” (Gonzalez, 2001, p. 653). Our ways of knowing, theorizing, and pedagogies are valid, legitimate, and belong in academic discourse. Future research should include Latina women and not just theory that elaborates on their experiences, with the intention that we reclaim our voices within these spheres. I am aware that academics of color, such as myself, often experience that established systems of knowledge production question our qualifications for using qualitative research methods. Traditional epistemologies do not always welcome our way of conducting research, learning and constructing new knowledge. Lastly, Communities of Color must also examine our own complicity in sustaining hierarchies, stereotypes, and power relations and be cautious not to become colonizers ourselves. Navigating racist and colonial structures within higher education can be physically, emotionally, and psychologically demanding; Women of Color and Scholars of color need to support each other.

The findings in this study demonstrate that doctoral students purposefully build community. Few participants could benefit from femtorships, while the vast majority highlighted the power of sisterhoods and community. The findings are consistent with previous Latina/o graduate literature highlighting race, gender, and social status challenges. While it is true that

doctoral students continue to face these challenges, it is also vital to mention that many Latina women have successfully penetrated the ivory tower and are making changes from within. Their *testimonios* reflect the importance of representation, agency, and having control of our narratives. In addition, their narratives show their resiliency, discipline, and academic achievements. Their experiences navigating educational structures guide current and future Latina scholars.

## References

- Acuña, R. (2013). *Los muertos de hambre: The war on Chicana/o studies—Unmasking the illusion of inclusion*. <http://mexmigration.blogspot.com/2013/11/acuna-on-war-against-chicanao-studies.html>.
- Aguayo, D., Herman, K., Ojeda, L., & Flores, L. Y. (2011). Culture predicts Mexican Americans' college self-efficacy and college performance. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 4*(2), 79.
- Alarcón, J. D., & Bettez, S., (2017) Feeling Brown in the Academy: Decolonizing Mentoring Through a Disidentification *Muxerista* Approach, *Equity & Excellence in Education, 50*(1), 25-40, DOI: 10.1080/10665684.2016.1250234
- Anzaldúa, G. (1983). La prieta. In C. Moraga & G. Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This bridge called my back* (pp. 198–209). Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1990). *Making faces, making soul haciendo caras: Creative and critical perspectives of feminists of color*. Aunt Lute Books
- Arday, J. (2018). Dismantling power and privilege through reflexivity: negotiating normative Whiteness, the Eurocentric curriculum and racial microaggressions within the Academy. *Whiteness and Education, 3*(2), 141-161.
- Arnesen, E. (2001). Whiteness and the historians' imagination. *International Labor and Working-Class History, 60*, 3-32.
- Aronson, B., Reyes, G., Banda, R., Barrios, V., Castaneda, M., & Berlioz, E. C., (2020) Improvising a space for us: A testimonio from a Latina Diaspora Group, *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, 17*(3), 266-274, DOI: 10.1080/15505170.2020.1786748



- Ayala, M. I., & Contreras, S. M. (2019). It's capital! Understanding Latina/o presence in higher education. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 5, 229–243. doi:10.1177/2332649218757803
- Berg, G. A., & Tollefson, K. (2014). Latina/o student perceptions of post-baccalaureate education: Identifying challenges to increased participation. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 13(4), 296-308.
- Bernál, D. D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 105–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800107>
- Biermann, S. (2011). Chapter Twenty-Four: Knowledge, Power and Decolonization: Implication for Non-Indigenous Scholars, Researchers and Educators. *Counterpoints*, 379, 386-398.
- Brittan, A., & Maynard, M. (1984). *Sexism, racism, and oppression*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- BonJour, L. (2010). The myth of knowledge. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 24, 57-83.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). The economics of linguistic exchanges. *Information (International Social Science Council)*, 16(6), 645-668.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine domination*. Stanford University Press.
- Bourke, B. (2016). Meaning and Implications of Being Labelled a Predominantly White Institution. *College & University*, 91(3), 12–21.
- Burciaga, R., & Tavares, A. (2006). Our pedagogy of sisterhood: A testimonio. In D. Delgado Bernal, C. A. Elenes, F. E. Godinez, & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Chicana/Latina education in everyday life: Feminist perspectives on pedagogy and epistemology* (pp. 133–142). University of New York Press.

- Calderón, D., Bernal, D. D., Huber, L. P., Malagón, M., & Vélez, V. N. (2012). A Chicana feminist epistemology revisited: Cultivating ideas a generation later. *Harvard Educational Review*, 82(4), 513-539.
- Calderón, D. (2008). *Indigenous metaphysics: Challenging Western knowledge organization in social studies curriculum*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Cervantes-Soon, C. G. (2016). Mujeres truchas: urban girls redefining smartness in a dystopic global south. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 19(6), 1209-1222.
- Comaroff, J., & Comaroff, J. (1988). Through the looking-glass: Colonial encounters of the first kind. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1(1), 6-32.
- Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought. *Social problems*, 33(6), s14-s32.
- Collins, P. H. (2002). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3-21.
- Cordova, A. J., & Knecht, L. M. (2019). Liminal Knowledge: Positioning Intersectionality in Academia. *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies*, 19(3), 203-213.
- Cook, A., Pérusse, R., & Rojas, E. D. (2012). Increasing academic achievement and college-going rates for Latina/o English language learners: A survey of school counselor interventions. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 4(2), 2.

- Crisp, G., & Cruz, I. (2009). Mentoring college students: A critical review of the literature between 1990 and 2007. *Research in Higher Education*, 50, 525–545.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11162-009-9130-2>
- Crumb, L. (2022). Fostering the success of working-class Latina doctoral students at predominantly White institutions. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 17, 25-38.  
<https://doi.org/10.28945/4886>
- Cruz, D. E. (2012). Nuestras experiencias: A phenomenological study of Latina first generation higher education graduates. *UNLV Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers, and Capstones*. 1553. <http://dx.doi.org/10.34917/4332534>
- Cueva, B. M. (2014). Institutional academic violence: Racial and gendered microaggressions in higher education. *Chicana/Latina Studies*, 142-168.
- de Alba, A. G. (2014). *[Un] framing the "Bad Woman": Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui, and Other Rebels with a Cause*. University of Texas Press.
- Dei, G. S. (2012). Indigenous anti-colonial knowledge as ‘heritage knowledge’ for promoting Black/African education in diasporic contexts. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1).
- Delgado Bernal, D. (1998). Using a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research. *Harvard educational review*, 68(4), 555-583.
- Delgado Bernal, D. (2001). Learning and living pedagogies of the home: The mestiza consciousness of Chicana students. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(5), 623-639.

- Delgado Bernal, D. (2008). La trenza de identidades: Weaving together my personal, professional, and communal identities. *Doing the public good: Latina/o scholars engage civic participation*, 135-148.
- Delgado Bernal, D., Alemán Jr, E., & Carmona, J. F. (2008). Negotiating and Contesting Transnational and Transgenerational Latina/o Cultural Citizenship: Kindergarteners, Their Parents, and University Students in Utah. *Social Justice*, 35(1), 111).
- Delgado Bernal, D., Burciaga, R., & Flores Carmona, J. (2012). Latina testimonios: Mapping the methodological, pedagogical, and political. *Equity & excellence in education*, 45(3), 363-372.
- Delgado Bernal, D., & Villalpando, O. (2002). An apartheid of knowledge in academia: The struggle over the “legitimate” of faculty of color. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(2), 169–180.
- Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1993). Parenting in Two Generations of Mexican American Families. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 16(3), 409–427.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/016502549301600303>
- Dixson, D. & Rousseau, C.K. (2006). “And we are still not saved: Critical Race Theory in education ten years later. In Adrienne D. Dixson & Celia K. Rousseau (eds.) *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God’s Children Got a Song*. Routledge.
- Elabor-Idemudia, P. (2001). Equity issues in the academy: An Afro-Canadian woman's perspective. *Journal of Negro Education*, 192-203.
- Elabor-Idemudia, P. (2011). CHAPTER NINE: Identity, Representation, and Knowledge Production. *Counterpoints*, 379, 142–156. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42980891>

- Elenes, C. A. (1997). Reclaiming the borderlands: Chicana/o identity, difference, and critical pedagogy. *Educational Theory*, 47(3), 359-375.
- Elenes, C. A. (2000). Chicana feminist narratives and the politics of the self. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 21(3), 105-123.
- Elenes, C. A., Gonzalez, F. E., Bernal, D. D., & Villenas, S. (2001). Introduction: Chicana/Mexicana feminist pedagogies: Consejos, respeto, y educación in everyday life. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(5), 595-602.
- Espino, M. M. (2014). Exploring the role of community cultural wealth in graduate school access and persistence for Mexican American PhDs. *American Journal of Education*, 120(4), 545–574. <https://doi.org/10.1086/676911>
- Esposito, J., Lee, T., Limes-Taylor Henderson, K., Mason, A., Outler, A., Rodriguez Jackson, J., & Whitaker-Lea, L. (2017). Doctoral students' experiences with pedagogies of the home, pedagogies of love, and mentoring in the academy. *Educational Studies*, 53(2), 155-177.
- Evatt-Young, D., & Bryson, B. S. (2021). White Higher Education Leaders on the Complexities of Whiteness and Anti-Racist Leadership. *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity (JCSCORE)*, 7(1), 47-82.
- Excelencia in Education. (2016). Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs): 2014–2015. Retrieved from <http://www.edexcelencia.org/gateway/download/17265/1453981347>
- Fields, B. J. (2001). Whiteness, racism, and identity. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60, 48-56.
- File-Muriel, M. D. P. (2013). An exploration of the social effectiveness of political kidnapping testimonios in Colombia. *Journal of Contemporary Anthropology*, 4(1), 2.

- Fierros, C. O., & Delgado Bernal, D. (2016). Vamos a pláticar: The contours of pláticas as Latina feminist methodology. *Latina Studies*, 15(2), 98-121.
- Flores Carmona, J. (2014). Cutting out their tongues: Mujeres' testimonios and the Malintzin researcher. *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies*, 6(2), 113-124.
- Fuentes, E. H., & Pérez, M. A. (2016). Our Stories are our Sanctuary: Testimony as a Sacred of Belonging. *Association of Mexican American Educators Journal*, 10(2), 6-15.
- Galván, R. T. (2001). Portraits of mujeres desjuiciadas: Womanist pedagogies of the everyday, the mundane and the ordinary. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(5), 603-621.
- Galván, R. T. (2014). Chicana/Latin American feminist epistemologies of the global South (within and outside the North): Decolonizing el conocimiento and creating global alliances. *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies*, 6(2), 135-140.
- Gándara, P. C., & Aldana, U. S. (2014). Who's segregated now? Latinos, language, and the future of integrated schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 50(5), 735-748.
- Garcia, G. A., Nuñez, A. M., & Sansone, V. A. (2019). Toward a multidimensional conceptual framework for understanding “servingness” in Hispanic-Serving Institutions: A synthesis of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 89(5), 745–784.  
doi:10.3102/0034654319864591
- Ghosh, R. (2015). Teaching case study – Mentoring – Is it failing? *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 27, 70–74.
- Giroux, H. A. (2004). Cultural studies, public pedagogy, and the responsibility of intellectuals. *Communication and critical/cultural studies*, 1(1), 59-79.

- Gonzalez, A., Lara, I., Prado, C., Rivera, S. L., & Rodriguez, C. (2015). Passing the sage: Our Sacred Testimonio as Curandera Scholar Activists in Academia. *Chicana/Latina Studies*, 15(1), 110–155. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43943383>
- Gonzalez, C. (2001). Undergraduate research, graduate mentoring, and the university's mission. *Science*, 293(5535), 1624–1626. doi:10.1126/science.1062714
- González, F. E. (1998) *The Formations of Mexicanness: Trenzas de identidades multiples: The Development of Womanhood among Young Mexicanas: Braids of Multiple Identities*. Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis.
- Gonzalez, F. E. (2001). Haciendo que hacer – cultivating a Mestiza worldview and academic achievement: Braiding cultural knowledge into educational research, policy, practice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14, 641–656.
- Gonzalez, G. G. (1996). A brief review of Chicano educational history in California: A legacy of inequality. In A. Hurtado, R. Figueroa, & E. E. Garcia (Eds.), *Strategic interventions in education: Expanding the Latina/Latino pipeline*, 28-47.
- Gonzalez, J. (2011). *Harvest of empire: A history of Latinos in America*. Penguin Books.
- González, J. C. (2007). Surviving the doctorate and thriving as faculty: Latina junior faculty reflecting on their doctoral studies experiences. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 40(4), 291-300.
- González, J. C., & Portillos, E. L. (2012). “Teaching from a Critical Perspective/ Enseñando De Una Perspectiva Crítica: Conceptualization, Reflection, and Application of Chicana/o Pedagogy.” *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 4(1).
- González, N. (2006). *I am my language: Discourses of women and children in the borderlands*. University of Arizona Press.

- Gonzalez, N., Moll, L. C., Tenery, M. F., Rivera, A., Rendon, P., Gonzales, R., & Amanti, C. (1995). Funds of knowledge for teaching in Latino households. *Urban Education, 29*(4), 443-470.
- Gramlich, J. (2017). Hispanic dropout rate hits new low, college enrollment at new high. Pew Research Center.
- Grant, C. M., & Simmons, J. C. (2008). Narratives on experiences of African-American women in the academy: Conceptualizing effective mentoring relationships of doctoral student and faculty. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education.*, 21(5), 501–517.
- Gutiérrez, R. A. (2004). Internal colonialism: An American theory of race. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race, 1*(2), 281-295.
- Hantzopoulos, M. (2016). Beyond American exceptionalism: Centering critical peace education in U.S. school reform. *Peace Education: International Perspectives, 177-192.*
- Hatt, B. (2007). Street smarts vs. book smarts: The figured world of smartness in the lives of marginalized, urban youth. *The Urban Review, 39*(2), 145-166.
- Hooks, B. (1986). Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women. *Feminist Review, 23*(1), 125–138. <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1986.25>
- Hill Collins, P. (2002). Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. Routledge.
- Horsford, S. D., & Grosland, T. J. (2013). Badges of inferiority: The racialization of achievement in U.S. education. In Lynn, M. & Dixon, A. *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education.*



- Howard-Hamilton, M. F., Morelon-Quainoo, C. L., Johnson, S. D., Winkle-Wagner, R., & Santiago, L. (2009). *Standing on the outside looking in: Underrepresented students' experiences in advanced degree programs*. Stylus Publishing.
- Huber, L. P. (2008). Building critical race methodologies in educational research: A research note on critical race testimonio. *FIU l. Rev.*, 4, 159.
- Huber, L. P. (2009). Disrupting apartheid of knowledge: Testimonio as methodology in Latina/o critical race research in education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(6), 639-654.
- Huber, L. P. (2017). Healing images and narratives: Undocumented Latina pedagogies of resistance. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 16(4), 374-389.
- Hurtado, A., Hurtado, M. A., & Hurtado, A. L. (2008). Tres hermanas (Three sisters): A model of relational achievement. In K. Gonzalez & R. Padilla (Eds.), *Doing the public good: Latina/o scholars engage civic participation* (pp. 39–81). Stylus.
- Johnson-Bailey, J., & Cervero, R. M. (2004). Mentoring in Black and White: The intricacies of cross-cultural mentoring. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 12, 7–21.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1361126042000183075>
- Jimenez, R. M. (2016). “Nuestro camino es más largo” (Our Journey Is Much Longer): A Testimonio of Immigrant Life in the Central Valley and the Road towards the Professoriate. *Association of Mexican American Educators Journal*, 10(2), 65-79.
- Jimenez, R. M. (2020). Community cultural wealth pedagogies: Cultivating autoethnographic counternarratives and migration capital. *American Educational Research Journal*, 57(2), 775-807. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831219866148>

- Khan, G. N., Soofi, S. B., Baig, I. Y., & Bhutta, Z. A. (2015). Impact of a community-based perinatal and newborn preventive care package on perinatal and neonatal mortality in a remote mountainous district in Northern Pakistan. *BMC pregnancy and childbirth*, *15*(1), 1-9.
- Kosoko-Lasaki, O., Sonnino, R. E., & Voytko, M. L. (2006). Mentoring for women and underrepresented minority faculty and students: experience at two institutions of higher education. *Journal of the national medical association*, *98*(9), 1449.
- Kouyoumdjian, C., Guzmán, B. L., García, N. M., & Talavera-Bustillos, V. (2017). A community cultural wealth examination of sources of support and challenges among Latino first-and second-generation college students at a Hispanic serving institution. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *16*(1), 61–76. <https://doi.org/1538192715619995>
- Kram, K., & Isabella, L. (1985). Mentoring alternatives: The role of peer relationships in career development. *The Academy of Management Journal*, *28*, 110–132.
- Krogstad, J. M. (2016). *5 Facts about Latinos and education*. Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/28/5-facts-about-latinos-and-education/>
- Kuntz, A. M. (2015). *The responsible methodologist*. Left Coast Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2003). Critical race theory perspectives on the social studies: *The profession, policies, and curriculum*. Information Age Publishing.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). The evolving role of Critical Race theory in educational scholarship. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*, 115-119.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2013). Critical race theory—What it is not!. In *Handbook of critical race theory in education* (pp. 54-67). Routledge.

- Latina Feminist Group. (2001). *Telling to live: Latina feminist testimonios*. Duke University Press.
- Lewis, A. E. (2004). What group? Studying whites and whiteness in the era of color-blindness. *Sociological Theory*, 22(4), 623-646.
- Macías, F., & Redondo, G. (2012). Pueblo gitano, género y educación: investigar para excluir o investigar para transformar. *RISE*, 1(1), 71-92.
- Maher, F. A., & Tetreault, M. K. T. (1997). Learning in the dark: How assumptions of whiteness shape classroom knowledge. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67(2), 321
- Mbembe, A. (2016). Decolonizing the university: New directions. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 15(1), 29-45.
- Mbembe, A. (2019). Future knowledges and their implications for the decolonisation project. *Decolonisation in universities: the politics of knowledge*, 239-245.
- McCabe, J. (2009). Racial and Gender Microaggressions on a Predominantly-White Campus: Experiences of Black, Latina/o and White Undergraduates. Source: *Race, Gender & Class*, Vol. 16, No. 1/2 (2009), pp. 133-151
- McCann, K. (2018). Women of color with critical worldviews constructing spaces of resistance in education doctoral programs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 59(4), 404–420. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2018.0039>
- McCoy, D. L., Winkle-Wagner, R., & Luedke, C. L. (2015). Colorblind mentoring? Exploring white faculty mentoring of students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 8, 225–242. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038676>.
- McKenna, T. (1990). Intersections of race, class and gender: the feminist pedagogical challenge. *Pacific Coast Philology*, 31-38.

- Méndez-Morse, S. (2004). Constructing mentors: Latina educational leaders' role models and mentors. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(4), 561-590.
- Mireles-Rios, R., & Garcia, N. M. (2019). What would your ideal graduate mentoring program look like?: La-tina/o student success in higher education. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 18(4), 376-386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2018.1447937>
- Moosavi, L. (2020). The decolonial bandwagon and the dangers of intellectual decolonisation. *International Review of Sociology*, 1-23.
- Morgan-Consoli, M. L., Torres, L., Unzueta, E., Meza, D., Sanchez, A., Vázquez, M. D., & Hufana, A. (2020). Accounts of Thriving in the Face of Discrimination for Latina/o Undergraduate Students. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1-15.
- Moya, P. M. (2011). Who we are and from where we speak. *Transmodernity: Journal of peripheral cultural production of the Luso-Hispanic world*, 1(2).
- Murphy, J. P., & Murphy, S. A. (2018). Get ready, get in, get through: Factors that influence Latino college student success. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 17(1), 3-17.
- Noe-Bustamante, L. (2020) Education levels of recent Latino immigrants in the U.S. reached new highs as of 2018. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/07/education-levels-of-recent-latino-immigrants-in-the-u-s-reached-new-highs-as-of-2018/>
- Oakes, J. 2005. *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*. Yale University Press.
- O'Meara, K., Griffin, K. A., Kuvaeva, A., Nyunt, G., & Robinson, T. N. (2017). Sense of belonging and its contributing factors in graduate education. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 12, 251–279. <https://doi.org/10.28945/3903>

- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1993). On the theoretical status of the concept of race. *Race, identity and representation in education*, 3-10.
- Patterson-Stephens, S., & Hernández, E. (2018). Hermandad: Sista' scholar bonds for Black and Chicana women in doctoral study. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 51(3-4), 396-415.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2018.1546150>
- Pecero, V. F. (2016). *Rise up: Exploring the first-year experiences of Latina doctoral students at predominantly white institutions* [Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University.]  
[http://rave.ohi-olink.edu/etdc/view?acc\\_num=osu1480646788839175](http://rave.ohi-olink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1480646788839175)
- Pecina, U. H., & Marx, D. (2020). In Spite of Urban Latina/o Leaders' Perspectives on Undergraduate Perseverance and Successful Degree Completion. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1-20.
- Perrakis, A., & Hagedorn, L. S. (2010). Latino/a student success in community colleges and Hispanic-serving institution status. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 34(10), 797-813.
- Pino, N. W., Martinez-Ramos, G. P., & Smith, W. L. (2012). Latinos, the academic ethic, and the transition to college. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 11(1), 17-31.
- Phillips, S., Dennison, S., & Davenport, M. (2016). High retention of minority and international faculty through a formal mentoring program. *To Improve the Academy*, 35, 153–179.
- Phruksachart, M. (2017). On mentoring future faculty of color. *Feminist Teacher*, 27(2–3), 117–132. <https://doi.org/10.5406/femteacher.27.2-3.0117>
- Ponjuán, L., & Hernández, S. (2016). Untapped potential: Improving Latino males academic success in community colleges. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, 23(2), 1-20.

- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 15(2), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>
- Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies*, 21, 168–178. doi:10.1080/09502380601164353
- Rabaka, R. (2007). The souls of white folk: WEB Du Bois's critique of white supremacy and contributions to critical white studies. *Journal of African American Studies*, 11(1), 1-15.
- Ramirez, E. (2017). Unequal socialization: Interrogating the Chicano/Latino(a) Doctorate Education Experience. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 10(1), 25–38. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000028>
- Ramos, D. M., & Yi, V. (2020). Doctoral women of color coping with racism and sexism in the academy. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 15, 135–158. <https://doi.org/10.28945/4508>
- Reyes Cruz, M. (2008). What if I just cite Graciela? Working toward decolonizing knowledge through a critical ethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 14(4), 651-658.
- Roberts, A. (2000). Mentoring revisited: a phenomenological reading of the literature. *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 8(2), 145–170.
- Russel & Rodriguez, M. (2007). Messy spaces: Chicana testimonio and the undisciplining of ethnography. *Latina Studies: A Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*, 7(1), 86–121.
- Saavedra, C. M., Chakravarthi, S., & Lower, J. K. (2008). (Re) invisioning linguistic diversity teacher training: Weaving transnational feminist (s) perspectives in early childhood education.

- Saavedra, C., & Pérez, M. (2012) Chicana and Black Feminisms: *Testimonios* of Theory, Identity, and Multiculturalism, *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45:3, 430-443, 10.1080/10665684.2012.681970
- Saavedra, C., & Pérez, M. (2014). An introduction:(Re) envisioning Latina feminist methodologies. *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies*, 6(2), 78-80.
- Salas, R., Aragon, A., Alandejani, J., & Timpson, W. M. (2014). Mentoring Experiences and Latina/o University Student Persistence. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 13(4), 231–244.
- Salinas Jr, C. (2017). Transforming academia and theorizing spaces for Latinx in higher education: voces perdidas and voces de poder. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(8), 746-758.
- Sánchez, P. (2009). Chicana feminist strategies in a participatory action research project with transnational Latina youth. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2009(123), 83-97.
- Sanchez, M. E. (2019). Perceptions of Campus Climate and Experiences of Racial Microaggressions for Latinos at Hispanic-Serving Institutions. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 18(3), 240–253. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192717739351>
- Sanchez, P., & Ek, L. D. (2013). Before the Tenure Track: Graduate School" Testimonios" and Their Importance in Our" Profesora"-ship Today. *Educational Foundations*, 27, 15-30.
- Sánchez, P., & Ek, L. (2013). Cultivando la siguiente generación: Future directions in Latina feminist pedagogies. *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies*, 5(3), 181-187.
- Sandoval, C. D. M., Lagunas, R. M., Montelongo, L. T., & Díaz, M. J. (2016). Ancestral knowledge systems: A conceptual framework for decolonizing research in social science. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 12(1), 18-31.

- Sandoval, C. D. M. (2017). Critical Ancestral Computing for the Protection of Mother Earth'. In Jimenez-Silva & Coulter (Ed). *Culturally Sustaining and Revitalizing Pedagogies* (pp. 25-40). Emerald Publishing.
- Sanjek, R. (1994). The Enduring Inequalities of Race. In S. Gregory & R. Sanjek (Eds.) *Race* (pp. 103-130). MW Books.
- Santa-Ramirez, S. (2022). Sink or swim: The mentoring experiences of Latinx PhD students with faculty of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 15(1), 124-134. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000335>
- Scheurich, J. J., & Young, M. D. (1997). Coloring epistemologies: Are our research epistemologies racially-biased?. *Educational researcher*, 26(4), 4-16.
- Segura, D. A. (2003). Navigating between two worlds: The labyrinth of Chicana intellectual production in the academy. *Journal of Black Studies*, 34(1), 28-51.
- Smedley, A. (2007). Antecedents of the racial worldview. *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*, 31-44.
- Smitherman, G., & Smitherman-Donaldson, G. (1986). *Talkin and testifyin: The language of Black America* (Vol. 51). Wayne State University Press.
- Solórzano, D. G. (1998). Critical race theory, race and gender microaggressions, and the experience of Chicana and Chicano scholars. *International journal of qualitative studies in education*, 11(1), 121-136.
- Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American College Students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1), 60–73. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2696265>



- Solorzano, D. G., & Bernal, D. D. (2001). Examining transformational resistance through a critical race and LatCrit theory framework: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban education, 36*(3), 308-342.
- Spivak, R. G. G. C., & Said, E. (1988). *Selected subaltern studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Squire, D. D., & McCann, K. (2018). Women of color with critical worldviews constructing spaces of resistance in education doctoral programs. *Journal of College Student Development, 59*(4), 404–420. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2018.0039>
- Suárez-Orozco, C., & Qin, D. B. (2005). Immigrant boys' experiences in U.S. schools. *The new immigration: An interdisciplinary reader, 345-358*.
- Sue, D. W., Bucceri, J., Lin, A. I., Nadal, K. L., & Torino, G. C. (2007). Racial microaggressions and the Asian American experience. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 13*(1), 72–81. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.13.1.72>
- Tellez, M. (2016). Arizona: A Reflection and Conversation on the Migrant Rights Movement, 2015. *Social Justice: A journal of crime, conflict & world order, 88–104*.
- Téllez, M. (2005). Doing research at the borderlands: Notes from a Chicana feminist ethnographer. *Chicana/Latina Studies, 4*(2), 46–70.
- Templeton, A. R. (1998). Human races: a genetic and evolutionary perspective. *American Anthropologist, 100*(3), 632-650.
- Teranishi, R. T., Suárez-Orozco, C., & Suárez-Orozco, M. ( 2015). *In the shadows of the ivory tower: Undocumented undergraduates and the liminal state of immigration reform* (The UndocuScholars Project). UCLA Institute for Immigration, Globalization, & Education. <http://www.undocuscholars.org/undocuscholars-report.html>

- Tillman, L. C. (2001). Mentoring African American faculty in predominantly white institutions. *Research in Higher Education*, 42(3), 295–325.
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American journal of evaluation*, 27(2), 237-246.
- Tom, M. N., Suárez-Krabbe, J., & Caballero Castro, T. (2017). Pedagogy of Absence, Conflict, and Emergence: Contributions to the Decolonization of Education from the Native American, Afro-Portuguese, and Romani Experiences. *Comparative Education Review*, 61(S1), 121-145.
- Turner, C. S. (2002). Women of Color in Academe: Living with Multiple Marginality. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(1), 74–93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1558448>
- Turner, C. S. (2008). Toward public education as a public good: Reflections from the field. In K. Gonzalez & R. Padilla (Eds.), *Doing the public good: Latina/o scholars engage civic participation* (pp. 97–111).
- Turner, C. S. V., & González, J. C. (2015). What does the literature tell us about mentoring across race/ethnicity and gender. In C. S. V. Turner & J. C. González (Eds.), *Modeling mentoring across race/ethnicity and gender: Practices to cultivate the next generation of diverse faculty* (pp. 1–41). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society*, 1(1).
- Urbina, M. G., & Wright, C. R. (2015). *Latino Access to Higher Education: Ethnic Realities and New Directions for the Twenty-First Century*. Charles C Thomas Publisher.
- Urrieta, L., & Villenas, S. (2013). The legacy of Derrick Bell and Latino/a education: A critical race testimonio. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16, 514-535.

- U.S. Census Bureau (2019). Quick Facts United States. <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219> The United States Census Bureau.
- Wane, N., N. (2009). Indigenous education and cultural resistance: A decolonizing project. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 39(1), 159-178.
- Willig, A. C. (2003). Discourse analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 159-183). SAGE.
- Wise, S., & Stanley, L. (1983). *Breaking out: Feminist consciousness and feminist research*. Routledge & K. Paul.
- Valencia, R. R. (2002). "Mexican Americans don't value education!" On the basis of the myth, mythmaking, and debunking. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1(2), 81-103.
- Villenas, S. A., Godinez, F. E., Bernal, D. D., & Elenes, C. A. (2006). Chicanas/Latinas building bridges. *Latina education in everyday life: Feminista perspectives on pedagogy and epistemology*, 1-9.
- Von Robertson, R., Bravo, A., & Chaney, C. (2016). Racism and the Experiences of Latina/o College Students at a PWI (Predominantly White Institution). *Critical Sociology*, 42(4–5), 715–735. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514532664>.
- Ybarra, M. G. (2020). “We Have a Strong Way of Thinking and It Shows through Our Words”: Exploring Mujerista Literacies with Chicana/Latina Youth in a Community Ethnic Studies Course. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 54(3), 231-253.
- Yip, J., & Kram, K. (2017). Developmental networks: Enhancing the science and practice of mentoring. In D. Clutterbuck, F. Kochan, L. Lunsford, N. Dominguez, & J. Haddock-Millar (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of mentoring* (pp. 88–104).

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91.

doi:10.1080/1361332052000341006