The University of San Francisco
USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center

Master's Theses | Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects

Fall 12-14-2018

On Education and Family: Testimonios of Latina Immigrant Daughters

Monica Chavez
University of San Francisco, mchavez4@usfca.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.usfca.edu/thes

Part of the Higher Education Commons, and the Other Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Chavez, Monica, "On Education and Family: Testimonios of Latina Immigrant Daughters" (2018). *Master's Theses*. 1148.
https://repository.usfca.edu/thes/1148

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects at USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact repository@usfca.edu.

University of San Francisco

On Education and Family: Testimonios of Latina Immigrant Daughters

A Thesis Proposal Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

By
Mónica Chávez
December 2018

On Education and Family: Testimonios of Latina Immigrant Daughters

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by
Mónica Chávez
December 2018

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

______________________	December 10, 2018
Rosa M. Jiménez, Ph.D.	Date
Instructor/Chairperson	

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Acknowledgements v
Dedication vi
Abstract vii
Prologue viii

Chapter I – Introduction 1

Background and Need for the Study 1
Statement of the Problem 2
Purpose of the Study 4
Research Questions 5
Theoretical Framework 5
Methodology 7
Limitations of the Study 9
Significance of the Study 10
Definition of Terms 11

Chapter II – Review of the Literature 12

Introduction 12
Identity and Culture 12
Latinos and Higher Education 18
Testimonios in Educational Research 29
Summary 33

Chapter III – Results 35

Angélica 36
Jennifer 41
Mariaelena 45
Yesenia 49
Analysis 54
Summary 58

Chapter IV – Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations 60

Reclaiming Their Stories 60
Reclaiming Mine 61
What's Next? 63

Epilogue 65

References 66

Appendix 75

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Angélica, Jennifer, Mariaelena, and Yesenia
For your friendship
For inspiring me
For trusting me to share your stories
I am forever grateful

En honor de mis padres
Yolanda González Parraguirre y
Antonio Chávez Trujillo
Gracias a su amor y apoyo
Nació en mi la posibilidad de algo más
Y la audacia de tratar de alcanzar mis
sueños

For all the internacionales…

Mezclados, somos mezclados
La misma historia con otro sabor
Venimos de todos lados
Con baile, ritmo y mucho color

Entonces baila conmigo
Que esta mezcla rompa el hielo y rompa el brillo
Mezclados de todos lados
Cambiando, somos piel y corazón

Sí, somos la sangre que corre en las venas
Sí, es el sentir de mi raíz, so

Yo soy un colombiano
Yo soy americano
Yo soy un ciudadano del mundo

Yo soy un mexicano
Yo soy dominicano
De la misma raza, el mismo color

¡Baila, baila!
Que para bailar no necesitas lengua
¡Baila, baila!
Vamos a bailar en la misma fiesta

Mixed, we are mixed
The same history with a different flavor
We come from everywhere
With movement, rhythm and a lot of color

So dance with me
Cause this mix breaks the ice and shines
Mixed from everywhere
Changing, we are flesh and heart

Yes, we are the blood that flows through our veins
Yes, it's the feel of my roots

I am Colombian
I am American
I am a citizen of the world

I am Mexican
I am Dominican
From the same race, the same color

Dance! Dance!
For dancing does not require language
Dance! Dance!
Let's all dance at the same party

Internacionales, Bomba Estéreo

ABSTRACT

Latina college students must balance the needs of family while navigating pursuit of a college degree. Using testimonio, I explore how family and self-identity influenced the educational journeys of four Latinas who attended and graduated college in the 1990's and early 2000's. Utilizing the frameworks of mestiza consciousness and subject formation, I uncover the ways their status as first-generation college student, second-generation immigrant daughter, and Latina manifested expectations (from family and self) and feelings of apprehension and loneliness that came to define their college experience. Through the process of testimonio and critical self-reflection, solidarity can be established and the process of healing can begin.

Keywords: Latina education, higher education, testimonio

PROLOGUE

My parents came to the United States from central Mexico during the Latin American immigration boom that began in the mid-1960's. At 20, my father crossed the Rio Grande in Texas, illegally, eventually making his way to San Francisco, CA. My 14-year-old mother and her family arrived at the San Ysidro Port of Entry early one September morning and left for San Francisco as legal permanent residents. They met in an English class at the Centro Social Obrero, a community center that also offered job placement services and social events in San Francisco's Mission District. I was born soon thereafter.

Their history is my history.

Throughout my childhood, I would hear stories of their lives in Mexico, the impact of which did not hit me until well into adulthood. My dolls were not made of dried cornhusks. I did not have to carry a bucket of clothes to the river to do laundry. I did not have to leave home at the age of 10 to work in Mexico City to help support my family. I did not leave my country to start a new life in another. They made sure I experienced a life different from theirs in the hope of a future with different options and more opportunities.

My future is their future.

I am the United States born daughter of Mexican immigrants, a resident of Anzaldúa's Borderlands. I do not make this declaration lightly nor do I consider it a bold political statement. It is a fact. This fact is not the defining characteristic of who I am, but it is the lens from which I experience, interpret, and interact with the world around me. This fact also carries with it a story shared by millions of other people in this country. Nevertheless, our individual stories are unique. They are the stories that connect us and inspire us.

We are the children of immigrants. This our duality.

Figure 1. Advertisement on Market Street in San Francisco, CA. July 7, 2018.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background and Need for the Study

In the first semester of this graduate program, I interviewed one of the participants of this study, Angélica, for a paper I was writing about the urban high school experience. During a break from the interview questions, our conversation turned to family, specifically our parents, and the influence their immigrant story had on our education. Luckily, I did not pause my recorder and captured the following quote:

> *For me, I felt like everything I did from birth on was for my parents. To make them proud. I did what they wanted me to do to be a good girl. It's like I wasn't able to find out who I was and be myself until I buried both my parents. I was born in 1976, but I began my own journey and to really live my life when we buried my mom. For the first time ever, I was able to live for myself. And it was crazy and I – I felt like an asshole for thinking it. I really did.*
>
> *I wish both my parents were alive, but the tremendous amount of pressure to put on us, to be their America Dream…what they came to this country to do, what they came and sacrificed for…I don't believe they understood the pressure on us as children growing up. To make them proud. To make every sacrifice they made worth it. And that's really deep. I don't think they understood that. And if we were ever to have told them that, it would've hurt their feelings. So we didn't.*

We continued with the interview, I wrote my paper, and completed my first semester. This quote, however, would linger in my mind for the next three years.

Many times throughout my undergraduate studies, my family would be my motivation during the tough times. "¡Échale ganas, mija!"[1] "¡No te rajes!"[2] Reminders from my mother to work hard and not give up. As immigrants to the United States, my parents understood the value of a college education and were proud of the fact that their first-born daughter would be the first in the family to earn a college degree. As the daughter of immigrants and a first-generation

---

[1] "Give it all you got!"
[2] "Don't give in!"

college student, I understood that I carried with me the hopes and dreams of my family and that my college education meant so much more than I would ever understand at the time.

During my darkest times, I often saw this added significance as a burden. The expectations to succeed in an environment I was not prepared for academically or socially created a belief in me that I could not fail. My accomplishments were their accomplishments but my failures would be my own. I would not even discuss these feeling with the friends I made in college for fear of sounding ungrateful or, worse yet, of sounding like a sellout.

Years later, as Angélica shared her thoughts with me, I felt a sense of relief wash over me followed by a deep sadness. In our conversation, we had unpacked feelings we had not shared with each other in the 20 years we had known each other. By acknowledging our pain, our friendship reached a new level of understanding. I wondered who else might have had similar feelings. I wondered if they ever spoke about them to others. After reading various testimonios of Latina faculty, I saw an opportunity to further explore this topic from a different perspective.

Statement of the Problem

The education of Latinos in the United States has long been stigmatized. Clouded in deficit thinking, the very real achievement gap that plagues Latinos is often blamed on poor parenting, laziness, or decades old stereotypes that Latinos don’t value education (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Valencia & Black, 2002). Krogstad (2016) states that Latinos have higher high school dropout rates than other ethnic groups. Latinos who make it to high school graduation are less likely to apply to college, let alone apply to selective schools; and those that do make it to college have lower four-year degree completion rates than other ethnic groups in the United States (Desmond & Turley López, 2009; Krogstad, 2016; Marcus, 2018; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

In spite of this, Latinos have demonstrated that they do in fact value higher education and its role in achieving the "American Dream." The 2009 National Survey of Latinos shows that of the over 2,000 Latinos age 16 and over surveyed, 88% believe a college education will help them get ahead in life. Furthermore, Latinos are more likely to believe this than non-Latinos (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Despite having a higher high school dropout rate (12%) than black (7%) and white (5%) students combined, the Latino dropout rate hit an all-time low in 2009. Latino college enrollment has also steadily increased since 1993 (Krogstad, 2016). Against the odds, Latinos have persisted.

Research has shown that a significant factor attributed to college success for Latino first-generation college students is the family. Close ties to home, campus community (Enriquez, 2011; Llamas & Morgan Consoli, 2012) and ganas, "a deeply held desire to achieve academically fueled by parental struggle and sacrifice" (Easley, Jr., Bianco, & Leech, 2012) provide first-generation students the motivation and support they need to overcome the odds. Indeed, the emphasis placed on family and community is a defining characteristic of Latino culture. With that in mind, it is easy to see how family can be the stimulus for success for first-generation students even when their lack of educational achievement is a detriment (Desmond & Turley, 2009; Llamas & Morgan Consoli, 2012).

The road to academic success is often not an easy one. Scholars have written extensively about the obstacles Latinos face in school. Students often confront issues such as environmental factors (Crisp & Nora 2010), familismo and family influence (Desmond & Turley, 2009; Torres & Solberg, 2001), and how use of their cultural capital helped overcome them (Easley, Jr. et al., 2012; Enriquez, 2011; Llamas & Morgan Consoli, 2012). Cultural capital in regards to the family and the role they play, forces students to find a way to balance their individual pursuit of

higher education with the needs of the family. A deeper look at the toll it plays specifically on first-generation Latino students is required. I argue this balancing act creates pressures that can cause additional stress and responsibilities for Latino students that can, in turn, put their autonomy and agency into question. These added burdens do not necessarily hinder success, but attention must be paid.

Purpose of the Study

"Dime con quién andas, y te diré quién eres"[3] is a popular saying throughout Latin America, and one that I heard often growing up. Though it refers to associations outside the family, the message is clear: group association and identity are one in the same. For Latinos, whether it be family or friends, the group identity defines you. Conversely, individual action, whether good or bad, is a reflection of the group. Living in a society as individualistic as the United States, Latinos have nonetheless held on to the customs and beliefs of their motherland (Faitar, 2006). Culture, no longer just norms, beliefs, and artifacts of a people, but also the people themselves (Akom, 2008; King, 2016; Martin, 2017; Ngo, 2008; Tanaka, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to explore these issues by re-examining the college experience of Latina college graduates with an emphasis on the role family and self-identity has played on their education. Specifically, I want to investigate how their status as second-generation immigrants and first-generation college students shaped their college experience. In presenting their stories, I hope to provide a voice for the alternate experiences Latinas encounter in pursuit of higher education. Through personal storytelling and reflexión (Alarcón, Cruz, Guardia Jackson, Prieto, & Rodriguez-Arroyo, 2011), connection and solidarity can be established among Latinas, as well as across ethnic, regional, and socioeconomic lines (Reyes &

[3]"Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are."

Curry Rodríguez, 2012). Equally, I hope these stories provide insight into the Latina college experience moving beyond the basic stereotypical understanding of Latino culture and statistics for educators and researchers who work closely with Latinas.

Research Questions

In order to fully comprehend the Latino college experience in regards to Latinas, a closer look beyond graduation rates and academic performance at the impact these added pressures can have is necessary. The following questions shaped the research for this study as well as guided the development of the interview questions used for the testimonios presented in this study (see Appendix I):

- How do family and identity influence Latinas throughout their education? Specifically, first-generation daughters of immigrants?
- In what ways might pursuit of the "American Dream" for one generation, while holding on to the customs and value system of their home country, influence the next generation's pursuit of their own "American Dream?"
- How does familismo, an identifying trait of Latino culture that emphasizes family over the individual (Sy & Romero, 2008), affect the success and happiness of first generation college students?
- How are autonomy and agency established when identity is so closely tied to that of family?

Theoretical Framework

To understand the internal struggles faced by first-generation Latinas, I will be working from the frameworks of mestiza consciousness and subject formation.

Mestiza Consciousness

Because I, a *mestiza*,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan
simultáneamente. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 99)

A mestiza is a woman of mixed race, historically being of indigenous and Spanish descent (Mestiza, n.d.). The Latina in the United States is not only a woman of mixed race, but also one of mixed cultures, mixed societies, mixed languages, mixed identities. Living in a constant state of flux, the mestiza must continuously cross the borders of different, often conflicting worlds. In this area, known as the Borderlands, cultures and races intersect and occupy the same space. To survive, a dual identity forms to navigate multiple cultures where, as Anzaldúa (1987) explains, she "copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (p.101). "As such, mestiza consciousness is a specific form of decentered subjectivity that is produced through immersion in a complex web of social relations including various relations of subordination and privilege" (Barvosa, 2008, p. 58). It is a means to resolve the internal struggle of multiple, contradictory identities, to reconcile the duality in which she lives.

For this "new mestiza", achieving mestiza consciousness is a process, a thorough reinvention of the mind, body, and soul (Henríquez-Betancor, 2012). One that heals the contradictory identities that are too "painful to live and experience" (Barvosa, 2008, p. 56) by embracing the contradictions and rejecting a binary definition of ethnicity and gender (Aigner-Varoz, 2000; Henríquez-Betancor, 2012). In doing so, the "new mestiza" "declares the right to decide for herself who she wants to be" (Henríquez-Betancor, 2012, p. 46).

Subject Formation

> I would say that it is when we are able to cultivate meaningful social and communal ties without losing our sense of being rooted in our own "being" that we approach the soul – that we approach a way of inhabiting the world that remains open to it without being overly dependent on it. (Ruti, 2006, p. 105)

Hegemonic systems and societal structures impose meaning onto individuals leaving them without the agency to create their own meaning. This oppressive act leaves the individual "psychically wounded", their soul a victim of alienation and suffering (Ruti, 2006). A reinvention of the soul is possible through subject formation. By allowing the victimized soul a space for self-reflection and the opportunity to stand as a witness for others, the individual's subjectivity is re-centered. They now become the subject of their self-created narrative empowering them to make connections across racial, social, and economic lines possible (Marginson, 2014; Tanaka, 2009).

Subject formation allows for experiences of pain, sorrow, failure, loss, etc., to serve "as a valuable rite of passage that ultimately, over time, empowers rather than debilitates" (Ruti, 2006, p. 21). Soulfulness, then, is the ability to process these experiences and accept them as necessary. In other words, the individual is enabled, not defined by, their "victimhood." Ruti's subject formation framework will be used to analyze the testimonios and further investigate the complex pressures that Latina's experience during college.

Methodology

I conducted the research for this study via four testimonio style interviews during the summer of 2018. I met with each testimonialista individually in their homes with the exception of one participant who chose to meet in my home. Over the course of an afternoon, prompted by

some guiding questions (see Appendix 1), the four women told their stories as related to their families and educational journeys. Each testimonio averaged around 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. There were pauses for breaks and/or unexpected interruptions. I took notes throughout the interview, noting the parts of their testimonio where I wanted more clarification or further elaboration.

Each participant was introduced to the topic of my research via Angelica's quote cited earlier in this chapter. With that in mind, I asked each participant to prepare for the interviews ahead of time by thinking back on their schooling and the influence their families had on them during this time. I began each interview by asking the participants to give me basic information (name, birthplace) as well information regarding their parents such as their place of birth, immigration details (if applicable), employment, and highest level of education. Then they would begin their testimonios starting from pre-school/kindergarten through high school. I was interested in the following information:

- School demographics and how they were chosen
- Parental involvement and guidance during these years
- Struggles participants faced

Next, we discussed their college experiences from the application process through graduation. Specifically, I asked participants to speak to how they navigated this endeavor and the roles their family and/or friends back home played during this time in their lives. Throughout the interview, I also asked participants to reflect on their identities as Latinas and how that influenced their choices and/or experiences.

I chose a qualitative approach for this research in order to allow the participants an open forum to speak but also to be able to dialogue with them. The dialogue not only presented the

opportunity to get clarification on aspects of their journeys via follow-up questions, but it also allowed for a more relaxed setting for participants. Approaching the interviews as a dialogue gave it a more conversational tone that let the women, who were new to this process, feel more comfortable. Furthermore, it allowed us to engage in a form of reflexión (Espino, Vega, Rendón, Ranero, & Muñiz, 2012). We were able to bridge together our common experiences and re-evaluate them as part of the larger Latina/immigrant/first-generation experience.

Limitations of the Study

A few limitations should be considered when reviewing this study. First, I had a relevantly small sample size of participants. Due to the qualitative nature of the data collected and the limited amount of time, I found a smaller number of testimonios to transcribe and analyze more manageable. A larger number of participants would have also yielded a more diverse sample size. Three of the four participants are of Mexican descent. Ideally, this study would benefit from a more diverse sampling of backgrounds and immigration experiences (i.e. Caribbean, South American, Afro-Latinos, non-Catholics, etc.). Despite the small number, the testimonios nevertheless provided an immeasurable amount of data.

I would also like to note my personal connection to this research. As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, I am committed to this study in mind, body, and soul. I understand that this level of connection can create bias and subjectivity. In addition, the four testimonialistas are friends from various parts of my life. While this can be seen as biased, I believe our friendship allowed for a more open dialogue and created a safe space to share their experiences. Despite, or perhaps because of my personal connection, I was careful to approach this study as truthfully, passionately, and respectfully as possible.

Significance of the Study

Alarcón et al. (2011) state, “Our stories are not part of the national discourse of ‘pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps’ – the individualistic, nation-building narratives of hegemony” (p.370). The immigrant experience is part this “American” narrative but the reality, of first and second-generation immigrants especially, is not as simple. This discourse ignores the fact that immigrants might adopt the United States as their home but they do not always adopt or adapt easily to the culture. Hence, the struggle to reconcile pursuit of the “American Dream” with family and community obligations.

Across the country, Latino students juggle the stresses of higher education with the added responsibilities of family and community. Familial responsibilities that have been shown to cause challenges for Latino students might include immigration issues, language gaps/barriers, and economic uncertainty, to name a few. In the process of managing these “burdens,” students can internalize the tension between family and education that often make it difficult for creation and development of an autonomous self, free from burden or guilt. My hope is that by speaking frankly and openly about this reality, in sharing our internal struggles and victories, a path to healing can begin.

As Ruti (2006) argues, when individuals facing hegemonic power structures are able to tell their stories, productive and positive meaning making can occur. Anzaldúa (2002) further notes that by “creating a personal narrative, you also co-create the group/cultural story” (para. 26). Testimonios offer the opportunity to tell the story of a people as well as allowing for the process of critical self-reflection of both the narrator and audience. “When we are addressed this way, directly…we are placed under an obligation to respond…Something is asked of us by testimonio” (Beverley, 2004, p.1).

Women who inhabit Anzaldúa's Borderlands told the testimonios presented herein. They were told with trepidation, pride, laughter, and tears. Most importantly, their stories were told. In them, I saw the stories of countless others. In their stories, I saw my own. My hope is readers can draw parallels to their own lives as well and answer the open-ended question that the testimonios ask of them.

Definition of Terms

First-generation: refers to first-generation college student; the first in their family to go to college/university.

Latina/Latino: an individual whose ancestral roots are from Latin America.

Testimonialista: used interchangeably with "participants", refers to the women in the study who gave their testimonios.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The four testimonios presented in this study are from women who have lived and/or witnessed the immigrant experience. Their sense of self and experiences all shaped by dual languages, dual identities, dual worlds. To give context to their journeys, I will begin by examining literature pertaining to matters of identity and culture. Specifically, how they help one understand self and one's place in society. Next, a look into the issues faced by Latinos in higher education, highlighting the challenges of navigating a predominantly white institution as a first-generation college student. Lastly, a review of testimonio and its place in educational research. This will provide insight into power of reclaiming one's narrative and the implications for future generations of students.

Identity and Culture

Of the 323.1 million people residing in the U.S. in 2016, 13% were first generation immigrants. Mexico (26%) and Guatemala (~2%) bookend the list of top 10 countries of origin (Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018). The 2017 Current Population Survey indicates that immigrants and their U.S.-born children combined account for a quarter (27%) of the total U.S. population (Zong et al., 2018). The United States is indeed a nation of immigrants. With the exception of indigenous peoples, all residents of the Americas descend from immigrants. The overwhelming majority of the U.S. population, though, is far removed from the immigrant experience.

The dominant narrative of the immigrant story in the U.S. is that of turn of the century immigrants from Europe, a familiar tale popularized in Hollywood movies. This narrative privileges the experience of white immigrants who settled into communities along the east coast

and throughout the Midwestern states. Assimilation and acculturation perceived as a rather straightforward process helped by the cutting of ties to the motherland and the planting of new roots in the U.S. (Sánchez, 2007). For the generations that came after, "America" was the land where anyone, through hard work and perseverance, could succeed (Gándara & Contreras, 2010).

For the 86.4 million first and second-generation immigrants in the United States (Zong et al., 2018), the immigrant experience is not far removed. It is not a romanticized version of their ancestor's story; it is their own. In California and the Southwestern parts of the U.S., where Mexican culture and presence dominates, Latino immigration has continued steadily since the 1960's, creating a large population of transnational citizens who maintain some level of relationship to their home countries (Sánchez, 2007). Despite stricter immigrations laws, political unrest and economic downturns throughout Latin America keep the hope of the "American Dream" alive for the millions that continue to cross our borders.

The Latino immigrant is one that is at once monolingual and bilingual; newly arrived or long-time resident; documented or undocumented; educated or illiterate. He/she living in an endless loop, cycling through the four stages of acculturation: excitement, culture shock, gradual recovery, and full recovery. The child of the Latino immigrant then, witnessing their parents' immigration journey, realizes a sort of second-tier immigrant experience along with their own. Straddling the balance of dual cultures through a different lens than their parents and the generations to come. Their experience is one of "cultural flexibility", seamlessly moving in and out of cultural spaces and continuously redefining their "Mexicaness" and "Americaness" (Sánchez, 2007).

In order to appreciate the complexity of living in the borderlands of multiple cultures, we must first understand what culture is and the part it plays in shaping our identity. For the purpose of this thesis, we will explore culture anthropologically as “the ideas, customs, and social [behavior] of a particular people or society” (Culture, n.d.). In general, culture is an agreed upon set of rules and behaviors shared by a group of people who inhabit the same space. It is a communal phenomenon. There is no culture of one. Culture shapes how one views and navigates the world. As cited by Gudykunst and Lee (2003), it is a “system of knowledge, shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires, organizes, and processes information and creates ‘internal models of reality’” (p.8). Simply put, culture provides the blueprint to one’s existence and the lens by which they view reality.

In a country as geographically and ethnically diverse as the United States, culture has taken on a revolving door like quality. Evolving from the combination of cultures that immigrants from all over the world brought with them, “American” culture is now arguably the biggest cultural influencer in the world. In a country that sees one new immigrant arrive every 33 seconds (Zimmerman, 2017), it is safe to say that “American” culture will continue to evolve. Despite, or perhaps due to this, what it is to be “American” and to participate in the culture has historically been undeniably white.

In the U.S., the words culture and ethnicity are often used interchangeably. This is easy to understand given the diversity of its population. Newly arrived immigrants, no matter their socio-economic status, bring their culture and language with them. It is easy to associate different ways of dressing, speaking, thinking, being with people of the same ethnic makeup. In the same vein, these variances are what situate people outside “American” culture. By interweaving the definitions of culture and ethnicity in this way, a greater sense of identity is

established with those that identify with cultures outside of the U.S. mainstream than those solely within.

In his article examining intercultural relations at a private, West Coast university, Tanaka (2009) evaluates this type of link between cultural and ethnic group association and its influence on identity. He argues that white students lack “a ‘repertoire of identities’ some societies have found useful when struggling to maintain their own meanings in diverse communicative spaces” (p.84). In other words, unlike Latino and Asian students who often have connections to their ancestral countries, language, and culture, white students are unable to pull from these sources and thus pulled into unfamiliar territory, from dominant group to deficient. Tanaka (2009) further elaborates that when white students find themselves in an intercultural situation “where individual voice and story are encouraged for all students… [the white student] discovers he has no story to tell” (p.88).

Without a cultural or ethnic story to identify with, how can white students develop a sense of meaning and belonging within an intercultural context? What is the cost? When faced with the loss of culture, Tanaka (2009) argues white students seem to find themselves at a loss of not only identity, but of soul. This existential crisis of sorts can trigger a sense of victimhood, which in turn, displays as hostility against student of colors. DiAngelo (2011) calls this “White Fragility”, or “lack of racial stamina” (p. 56). For it is because of students of color’s connection and identification with the “outside” culture that highlights what is lacking for the white students.

It is important to note that identification with a culture/ethnicity is not predictive of actions or beliefs. Students of color often use cultural/ethnic association as a tool for surviving within mainstream U.S. culture. Moreover, cultural behavior and practices looked at as

traditional, that stand in opposition to the dominant culture, can be re-evaluated as adaptive, resistant to tradition, and transformative. In a 2002 study examining the practice of early marriage among a group of Hmong-American female co-eds, Ngo found that participation in this practice, and by default identification with non-U.S. culture, was a form of resistance and self-expression. Specifically, this behavior was found to be in direct conflict to two central cultural institutions – family and education (Ngo, 2002).

The Hmong-American females interviewed by Ngo have unknowingly taken steps to reclaim agency by attaching new, if at times ironic, meaning to traditional cultural practices and identification. While parents saw early marriage as a way to fend off assimilation to U.S. culture, the women saw it as a way to escape parental control and the struggle of balancing their dual identities and responsibilities. “Early marriage provides these young women with a way to gain power from parents and affirm their identities and self-worth” (p. 175). The women also saw early marriage as a response to “oppressive and exclusionary educational and social structures” (p. 175). When confronted with an educational system that constantly views student of color at a deficit, students will react with behavior that challenges the institutional norm. Subversion of traditional cultural practices was then a means to a react and respond to race, class, or gender discrimination.

Ngo (2002) also observed the following regarding culture and cultural difference: 1) Hmong culture is often looked at as static and does not take into account the intercultural exposure and interactions Hmong immigrants participate in within the U.S. This exposure means, “culture is imagined, remembered, reinvented, created, and continued” (p.165). Hmong identity is one in a constant state of negotiation. And 2) Focusing on “cultural difference deflects responsibility…from social and education institutions” (p. 165). Cultural difference equated with

a refusal to assimilate thereby reinforcing the belief that immigrant success in the U.S. is achieved through education if one is only willing to work hard enough. These two observations are not unique to the Hmong-American experience. Nonetheless, they illustrate how the cultural clashes experienced by immigrants and their U.S.-born children is a shared phenomenon.

Identity/ethnicity is inextricably linked to rate of academic success. For example, as of 2013, the percentage of black and Latinos age 18-24 enrolled in college was less (around 34% each) than their white counterparts (42%) (Krogstad, 2016; Marcus, 2018). These nonwhite students were also less likely to apply and attend more selective institutions (Desmond & López Turley, 2009; Marcus, 2018). Whites over the age of 25 are more likely to hold a bachelor's degree than black and Latinos combined (Krogstad, 2016; Marcus, 2018). While these statistics may sound bleak, for those students of color who do complete their undergraduate studies, identity, and all that comes with it, can also be a motivating factor for success.

In a 2012 study on the factors attributed to educational success for students of Mexican descent at a well-known Western university, the authors found that student motivation was linked to their immigrant and first-generation college student identities (Easley, Jr. et al., 2012). Data analysis revealed a large percentage of the participants referenced ganas as a motivating factor in their educational journey. As stated by Easley, Jr. et al. (2012):

> *Ganas*, a deeply held desire to achieve academically fueled by parental struggle and sacrifice, is evident in 46% of the autobiographies and 48% of the interviews. The significance of this finding cannot be understated as the researchers found no mention of this phenomenon in the literature. (p. 169)

Ganas, or desire, is a word used by many Spanish-speaking people to inspire people to action. "¡Échale ganas!" is a common phrase used by parents to encourage their children to work hard

and give it their all. For the students in this study, ganas was not simply a desire to succeed. It was derived from several factors related to family and identity: 1) acknowledgement of parental sacrifice and its role in academic success, 2) honoring the legacy of their ancestors and parents through academic achievement, 3) an obligation and desire to give back to their communities, 4) inherited resilience and perseverance (Easley, Jr. et al., 2012).

"Ganas seems to result in a commitment to succeed and a refusal to see failure as a viable option" (p.174). Furthermore, by associating ganas to their status as first-generation students of Mexican descent, ganas became more than desire, but also a purpose. It connected their academic journey with the immigration journey of their ancestors; the ganas of one generation passing on to the next. Attaching a deeper significance to their studies fueled the students to succeed; a success that was seen, for many, as not solely their own but of their family as well. This type of self-identification can develop the self-efficacy students need to succeed in all facets of college life (Torres & Solberg, 2001).

For students of color, identity plays a crucial role in their educational journeys. As shown in the literature, students of color benefit from the identity their ethnicities provide. Identity helps build community and solidarity with other students of color. It can also attach a greater significance to their college education. Latinas, who must transverse between the white spaces of higher education and the brown spaces of home, must reconcile the duality of their existence in either space. Still, how does adherence to their brown identity in a white space allow for a fully realized self-identity?

Latinos and Higher Education

For this section, I will examine research pertaining to the issues faced by Latinos who pursue higher education. First, an overview of higher education through a Critical Race Theory

lens. Next, a look at the need and development of counterspaces followed by a review of obstacles faced by first-generation students. Lastly, a deeper look at the familismo.

A Look via Critical Race Theory

Horace Mann dubbed education "the great equalizer". While the notion that formal education levels the playing field is what motivates many people to enroll in college, it is not an accurate assessment of the educational experience in the U.S. Looking at the institution of higher learning through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework can help us analyze current "colorblind" policies and practices. Simply put, by donning a racialized lens, CRT can shed light as to why educational inequities are embedded in the foundations of the U.S. educational system. For context, what follows is a brief overview of the five central tenets of CRT as cited by Ladson-Billings (2013):

1. Racism is a normal, accepted part of everyday life.
2. The belief that the dominant group will only act in the benefit of the oppressed when it benefits them, known as interest convergence.
3. Race is real and exists as a social construct.
4. Intersectionality and Anti-Essentialism: Issues of race are intersectional, meaning that a combination of identities (not just race) operate concurrently. CRT scholars also denounce essentialism, or the "belief that all people perceived to be in a single group, think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways" (p. 40).
5. The narrative or counter-story of the oppressed is important.

In a study examining inequities and racialized obstacles that challenge Latino undergraduate educational attainment, Sólorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera (2005) use CRT to investigate how institutions of higher education often act contrary to student interest. They begin by reviewing the educational pipeline, from elementary school through post-baccalaureate work (see Figure 2). To gain a better understanding of the "leakage points" that prove detrimental to Latinos along this pipeline, the authors identify three areas of special concern: 1) 2-yr vs. 4-yr college enrollment rates, 2) transfer rates, and 3) retention and graduate rates.

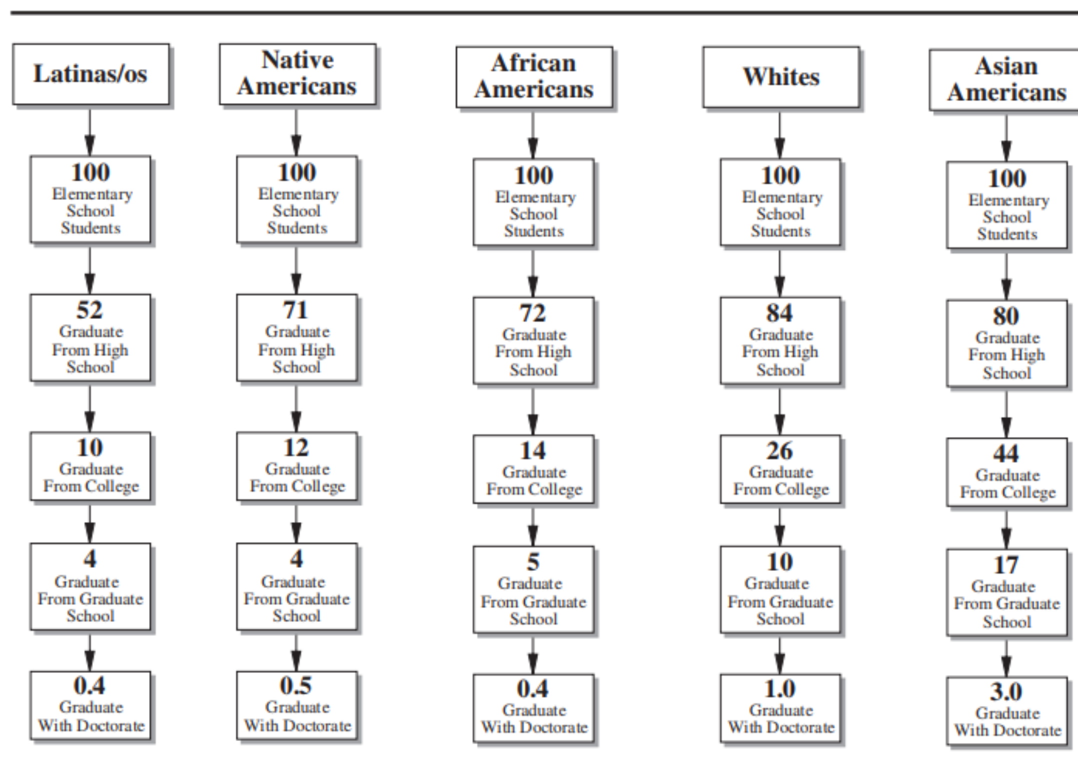

Figure 2. The U.S. Education Pipeline (Sólorzano et al., 2005, p. 278)

Community colleges serve multiple functions. They provide access to vocational programs, associate degrees, and affordable courses for those looking to transfer to a four-year college. Sólorzano et al. (2005) argue that these "multiple and competing functions…may serve to exacerbate the pipeline dilemma for Latina/o students who find themselves in 2-year colleges" (p. 281). However, many students find themselves at community college because of the opportunities for education it provides such as lower enrollment fees and the ability to prepare academically for work at a 4-year university. Once at the community college, however, many students find it difficult to transfer out. Lack of transfer culture, misinformation, and deficit-based guidance and counseling are cited as obstacles for students wishing to transfer (Sólorzano et al., 2005). Finally, to ensure completion of four-year degrees, the authors suggest stronger

community college partnerships, increased financial aid, mentoring programs, and improved campus racial climates.

Via a CRT lens, the authors point to the following ways colleges and universities have ignored the issues faced by Latinos while promoting a neutral front. First, Sólorzano et al. (2005) point to the "persistent racial stratification of higher education in the United States" (p. 287). The uneven enrollment of Latinos in 2-year (large) versus 4-year (small) colleges shows an insistence of a level playing field from the institutional perspective. However, via CRT, the authors contend colorblind admissions policies continue to promote a racially segregated college landscape. Furthermore, institutions that value diversity and claim to serve students of color, by instituting race neutral, meritocratic policies, continue to "maintain existing race, class, sexual, and gender privileges while clearly devaluing and marginalizing Latina/o college student" (p 289).

As indicated in the first tenet of CRT, race and racism exist within the structures of higher education. Latino students often times find entering a space that is predominantly white a difficult transition as they are met with "stereotyping, discrimination, and nonwelcoming campus climates" (Nuñez, 2011, p. 639). In this next section, I will look at literature that explores the ways Latino students cope with this hostile environment. More importantly, is a look at the sources of strength and support students cultivate for themselves when institutions will not.

Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Sólorzano (2009) explore campus racial climates and racial microaggressions against Latino students at three U.S. universities. As cited by Yosso et al. (2009), microaggressions are "subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal and/or kinetic" (p. 660). Microaggressions, though not as blatant as physical violence or cross-burning, causes an innumerable amount of stress and anxiety on its victims who must constantly evaluate interactions, defend themselves,

and find ways to cope with the strain these attacks cause. Campus racial climate is defined as the campus culture that should promote positive academic achievement for all students but, in actuality, contributes to the continued low academic success rates of students of color (Yosso et al., 2009). Furthermore, diversity in higher education is an ideal that is not practiced but rather used as a means to serves the interests White students leaving students of color lacking (Yosso et al., 2009).

Through a series of focus groups, centering the students' experiential knowledge, Yosso et al. (2009) found three types of incidents of racial microaggressions against Latinos. The first, interpersonal microaggressions, are verbal and/or nonverbal insults from members of the campus community that result in feelings of intellectual self-doubt for the Latino student. Student are left feeling as though they do not belong. These interactions "create anxiety for Latina/o undergraduates, who cannot shake the sense that their every word may reaffirm racialized assumptions and cast doubt on their academic merit" (p. 669).

Racial jokes are the second type of racial microaggression. Intentionality distinguishes this type of microaggression from the first as the jokes aimed at the students were deliberate in nature. For some students, continued exposure to racial jokes caused them to reduce campus participation. Others found they "expended an enormous amount of time, energy, and stress trying to respond" (p. 671) with one participant still dealing with the effects of an incident year later. Lastly, "racially marginalizing actions and inertia of the university evidenced in structures, practices, and discourses that endorse a campus racial climate hostile to People of Color" (p. 673) are what Yosso et al. (2009) term institutional microaggressions. This microaggression is built into the foundation of the institution of higher learning that does not place a priority on the experiences and efforts of students and faculty of color.

Counterspaces

In order to heal and re-center themselves, students build community and a sense of home with other Latino students. This creation of "socioacademic counterspaces" allows students to re-position and draw strength from their cultural wealth. Additionally, these counterspaces foster the sense of belonging and resilience students require for academic success. "A sense of belonging represents a form of social capital in that it reflects students' feelings about their connection with the university and the quality of social ties within that community" (Nuñez, 2009, p. 38). As Yosso et al. (2009) explains, they "enable Latinas/os to develop skills of critical navigation through multiple worlds (e.g., home and school communities") and ultimately to survive and succeed in the face of racism" (p. 678). These relationships can be viewed as a form of "social capital" that students use, as Enriquez (2011) explains, "to access economic or cultural capital (e.g., resources like advice, institutional knowledge, or academic skills), which can then be harnessed to generate human capital (e.g., educational success and credentials)" (p. 478).

Students also seek out Chicano/Latino studies courses to serve as an academic counterspace (Nuñez, 2011; Yosso et al., 2009). Due to campus demographics, students of color can find themselves in classroom spaces where they may be the only person from their ethnic background or only person of color. Ethnic studies courses, such as Chicano/Latino studies, allow for academic spaces with an increased presence of students of color. As Nuñez (2011) indicates, the increased presence of Latino students in these courses can lessen feelings of being "'the only one' from their background in the university or in the classroom" (p. 646). These courses also served to promote students' cultural pride and awareness exposing them to history of their ancestors. Knowledge many were denied in high school. Students are also introduced to faculty of color who serve as role models as well as upheld their cultural knowledge, through use

of Spanish in the classroom, for example. Also, by setting high academic expectations and actively engaging students, faculty of color affirm Latino students place in the university (Nuñez, 2011; Yosso et al., 2009). Lastly, these courses allowed students to make connections to the history and experiences of other ethnic and racial groups (Nuñez, 2011; Yosso et al., 2009).

First-Generation College Students

A report profiling the undergraduate student population in 2012 showed that nearly 50% of all Latino undergrads were the first-generation in their families to go to college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). This statistic posits that a large number of Latino students arrive on college campuses without the knowledge that children of college graduates possess. This knowledge includes mastery of the "college student role" (Collier & Morgan, 2008) and fluency in the "middle-class independent norms prevalent in universities", or university culture (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012).

The education system in the U.S. is the means by which students acquire "cultur[al] capital (knowing how things work) and social capital (having access to important social networks)" (Gándara & Contreras, 2010, p. 30). Likewise, institutions of higher learning are rooted in the values of the dominant culture (as cited by Collier & Morgan, 2008). What this means is that post-secondary education perpetuates ways of knowing and being that benefit those already familiar with it, the privileged class. In other words, those who are able to receive and interpret this capital, like children of college graduates, are not only more "successful", but can continue to preserve their privileged status (Gándara & Contreras, 2010).

One way they use their cultural capital is by mastery of the college student role. A major component of this role is the ability to better understand the expectations of the university. As Collier & Morgan (2008) state, while "traditional students are expanding their role mastery to

develop a fine-tuned understanding of each professor's expectations, first-generation students may still be struggling to understand the university's expectations 'in general'" (p. 430).

In their study on student understanding and faculty expectations, Collier & Morgan (2008) found the cultural mismatch between faculty and first-generation students created miscommunication and frustration between the two groups. Expectations about academic workload and prioritization (e.g., time spent on readings and assignments outside the classroom), explicit of expectations and assignments (e.g., use of faculty hours, the role of the syllabus), and expectations regarding communication and problem solving were key point of contention. As a result, first-generation students tend to have more trouble with understanding class assignments and the basics of what faculty expect from students (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

First-generation students may also lack familiarity with the culture they encounter in a college setting. Stephens et al. (2012) propose a "cultural mismatch theory" wherein "individual performance is contingent on whether people experience a match or a mismatch between their own cultural norms and the norms that are institutionalized in a given setting" (p. 1180). This "cultural mismatch", much like issues faced with non-mastery of the college student role, impedes academic success. First-generation students who come from working-class families adhere to more interdependent cultural norms. As stated previously, universities are grounded in the dominant culture. Stephens et al. (2012) expand on this idea by offering that "American universities focus on middle-class norms of independence" (p. 1180) and that by doing so establish the standard for being a college student. In other words, students with a cultural match to their university setting performed better academically.

Not only did cultural mismatch affect academic performance, but it also influenced motives for attending university. First-generation students were found to be "more likely to

transition to the university environment with an additional set of interdependent motives that diverge from the university culture's primary focus on norms of interdependence" (Stephens et al., 2012, p. 1189). As such, first-generation students are at an "unseen disadvantage" when compared to students with a least one college-graduate parent. This disadvantage can exasperate feelings that first-generation students do not belong on campus and, in turn, affect retention.

Familismo

Familismo is a concept from counseling psychology that is defined as a cultural value whereby an individual's decisions and actions are made by prioritizing the interests and needs of family over their own (Desmond & López-Turley, 2009; Sy & Romero, 2008). Latino immigrants come to the U.S. from countries that identify with a collectivist culture. Due to this, Sy & Romero (2008) suggest that immigrant children of "Latino families continue to endorse, and to be strongly influenced by, the emphasis placed on prioritizing family needs over personal needs" (p. 215). This impulse can put students at odds with the individualistic culture they encounter in college (Desmond & López-Turley, 2009). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, this cultural mismatch can affect student experience. When students transition into an environment with inconsistent expectations (college) from those they are accustomed (home), Sy & Romero (2008) suggest "there is an increased potential for negative psychological outcomes" (p. 213).

One way that familismo affects Latino students and their education is by influencing the college application process. Desmond & López-Turley (2009) found that familismo contributed to the college application gap between Latino and white students in Texas high schools in three interconnected ways. First, Latino students who believe that it is importance to live at home during college were generally disinclined to apply to colleges away from home. This belief will often discourage high school students from even applying to college. Finally, the geographic

restrictions of staying close to home means less of a likelihood of applying to more competitive, selective colleges. Overall, compared to white and black students, Desmond & López-Turley (2009) concluded that Latinos are less likely to apply to college.

Conversely, Pérez & McDonough (2008) found that in addition to family, extended family and/or acquaintances played a role in the college application process. Cousins, aunts/uncles, family friends, etc., were all seen as valuable and trusted sources of information. "The relationships students cultivated through parents or through other trusted individuals set the foundation for the bridges that allowed the chain migration contacts and networks to form" (Pérez & McDonough, 2008, p. 256). Students were more likely to apply to colleges where people they knew already attended. These contacts provided students with resources to "circumvent challenges, such as loneliness and distance" (p. 258) as well as act as "informants" that provide valuable information about college and being a college student.

For students that do enroll in university, familismo played a persuasive role in their college experience. Sy & Romero (2008) interviewed a small sample of women at a Hispanic Serving Institution in Southern California. Familismo influenced the women in three ways. First, they emphasized the importance of becoming self-sufficient, not a as a rite of passage but as a "means by which they could help the family" (Sy & Romero, 2008, p.218). By becoming self-reliant, the women were not necessarily asserting their independence but rather relieving their family of burden. The women tried to lessen this burden via the second theme in the data, voluntary financial contributions. The women made it a point to stress that the contributions were not an obligation, a word they interpreted as negative. "Rather, the children do it out of a 'culture of concern,' resulting from years of socialization to respect and value family above personal needs" (Sy & Romero, 2008, p.219).

The final theme that emerged was that of caretaking. Many women in the study, particularly those from single-parent homes, took on the role of "second parent" or surrogate parent to their younger siblings. This phenomenon is consistent with marianismo, the gender based set of values and expectations placed on Latinas. Named after the Virgin Mary, marianismo dictates the submissiveness of women and centers their role in the family as caretaker and nurturer (Sy & Romero, 2008; Gil & Velazquez, 1996). This added responsibility, combined with parents unfamiliarity with what it takes to be a successful college student, increased feelings of stress among some women (Sy & Romero, 2008).

Familismo can affect multiple aspects of college life. While family support and Latino academic achievement are inextricably linked (Altschul, 2011; Azmitia, Cooper, & Brown, 2008; Ojeda, Navarro, & Morales, 2011; Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006; Pérez & McDonough, 2008), the stress of balancing school and family obligations can take its toll on students emotionally. In addition, because of the cultural and personal nature of familismo, it is not a phenomenon that can be easily fit into a one size fits all solution. The degrees of familismo that affect Latino students are as varied as the population is diverse.

Latino undergraduate students face issues of race, culture, and class. In addition, unfamiliarity with the college environment and familismo create hurdles students must overcome. To cope with these challenges, students craft and nurture counterspaces and social networks as resources to replenish their minds, bodies, and spirits. It is important to note that the issues faced by current students are the same as those faced by previous generations. As more and more Latinos graduate from colleges and universities, it is important to take inventory of the varied journeys and experiences.

Testimonios in Educational Research

Testimonios evolved out of Latin American political struggles of the 20th century. They are first person accounts of the subaltern, the histories of the people that experienced persecution and oppression at the hands of their government or socio-political factions (Beverley, 2004; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). According to Beverley (2004), the main differences between testimonios and oral histories is that of intention and results. With oral histories, the recorder takes a dominant role with the intent of collecting data. Testimonios, on the other hand, give the power back to the narrator. This "intentional narrator" has an urgency to communicate problems of oppression, poverty, subalternity and imprisonment, and survival.

It is important to note that testimonios should not necessarily tell "the truth". Rather, testimonio is a form of the truth, the truth of the other (Beverley, 2004). It is the version of the truth as lived by the oppressed individual or experienced by the collective group (Pérez Huber, 2009). It is *their* truth, a truth filtered through experience and self-analysis (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). However, while telling their truth via testimonio is, as Beverley (2004) states, a practice of "emancipation and enlightenment", it is also a version of the truth that has been created and influenced by oppressive forces.

Beverley (2004) makes clear, testimonios are more than just "the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense" (p. 32). They require active participation of both the testimonialista (narrator) and their audience. The testimonialista must tell their story with critical reflection and intention, to affirm and empower the oppressed and to expose injustices (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). In doing so, the audience engages and establishes solidarity with the testimonialista (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). As Beverley (2004) states:

> When we are addressed in this way, directly, as it were even by someone who we would normally disregard, we are placed under an obligation to respond; we may act or not on that obligation, we may resent or welcome it, but we cannot ignore it. Something is asked of us by testimonio. (p. 1)

By placing individual histories into the context of the larger shared history of a community, city, state, country, world, testimonios re-center the testimonialista and, by default, the audience. The injustice becomes personal. What is asked of us by testimonios is a political response, a call to action, the first steps toward social change (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009; Saavedra & Salazar Pérez, 2012). "Once introduced to *testimonios*, both the narrator and the listener experience cathartic epiphanies that open their eyes to the power of individual accounts that ensure that social and political events become part of the greater human consciousness" (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 528).

Over the years, testimonio has been adopted by other disciplines such as anthropology, women's studies, psychology, and education as a means "to document and/or theorize their own experiences of struggle, survival, and resistance, as well as that of others" (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 643). Testimonio is the means by which knowledge of the "mind, body, spirit" can be validated in a way that quantitative research cannot measure (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Urrieta & Villenas, 2013). Traditional fountains of knowledge for research are then shifted from "The Academy" to the marginalized (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009). The researcher then, being part of "The Academy", must work within this shift and acknowledge their positionality. Due to this, special care should be taken to work closely with testimonialistas to ensure meaning is not lost within the research.

The knowledge produced by testimonios can thus be used as a powerful pedagogical tool to teach and learn from oppressive experiences and acts of resistance. This "theory of the flesh" (Moraga, 2002) elicits action in the audience through understanding, active listening, and conscientização, or the raising of critical consciousness (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). "When sharing intimate or vulnerable parts of themselves, *testimonio* pedagogy asks the listeners for openness, respect, and self-reflexivity to forge connections between people who otherwise might never coalesce or build solidarity" (p. 369). In essence, testimonio brings about new ways of thinking and learning, and challenges the status quo (Alarcón, Cruz, Guardia Jackson, Prieto, & Rodriguez-Arroyo, 2011; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Saavedra & Salazar Pérez, 2012).

Testimonios have been used by faculty of color as a form of resistance against the marginalization experienced in academia. In reflecting on their personal and academic journeys and the ways that race, class, language, etc. intersect in their lives, faculty of color are able to re-position themselves and their knowledge in order to cement their place in academia. In their article examining the academic socialization process for Latinas, Espino, Vega, Rendón, Ranero, & Muñiz (2012) develop a methodological technique for bridging testimonios across lived experiences known as reflexión. This process allows for the analysis and interpretation of "individual *testimonios* as part of a collective experience that reflects our past, present, and future, thus moving us toward a collective consciousness" (p. 445). Reflexión takes place after testimonio by engaging in a dialogue with a trusted partner. The addition of a dialogue partner allows for re-evaluation of self and places individual experiences within the context of larger societal structures, eliminating the dangers of essentializing experiences. Through reflexión, we can turn the narrative "I" into the collective "we" that testimonios engender (Beverley, 2004).

The first step to reflexión is to identify developmental milestones or key moments in life that have helped shaped one's identity. With these moments in mind, the participant can develop their individual testimonio. This can be done ad hoc or with a guiding question you and a dialogue partner have agreed upon. Dialogue partners, as Espino et al. (2012) explain, are "identified as one who has wisdom (regardless of age or circumstance) and ways of knowing that parallels or differs from one's life experiences" (p. 455). Testimonios are then exchanged and read with a set of guiding questions in order to facilitate discussion. Through this process, the authors were able to take the testimonio of multi-generational Latina scholars to affirm their identities as Latina scholars and reclaim their place in higher education. The dialogue connected individual and collective struggles in academia and empowered them to "heal the fractures of minds, bodies, and spirits" (p. 457).

The process of reflexión can be found in other forms of testimonio if not explicitly named. Through conversations and online communications, Saavedra & Salazar Pérez (2012) connect their narratives to each other and their work by exploring themes of theory, identity, and multicultural education via the lens of Chicana and Black feminisms. First, the authors connect the theories of Chicana and Black feminisms to their personal and professional lives, establishing their "theoretical homes." By doing so, they were able to "open spaces to reconceptualize subaltern lives and identities" (p. 435). A theoretical lens can turn testimonio into a tool to resist dominant and oppressive frameworks that marginalize people of color. Next, their testimonios unpack their multiple and fluid identities. Identity cannot be confined to an either/or dichotomy. Interconnectedness can be enabled by viewing identity as existing equally between one of privilege (academic/professional) and oppression (woman of color). Lastly, their testimonios uncovered issues with multiculturalism in education. They argue that educators must move

towards a pedagogy of understanding "(with epistemological and ontological questions) what it means to live or be in multicultural spaces" (p. 440).

To investigate how race and racism influenced their lives, Urrieta & Villenas (2013) co-created a joint testimonio via a Latina/o Critical Theory lens. The authors examine how Derrick Bell's work in Critical Race Theory (CRT) can "be used to conceptualize and theorize/understand the struggles of Chicanas/os, Latinas/os in academia" (p. 515) by tracing their journeys from student to scholars. Alarcón et al. (2011) further explore testimonio as a means to define their place in higher education. They use testimonio as a means to ground their praxis "in the community work and activist scholarship" they participate in as they establish themselves professionally as Latinas from working-class backgrounds (p. 370). Together, these authors showcase the creative ways testimonios can be used in educational research. Their narratives, intersecting histories of assimilation, patriarchy, otherness, racial and gender discrimination, reflect the collective experience of faculty of color and offer a space for healing and transformation.

Testimonios have become an invaluable tool in educational research. Through storytelling, dialogue, and self-reflection, researchers are able to collect more than just data but also the life experiences of those in the margins. More than just a re-telling of dates, facts, and events, testimonio tells a version of the truth that is lived rather than seen, experienced rather than told. Furthermore, in documenting the story of one, they are able to tell the story of many. In this way, they engage the reader, building solidarity and inspiring action.

Summary

In conclusion, the literature presented addressed 1) the importance of identity and culture and its role in academic success, 2) issues faced by Latinos pursuing higher education, and 3)

testimonios and their use in education research. These topics provide context to the background and challenges faced by the testimonialistas in this study as well as justify the use of testimonio for this thesis.

CHAPTER III
RESULTS

I chose the four women in this study based on their self-identified gender and ethnic heritage (Latina), family immigration status, education, and careers. My goal was to select women of varying personalities and experiences. Additionally, I was interested in selecting a mix of women who were both familiar with the process of testimonio and those who were not. Lastly, I chose women whom I already had a personal connection. Angélica and Jennifer were classmates from University of the Pacific (UOP), where all three of us pursued our undergraduate degrees. I met Mariaelena and Yesenia at the University of San Francisco, via work and in my graduate program, respectively. My hope in choosing these women was to take advantage of the safe space that already existed between us. More importantly, I wanted to facilitate the process of self-reflection for each participant.

This chapter consists of four testimonios followed by an analysis of the themes that emerged from the interviews. Each testimonio is presented in three sections: 1) a biographical introduction, 2) select excerpts from the full-length testimonios, and 3) a review of the testimonio. I have transcribed the testimonio from the recording as accurately as possible, editing for clarity and comprehension. Jumps in the testimonio are indicated with ellipses (…) and spoken pauses with a long dash (–). Participants were contacted whenever needed to ensure meaning was not misinterpreted. The biographical introduction and excerpts were sent to participants for approval.

Table 1: Participant Information

Name & Age	Participant Birthplace	Birthplace of Parents	Highest Degree Achieved	Occupation
Angélica, 42	Richmond, CA, United States	Mexico (M) United States (F)	Doctor of Education	Superintendent
Jennifer, 44	Santa Monica, CA, United States	Guatemala	Master's	Law Enforcement/adjunct professor
Mariaelena, 36	Oakland, CA, United States	United States (M) Mexico (F)	Master's in progress	Higher Education Professional (Enrollment Management)
Yesenia, 30	Michoacán, Mexico	Mexico	Master's	Higher Education Professional (Student Services)
Key: (M) = mother (F) = father				

Angélica

Angélica is the superintendent of a school district located in the southernmost county of California's central coast where she currently resides with her husband. Her mother immigrated from Sinaloa, Mexico to the San Francisco Bay Area in the early 1970's via a work permit. Soon after, she met Angélica's father, a U.S. citizen of Mexican and Chilean descent. Her family, which included an older brother, lived in the Bay Area and Los Angeles area before settling in Stockton, California, a port city in California's Central Valley. After high school, Angélica and her brother both attended the University of the Pacific, a local, private university on a partial service-based scholarship for local residents. Her father, who had been wheelchair bound since high school, passed away during her first year of college. She joined the Army after college where she met her future husband. Her mother was diagnosed with lung cancer and passed away within a year, prompting her to leave the Army. She joined her now husband who was stationed in El Paso, Texas where she began working in public education as a high school teacher. While

there, she earned her Master's degree at the University of Texas at El Paso and her Doctor of Education from Liberty University.

> *They made clear to us that their expectation of us was to get good grades and to behave well, right?...Education was always stressed and we always heard about how [my mom] wished she had the opportunity to go to school, how [my dad] wished that he had the opportunity to finish school and how lucky we were to have the opportunity. That it was our responsibility to finish school and that we needed to go to college because that would change our lives.*
>
> *I always liked to challenge myself and I wanted to do better. I always knew I wanted to get out and I always knew I wanted to do better and be in a better position. I heard so much from my parents that that was through school, so I really wanted to challenge myself and put myself in a good position so that I could go to college…I don't know I just kinda took it in stride and knew that no matter what the circumstances were, if I could get good grades and I could get into college that, you know, "sufre uno un ratito para nunca mas sufrir."* [4] *Like it would work out in the end.*
>
> *I actually applied a bunch of places. Anywhere I could apply that didn't cost any money I applied to even though I knew that I wasn't going anywhere. That my best bet was to get into UOP cause I DID NOT WANT to go to community college. I still applied because I thought, well, you never know. What if I get in somewhere and I get like a full scholarship? Like maybe I'll be able to go…I applied everywhere and I started getting my [acceptance] letters. And that's cool, you get your letters and then you have to wait – and you get your financial aid, and my financial aid sucked. Everywhere…There was ZERO that my parents could have contributed so I was really, really lucky that CIP*[5] *came through.*
>
> *I only [discussed college application process with] my best friend at the time. I don't think my parents even knew where – I was afraid to tell my parents I had applied other places and I was afraid to tell my brother. I felt like he would judge me and that he would feel like I was abandoning him, shitting on him by leaving all this to him. And then my parents – I don't know if it was that I didn't want them to know cause I felt like I was doing something wrong or if I didn't want them to know because then we would have to talk about it and then there would be like – I'd be guilty, they'd feel bad because I couldn't and – there was enough drama that you didn't need to create anything that would, or bring up something that would, create drama.*

---

[4] You suffer a little right now to never suffer again.

[5] The Community Involvement Program (CIP) is a comprehensive need-based scholarship and retention program for first-generation college students from the Stockton community who have demonstrated the potential for sustainable leadership, community awareness, and involvement. The program serves the educational needs of low-income students by providing access to college along with a wide range of support to the CIP Scholars as they pursue higher education. (University of the Pacific, n.d.)

So when I got my interview [for the CIP scholarship] I told my mom and my brother, because my brother had to take me…I don't remember her asking me questions about the process. I do remember her asking me if I needed something to wear. Like if I needed clothes…She wouldn't have asked me questions, because I don't think she would have even known what the process was and honestly I didn't know either…even though my brother went through the process and lived in the same house.

It took me the whole summer to get the courage to tell them that I wanted to live on campus. I had already applied for housing [laughs], you know? I had already applied and decided that I wanted to live in John B., because it was the international house. I told my mom first. I told her that she wouldn't have to pay for it and that I'd come home every weekend. I had already made up everything, all the contingencies in my head. You know, I wouldn't stop working at La Cabaña, everything would stay the same except that Monday through Friday I would stay at school…By then – we always had people living in our house – but by then we had [a cousin], [my aunt], and [another cousin]. We had all these extra people in the house…that's just not conducive to studying and stuff so I convinced her of that…Then I told my dad and he felt bad. He felt like I was running away. So that sucked.

We were going to have to get a PLUS loan to pay for the last piece of my housing. We didn't end up doing it because they wouldn't – I mean, this is back in the days when everything was hard copy. We couldn't do it because we couldn't get my dad into the building. [The Financial Aid building] wasn't ADA compliant and they wouldn't give me the stuff so we just said screw it. I'll just do it in work study. So I had a job on campus and a job off campus so that I could finish paying my meal plan…[My dad] just kinda rolled with it. "OK, you guys know. You know better, you know more than us. You got further than us." Just like they really relied on the expertise of our public schools when we were in elementary, middle, and high school, like "you know best." By the time we had gotten further than them they relied on us to know better. Like we were the experts. Dude we were 18 years old. [laughs] We didn't know anything!

I went to the first orientation, in June. My roommate was a white girl that was a soccer player there on a soccer scholarship. When I walked into the room she was on the phone and, first of all, that kinda shocked me cause she had a cell phone in 1994. She was cussing somebody out…I thought she was breaking up with her boyfriend or something. She got off the phone and introduced herself. She told me that was her dad and he was a cheap bastard because he bought her a white BMW when she was promised to get a black BMW for her graduation present…and I felt sick. My clothes were from Wal-Mart. I just didn't know. I was like "OH MY GOD!" This is – this is bad.

I wasn't even prepared with the toiletries you need. I didn't take shampoo and conditioner because I thought it would be there…I felt really self-conscious about my towels compared to [my roommate's]…At orientation they would get us into little groups and I was the only person of color in my group. The guy that worked with us. He knew something about every single person and he always either mispronounced by name or forgot my name. He never had a side conversation with me. So I already felt a little weird.

I just felt lonely. In the same city that I had lived in almost my entire life. I felt like I was in a completely different place…I felt really poor and – just like, not good enough during that process…I didn't feel as confident as I was. Which sucks because I had about two months before school started. Now you're starting to have all those going away parties with your high school friends. "Where you going?" All these people are going to UCLA. They're going to Stanford. This one's going to Boston University. Like all these awesome places…And you lie, because you don't want to say "I feel inferior." Cause if it's all working out for them then there's something wrong with you.

Very quickly I felt comfortable again but only in my dorm. When I would go to class I – I'd never been in this experience before. I was always one of the popular kids and I was now in a place where no one sat next to me. That was strange and hurtful. I remember trying to change the way I looked a little bit. Maybe not wearing maroon lipstick? At the time I had curly, long hair so I cut it a little bit…Just to try to fit in a little bit.

One of the kids [from psychology class] turned to me and said "Well you're here because of affirmative action, right? Like you're on a scholarship, right?" And I just felt – hot, like offended. No one spoke up for me.

College was a must. Had I not graduated from college it would have been this huge failure for [my parents]. I mean for me, but for them…I was gonna go to college and graduate from college and get the hell out of there. I wanted it…Our clothes were cheaply made and ill-fitting because we didn't buy things that fit us. We bought things that cost the right price and they felt we would grow into. I didn't want that. I didn't want – I wanted to do better. I wanted to do the things I saw white people doing…Even though your parents try to shield you as a kid, you know that they're stretching their money. That there isn't enough. That there's more need than not. And I wanted better. I wanted to be able to buy my mom a house. I wanted her not to have to work, you know? So I wanted it baaad. I did.

A frequent theme that emerged in Angélica's testimonio was that of parental expectation. Throughout her childhood, Angélica's parents set expectations on her and her brother to do well in school. Education, as seen by her parents, was the tool necessary to succeed in the United

States. Through education, the American Dream was attainable, if not for them, for their children.

Angélica's parents were not afforded the opportunity to attend and/or complete school. Her mother completed the 2nd grade in Mexico and her father made it to 8th grade. Their lack of education and language barriers limited their opportunities so it was important that their children take advantage when they could not. However, for Angélica, this also meant that her parents could not be a resource in the same way English-speaking, U.S. educated parents could. As a result, parental involvement in school (activities, events, help with homework, etc.) lessened the older Angélica got. Nevertheless, parental expectations of academic success and college attendance, in addition to knowing how to navigate that process, increased.

These expectations motivated Angélica to pursue college as a means to a "better life" while at the same time increasing feelings of alienation and self-doubt. Upon arrival on campus, Angélica experienced what can be described as culture shock. While she was confident in her academic abilities, she found herself unprepared for the social and financial aspects of college. This manifested itself in not bringing the appropriate personal items for orientation. In a new environment and surrounded by people different from her, she describes feeling alone. She was able to find solace in her international themed residence hall, a home away from home where she befriended students of similar background and/or economic status. In an effort to try to fit in better with the students outside of her residence hall, she changed her appearance to fit in better with the student population.

While college attendance was a personal goal for Angélica, her family was still a major influence in most of her decisions regarding college. Nevertheless, Angélica felt that she could not discuss her feelings in regards to school or the struggles she was having with her parents.

This was partly due to limited knowledge of the college experience from both parents and child. Angélica also expressed feelings of guilt several times throughout the interview, which caused her to withhold information from her family. Interestingly, these feelings were often felt when making a decision based on her individual preferences or desires, such as wanting to live on campus, not her family's.

Jennifer

Jennifer (Jenn) was born in Santa Monica, California, the second daughter of Guatemalan immigrants. Her mother immigrated on a visa, while her father was undocumented for the majority of her childhood. Her parents divorced when she was in elementary school making her the only participant with divorced parents. She is proudly private school educated, having attended Catholic schools from kindergarten through community college. Jenn received her bachelor's degree from the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. After college, she worked as an investigator for a public defender and high school teacher before beginning a career in law enforcement with the Los Angeles Police Department. After earning her Master's degree at California State University, Long Beach, she began teaching college courses in Criminal Justice. She is currently an adjunct professor at a private four-year university. Jenn currently lives in Los Angeles with her husband, a fellow police officer, and her two sons.

> *K through 4 I went to a private Catholic school in West LA…That was one of the schools we lived closest to at the time…Even after [my parents] divorced, they just, for the sake of not taking us to a new school, they just sort of kept us there…My parents, even though they were poor, I know both of them went to private schools in Guatemala. They didn't want to be around, well from what they tell me, their parents didn't want them to be around like what we would consider the "general pop." So if anything, sacrifice the way we live for our children's education. And my mom felt the same way.*
>
> *When I was in 4th grade my sister was in 8th and she graduated. Since my parents had already been divorced, we now lived by LAX, with my grandmother…Once my sister graduated from that school, my mom was like "I'm not driving for one child."*

So she had me transfer to another Catholic school in Westchester which at that time was a predominantly upper-middle class, white neighborhood. So culture shock for me? Absolutely.

I remember walking into class and nobody looked like me. Nobody. It was just a culture shock, I felt like totally out of place. I completely went from an extroverted person to now completely introverted. Like no one would talk to me. And I'm sure it also had a lot to do with a lot of those kids had been together since they were in kindergarten and now who's this person coming along 4 or 5 years later. You know it's going to be hard to penetrate those bonds and friendships. Especially since a lot of them would walk to school together cause they all lived right down the block...It didn't help that people were like "What's your last name? How do you pronounce it?" Even like the dumb ass teachers would make a big stink out of it "How do you say it?" Then when I would say it. They would say it wrong even though I would pronounce it like 50 million times. And it's not like I was saying it with, you know, an ethnic flair to it. I was keeping it as Americanized as possible but they made a big stink out of it. It just made it feel so weird and uncomfortable.

I remember at one point I just wanted to be white and I thought that was going to solve all my problems…It was all internal…I don't know. I just figured it was my problem and something I had to deal with. Yeah, I don't remember ever discussing any type of issue with my mom. I don't think she wanted – I don't think she had time. We didn't discuss absolutely anything about "So how's school going?" or anything or "How's life?" or "How are your new friends?" Like I mean it just, it is what it is. And I had to cope with it.

[For high school] I went to another Catholic school…and by then I resented white people…I [couldn't] wait to go to high school and meet everybody else who was like me…I think I just hated the way I was treated or the way I thought I was treated.

As soon as I got there, I totally gravitated to everyone who was exactly like me…Where I went to high school it was predominantly black and Latino and then all the locals from the area. It was a white neighborhood but the school was very ethnic.

I remember going to a counselor, an academic counselor, in like my junior or senior year. By then, my grades were shot. He asked me what I wanted to do and I'm like well – I know I wanted to do something in the legal field but I didn't quite understand what it was that I wanted to do. I was like "I don't know maybe be like a paralegal. I know I don't want to be a lawyer but something with law." He said "Well, with your grades, your only option is going to DeVry" or some tech school. And in my mind I'm like NOOO. I've seen Revenge of the Nerds and Animal House. [laughs] I want to do what they're doing. No, I'm not going to no ITT Tech. I remember he sent me information, a video to watch. I'm like, dude, this is a trade school! I know I'm like academically stupid but this is not what I envision for myself…I could tell that he only cared about helping people who had good grades

and didn't try to, you know, guide us with other options. And when I mean "us", I mean people who didn't have good grades…There were some teachers who didn't really care or they didn't really want to help you if you didn't have good grades. That's how I felt. It's kinda like we were wasting their time. They were doing us a favor if we needed extra help or tutoring.

I remember one teacher – I was doing so poorly in geometry and he said he only tutored during lunch. I'm like "Well, when am I supposed to eat?" He said it wasn't his problem. I asked if I could go after school. He's like "No, I have to go home."...I taught high school and I would never have done that to any of my students…I'm never going to do stuff to people that was done to me, that held me back.

[My dad] would always say that my sister and I didn't need to go to college because we were never going to amount to anything anyway. We were just going to be wasting our time and our money…[My mom] would say "You guys need to go to school. You need to go to college because you guys are going to want to work and do something that you want to do." I remember that she would always ask me "What is it that you wanna do? What is it that you like?" Other than that, that was the only somewhat of a support system that I had.

I want to do to everything they do in the movies. I want that to be me…In my mind, I always knew I was gonna to go to college…It was just about what do I want to do? How am I gonna get there? What do I need to do to make it happen?...My [older] sister went to college but she went to a local university. She lived at home and I saw how her life had not changed. I don't want that! I want to go away. Go far away…Where I can do my own thing…Because I didn't have good grades, I ended up going to a private JC about 10 miles away, so I was stuck at home for two years.

I had the same friends from high school. I was doing the same thing. Nothing was changing. I'm like what happened to that spark from Revenge of the Nerds and Animal House and all this stuff. You know, I haven't seen any of that yet. And I'm already into my second year of college. I'm like where is that? There's gotta be more to life than just here…I was like, I have to get out of here. I know there's a purpose and there's people I need to meet to teach me that it's ok to be different…My mom had told me so many stories about her being my age and just wanting to get away from her family and doing her own thing. I think I was the same. I just wanted to go out there and see what was out there for me. I don't want anyone to tell me. I want to find it.

In the back of my mind, [I would hear my mom] especially, "What if something happens to you?" I could be here, walking down the street and something could happen to me! Finally, one day I remember telling her to leave me alone. I could be anywhere and something's gonna happen…You need to let me do what it is that I wanna do.

> *I really missed home, ironically, when I got [to college]. I would say that the first six weeks that I was there I flew home four times…I remember I would call [home] and I would cry. I [was] by myself. I didn't live on campus. I lived in an apartment across the street by myself. It was hard. I should have lived on campus…The whole [reason] that I wanted [to go away] was for the whole college experience. I wasted my first year not living in the dorms.*
>
> *I know the professors, they stereotyped me because when I told them I was a transfer they were like "Oh you went to Delta?"*[6] *So automatically, they thought I was a Stockton local. Why? Because I'm Hispanic?...For me, to get good grades was to prove it to everybody else. Not to myself because I knew I could do it…[Eventually] I started to get it and started getting good grades and I saw how the behavior of my professors towards me changed.*
>
> *I wish I wouldn't have resented different cultures at a young age. I wish I wouldn't have listened to my mom and sister. Made my own decisions based on what I knew was right versus having someone in my ear or having friends in my ear. Just really got to know people before making a general decision on who they were, or who I thought they were, or what they thought of me. Cause for all I know it was all me and I was living this façade and no one really cared that I looked different…And I wish I would have been a lot more open-minded but I think it had to do with the way my parents were treated. They were treated a certain way so they didn't want us to be treated that way. So they instilled fear in us and it carried over.*

As with Angélica, the importance of education was a constant theme in Jenn's testimonio. Despite her parent's divorce and financial struggles, Jenn's parents were able to send her to Catholic schools until her second year of college. The sacrifices her parents made to pay for school were their way of providing opportunities for their daughters. Though her father was not as involved or supportive in her education, she did find support from her mother who encouraged her to go to college in order to find a career that she enjoyed, rather than one out of necessity.

Interestingly, Jenn was the only participant to discuss the importance of the social aspects of education. Transferring to a predominantly white elementary school as a person of color left her feeling different and out of place. This lead to resentment of her white classmates and white

[6] The local community college located just over a mile away.

people in general. Once in high school, surrounded by other students of color, Jenn felt she was able to get out of her shell. By college, she was ready to have different experiences and was more open to meet and learn from people of different backgrounds. For Jenn, who grew up on American pop culture, college would not only open up her world academically, but it would also develop her sense of self.

Jenn frequently mentioned having goals (working in law, attending college, etc.) but not knowing how to achieve them. Failure was not an option as she was determined to achieve her goals despite not feeling fully supported at home or at school. On more than one occasion, she recalls feeling stereotyped and/or underestimated by teachers and administrators. This motivated Jenn to succeed in order to "prove them wrong."

Many of the struggles Jenn faced growing up and in college were not discussed with her family. Instead, she internalized her feelings, opting to deal with them herself as best as she could. Moreover, family and friends alike met any discussion of plans for her future with trepidation or judgement. Her mother worried about Jenn's desire to move far from home and tried to convince her to stay close to home. She recounted how her sister talked her out of going to her dream school, Ohio State University, and how a childhood friend would criticize her choices. She would ultimately choose the path best for her; however, she acknowledges the lasting influence friends and family played in her decision-making.

Mariaelena

Mariaelena is the Oakland, California born daughter of Mexican immigrants. Her parents were of mixed citizenship status. Her father was undocumented for most of her childhood while her Mexican-born mother was able to immigrate to the U.S. on a visa. The oldest of three, Mariaelena received her undergraduate degree at the University of California, Santa Cruz

(UCSC). She has worked in higher education since graduating from college and is currently a financial aid counselor at a small, private college in the San Francisco Bay Area. She resides in Oakland, California and is in the first year of a graduate program in Educational Leadership at Mills College. Mariaelena was interviewed the summer before the first semester.

> *I have a recollection of my mother telling me, like in 1st grade, that she wasn't going to be able to help me with my homework. I remember I was asking her questions and she's like, "I can't help you. I don't know how to do that. So you have to get used to it cause I'm not going to be able to help you with your homework as you get older." So that kinda stuck with me. It really did. I'm gonna have to figure out a way to get things done. I didn't take it as a negative thing at that time. I think I was more just disappointed that I didn't have that support from my mom and my dad was always working.*
>
> *If you wanted to go to a junior high that was out of your area, you had to apply through a magnet program. I wanted to go a school called Montera in the Oakland Hills because that's where all the smart kids went, right? And I wanted to be like one of the smart kids. I wanted to be one of the ones that didn't go to school in the ghetto. I don't know where I got that from but I wanted to get a good education.*
>
> *I went to Fremont High School which was my neighborhood high school…I didn't do a ton of extracurricular activities because there weren't many in high school. I think we had three or four AP courses for the whole school. There I did fairly well. I just knew that I had to go to college. And my parents, as long as they would look at my report card and as long as I had good grades that's what mattered…They wouldn't pressure me but it was always like "You have to do good in school. You have to do good in school."*
>
> *My dad would always say "I trust you. I don't trust other people"…I felt like I always had to show that I was good. Had to clean the house and have good grades to be able to do basic things that prove myself to them. It wasn't like they made me feel bad about it but I felt like I always had to show something in order to have fun.*
>
> *I had younger siblings – a younger sibling and two cousins that I would kinda boss around. [laughs] I felt like I was given the role of taking care of them. You have to watch them. You have to make sure they aren't doing anything. You have to make sure that they aren't getting into trouble because I was the oldest and I was also the girl. So I was kinda given that role that I had to take care of them.*
>
> *I did help my brother a lot with his school work…Now that I'm older I think he had dyslexia we just didn't know…So I would help him a lot with his homework. So I did have that role of having to help them with their homework…I don't remember it being tedious. It was just kinda an expectation and you just did it.*

With my sister, when I went off to college she was like in first or second grade. So it was a big age difference. And so with her, I did help her here and there but it was more when I was home versus like with my brother when we were growing up and living together…She was very smart but I think that she needed extra help that we didn't really realize at that point…There were other resources that she had. I just feel like if my parents might have been more involved or if they pushed [my siblings] as much as they pushed me [it might have been different]. I also didn't want to push [my sister] as much cause I didn't want her to feel like she had to do the same things that I did. I wanted her to go to college but if she didn't feel like it I didn't want to push her and be like this is the path you have to do because that's what I did. So I think I didn't push her enough in a way.

So with me it was always like you're gonna go to college because you can do something else …you'll use your brain instead of your body. That was the thing that [my dad] would emphasize a lot…So it was always like "Oh she's smart cause she's doing well." I didn't feel like I was smart. I felt like I was just doing the work. Other students seemed like they weren't. Like they were disinterested or maybe they had more friends than I did so I just felt like I had to prove myself to my parents versus to my friends at that point.

I always felt like I was going to get out of Oakland and I mean it in the positive sense. That I was going to go to college. So I felt different from other students in terms of [doing] something with my life. I'm not gonna just stay here and get pregnant and marry my high school sweetheart which I thought was the worse thing you could do. At that point my world was small, right? My world was high school and my friends and you know whatever you do…I had a small world so to me it was like I know I'm going to go to college and college was going to give me the opportunity to have a good job and a good education.

In terms of us having a discussion of [where I was going to college], I don't really remember having that conversation…[My parents] actually did let me decide that on my own. They trusted my judgement I guess because they didn't know anything about college really. So they trusted me to make a decision. And again [the schools] were all local. If I would have said San Diego I don't know how that would have been. That would have been a tougher conversation probably…It was like wherever I go I want to be able to come back…I just wanted to be able to feel that I could always come back home. I don't know why…Just like if I want to come back I can just come back.

I got there with some clothes, a fucking pillow and a fucking San Marcos cobija.[7] *I didn't even have a computer yet cause we didn't have money for a computer at that time. So it was literally like, it was visual, the difference of a prepared college student versus a fucking first time college student. First in her family to go to*

[7] blanket

college…It would be so easy to say oh which one is the first, whose parent went to college already. It's so stupid but the visual was so big at that point.

[It was culture shock] because all your life you get told you're a minority but that's the first time I saw it. Like in class everybody was white. There would be a sprinkle of us. Like you could literally point us out. Everybody was white…I remember walking through Santa Cruz, in the woods or something, and I'm like "I really am a minority" cause everybody was passing by with fucking flip flops…Everything about it was like a surfer school but it wasn't really. I don't know how to explain it, but I just felt like I didn't belong. It bothered me but I figured that that's how it was gonna be anywhere I went.

I don't remember really telling them because I didn't want them to think that college wasn't for me. That I was like being a baby about it. I was like oh it's probably just me. And I didn't think maybe that they'd understand that. Like the whole racial and social dynamic of a college setting because they hadn't been there…But I never told them that I felt like I was out of place cause I didn't want them to think that it was because of things I didn't have, like money, or like even not having a poster on my wall. Everybody had like all these posters and stuff hanging and my shit was just blank. I felt like I had to put stuff up just so that I didn't – everybody just seemed so fake.

When people ask "Oh, what is your daughter doing?" [and their response is] "Oh she's in college." Like that's supposed to be the highest – at least in certain points of your life – you've succeeded as an immigrant parent because you have no education but you were able to put your kid through college…It's the epitome of why immigration works, right? Or it's like "Oh I did all this so that my family could get an education because I didn't." So it was kind of like you did your part as a parent. Like you helped them. Guided them to be able to go thru college and become a successful adult but also not realizing how much pressure that puts on you as the oldest one.

It's the fear of being a disappointment. They do all these things to raise you only to be disappointed by you. Like there's always that fear that you're disappointing your parents.

Parental expectations are a recurring theme also found in Mariaelena's testimonio. As the first-born child, she felt an added pressure to succeed academically with minimal help from her parents. At a young age, Mariaelena understood she would need to develop strategies to get through school due to her parents limited knowledge of the U.S. educational system. In addition, she was given the role of secondary caregiver to her younger siblings and family members. This

role also included the expectation of helping them with their homework and school-related activities. Due to this, Mariaelena developed a sense of responsibility for her siblings' education in addition to her own.

On more than one occasion, Mariaelena mentions having to prove herself to her parents. By getting good grades, doing household chores, helping with her siblings, etc., she was able to gain the trust of her parents. For Mariaelena, this meant that her parents not only trusted her to make the right decisions for her future, but that she had also earned that right. In her mind, the sacrifices her parents made to provide better opportunities for their children were rewarded by being a "good daughter" and not disappointing them.

The transition to college was not easy for Mariaelena. Similar to the other participants, she describes feeling unprepared and out of place, both socially and academically. She chose to live in a culturally themed residence her first year at UCSC but was not able to connect with her roommate who was white and from an upper middle-class family from San Francisco. Mariaelena also describes how, once away from home, she felt the impact of her minority status. Many times, she found herself to be one of a small number of Latino students in class and around campus. She would also choose not to discuss her feelings with family thinking they would not understand her situation but also to spare them from feeling they had not provided enough for her.

Yesenia

Yesenia is a full-time employee of a large public research university in the San Francisco Bay Area. She currently resides in San Pablo, CA with her husband, a French immigrant, and her 1-year-old son. Born in Michoacán, Mexico, Yesenia immigrated to the mid-western United States as a child living in Nebraska and then finally Minnesota where most of her family

currently resides. Her father, a green card holder, was able to secure residency status for her older siblings. Yesenia, the rest of her siblings and mother were undocumented until she was ten years old. The youngest of four brothers and sisters, Yesenia was the only child to attend a four-year college. After graduating from Mount Mercy University (MMU), a Catholic liberal arts university in Iowa, she began a career in higher education. She moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to pursue her graduate studies and received her Master's degree from the University of San Francisco in 2018.

> *I definitely was proud to feel like I'm gonna be the first. This is gonna be a big thing in our family and we're gonna celebrate it. But I was also like I'm doing this for me because I don't want to be in a situation where I'm vulnerable. Where I'm just put in a place where just getting married and finding a nice husband is it. I saw what many women in our family and our culture go through and I was like I don't want any of that. I want to be in control of my life and I want to find the right person when it's time, if I get to find that person. I didn't want anybody pressuring me.*
>
> *Just before going to college I got this job [at a factory] and I applied to so many scholarships. Coming into college I was mainly funded except for like $7,000, which was my room and board...I took out student loans because I didn't want to ask [my parents] for money. We had just gotten a house and I was under the impression that it was going to put more pressure on them and also they wanted me to stay close. They wanted me to go to a community college…For me it was just kinda like me doing what I said I was gonna do. Asking them for help, I feel like that was gonna make me feel bad just because they wanted me to stay close and I didn't want that.*
>
> *It really wasn't until my senior year [of college] that I asked them for help. And it was mainly because I was an RA between sophomore and the middle of my junior year and that covered my room and board…But then I changed my major and one of my scholarships went away…All of a sudden I owed a lot of money my last year and I was really stressed out. I still didn't want to ask my parents for money.*
>
> *I would have issues communicating in Spanish at that point. I was like "Oh my god, como se dice el ese de la esa?"* [8] *[laughs] My dad was like "What the hell? You need to eat more beans when you get home!" It was interesting you know just to get back into the groove and it was always like a culture shock. Once I would get home, it was like "Oh my god, la casa is still the same. You guys are still the same!"*

---

[8] How do you say that thing, of the thing?

I signed up for [a religious treat] the Sunday before the weekend [it was happening]. And when you go there, you don't really know what's going to happen…They kinda give you a vague description and then you just go with it. And so I got there and, you know, it was fun. We did different activities and I made a lot of new friends…Then we got to this palanca letter[9] *thing. So they were explaining it and I was like, oh goddamnit! I'm not gonna get any letters! Who's going to write to me?... And then finally I got to this envelope and it was kinda like blank. You know it was just like an envelope and it had mini letters in there. I opened it and it was in Spanish and it was from my parents. They typed this letter and they emailed it…It wasn't just about this Christian retreat they were talking about like "We're so proud that you set yourself to do what you said you were going to and you're there and kicking ass!" And, you know, "We miss you but we are proud of you and then you're reflecting on your spirituality. Go you!" [laughs]…I think that really gave me some motivation. I was there not just for me because I think I came in with that mentality. Oh, I'm just here to do my own thing, which is important and something I believe in. But I feel like it also kinda helped me think about how I'm doing it for our family. What I'm doing is also impacting them. They're proud of me. They're gonna be happy and also the younger kids in my family, my nephews and nieces, it's going to impact them. So it's like a greater thing that I'm doing even though ultimately it will benefit me.*

Because your parents weren't as involved as white kids parents you feel like they don't really care sometimes or – not that they don't care – they just don't know the importance of them showing up during these simple times. For me that was the case even throughout high school…I always felt like I just had to rough it out and just kinda be strong about everything…I feel as a first-generation student you're most of the time figuring out on your own. Yes, they expect high things from you but I've never done this, you know. I don't know what I'm doing. But you're figuring it out on your own and there's never anyone there that you can just talk to. But [with the palanca letter] I was like, wow, they showed up. They were there and they just made me feel like I wasn't alone. You're going for the gold, you're going for the win and most of the time you feel like you're alone. But there I felt like, wow, they're actually watching. They're actually proud of what I'm doing.

I almost feel like I didn't know you could talk about these things. Like, I didn't really know what was going on really. I was just trying to use whatever I was already involved in to just kind of ignore my feelings that I was going through…It also hit me there that [my college friend] didn't really know what I was going thru. She's still a good friend regardless but I felt alone for the longest time in college. I actually felt alone all the time. Even once I had Latino friends, their experience was totally different than mine. I mean they were there and they're from Latino countries but they – I feel like they were more wealthy and well off. They came to college and their families were wealthy middle class people in their countries. And

---

[9] In the Catholic faith, palanca letters are written by family members or friends of a person who is retreating, or withdrawing, from ordinary activities for a period of time, such as a weekend to spend time in reflection and prayer to God (King, 2018).

so I felt like, even though we're Latinos, it wasn't the same experience. That duality of, you know, no soy ni de aqui ni de alla.[10] *They had the privilege to just be de alla*[11] *and be kind of a sensation at the college. Oh, you're Costa Rican, or you're this, or you're that and people were all excited about you. Nobody's excited about me! [laughs] Nobody cares about Mexicans! And so I felt very alone.*

Hasta los amigos[12] *that I made at Mount Mercy, a lot of them were Catholic. We would go to church together and hang out together. But then I started to realize that their political views were not aligned to mine…I mean they were talking shit, you know, about inmigrantes.*[13] *Just some of the ways that they would speak was very condescending and very patronizing and I couldn't really – they were nice people and everything but I couldn't really fully feel like they were my friends. I felt like they were just my friends in this superficial level but then like deep down they don't really know me, what I value, what's important to me.*

I feel like, I mean ever since I was young, I kinda had this sense of independence. [I] always wanted to have my own things. I started working really young and saving money even giving [my parents] money to help pay for bills whenever they were struggling. And I mean my parents would actually ask me for money – they never made me give them money. They were like "Hey can we borrow 200 bucks?" and I was like "Yeah sure!"… I would always let them borrow it and I would never ask for it back even though they tried to pay me back...I feel like that kinda gave me a sense of, you know, I should have a say in what my life is gonna be like rather than depending on them and doing what they want me to do. So I always felt like they had that respect. Like, you know, she knows what it takes to be responsible and to do things. So in that way it kinda helped me. It armed me with that courage to feel like I'm ok doing what I need to do.

For Yesenia, making it to college was more than just accomplishing her goals but also a way to declare her independence, a constant theme throughout her testimonio. Since her family wanted her to stay close to home for college, Yesenia worked hard to save money and applied for scholarships in order to fund her education with minimal financial help from her parents. By taking financial responsibility for herself, she was also able to have a say in her life and choices; removing any sense of guilt for going against her family's wishes.

[10] I am not from here nor am I from there.
[11] from there
[12] Even my friends
[13] immigrants

She continued to work during college but eventually required her parents help in securing a loan for her final year. Though she would make the payments for that loan, she was disappointed in not being able to do it on her own. In her financial independence, she gained the confidence and the motivation to follow her goals. Coming from a traditional Mexican family, she was determined to prove herself and show that being a woman did not mean having to be dependent on others. This financial setback, though not detrimental in any way, affected Yesenia nonetheless.

Yesenia also talks about not being able to talk to her family about the struggles and alienation she felt while in college. There were times when she felt alone in her journey without a support system at home or in school that truly understood what she was going through. However, a small gesture from her parents in the form of the palanca letter, made a huge impact on Yesenia. She was able to gain a new perspective on her goals and motivations. She also felt that by showing up, her parents recognized the enormity of the task she had undertaken, something she did not necessarily feel before.

Lastly, Yesenia brings up an interesting point about the differences within the Latino population, class, and higher education. Student enrollment at MMU for the Fall 2016[14] semester was around 1,800, more than 75% of which were white and less than 2%, roughly 36, students of Hispanic/Latino descent (Mount Mercy University, n.d.). With so few students to identify with, she turned to international students from Latin American countries to befriend. She found that these students, who often come from wealthy families in Latin American, were treated differently than residents/citizens of Latino descent. They were welcomed where she felt she was

[14] Yesenia graduated from MMU in 2010. According to their website, total enrollment for Fall 2010 was around 1,643. No further information was available on enrollment numbers for that term.

not. They came to the United States, temporarily, and were not burdened with the stigma of being Latino in the U.S. and all the baggage that comes with it.

Analysis

Upon review of the qualitative data presented in the testimonios, three main themes emerged: parental expectations, loneliness, and apprehension. These themes highlight the ways in which family and identity influenced the participants throughout their education and how this influence has carried over into their adult lives. I have given each theme its own section in this chapter for organizational purposes. It is important to note that they do not exist independently of each other. For every participant, it was clear that the themes were interconnected.

Expectations

A resounding theme that repeated throughout all four testimonios was that of familial expectations. For the women in this study, the expectations placed on them (by friends and family alike) to fulfill certain goals or obligations had significant impact on them growing up. While the desire to earn a college degree was a personal goal for all women, parental influence on their pursuit of higher education and the choices they made in the process should not be ignored. As children of immigrants, the women understood that the education they were afforded here in the United States was a privilege their parents did not have. Moreover, the message being communicated was that education would provide opportunities that their parents did not have. Education is the pathway to a life without struggle, the elusive "American Dream."

A study of Latino immigrants and their children found that parental expectations are influenced by academic performance but that the reverse does not hold true (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001). In other words, a parent will place greater expectations on a child's education when their child does well academically. However, these expectations will not

have a corollary effect on academic performance. As Mariaelena stated during her interview, "I think [going to college] was an expectation because I always had decent grades." Goldenberg et al. (2001) also add that "the longer parents had been in the United States the more they expressed the belief that school success is associated with desirable outcomes for their children" (p. 576). This was seen in the encouragement from Jenn's mother to go to college to find what she wanted to do and not settle for a job she had to do.

The expectations placed on the testimonialistas by their parents were at times incongruous to each other. Angélica recalled, "There was always a big focus on doing well, and going to college, and education, but language barrier for my mom, and then content as we got a little bit older, they couldn't necessarily help us with our homework." Since education was seen as a path to a life without the struggles they themselves endured, the parents of the participants of this study continued to emphasize the importance of education, however, without necessarily being able to offer the constructive support (help with homework, college application process, etc.) to help their daughters in their schooling. Conversely, "I always knew I was going to go to college" was a phrase I heard from each participant in one form or another. With the expectation of college for each woman, though, they also acknowledged that they did not necessarily know how to get there or what was to be expected of them when they did arrive.

The expectations of both parents and daughters were also found to be at odds with each other. For the parents, college was the means for economic and financial freedom for their daughters, the chance at "una carrera buena" and to "trabajar con la cabeza y no con el lomo"[15] but it did not suggest a break from the family unit. As shared by Jenn,

[15] "a good job" and "to work with your brain and not your body/back"

My mom had told me that if I went to SC or UCLA or LMU, or any of the local schools I was going to live [at home]…So as soon as she told me that I'm like, OK, I'm not applying to any of those schools because then they are going to make me live at home. The only way I can get out of here is to pick a school that's far and where I can't commute.

Similarly, Angélica and Yesenia were also expected to stay at home but worked to pay for room and board.

College signified a different kind of freedom and importance for the testimonialistas. Jenn's desire to go away to college stemmed from a wish to experience a different way of life and meet new people in the hopes of finding herself. Likewise, the independence that Yesenia felt by not asking her parents for financial help gave her a sense of confidence and self-assuredness. As determined by Turcios-Cotto & Milan (2012), Latino youth with aspirations of "higher education goals were twice as likely to express individuation desires as youth without higher education goals" (p. 1407). In other words, going away to college was seen by Latinos as a means to develop and express individuality and independence. For the Latinas in this study, college was a time of self-discovery and self-assertion.

Loneliness

The newfound freedom and independence experienced by the participants in college did not come without a price. Another recurring theme that emerged was that of loneliness. At one point or another, each participant experienced feelings of loneliness during their college years. Studies have shown that loneliness is a predictor of depression and anxiety among Latinas (Chang, Hirsch, Sanna, Jeglic, & Fabian, 2011; Chang, Díaz, Lucas, Lee, Powell, Kafelghazal, Chartier, Morris, Marshall-Broaden, Hirsch, & Jeglic, 2017; Foley Nicpon, Huser, Hull Blanks,

Sollenberger, Befort, & Robinson Kurpius, 2006) and that pursuit of higher education could intensify these feelings (Lopez, 2005; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2012). While none of the women stated feeling depressed or anxious, it is nevertheless important to understand the underlying causes of the loneliness they experienced in college and how it affected them.

As Angélica states,

I just felt lonely. In the same city that I had lived in almost my entire life. I felt like I was in a completely different place…I felt really poor and – just like, not good enough during that process…I didn't feel as confident as I was.

The cultural and economic differences presented to Angélica were a stark contrast to her own life and experiences. She felt different and, therefore, out of place in her new surroundings, the impact of which made her doubt her abilities. Likewise, Yesenia and Mariaelena mention undergoing similar episodes during their first year of college.

The loneliness was also connected to issues of race. All women attended predominantly white institutions and the lack of students of color on campus was hard for them to ignore. "I really am a minority," Mariaelena said to herself at one point in her first year of college. When talking about transferring into a predominantly white school in the 5th grade, Jenn said, "Oh my God! Such a hard time…I felt totally out of place." Inevitably, the women felt the stigma of being one of few. They became hyper-aware of their differences and/or the advantages they did not have; however, they did not have the proper tools to process these feelings. Additionally, all the women indicated they did not or could not speak to their friends or families about these issues further exacerbating feelings of loneliness.

Apprehension

The final recurring theme I found was apprehension. Throughout their testimonios, the women shared their feelings of anxiety and fear in regards to college and the expectations placed on them by their family. The desire of the family for the women to stay close to home during college, in particular, caused some tension for most of the participants. For Angélica, the conversation proved difficult despite the proximity of her parents' house to campus. Jenn, whose mother worried for Jenn's safety away from home, was ultimately convinced by her sister to not enroll at the out-of-state college of her dreams. In both cases, the apprehension felt by their family was internalized by the women and caused some degree of stress.

Being out on their own also proved difficult for the women individually as well. As Mariaelena remembers, "I felt I couldn't do certain things by myself. Like it was the first time that I was genuinely by myself." Though she was able to navigate the college application process and enroll in college, Mariaelena found certain tasks difficult to do now that she was on her own. Furthermore, she would not share this information with her parents for fear of making them worry. "…I didn't want them to think that college wasn't for me. That I was like being a baby about it", she recalled. All women shared this sentiment during different parts of their educational journeys. As Yesenia states, "I always felt like I just had to rough it out and just kinda be strong about everything."

Summary

The testimonios presented in this chapter require a commitment "to another kind of understanding – one of solidarity" (Alarcón et al., 2011, p. 370). While Angélica, Jenn, Mariaelena, and Yesenia's stories highlighted the experiences of four unique women, the similarities between them were a powerful testament to the Latina experience. Due to these

similarities, the expectations, loneliness, and apprehension they experienced throughout their journeys resonated with me. Their journeys and mine interwoven within the Latina educational diaspora.

CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Reclaiming Their Stories

> Her first step is to take inventory. *Despojando, desgranando, quitando paja*. Just what did she inherit from her ancestors? This weight on her back – which is the baggage from the Indian mother, which the baggage from the Spanish father, which the baggage from the Anglo? (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.104)

For the women in this study, the pursuit of higher education was a balancing act of multiple identities, cultures, and responsibilities. To achieve their goals, Angélica, Jenn, Mariaelena, and Yesenia traversed Anzaldúa's Borderlands, the place where two or more cultures or races intersect and occupy the same space. The loneliness and apprehension felt by the women during college was more than just homesickness or culture shock. Without knowing it, they were in the process of reconciling the duality of their existence: as both an "American" and Latina student, an individual in pursuit of her own "American Dream" and a daughter in pursuit of the opportunities her immigrant parents could not access.

In telling their stories, the testimonialistas were able to critically self-reflect on their schooling and how their various identities (Latina, second-generation immigrant, first-generation college student, etc.) and family influenced their lives. Moreover, by allowing a space for the women to share their testimonios, the opportunity to re-center their narratives and develop new meaning for the events in their lives emerged. "Looking back", "Now that I think about it" were phrases that repeated themselves throughout our discussions. By reclaiming their stories, the testimonialistas also participated in the process of "distinguishing between loving and harmful forms of sociality", a process that Ruti (2006) believes "is vital for our ability to develop a

sophisticated appreciation for the complex relationship between intersubjectivity and autonomy" (p. 75).

In their identities, the testimonialistas found the strength and motivation to complete their college degrees. Once in college, they encountered a racially hostile environment that exposed them to microaggressions (Yosso et al., 2009) and, as Sólorzano et al. (2005) argue, acted against their interests as students of color. As first-generation students, they lacked the cultural capital necessary to carry out the college student role (Collier & Morgan, 2008) and navigate campus culture (Stephens et al., 2012). In response, they sought sanctuary in counterspaces both in and out of the classroom (Enriquez, 2011; Nuñez, 2011; Yosso et al., 2009).

Latinos must navigate college by managing matters of identity and culture while simultaneously dealing with issues specific to Latinos in higher education. Definitive of the first-generation, Latino college experience, the Latinas in this study shared an overarching theme of expectations from family (and themselves) to succeed without any inherited cultural capital. The pressures felt by these expectations, combined with feelings of apprehension and loneliness, defined their college journeys and the women they would become.

Reclaiming Mine…

Initially, I planned to include my personal testimonio in this study. As I conducted the interviews and read through the literature, though, I began to feel the weight of the task I had undertaken. The need to share my story paled in comparison to the great responsibility I had assumed in sharing Angélica, Jenn, Mariaelena, and Yesenia's. I soon found myself overwhelmed but inspired. With a new focus, I continued with my research.

Many times over the last three months of my graduate program, I told myself that I should have picked another topic. Something that was not so personal. Perhaps my original idea

to write about diversity and representation on network television shows would have been more fun. Maybe I would not have struggled to start each section. Better yet, perhaps the hours after work and on weekends I spent writing would not have felt like such a chore.

I struggled many times throughout the writing process. Writing was always difficult for me but the significance of this topic was proving to be quite the hurdle to jump. I had heard from many people that choosing a thesis topic that you had a personal connection to would make writing easier. This was proving not to be the case for me. I second-guessed nearly every choice I made.

Why was I being so hard on myself? Why did I constantly seek perfection knowing how much I have always struggled with academic writing? As I completed the first draft of Chapter 3, I found the answers to these questions and more; eventually, coming to a realization that would greatly influence the direction of this study, as well as the way I would reflect on my educational journey up until this point. What I had discovered in writing their testimonios was that I had also written my own.

Like Mariaelena, I was labeled "smart" by my parents at an early age and was expected to help my younger brothers with schoolwork. In fourth grade, my family moved to Benicia, a predominantly white suburb 35 miles northeast of San Francisco, and I experienced the same culture shock Jenn described in her testimonio. Similar to Angélica, I did not discuss the schools I was applying to with my parents. I had learned my lesson when I mentioned liking New York University to my mother who quickly told me she wouldn't help me pay the application fee. Finally, like Yesenia, a small gesture in the form of a handwritten letter from my grandmother in Mexico during my first semester in college gave me a newfound sense of purpose. These were

not simply things we had in common but rather the things that connected us to each other and to other Latinas.

Much in the same way that I cannot separate my story from my parents', I cannot remove myself from the testimonios. The pressure I was putting on myself was the same pressure I had felt throughout my life. The expectation to succeed, to do their stories justice, to make them proud, was keeping me from acknowledging my own part of the narrative. As with many aspects of my life, failure would not be an option. This time, however, I could not chose to take the easier path. I would forge ahead, determined to create something meaningful, relevant, and needed.

It comes as no surprise to me that the five of us have chosen careers in education. As Latinas, we watched our mothers cook and prepare food, serving our fathers and siblings first. We shared rooms with siblings so that our newly arrived relatives from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, etc., would have a place to stay. We translated for strangers at the store, post office, or hospital when we saw them struggling with English. We were taught to serve others and give back to those who were in need. We were taught to look out for the group first. We would now do the same for the generations of immigrant children that would come after us.

What's Next?

This thesis has been a cathartic experience; one I entered carrying the pain from the past 40 years and leave feeling revived and hopeful. We often look back on our lives without the luxury of critical self-reflection, the danger of which results in not being able to fully acknowledge and deal with our pain and struggles. We instead carry it with us, letting it affect our lives indefinitely. For Latinas, acknowledging this pain and understanding the duality of our

existence in the Borderlands enables us to let it go and begin a new narrative; one that is free from the burden or guilt of the past yet still undeniably linked to it.

The path to healing offered by testimonio and critical self-reflection for students of color should not be overlooked. While I focused on Latinas, the need exists for other populations as well. Latinos, Asian-American, transgendered students, etc., all could benefit from creating their own narratives. Of greater significance, I believe connecting these stories to one another bridges the experience of marginalized students and establishes solidarity among groups that don't always see what truly links us all together.

Epilogue

I am the United States born daughter of Mexican immigrants. I do not make this declaration lightly for it is in fact a political statement. It defines who I am in ways I will never fully understand. My experiences, my beliefs, my actions, my heart, my soul; all molded by the decision of two men, my father and grandfather, to leave behind everything they knew in search of a better life. The impact of this decision is a shared phenomenon, cycling through the continuous wave of immigrants who dare to dream of something more.

In Lak'ech Ala K'in/Tú eres mi otro yo/You are my other me.

We are the children of immigrants. This is our reality.

REFERENCES

Aigner-Varoz, E. (2000). Metaphors of a Mestiza Consciousness: Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera. MELUS, 25(2), 47-62. http://doi:10.2307/468218

Akom, A.A. (2008). Black Metropolis and Mental Life: Beyond the “Burden of ‘Acting White’” Toward a Third Wave of Critical Racial Studies. Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 39(3), 247-265. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1492.2008.00020.x

Alarcón, W., Cruz, C., Guardia Jackson, L., Prieto, L., & Rodriguez-Arroyo, S. (2011). Compartiendo Nuestras Historias: Five Testiomonios of Schooling and Survival. Journal of Latinos and Education, 10(4), 369-381. http://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2011.605690

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Anzaldúa, G.E. (2002). Beyond Traditional Notions of Identity. Chronicle of Higher Education, 49(7). Retrieved from http://www.chronicle.com/article/Beyond-Traditional-Notions-of/24058

Altschul, I. (2011). Parental Involvement and the Academic Achievement of Mexican American Youths: What Kinds of Involvement in Youths' Education Matter Most? Social Work Research, 35(3), 159-170. https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/35.3.159

Azmitia, M., Cooper, C.R., & Brown, J.R. (2009). Support and Guidance from Families, Friends, and Teachers in Latino Early Adolescents' Math Pathways. The Journal of Early Adolescence, 29(1), 142-169. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431608324476

Barvosa, E. (2008). Wealth of selves : multiple identities, mestiza consciousness, and the subject of politics. Retrieved from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Beverley, J. (2004). Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis

Chang, E.C., Hirsch, J.K., Sanna, L.J., Jeglic, E.L., & Fabian, C.G. (2011). A Preliminary Study of Perfectionism and Loneliness as Predictors of Depressive and Anxious Symptoms in Latinas: A Top-Down Test of a Model. American Psychological Association, 58(3), 441-448. https://doi.org/ 10.1037/a0023255

Chang, E.C., Díaz, L., Lucas, A.G., Lee, J., Powell, N.J., Kafelghazal, S., Chartier, S.J., Morris, L.E., Marshall-Broaden, T.M., Hirsch, J.K., & Jeglic, E.L. (2017). Ethnic Identity and Loneliness in Predicting Suicide Risk in Latino College Students. Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 39(4), 470-485. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986317738028

Collier, P.J., & Morgan, D.L. (2008). "Is that paper really due today?'': differences in first-generation and traditional college students' understandings of faculty expectations. Higher Education, 55(4), 425-446. http://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-007-9065-5

Crisp, G., & Nora, A. (2010). Hispanic Student Success: Factors Influencing the Persistence and Transfer Decisions of Latino Community College Students Enrolled in Developmental Education. Research in Higher Education, 51(2), 175-194. http://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-009-9151-x

Culture. (n.d.) In Oxford Living Dictionaries. Retrieved from http://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/culture

Delgado Bernal, D., Burciaga, R., & Flores Carmona, J. (2012). Chicana/Latina Testimonios: Mapping the Methodological, Pedagogical, and Political. Equity & Excellence in Education, 45(3), 363-372. http://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2012.698149

Desmond, M., & López Turley, R.N. (2009). The Role of Familism in Explaining the Hispanic-White College Application Gap. Social Problems, 56(2), 311-334. http://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2009.56.2.311

DiAngelo, R. (2011). White Fragility. International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 3(3), 54-70.

Easley, Jr., N., Bianco, M., & Leech, N. (2012). Ganas: A Qualitative Study Examining Mexican Heritage Students' Motivation to Succeed in Higher Education. Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 11(2), 164-178. http://doi.org/10.1177/1538192712440175

Enriquez, L. (2011). "Because We Feel the Pressure and We Also Feel the Support": Examining the Education Success of Undocumented Immigrant Latino/a Students. Harvard Education Review, 81(3), 476-499. http://doi.org/10.17763/haer.81.3.w7k703q050143762

Espino, M. M., Vega, I. I., Rendón, L. I., Ranero, J. J., & Muñiz, M. M. (2012). The Process of Reflexión in Bridging Testimonios Across Lived Experience. Equity & Excellence in Education, 45(3), 444-459. http://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2012.698188

Faitar, G. (2006). Individualism versus Collectivism in Schools. College Quarterly, 9(4). Retrieved from http://collegequarterly.ca/2006-vol09-num04-fall/faitar.html

Foley Nicpon, M., Huser, L., Hull Blanks, E., Sollenberger, S., Befort, C., & Robinson Kurpius, S.E. (2006). The Relationship of Loneliness and Social Support with College Freshman's Academic Performance and Persistence. Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 8(3), 345-358. https://doi.org/10.2190/A465-356M-7652-783R

Gándara, P. & Contreras, F. (2010). The Latino Education Crisis: The Consequences of Failed Social Policies. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gil, R.M., & Vazquez, C.N. (1996). The Maria Paradox: How Latinas Can Merge Old World Traditions with New World Self-Esteem. New York, NY: Perigee Book.

Goldenberg, C., Gallimore, R., Reese, L., & Garnier, H. (2001). Cause or Effect? A Longitudinal Study of Immigrant Latino Parents' Aspirations and Expectations, and Their Children's School Performance, American Education Research Journal, 38 (3), 547-582. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038003547

Gudykunst, W.B., & Lee, C.M. (2003). Cross-Cultural Communication Theories. In W.B. Gudykunst (Ed.), Cross-cultural and intercultural communication (7-24). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Henríquez-Betancor, M. (2012). Anzaldúa and ‘the new mestiza’: A Chicana dives into collective identity. Language Value, 4(2), 38-55. http://dx.doi.org/10.6035/LanguageV.2012.4.2.4

King, V.T. (2016). Conceptualising Culture, Identity and Region: Recent Reflections on Southeast Asia. Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 24(1), 25-42. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=hus&AN=114346102&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=s3818721

King, Y. (2018, June 27). How to Write a Palanca Letter. Retrieved from https://classroom.synonym.com/how-to-write-a-palanca-letter-12082710.html

Krogstad, J.M. (2016, July 28). 5 facts about Latinos and education. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/28/5-facts-about-latinos-and-education/#

Ladson-Billings, G. (2013). Critical Race Theory – What It Is Not! In M. Lynn & A.D. Dixson (Eds.), Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education (34-47). New York, NY: Routledge.

Llamas, J. D., & Morgan Consoli, M. (2012). The Importance of Familia for Latina/o College Students: Examining the Role of Familial Support in Intragroup Marginalization. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18(4), 395-403. http://doi.org/10.1037/a0029756

Lopez, J. D. (2005). Race-Related Stress and Sociocultural Orientation Among Latino Students During their Transition into a Predominately White, Highly Selective Institution. Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 4(4), 354–365. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1538192705279594

Marcus, J. (2018, July 6). Facts about race and college admission. Retrieved from http://hechingerreport.org/facts-about-race-and-college-admission/

Marginson, S. (2014). Student Self-Formation in International Education. Journal of Studies in International Education, 18(1), 6-22. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315313513036

Martin, K. L. (2017). Culture and Identity: LSIC Parents' Beliefs and Values and Raising Young Indigenous Children in the Twenty-First Century. In M. Walter, K. Martin, G. Bodkin-Andrews (Eds.), Indigenous Children Growing Up Strong (pp. 79-99). London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53435-4_5

Mestiza. (n.d.) In Oxford Living Dictionaries. Retrieved from http://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mestiza

Moraga, C. (2002). Theory in the flesh. In C. Moraga & G.E. Anzaldúa (Eds.), This bridge called my back: Writing by radical women of color (3rd ed., p. 21). San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Press

Mount Mercy University. (n.d.). Student Body Diversity Report by Full-time Enrollment Fall 2016. Retrieved from https://www.mtmercy.edu/compliance/EnrollmentData.pdf

National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). Profile of Undergraduate Students: 2011-2012 (DHHS Publication No. NCES 2015167). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Ngo, B. (2008). Beyond "Culture Clash" Understandings of Immigrant Experiences. Theory Into Practice, 47(1), 4-11. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840701764656

Ngo, B. (2015). Hmong Culture Club as a Place of Belonging: The Cultivation of Hmong Students' Cultural and Political Identities. Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement, 10(2). http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2153-8999.1130

Nuñez, A. (2009). Latino Students' Transitions to College: A Social and Intercultural Capital Perspective. Harvard Educational Review, 79(1), 22-48. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.1.wh7164658k33w477

Nuñez, A. (2011). Counterspaces and Connections in College Transitions: First-Generation Latino Students' Perspectives on Chicano Studies. Journal of College Student Development, 52(6), 639-655. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2011.0077

Pew Hispanic Center. (2009). Latinos and Education: Explaining the Attainment Gap. Washington, DC: Mark Hugo Lopez.

Ojeda, L., Navarro, R. L., & Morales, A. (2011). The Role of La Familia on Mexican American Men's College Persistence Intentions. Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 12(3), 216-229. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020091

Ong, A.D., Phinney, J.S., & Dennis, J. (2006). Competence under challenge: Exploring the protective influence of parental support and ethnic identity in Latino college students. Journal of Adolescence, 29(6), 961-979. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2006.04.010

Pérez Huber, L. (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. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390903333863

Pérez, P.A., & McDonough, P.M. (2008). Understanding Latina and Latino College Choice. Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 7(3), 249-265. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192708317620

Reyes, K.B., & Curry Rodríguez, J.E. (2012). Testimonio: Origins, Terms, and Resources. Equity & Excellence in Education, 45(3), 525-538. http://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2012.698571

Ruti, M. (2006). Reinventing the Soul: Posthumanist Theory and Psychic Life. New York, NY: Other Press

Saavedra, C.M., & Salazar Pérez, M. (2012). Chicana and Black Feminisms: Testimonios of Theory, Identity, and Multiculturalism. Equity & Excellence in Education, 45(3), 430-443. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2012.681970

Sánchez, P. (2007). Urban Immigrant Students: How Transnationalism Shapes their World Learning. The Urban Review (39)5, 489-517. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-007-0064-8

Sólorzano, D.G., Villalpando, O., & Oseguera, L. (2005). Educational Inequities and Latina/o Undergraduate Students in the United States: A Critical Race Analysis of Their Education Progress. Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 4(3), 272-294. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192705276550

Stephens, N.M., Fryberg, S.A., Markus, H.R., Johnson, C.S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen Disadvantage: How American Universities' Focus on Independence Undermines the Academic Performance of First-Generation College Students. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102(6), 1178-1197. http://doi.org/10.1037/a0027143

Sy, S.R. & Romero, J. (2008). Family Responsibilities Among Latina College Students From Immigrant Families. Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 7(3), 212-227. http://doi.org/10.1177/1538192708316208

Tanaka, G. (2009). The Elephant in the Living Room That No One Wants to Talk About: Why U.S. Anthropologists Are Unable to Acknowledge the End of Culture. Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 40(1), 82-95. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1492.2009.01029.x

Torres, J.B. & Solberg, V.S. (2001). Role of Self-Efficacy, Stress, Social Integration, and Family Support in Latino College Student Persistence and Health. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 59(1), 53-63. http://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.2000.1785

Turcios-Cotto, V.Y., & Milan, S. (2013). Racial/Ethnic Differences in the Educational Expectations of Adolescents: Does Pursuing Higher Education Mean Something Different to Latino Students Compared to White and Black Students? Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 42 (9), 1399-1412. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-012-9845-9

University of the Pacific. (n.d.). Community Involvement Program. Retrieved from https://www.pacific.edu/about-pacific/administrationoffices/office-of-financial-

aid/scholarships-grants-loans-and-work-study-/undergraduate-student-scholarships-and-grants/community-involvement-program-(cip).html

Urrieta Jr., L. & Villenas, S.A. (2013). The legacy of Derrick Bell and Latino/a education: a critical race testimonio. Race Ethnicity and Education, 16(4), 514-535. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2013.81771

Valencia, R.R. & Black, M.S. (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. http://doi.org/ 10.1207/S1532771XJLE0102_2

Yosso, T.J., Smith, W.A., Ceja, M., & Sólorzano, D. G. (2009). Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates. Harvard Education Review, 79(4), 659-690. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.4.m6867014157m707l

Zimmerman, K.A. (2017, July 13). American Culture: Traditions and Customs of the United States. Retrieved from http://www.livescience.com/28945-american-culture.html

Zong, J., Batalova, J., & Hallock, J. (2018, February 8). Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the Unites States. Retrieved from https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states

APPENDIX I
Interview Questions

The following questions were used to guide the testimonios. If a question was not addressed in the testimonio, I would ask the participant directly to speak on the topic.

1. Tell me about your education history, grades K-12.
    a. What school did you attend?
    b. How was it chosen?
2. Talk about your college experience.
    a. Tell me about the application process.
    b. What school did you attend?
    c. What did you study?
    d. What was your first year like?
3. What influence did your family have on your college decisions?
4. Was there a moment in your life where you realized your otherness or were made to feel different?
5. What role did religions have in your upbringing and choices?
6. What challenges did you face in achieving any successes?
7. How has your self-identification played a role in your life/choices?
8. What pressures have you experiences that you feel affected your life? Were any family related?
9. Do you feel that you have found yourself? If so, when did that happen?