

2014

Exploring the Educational Paths of Mexicanas: Testimonios of Academic Success

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The University of San Francisco

EXPLORING THE EDUCATIONAL PATHS OF *MEXICANAS*:
TESTIMONIOS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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

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

by
Luz A. Navarrete García
San Francisco
May 2014

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

EXPLORING THE EDUCATIONAL PATHS OF *MEXICANAS*:
TESTIMONIOS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

In 2014, Latina/o children comprise over 50% of the California K-12 student population. The recently changing demographics are not problematic; rather, the problems that inspired this study include a legacy of inadequate education (under-education) and the lack of support of Latina/o students throughout the P-20 educational system (preschool through graduate school). This qualitative study explores the experiences of nine Mexican American women who share at least four past experiences in common: 1) immigration to the United States from México, 2) experience learning English as a new language, 3) attainment of a baccalaureate degree, and 4) enrollment in a post-baccalaureate (graduate school) program. Data was gathered through individual narrative *testimonios* of personal and academic experiences. Data collection also included a focus group discussion (*plática*). Participants shared and reflected on the ways in which their families, individual educators, student support programs, personal characteristics, and experiential/lived experiences contributed to their academic success. To honor the participants' lived experiences, complete *testimonios* are included. The findings of this study parallel and build on Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth, including aspirational, familial, and resistant forms of community cultural capital. The participants make eleven recommendations for current and future educators.

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

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is the culmination of many, many years of growth and learning, and it would not have been possible without the loving support of *mi familia*. I love you and thank you for all that you have done to support me, guide me, and inspire me. Un abrazote con mucho, mucho amor para todos.

To the nine *mujeres* in this study: Thank you for sharing your *testimonios*. Your stories and experiences are an inspirational gift for educators and students.

To my past, current, and future students, mentors, and teachers: Thank you for inspiring me. You teach me something new every day.

To the International and Multicultural Education/University of San Francisco School of Education community: I have thoroughly enjoyed learning and working with each of you. You challenged me to think critically yet to have an open mind, and you taught me to see and love the world in a new way.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee: Dr. Emma Fuentes, Dr. Katz, and Dr. Capitelli, for positivity and support throughout this transformative endeavor. A heartfelt abrazo to all three of you, and especially to Dr. Fuentes for never giving up on me, and not allowing me to give up on myself.

In Lak'ech

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Chapter I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction and Background

Educators must be responsive to the ever-changing needs of students (Camangian, 2013; Gay, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1993). Outdated one-size-fits-all education models are not relevant in modern educational settings, especially given the increasing diversity of student backgrounds, needs, and skill levels (Many, Dewberry, Taylor, & Coady, 2009). Moreover, generalized research studies and data are not detailed enough to address the academic needs and educational concerns of specific demographic groups, including Latina/os. The Latina/o student population has been steadily increasing for many years, and in the 2009-2010 academic year, for the first time, Latina/o students comprised over 50% of the K-12 population in California (Ed-Data, 2010). In the 2012-2013 school-year, Latina/o students accounted for 52.7% of the K-12 population (Ed-Data, 2014). The shift in demographics brings new challenges that our educational system cannot ignore, for Latina/os are not only the largest and fastest growing group, they are also the least educated (Villalpando, 2010).

There is a documented achievement gap at all levels of the education pipeline, a complex phenomenon partially attributable to socio-economic status, linguistic background, and home-environment factors, and it is painfully real for Latina/os who are underperforming and lagging behind their peers (Contreras, 2010). “There is simply no harder job in education than closing this pernicious achievement gap. But there is also simply *nothing* more important” (O’Connell, 2007). Former California Superintendent of

Education O'Connell recognized the urgency of the academic disparity for Latina/os, as all educators must.

The inequalities do not stop at the K-12 level, and very much due to the complex issues in primary and secondary education, Latina/os remain underrepresented in higher education. This underrepresentation is true when looking at enrollment and program completion in higher education beyond the community college level (Fry, 2002). College enrollment rates for Latina/os are above the average for all high school graduates, though most of the college enrollment does not go beyond the community college level, and many enroll only part-time (Fry, 2002). Moreover, despite increased enrollment trends, there remains an alarmingly low rate of degree completion for Latina/os (Fry, 2002; Hurtado, Cervantez, & Eccleston, 2010; Villalpando, 2010).

Beyond the bachelor's degree, Latina/os lag far behind other groups in enrollment in graduate school (Villalpando, 2010). Fry (2002) posits:

Very few [Latina/os] are gaining a bachelor's degree and then moving on to the highest echelons of the American education system...Advanced education opens doors to the nation's best-paid and most influential careers. Indeed, such credentials are nearly essential to practice many professions from teaching to dentistry, from engineering to economics...Simply put, in American society today, attainment of an advanced degree markedly enhances the likelihood of entry into positions of leadership and status. (p. 8)

Some may believe that focusing on issues of race or ethnicity are divisive, but to ignore the disparities, discrepancies, and experiences of people of color holds a far greater consequence. In Northern California, the Latina/o population, most notably of

Mexican origin, continues to be underserved by the educational system at all levels (Children Now, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

The increase in the Latina/o population is not problematic in itself; rather, the problems that provide the background and need for this study include the inadequate education and lack of support of Latina/o students throughout the P-20 system (preschool through graduate school). It is a problem that so few Latina/os earn college degrees, and that there are few success stories and role models for younger students (Villalpando, 2010). This is an essential topic for all California educators, as this issue affects the majority of students in California.

The achievement gap begins even before elementary school and remains through the highest levels of education (Contreras & Gándara, 2006; Jones & Castellanos, 2003). Unfortunately, Latina/os, and specifically Latina/os who are in the process of developing their English skills (e.g., English learners, or emergent bilingual students) are not being adequately served in the current P-20 educational system (Children Now, 2010; Fry, 2002). Latina/os are less likely than other ethnic groups to complete high school or complete college, resulting in a smaller pool of those even eligible or on the path toward graduate degrees (Contreras & Gándara, 2006). The educational progress among Latina/os also varies by national origin. Latina/os of Mexican origin are the least educationally successful when compared to Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Dominicans, and only slightly more educationally successful than Salvadorans, yet Mexicans comprise 64% of the Latina/o population (Hurtado, Cervantez, & Eccleston, 2010). Thus, though Latina/os of many national backgrounds share similar trends of undereducation, the

largest group, of Mexican origin, is most at-risk (Contreras & Gándara, 2006, p.92). The oppressive colonization experiences, as well as patterns and reasons of/for immigration into the United States have contributed to the low academic achievement among those of Mexican background (Hurtado, Cervantez, & Eccleston, 2010). Furthermore, Latinas as a demographic are the poorest socioeconomically than any other group (Hernández-Truyol, 2003). This background and context leads to a problem addressed in this study: that there are relatively few academic success stories among Latina/os, specifically *Mexicanas*, who have successfully navigated the educational pipeline, including higher education and post-baccalaureate studies.

Need for the Study

The Latina/o population is a broad and heterogeneous group. This study will focus on a significant subgroup: Mexican American women (*Mexicanas*) who share at least four past experiences in common: 1) immigration to the United States from México, 2) experience learning English as a new language, 3) attainment of a baccalaureate degree, and 4) enrollment in a post-baccalaureate (graduate school) educational program.

Despite the numerous challenges and obstacles, a small but increasing number of Latina women are succeeding academically (Reyes, 2007; Miller & Garcia, 2004; Gonzalez, 2007). Latina/o students who continue their education beyond high school are commonly found to be inadequately prepared for the transition to higher education, in part due to linguistically and culturally subtractive curriculum (San Miguel & Donato, 2010). Those who successfully navigate the educational pipeline, complete college, and continue their education to pursue graduate degrees can provide insight that can benefit P-20 educators of all levels. There is a need to explore what themes and factors can be

identified that academically successful Latina students experience, and to share this information with educators. The specific focus on Latinas who have learned English as a Second language will provide insight into this particular demographic, which is important especially given the fact that women now outnumber men in enrollment percentages and graduation from college, and this holds true for second language learners as well (Burciaga, Huber, & Solórzano, 2010; Fry, 2002). There has been little research on Latina English Learners and their linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences (Buttaro, 2002). Academic access and academic success of bilingual Latinas are not only necessary for the long-term economic stability of this population, but also as social justice and equity issues that must be addressed (Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009). Gathering *testimonios de inmigrantes*, and learning from their experiences can help educators and others to understand and address the needs of this growing population (Latina Feminist Group, 2001), while simultaneously serving to unsettle the hegemonic tranquility of dominant discourse (Montoya, 2003). Furthermore, this study may also benefit the participants themselves, as well as younger generations of Latinas, for in telling their *testimonios* and sharing their stories, silences are broken and participants are empowered (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

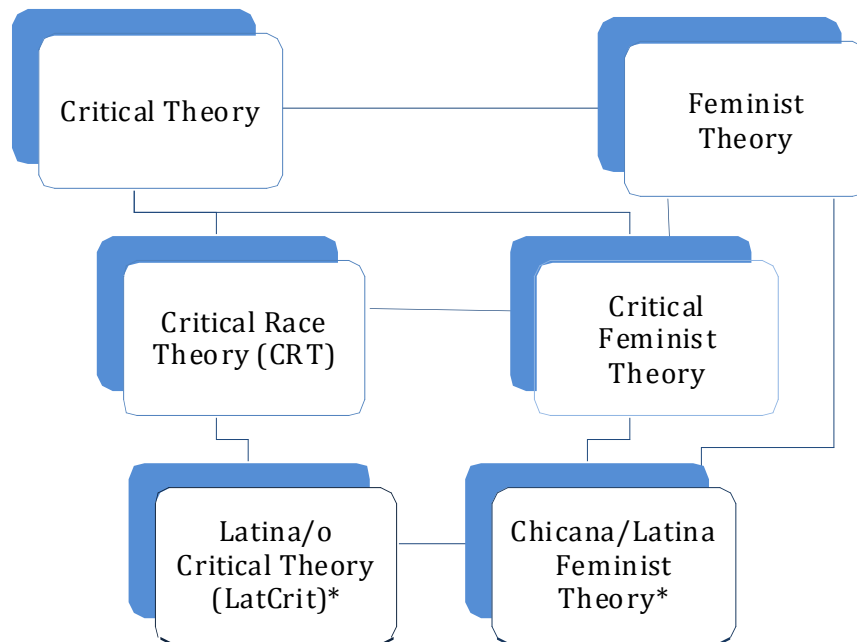
Theoretical Frameworks

This study is based on a qualitative approach of educational research, to explore the experiences of the participants in an in-depth manner. The racial, ethnic/cultural, linguistic, and gender backgrounds of the participants are defining lenses for this study; thus, the theoretical frameworks used to frame this study are Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) and Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory. Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010)

identify four theoretical traditions that are appropriate for studies of Latina/os and education, and among the four are both LatCrit and Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory.

LatCrit and Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory are not completely distinct from the frameworks they build upon, specifically Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Feminist Theory (CFT). Raced and gendered frameworks, in this case LatCrit and Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory, though distinct, are compatible, supplementary, and complementary, and are not meant to replace one other (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). Together, these two theories address issues of race, ethnicity, immigration, language, culture, gender, sexuality, and identity (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010; Villalpando, 2003).

The diagram below illustrates the relationships and connections between LatCrit and Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory, and additional closely related theoretical frameworks.



*Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) and Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory form the theoretical frameworks used in this study.

Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit)

LatCrit was born of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and builds upon CRT's strong commitment to social justice, yet based on a Latina/o consciousness (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010; Villalpando, 2003). Like CRT, LatCrit is based on the assumptions that race still matters, that racism is endemic, and that it even appears normal (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Critiqued as essentializing the Latina/o experience, LatCrit scholars are careful to clarify that this is not an attempt to essentialize all Latina/o experiences, which are known to be unique and multidimensional, with multiple intersectionalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, language, etc. (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010; Villalpando, 2003). Rather, LatCrit fosters a liberatory discourse centered on the experiences of Latina/os: in their own voices and based on their experiential knowledge (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010).

Experiential knowledge and lived experiences are of the utmost importance in LatCrit (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, 2003). This emphasis on experiential knowledge allows for storytelling (and counterstorytelling) as a valid and preferred methodology (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Villalpando, 2003). LatCrit is founded upon the concepts that the counterstories of Latina/os are counter-hegemonic (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010), that they can unmask and expose inequalities, and that they serve to challenge the academy's traditional view of our (Latina/o) experience and presence as foreign (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Montoya, Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, 2004).

Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010) identify storytelling as potentially the greatest contribution of LatCrit. LatCrit is not solely about race, but “the nature of truth,

production of knowledge, and the power to name one's reality" (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p.69). This powerful methodology can "capture the stories, counter-stories, and narratives" of Latina/os, as it draws explicitly on experiential knowledge (Fernández, 2002, p.46). Through counterstory methodology, including *testimonio*, which is used in this study, the participants' experiential knowledge and voices are esteemed and brought to the forefront (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010; Zarate & Conchas, 2010). These are stories that are not often told or listened to, and that can serve to challenge the stories of those in power (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, 2003). The *testimonios* are not only a source of knowledge, but also a source of empowerment. Through telling their *testimonios*, the participants' individual and collective truths are acknowledged and valued, while raising awareness and contributing to a deeper understanding of their experiences (Carmona, 2010). Counterstories have the power to build community, challenge perceived wisdom, open new windows into reality, and combine past stories with present realities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The act of *testimonio* coupled with a focus group *plática*, as this study utilizes, will allow for participants to be given several opportunities to share their stories, their experiential knowledge, and name their realities (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory

LatCrit and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) are the foundations for Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory. Like CRF, Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory challenges the feminist notion that there is an essential female voice and experience. As in CRF, Chicana/Latina Feminist scholars recognize that whiteness and maleness as a privilege is implicit yet not obviously perceived (Crenshaw, 2003). The phrase "women and minorities" identifies

marginalized groups, yet fails to recognize the overlap and multiple bases of oppression that women of color are subjugated to as members of both groups (Crenshaw, 2003). As in LatCrit, anti-essentialism is emphasized in CRF and Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory, yet there is also an acknowledgment that there may be certain degrees of essentialism in any theory. To reconcile this, Wing (2003) sought the ideal of being strategically essentialist, recognizing that the reality for any individual is far more complex than any one theory can address.

Critical Race Feminism (CRF) addresses the fact that women of color have experiences that are different from white women (whose perspectives are prevalent in Feminist Theory) and distinct from minority men (whose perspectives are prevalent in Critical Race Theory). Likewise, Latinas have experienced issues, such as those related to language and immigration, which are not part of the experience of other women of color. Similarly, Latinas have lived experiences that are different from those of Latinos, sometimes rendering LatCrit insufficient. Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory addresses these distinctions; thus, the most specific and applicable theoretical framework that recognizes the unique experiences, challenges, and perspectives of Latina women, while cautious not to essentialize the Latina experience, is Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory.

Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory also builds on CRF's intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 2003), with similar notions of multiple consciousness, multidimensionality, and multiplicative identity (Wing, 2003). At the core of these concepts is the belief that women of color do not experience their lives as white + color + gender. The identities do not add or combine neatly together (Crenshaw, 2003; Delgado, 2003; Wing, 2003). Rather, there is an intersection of multiple identities and oppressions, and it is impossible

to separate one from the other. To illustrate, Montoya (2003) explained that it was not possible to separate her female-ness from her Latina-ness, and she developed masks as defense mechanisms to hide both. Also, as Johnson (2003) theorized, oppression on multiple grounds (race, gender, sexuality, etc.) is always greater than the sum, so it is no surprise that women use masks and defenses to protect from subordination and marginalization. Unfortunately, this has resulted in Latinas as a group being “olvidadas,” or forgotten women, and it is time to unmask ourselves (Hernández-Truyol, 2003, p.66).

Within the Latina/o culture, there are delineated gender identities and roles that are enforced. There is pressure within *la cultura Latina* for individuals and groups to marginalize women who don't conform to the cultural gender roles (Hernández-Truyol, 2003). This results in the subordination and invisibility of Latinas who do not meet the expectations of being self-sacrificing, heterosexual, virgin mothers, saints, and superhuman beings (Hernández-Truyol, 2003). Latinas experience multiple “otherness” and oppressions, and can feel alienated within the Latina/o community as well as in the majority community (Hernández-Truyol, 2003). Unfortunately, silence begets silence, and not speaking out contributes to the silence of others (Gilmore, 2003). The Latina voice is needed, and Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory seeks to break the silence (Arriola, 2003).

Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory is influenced by border/borderland theories, which see borders as concrete and metaphorical (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). Borders symbolize boundaries found within the scope of experience of Latina/os; they are symbolic and influence identity and position in society, and greatly affect cultural citizenship (Bañuelos, 2006; Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). Cultural citizenship can be

seen as a struggle for a space of belonging, an attempt to find a space and place of acceptance, transient though it may seem (Bañuelos, 2006). This brings to mind a scene in the movie *Selena* (1997), where the actor Edward James Olmos, playing the part of Abraham Quintanilla, tried to reconcile the dilemma of cultural citizenship and the need to feel belonging and acceptance in two cultures. He taught his daughter Selena (played by Jennifer Lopez), “We have to be more Mexican than the Mexicans and more American than the Americans, both at the same time! It's exhausting!” The threat of exclusion from one or both groups led Mr. Quintanilla to the conclusion that it would be better to try to maintain (or feign) cultural citizenship in both, while not feeling like he truly belonged in either. For many others, exclusion from American society increases Latina/os ethnic identity, and alienates them from the majority culture (Bañuelos, 2006). For Latinas, gender role expectations add yet additional complex layers to the issue of cultural citizenship.

Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory, as heavily influenced by LatCrit, CRF, border/borderlands theory, and cultural citizenship theory, when applied to education research, has been “instrumental in uncovering Latinas’ previously unheard and non-mainstream education experiences” (Zarate & Conchas, 2010). This study will build on this foundation and use Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory, as well as LatCrit, as its theoretical frameworks.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and describe the experiences of Mexican American women who share at least four past experiences in common:

1) immigration to the United States from México, 2) experience learning English as a new language, 3) attainment of a baccalaureate degree, and 4) enrollment in a post-baccalaureate (graduate school) educational program. Individual narrative *testimonios* of personal and academic experiences will be explored and analyzed after being gathered through in-depth interviews, journal reflections, and a focus group (*plática*). This study will fill a gap in existing literature with information about a specific marginalized population, add to knowledge by giving a forum for the *testimonios* of participants, and inform educational practice, all three valid reasons for engaging in research (Creswell, 2008).

Research Question

This research study examines the following research question:

How have the experiences of Mexican American women, as conveyed through *testimonios*, impacted their educational paths?

- a. What are the memorable stories and perspectives that participants share?
- b. What resources and support did/do the participants access?
- c. What challenges did/do the participants face?
- d. What reflections do the participants make on their experiences?

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

The delimitations of a study narrow its scope. This study includes only Mexican American women who have been academically successful and pursued graduate studies. A second delimitation is the setting of the study. The location of the study is in one region in northern California, and all participants live in the same county.

The narrow focus and small sample size of 7-10 participants could be viewed as limitations of the study, but for this specific qualitative research design, the focus and specificity are preferred.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the understanding of the educational and personal experiences of Mexican American women who have successfully navigated higher education and pursued graduate school. The participants openly shared and thoughtfully reflected on their educational paths and experiences. A deepened understanding of these experiences is educationally significant, as it addresses contemporary, relevant, and complex issues that affect the P-20 education system in California, especially given the increasing Latina/o student population. A heightened awareness of specific student experiences may inform praxis (action and practice) of administrators, counselors, and teachers at all educational levels.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were made to protect the participants of the study. Appropriate consent from the participants and the University of San Francisco, including institutional review board approval, was obtained. As an ethical consideration, pseudonyms were used and confidentiality will continue to be maintained.

Definition of Terms

Labels are sometimes limiting, misunderstood, and misused; therefore it is necessary to define the cultural focus of this study. Following the emic tradition in research, participants' own terms will be used in the *testimonios* and analysis.

Academic success / academically successful: In this study, academic success will refer to the retention and successful completion of the academic program in which a student enrolls, whether an undergraduate or graduate degree program.

English Language Development (ELD): This refers to English as a second language classes taught within the K-12 system in California.

English as a Second Language (ESL): This refers to English courses taught to English learners at the postsecondary level.

First Generation: First generation refers to those who have immigrated to the United States; the participants in this study are first generation, immigrant women originally from México.

Generation 1.5: This is an ambiguous term that refers to those who were born in another country and immigrated to the United States as children, acculturating and learning English at a young age. Additionally, this term also identifies American born children who developed and maintained very strong cultural, linguistic, and identity connections with the cultural background of their parents, so that they identify with the first generation.

Latina/o: The inclusive term Latina/o is used in this study, as opposed to the term Hispanic. Latina/o will be used with mixed data for both genders.

Latin@: Latin@ is used interchangeably with Latina/o.

Latina: Will be used to identify women of color who classify themselves as Mexican, Mexicana/o, Mexican-American (with or without the hyphen), Chicana/o, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Spanish/Hispanic/Latina/o, including people whose origins are

from Spain, the Dominican Republic, or Central or South American Spanish-speaking countries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

Mexicana(s): The participants in this study were all born in México. The term *Mexicana* is used, unless individual participants specify another identifying term.

Plática: A part of the methodology is a focus group, which is referred to as a *plática*, or discussion.

Second Generation: Second generation refers to the children born in the United States of immigrant parents.

Testimonio: Translated as testimonial. This is a Latin-American genre that is used in this study. *Testimonios* are urgent and authentic narratives told in first person. This term is thoroughly discussed in Part III.

Background of the Researcher

I was raised in a family of educators that deeply values and prioritizes cultural and formal education. My mother immigrated with her family to the United States from México as a child, and my father's family has roots in Aztlán, lands that were once a part of México and are now part of the United States (Arizona). Though my grandparents did not have the opportunity to attend formal education past primary school, they sacrificed for a better future for their children and instilled the values of education in my parents, who passed these values on to me.

I have strong convictions about the importance of providing equitable, quality education to all students, and feel it is unjust for the learning and opportunity gaps in education to persist unaddressed. As a high school English and English Language Development teacher since 2000, I have seen firsthand that the majority of students who

have not been prepared to meet high school graduation requirements (especially the high school exit exam) are Latin@s. Without meeting high school requirements, these students are not able to access college preparatory coursework. I have met with parents, teachers, and even students themselves who are frustrated, yet do not know what can be done about the achievement gap, or how to move forward. I have also seen many students who have capacity and potential, yet who for many reasons have not pursued higher education. I have known relatively few students who have not only enrolled but also persisted in higher education. I believe educators have an obligation to learn from the experiences of our struggling as well as from our successful students, to inform and improve educational pedagogy, practice, and policy. Through this study, academically successful participants will voice their experiential knowledge, contributing to and building on the scholarship in this field.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study focuses on a significant demographic: bilingual *Mexicanas* who were English as a Second Language (ESL, post-secondary level) or English Language Development (ELD, K-12 level) students, successfully completed a bachelor's degree, and continued to graduate school. The review of the literature serves to provide an overview of previous and contemporary research studies that relate to the participants of this study. The major themes that are addressed in this review of the literature are: 1) Latina/os in the United States and 2) research in Latina experiences in education.

Latina/os in the United States

Latina/os are “the most educationally disadvantaged and economically disenfranchised member[s] of society in the United States” (Darder, Torres, & Gutiérrez, 1997, p. xii). The disadvantages are not culturally determined; rather, they are patterns of discrimination and oppression that date back to the Mexican American War, when México lost almost one half of its territory to the United States. Latina/os in the United States have been “dehistoricized” (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010), and this section begins with a brief history that will provide the background and context for contemporary issues.

Historical Events

Oppression of Latina/os in the United States has taken different forms and has had lasting consequences. This brief overview will focus on legal, linguistic, and educational events that have had significant impact on the current experience of Latina/os in the United States.

Dating back to the 1800s, key events impacted Latina/os and their education. Such events included the annexation of the southwest and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. These events resulted in “peoples residing in Mexican territory [being] conquered and brought under U.S. territorial or state authority” (Wiley, 2006, p. 92), leading to a loss of autonomy and independence. In 1885, California required all school instruction to be in English, in response to growing concerns about linguistic pluralism in education and public settings. Other states followed suit, so that by 1889, English-only instruction became the norm throughout the country. The 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson ruling supported a ‘separate but equal’ doctrine in education. The 1897 Texas court decision that declared Mexican Americans “not white” made it legal to segregate schooling, and many schools did so, even establishing separate schools. These oppressive and discriminatory rulings defined Latina/os as “the other,” and just as other underrepresented cultural groups, they were targets of discrimination, as well as unequal treatment and limited access to quality education.

To continue the trend set in the 1800s, in the early 1900s, “a majority of states passed laws officially designating English as the language of instruction and restricting the use of ‘foreign’ languages” (Wiley, 2006, p. 93), including Texas which in 1918 made it a criminal offense to use any language other than English in instruction. The fact that speaking Spanish could be considered a criminal offense demonstrated a grave lack of linguistic and cultural respect. In response to widespread discriminatory practices, the 1920s brought forth the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), a group who supported bilingualism and biculturalism and sought to maintain traditional Mexican heritage among U.S. Latina/os. Following, there were some advances in the state of

education for Latina/os. For example, a few years later, the Lemon Grove Incident of 1930-1931 in California resulted in a successful desegregation case, the first in the United States, outlawing the segregation of Mexican American children. However, at the same time in 1930, Texas legalized the segregation of Mexican Americans in education, and in 1935 California also allowed for the segregation of Mexican Americans due to their indigenous background (it was then legal to segregate Native Americans). There was instability in the quality and expectation of education for Latina/os. The inconsistency, inequality, and discrimination in education affected all young Latina/os who were in school during this time period, and it left a legacy of undereducating and underserving Latina/o students.

In addition to issues directly affecting students, there were social and political issues that affected Latina/o families during this time. In the 1930s mass repatriation (deportation) programs commenced, oftentimes ignoring citizenship rights of native-born citizens through the harassment and repatriation of citizens, legal residents, and undocumented alike (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010; Spring, 2001). Among those who remained in the United States, segregation continued, and to further complicate matters, waves of immigration were sometimes encouraged to support the agricultural regions in California and Texas, especially in the 1940s. The Bracero program, which lasted from 1942-1964, sought to contract male migrant workers from México. Two of the participants in this study have fathers who participated in the Bracero program. By all accounts, the labor and living conditions for workers during that time period were awful, and further contributed to the marginalization and oppression of Mexicans (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010). An unintended consequence of the Bracero Program for the United

States was that there was a rise in undocumented immigration, and it was not confined solely to male workers, but families as well. An issue that arose with the increase in Mexican immigrants after immigration had been encouraged was that: "...farmers did not want Mexican children to go to school...on the other hand, many public officials wanted Mexican children in school so that they could be 'Americanized'...farmers wanted to keep Mexican laborers ignorant as a means of assuring a continued inexpensive source of labor" (Spring, 2001, pp. 78-79). The desire of public officials to force assimilation was in direct contrast to the employers who wanted to keep immigrant families marginalized. Both of these perspectives illustrate a perceived dominance over Latina/os and a concerted effort to control and dictate how they lived their lives. In 1954, there were again mass deportations, identified as "Operation Wetback" (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010). United States policy was oftentimes contradictory and confusing for immigrants, as well as for U.S. nationals of Mexican descent. The legacy of contradictory and confusing immigration policies continues to the present day.

In education policy, the 1946 case of *Mendez v. Westminster School District* found that separate but equal facilities were inherently unequal because they denied children social equality, they fostered antagonism, and they led towards feelings of inferiority (San Miguel & Donato, 2010). This preceded the 1954 ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which formally reversed the *Plessy v. Ferguson* doctrine of separate but equal, and paved the way for education reform and desegregation. Between 1974 and 1981, the Supreme Court found that schools must accommodate non-native speakers of English, most notably in the 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* case that allowed for bilingual instruction. The 1978 *Castañeda v. Pickard* ruling established acceptable program

frameworks to support English learners. There arose public backlash to bilingual education, and in the 1980s and 1990s, “regressive language legislation resurfaced and became increasingly widespread...in policies aimed at undermining, dismantling, or repealing bilingual education legislation” (San Miguel & Donato, 2010, p.38). The 1990s brought forth several California ballot initiatives (Propositions 187, 209, and 227) which sought to limit the civil rights of Latina/os and immigrants, including initiatives to: limit crucial services (such as social, health, and education services) to undocumented residents, outlaw affirmative action, and severely limit bilingual education programs. More recently in 2010, Arizona implemented SB 1070, another controversial immigration law, as an attempt to limit and deprive the rights of Latina/os and immigrants. The continued and recursive waves of anti-immigrant and anti-Latina/o sentiment continue to impact all Latina/os in the United States.

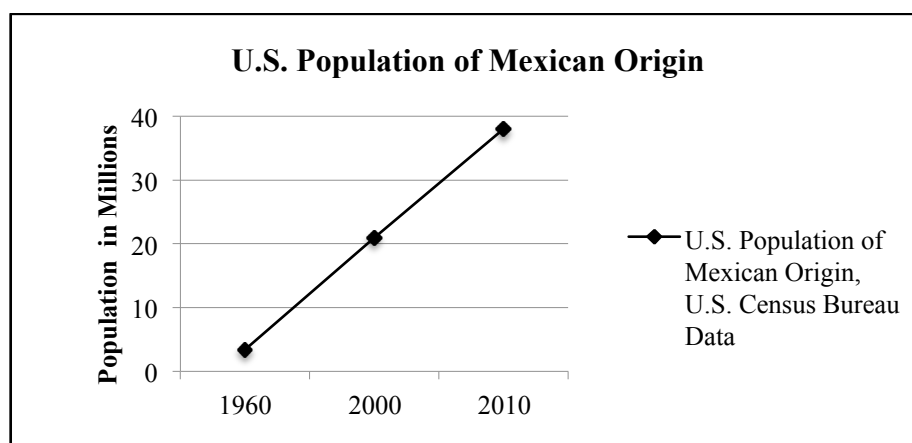
Education policy-makers do not seem to consider the implications and legacy of racism, oppression, and struggles that Latina/os in the United States (as outlined above) have endured and continue to face (Villalpando, 2010). Racism is still present, though it may be more covert and invisible now. This may be a continued factor in the undereducation of Latina/o students. The undereducation of Latina/os is not only a social justice issue, but also an economic, political and societal issue, given the growing population (González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Hurtado, Cervantez, & Eccleston, 2010).

Recent Latina/o Demographic Changes and Educational Issues

Since the 1960s, there have been dramatic changes in the size of the Latina/o population, and increased access to higher education. In 1960, there were 3.4 million people of Mexican descent living in the United States. This increased to 21 million by

2000, and the most recent 2010 Census data revealed a 54% increase to almost 32 million (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). Indications are clear that the Mexican American population has continued a dramatic growth trend (San Miguel & Donato, 2010). In addition to the population growth, there have been increases in access to education and power.

Figure 2. U.S. Population of Mexican Origin



Still, Latina/os remain severely underrepresented in positions of power and prestige in society, as well as in higher education (San Miguel & Donato, 2010). The gains that have been made in educational access and attainment do not mirror the large increases in population; in other words, there have been increases in numbers of Latina/os in higher education, but not proportionately (Bañuelos, 2006; Villalpando, 2010). We know that many Latina/os are pushed out or drop out of school (Burciaga, Perez Huber, & Solórzano, 2010). Many students do not successfully navigate the education pipeline; the pool of college eligible Latina/os is diminished as students do not pass on from one level of education to the next (Villalpando, 2010). Of 100 students of Mexican background, only 46 graduate from high school, 2 graduate from college, and .2 earn a graduate

degree (Villalpando, 2010). Most scholars focus on the well-documented Latina/o educational underperformance, but there is a also compelling need to focus on stories of success and hope, to understand the experiences and factors of successful students, so that we may gain insight and learn from their successes (Conchas, 2006; Gándara, 1982; González, Stoner, & Jovel; 2003; Ramirez Lango, 1995; San Miguel & Donato, 2010).

Recent Immigrant Experiences

The Latina/o experience in the United States is not singular. Many studies and much data combines the experiences of native born Chicana/os with first generation immigrants, while the experiences are quite distinct. While both immigrant and native-born Latina/os may struggle with similar challenges, the 40% of Latina/os who have left their homeland have another level of challenges that they must face (Burciaga et al., 2010). First, the decision to immigrate to the United States, especially for immigrants from México, is usually born of economic necessity. Also, Latina/o immigrants, especially those from México, are seen as coming from subordinate and inferior countries, and are met with racism and xenophobia (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010). After the oftentimes extremely difficult decision to leave their homeland due to extreme economic hardship for the opportunity to work here, many continue to live below the poverty line in the United States (Burciaga et al., 2010).

Immigrant children did not make the conscious decision to leave home to come to the United States, yet are often blamed and stereotyped as draining economic resources. Even the immigrant population is diverse; a most salient distinction is between those who “have papers” and those who are undocumented, who face even more challenges. It is

estimated that 65,000 undocumented immigrants graduate from high school every year (Burciaga, et al., 2010).

Irrespective of their legal status, all immigrant youth face inordinate challenges to succeed academically, yet they have been found to have more positive schooling orientations than U.S. born Latina/os, or “immigrant optimism” (Valenzuela, 1999). The transition to schools in U.S., as well as the transition to a new life and lifestyle is often impacted in part by previous educational experiences, oftentimes including a more strict and serious schooling environment in the home country.

The most significant way in which immigrant groups differ from U.S.-born youth – as well as from youth in mixed friendship groups – is their marked tendency to combine *empeño* [diligence] with other resources in a collectivist fashion...Immigrants’ collectivist orientation is enabled by the academic skills many acquired from earlier schooling experiences in México thus, in their peer group, human capital based on the level of schooling and cognitive skills attained in México become social capital. (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 159).

Newcomer immigrant students develop supportive friendship networks that allow them to experience school more positively than many U.S. born peers who do not often develop this type of collectivist support group. Still, this social capital is oftentimes not enough to overcome the challenges and exclusionary aspects found in their educational programs, such as tracking and racism (Valenzuela, 1999).

In a study of over 300 immigrant students (not all were Latina/o), (C. Suárez-Orozco, M. M. Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010) stated: “While there are similarities between the experiences of immigrants and those of the second generation, their realities

are distinct and must be separately understood” (p.4). The focus on the education of immigrant students and their journey in the United States provides insight into their specific experiences, perspectives, and needs. In their study, (C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010) found that most parents clearly identified improved and increased opportunities for the education of their children as a key factor in the choice to immigrate to the United States. Immigration was oftentimes not solely a financially-based decision, but a social one. Also, because the choice to migrate to provide increased opportunities was often discussed openly, students recognized the sacrifices their parents had made and were motivated to pursue their education, study hard, and contribute to the family. Contrary to popular stereotypes, Latina/os, and especially immigrants, greatly value education, and educational opportunity is often named as one of the primary goals that immigrant parents have for their children (Darder et al., 1997).

Latina Experiences in Education

For this review of the literature on Latinas and Education, I sought to review studies that focused on the experiences of Latinas in higher education, with an emphasis on Mexican or Mexican American women who had pursued, or planned to pursue higher education. Nine such studies are included in the following review of Latina experiences in education. It is important to note that I was fortunate to have identified *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life* (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006), a groundbreaking volume that includes several of the studies reviewed below. In *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life* (Delgado Bernal, et al., 2006), Delgado Bernal (2006) identified the need to focus on the successes of Chicanas/Latinas in higher education, moving away from the deficit and assimilationist body of research that has

been so prevalent. Delgado Bernal (2006) and additional *feminista* researchers continue to respond to Anzaldúa's (1990) call to "theorize the lives of Chicanas/Latinas" based on their own experiences (Delgado Bernal, 2006, p.77). That emphasis is an essential foundation for all of the literature reviewed below, as well as my present study.

Latina Identity

Godinez (2006) explored the experiences of 15-17 year old self-identified *Mexicanas* who had been born in México, had lived in the United States for less than 7 years, and who came from poor backgrounds. Different from studies of "at-risk Latina/os," Godinez conducted a strength-oriented study and created a methodology she termed *trenzas y mestizaje*, in which the strength and knowledge of the participants, by and about their own lives, were woven together. The methodology included *pláticas y encuentros* (which were described as interviews and focus groups), which is similar to the methodology in my study. The participants revealed "trenzas de identidades multiples" (Godinez, 2006, p.30), meaning that they had braids of multiple and complex identities that intersected. They had aspirations of success for the future, and recognized their rights, responsibilities, and power. They recognized cultural knowledge, and valued the knowledge their mothers and elders had shared with them. To Godinez, the participants epitomized energy and theory in the flesh. Godinez eloquently expressed that: "By shifting the focus from deficiency to an understanding of integrity and brilliance, the young Mexicanas' counter-narratives unravel the notion of the Hispanic dropout problem" (pp.33-34). Godinez cautioned that it is imperative that cultural knowledge be recognized as a foundation for educational achievement and excellence.

Holling's (2006) study explored the identity of 8 undergraduate Chicana/Latinas, including their racial, ethnic, cultural, sexual, and gender identity. Some of the participants expressed "pain" when reliving or retelling about past experiences, yet they felt an urgency to do so (Holling). They shared their experiences of being socialized as females (gender socialization), and all witnessed distinct gender roles at home, where men were authoritative and women were submissive and silent (Holling). They felt a strong responsibility toward their *familias*, and also felt guilt for their choices that were in conflict with their upbringing, and for not being able to meet all familial expectations (Holling). The undergraduate Latinas spoke of the difficulty of straddling two cultures, at times feeling deeply rooted in one, and then the other, continuously seeking to belong (Holling). Two main implications of Holling's study are: 1) the importance of identity and storytelling, and 2) the need to continue to explore Chicana/Latina students' critical consciousness.

Bañuelos (2006) investigated the gendered experiences of five Chicanas in MA/PhD programs. All of the participants were bilingual, and they reported feeling excluded and marginalized in their educational experiences. Bañuelos (2006) identified the theme of cultural citizenship, which she defined as "the contestation that takes place over spaces of belonging" (p. 98). The participants revealed an internal and external struggle with cultural citizenship: wanting to belong yet always struggling with identity and belonging. Though the participants were formally admitted to their graduate school programs, they still had the sense that they didn't truly belong in the same sense that other students did; they reported feeling like outsiders (Bañuelos, 2006). Bañuelos (2006) identified this as feeling like an outsider-within, and even a six-year PhD student still felt

the isolation, though she was clearly in academia. All of the students except for the lone scientist took it upon themselves to find or create spaces of community and belonging. They identified the importance of mentors, including their professors and peers. Their identity development was complex, and they were flexible and fluid with their multiple identities. One identity that they did not see for themselves was feminist; none of the participants identified as a feminist. Key findings include: 1) the critical need for spaces of cultural citizenship, 2) recognition that identity can be shaped by exclusion, as well as inclusion, and 3) the women articulated that Chicana representation in graduate school was inadequate, despite increases in undergraduate enrollment and in the population overall (Bañuelos, 2006).

Latinas and Academic Success

Patricia Gándara (1982) studied 17 Mexican American women who came from low socioeconomic backgrounds, yet succeeded in attaining professional degrees (PhD, MD, or JD). The purpose and focus of the study was to identify the background factors and experiences that highly educationally accomplished Mexican American women (all doctoral level graduates) shared in common. Gándara (1982) found Mexican American women to be the more poorly educated women in our society, and that few studies had been conducted to analyze the reasons for underachievement. Gándara (1982) found that there were more studies that focused on the underachievement, and she chose a distinct perspective: “to isolate factors that appear[ed] to contribute to *high* educational attainment” (p.168). Gándara interviewed 17 women who were U.S. educated, with professional degrees from prestigious universities, and who had come from a low socioeconomic background. The participants shared many traits in common with each other,

yet distinct from other Mexican Americans of their generation. Most of the women revealed that they had always felt different, and they had always been excellent students. At an age when many others their age were starting their families, none of these women did. They felt a responsibility to their families, and identified their families as being strong supporters of their endeavors. The women revealed that they had been well integrated in the Caucasian culture throughout their educational backgrounds (Gándara, 1982). Three main findings that the participants identified as having influenced their graduate level education were: 1) the importance of having strong mothers, 2) the support of their families, and 3) having attended integrated schools (Gándara, 1982).

In 1995, Gándara published *Over the Ivy Walls: The Educational Mobility of Low-Income Chicanos*, in which she again focused on factors that create academic success. In this volume, Gándara added a “new generation” cohort with which to update and compare to her 1982 findings, and she provided the context and background for her initial and follow-up study. First, Gándara (1995) posited that by grouping males and females together, as most studies tend to do, there is a broad picture painted, but gendered experiences are made invisible. Until that time (1995), very few studies focused on the education of women, let alone Mexican American women with high educational attainment.

In both generations of women that Gándara (1982, 1995) studied, about 20% had been placed in non-college track coursework in elementary or secondary school, despite being strong and motivated students. The students themselves had to self-advocate and fight to be moved out of low-track classes. In both groups, the Mexican American professionals had: 1) families who were extremely supportive. 2) parents who encouraged

their sons and daughters equally, 3) attended highly integrated schools, 4) extensive contact with non-minority peers, and 5) strong, encouraging mothers (Gándara, 1995). The second generation of women also differed in several ways from the first cohort; they did not have the same “superwoman syndrome” (intense pressure to exceed all familial and educational obligations and expectations), and many admitted that they had at one point done poorly in school (Gándara, 1995). They also experienced less college recruitment and support; the second cohort felt they had to rely on their own resources to navigate the educational pipeline. In conclusion, Gándara (1995) quoted one of her participants about her perspective of the influence of gender on her academic success: “If I had been born male, I probably would not have done as well because I would have resisted. I was able to put up with more; as a female, I accepted humiliation more” (p.109). This is an interesting claim, and it may support why more women matriculate to higher education than men.

Latinas and Higher Education

Ramirez Lango (1995) researched 60 Mexican American women in graduate programs at California State University Sacramento and found that much like today, though the educational achievement gap was narrowing, it was not keeping pace with the increase in Latina population. Few Mexican American women completed four-year degrees, and even fewer went on to graduate study. The primary goal of Ramirez Lango’s study was to determine the characteristics that influenced the participants to continue to graduate studies.

Ramirez Lango (1995) chose to focus on Mexican American women specifically because of the dearth of information on this particular group; most studies focus on male

and female Latina/os of all ethnicities, and rarely were Mexican American women studied exclusively.

Using a questionnaire and phone interview methodology, Ramirez Lango (1995) found that the graduate students shared social characteristics, parental and familial characteristics, and positive educational experiences. More than 90% of the participants reported feeling comfortable or very comfortable in a group of Caucasians, which was much higher than the undergraduate cohort that Ramirez Lango (1995) also studied as a comparison group. The dominant language they had grown up with was English or an even split of English and Spanish, and most spoke English as their primary (first) language. As in Gándara's (1982) findings, a majority of the graduate students identified their mothers as being their strongest support, and they maintained close familial relationships, with more than 70% reporting that their education was important or very important to their families (Ramirez Lango, 1995). Also in support of Gándara's (1982) findings, a majority of the graduate students had attended a high school that was majority Caucasian, and over 90% had completed a college preparatory curriculum in high school, yet over 80% had begun their postsecondary education at a community college (Ramirez Lango, 1995).

This study found that the typical Mexican American graduate student came from a traditional family and was well integrated into mainstream American culture. Ramirez Lango (1995) found that there was an expectation of assimilation among the women, and wondered at what cost this assimilation occurred. She wondered if it was necessary for women to shed their cultural identity to succeed in academia, and hoped that was not the case, and as others have demonstrated since, it clearly is not.

In another study on Latinas and higher education, González, Stoner, and Jovel (2003) conducted a life history study with 22 Latinas, to explore how relationships with family and school personnel impacted and influenced their pursuit of postsecondary education. The focus of this study was on the impact of primary and secondary school experiences. This study was founded on the premise that few studies have examined the education experiences of successful Latina students, as well as the assumption that a postsecondary degree is desirable and can lead to social mobility. The researchers noted that Latinas are the least formally educated ethnic group, and that the United States has a social and political interest in providing access to education to this important group.

Gonzales, Stoner, and Jovel (2003) interviewed 22 Latinas who were separated into two groups: 12 highly academically successful Latinas who attended selective four-year universities, and 10 Latinas enrolled in community college, all of whom had plans to transfer to a university. The findings of this study revealed that nearly every university student had been in a college preparatory support program, in addition to having participated in a Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program since elementary school. The early identification as GATE students opened the doors to rigorous coursework with college-bound students, including honors and AP courses in high school, and a high volume of social capital due to being immersed in the SAT and college-visit culture of their academically minded peers. Whereas the “postsecondary decisions of underrepresented students are limited due to their lack of cultural and social capital” (Gonzales, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003, p. 166), the university women were clearly exposed to and integrated in a culture that promoted and shared the cultural and social capital necessary to matriculate to prestigious universities (as Gándara, 1982, and

Ramirez Lango, 1995 also found). On the other hand, the students who were community college students all spoke of being neglected by counselors, being tracked into non-college-bound coursework (including English as a Second Language, or ESL), and wondering about their futures throughout high school. By the time they were juniors and seniors in high school, they had unknowingly limited their post-secondary choices to community college.

The implications of this study are that 1) educators should examine the identification and representation of Latina/os who are identified as GATE, as this is a gate-keeper program, and 2) educators should examine the role of tracking, especially in ESL programs.

Latinas and Education: Testimonios

Recent *testimonio* studies and articles have been inspired by the groundbreaking Latina Feminist Group's *Telling to Live* collection of *testimonios* (2001). Burciaga & Tavares's (2006) *testimonio* builds on the Latina Feminist Group's foundation and chronicles the experiences of two Chicana/Latina graduate students, who developed a strong sense of sisterhood in school, and who both matriculated to doctoral studies. They found that it was imperative to establish a sisterhood, to support each other, and to recognize that they are not alone (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006). Burciaga & Tavares (2006) "unmasked" who they were as ivy league master's students; they felt isolation and continued a struggle to negotiate a space and place for themselves. Like the Latina Feminist Group, Burciaga & Tavares identify as *testimoniadoras*, and feel the responsibility to their communities to tell their stories. Burciaga & Tavares stated, "*testimonios* of feminists of color within and outside the academy sustain our

hope...[allowing] us to breathe life into all aspects of who we are without having to divide ourselves into prescribed categories” (p.140). Burciaga & Tavares found that developing and sustaining a sisterhood was essential to their graduate school experience.

In another *testimonio*, Orozco (2003) reflects about her experiences as a Mexican American female undergraduate student. Orozco testifies about her fears, her determination, her risk of dropping out, and her caring *familia* who did not understand her educational experiences or how to best support her through her difficult times. Upon reflection, Orozco recommended early outreach programs specifically for Latina students, support systems within the university, and increased family outreach and information so that parents can understand the experiences that their children go through.

In Espino, Muñoz, & Marquez Kiyama (2010), three Latina doctoral recipients gave *testimonio* to theorize their educational journeys. They analyzed how their *trenzas de identidades multiples* informed and influenced their experiences. By weaving together their *trenzas*, Espino, Muñoz, and Marquez Kiyama found strength and power. Muñoz writes, “I feel my voice and my trenzas are needed in the academy...” (p. 815). Another theme is that they strongly feel that their success is their family’s success, and their community’s success as well. They find it helpful to share knowledge they have gained, and continue to assert their identities as they continue on their journeys in the academy, with hope to not only survive but thrive.

The nine contributions to the field identified above all focus on issues that affect and impact Latinas in their educational journeys. The themes of Latinas and identity, experiences in higher education, factors of academic success, and the methodology of the *testimonio* as explored in the review of the literature provide a rich foundation for the

present study, which will contribute to this growing body of work, focusing specifically on bilingual *Mexicanas* who have pursued graduate-level education.

Issues of Language and Second Language Acquisition

One salient issue that affects the educational experience of *Mexicanas* is the experience of becoming bilingual. The complex process of second language acquisition (SLA) is a challenge and a concern for many educators, and the entire education system (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010; Valdés, 2001). The complexities arise out of the multitude of factors that influence the learning, or as Valdés, 2001 found is often the case, “not learning” English. In addition to the difficulties of learning a new language, immigrant children may suffer from culture shock, identity development issues, separation from family, financial issues, peer pressure, family pressure, and much more. The complex process of learning a new language is not always the foremost issue in these children’s lives, and there are many reasons that children struggle with English language acquisition.

Prior to exploring second language acquisition theory, the power and importance of language and voice must be addressed. Issues that affect speakers of languages other than English in the United States are not solely based on language issues, but a myriad of additional sociocultural factors such as discrimination, oppression, disenfranchisement, and as will be explored below, the suppression of voice (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Macedo, 1997; Ruiz, 1997).

The Power of Language and Voice

The importance of both language and voice cannot be overstated. Cook (2008) states, “Language is at the centre of human life...through language we plan our lives and remember our past; we exchange ideas and experiences; we form our social and individual identities. Language is the most unique thing about human beings” (p.1). The ability to express, communicate, and comprehend thoughts, feelings, and experiences is inextricably linked to the abilities to create, use, and manipulate language. In addition to the power of language is the power of voice. According to Darder (1997), “Language is essential to the process of dialogue, to the development of meaning, and to the production of knowledge...and constitutes a major cornerstone for the development of voice” (p. 333). This study is based on the methodology of *testimonio*, for which the voice is of utmost importance.

People discover and reveal their authentic voice through language, yet there is a distinction between language and voice. Darder (1997) posited that “language must be recognized as one of the most significant human resources” (p. 333), and Ruiz (1997) indicated that the power of language is not only to define, but to decide the nature of one’s lived experience. Life, identity, cognition, experience, and voice are all framed through language. Language is used to frame voice, yet language doesn’t necessarily foster or validate voice. For example, in a predominantly monolingual society, the mere tolerance of additional languages on the periphery of society does not ensure that the non-dominant voices, or people associated with them, are accepted.

Language (Linguistic) Discrimination

It is not difficult to find people who espouse the belief that in the United States, the only language that should be used is English. The contemporary English-only movement is merely an extension of the long-standing discrimination against, and even corporal punishment inflicted upon, speakers of other languages. Language variety and dominance in a language other than English, rather than being seen as a benefit or advantage, is often seen as an individual failure on the part of the learner, a systemic failure in the education system, and a threat to American society (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010). However, the suppression and prejudice against all languages other than English is nothing more than another form of discrimination: “linguistic discrimination” (Attinasi, 1997). Linguistic discrimination includes negative attitudes towards languages, and speakers of languages other than English, and can lead to societal, personal, and psychological (internal) conflicts, as well as impact the access to and acquisition of English (Attinasi, 1997). However, as stated previously, language development is not the only issue, as Macedo (1997) discusses:

It would be more socially constructive and beneficial if the zeal that propels the English- Only movement were diverted toward social struggles designed to end violent racism and structures of poverty, homelessness, and family breakdown...if these social issues are not dealt with appropriately, it is naïve to think that the acquisition of the English language along will, somehow, magically eclipse the raw and cruel injustices and oppression perpetrated against the dispossessed class of minorities in the United States. (p. 270)

Not only does English-only discrimination ignore sociocultural issues facing immigrant and language minority populations, it “points to a pedagogy of exclusion that views the learning of English as education itself” (Macedo, 1997, p. 270). It is dangerous for educators to focus solely on the teaching of the English language, when there is much content that English learners need in addition to English. Moreover, solely because a student is not fluent in English does not mean that she/he is not educated.

Empowerment through Language

First, it is important to acknowledge that the term empowerment is oftentimes used as transitive verb meaning to enable. In this context, it is more closely related to self-actualization. Giroux & McLaren, as cited by Macedo, 1997, defined empowerment as a means “to interrogate and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than merely serving, the wider social order” (p.272). It is not a gift to the powerless, nor is it passive (Ruiz, 1997). Empowerment requires activity, as opposed to passivity, and agency.

Linguistic empowerment (Macedo, 1997) is critical for speakers of languages other than English to overcome marginalization due to race, language, culture, and gender of which they are oftentimes the objects. According to Valenzuela (1999), when language and culture disempowerment occur, this can lead to what she termed subtractive schooling. Ignoring the existence and the prevalence of negative attitudes and messages that undermine the worth of immigrants’ language, culture, and history leads to subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999).

Rather than remaining passive objects of many types of discrimination, through educational and linguistic empowerment, learners can become agents, or subjects, with the power to engage in dialogue with and fully participate in society (Macedo, 1997). Linguistic empowerment would never force the sacrifice of the native language, as many English-only proponents idealize, nor would it exclude proficiency in English. The students' language, whether English or another language, is a means and a "requisite for their empowerment" (Macedo, 1997, p. 271), and this is something educators must understand and foster.

Linguistic empowerment requires the valuing of linguistic and cultural diversity, and promoting cultural pluralism rather than assimilation (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1997). Rather than looking at immigrant students as having a liability and an insurmountable problem, we must learn to regard languages as resources, as invaluable human capital, and as doorways to success (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Educators should learn to build on this advantage that immigrants bring with them.

English Language Development and Proficiency

In a more inclusive society, linguistic empowerment would help ensure that native languages are maintained, developed, and nurtured alongside the simultaneous development of the language of power in the United States: English. Learning and acquiring English is complex and difficult, and though it affects millions of people, it is also an individual process.

English language proficiency has been found as the best indicator and predictor of positive academic outcomes (C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). The acquisition of academic skills in English allow students to not only achieve academically, but also adapt socially

as immigrants must not only struggle with language issues, but also with adjustment, acclimation, and acculturation. According to (C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010), “While conversational verbal proficiency can be developed within a couple of years, it takes, for most nonnative English speakers, five to seven [some studies indicate ten] years under optimal conditions to achieve the level of academic language skills necessary” (p. 42) to compete academically.

In a review of SLA literature, Valdés states that “older means faster in terms of rate of acquisition of morphology and syntax, while younger is better in terms of final level of attainment of accent-free, nativelike proficiency” (p.20). A critical or sensitive period hypothesis has not been proven other than for phonology. Young children learning a new language have a more basic level of language to learn to reach grade level, and they have more time. Despite the many distinctions, Valdés (2001) finds that children and adults go through similar stages and processes in second language acquisition.

Background characteristics that children have no control over that have been found to impact SLA are: parental education, especially maternal education, and the number of years of education in the native country (C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). In fact, in a review of the literature, Valenzuela (1999) identified the importance of academic competence in one’s primary language as a prerequisite to mastery in a second language. When students have a foundation and base of literacy skills, they are able to apply that knowledge to the new language if appropriate instruction is provided (C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Additional factors that Valdés (2001) identifies as impacting SLA are: age of acquisition (impacts cognitive maturity), language aptitude, motivation, social factors, personality, cognitive style, access and use of the second language (L2), and instruction.

(C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010), emphasize the additional factors such as length of time in the United States, the amount of maternal education, and student perceptions as well as educational quality.

The instructional component varies greatly from school to school, and even from class to class. The instructional program types that Valdés (2001) describes for elementary aged children are English-only, English-only with ESL, transitional bilingual education, maintenance bilingual education, and dual-language immersion. The English-only programs may include pullout programs where students leave the primary class for additional English instruction. Valdés (2001) also describes secondary instructional program types: newcomer programs, ESL instruction, sheltered instruction, subject-matter instruction for ELL students, and English-only. Regardless of the type of program, Valdés (2001) cites Wong Fillmore in a description of the necessary ingredients for language learning:

(1) learners who realize that they need to learn the target language (TL) and are motivated to do so; (2) speakers of the target language who know it well enough to provide the learners with access to the language and the help for learning it; and (3) a social setting which brings learners and TL speakers into frequent enough contact to make language learning possible. (p. 28)

Due to the fact that it is impossible to meaningfully teach language in isolation, Valdés (2001) suggests that improving educational programs for immigrant students requires an understanding of critical pedagogy and critical language awareness, especially when it is understood that education is never neutral. Education is inherently cultural, political, and social. Moreover, there are constant struggles that impact students

and educators and that make schools sites of constant negotiation and resistance.

Learning or not learning English leads to the inclusion and the exclusion from different aspects of society. To promote inclusion, there is a need for critical pedagogy in ESL that is “affirming and supportive” of students’ histories, lives, experiences, languages, cultures, and knowledge (p.158). Educators must learn to allow and encourage students to “change the ways [they] understand their lives and the possibilities with which they are presented” (p.158). In such a learning environment, students can learn to examine their realities and develop their own voices, which is something everyone deserves.

The societal and cultural attitudes of the learners, and those of their peers and families, are influential as well. The importance of attitude and motivation influences language proficiency, which in turn allows for more academic success. Immigrant learners who have strong hope, despite linguistic and socio-economic challenges, tend to place an emphasis on education that many second and third generation students have lost (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). This underscores the importance of stronger language education and programs to support English learners.

Segregation and Isolation

A recurring pattern among the participants in studies about second language acquisition is the theme of segregation and isolation. The physical segregation of students in their oftentimes racially and linguistically segregated neighborhoods, neighborhood schools, and tracked classes allows very limited access to English, and even less access to academic English. “Newly arrived immigrant Latino students who enter American schools at the middle school and secondary levels face particularly difficult challenges”

(Valdés, 2001, p. 16). A large number of students who enter the U.S. in middle school or later become ESL “lifers,” meaning that for the rest of their academic lives, these students never move out of ESL level classes. It is as if the ESL track is a separate world, segregated and isolated from mainstream English and rigorous content area instruction, which leads to the problems of segregation and isolation. In classrooms where most other students speak the same native language, in homes where the native language thrives, and in social settings with others who speak the native language, many newcomers are not able to access enough English to support second language (L2) development, especially academic development. New immigrant students tend to form friendships with others like themselves – particularly those who share their immigrant background. This natural type of self-segregation, coupled with institutional segregation through tracking, keeps immigrant students from their more acculturated peers, and this segregation results in significant educational implications (C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010).

Outside of school, in the neighborhood, in the home, and even at school, many immigrant students live in a Spanish-speaking world. It is as if the student’s world remains in the native language, and access to the English-speaking world is denied except for a brief time each day at school. Even at school and beyond, students are oftentimes linguistically isolated and provided with very few opportunities to engage and interact in English. Also, despite the value and recognition of the importance of learning English, newcomer students maintain linguistic loyalty to their native language and continue to speak it almost exclusively when communicating with family and close friends (C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). In a study conducted by C. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2010),

participants exclaimed: “it is my language; it is rich; I like it more. It is my native language and you can express more emotions” (p. 150).

At school, in common English Language Development (ELD) educational programs, students are placed in classrooms with other nonnative English speakers and do not often interact with mainstream students (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). In fact, they often take all of their classes together (C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). This institutional segregation isolates English learners and hinders their English language development. With less contact and exposure to fluent speakers, there is less language development, and their access to educational opportunity is reduced (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Additionally, the segregation keeps immigrant students from the mainstream experience, which is further isolating.

According to C. Suárez-Orozco, M. M. Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova (2010), “To learn a language well, one must have sustained interactions with educated native speakers of English, as well as good language instruction” (p. 158). Valdés (2001) also found that students were more successful in acquiring English when they had “opportunities to engage in real communicative interactions with fluent speakers” (p.147). One of Valdés’s (2001) primary recommendations to reverse the trend of students “not learning” English is that schools must address this issue of isolation of immigrant students to deliberately foster meaningful interaction with native English speakers. Valdés (2001) insightfully points out that while “many older immigrants claim to have learned English quickly in the classroom without special support,” it is most likely that they were not segregated or isolated from English speakers (p. 151). This is not to say that language development

support programs are not needed, but that the situation in today's classrooms and in today's schools is very different than even 10 years ago.

Conclusion to the Review of the Literature

The major themes addressed in this review of the literature were: 1) Latina/os in the United States and 2) research on Latinas and education. Collectively, this foundational knowledge provides a thorough contextualization of the present study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of Purpose

The voices, experiences, and perspectives of *Mexicanas* in the United States have historically been silenced and overlooked in education and educational research, and only recently legitimized as a valued field of study (Hernández, 2010). The historical exclusion and silencing of the Latina voice, and the historical underrepresentation of Latinas in higher education provide a context for this study, which focuses on academically successful, well-educated, wise *Mexicanas* whose stories are *ejemplos* (examples/ models) for educators and future generations. The bilingual participants have navigated the educational pipeline in a new country and continued to post-baccalaureate education. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the experiences of women who share at least four common experiences:

- 1) Immigration to the United States from México,
- 2) Experience learning English as a new language,
- 3) Attainment of a baccalaureate degree, and
- 4) Enrollment in a post-baccalaureate (graduate school) educational program.

Individual narrative *testimonios* of personal and academic experiences were explored and analyzed after being gathered through interviews and a group *plática* (focus group discussion).

Research Design and Methodology

Albert Einstein is often credited with saying, “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.” Not everything that can be

statistically aggregated or disaggregated is important, and the use of traditional quantitative methods is not the only accepted option for research. To emphasize the second part of the quotation, some of the most important things in life cannot be quantified. This study is founded on the principles of qualitative research. A qualitative study does not aim to prove or disprove a hypothesis, but to generate ideas to make us think critically (Holliday, 2010). In this study, I did seek to calculate, quantify, or statistically analyze the participants' lives. I sought to describe and analyze the stories that the participants shared, and to contribute a deep understanding about their experiences.

Qualitative methods are rooted in anthropology and sociology, and are known for rich, in-depth, descriptive, and interpretive data and analysis. One of the most valued strategies for data collection is the interview, or purposeful conversation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002). A primary concern with all data collecting strategies is gathering the richest possible data that show the full complexity and depth of the topic of study (Holliday, 2010). Qualitative data may include interview transcripts, photographs, field-notes, documents, official records, audio recordings, memos, journals, or artifacts. Qualitative research is not generalizable, nor is that an aim; rather, its goal is to better understand human behavior and experience through specific accounts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002). The setting and context are important, and a naturalistic context is preferred. There must be trust and collaboration between the participants and the researcher. The small, purposeful sample of 10 participants was not selected for generalizability, but for specificity (Patton, 2001). The research design is not rigid or prescribed, and may need to be evolving and flexible.

Restatement of Research Question

This research study examines the following research question:

How have the experiences of Mexican American women, as conveyed through *testimonios*, impacted their educational paths?

- a. What are the memorable stories and perspectives that participants share?
- b. What resources and support did/do the participants access?
- c. What challenges did/do the participants face?
- d. What reflections do the participants make on their experiences?

Narrative Research

This qualitative study was designed to better understand the experiences of the participants through a narrative *testimonio* research design. Narrative research is an inquiry strategy where the researcher asks participants to share stories about their lives (Creswell, 2009). Narrative comes from the verb “narrate,” which means to tell a story. According to Creswell (2008), “When people tell stories to researchers, they feel listened to...[the] stories reported in qualitative narrative research enrich the lives of both the researcher and the participant” (p.511). The collected stories, which in this study were gathered through interviews, a group *plática*, and journals, have the potential to empower the individual participants as they share their experiences. “When you have individuals willing to tell their stories and you want to report their stories...[they may] feel that their stories are important and that they are heard” (Creswell, 2008, p.512). They may also better understand and “work through” topics that they need to process (Creswell, 2008). Capturing the stories, in the language that the participants use, follows the emic tradition of research. The stories that the participants shared are representations and memories of

their experiential and lived perceptions and truths, and that is exactly what this study sought to explore. Life stories are subjective, and the critical narrative *testimonio* tradition honors this.

Testimonio

In this study, narratives were captured as *testimonios*, or “*authentic narrative[s]*, told by a *witness* who is *moved to narrate*” (Yúdice, 1984, p.4). In *testimonios*, the narrator typically speaks directly to the reader through the researcher in first person to preserve the voice of the speaker. The use of “I” reminds the reader that the participants are actual people who continue living and continue to have voice (Beverly, 2000).

Testimonio is a recent yet powerful and recognized Latin-American genre that can be described as a

verbal journey to the past that ‘allows the individual to transform past experience and personal identity, creating a new present and enhancing the future’ [Cienfuegos & Monelli, 46].... Through storytelling, one moves from individual, personal tragedy toward shared strength [Lykes, 729]. The speaker connects not only with her/his community of belonging but also with the human community who bears witness. (Brabeck, 2001, para. 8 &10)

Testimonio as a genre began in the 1960s, and by 1970, a Cuban publishing house awarded literary prizes to published *testimonios* (Nance, 2006). The genre was defined as the documentation of Latin American or Caribbean reality from a direct source, as told by the individuals involved (Nance, 2006). The speaker’s experience is representative of a larger class, a larger experience. Thus, *testimonios* embody both individual and group

memory, and may represent a collective or common struggle, though without claim to universal representation (Brabeck, 2001; Perez Huber, 2009).

A *testimonio* that many in the United States may be familiar with is that of indigenous human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú Tum. In her *testimonio*, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la consciencia*, (its English translation was entitled *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian woman in Guatemala*), Rigoberta Menchú Tum testified and bore witness to the violence and injustice that she, her family, and her people, suffered in Guatemala. Menchú Tum, who narrated her story to Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, began:

My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty-three years old. This is my testimony. I didn't learn it from a book and I didn't learn it alone. I'd like to stress that it's not only *my* life, it's also the testimony of my people.... The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too...My personal experience is the reality of a whole people. (Menchú, 1984, p.1)

One need only to look at this first page of Menchú's *testimonio* to see that her purpose was to tell the story of her people. Menchú Tum's testimonial narrative bore controversy years later, when David Stoll (1999) questioned the accuracy and truth of Menchú's accounts. Stoll (2001) maintained that he did not intend to represent Menchú's *testimonio* as a lie, but to point out that she was not a direct witness to everything she spoke of, and that not all of the facts were reported accurately (Stoll, 2001). Many scholars and activists supported Menchú, recognizing and honoring the fact that her *testimonio* was a form of collective memory that revealed larger truths (Lovell & Lutz, 2001; Beverly, 2001). Stoll

later (2001) conceded that in *testimonios*, context and perspectives are indeed important, that Menchú interpreted her experiences while telling them, and that the power of testimonial narrative is also a function of the power of the narrator. All of these, I believe, are vital elements that enrich and strengthen *testimonios*. The Menchú controversy is included in this overview of *testimonios* because it is such a foundational and well-known work. According to Pratt (2001), “Menchú Tum’s *testimonio* is canonical and foundational to defining the recent genre of Latina *testimonio*” (p. 41).

The Significance of Testimonio

The epistemological concept of truth is considered in the methodology of the present study. The perspectives, interpretations, reflections, and contextualized experiences of the participants were sought, and are presented as such, not as absolute truth. The methodology of this study does not include validation, fact checking, or triangulation of events that the participants narrate. I concur with Perez Huber’s (2009) assertion that the role of the researcher using *testimonio* methodology is not to determine truth or authenticity, but to explore and understand the experiences and realities of the participants. “The art of *testimonio* situates the subaltern as holder of knowledge and has served to guide Chicana and Latina scholars to trace down our own epistemological tools that draw from a theory of and in the flesh” (Flores Carmona, 2010, p.41). As holders of knowledge, and as women whose lives are theories in the flesh, participants have been entrusted to tell their truths, as messy or as contradictory as they may be. The *testimonios* themselves have become counterstories that disrupt the dominant narratives and discourse (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Like all people of color, *Mexicanas* have traditionally been silenced and invisible in educational research, yet this growing field of interest allows for the expression of their complex experiences (Delgado Bernal, 2006). Gathering *testimonios*, especially immigrant *testimonios*, not only contributes to knowledge on this topic, but also helps prepare teachers and educators to understand and address the needs of this specific population (Flores Carmona, 2010). Furthermore, *testimonios* provide an opportunity for the participants to bravely share their experiences to break past silence. The participants did not “give” their experiences to me or to anyone; they continue to own them. This study is not a retelling about the experiences of “others.” It does not follow in the painful, oppressive tradition that bell hooks (1990) describes:

No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you... (p.343)

This study serves to break the historical patterns of marginalization and oppression against immigrants, women, and Latinas; it empowered and provided a channel for strong *mujeres* to testify as to their perspectives and their experiences. The urgency is in the contextualization of this study; its offering of counterstories to the common perception that Latinas drop out of school, become teenage mothers, and make nothing but poor choices (Denner & Guzman, 2006).

In this study, nothing that the women revealed or included in their *testimonios* was trivial or unimportant. The emphasis on narrative *testimonios* connotes that everything the women shared is purposeful, intentional, and urgent (Beverly, 1989; Beverly, 2000; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Irizarry, 2005). Likewise, what the participants

chose not to share is also intentional, and some silences may not be broken (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

This specific methodology made the interview structure different than other qualitative methods; I used an interview guide but interviews were less structured than standard interviews to provide space for the participant to direct the flow of information, and to narrate her *testimonio*. The purpose was not for me to only gather and document lists of facts, but to listen to, reflect on, and learn from the experiences and stories of the participants, with the participants. Also, throughout the course of the *testimonio* interviews, I reciprocated and shared some of my own life experiences with the participants, some of who are known to my family and me. I chose not to remain a detached, impartial researcher, and the participants know why and how I deeply care about their stories.

Components of this Study

There are four components in this study: two one-on-one interviews with each participant, a focus group *plática*, and an open-ended journal that each of the participants and I kept throughout the study. I met with each participant individually for a one to two hour interview dialogue. The participants were asked to journal memories and thoughts that came to them after the initial interview. Then, eight of the nine participants came together for a focus group called a *plática* (a time to collectively talk about experiences). The idea of *testimonios* and a *plática* was inspired by the work of Perez Huber (2009), Flores and Garcia (2009), and Espino, Muñoz, and Kiyama (2010), who wrote about the need for and the power of *pláticas* among Latina women in academia. This *plática* took place at a special and lovingly prepared dinner, where each of the participants was a

special guest. I used a *plática* guide to help focus and initiate conversational topics, but the discussion was unstructured. Again, participants were asked to keep a journal of memories and thoughts that may come to them after the dinner *plática*. As a follow-up, I met individually with each participant to review transcripts and data gathered from the first two meetings, and also to discuss and analyze their journals.

Research Setting

About an hour north of San Francisco, California, in wine country, lays a picturesque region with rolling hills, mature oak trees, and vineyards. This is the setting for the present study: Sonoma County, California, where I have lived for much of my life. The Latina/o population continues to grow in Sonoma County, increasing from 17% of the countywide population in 2000 to 23% in 2006, and projected to continue to grow (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). There is an educational attainment gap in the county, with 32% of white residents having earned at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 10% of Latina/os, and 11% of white residents having earned a professional or graduate degree, compared to less than 3% of Latina/os (Lopez, 2002).

The region, which includes several small towns centered around a central city of 150,000, includes people from wide ranges of socioeconomic status, from the millionaire winery owners to the impoverished seasonal migrant day laborers. Many immigrants in this region moved to Sonoma County initially to work in the wine industry, a billion dollar industry that continues to marginalize and oppress many of its hardest-workers (Espinoza & Fricker, 2005). The participants in this study may have family members who are or have previously been fieldworkers, and this may be a theme or an obstacle that the participants share. There is marked racial tension and anti-immigrant sentiment, as

evident on blogs and comments in the local newspaper, with commentary that is overtly racist and xenophobic. Also, anecdotal stories that have been printed in the local newspaper include recent incidents that illustrate that racism is a part of life in Sonoma County. For example, a young Chicana in high school recently published an article detailing her experience of being threatened by her classmates who said that they could easily get rid of her by calling immigration. In another story, a wealthy Latina woman recounted her experience when she called local bakeries to order a special cake for her daughter's upcoming *quinceañera* (15th birthday party), and was told by an exclusive bakery that their cakes were most likely out of her price range, and that they "didn't do" quinceañera cakes (as if the idea was beneath them). This study offered an opportunity to learn about the experiences of local *Mexicanas* who live in this context, to hear their stories and experiences, and to bring them together to share their stories with one another.

Participant Identification and Selection

Snowball sampling, the method of asking key people for their recommendations of strong possible participants, was employed to select the women who met the specific criteria of: 1) immigration to the United States from México, 2) experience learning English as a new language, 3) attainment of a baccalaureate degree, and 4) enrollment in a post-baccalaureate (graduate school) educational program. Local educators were consulted for recommendations and referrals of strong participants who have completed post-baccalaureate education programs, such as teacher credentialing or graduate degree programs. To facilitate the gathering of participants in *plática* at a central location, participants were all residents of Sonoma County in northern California.

Introduction to the Participants

The nine participants in this study range in age from their late 20s to early 60s. This wide range of ages was selected to better understand the experiences of *Mexicana* women who were educated in different places and different time periods. Despite a range of forty years, the participants all had several key factors in common. They were all born in México, immigrated to the United States, learned English as a second language, pursued higher education, and continued their education after earning a bachelor's degree. All of the participants work in northern California the field of education as teachers, counselors, or program coordinators.

Valentina Guadalupe

Valentina Guadalupe was born in Michoacan, México. She was the third child of seven siblings. The family moved to the United States when she was seven years old. They moved after years of her father migrating back and forth for work. When the family left México, it was for economic survival, and the family always planned to move back, though they established roots in the U.S. and have remained here. Valentina Guadalupe's *testimonio* includes detailed memories of learning English and her passion and motivation to excel academically. Currently an elementary teacher, Valentina Guadalupe's *testimonio* also includes her high expectations for her first-grade students to love learning and education, and to begin their path to college.

Ita Silva

Ita Silva was born on a remote ranch in Michoacan, México. She is the 5th oldest sibling in a large family of 12 children. In Michoacan, Ita had years of experience and

knowledge working on the family ranch, and only one year of formal education. When she moved to the United States with her family, Ita was nine years old, and she first enrolled in school at the age of ten. In her *testimonio*, Ita shares her powerful migration story. She recalls the threads of support that helped her throughout her educational journey. A high school Spanish teacher for almost 20 years, Ita speaks of her passion to validate and empower her students.

Marina Angel

Marina Angel is the 5th child of six siblings, and she was the first person in her family to go to college. Born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, México, she moved many times as a child. Describing her family as “very migrant,” Marina’s family had a transnational identity; they moved back and forth between the United States and México throughout her childhood. Marina Angel’s *testimonio* reveals the importance of her faith, and of having people in her life who had faith in her. She details her experiences with adults who started holding her accountable and inspiring her in her youth. A current elementary school principal, Marina Angel believes all educators need to hold children accountable.

Lupita García

Lupita García was born in Oaxaca, México, and first moved to the United States with her family at the age of five. As the youngest of nine children, she often accompanied her mother to México for extended trips of two to four months, during which time Lupita enrolled in school. She continued to travel with her mother, and studied in California and in México, until fifth grade. Lupita’s *testimonio* reveals the importance of having positive mentors, developing independence, and becoming comfortable with one’s own voice. As a community college counselor, Lupita connects

her students with mentors who can support them just as her mentors have supported her.

Angelica

Angelica was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, and moved to the United States at the age of 6 months. When Angelica was a young child, her family moved often as her parents searched for work. In her *testimonio*, Angelica reflects on being tracked in school; initially tracked into low classes, but later into advanced and college preparatory classes. Her mother advocated for her to transition out of bilingual ESL classes, and she herself advocated to be tested for the Gifted and Talented Education program after becoming aware of it. She reveals her belief that being innately smart is not necessarily as important as learning to tap into resources. As a Program Coordinator for Migrant Education, Angelica believes that higher education pays off, despite the struggles and cost.

MaJulie

Of all of the participants in this study, MaJulie is the only one who immigrated to the United States as an adult, after being very well educated (bachelor's and master's degree in the engineering field), and working professionally as an engineer and manager in México. MaJulie grew up in the northwestern state of Sonora, and though she immensely disliked school, her parents demanded that she complete high school and university studies. MaJulie moved to the United States with her husband, "a gringo." In the United States, MaJulie earned a teaching credential and master's degree in Spanish and works as a teacher at the secondary and community college level. She believes that all educators need to provide students with love, care, and parenting.

Victoria

Being from Oaxaca, México is a source of pride for Victoria, though it hasn't always been. As the oldest of four children and a child of divorced and very strict parents, Victoria's childhood holds traumatic memories for her, including internal racism from her classmates who were negative and discriminatory toward everything and everyone from Oaxaca. It was not until she visited Oaxaca as a teenager (once she had legal residency) that she began to see her hometown and home state as a source of pride. She loves dancing ballet folklórico, art, music, and family, but she resents being called "cultural" for being who she is. After working as an instructional aide, full-inclusion aide, and substitute teacher, she decided to pursue her teaching credential and is now a kindergarten teacher at a Spanish language dual-immersion school.

Lluvia

A self-described resilient, strong, and caring person, Lluvia immigrated to the United States for the first time at the age of ten. She had lived and worked on a ranch and in the streets prior to immigrating, so she did not have formal education before the fifth grade. Lluvia loves books and learning, and she now has a bachelor's degree, teaching credential, and master's degree. She wanted to prove to her doubters and naysayers that she could not only pursue higher education, but be successful. Lluvia has worked in education and social services, and she recognizes the power that educators have in influencing students.

Xumakari

Xumakari is the elder of the group. In her sixties now, Xumakari moved to California from the small mining town of San Francisco del Oro, Chihuahua at the age of

eight. She remembers practicing English by imitating what she heard on television. She listened to how people spoke and tried to imitate what she heard. For her, school, fun, dance, music, religion (Catholic school student for sixteen years), and learning all complement each other, and she has worked to continue to blend academia, culture, and spirituality throughout her education, professional, and personal life. Xumakari has been a very influential and inspirational college counselor, teacher, and student advocate for many years. She helps students identify resources, mentors, and connections so that they can navigate the educational system.

Data Collection

The methodology of this study included two individual interviews with each participant, a focus group dialogue (*plática*), and journaling.

Interviews

The purpose of a qualitative interview is to reveal the participants' perspectives, and the interviews were conducted from the idea that "the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit...to gather their stories" (Patton, 2001, p. 341). The focus on the *testimonio* means that the participants themselves directed much of the narrative (Perez Huber, 2009), and they shared the most urgent memories they chose to.

The setting for each interview was a natural setting convenient to the participant, yet conducive to an in-depth and confidential interview. Preferred locations were at the participants' homes or offices; these personalized settings provided another layer of insight into each participant. Some participants preferred to meet at coffee shops or restaurants.

To conduct the interviews and encourage participants to direct their testimony, I used an informal interview guide format, with a conversational flow. This structure combined what Patton (2002) terms the “Informal Conversational Interview” and “Interview Guide” formats. It was necessary for me to prepare a guide with a list of questions to allow the participant to recall significant experiences, and to prompt for stories that would address the research question, but it was also important to gain trust and alleviate nervousness by maintaining a conversational flow that encouraged participants to share their stories. According to Patton (2002), the Interview Guide format “keeps the interactions focused while allowing individual perspectives and experiences to emerge” (p.344), and this facilitated the storytelling and *testimonio* process. Thus, it was also vital for me to be attentive and listen to the *testimonios* that the participants shared, even if they were not addressing the primary research question or questions from the interview guide. To do this, I was open to and flexible, and also worked to naturally bring the conversational flow to the focus topics.

Another factor that may have influenced the format and flow of the interviews is my prior relationship with the participant. I knew several of the participants prior to the study, and I kept this factor in mind as I decided the sequence and wording of questions for each interview.

Interview Protocol

At each initial interview, I referred to an interview guide with the research question listed, as well as a thorough list of questions to initiate and focus the dialogue. The initial interview guide included the following questions, though depending on the

flow of the conversation, not all were discussed in every interview. The questions in bold were asked in each interview to provide a baseline for analysis.

- 1) **Please tell about yourself. If someone really knew you, what would he/she know about you? Tell who you are.**
- 2) How do you define education? Educación?
- 3) Please share about your informal and formal early education experiences, in México and in the United States.
- 4) **Tell about your language learning experiences (when you developed your native language and English language skills).**
- 5) What is an event that you remember when you first began school in the United States?
- 6) How did your family upbringing impact your education experiences in México and in the United States?
- 7) **What resources and support do you think most impacted your academic path?**
- 8) **When you think about the challenges that you've faced in terms of your educational path, does one story or experience come to mind?**
- 9) When and how did you make the decision to pursue a graduate degree?
- 10) **How has your advanced education impacted your life, and your family? How do you think it impacts your future?**
- 11) What is essential to know about your educational experiences?
- 12) **If you were to write an autobiography, what about your education would you include?**

At the secondary (follow-up) interview, I asked questions to address themes that were generated from all of the interviews and from the group *plática*. Prominent themes that arose were related to the expectations that educators, family members, peers, and the participants themselves had while they were in school, and I was sure to address questions related to expectations in the follow-up interviews. We also discussed the *plática*, the participants' reflections or journal entries, and any additional information that required clarification. Another purpose of the follow-up interview was to provide a final opportunity for additional *testimonio*.

Focus Group: Plática

Focus groups have been found to be complementary to individual interviews, with distinct information emerging from each (Patton, 2001). The *plática* component of this study was selected based on the success of focus groups, yet the *testimonio* narrative was further emphasized in the *plática* by asking participants to share their *testimonios* (stories and memories) with each other. To maintain confidentiality, the participants agreed to honor and abide by a confidentiality code prior to participating in the group *plática*.

This component of the study took place after each initial individual interview had already been conducted. The *plática* included a special dinner, giving the participants the opportunity to break bread together. It was in a lovely home setting of one of the participants. The discussion and stories that were shared in the group *plática* complemented the data gathered in the individual interviews. The group discussion and collective *testimonio* allowed for direct interactions among the participants, where they were able to hear and respond to one another's *testimonios* and make additional comments (Patton, 2002). In this component of the research, I was a moderator instead of

an interviewer, and eight of the nine participants contributed to this open yet confidential, collective, and empowering approach to data collection. They shared stories together and responded to each other's experiences, including shared stories of success, of exclusion, of benefits, of privileges, and of challenges (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). The participants have generational, class, cultural, linguistic, and identity distinctions, and the *plática* began with that acknowledgement. Though it was a communal *testimonio* experience, as the Latina Feminist Group (2001) found, participants were given permission to say at any time: "That doesn't include me. My experience was different."

Plática: Focus Group Protocol

The purpose of the *plática* was to foster direct interactions among the participants, and for them to share their paths and stories with each other. Every participant agreed to keep the information in confidence prior to the focus group meeting, so that each participant could begin knowing that there was a trust and agreement that had already been established. There were norms established to guide the interactions, and the norms were elicited and established by the group on the day of the *plática*.

As the *plática* followed initial individual interviews, the themes generated from the initial interviews informed some of the questions for the *plática*, to make it relevant and specific to the participants. In addition to the specific questions that were developed after an initial analysis of the interview data, some of the guiding questions/prompts that were posed to the focus group were:

- 1) Please introduce yourself to the group.
- 2) Please share your educational paths with the group.
- 3) Please share your linguistic journey with the group.

- 4) Think about the stories that you shared at our initial interview. Share one of the most impactful stories with the group.
- 5) Listening to the stories of your *colegas* here, what feelings or thoughts come to mind?
- 6) How do you think your personal path may be connected to paths that others may have gone through?
- 7) What support do you think you can collectively offer to young women who are just starting their educational paths?

Participant and Researcher Journals

Thoughts can be fleeting, and I knew ahead of time that the participants or I would possibly have thoughts related to and pertaining to the study that came to us outside of the scheduled interview and *plática* time. I kept a researcher's journal from the beginning stages of the study. Participants were also provided with a journal to document their thoughts and reflections after the initial interviews and after the *plática*. We discussed any completed journal topics and themes at each follow-up interview, and the thoughts and reflections from the journals, as shared in the interviews, were part of the data collection for this study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Narrative research honors people's stories as data, honors the pure description of the storied experience, and can be empirically analyzed through narrative analysis (Patton, 2001). The act of narrating, storytelling, or telling *testimonios* maintains participant ownership of their own experiences, which are powerful and important enough to stand alone. This study does not only to share and document the stories, but

also analyzes and seeks to learn from the selected sample of *testimonios* and experiences. The data was interpreted using the process of coding, determining themes, and data analysis.

First, each initial interview was audio recorded. As soon as possible, the recording was transferred to a computer program, and transcribed word for word. Then, each recording was replayed and the transcriptions checked for accuracy. Once transcriptions were verified, I began the process of codifying themes, which were color-coded. Following the initial interviews, the data was analyzed to assist in the preparation of the questions for the focus group.

The *plática* was audio-recorded, and the same transcription and coding process described for the initial interview was followed. The data from the first interviews and from the *plática* was analyzed to assist in the preparation of questions for the individual follow-up interviews. The follow-up interviews were then transcribed, codified, and analyzed for themes.

The researcher and participant journals were also be analyzed to document thoughts and reflections throughout the research study. In each step of the process, the narratives that the participants shared were kept in their voice, in their words. I paid particular attention to strive to keep each participant's voice and perspective pure.

Instrumentation / Validity / Reliability

There are standards for instrumentation in quantitative studies to ensure validity. In qualitative studies, it can be said that the researcher is the instrument (Patton, 2002). The credibility of qualitative studies is founded in the research design, rich, thick description, transparency of process and analysis, and the competence of the researcher.

The accuracy and credibility of my findings are vitally important. To ensure qualitative validity in this study, I thoroughly documented each of the steps and procedures of the study, to provide rich, thick data description (Creswell, 2009). I am aware that my credibility as a researcher is not yet well-established, so to mitigate this I implemented the reliability procedures of: recording the interviews, transcribing and double-checking the interview data, and clarifying and confirming *testimonios* with the participants.

Protection of Human Subjects and Instrumentation

Appropriate consent from the participants and the University of San Francisco, including institutional review board approval, was obtained. As an ethical consideration, pseudonyms were used. Due to the open nature of the *plática*, participants agreed to maintain confidentiality of co-participants prior to the beginning of the study.

Digital recordings and field notes were kept to capture the stories and perspectives accurately. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed, as well as the *plática*. A researcher's journal was kept to document my thoughts, reflections, and preliminary analysis throughout the study. All of the data was safeguarded in a secure location to protect the participants.

CHAPTER IV

TESTIMONIOS

Introduction

The research question that guides this study focuses on four important aspects of the participants' *testimonios*: significant stories and memories that the participants feel impacted their academic success, the types of support they received, the challenges they faced, and the implications of these experiences. As discussed in the previous chapter, the act of sharing *testimonios* allows participants to maintain ownership of their own experiences. The act of telling one's *testimonio* connotes that everything that is shared is purposeful. In this chapter, I have created a space for each participant's *testimonio* to stand on its own, preserving the power and essence of each *testimonio* gathered. I feel it is very important to present each participant's *testimonio* in its entirety, prior to my analysis (in Chapter VI). In doing so, I honor the lived experiences, personal truths, and perspectives that were shared.

Thus, this chapter captures the stand-alone *testimonio* of each participant. Each *testimonio* was captured in the first-person voice to maintain authenticity and emphasize each participant's ownership of her experience.

Testimonios

Valentina Guadalupe

“¡*Si se puede!* Anything is possible; all it takes is hard work. If I can do it, anybody can do it!” ~Valentina Guadalupe

I was born in Michoacán, México as the third-born child of seven siblings. My

family moved to the United States when I was seven years old, after many difficult years of my dad migrating back and forth for work. When my family left our home in Michoacán, it was for economic survival and to unite the family, but the family always planned to move back to México someday. Despite the plans to return to México, we all established permanent roots in the United States.

I remember when I first came to the United States, I was seven years old, and I was kind of excited. At the same time, my family, we didn't know what to expect. I remember that the seven of us kids, plus our mom and dad, we drove for days. When we got here, we were in shock. We all wanted to go back. But of course, we didn't. We went to school, and I was supposed to be in second grade, but I started in a kindergarten classroom. I didn't understand the language. I didn't understand anything. Nothing. I walked in there, and it sounded like people were saying, 'Whatichu, whaticha.' My sister Irma and I used to practice at recess time. We would meet on the playground and I'd say, 'Whatichu, whaticha,' and she'd respond, 'Whatichu, whaticha.' That's what English sounded like to us. I remember just crying and trying to adjust to all of the new experiences. I didn't understand anything, and the teacher didn't speak any Spanish. Nobody spoke Spanish. There was a little boy name Miguel; I know he spoke Spanish, but he was embarrassed. He was embarrassed to translate, so he acted like he couldn't. I didn't have support, but little by little, the more English I learned, the better. I'm not kidding you, I think I learned English in a year. I think this is because I really had to learn how to speak and understand. I was so immersed in it, and it was about survival. I had to survive, so I really had to learn.

At home, my parents greatly valued education. We were a very typical, traditional

Mexican family. My parents were very strict, especially my dad. We couldn't go anywhere; the only time I went out in high school was to one turnabout dance. I didn't go to any proms or any of the other dances. That was just the way my dad's beliefs were. We were supposed to stay home, go to school, come home from school, and never go out. The liberty that we give our kids now, in this generation, is very different from how I grew up.

In México, my parents didn't have a lot of education. I believe they went to second and third grade. And even now, their English is not very strong. They always took ESL classes though. They have a thick accent, and it's been really hard for them, but they did try really hard to learn English. As a matter of fact, my mom, who is now in her 70s, she is taking ESL classes at the JC. I tell her that she is a good role model.

In fact, my mom always said that we needed to learn English. She would say that in order to have a good job, we needed English and Spanish. Education was very important to her, especially since she didn't have the opportunity to study beyond the third grade. And my father, he valued education too. He would never let us miss school. And he would always say that if we didn't get an education, we would be like him working in the fields. He would take us to work with him out in the fields and say, "See, do you want to work like this for the rest of your life?"

In high school, I was tracked in home economics and vocational classes. I actually took four years of sewing and cooking. The counselor never called me in to ask if I had thought about college. Never. Nobody ever told me that I could actually go to college and become something that I really wanted, something that I could be happy in. I took such basic classes; they were not challenging at all. I never had to do much homework. My

parents didn't know how to help me because they didn't know the educational system. Nobody ever saw me as going to college, not the counselors, not the teachers, not my classmates, not even myself. I didn't see myself as very motivated. Nobody ever told me anything about college. But when I was a junior in high school, it started changing. I was in the Adelante summer school program [through Migrant Education], and that is when one of the teachers really encouraged me. I was empowered there, and I finally thought about new possibilities for my future. I started thinking, "Maybe I will go to college."

Well, I didn't go to college after high school, not right away. After high school I started working at the bilingual radio station, KBBF, and I had two other jobs as well. I was working three jobs, and I didn't really know why. I thought, "Is this really what I want to do?" That's when I decided to look into the JC. I learned about the Mini Corps program [through Migrant Education], which would be a job where I could make money while I went to school. I really enjoyed it, and since it was training to be a teacher, I decided that's what I wanted to study. My Mini Corps coordinator is the one who encouraged me to transfer to Sonoma State right away, so I transferred after one semester.

I was the first one in my family to go to college, and one of the only one of my friends to finish. They started, but they dropped out. And I thought I was the most unlikely person to make it all the way through university, but I did it. Part of it was to prove that I could. I remember that my Mini Corps coordinator warned me that if I got married, I wouldn't finish my program. He really wanted me to wait one year until I had finished my credential program before getting married. I said, "How much do you want to bet that I will finish?" We actually bet \$100, and I won. I was very motivated, and

when someone tells me, “You can’t,” I prove them wrong. It motivates me more. I consider myself patient, determined, and not one to give up on myself easily. When people doubt me, I want to prove them wrong, to prove to them and to myself that I can accomplish anything.

That is what I hope to instill in my young students as well. As an elementary school teacher, I have high expectations for my first-grade students and a strong desire for them to love learning and education. I want them to realize that they have the potential to do anything. I often say, “If I can do it, anybody can!”

Ita Silva

“The less you have growing up, the harder you work to accomplish your goals; you learn to appreciate things later in life.” ~Ita Silva

I was born on a remote ranch in Michoacán, México. I was the 5th oldest sibling in a large family of 12 children. In Michoacán, I had years of experience and knowledge working on the family ranch, and only one year of formal education. When I moved to the United States with my family, I was nine years old, and I enrolled in fifth grade at the age of ten. I am now a high school Spanish teacher with two bachelor’s degrees, a teaching credential, and a master’s degree. I have a passion to validate and empower all of my students.

I had very little formal schooling in México. I grew up on a ranch where my brothers and I and our family grew our own food. There was no schooling, no electricity, no running water, and sometimes no food. Dad had probably 300 acres of land. It would be a 45-minute to an hour walk to get to my grandma’s ranch. It was pretty isolated. All of the people around us were related to us in some way or another. I remember learning

how to grow food and contribute to the family. Even though I was very young, in my family, from the time you can actually walk, you start getting some chores around the house. So, they would ask me to go get water. I remember when I was five, six, and seven years old, before we moved from the ranch to a little town, my sister and I were in charge of taking care of the goats. We were in charge of maintaining the food source. Then there was a huge drought, and we had to really take care of everything we had. Everyone in the family was responsible for something, for taking care of something. When we travelled, it had to be by foot. There were only trails. We had a couple of horses, but the horses were just to carry the things that we were going to sell, or to carry bulky things to my grandma's house. The rest of us had to walk. That was our main means of transportation. After a huge drought lasted a few years, we couldn't harvest enough to live on our land. We only ate tortillas and *chiles* for many years. So, we moved to a town.

Dad had already been coming to the United States to work. He had started coming here with the Bracero Program with one of my uncles. He would come to harvest in the United States, and then return to visit us for a few months. My dad and my older brother, who also worked in the U.S. at that point, started sending more money. Finally they saved enough money for a one-room house in a nearby town, so we moved from our ranch. When we moved, we still had very little, because we didn't know a lot of people and didn't have resources. There were still months when we didn't have cash or money to buy food. We had only taken a couple of chickens to the town, so we didn't have the same source of food that we had on the ranch. My mom became friends with the owner of a little store so we could get flour and ingredients for tortillas with credit until my father

sent money to pay them back. They were an incredible family that trusted us and believed that Dad would send the money, so they gave my mom whatever she needed to feed us at the time.

Not right away, but eventually, I started school. In México, parents have to pay for all of the supplies, and since there were quite a few of us of the age to go to school, it took time to save. None of us except for one of my older sisters had had formal schooling before. I went to first grade. All of us entered first grade; it doesn't go by age, it just goes by if you had attended school before or not. We started learning how to read and write. And in my second year in school, Dad had saved enough money for us to migrate to the United States. We understood that if we wanted to have food, let alone an education, but especially food, we had to go to the United States. I don't think we were thinking about or worried about the education component, it was just about food and clothing. It was the logical decision, and we didn't have a say.

I was nine years old at the time. There were ten of us travelling together. Two of my older brothers were already working in the United States. When it was time for all of us to go, Dad made sure we were safe. He had been across the border so many times that there was no way he would send us by ourselves. He saw women being raped and left behind at the border. He said there was no way we would go through that. He travelled with us because he would not let just any *coyote* cross us over, because he saw what would happen to families out there. He said there was no way he was going to lose any of us, so we all travelled together. The children, we used birth certificates from our relatives from San Diego.

Before we crossed, the children, including myself, stayed with some people in a

house. But everyone else, they had to cross the border walking, and with a *coyote* guide that my dad apparently knew. So us children stayed overnight by ourselves, and I remember very clearly that there were five of us with birth certificates, and we were all sick with the chicken pox at the time. I remember that was the hardest night ever. The youngest ones were crying and calling out for mom and dad, and I was sick, and so were my brother and sister, yet we had to take care of the younger sick children all night. There were actually over 20 children there who were under ten years old, and they were all in the same situation as us. None of us knowing if we were going to see our parents again or not. Eventually, my family did reunite, but other children were left alone, because their parents were caught and sent back to Tijuana. I honestly don't know how long those children were without their families, but it could have been for weeks. For us though, our dad made sure he would be on the other side when we got there. Other children didn't have this family network; they were there with complete strangers. Dad made sure we were safe. He knew of children who would be left with strangers for days and weeks, so he made sure to have somebody at each stop waiting for us when we arrived.

Dad had been working for a winery in Geyser Valley, and that's where we headed. That's actually where his planning stopped being really well planned. He didn't have a place of his own, just a room provided by the winery that he shared with other farm-worker men. It was just one little room, and they slept in cots and little sleeping bags.

That ranch where he worked was typical. My father always had very difficult back-breaking jobs. He was a carpenter, farmworker, tractor driver, etc. He told us that

school was very important for us, especially if we didn't want to be stuck in low-paying labor jobs forever.

Luckily, we only had to stay in the men's housing for a few days until we found a house. We got here in March, but I didn't attend school right away. Another family connected us to the church in town. Mom met some families who did charity work, and they guided her through the different school systems and enrolled us for the following year. They connected us with the Migrant Education program, who then helped us to settle and guided us to different support agencies. I was ten when I started school, and they enrolled me in the fifth grade.

When I started school here in the fifth grade, I didn't know how to read or write in either Spanish or English, because I had only been to school in México for a year and a half. At the time, there was nobody else in my class who was Hispanic, unlike now where it's 50/50. I was the only Latina Spanish-speaking person in the classroom. And the teacher did not know a word of Spanish either; I was isolated to sit in the back of the classroom because I couldn't do anything. They did have a pull-out ESL program. I remember there was one other Spanish-speaking boy at the school, in a different classroom. We were pulled out for about 45 minutes to work with someone with flashcards, and that's how I started learning English.

I can remember that there was nobody else that I could relate to or talk to, but there was a classmate who stuck to me like glue for some reason, Crystal. She was determined to communicate with me. So, she was with me the entire time, on the playground, in the classroom, everywhere. I think she was the one that I probably learned the most from as far as English and how to communicate and learn the language. It was

through Crystal. I don't know what ever happened to her, but I still give her credit, because, for the first six months, she was my only source of communication. She wouldn't give up. We would mime; we would sign; we would play. She was my thread to being immersed in the culture and the language.

It probably took a good year before I started really reading and being engaged in the classroom with activities. But after a year, things really started to pick up, and Crystal was still there. I remember being able to read a little after that first year. I think the combination of being immersed and the pull-out as a private tutorial helped. I also had the desire to keep hearing and learning English outside of the classroom, and I think that helped, too.

After the initial year of transition and acclimating to school in the United States, I found academic success. By seventh grade, I had adjusted well to school, and teachers began to recognize my potential. My teachers advanced me to algebra in my eighth grade year, which was rare during this time period when pre-algebra was the norm for eighth graders. I felt encouraged and challenged, and always found a way to excel and distinguish myself, whether focusing on being the best speller, or striving to be a top math student.

Even though my mother never had any formal education, she always motivated us to go to school and do well. She told us that education was the only way out of poverty. In a sense I think she felt trapped always having to be a housewife. She wanted us to have more choices. My mom kept every single certificate and recognition that I earned in school, and she brings them out every one in a while. Yes, my mom always valued education. She believed that if you were deprived of certain things, such as not having

any education in México, well that made you value it even more. After the first year, we would get As in our spelling quizzes and As in our math classes. We had determination, we put the time into it, and we did well. My mom kept everything; we were all honor roll students. Except for the youngest siblings, those who hadn't been deprived like we were; they didn't do so well.

Outside of school, my older sister and I spent a lot of time at a public bilingual radio station, KBBF. This was a safe and supportive place for us to spend time; my sister was interested in broadcasting and journalism, and the local radio station was her refuge. While there, I received tutoring and support. Everyone at KBBF helped me to make sure I was doing well in school and taking the right courses.

All of my family qualified for Migrant Education support services, and we were able to attend summer school through the *Adelante* program every summer. Another one of the services that Migrant Education helped with was job placement; I began working at the age of 13 or 14 and continued to work every year thereafter.

In high school, I didn't participate in sports or extra-curricular activities. My children always ask, "What sports were you in to?" I just tell them that we didn't have sports as an option. For two reasons. First, we always, even when we were really young, we always had to work. It was always very difficult for my parents to provide even clothing and the regular things, so all of us worked as much as we could. The second reason was that by the time I was in high school and had my daughter, I had to work to support her. My mom always helped me to take care of her, but we didn't have extra money. I had to work four to five hours after school just to pay for diapers and food and stuff.

I remember that when I was a freshman in high school, being with friends was more important than schooling. I met my boyfriend at summer school, in the *Adelante* Migrant Education program, and he was not focused on school either. That was the year when I got pregnant. I faced the challenges that come with becoming a mother at the age of 16. Sophomore year was definitely a turning point in my life. And now I look back, and I think it was a blessing. I know that having a child is a big thing, but I don't think I would have ended up being so focused later on. I would have just ended up doing the same thing I did during 9th grade, when I was more focused on friends and having fun than education.

I knew I was pregnant in November, but I didn't tell anyone until I finished the semester at school. At that time, I was almost five months pregnant, and I contacted the counselor to tell him. I talked to the counselor, Arturo Vasquez, and asked him what my options were. I told him, "I'm going to drop out for the semester." And he was the one who said, "Well, let's first look at what all of your options are." He was really good about it. He said, "How about if we do home schooling for one semester and then you come back in September?" I said okay and didn't question him at all. He didn't say, "You're going to have a baby and it's going to be very difficult." He just told me I was going to do home schooling and that he expected me back in September. He never actually gave me another option. He never gave me a way out. From then on, I became a better student. After returning, I started earning certificates again, those certificates that my mom holds so dearly. I ended up with a 3.5 GPA. I was determined, in my head, to go to the JC. Because of my daughter, I was already working four to five hours after school. But my sister, she had other plans for me. She had already gone to the JC and transferred to

Sonoma State. She said that since I had the grades, I should just enroll at Sonoma State, so I applied through the EOP program and got in. I applied and got financial aid to go there, and even after I saw that everything was going to be paid for, I was still not quite convinced. I didn't have a car, so I was worried about transportation, and I wanted to still work, but I decided to enroll to try it out. It was quite difficult the first year, to adjust to classes and working. But once I got set there, my sister told me to look in to working for Migrant Education Mini Corps instead of Carl's Jr. She told me that they were willing to work around my class schedule. So after that first semester, I was hired through Mini Corps to go to the schools and tutor migrant students. That really helped out with my school schedule and my finances too. This group was tight-knit and supportive; it was more like a family than an employer. We took trips, had gatherings, and formed a strong bond.

Until college, my daughter's father was still in the picture. He was in and out of my daughter's life those years in high school. He has a completely different view of his life and where he wanted to be. He basically started being more involved in gangs and not being part of our lives consistently, so when I ended up going to college I told him, "You are either going to be a part of her life, or not." And after that, that was it. Even though he lived in town, not far from us, he wasn't a distraction anymore, and I became more focused than ever.

I didn't want to wait long to graduate. I became more focused on just getting it done: as much as I could, and as fast as I could. I ended up taking 15 to 18 units a semester, plus summer school and any end of session courses that were offered. I told my counselor at Sonoma State, "I want to get this done as fast as I can. I have a daughter. I

want to get out to the job force.” Then he helped me to plan it out. EOP and Mini Corps really helped me out. I knew I wanted to be a teacher ever since my freshman year in college when I started Mini Corps. Within five years, I had finished my degree in Spanish Linguistics, a second degree in Mexican American Studies, and a credential. Again, I was really fortunate to have EOP, Mini Corps, and my sister there to guide me. Everyone helped me to make sure that I was able to complete my goal.

I had my son my senior year, before I even started the credential program. I never stopped working, and never stopped going to school. When my husband and I got married, he was 13 years older than me, we were ready to start a family. So I asked myself, “Am I going to stop and have this child, or just continue through? Can I continue and get my BA?” And after everything I had gone through, I knew that I could. So I got pregnant and continued going to school. I remember taking courses over the summer, and I couldn’t even fit my belly in the desks anymore. I only took one week off when I had my son. I just called the professors and told them that I was going to be gone the first week, and I was able to continue school without a break. I don’t know if I would have or could have done the same if I didn’t have family support. They were all very supportive.

I think it really helps when you have the right people around you. The network that I had really helped. I don’t want to say that it’s just my character. You do have to have something inside of you, *ganas* [drive/motivation], as they say in Spanish. But I really think that a lot of people might have the *ganas*, but there are other environmental factors that bring them down, and they don’t have the same safety network like I did. The times that I felt down or felt like I couldn’t do it, those were the times that there were people like my sister Celeste to say, “Hey, if I can do it, you can do it.” I think that’s the

difference. Having those people when you need them the most.

Marina Angel

“The most life-changing thing has been that somebody believed in me and expected more from me; they saw my potential. One person can have a real impact, and we have to see that potential in kids, and really believe in them. We need to help them to believe in themselves.” ~Marina Angel

I was born in Guadalajara. I was supposed to have been born in Los Angeles, but my grandmother got sick when my mom was pregnant with me, so my mom went to México to see her, and I was born while she was there. They brought me over to the United States illegally with my cousin’s birth certificate. During my childhood, I was basically back and forth to and from México. My family was very large with six children, and we were very migrant.

I grew up in a very strict household with a very strong father figure. My dad was very traditional and very strict. He has always been really ambitious. I think my siblings and I all get it from him - a very strong work ethic. He is a very proud man. He works really hard and he’s a man of really strong character. He has such integrity. I think he always instilled in us to be good people, and to be proud of ourselves, and to never be ashamed. It’s interesting because most people are very close to their mothers, and all of us are so close to my father. We kind of have him on a pedestal because he took so much time to talk to us. He lectured us all of the time and instilled a sense of pride in us. We are all pretty confident and we’re pretty secure, and I think that really has a lot to do with my dad always talking to us and really building us up. But he also used some reverse

psychology with us, too. I remember wondering, “Am I ever going to please him?” He always had very high expectations for us. He was all about character and being a person of integrity.

I think one of the reasons my siblings and I are all very bilingual is because my dad refused to ever let us speak to him in English. He would say, “*En esta casa se habla Español.*” (In this home, we speak Spanish.) He did this for us, because he is very intelligent. Later on, my siblings and I spoke English to each other, but we always spoke Spanish with our parents. Reflecting on this, I know that this was ultimately to my benefit.

Spanish was our home language, and it probably took me until fifth grade to really feel confident using English at school. Before then, I didn’t really experience it or participate. I know that when we lived in Stockton, I would get pulled out of class and get pretzels for anytime I said something right in English. It was basically a pull-out ESL program, and that was how I learned English in Stockton. When we moved to Sonoma County it was just immersion – there was no pull-out, no support, no nothing. But by then I already had some of the basic language skills.

I was very fearful all throughout elementary school. I was just really quiet and shy, and didn’t really talk or answer any questions. I remember being really embarrassed in fourth grade and going back even further into my shell, because I was asked to read aloud, and I mis-read. I was reading about West Virginia and I said ‘West Vagina.’ All the kids started laughing, and I had no idea what I’d said. I was always so worried about sounding right, but I had no idea what I was reading. I had no comprehension.

Due to our family being migrant and often moving due to seasonal employment,

we qualified for Migrant Education services and I attended summer school every summer as a child. Other than in the Migrant Education program, I never felt like teachers understood me or my family background, nor did they care to.

I remember a painful experience from the fourth grade when my teacher told my class that we could earn prizes if our parents went to an important school meeting. I was so excited, and I asked my mom to go, because she would never typically go to school meetings. She was like, "*Ay mi'ja, ni entiendo, para que voy?*" (Oh, honey, I don't understand, why should I go?) She never wanted to go. I remember telling her, "Please go. I'm going to get a prize!" And I remember as a fourth grade student feeling so sorry for my mom when she went. Not for myself, but for her. The teacher did not even say "Hi" to her or acknowledge her. She was completely ignored the whole time. So my mom was just with me, with no acknowledgement from the teacher whatsoever, and I felt bad for asking her to come. Yes, I did get my prize the next day, but there was no acknowledgement of her; it wasn't worth it.

Luckily, things changed for me in fifth grade, when I had a teacher who made a lasting impact in my life. In fifth grade, I had a teacher who was constantly calling on me and holding me accountable. At first, I was shocked and really nervous. Then, because I knew he was going to call on me, I'd be more prepared. I would pay more attention. I remember being uncomfortable in the beginning, and I kind of felt picked on, but I really started paying attention. I really think that made a huge difference for me educationally, just to be held accountable, and have somebody believe in me, thinking that I could answer these questions, and that I should be answering these questions. To this day, I really thank him for that because I think he was my turning point. By sixth grade I

became much more outspoken; I had much more confidence in myself and started participating more on my own. The more that people believed in me, the more I believed in myself. I really attribute it to that fifth grade teacher, because if he hadn't done that to me, I don't think I would have taken the risks that I did.

By the time I reached junior high, I had another important teacher influence my life. My math teacher, Mrs. Dodd, asked me to babysit her children. I was impressed that she was a Latina and that she was a teacher, because I'd never had any Latino or Latina teachers before. Even though she didn't really speak Spanish, I bonded with her, and I loved going to her house to watch her kids. My house was totally unstructured. My parents were strict, but everybody ate dinner whenever they wanted to; it was fend for yourself. There was no bedtime; everybody did their own thing. But there was total structure at her house. I was expected to feed the children at a certain time, and have them brush their teeth and put on their pajamas at a certain time. I loved the structure. I felt so safe there. I actually remember thinking, "I want to go to college someday, and I want to have a house like this. I want my kids to grow up with structure like this – it feels so safe to me." She was really the person I wanted to be like, and I knew that I wanted to go to college to have that kind of life.

Junior High is when I started participating in school activities. I was voted the junior high vice president and I wanted to be involved in school government to have some influence and to make decisions, which is still part of my personality today. In high school, I joined the cheerleading squad. This choice had both positive and negative consequences. The positive outcomes of being involved in cheerleading included representing the school, and doing something that I loved to do. I got to meet a lot of

people and travel. Plus, the summer cheerleading camps at U.C. Davis introduced me to what college might be like. U.C. Davis was the first university that I set foot on. I remember walking around campus going, “Oh, I would love to go to college. I would love to be able to come here and take classes here.” I thought it was a beautiful campus, and seeing all of the college students, including Latinos, really inspired me and allowed me to envision myself there. I remember looking around and thinking, “I want to do this someday.”

I did not anticipate the negative and cruel feedback that Latino peers gave me for participating in cheerleading. I was the only Latina on the cheer squad and I had to deal with demeaning comments from other Latino students. I was called coconut, wannabe, sellout, and slut on an ongoing basis. I think that many of my peers didn't understand me. Nobody in high school knew that I spoke Spanish. Whenever someone found out, they were kind of shocked that I spoke Spanish and that my parents, and I, were born in México. They were surprised, so I think they saw me as really assimilated, even though I truly don't think I was. My father would encourage me and would always tell me, '*Tu demuéstrales que los Mexicanos también pueden. Diles que eres Mexicana.*' (You demonstrate that Mexicanos can do it, too. Tell them that you're Mexican.) But to be really truly honest, I was a little fearful, because there were a lot of people who didn't like me. I felt I had to hide a part of me. They would walk by and call me slut and stuff, or coconut, or wannabe, and a lot of Latina girls were really mean. It kind of instilled a little bit of fear. And I think it kind of confused me because I don't even know if those people that called me that were as connected culturally as I was. We went to México every year and I watched Spanish television. I felt like I was really culturally connected,

but it was a different side of me and something that I did more at home with my family.

When it came time for me to make plans for what I was going to do after high school, I knew I wanted to go to college. Being from a very strict family, however, I was really worried that my parents might not let me go. I never felt that my parents had high academic expectations for me or my siblings. I don't remember my parents asking me about classes or homework, but they knew that schooling was important. My father would tell me, "*Si estudias va ser para tu beneficio, no para el mio.*" (If you study, it will be for your benefit, not mine.)

I'm the fifth of six kids, and the first to go to college. I had no idea what I was doing, but I knew I wanted to go to college. I wasn't sure that my parents would let me go, so I didn't tell them. I applied and did everything on my own, and figured that if I got in, then they would be more likely to let me go. If I had asked permission, my dad would have said no. None of the girls left the house until they were married; my dad was very traditional, very strict. So I just did everything on my own and really had no idea if I was doing it correctly. I didn't really have anybody, a mentor, or anybody to ask, so I basically did the paperwork and was thrilled when I found out that I could go to Sac State. I had figured that was the only place my dad would let me go because my uncle, his brother, lived there. I finally told him that I was going to college, and surprisingly he didn't put up a fight or anything. I was really surprised that he didn't really put up a fight. I was expecting a real fight to let me go to school because nobody left, especially the girls. And I was the first one to leave the house period. My brothers hadn't even left the house. So I was surprised that he didn't oppose it or really get in the way as I was expecting. I was really expecting him to say, "No, you're not going. You're not leaving

this house until you get married.” I would always be praying, “Oh, let him let me go.” He supported me by allowing me to go.

I went to Sacramento State University. There was a period of culture shock as I became accustomed to living independently. It was also financially very difficult, but my family was very proud and supportive, and my siblings even contributed financially to pay for my tuition and books when I almost stopped attending due to financial difficulties. I believe in divine intervention. I think I was supposed to be there. That is why, despite many cultural and financial challenges, I was able to complete my degree program.

At the age of 20, when I was still in school, I got married. Many things are blessings in disguise. I was able to avoid stress related to dating or partying, and was able to focus on school. I worked full-time and went to school full-time, and focused on my family and finishing my degree program. Even after I was married, I would travel the two hours home to Sonoma County to visit my family almost every weekend. This was a family expectation, but I was always very close to them, and visiting them weekly was a way to keep close ties.

When I graduated after my fifth year, it was an extremely emotional time. When I graduated with my B.A., my parents were incredibly emotional; actually, everybody was. My older brother couldn't believe that I had done it, and he was really proud of me. At the same time, the happy moment made me sad, because my siblings were all really intelligent, and they could have done it too. I think that they're very, very articulate and have a lot more qualities than I do, and I feel like they were cheated of the college experience because their high school counselors didn't talk to them or encourage them.

They were never called in to the counselor's office to talk about whether they wanted to go to college or what they wanted to do. None of them had that experience except for me.

The most life-changing thing has been that somebody believed in me and expected more from me; they saw my potential. One person can have a real impact, and we have to see that potential in kids, and really believe in them. We need to help them to believe in themselves. One way is to give them multiple opportunities to try something that is out of reach for them, so that they can see that they can do it, that they can achieve it. Educators, parents, and peers should encourage more Latina/os to participate in activities that challenge cultural stereotypes. Being the only Latina cheerleader was difficult, but if more students are encouraged and supported, cultural stereotypes and boundaries can be broken.

Lupita García

“¡No te dejes, échale ganas!” ~Lupita García

I am the youngest of nine children, and I was five years old when we first migrated to the U.S. from Oaxaca, México. I started Head Start preschool in Sonoma County and was held back in kindergarten. I didn't know English, and my family was the only long-term Mexican family at a very small, rural school. Other migrant families enrolled their children seasonally, and I myself left seasonally too – I would go down to México with my mom for two or four months at a time, but my family was the only Mexican family who stayed year-round.

My parents and older siblings spoke only Spanish, and we didn't learn English until we went to school. The school held me back to help me with English, and from there I think I did fine. Out of my siblings I felt like I had the stronger language skills,

and maybe that's because I started earlier in school. I learned English through immersion. I don't recall exactly the learning process; I just know that I didn't fit in. I know that a lot of people teased me because I didn't speak correctly. I don't remember any special program, but it was a sink or swim environment. Even in third and fourth grade I was pulled out of classes, not specifically for English, but to help with all subjects. I didn't understand the purpose of being pulled out of class, but the teaching assistant who taught me was really nice and helpful, so I thought it was cool.

During these elementary school years, I was the only Mexicana. I felt that in order to be accepted by my peers, I had to try to hide my Mexican culture. I remember being really embarrassed of knowing that I was Mexican, because I was the only one, and it just came with stereotypes. I would try to hide that my parents were farmworkers, which just made it even more embarrassing. They would come from the fields dirty and sweaty and smelly, and I recall ducking when my parents would drive through town to go to Safeway. I remember always having to go with them and translate, and I would be really embarrassed.

I tried to assimilate, and did not speak Spanish at school. I had friends at school, but was never invited to social gatherings or to spend the night at friends' houses. I had one close friend, but was never invited to her big slumber parties.

When I went to junior high, which was a bigger school, for the first time, I met other Mexican students. I was like, "Wow, I'm not the only one!" I kind of looked, for them, whitewashed – even in how I spoke. But I desperately wanted to make friends with people I could relate to. I remember I was in shock when I first realized that there were other students who spoke Spanish. I asked them, "Do you speak Spanish?" And they

answered, “yes.” And I would ask, “Are your parents from México?” I remember thinking, “Yes, I’m so excited that these people exist!” Because in my world at the time, they hadn’t existed. I thought, “This is good. I don’t have to hide that part of myself anymore.” I was forced to choose sides because my friend from elementary school, she actually told me that I had to choose who I was going to hang out with. It was going to be either them [from elementary school], or the new people I was talking to, meaning the Mexicana students that I had met. I didn’t really cut all of the ties with the old friends I had, but I definitely didn’t hang around with them as much as I would have if I didn’t fit in with the new group. I identified with them much better.

Another change in junior high was that I began contributing to the family’s finances. I began cleaning houses so that I could take care of personal expenses and contribute to the family. In addition to starting to work at a such a young age, my relationships with older siblings were atypical as well. The age difference between me and my oldest sibling was eighteen years. My older sisters were more like mothers or aunts, and my brothers took on parental responsibilities, especially with my education. One of my older sisters was in charge of going to parent meetings at school. I don’t remember my dad saying anything about school, and he didn’t have to, because my older siblings took on that role. My mom gave them that power, and sometimes I resented my older siblings for it, because they were very harsh. All of them would question anything I would do. I was very limited with what I could do.

My dad never said, “You’re doing great in school.” Or even ask how I was doing in school. It was assumed that I was going to school, and that was all he needed to know. I remember one really impactful situation was in seventh grade. When I got my first

report card with letter grades, I was so excited and proud. I had all As and one B in math. When I showed it to my older brother, the one who took on a father role, he just said, “Why do you have a B?” And I felt really hurt because I had been so excited. I wanted him to share that excitement and be proud of me, but he just questioned the B. That’s when I really wanted my parents to be my parents and understand and be proud of me, because I think they would have been, instead of my brother being my surrogate dad. I know that he probably just wanted what was best for me, and he himself was not good at school, so maybe he didn’t want for me to fail like him. It was really hurtful though. After that, I was always worried about not doing good enough.

In high school, I felt like I was on the right track. I participated in school clubs and athletics, and it was a worthwhile struggle to get permission from my family to play school sports. I begged for permission, and I was able to play volleyball, which greatly improved my confidence. I was also actively involved in the Mexican American Youth Organization – MAYO Club.

I remember talking to my high school counselor only a few times. He would tell me, “You’re a good student. You need to go to the JC.” But that was it. He never told me what I needed to do to get there. I didn’t even know what questions to ask. I didn’t even know what the requirements were to attend junior college. I knew that people around me were taking the SATs, and I was a little nervous wondering why I wasn’t taking them. But at the same time, I didn’t question it too much. Not until my MESA (Math, Engineering, and Science Achievement) class with Mr. Ramirez. He was the one who kept saying, “You need to go to college. You need to go to college. You can be successful.” He really believed in us, and I think that was probably the biggest thing for

me, and for a lot of us who had him as a teacher. And then I finally started questioning and thinking, “Maybe I need to go to college! Maybe that’s the next step for me.” When the counselor from the community college, Luz Navarrette, came to talk to our school. Mr. Ramirez told her, “Lupita is smart. She can go to college.” I told the JC counselor, “My parents are going to need to talk to someone about this. They’re not just going to let me go to college. They don’t even know what the JC is about.” When I explained this to the counselor, she was willing to come to my house and visit with my parents. She sat and talked to them about college. My mom, after talking to her, said, “Okay, I’m going to trust that you’re going to take care of my daughter.” And that is the only reason I was able to attend the JC.

I went to the JC for three years before transferring to the university. While at the JC, I was in the Puente Program. That was probably the best thing I ever did in college – join the Puente Program. It was very supportive. I met friends from college that all had the same goal – to graduate and transfer. We had similar interests and we kept each other focused on school. And thank God for my counselor, Luz, because she is the one who would tell me, “Okay, you’re almost done here, you have to consider where you’re going to transfer.” I decided to go to Sacramento State because I knew I wanted to experience life independently. If I went to Sonoma State, I would have just added more years to not being a truly independent person. I knew my mom wouldn’t want me to go to Sacramento, so I just told her that’s where I needed to go. I didn’t want her to find out about Sonoma State and even think it was an option, because then that would have been where I would have had to go. It was really tough. And then, it was expected for me to come home every weekend. It was hard trying to become independent during the week,

but then every weekend I would go right back to being the young daughter, and everything that comes along with that role. It was really difficult, but I stayed there for a year, and then, unfortunately, my father had a stroke. That meant that I could no longer stay, because, being the youngest, it was my duty to come back and live with my parents. My mom had never learned to drive or speak English, so I became that vehicle for her. I moved back and ended up transferring to Sonoma State. When I started at Sonoma State, there were different challenges, including financial aid. I don't recall exactly what happened with my financial aid, but it was not going to be able to pay for my classes, and I wasn't going to be able to continue. My older brother actually paid for my semester. I had been working part time, but it wouldn't have been enough. I was really fortunate that my brother was able to help me. Then, after finishing my bachelor's, I went straight to the credential program. My family was fine with it; they didn't question it. I just said, "Mom, the next thing I have to do is apply for the program." And she would say, "Okay, you know more than I do." So there wasn't any resistance when I continued on to the credential program and the master's program.

It wasn't easy, but I thank the mentors that I met along the way who were always willing to take me under their wing. Fortunately, those mentors were always working in some kind of program that supported the mission of under-represented students continuing in education. I happened to tap into really strong programs and met the right people at the right time. And now, I'm actually working for the Puente Program myself. I know first-hand that it is a great resource for the students to make them realize their potential.

I believe that educators need to start encouraging students at a younger age, especially those who don't see themselves as college-bound students. I know that family pressure to be academically successful led to high expectations for me, but I still didn't know how to visualize what college would be like. Students need to begin to visualize and imagine themselves going on to college, and they need the self-confidence to do so. Also, parents need to be taught how to be involved in their children's education. It is not enough to simply tell them to get involved, but to share what that means and what that looks like.

A significant realization that I've had is in regard to the power of my voice. As I'm getting older I'm finding that I have a stronger voice. I think that growing up, I went with the crowd. Growing up, I never had a voice. I didn't even realize I had an opinion about things. I'm now realizing that my ideas and thoughts matter, and I have a voice, and right to use my voice. It took some time to find independence that I never had as a sheltered child.

One word that would describe my educational experience is luck. I believe I've had good luck – I feel fortunate to have friends, family, and teachers who have supported and pushed me, even when I didn't believe in myself. I had the right friends and connected with the right programs, and I feel lucky to have had so much support.

Angelica

“It's not about being smarter than others, it's knowing about resources and how to use them. We need to instill a belief in children that they have unlimited ability. We need to help kids believe in themselves to know that everybody has the ability and the

intelligence. We need to teach them to use all of the resources available to them.”

~Angelica

I was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, México, but I was brought to the United States when I was six months old, so I didn't grow up there. My parents took the risk of moving to the United States before I was born. My mom had residency, but my dad didn't. So my mom would work in LA, and in México. She went back and forth, so one of my brothers and I were born in México.

My dad couldn't find good work or really settle down. We moved a lot until I started kindergarten. We moved around a lot because of my dad trying to find work. I am the third child, so my brothers had already been in school when I started kindergarten. They already knew some English from having gone to school before me.

When I started school, preschool was a nightmare. I think they only took me a few times because I couldn't handle it. I didn't like being away from my mom, or the food they tried to make me eat. And then kindergarten – it was stressfull because I had a teacher who didn't speak Spanish. She was really old and mean. And since I hadn't stayed in preschool to get used to being in a classroom all day, that made it harder. I remember not really understanding what was happening. I don't know if it was that I didn't know English, or if it was the fear of the teacher who wasn't very nice. I remember her being very stern, and my not responding fast enough upset her. I just feared her. I didn't want to stay there. I didn't feel comfortable. I didn't feel at home. I felt really out of place. I latched on to the bilingual aide in the classroom. Finally by Halloween I started settling in. But those first few months were really traumatic. And when it was time to go to first grade, I remember the first day I told myself, “I'm not going to cry this

year. I'm going to be good."

I was in a bilingual program up until third grade, and then I noticed that the kids in my group were reading books that didn't seem as interesting as the kids in the other group. They were reading chapter books and we were reading little, thin books. I didn't get the whole thing that they transition you into English slower. I told my mom, and she took me out of the bilingual program. My mom had to go duke it out with the teacher because they didn't want to let me out. She had to go talk to the principal, and they finally took me out.

After that, in fourth grade, I remember – I was such a weird kid – the other kids in my class were in the gifted program. And I would think, "How come I'm not in the gifted program? I'm just as smart as those kids!" Can you believe that – this was when I was in fourth grade! And so, I remember going to another school on a Saturday to be tested for the gifted program. They did this test with shapes and puzzles, and they were like, "Ok, you're gifted." So then they let me in to the program. Then, I didn't really like it, because it was after school. I had to stay and do extra science projects. I had just wanted to prove that I was just as smart as those other kids.

In elementary school, I was expected to perform well, to do well. There were high expectations of me to get good grades and to learn it all. I did put a lot of effort into what I was doing. But it wasn't super hard for me. I think it all just came a little bit easier for me than for others. They never had to tell me to do my homework; I was always a really anal kid. My mom being involved made me feel more comfortable in school. My mom was always involved with parent groups, and she would volunteer at the elementary school.

When I was in sixth grade, we first moved up to Sonoma County. Before that I had gone to school in Los Angeles. We moved to a rural valley, and this was another traumatic experience for me. I didn't know anyone, and I didn't have friends, and this was how I started middle school. I had to ride the bus for an hour to get to school every day, and it was so small. Everybody had known each other since kindergarten, and I came in and didn't know anybody. It was such an adjustment and such a different environment. The first thing I asked the principal was, "Do you have a gifted program, because I'm gifted." That was really important to me.

I became more aware that I was Mexican when I went to school there. In Los Angeles we had white kids and white teachers, but it wasn't much of an issue. Probably because in East LA everything else seemed to be Latino – the stores, the people, everything. So moving to this small town was culturally shocking. Everything was very defined and segregated for white kids and Mexican kids.

I remember in middle school, probably seventh grade, we had one critical thinking class with Fernando Nugent, may he rest in peace. He would ask us really challenging questions, and always ask us to explain why. I remember there not being any other Latino kids in the class; it was me and all white kids. And I would wonder where all of the other Latino kids were. Well, they were in another English class. I remember telling my mom, "I don't want to be in this class. I want to be with the Latino kids. I want to be with my friends." She told me, "You're not going to move just because you want to be with your friends. You need to stay where you are." From then on, I wasn't in the easy classes with my friends. I had to stick with the white kids in this other track. For me, it was the right thing. It just makes me sad that those other kids, their potential wasn't

explored. It seems like they were stuck there because they were Latino, because they were ESL students, because they didn't advocate for themselves, and because that other class was easy. The teacher for the easy class, Mr. Scarf, was a horrible teacher. All he did was have fun with the kids and he never had any expectations for them. It was sad, but they didn't realize that. Mr. Scarf is no longer there, because he actually said, "These kids don't need to be educated because they are just going to work in the fields." That started a controversy, and before long, he was gone.

By high school, we were clearly tracked. There was a divide – "You're the nerd, and you're not." There was a college track and a high school graduation track. If you were in the college track you had to do more work. Most of my friends were on a different track – they were just trying to graduate from high school. It was a really small school, so we were actually in the same class, but we did different assignments and were graded differently. The kids who were in the college track didn't really become my friends. Well, maybe temporarily, but I still felt divided from them. I can remember them having money or being cheerleaders. It was a different reality. They had Swatch watches. The clothes they wore, the way they were, and the way they carried themselves was so different. You could tell they had money. So, no, we didn't socialize together.

When we were growing up, my mom made all of our clothes. Well, except for my brothers – they got to buy clothes. I remember really wanting to be able to buy a pair of jeans. I thought about my future and wanted to be able to buy clothes and have things, and not worry about the rent. I remember when I was younger, I would wonder, "Why am I in this situation and that kid isn't? Why doesn't Santa Claus bring me cool gifts?" I felt like I needed to visualize myself somewhere else, in another kind of life. Other kids didn't

seem to have these same worries.

In high school, I actually tried to get more of my friends to be part of the college track. I asked them to take the SAT, to apply for college. I think that people who get stuck and don't move forward – those are the people who can't visualize themselves somewhere else. They are afraid, or they think they can't handle that level of responsibility. I finally realized what I really should have been asking, which is why weren't they on a college track the whole time. I started to really think about this late in my junior year and early in my senior year. And that's why now, I think we constantly have to remind kids that they can make changes and be somewhere else. They just need to see themselves, to visualize themselves, somewhere else. They need to believe that they deserve more than that. I think some people don't believe they deserve more, and that keeps them stuck. Self-doubt holds a lot of people back. My mom raised me to know that I deserve more, to have trust in myself that I could do it, and to ask questions. That's what needs to be developed.

As far as other activities in school, I was in the Ballet Folklórico, I was on the student council, and I played volleyball in junior high. I didn't like sports, and I didn't really care much for the student council, but I did them. I liked the MAYO Club [Mexican American Youth Organization]. The school I went to was so segregated with Mexicans and non-Mexicans. Being part of the MAYO club, and Ballet Folklórico dancing – that was all due to me wanting to be in touch with my identity. I wanted people to know that it's a positive thing to speak Spanish, and it's ok to not be rich.

Senior year was really stressful when it came time to apply to colleges. I went to a tiny, tiny school, and there were only 22 in my graduating class. Out of our 22, I think

only three or four of us went straight to a university. I wasn't stressed about applying to college, but I was worried about getting in somewhere and then having to move. It was culturally overwhelming. I got in to Berkeley, Stanford, and Sonoma State. My mom said that I should just go to Sonoma State so that I wouldn't have to go so far away. One of my teachers told me that I had a great opportunity to go to a really good school, and why wouldn't I go. I decided that I couldn't not go, which in retrospect isn't the best way to make a decision. But that's why I ended up going to Stanford. Once that was my decision, my parents were very supportive. No one in the family had moved out to go to college before.

Being from such a small town, everybody knew where I was going to school. They made a big deal out of it and I felt like everyone was expecting me to do well. I did have one teacher, before I left high school, who said, "Well, you got in, but we'll see if you can make it through. We'll see if you graduate." I still ask myself, "Why would somebody say that?" And there was also another student, a white student in high school, who said, "Oh well, she only got in to Stanford because she's a minority." And I just thought, "Really? You really think they accept whoever without talent or skill?" I wanted to show both of them! But I think that most people cared about me and believed that I could do well. They saw me as the smart one. And when I got to Stanford, everybody is the smart one there! It's not about you anymore, and I quickly realized that.

When it was time to go away to school, I didn't know what to expect. I did expect myself to be successful. I expected to graduate. But it was another culture shock. Luckily, Stanford had Ballet Folklórico there too. That was important to me because I didn't know how my classes would go, but I knew I could dance well. They had a freshman support

advising program. But, they treated everybody the same. I don't think that they should treat first time, first generation freshmen the same as other students who didn't even think they needed the group at all. Because there I was, and I thought I needed more support! I felt like I needed much more guidance. I was still a nerd, and I had to figure it all out by myself. I felt like I was on my own.

I felt like I had to learn a new culture, and it was hard to navigate. Looking back, I think it was positive for the most part. It definitely made me a stronger person. I was presented with challenges that I was able to overcome. But when I look back, sometimes I wonder if I should have gone to a community college first to get my bearings beforehand. I still feel like the first two years of college were kind of a blur. I think that overall I made good choices and I was able to pummel through it.

If only I had known more; if only I knew then what I know now. I would definitely take more advantage of the opportunities. I knew people who walked out with two degrees in four years. And I know that I could have done that too. It's not that people are smarter; it's that they know how to use their resources. And I really believe that about people. I mean, yes, of course there are some people who aren't so bright, but I think that for the majority of people, it's just that some of them figure things out sooner.

By my junior year I got it together and was able to graduate on time with my BA in American Studies. Then, I started grad school two weeks later. I hadn't thought it through – that I wouldn't have a break. I had to take a break; I needed a breather. So I came home for the rest of that summer, and then I went back in the fall, which was difficult because I had to reintegrate myself into the cohort of students who had already bonded through the summer. But I did finish my master's degree in Education in Secondary

Teaching from Stanford. And now, I'm 38, and I still wonder about my own education. I used to think that I wanted to go back and get a doctorate degree. But I'm not sure if I have the energy to do that right now. And then I wonder, "What would I do with a doctorate? Where would I go from there? What would I use it for?" I don't want to jump into school again without having a good plan. But I know that if I wait for a good plan, I'm probably not going to go back.

I was listening to the radio recently, and they were talking about how in debt students are when they graduate from college, and they were alluding to the fact that it's not worth it. But I look back, and I can acknowledge that yes, I was in debt when I graduated. But I paid it off and now I have a better quality of life. Yes, it was worth it. Education does pay off. It is worth it. In the moment there might be a struggle, but for us Latinos where there is a scarcity of professionals who are bilingual and in education, it is definitely worth it.

MaJulie

"I believe that education has to be interesting and have meaning. It has to make the mind work. Education has to include creativity, passion, and love." ~MaJulie

I grew up in the northwestern Mexican state of Sonora. When I was young, I didn't like school. I strongly disliked school. That's why I was always in a rush to finish. In my family, it was a requirement to finish with a diploma. My parents didn't have the opportunity to attend school, so for them it was important that all of their four children finish school, and we all did. It didn't matter what kind of degree, but we needed to get a diploma.

My parents hadn't even finished elementary school. My mom had a very, very sad trauma when she was a child. Her mom told her she had to start working because my grandfather had abandoned the family. Nobody knew the truth, they all said that he had died. My grandmother became known as a widow. My mom's aunts and cousins had everything – new cars, the best education, but not my mom; she had to work. They had a small store, and they were treated with respect, because her grandfather owned a lot in the town, but it was a great trauma for my mom.

She never had the opportunity to study, so she never gave me a choice about school. It was the expectation that I had to study. I remember when I was in the second grade my mom threatened me that she was going to tie me to the bumper of her car to drag me to school. And I believed that she was going to do it if I didn't go! So I had to continue. It's interesting, because I'm a teacher now, and when I see students who don't like school, I tell them, "I understand you. I didn't like it either. But it's not that bad."

I was desperate to finish school. I finished high school in two years, after spending the whole day at school, from 7:00am to 11:00pm. I had to finish. I knew I had to earn a degree or diploma, and I was desperate to get it done. When I got paid for getting good grades, my grades went way up! There was no choice; it was an obligation in my family. I never liked school though. I even didn't like it recently! It's not for me.

Most students don't go to college because they don't have my mom. If I had a choice, I would have stopped in elementary school. I think a lot of the responsibility falls on the parents. My mom said, "Your job is to study. You have to do your job properly." And I would tell her that I was so tired. She would talk to me and energize me. She would have me work hard and then perfect my work. She would do whatever it would

take to make me interested. Many times I would go to bed and go over the problems in my mind, and actually solve the problems in my dreams. But I would wake up and forget them. So, I developed a system so that I could work in my sleep. I just had to wake up and go over my notes. It was fantastic when I discovered that I could work when I was sleeping.

In México, I got a degree in industrial engineering; it was so simple for me. Most of my teachers liked me, but I don't know why. There was one teacher in college that didn't like me, and who was really mean. I don't know why, but he was actually mean. I was sitting outside of a building one afternoon, and he was passing by. He asked me what I was doing there, and I told him I was going to my French class. He asked me, "Why are you studying French? That's so ridiculous. Are you ever going to go to France?" And the first time I went to France I remembered his words. He actually didn't expect or believe that I would ever go, but I knew I would. I love to travel. He was just mean. He should have encouraged me, rather than tell me that what I was doing was ridiculous.

I went looking for a job at a factory, but they would not employ women. When I went to apply, I ran in to one of my professors from college. I told him I was there to apply for a job. He said he would give me a job, but only if I promised to stay on for a year. So I agreed. When I went to fill out the paperwork, they told me they had already hired someone else, but my old teacher hired me and told me to show up for work on Monday. I was a manager, and the workers didn't want to listen to me. They would say, "¿Como le voy a hacer caso a una vieja?" [How am I supposed to listen to a woman?] So I identified a leader, and I paid attention to what he needed, and what he needed to learn. I exchanged information with him; I told him that I could teach him and help him, if he

would help me get acclimated and learn the ropes. So we worked together, and he started telling people to treat me better. Then I started helping everyone. I would teach and help everyone there. We are always teaching and learning. We are all teachers. Even my students now, I learn so much from them.

Eventually everything I had learned in college was outdated, so I went back to graduate school and got a master's in quality engineering. I never like to be the one who doesn't know anything. I was working full time and then going to graduate classes on the weekends. It wasn't that challenging though.

I came to the United States in February of the year 2000 after I got married with a gringo. He told me we would live here for only five years, and that was almost 12 years ago. Every five years it seems to become another five years.

We moved here on a Sunday, and in less than a week I told my husband that I was going to start taking ESL classes. I always have to be doing something, actually lots of things! I started studying ESL at the adult school nearby. I remember when I first arrived here my English was bad. I could communicate, but it was bad. I definitely understand the students who are newly arrived here. It is so frustrating. I felt like I was dumb. But I knew I wasn't dumb or mute! I just couldn't communicate. It was very frustrating. One of my current colleagues was my first ESL teacher, so if my English is not so good, I always say it's her fault, as a joke. I was taking ESL, and also ceramics and drawing, and I wanted to do oil painting, too.

While I was at the adult school, I saw an ad for bilingual educators. I saw the ad, and I really started thinking about it. I liked the idea. I started thinking about the possibility of being a teacher, and I asked my husband, who was supportive. There was a

very nice young lady working for the Bilingual Educator [BECA] program named Angelica [in the present study], and she guided me through the process. Before the program started, I took an intensive ESL class from 8:00am to 3:00pm. I couldn't wait to be perfect in English. That's what I thought. Now I tell my students, "Don't be perfectionists. You're going to learn how to communicate. You're going to learn what you need to. And if someone cares what you're saying, they'll ask you again. They're going to ask for clarification. But don't wait until perfection before you start using English."

I studied at the adult school for only one semester before starting at Sonoma State. The Sonoma State program was to help me get my teaching credential in Spanish. I thought it was going to be so easy, but I had a test on the first day and I didn't know anything about grammar. I didn't know the names, like the subjunctive. I learned them all, and I started teaching immediately. It was a wonderful program. They helped a lot of bilingual educators. Many of my colleagues were helped in that program.

I started teaching in 2002, and the first semester was amazing. I started teaching in high school. I didn't know the grading system yet, because for me the grades were 1-10. I didn't know the meaning of freshman, sophomore, junior. I was learning a lot that first semester! I also didn't know how to deal with classroom management. And I had three different classes in two different classrooms. It was quite an experience, and I don't know how I survived.

A few years later I went back to school for a master's in Spanish. Now I have two master's degrees: one in quality engineering and one in Spanish. I've had a lot of schooling, and I have learned what to do and what not to do as an educator. I think that

bad teaching is the biggest challenge. It is disappointing and a waste of money and time. I think that's what happens with many students. They notice when we are weak. They notice when we're not prepared. And they notice when we don't know the subject. I have also learned that the biggest support can be good teaching. I loved so many of my teachers. When classes made me feel happy, and made me want to be there, that's what I've learned about. I wish I could become a teacher where students want to be in my class. I believe that education has to be interesting and have meaning. It has to make the mind work. Education has to include creativity, passion, and love. It is a process. Sometimes, students want to jump, and yes, sometimes it's great to jump, but sometimes we need to go step by step.

I think that we have a serious problem today. Children are so alone, especially Hispanics, and especially newcomers. They need to feel valued. That's one of the reasons the class Spanish for Spanish speakers is so important! They need to feel security and a sense of self-worth. Right now they are lost. From young children, we should be telling them that they can do it. Don't treat them like they're stupid. Treat them like they are capable and responsible. Self-esteem is missing, and it is so important. They don't value themselves. They need love and care, and parenting, and we all need to give it.

Victoria

"I am determined, but I don't have to be first. I don't care when I get there, but I know I'll get where I want to eventually. I don't have to be first or second place, but I will finish." ~Victoria

My name is Victoria, and I was born in Oaxaca. I've always been shy, not so

outgoing. I have had a lot of support from my family. I think my family has really gotten me through a lot of situations. I've been called cultural, which I really dislike. "Oh, you're so cultural!" Okay, what does that mean? Just because I know who I am and I love dancing and art... "Oh, you're so cultural." I hate being labeled cultural because it's just normal to me. I love dancing. I love music, and I just really love my family. I'm really family-oriented.

I'm the oldest of four. My mom and dad had three children, and we were all born in México. We came here when I was five. Once my parents got here, they started having problems and divorced, and my mom remarried years later, so I have a younger sister.

I remember that we moved here in September, and school started right away. My cousin and my teachers made me feel at ease. I think it was an immersion class, so I remember that it wasn't that difficult. I don't really know how I learned English, but I don't remember struggling with it. I always loved going to school and doing macaroni and bead activities, singing songs, dancing, and being with my teachers. It was very positive.

One year my parents had a little nasty fight over custody. I remember my dad couldn't come see us, and one time my dad came to school. I was a daddy's girl, but when he came to school, the teacher knew that my mom had told her that he couldn't see us. So she told me to hide. "Hide, go over there," and so I was scared, not knowing what to do. And I could hear my dad saying, "I know she's there. I know she's there." And she would say, "No, she didn't come to school today." That was really difficult. "Why am I hiding from my dad? Why can't he see me? Why is my teacher doing this?" That was one experience I remember from elementary school.

In middle school, things were mostly negative. A lot of teasing began, and I started to realize that being from Oaxaca was negative. I was embarrassed because people would say, “It’s Oaxaca” to mean something very negative. It was just so embarrassing, and I remember keeping everything to myself and never wanting to say where I was from. It seemed that everyone else, other than my family, was from Michoacan or somewhere like that. I always wanted to be from there. If there were others from Oaxaca, they probably wouldn’t say. It’s so sad now that I think about it.

In my classes, I was not challenged very much. I probably could have been in a different class, especially in math. In eighth grade we had an exchange program during the summer. It was for students from Oaxaca to go back, which was a big turning point for me. My aunt was the chaperone, and I stayed with a family. I had never been back to Oaxaca, because we didn’t have our papers until then. It was really nice to go back and see that Oaxaca was nothing to be ashamed of. When I came back, it was like me against the world! If anyone wanted to say something about Oaxaca, they would hear from me!

When I got to high school, I was still quiet and to myself. I remember being in pre-Algebra and ESL. My parents got a little more involved when I was in high school. They asked why I was being placed in those classes. I was placed in pretty low classes. Not even Biology; I think it was life science. I did pretty well, not trying very hard, but pretty much at the top of my classes. That’s when I realized, “I probably shouldn’t be in these classes anymore.” I had underestimated myself a lot, and I still do sometimes. I don’t think my teachers realized my academic potential until really late. They didn’t really look at me, period. I was just overlooked. Ever since junior high, I seemed to be under the radar and invisible. I started in pre-Algebra by my senior year I was in AP

Calculus. That was a big accomplishment for me; I even had to take a JC math class to do it. I just wish I would have known about AP classes sooner. I remember the first interview with my counselor she asked me, “Well what do you want to do when you grow up, or what school,” and I didn’t know about universities, so I said the name of the only university I knew, Sonoma State. I almost feel like I was placed on that track for a CSU. Why couldn’t someone tell me more about UC’s? My parents wanted me to be challenged and do a little more. I think it was a little too late when I started upping my game, so I was only able to take AP Calculus and AP Spanish. I still had a good GPA, but I think I could have done better. I could have been pushed a little more in my classes.

With my friends, I was known as the quiet schoolgirl, and I really hated that word. Just because I did my homework. They would say that I was the smart one. And I would hate that too, because I’m not smart, but I would apply myself to everything. I didn’t pull all-nighters, but I did my work and finished all of it. The smart one. The smart Mexican. The smart quiet girl. And this was in my group of friends. They thought things were easy because I was smart, but no, it was because I did my work and worked hard.

My parents really pushed me a lot. They were very strict, and I was the obedient daughter who got good grades, yet sometimes with an attitude. As the oldest, my mom was always strict with me. I remember when I would get teased about being from Oaxaca, my mom and my dad would always say, “You have to show them through education.” You know my mom would say something like, “A la gente hay que darles una cachetada con un guante de seda” - respond to people with a white glove - and I didn’t really get it. But she says you show people through education that you can do something for yourself. So they would say, “Show them who the people from Oaxaca

are.” So they would make me feel good about it and turn it around and say, “Show them, you have to show them that you’re smart. You have to show them who you are.” They helped me feel better about who I was, but they also really pushed going to school and getting good grades.

I really, really, really wanted to go to Berkeley, but I didn’t get in. I didn’t want to go to a CSU; I wanted to prove that I could get into a UC, and I got into Davis and Santa Cruz. Before I went to Davis, that summer I was scared. I was scared of leaving home, and I can’t tell you how many people threw in my face, “Did you know that Latinos mostly quit their first semester or their first year at college?” “Are you sure you want to do this?” I was so scared. I started to question why I wanted to go there. I remember being so scared to the point where that summer I went to the JC and registered for classes there just because I was like, “I can’t do Davis.” I’ve always been such a scaredy-cat period. I’m always scared of doing things. I didn’t want to be that percentage. I didn’t want to be that person that didn’t finish. I was really nervous about going, and my parents helped me. They said, “Okay, well check out the JC.” I guess they were comforting me. They never said, “That’s okay,” but they said the JC was better than just dropping it altogether. I was scared, but my parents talked me into just giving it a try. They reassured me, “If you don’t finish, then you don’t finish,” and that sort of stuff. That was really comforting, but I am not the type of person to not finish.

At Davis, advising was a big problem. They gave me all of this information at orientation, and I didn’t know what to do with it. I was really excited about the Ballet Folklórico. I had heard about their program from a high school instructor, and I had been dancing a lot already, ever since elementary, so it was great to go in and start learning

dances from different regions. I made a lot of friends.

My first year went really well. I had a lot of support from friends and family. The second year was difficult. I was just overwhelmed with school. My grades were down. I had issues with boys and my first heartbreak. I was on my own. My parents went back to court. It was just terrible. I think I was on academic probation more than once that year. And I just stopped really caring. I really did stop caring. When I look back on it, I think I was depressed. It was a really difficult and stressful time, and even dancing wasn't fun for me anymore. My second year was challenging in every way. I know I did my share of crying.

I changed my major to Anthropology and American Studies, and that helped a lot. That transition was helpful. I graduated in five years. I know I could have done it in four, but sometimes I don't feel like I have to hurry or pressure myself into rushing or finishing right away. I don't care if I'm not first. I know that I will finish.

I moved home after graduation. I originally intended to take a break and then go back for my PhD, but I thought, "I can't do this right now. I just got out of five intense years. I can't do five plus more years right now." So I just came home, and my grandpa was really sick that year and ended up passing away. My student loan grace period was going to end soon, so I started working in the schools as an aide, and that's how I got into teaching. I worked as an aide for four or five years when I realized, "Okay, I have a BA, and I'm still doing this job that just requires a high school diploma. I should probably go back to school and have my own classroom." I just kind of realized it was time to get my credential. Also, my dad was an inspiration. Both of my parents started out working in the fields, but my mom, she got into electronics, got a little bit of training, and got a good

job. My dad became a janitor, but he always took English and ESL classes. Slowly, after years, he ended up graduating from Sonoma State with his teaching credential. He got his BA in Spanish. It was an inspiration knowing that my dad was also going through school. And he became a teacher. I always thought, “I don’t want to be a teacher.” But I think it was in my blood. I have a lot of teachers in my family, including uncles and aunts in México.

At the beginning of high school I realized, like a little switch went on that told me I could do it. I knew I could do more for myself, instead of just letting the current take me. That’s what I want for today’s students. Students need to feel like they can achieve something. I’ve heard a lot of kids saying, “I’m just going to work in the field. Big deal.” And I’m say, “No big deal. Why are you telling yourself this?” I want them to know that they can do something more, at least to give it a try, and to know that there is more out there for them. They don’t just have to stay in town and work. There is nothing wrong with that, but at least give school a try and get informed about opportunities. Young people need support, confidence, information, and a sense of responsibility. When I was in high school, my parents said, “You don’t have to work. School is your work. You’re a student and that’s your job.” They were saying, “We want you to just focus on school.” So that helped a lot, knowing that school was my main responsibility. Sometimes parents don’t hold their kids accountable. I feel like mine really pushed me in the right direction. My mom always had high expectations. Even if I dropped from an A to an A-, she would say, “Ya vas bajando.” My dad would always want to know about my classes. He would say that if he could do it (college) at his age, I could do it too. My dad set an example for me, and my mom supported me.

Thinking about my experiences, I realize that family is the most important, along with determination. And knowing that there's more, so that there is something to strive for. As Latinas, we don't have to conform to being that good, quiet, submissive wife. We don't have to conform.

Lluvia

Follow your dreams and never give up... porque si se puede! ~Lluvia

My name is Lluvia, and I am resilient, strong, and caring. I am an immigrant from México. I know that there are a lot of people out there who just need one person, one meeting with one person, one word from a counselor or teacher that will keep them going. Teachers make a huge difference in student's lives, and that's the kind of educator I want to be.

I immigrated when I was 10 years old for the first time. I immigrated to the United States, specifically California, L.A, and then from there we moved up to Santa Rosa and Sonoma County. We did move back to México twice, and then ended up coming back and staying here for good. I've always wanted to learn; I've been eager and motivated to learn. I remember that I made it my goal to learn English. That was the first goal that I remember having. I was illiterate when I came here at the age of 10. I didn't have any previous formal education at all in México. I followed my education and dreams, and I am now a mom. I have a son and he is 4 years old. I'm working, and I'm also a full time student.

Education is really a learning process. And it could be education in life in general. It doesn't have to be academia. It could be a basic learning opportunity about something in your daily life. My education has provided me an opportunity for wisdom and for

growth as a person. In Spanish, educación has a meaning closer to family, values, and morals for me. Did they teach you the ethics and the morals in your family of respect, of caring for others, etc.? So, it isn't as connected to the academia as it is in the American educational way, but both are important.

When I was little, I remember working together with my family to survive. My mom was a single mom with five children in México, so she was working most of the time. So I remember I had to learn how to take care of my younger sister. I was responsible for her. And my two older sisters were responsible for us. There were four girls at home on our own while my mom and brother were working, so first I learned how to be responsible, how to be independent, how to get along with others, how to prepare to stay safe in the home, and how to protect ourselves. So that was like a form of education.

We lived on a small ranch, like in the mountain. The nearest town was about two hours away. So when my mom would go work in the fields, we would stay home and my sister tried to help by cooking. So we had to pretty much get like the wood and start a little fire, and that's how we would cook. My sister did actually start a fire and the whole house burned down. She was able to pull us all out, and one of my sisters got severe burns, but we all survived. So when my mom got home we were homeless, but we were still safe. My mom came from a single parent, and my dad's family didn't quite accept her. My mom was poor, and my dad's side of the family was not. They owned properties; they had ranches; they had horses; they were pretty well off. They never agreed to let my parents get married. So they completely like disowned him and didn't want to talk to us. My dad had to move to the United States to work. He left my mom there with all of us, and he came back and forth. We had family on my dad's side but they didn't support us.

They didn't talk to us and my mom had to survive on her own. So when we became homeless there was no one to help us. We moved to the nearest town and tried to rent a little room. My mom couldn't find anything. The only thing she could find was a ... it's taking me back, so I'm getting a little bit emotional. It was a place where they used to store corn. Where they keep the pigs... it was a pig home, but they had gotten rid of the pigs. You could still see where the pigs were in the water and everything. It was not for people. There was no restroom, nothing. So when we moved in there we had to literally walk, and we were on the outskirts of the town so we had to literally walk to the field and whatever, do what we need to do. It was the only place she could find.

My mom began working as a maid. So she wasn't working in the fields anymore because we were two hours away, so she got a job in the town. So she was working as a maid and in the daytime and in a restaurant at night. Then my brother started working in another restaurant, one of my uncle's restaurants, because that's how they decided to help my family - by giving my brother a job.

It was really hard to survive. One of my sisters got really ill. She started getting seizures, and she passed away because there was no medical attention. My sister died in my mother's arms as she was walking to the next town trying to get medical help.

We were all really skinny, you know, barely surviving. On the weekends we would go around, "Chiclets! Chiclets!" We were the children in the streets who would sell gum. We would go under the benches to see if anyone had dropped any coins. Moving to the United States was for survival. I don't think that she could take seeing another one of her children die. Everything is kind of a blur. We never talk about that.

So I think my mom just said, "You know what, I think I'm going to go and find

my husband.” The last time that he left my mom pregnant he just didn’t come back, and I think it had already been seven years. So she came to the United States looking for him. We took the train. We didn’t take the train by actually buying the tickets. We jumped on the train and hid under the seats. I remember that, hiding, and it was painful. My legs were swollen. All of our bodies were swollen because we were in a very tight area. Then we stayed in the streets in Tijuana, trying to cross over.

My aunt and uncle from Los Angeles came up with some money, and we crossed the border. There were six of us. Five children plus my mom. My older sisters were taken by a different *coyote*, and us little ones went on a different route. When we all crossed, my oldest sister, who was about fourteen years old, wasn’t there. The *coyotes* kept her a week. They wanted more money. I remember being scared; I just wanted my sister back, and my uncle resolved it.

After a few months, we heard that they had located my dad in Santa Rosa. My mom decided to show up with all of the kids. Well, he had a different family here. He was with an American woman, and they had other children. We stayed at a homeless shelter. I didn’t go to school; we were homeless. My dad worked on a ranch picking grapes, and my mom started working in the fields too. It was a while before we found out that the nice woman was not really my dad’s friend.

We lived at the ranch close to my mom’s work, and it was a Christmas or Thanksgiving, one of those holidays, and there was like a van full of clothes and food that came to the ranch. They were asking questions like, “Do you guys go to school?” The lady spoke Spanish. “No, we don’t to school.” We would wake up in the morning and go and play in the field. We lived on a cattle ranch, so we didn’t go to school. And

apparently that van was a Migrant Education van. They would go around ranches back in the day, and I guess they found out where there were children or families, and they would just stop by with blankets, food, and presents. They talked to my mom and they told us that we had to be enrolled in school. My older sister was probably 16, and my older sisters never went to school. But that was how I had my first experience with formal education.

Before that, I remember going to the thrift store around the corner where there were a lot of books. It was a picture book, and I wanted to know what it was about. My mom would always tell us stories. She wouldn't read us stories, because she didn't know how to read; she never went to school either. I was curious to know what those letters were saying and I remember telling myself, "I'm going to learn to read so that I can read this book." I wanted to learn what that book was about. So I had previously thought about learning to read. I just didn't know how; I didn't know what it would take for me to learn how to read.

I started school for the first time in fifth grade. My teacher didn't know any Spanish. There was no ESL, but they put my younger sister and me in the same classroom. I think they wanted to keep us together because they didn't know what to do. I remember there was an assistant in the office who spoke Spanish. I don't remember her name, but she was a short woman. I remember she called me and my sister in and told us that we were dirty. She said, "You guys need to bathe because you are dirty." And I was like, "Oh my gosh, we bathe every day." I remember being so embarrassed to tell my mom that she told us that we needed better clothes. We wore the same clothes all the time, and we were dirty. I remember being really, really embarrassed and I didn't tell my

mom about that. But then the lady talked to my mom, and I know my mom had a lot to say about that, because my mom is the type of woman who will just tell somebody off, and that's what she did. But I do remember that they gave us money, the school did. They gave us a gift certificate for Ross. They gave us like \$20, and I remember I bought a dress with that. I thought, "They don't like us." I was dirty, and I felt like I didn't belong there.

There were only two other Latinas in the school. One was Americanized; she said she didn't speak Spanish, but she did. She just didn't want to talk to us. And then there was another Latina, and she did talk to us. If the teachers had to say something to us, they would pull her and have her translate. I just remember sitting in the back of the room coloring and drawing. Then they put me in like some art class and I remember just doing clay figurines. So that was fifth grade! And then sixth grade they put me in a different class. I remember my teacher talking to me, pulling me out of recess and lunch to help me. Somehow I would understand her. She had a little area for me and my sister. It was all books and she would sit there with me and talk to me and read to me. I think that's how I learned to read and write in English, because I don't know how else I learned. She used to say, "Lluvia, you're going to graduate. You're going to graduate from middle school. And then you're going to graduate from high school." And she was always asking me, "What do you want to do when you're older? Don't get married." And I remember she used to tell me those things. I remember thinking like, "I think I want to be a teacher like you and help people like you're helping me." So I believe that she was the only one in my younger years with an expectation of me going on to higher education. That was in beginning of sixth grade. Toward the second part of sixth grade they hired ESL teachers,

and an ESL teacher would come pull us out. So by sixth grade they had an ESL program.

I remember knowing how to read by the end of sixth grade. I could read my book, a thick book, although not completely. I had a dictionary with me all the time. I loved to carry my dictionary around that I had gotten at the second hand store. I started collecting books there, so the owner of the second hand store would just give me the books. The first thing I would do when we got the second hand store, instead of going to the toys or the clothes, it was always, "I'm going to the books." So I had a collection of books that I wanted to read. I mean you can ask my mom; I had suitcases, our suitcases full of books. I was really hungry to learn, and I loved it. I love to read. My dream was to have a library of all of the books that I have ever read. That was a dream; it still is. For a long time I carried those books around, and then finally, maybe three years ago, I just let them go. I don't know what that was about but I was like, "I can't carry these books around my entire life, I can just slowly buy them back if I ever need to, or just know that I read them."

After sixth grade, I wasn't in ESL anymore, but even to this day, I am still not too comfortable with English. I believe that it is still a learning process for me. I remember going home and crying because I didn't know how to do the homework. I did really well in PE because I was athletic, so I ran the mile; I exercised. I completed the mile in six minutes, which was first place for women. I remember one time it was like five minutes and something seconds, and I was so proud of myself. I really liked PE. But in science, I struggled. I didn't understand the English concepts, but I was interested in learning. English was, very, very hard, but I had a wonderful teacher. I was really blessed. Somehow there was always this wonderful soul that would kind of come and protect me,

like support me. Mr. Bert would spend that extra time with me. He told me, “I know you love to read. There is an opportunity at the library to volunteer - you should go.” So I started volunteering at the library, and then I started learning more, and I had more time for tutoring. So Mr. Bert got me a tutor, and then he would also tutor me so that I could survive in that English class. I don’t remember passing math, and I remember crying and wanting to just not go to school anymore. So I think it was like the beginning of eighth grade that my mom decided to just, “Forget it. I'm going to pull them out and we’re just going to go back to México.” We did. She pulled us out and we went to México for a year, but it was really hard to survive over there, so we came back again.

I started high school, and there were a lot more Latinos, more people that I could connect with. I got connected with Migrant Education and the Adelante program. I remember Martha, the Migrant Education lady, talking to my parents about supporting us with school, you know supporting me and my younger sister. “Lluvia is doing really well, and she could do even better with your support with school. Will you let her go to this program at the JC?” My parents didn’t want to let me go. “What is this? What do you mean she’s not going to stay home in the summer and help?” So I remember Migrant Education talking to my parents, and my mom somehow ended up letting me to go to Adelante. I think that’s when I really felt like expectations of me shifted, because everyone around me expected us to do good. Everyone knew that we were going to be successful. I didn’t feel like there was any doubt from Mr. Nugent or Mr. Ramirez. Adelante is where I connected with math more; Mr. Ramirez was able to explain it so that I could understand it. I always got support through Migrant Education.

From ninth through twelfth grade, I was successful in my academics. I think I had

a 3.0 and up, except for that math, always math would give me a hard time, but I think at some point my teacher was just like, “Eh, I’ll let her pass even if she doesn’t get it,” which was unfortunate because I think I could have learned more. But for my other classes I was fine. I was on honor roll four years in a row, the entire time I was in high school. My biology teacher thought I was great. I remember he gave me a letter to take to my parents. I never gave it to them. It was in English, and it was just like, you know, “Lluvia is doing outstanding in my class. You should be proud of her. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” I never shared that with my parents. They never made it to even one of the meetings. I felt they didn’t care. But really, they were working. I know now it wasn’t that they didn’t care.

My mom did say, “School is your job. So do it well, so you can get a good job and support us.” That was supposed to come after my schooling, helping the family. She thought high school was going to be it. She needed me to support her, my dad, and my brother and sister. She would say, “As soon as you graduate from high school you make a lot of money and help us.” So that was her plan for me.

But I had learned about college through Adelante and my friends. I was doing well socially. I got involved in the Mayo Club and Key Club. There was a teacher diversity program at my high school. I fell in love with teaching, and I knew that’s what I wanted to do.

My parents wanted me to get married. I was like, “No, I want to do more.” Then there were my teachers, you know like Mr. Bert and my art teacher. They would tell me, “You have potential.” And I felt like they believed in me, and they talked to me about my future. “Don’t rush to get married. Do your career first, follow your dreams,” and they

believed in me. They told me these wonderful things that I wasn't getting from anyone else, not at home, not my friends, maybe one or two of my friends out of ten of us who thought about college. And there were three of us who decided to apply to school.

I showed up to my counselor and I said, "Hey, I want to go to Sonoma State. Can you help me?" He looked at my schedule. He looked at my transcript and said, "Well, it looks like you haven't been doing good in math, but you've been on the honor roll. Maybe we should look at other options, because you really have to know math for college." I just walked away. He didn't want to help me. He basically said I didn't belong in college. I hadn't done well in math, so I wasn't going to succeed in college. I walked away and didn't apply to Sonoma State. I was like, "Okay, I guess high school is it for me." Years later, I wanted to go back and show my counselor that I had done it. And I did go back, when I was finishing my BA. I was doing a civic engagement activity at my high school, and he was still there. I told him, "I'm about to graduate from Sonoma State, the Hutchins Program, where I really wanted to go." I think he didn't even know what I was talking about. I don't even think he was conscious that he made that negative statement to me years before.

After deciding not to apply to Sonoma State, I just focused on graduating. Actually, I almost didn't graduate because my grandma got sick. I had to miss school a lot, and then she passed away, and I missed more school. So I was missing some units, but I was fortunately able to make them up with Adelante summer school, and I was able to graduate from high school.

By that time I was just not doing well emotionally. I felt like my mom didn't support me. She wanted me to get married. My grandma had died. My mom pretty much

lost it. She had a nervous breakdown. She was in the hospital for like two or three days. She was trying to commit suicide. They released her, and I had to be there for her to make sure she didn't take all of the pills she wanted to take. She wanted to kill herself. I had to take care of my brother and my sister. And then there were a lot of bills for my mom and my grandma's services. So it was a lot for me. I was really angry. I was really angry; I hated the world. I just wanted to be done. I wanted to get away. I started going out more. I would just stay at work longer. I would come home and she would beat me. Yeah, it was a very aggressive relationship. It just wasn't healthy. She kicked me out a lot of times because I wasn't just doing what she wanted me to. I was like, "What else do you want? I'm doing everything I can right now. I'm still in school. I'm working. I'm helping you with your kids. They're not my kids." And I remember talking to her like that, and she smacked me, because I can't talk like that to my mom. "I'm leaving." Of course she chased after me. So home became this horrible place. One day I came home from school; I was tired, and she was yelling at me. She kicked me out again and I said, "Okay, that's fine." I left. I just left and never went back. And I remember thinking, "What do I take with me? I'll just take my backpack and my books." I think back to that moment. I could have grabbed my jewelry. I could have grabbed underwear, you know basic things to survive, but I didn't. I grabbed those damn books.

I felt like it was too much, and I just left. I was tired of the beatings. I was tired of the yelling, and I was tired of the blaming. I was tired of her deciding my future. So I left. And then somehow, I made it. I worked, and I graduated. She didn't want to show up to my graduation. It hurt. She didn't talk to me for two years.

My sisters were getting my mail, and there was something about the JC

registration time. So I registered for the JC, showed up, and ended up in the wrong classes because I didn't talk to a counselor. I didn't have a counselor. And then I ended up in a counselor's class, Luz Navarrette, and she kind of pulled me to the side and said, "Have you talked to a counselor?" I was like, "Nope." "I'm a counselor. You should come by my office." And I was supported after that. So I've always had one person in my educational life that has kind of noticed me and supported me. I know I have the strength in me to continue to go on, but somehow there is always this angel there, this person that reminds me that I can do it, and pushes me forward. Luckily, this happened in my first semester. I met a great teacher and counselor who was my counselor until I transferred to Sonoma State two and a half years later. I stayed involved with Migrant Education, student groups, and community service. I graduated from Sonoma State, earned a teaching credential, and am now in the master's program in Counseling.

I think there are several factors that helped me develop that inner strength and motivation. There were many times that I didn't feel supported by others, so I had to find strength within myself. To be honest from my whole high school group, only two of us really graduated and made it through. They would say, "You think you're so good, or you think you're so smart," instead of, "Oh really? You're going to apply to the JC? You're going to go to Sonoma State? Wow!" I still remember when I was going to transfer from the JC to Sonoma State when some of my friends were going to the JC. They were like, "You got accepted? What makes you smart?" There was always that doubt, that: "You can't do it." I also got a lot of comments from people about my light skin color, my height, but mostly people who were surprised by my intelligence. "Oh, are you really that smart? I didn't think you were that smart. You know your history." Well, yeah.

Even one of my friends who dropped out, I still talk to her, and I told her that I was applying to the master's program. Her response was, "Well, how are you going to do that? Don't you want to focus on your son and your family?" So there is always that, I don't know what it is, it could be jealousy. I do have one friend who loves school and supports me. She's getting her PhD right now, and she's really determined.

The struggles that I saw my parents go through motivated me to stay in school. I feel that her strength was kind of passed onto me, even though in the beginning she had a really hard time understanding why I wanted to go to college, and why I couldn't just get married and have a family right away. But I feel that her struggles kept me going. Also, strong mentorship. I think of people in my life who have been role models for me, because there have been times when I've had doubts. I've had obstacles in my life where I felt that, "Okay maybe this is a sign that I need to just stop." But then there is something stronger within myself, within my soul or inner me, whatever that is, that keeps pushing and saying, "You know what, it's a struggle right now, but you won't be happy if you give up, because this is something you really want to accomplish." And giving up, I'm just not the kind of person who gives up. I want to be happy with myself. I feel that it's taken me a long time to get here. But I'm more than halfway through my master's degree, so I know that someday I'll be sitting in an office being the counselor that I want to be. I know that has a lot to do with people in my life have pushed me when I've given up on myself. There have been mentors, counselors, friends, and family members to push me.

Xumakari

“We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love.”

–Mother Theresa

I am a 60 year old Mexicana who immigrated to the United States at the age of 8. I’ve lived in California most of my life, although I’ve travelled back and forth into México all of my life too. If someone knew me really well, they would know that I am on a spiritual journey, and that I have been since I was very young. I have amazing things happen in my life every day. I can attribute them to miraculous kinds of things. I see miracles in my life everyday, and in other people’s lives everyday. I am a highly motivated, persistent, and resourceful person.

My earliest education memories come from Chihuahua, México where I was so excited to start school. I just couldn’t wait to start school. I was three years old, and my mother took me to a little pre-school. I remember that she got me a little backpack, and she made lemonade for me to take to school. It was an old school, and it was dark with no windows. I was always very excited to go. I was always very smart and learned everything very quickly. I did very well there, so they allowed me to go to regular elementary school. I was the youngest person there, and I was the smartest person there. I remember participating in a dance performance for the region of Tepehuana when I was five or six years old. That was my first performance in Ballet Folklórico, and I loved it. I loved school. For me, school and fun and dance and music and learning all went together. I think that as far as education, the support you get from your parents is very, very important. Parental support is key. For me, my family- my mother and my father – especially my mother – who loves and learning and loved to go to school. I mean she was

going to school at 80 years old to learn English still. I think her love of education and teaching impacted me. She used to have a preschool at our house – she used to love to teach children - I think I picked it up from her. That love of teaching.

And then I came to the United States when I was eight years old. I had to learn another language, which put me behind. I was still ahead of everyone else in math, but I had to learn the language. I went to a Catholic school, so I was going to mass every day and following a very disciplined way of being in school. I was in the choir and in the religious church rituals. I really liked that. My father's older sister was here in the US, and she sent her kids to Catholic school, and she told my father to do it too. And I really appreciate them doing that. I went to Catholic school through college! I went to Catholic school for 16 years!

I came from the Sierra Madre, where I was free always to walk in the mountains and be in nature. I was in nature all of the time. I loved to climb and hike and throw rocks, and I wouldn't come back until sunset. My father told me that when we go to the US we would be in the big city of LA, with concrete. He said things would change. That was very sad to me, and I remember that my father said that when we got there, he would get me a doll. I was so happy, because I didn't have a doll. We moved on November 18, and the next day was my birthday. They got me a big walking doll, which was the popular doll of the day. I was happy with my doll, but I was very sad because I was no longer in my environment of la Sierra Madre.

My father was working in San Francisco del Oro, a small mining town. He didn't want to be a miner anymore, and he decided we should move to LA because his sister lived there. He went there a year before we did, and he found a job. We moved so that my

mother and father could have better jobs, and for education for my brother and me. They wanted us to have a good education.

In November it was my birthday, and in December it was Christmastime, so they were having ads for Christmas. I learned and imitated doll names by watching tv. I was able to imitate what I was hearing very easily. I was told that I spoke with a northern México accent, which is different from the rest of the Mexican people. I had to correct my north Mexican accent and my English. I started really listening to how people spoke, and I would try to imitate what I heard. I remember doing that. I remember learning, learning all of the time. At school, the nuns didn't speak Spanish, but I had a few friends who did. They assigned two girls to work with me, to help me learn English. Luckily, they assigned the top students to help me. One ended up being the president of the class, and in high school she was the president of the high school. Her name was Rosa Hernandez. She helped me with anything I didn't understand. She was very smart, and she always helped me.

When I was in fifth grade, one nun, Sister Barbara, liked me a lot. She would take me to St. Mary's college on the weekends where she was studying for her master's degree. I used to go to the library, and I felt really comfortable wandering around the college. She took me there and exposed me to the college. Within two years, I was very strong in English. I was winning spelling bees. I was a good speller. I'm a fast learner.

When I was in high school, I had to go farther away on a bus. I went to one high school in downtown LA for three years. They start placing you in a college track, or a home economics track. I made sure that I was on a college prep track, with algebra, chemistry, and everything I needed for college. The gauge was to compare my studies to

my friends in México. Every time I went to México we'd compare what I was learning and what they were learning. They told me I had to make sure I was on the right track for my pre-med plans.

In high school, I joined the College Capable program. This was an enrichment program with the all boys school. We had a series of art, humanities, making movies, and other enrichment classes. They were taught by very specialized people who would come to teach us. It was very creative and really fun. The College Capable Program was a resource that really helped me. In high school, I also formed study groups and studied with my friends. My friend would help me with math and chemistry, and I'd help her with Spanish.

Everybody thought I was very weird. My uniforms were always weird – they were tailor-made for me, and they were always different. My father made my uniforms. Everyone else bought them, but my father made them for me. My sophomore year I decided to become more integrated, and I joined the drill team. They nominated me to be captain of the drill team, but I didn't want to be captain of the drill team, I wanted to be a cheerleader. All sophomore year I practiced cheers, and I made varsity cheerleader my junior year. I was a varsity cheerleader and I also played sports – basketball, volleyball, and softball - not at the varsity level, but at the junior varsity level. My parents liked for me to be involved. My father liked to take me everywhere and pick me up – activities and dances too. He always helped other girls who needed rides too. My parents supported all of my extracurricular activities.

Teachers perceived me as a leader. I would run for different offices, and I participated in everything that I could. They nominated me for Girls State my junior year,

but unfortunately my school shut down my junior year. The bishop shut down my high school, and I had to start from scratch my senior year. Way far away – I had to take three busses to get here. That was traumatic for all of us that our school was shut down our senior year. They did give me a full scholarship to Immaculate Heart High School, which is a prestigious private school in Hollywood. That transition was really hard, especially since I was already a leader. I was going to be student body vice president. I was going to be the head cheerleader. My lettergirl sweater was going to have stars, and I expected to get awards for all the different things that I'd done. But at my new school, I didn't get anything. I made class cheerleader, and I was a varsity cheerleader at the all-boys school. I was culturally shocked – it was a very different place.

My parents thought I was a very good student. I was always studying. I was always at the library downtown. I would go to the library and come home with a ton of books every Friday. My parents didn't have a lot of books at home. I was a good student. I was studying all of the time. Still, nobody guided me to go to college. I told the counselor that I wanted to go to Loyola Marymount. I wanted to go to a four-year school. My GPA wasn't that high –it wasn't a UC gpa, and neither were my SAT scores, so I knew I wasn't going to go to a UC school. I found out about Loyola Marymount, and that's the only school I applied to. If I hadn't gone to that school, I wouldn't have gone to college, probably. It was a beautiful school, and I really wanted to go to school there.

An interesting thing is that they didn't call me to accept me, I called them. I called them to ask the status of my application. They said they were considering me, so I made an appointment with the committee and I told them that it was very important that they accept me to their school because I had a lot to contribute. I told them I could start a

Ballet Folklórico - I could do a lot of things to bring cultural awareness. They accepted me on a probationary basis. Luckily, one of the girls that I tutored at Immaculate Heart High School had a father who was a political science professor. He said I could move in with him and the family. I didn't have any other way of getting there. I didn't have room or board. I stayed with that family my first semester. I know that if it wasn't for them I wouldn't have been able to go to that school. He would take me every morning and bring me back home. Every day we would go to mass together. Every day. It was an Irish Catholic family. They provided room, board, transportation, and food. I would try to help around the house. My parents were very grateful that they did that for me. And they wouldn't take any money from me.

The next semester I was able to get a dorm and work-study money. I was able to graduate in three and a half years so I wouldn't have to pay so much tuition. I never identified myself as being poor, because I always got what I wanted and needed. I was never deprived anything - of food or anything. I never thought of myself as being a poor person. Although other people, when I got to the university, told me that I came from a ghetto area, from a poor school - I never saw that. I did have to work very hard to pay for my college education. It was a very expensive Jesuit school, and my parents could only provide so much, so I worked four jobs. I couldn't buy any clothes or shoes. I didn't have a car until after I got married. I didn't have a big wardrobe. I had always worn a uniform before, so I didn't care. I had to work really hard for my education, because I had to pay for most of it. I didn't buy anything. I cooked our food. I was very tight with my money; I had to be that way. But I never identified as being poor or disadvantaged. At least I didn't think I was from my perspective. Other people might have judged me as that, but not the

way I looked at it.

My college peers thought I was very weird. I've always been very different in the way I see things and the way I express things. I was looked upon as being different. In my neighborhood, they thought I was someone who had sold out. Someone who thought I was better than them. I was being whitewashed – that's what people in my neighborhood would say. Not even just, my family members would say that too. You're talking like a white person. Why are you talking like that? I had to learn to talk one way at school and another way at home.

I was happy in college. I was exploring everything- all of the university and all of the programs. I was dancing in the Ballet Folklórico and doing performances in front of four thousand people. And I was the head dancer. I was having a lot of fun. We were putting together Chicano art exhibits. This was the sixties. There was a lot going on I was involved with the hippies, the Chicanos, the black movement – I was involved with all of the groups on campus; it was really fun.

My family didn't like me living away from home. My father took it very hard. That's when my father started drinking a lot, when I moved away from home. And because of his drinking, I didn't even want to be home. I spent a lot of time at school, and I spent a lot of time with Ricardo, my husband. I also found Upward Bound. This program was helping high school kids to stay focused to go to college. During the academic year I would tutor them on Saturdays. During the summer, I would live with them in the dorms. I tutored them. I did that for four years I taught Ballet Folklórico, Spanish, and career classes with the Upward Bound program. That's when I decided I was going to be a counselor. When I was really involved with them.

I remember vividly how counselors were misleading students and having them believe that they couldn't do things. Like the counselor that told me that I couldn't go to Loyola Marymount because my grades weren't high enough, I didn't have enough money, and I was poor. If I would've believed her, if I didn't have the self-confidence that I had in myself, or my parents to support me, I would've believed her. And I wouldn't have gone. Like my other friends who didn't go to college because they believed her, and they didn't believe in themselves, and maybe they didn't really want to go to college and do all that hard work anyway. And now they regret it. I went to my forty-year reunion, and many of them still don't have their degrees, but they still talk about college and how they should've gone. I think it's something that they always regret. I tell them it's not too late. I work with people who are fifty and sixty years old, and they go back to school just for themselves because they want to do it. I think a lot of students don't finish college because they don't want to finish. I'm a college counselor, and the students who want to go to school – they find the resources, they ask questions, and they connect. The ones that don't go I think are the ones who chose not to. They found other priorities in their lives. People that really want to be there and have a vision or goal –they do it! No matter what's going on.

When I graduated from college, I worked for EDD for a while. I was married with one child when we moved from LA to San Jose. I applied for a job at a community based organization and a school district targeting truant high school kids. We started implementing a program in which truant students were provided a job, but they had to go to school every day, to get a paycheck on a monthly basis. I didn't have a credential at the time. The faculty and counselors weren't happy that I was overseeing them and I didn't

have a credential in counseling or teaching. So I started the master's program in Mexican American studies and Public Affairs, as well as a high school and community college credential program at San Jose State. I felt like I needed something more for credibility. I saw myself becoming an administrator- I was an administrator for the federal government. That's why I studied public affairs, so I could administer public funding. I was in the program for three years. I almost got two master's degrees, but I ended up getting one plus the two credentials.

I started the program pregnant with my second child, and I graduated pregnant with my fourth. So I had those pregnancies when I was in the program working full time. One of the challenges was in the counseling part of the program. They were mainly white people there. There were books we were reading and things that were said that were inappropriate and incorrect. I always had to challenge, from the Mexican American perspective. I always had to be vocal about it. Sometimes it wasn't looked upon very well by my professors. I challenged them and certain things that they were teaching. But I got a lot of support from my Mexican American professors. Out of 15 people who started the program, only 3 of us finished it, and I was the only woman. My professor was pushing me to get my PhD – he tried to recruit me, but I never did.

Ricardo, my husband has always been very supportive. He is an educator as well. There are a lot of teachers and educators in our family! Education is very important to us.

CHAPTER V
FOCUS GROUP *PLÁTICA*

The focus group discussion, or *plática*, brought together eight of the participants, plus one guest (an older sibling of one of the participants). The group met at participant Xumakari's home, and it was a powerful evening where the participants broke bread together and shared their *testimonios*, coming together to form a profound group *testimonio*. I was aware that some the participants knew each other prior to the study, as they all live in the same northern California region and work in the field of education, but interestingly, more knew each other than was previously known. They knew each other from school, from work, and from everyone's extensive community involvement. From the very beginning of the evening, it was a convivial atmosphere, with hugs, catching up, and meeting new friends. By the end of the evening, every participant was extremely positive and thankful for the opportunity to come together.

Although many of the participants knew each other, we began the *plática* with *conocimiento*, which consisted of sitting around a large table so that each person could introduce herself. People were asked to complete the prompt, "If you really knew me, you'd know that I..." People shared the many challenges that they had faced, and Xumakari spoke for many when she said: "Throughout my life, I didn't take challenges as a negative. I always took them as a positive. I was always challenged, but I always knew that I could do it, whatever it was, and the times I wasn't sure myself, I was surrounded by someone who supported and encouraged me." Other participants agreed that they also saw challenges as opportunities.

A common thread that became evident was the importance of *la familia* (the family). The participants spoke of strong, hard-working parental figures who had little or no formal education themselves, yet who wanted and expected more for their children. Angelica reflected: “I think that when we listen to everyone’s experience, we realize that we all have really strong parental figures. Whether it was through direct support, reverse psychology, high expectations, or whatever it was, we all spoke about our strong parents.” After Angelica shared this insight, several women concurred.

Each participant also spoke about the vital role that educators played in their educational paths. It was evident that educators (counselors and teachers) were very powerful in influencing participants’ self-confidence and educational journeys, positively and negatively. When counselors or teachers doubted, did not seem to believe in the participants, or tracked them in nonacademic courses, the “strong, stubborn, and hardworking” women in this study oftentimes took that as a challenge to prove them wrong. They also saw their personal success as a way of breaking negative stereotypes and showing that *Mexicanas* could be successful. Specifically, Marina spoke of aiming to please her father who told her, “*Tu tienes que demostrarles que eres Mexicana, y que tu también puedes.*” (You need to show them that you are Mexican, and that you can do it too!) Several women identified an internal resiliency and motivation to prove that they could do what others did not believe they could. Victoria said: “When challenged, I just fought with my actions. I would think, ‘You know what, I’m going to prove this to you. I’m going to show you guys that you’re wrong about me.’” In addition to the challenges that educators presented, each participant spoke of at least one key counselor or teacher

who really made a difference through their *confianza* (confidence), high expectations, and support.

Individual educators were significant, as were special student support programs. Every participant identified at least one program that they greatly benefitted from. So many of the participants brought up the impact of Migrant Education that they went around the table and spoke just of Migrant Education programs for a time. Five of the eight women at the *plática* had received support services from Migrant Education, including summer school opportunities, employment, and support through college. Specific programs that the participants were thankful for were: Mini Corps (Migrant Education), Adelante (Migrant Education), EOP (Extended Opportunity Program), Upward Bound, Puente, BECA (Bilingual Educator Program), Teacher Diversity Project, MESA (Math, Engineering, and Science Achievement), MAYO (Mexican American Youth Organization), Ballet Folklórico, and scholarships and financial aid. One important point that was mentioned about participating in these student support programs is that by joining many of these programs, such as Mini Corps, EOP, and Puente, the women created a support network with like-minded individuals who shared similar goals and interests. They were more than just programs; they became extended families.

The topics of acculturation and discrimination were discussed as well. Many of the women felt discriminated against due to their gender, their native language, their skin color, their socio-economic status growing up, being Mexicana, being from Oaxaca, being immigrants, and being the children of laborers. The topic of internal racism was discussed, and Victoria spoke about the difficulty and pain to have other Mexicana/os look down on her because she is from Oaxaca. Angelica said: “It is the racist nature of

our country. We find all kinds of ways to be cruel to each other. It's a mechanism to feel better when others are making you feel bad about yourself. So you just try to make someone else feel worse." Marina shared: "Growing up, I never felt proud of my culture outside of my home. People couldn't even pronounce my name right, and they Anglicized it. It makes me proud to see people who are proud of their culture, because I felt I had to hide that part of me to fit in at school." Two other women shared that they felt they had to hide part of their culture at school as well. Others had the opposite experience, and connected with groups that strengthened their sense of cultural pride, including the local public bilingual radio station, ballet folklórico, and cultural clubs.

After a rich discussion of almost three hours, and an amazing dinner of molé enchiladas, the participants recognized the importance of coming together. They relished the rare opportunity of sharing their experiences, of reflecting on them, and of never forgetting the struggles, support, and opportunities that led them to be academically and professionally successful. Angelica captured this overarching sentiment when she stated: "Hearing everybody's stories and thinking about my own, it really makes me realize how important it is to always reflect back on these experiences. It wasn't easy for any of us. We need to acknowledge this, and realize that today's youth don't have it easy either." The participants believe in the importance of sharing *testimonios*, not only for themselves personally, but also to improve experiences for today's youth. All of the women in the study are educators, and Marina closed the *plática* by saying:

I feel really proud to be in this group. I wish that I had teachers and counselors like all of you when I was a student. I think about my early schooling experiences and I never once had a Latina/o teacher, and I don't think a Latina/o teacher ever

worked in any of the schools that I attended. I get emotional just thinking about how you all inspire students every day, and I try to do it as well. I'm so grateful that our kids have you as cultural role models. For so long it was rare to see a successful Latina, and I think it's wonderful that our kids have you as role models who feel proud of our culture and who share cultural experiences that so many of our students can relate to. Our children are so fortunate to have all of you in the schools to support them.

In the follow-up interviews, the participants reflected on the focus group *plática* experience of coming together for an evening of dinner and discussion. Angelica reflected,

I think that the group of women that got together at the dinner was really impressive. We got to see each other's perspectives. It made me think about other people that I know, other women who belonged there too. I thought, 'Well, she could have been here, and her story is similar to this.' It was a special opportunity, and I wish others could have been there too. It's amazing how we've all made it through obstacles and we're all successful. Sometimes people look at us, but they don't see what a struggle it was to get where we are. I don't think people recognize that struggle, especially people who haven't had to deal with issues of gender, race, and class.

The participants voices: "We need to have this type of opportunity more often: to come together to share our experiences. It was reaffirming and inspiring." "I could just feel everyone's energy." "It was powerful to be with such strong women who stood up to challenges and showed their resiliency. We learned to appreciate each other's stories and

our differences.” “None of us like to be told we can’t do something, because that just motivates us to want to do it even more.” “I really noticed that all of us at the dinner were determined, driven, resilient, and workaholics. People saw our potential, and if they didn’t, we proved them wrong.” “I walked away thinking, ‘Gosh what a group.’ It felt very empowering to be there. And then I was thinking, ‘Where were you guys when I felt like I was the only one?’ You know, because there were a lot of times when I had my doubts and I was like, ‘I wonder how many other people are going through this.’” “There is a persistence that we all have. We all have persistence in whatever we want to do. Resourcefulness. We have found and developed resources to tap in to if needed.” “Even though we all had a different story, we all had the same story.” “There was so much laughter, and even tears. We had strong connections. It was like my story was being told by others.”

CHAPTER VI

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF *TESTIMONIOS*

Restatement of Research Question

Prior to presenting excerpts of powerful participant *testimonios* thematically, it is important to restate and revisit the research question. This research study examines the following exploratory question: How have the experiences of Mexican American women, as conveyed through *testimonios*, impacted their educational paths?

- a. What are the memorable stories and perspectives that participants share?
- b. What resources and support did/do the participants access?
- c. What challenges did/do the participants face?
- d. What reflections do the participants make on their experiences?

Community Cultural Wealth

Several themes emerged upon analysis of the *testimonios* and group *plática*. Rather than present the participants' life experiences through the prevalent deficit lens (García and Guerra, 2004), with an emphasis on the disadvantages that the participants magically overcame, the themes are presented here using Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth.

Yosso (2005) posits that "Communities of Color nurture cultural wealth through at least six forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital... These various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth" (p. 77).

This chapter focuses on the strengths and community cultural wealth that the participants of this study revealed through their *testimonios*. In presenting the themes in this manner, I am consciously and purposefully highlighting the knowledge and skills of survival and resistance of the participants. These experiences and stories have been historically undervalued, unrecognized, and unacknowledged (Yosso, 2005). Utilizing the framework of community cultural wealth allowed me to see, organize, and analyze *testimonio* data to not only fully address the research question, but also to highlight the resilience, interconnectedness, and parallels among participants found in this study. In the following section, a brief introduction to each theoretical construct of community cultural wealth precedes relevant excerpts from participant *testimonios*. Please refer to Chapter IV for complete participant *testimonios*.

Findings According to Community Cultural Wealth Framework

Aspirational Capital

To have aspirational capital is to dream, to hope, and to develop a sense of resiliency. It is to have the *ganas*, or desire, motivation, and belief in oneself necessary to achieve. This hopefulness remains strong despite, and sometimes in response to, challenges or barriers (Yosso, 2005).

Every participant in this study is a holder of aspirational capital. Survivors and thrivers, these nine women did impose limits on their dreams; nor did they see themselves as poor, disadvantaged, incapable, or lacking, even though others may have. Though only select excerpts are presented in this section, it is vital to note that the *testimonio* of each participant in this study exemplifies aspirational capital. Many of the

women attest to being the type of person who does not give up, the type of person who dreams of possibilities, finds a way to reach goals, taps into resources, and always strives for more. Lluvia shared,

I've had obstacles in my life where I felt that, 'Okay maybe this is a sign that I need to just stop.' But then there is something stronger within myself, within my soul or inner me, whatever that is, that keeps pushing and saying, 'You know what, it's a struggle right now, but you won't be happy if you give up, because this is something you really want to accomplish.' And giving up, well, I'm just not the kind of person who gives up.

This exemplifies aspirational capital: the ability to maintain hopes and dreams, and to develop and maintain resiliency and hope.

Angelica's voice captured the sentiments of many participants when she shared her ability of being able to visualize and see herself in a better place, and the importance of passing this power of self-visualization on to students.

I think we constantly have to remind kids that they can make changes and be somewhere else. They just need to see themselves, to visualize themselves, somewhere else. They need to believe that they deserve more than that. I think some people don't believe they deserve more, and that keeps them stuck. Self-doubt holds a lot of people back. My mom raised me to know that I deserve more, to have trust in myself that I could do it, and to ask questions.

Angelica developed the ability to be an advocate for herself, and she shared an insightful story of advocating for herself to be tested and placed in the gifted and talented program in elementary school, and following up to make sure her new school placed her in the

gifted program when she moved. Xumakari used a similar approach to gain admittance to Loyola Marymount University, making an appointment and making a case for why she deserved to be admitted, and what she would contribute to the campus. Both Angelica and Xumakari exemplify the entire group of participants who are all resourceful self-advocates who dreamed of possibilities beyond their past circumstances.

Learning a new language, and learning in a new language was a challenge that all participants shared, but with a shared love of learning, linguistic challenges were not seen as insurmountable obstacles. Eight of the nine participants spoke of a deep love of learning, and the only outlier, MaJulie, who despised school, greatly values education. She became a teacher partly so that others would not have the negative experiences that she did. But what does a love of learning look like? Lluvia and Xumakari illustrate their aspirations for learning through their love of books. Xumakari shared: “I was always studying. I was always at the library downtown. I would go to the library and come home with a ton of books every Friday. My parents didn’t have a lot of books at home. I was a good student, and I loved books.” Xumakari’s thirst for knowledge was manifested in the stacks and stacks of books that she checked out every week, which also exemplifies her resourcefulness and drive. Lluvia’s relationship with books was a poignant thread throughout her entire *testimonio*:

I remember going to the thrift store around the corner where there were a lot of books. [There] was a picture book, and I wanted to know what it was about. My mom would always tell us stories. She wouldn’t read us stories, because she didn’t know how to read; she never went to school either. I was curious to know what those letters were saying and I remember telling myself, ‘I’m going to learn

to read so that I can read this book.’ I wanted to learn what that book was about.

So I had previously thought about learning to read as a young child. I just didn’t know how; I didn’t know what it would take for me to learn how to read.

When Lluvia started school in the United States at the age of 10, it was her first experience with formal schooling. She remembers her sixth grade ESL teacher talking and reading to her, and she remembers being able to read by the end of sixth grade. “I was really hungry to learn, and I loved it. I love to read. My dream was to have a library of all of the books that I have ever read.” Lluvia, who learned to read many years after most of her classmates, had a strong connection to books and they became symbols of her goals and dreams. For both Xumakari and Lluvia, books became symbols of their aspirational capital.

Three of the participants spoke about the impact of establishing a family while going to school. The typical and expected narrative would be that these women would have dropped out of school, but these counter-narratives exemplify aspirational capital and offer a different truth:

Ita Silva became a mother at the age of 16, while a sophomore in high school, and had her second child while in college. She reflected,

I look back [on being a teen mom], and I think it was a blessing. I know that having a child is a big thing, but I don’t think I would have ended up being so focused later on...I became more focused on just getting it [my education] done: as much as I could, and as fast as I could. [In college] I ended up taking 15 to 18 units a semester, plus summer school and any end of session courses that were offered. I told my counselor at Sonoma State, ‘I want to get this done as fast as I

can. I have a daughter. I want to get out to the job force.’ Within five years, I had finished my degree in Spanish Linguistics, a second degree in Mexican American Studies, and a credential.

Rather than perceive her circumstances as barriers, Ita became hyper-focused and never gave up on her dream of becoming a teacher. Ita’s commitment to her education is an example of resiliency, focus, and drive. She also emphasized and gave credit to her support systems, including her family and educational support programs, which are additional forms of community cultural wealth that will be explored in a following section.

A second counter-narrative about the impact of starting a family at a young age was Marina’s *testimonio*. Marina, who was married at the age of 20, shared:

When I was still in school, I got married. Many things are blessings in disguise. I was able to avoid stress related to dating or partying, and was able to focus on school. I worked full-time and went to school full-time, and focused on my family and finishing my degree program.

Marina found strength and focus in getting married while in college, much like Ita found with her children.

Xumakari was a third participant who spoke about continuing with her education while raising a family.

I was in the [master’s degree] program for three years. I almost got two master’s degrees, but I ended up getting one plus two credentials. I started the program pregnant with my second child, and I graduated pregnant with my fourth. So I had those pregnancies when I was in the program and working full time.

For Xumakari, she knew the importance of obtaining her master's degree, and she maintained hopes and dreams that her education would be worth all of the sacrifices.

These women credit challenging familial circumstances as their motivation to aspire for more. They do not feel that they succeeded despite their circumstances, but because of them. None of these three, Ita, Marina, or Xumakari spoke about getting married or having children as an insurmountable obstacle to continuing their educational paths. Rather, they identified their families as a source of strength and inspiration, which is a testament to the importance of familial capital as another form of community cultural wealth.

Familial Capital

Familial capital includes knowledge, skills, values, traditions, and support from family relationships, yet it also goes beyond kinship ties to include an extended sense of *familia*, cultural knowledge, communal consciousness, and interconnectedness. Since the focus of this study is to explore how the participants' life experiences impacted their educational journeys, the focus of selected familial capital excerpts is connected to education.

In Lluvia's *testimonio*, she reflected on her childhood prior to immigrating to the United States, and she considers all of her experiences with her family a form of educación, despite not attending formal schooling.

I remember working together with my family to survive. My mom was a single mom with five children in México, so she was working most of the time. I remember I had to learn how to take care of my younger sister. I was responsible

for her. And my two older sisters were responsible for us. There were four girls at home on our own while my mom and brother were working, so first we learned how to be responsible, how to be independent, how to get along with others, how to prepare to stay safe in the home, and how to protect ourselves. So that was a form of education.

Similarly, Ita reflected:

I had very little formal schooling in México. I grew up on a ranch where my brothers and I and our family grew our own food. There was no schooling, no electricity, no running water, and sometimes no food. Dad had probably 300 acres of land.... Even though I was very young, in my family, from the time you can actually walk, you start getting some chores around the house. So, they would ask me to go get water. ...Everyone in the family was responsible for something, for taking care of something.

Both Lluvia and Ita recognize the skills, knowledge, and education they gained from their families and family circumstances in their early years in México. They began working and contributing to their families at a very young age.

Another familial theme that came out of the *testimonios* was a strict, traditional upbringing. Marina, Valentina, and Victoria each independently described their family upbringing: “My parents were very strict, especially my dad.” “My parents really pushed me a lot. They were very strict.” “I grew up in a very strict household with a very strong father figure. My dad was very traditional and very strict.”

Three of the participants shared that their parents told them, from a young age, that their most important job was to go to school. MaJulie’s family and education

experience was different from everyone else's since she lived and studied in México until adulthood, and also because she was the only participant who was vocal about not liking school. Her mother insisted and instilled in MaJulie the value and importance of education:

Most students don't go to college because they don't have *my* mom. If I had a choice, I would have stopped in elementary school. I think a lot of the responsibility falls on the parents. My mom said, 'Your job is to study. You have to do your job properly.' There was no choice; it was an obligation in my family. I never liked school though.

Victoria's parents supported her in a similar way.

When I was in high school, my parents said, 'You don't have to work. School is your work. You're a student and that's your job.' They were saying, 'We want you to just focus on school.' So that helped a lot, knowing that school was my main responsibility.

The ability to focus on school was beneficial for Victoria, and it also gave her a sense of pressure and accountability to excel.

Though Lluvia worked as a child, even selling Chiclets in the streets in México to contribute to her family, when she was in high school, her mother really wanted her to focus on her studies. Lluvia's mother wanted her to finish school to be able to continue to contribute to the family: "My mom did say, 'School is your job. So do it well, so you can get a good job and support us.' That was supposed to come after my schooling, helping the family." Even though Lluvia did not exactly follow her mother's plan for her (of

graduating from high school and pursuing a job to support the family immediately afterward), she does remember her mom wanting her to do well in school.

There are examples of funds of knowledge and values taught in the home that are interwoven throughout each *testimonio*. In the following excerpts, participants credited their familial support and influence.

In Valentina's words:

At home, my parents greatly valued education.... In México, my parents didn't have a lot of education. I believe they went to second and third grade. And even now, their English is not very strong. They always took ESL classes though. They have a thick accent, and it's been really hard for them, but they did try really hard to learn English. As a matter of fact, my mom, who is now in her 70s, she is taking ESL classes at the JC. I tell her that she is a good role model! My mom always said that we needed to learn English. She would say that in order to have a good job, we needed English and Spanish. Education was very important to her, especially since she didn't have the opportunity to study beyond the third grade. And my father, he valued education too. He would never let us miss school, and he would always say that if we didn't get an education, we would be like him working in the fields. He would take us to work with him out in the fields and say, 'See, do you want to work like this for the rest of your life?'

Ita spoke about her mother and father, who similarly inspired her to aim and aspire for a different way of life.

My father always had very difficult back-breaking jobs. He was a carpenter, farmworker, tractor driver, etc. He told us that school was very important for us, especially if we didn't want to be stuck in low-paying labor jobs forever....Even

though my mother never had any formal education, she always motivated us to go to school and do well. She told us that education was the only way out of poverty. . . . She believed that if you were deprived of certain things, such as not having any education in México, well that made you value it even more. After the first year, we would get As in our spelling quizzes and As in our math classes. We had determination; we put the time into it, and we did well.

And after Ita became a mother herself at the age of 16, she relied on her family's support.

I don't know if I would have or could have done the same if I didn't have family support. They were all very supportive. I think it really helps when you have the right people around you. The network that I had really helped. I don't want to say that it's just my character. You do have to have something inside of you, *ganas* [drive/motivation], as they say in Spanish. But I really think that a lot of people might have the *ganas*, but there are other environmental factors that bring them down, and they don't have the same safety network like I did. The times that I felt down or felt like I couldn't do it, those were the times that there were people like my sister Celeste to say, 'Hey, if I can do it, you can do it.' I think that's the difference. Having those people when you need them the most.

Ita credits her familial social network with providing her the support she needed to move forward with her aspirations.

Though evident in each individual *testimonio*, the importance of *la familia* (the family) became even more evident at the group *plática*. As captured in their full *testimonios* (*Chapter Four*), the participants spoke of strong, hard-working parental figures who had little or no formal education themselves, yet who wanted and expected

more for their children. Victoria made a statement that many of the participants wholeheartedly agreed with, “Thinking about my experiences, I realize that family is the most important, along with determination.” Angelica reflected: “I think that when we listen to everyone’s experience, we realize that we all have really strong parental figures. Whether it was through direct support, reverse psychology, high expectations, or whatever it was, we all spoke about our strong parents.” After Angelica shared this insight, all of the women agreed and attested to this as truth.

Familial-Navigational Capital

Familial capital and navigational capital are two distinct forms of community cultural wealth identified by Yosso (2005). Familial capital in the traditional sense was explored in the section above, but it is also explored in this section in conjunction with navigational capital, in what I have termed familial-navigational capital to note the interconnectedness. Navigational capital is comprised of the knowledge, skills, strategies, and resourcefulness to access and navigate institutions, businesses, health care, and the educational system. Though Yosso (2005) identifies each of these forms of capital discretely, she also posits that they build on each other and oftentimes overlap. It became clear that all participants greatly valued and found strength in familial capital. Moreover, many women came to see their social and navigational networks and resources as extended family and a form of familial capital as well.

In my overview of the group *plática* in Chapter Five, I noted that every participant in this study identified at least one program that they greatly benefitted from. Seven of the nine participants were raised in an agricultural region, and all seven had

parents who at one point were farmworkers in the wine industry. The support provided to these families and individuals through the (federally funded) Migrant Education program had a great impact in their lives, and in their educational and professional trajectories. Programs that the participants identified as having a positive impact were: Mini Corps (Migrant Education), Adelante (Migrant Education), EOP (Extended Opportunity Program), Upward Bound, Puente, BECA (Bilingual Educator Program), Teacher Diversity Project, MESA (Math, Engineering, and Science Achievement), MAYO (Mexican American Youth Organization), Ballet Folklórico, and scholarships and financial aid. One important point that was mentioned about participating in these student support programs is that the women created and became members of support networks with like-minded individuals who shared similar goals and interests. These were far more than just programs; they became extended families. The concept of the extended family, the programs, networks, teachers, counselors, and friends who created a feeling of *familia* was vital for their successes.

Marina was one of the women who participated in Migrant Education support programs as a child. She reflected:

“Due to our family being migrant and often moving due to seasonal employment, we qualified for Migrant Education services, and I attended summer school every summer as a child. Other than in the Migrant Education program, I never felt like teachers understood me or my family background, nor did they care to.

Though Marina felt like an outsider in her regular school classes, her connection and participation in Migrant Education was the one place in the educational system where she felt understood and cared for.

For Lluvia, Migrant Education was the sole reason she started her formal education. After migrating from a ranch in México to a ranch in Sonoma County, Lluvia had never been enrolled in school:

We lived at the ranch close to my mom's work, and it was a Christmas or Thanksgiving, one of those holidays, and there was like a van full of clothes and food that came to the ranch. They were asking questions like, 'Do you guys go to school?' The lady spoke Spanish. 'No, we don't to school.' We would wake up in the morning and go and play in the field. We lived on a cattle ranch, so we didn't go to school. And apparently that van was a Migrant Education van. They would go around ranches back in the day, and I guess they found out where there were children or families, and they would just stop by with blankets, food, and presents. They talked to my mom and they told us that we had to be enrolled in school...that was how I had my first experience with formal education.

Later, when Lluvia was in high school, she reconnected with Migrant Education services through the Adelante summer school program.

I remember Migrant Education talking to my parents, and my mom somehow ended up letting me to go to Adelante. I think that's when I really felt like expectations of me shifted, because everyone around me expected us to do good. Everyone knew that we were going to be successful. I didn't feel like there was any doubt from Mr. Nugent or Mr. Ramirez [Adelante teachers]. Adelante is also where I connected with math more; Mr. Ramirez was able to explain it so that I could understand it. I always got support through Migrant Education.

Just as Marina felt supported and understood by Migrant Education, Lluvia found that support as well. While in college, Lluvia worked at the *Adelante* summer program that had provided her with so much confidence and support. She, like Ita and Valentina, whose *testimonios* will be explored next, all worked as a Migrant Education Mini Corps to learn about the teaching profession and to gain hands-on classroom experience. Mini Corps, a successful teacher-training and support program for migrant or former migrant students, provides the opportunity for students to learn about and gain experience in the teaching profession while in school.

Ita voiced:

All of my family qualified for Migrant Education support services, and we were able to attend summer school through the *Adelante* program every summer.

Another one of the services that Migrant Education helped with was job placement; I began working at the age of 13 or 14 and continued to work every year thereafter.... This group was tight-knit and supportive; it was more like a family than an employer. We took trips, had gatherings, and formed a strong bond.

Ita's recognition of Migrant Education as a family was typical for all of the participants who felt understood and valued while receiving and participating in Migrant Education programs.

Valentina spoke of the importance of Migrant Education's Mini Corps program though her higher education studies.

I decided to look into the JC. I learned about the Mini Corps program [through Migrant Education], which would be a job where I could make money while I went to

school. I really enjoyed it, and since it was training to be a teacher, I decided that's what I wanted to study. My Mini Corps coordinator is the one who encouraged me to transfer to Sonoma State right away, so I transferred after one semester.

In these women's lives, Migrant Education was not just an organization or program, but a familial support system that provided a loving, caring environment while providing navigational capital.

Just as the Migrant Education programs provided support and navigational capital with a strong sense of familial connection, individual counselors, both of whom happened to be Latin@, were instrumental for several of the women.

When Ita became pregnant while a sophomore in high school, her counselor was instrumental in motivating her to continue with her education.

I was almost five months pregnant, and I contacted the counselor to tell him. I talked to the counselor, Mr. Velasquez, and asked him what my options were. I told him, 'I'm going to drop out for the semester.' And he was the one who said, 'Well, let's first look at what all of your options are.' He was really good about it. He said, 'How about if we do home schooling for one semester and then you come back in September?' I said okay and didn't question him at all...He never gave me a way out. From then on, I became a better student. After returning, I started earning certificates again, those certificates that my mom holds so dearly. I ended up with a 3.5 GPA.

This counselor didn't see Ita's pregnancy as an insurmountable obstacle for her, and he gave her an educational plan to look forward to. He also communicated with her in a way that expected academic success.

Lupita had a challenging time with her high school counselor, who did not support or guide her to continue her education other than telling her to go the JC (community college). When her Migrant Education Adelante and MESA teacher Mr. Ramirez started telling her to go to college, and truly believing in her, she started seeing it as a possibility. Not only did he encourage her, Mr. Ramirez connected her with a navigational expert at the community college.

When the counselor from the community college, Luz Navarrette, came to talk to our school, Mr. Ramirez told her, ‘Lupita is smart. She can go to college.’ I told the JC counselor, ‘My parents are going to need to talk to someone about this. They’re not just going to let me go to college. They don’t even know what the JC is about.’ When I explained this to the counselor, she was willing to come to my house and visit with my parents. She sat and talked to them about college. My mom, after talking to her, said, ‘Okay, I’m going to trust that you’re going to take care of my daughter.’ And that is the only reason I was able to attend the JC. Through the support of Mr. Ramirez, and Luz Navarrette’s connection with Lupita’s mom on a personal level, Lupita was able to start her pathway in higher education.

Lluvia was also impacted and supported by a school counselor, in fact the same community college counselor who supported Lupita.

I registered for the JC, showed up, and ended up in the wrong classes because I didn’t talk to a counselor. I didn’t have a counselor. And then I ended up in a counselor’s class, Luz Navarrette, and she kind of pulled me to the side and said, ‘Have you talked to a counselor?’ I was like, ‘Nope.’ ‘I’m a counselor. You should come by my office.’ And I was supported after that! So I’ve always had

one person in my educational life that has kind of noticed me and supported me. I know I have the strength in me to continue to go on, but somehow there is always this angel there, this person that reminds me that I can do it, and pushes me forward.

Lupita went on to earn a master's degree in counseling and became a colleague of the community college counselor who was instrumental in developing her navigational capital.

The teachers, friends, counselors, and family members who supported the development of navigational capital helped to change each participant's educational pathway. They learned how to navigate the system; they learned about resources and supportive networks, and these networks ultimately helped guide them toward educational and professional success.

Resistant Capital

The theme of resistant capital was my primary draw to using the constructs of cultural community wealth as a way to organize, present, and analyze these nine *testimonios*. Before I began the process of coding and analyzing themes, it was evident that all of the participants had a drive, a motivation, something about their character, that would challenge those who did not believe in them or support them. As I searched for a way to describe and analyze this prevailing characteristic among the participants, my advisor, Dr. Fuentes, guided me to Yosso's (2005) work. Resistant capital includes the skills and ability to respond to oppositional behavior by challenging inequality, resisting subordination, and providing a counter-narrative to the status quo. Transformative

resistant capital refers to the power and the act of transforming oppressive structures, people, or beliefs rather than conforming to them. The strength and motivation drawn from resistant capital was empowering for each of the women.

Valentina, who was the first one in her family to go to college, remembers that one of her primary motivations in finishing her degree and credential programs was to prove that she could. Perhaps her Mini Corps coordinator knew this about her when he challenged her.

I remember that my Mini Corps coordinator warned me that if I got married, I wouldn't finish my program. He really wanted me to wait one year until I had finished my credential program before getting married. I said, 'How much do you want to bet that I will finish?' We actually bet \$100, and I won. I was very motivated, and when someone tells me, 'You can't,' I prove them wrong. It motivates me more. I consider myself patient, determined, and not one to give up on myself easily. When people doubt me, I want to prove them wrong, to prove to them and to myself that I can accomplish anything.

Lluvia shared a negative experience with her high school that motivated her to resist and prove him wrong.

I showed up to my counselor and I said, 'Hey, I want to go to Sonoma State. Can you help me?' He looked at my schedule. He looked at my transcript and said, 'Well, it looks like you haven't been doing good in math, but you've been on the honor roll. Maybe we should look at other options, because you really have to know math for college.' I just walked away. He didn't want to help me. He basically said I didn't belong in college....I walked away and didn't apply to

Sonoma State....Years later, I wanted to go back and show my counselor that I had done it. And I did go back, when I was finishing my BA. I told him, 'I'm about to graduate from Sonoma State, the Hutchins Program, where I really wanted to go.' I think he didn't even know what I was talking about. I don't even think he was conscious that he made that negative statement to me years before.

If Lluvia had not developed resistant capital, she may have walked away and never pursued higher education. Though her counselor may not have been aware that his negativity years before had made such a lasting impression on Lluvia, she vividly remembers and carries the pain and the impact from this exchange with her counselor.

Xumakari had a similar experience with her high school counselor, and she feels for those who didn't have the resistant capital to move forward.

I remember vividly how counselors were misleading students and having them believe that they couldn't do things. Like the counselor that told me that I couldn't go to Loyola Marymount because my grades weren't high enough, I didn't have enough money, and I was poor. If I would've believed her, if I didn't have the self-confidence that I had in myself, or my parents to support me, I would've believed her.

Xumakari's ability to resist and challenge subordination allowed her to pursue her dream of attending Loyola Marymount. Her transformative resistant capital, coupled with her strong aspirational and familial capital, ensured that she would not be swayed or ever give up on herself.

Angelica's aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital are all evident in the story about how she came to be identified as a gifted child.

In fourth grade, I remember – I was such a weird kid – some other kids in my class were in the gifted program. And I would think, ‘How come I’m not in the gifted program? I’m just as smart as those kids!’ Can you believe that – this was when I was in fourth grade!

When Angelica changed schools two years later, she made certain that the gifted program designation was noted.

Everybody had known each other since kindergarten, and I came in and didn’t know anybody. It was such an adjustment and such a different environment. The first thing I asked the principal was, ‘Do you have a gifted program, because I’m gifted.’ That was really important to me.

Angelica’s transformational resistance fought against, yet allowed her the benefits, of the educational system that would have ignored, overlooked, and excluded a migrant ESL student from ever being considered for the gifted program. Later, when Angelica was preparing to go away to a prestigious university, she recounted:

I did have one teacher, before I left high school, who said, ‘Well, you got in [to Stanford], but we’ll see if you can make it through. We’ll see if you graduate.’ I still ask myself, ‘Why would somebody say that?’ And there was also another student, a white student in high school, who said, ‘Oh well, she only got in to Stanford because she’s a minority.’ And I just thought, ‘Really? You really think they accept whoever without talent or skill?’ I wanted to show both of them!

And she did, by not only earning her bachelor’s, but her credential and master’s degree from Stanford.

In the group *plática*, during the *conocimiento*, Xumakari made a statement that resonated with many of the women in attendance.

Throughout my life, I didn't take challenges as a negative. I always took them as a positive. I was always challenged, but I always knew that I could do it, whatever it was. And the times I wasn't sure myself, I was surrounded by someone who supported and encouraged me.

Other participants agreed that they also saw challenges as opportunities. Victoria shared, "When challenged, I just fought with my actions. I would think, 'You know what, I'm going to prove this to you. I'm going to show you guys that you're wrong about me.'" Later, when reflecting on the evening and all of the stories, experiences, and perspectives that were shared, it was noted: "None of us like to be told we can't do something, because that just motivates us to want to do it even more."

All of the participants gained strength from their resistance, and fought back against naysayers, negative stereotypes, and detractors. They embodied transformational resistant capital in their responses to challenges throughout their lives.

Summary

This chapter, through carefully selected excerpts from the gathered *testimonios*, highlighted the strengths and community cultural wealth that the participants of this study found impactful and significant. Through their *testimonios*, the participants addressed and reflected on the primary research question of this study, which was to explore how the lived experiences impacted the participants' educational paths. Through their memorable stories (familial capital), identification of resources (navigational capital), ability to overcome challenges (aspirational and resistant capital), and individual and group

reflections (social capital), it is clear that the participants are holders and passers on of various forms of cultural community wealth.

This study was designed to explore how the experiences of the participants, conveyed through *testimonio*, impacted their educational paths. Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth provided a helpful lens to present the findings and analyze the data. Used as an organizational tool, as well as for analysis, the concept of community cultural wealth was an ideal way to frame the findings of the present study. As noted in the introduction to this section, such experiences and stories have been historically undervalued, unrecognized, and unacknowledged (Yosso, 2005). The participants of this study have purposefully and bravely shared their *testimonios* so that their experiences can be valued, recognized, and acknowledged, as they should be.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The *testimonios* presented in this study confirm and contribute to existing research that identifies salient factors of academic success, especially for Latina/o students (Bañuelos, 2006; Darder et al., 1997; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Espino et al., 2010; Gándara, 1982; Gándara, 1995; Holling, 2006; Johnson, 2011; Ramirez Lango, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2000; Yosso, 2005). More powerful than traditional interviews or general narrative storytelling, the *testimonios* depict a sense of urgency and importance and go beyond simply telling the participants' experiences. These *testimonios* challenge and provide counternarratives that reject the dominant paradigms and beliefs about Latin@s and education. The heartfelt *testimonios* “flip the script” and challenge the notion of what is most helpful for Latinas, including a paradigm shift where the family circumstances, linguistic challenges, and socioeconomic background of the participants, too oftentimes seen as obstacles to be overcome, are transformed into sources of strength and community cultural wealth.

In this chapter, I will present a discussion of the emergent themes, contribute an additional form of community cultural wealth: Experiential Capital, and make recommendations based on the participants' *testimonios*.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the theoretical frameworks used to frame this study are Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) and Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory. In the discussion that follows, the intent is not to essentialize or generalize the Mexicana experience, but to discuss salient themes that emerged through the course of this study. As mentioned in the

previous chapter, several themes, which correspond with Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth, emerged through the *testimonios* and group *plática*. The participants hold a wealth of community cultural capital. The four themes that are discussed in the following sections are: family influence (familial and linguistic capital), the importance of educators (familial-navigational capital), support systems (familial-navigational capital), and internal personal characteristics (aspirational and resistant capital).

La Familia

La familia formed the foundation for each participant's life experiences and educational journeys. The family is a source of great strength, of cariño, and of a strong educación. As Johnson (2011) found, the preeminence of family in all aspects of their lives is characteristic of the importance of strong family ties, and family remains a primary social group for many Latin@ students.

In each *testimonio*, the participants spoke of memories of México, whether it was when she lived there as a child or when she returned to visit for extended periods of time. None of the families immigrated to the United States never to return to their homeland; they all lived transnationally for much of their childhood. Español, everyone's primary language, was the language of the home, the language of their parents, and the language of their cultural identity. Each of the participants maintains and values bilingualism, and this value is rooted with the parents who oftentimes insisted that they never lose their home language. Each participant identified herself as coming from a strict, traditional *Mexican* family. Though not all participants came from two-parent households (two of the nine were raised in single-parent households), everyone's parental figures were strong

and firm influences. All of the families came from humble backgrounds; the participants were the first generation to finish high school, let alone earn graduate degrees. Many parents did not have the opportunity to study in México, and most struggled with English most of their lives. Yet they instilled a strong value of education in their daughters. Thus, as Darder et al. (1997) and C. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2010) found, the Mexican immigrant families in this study greatly value education and often name educational opportunity as a primary goal for their children, one they are willing to sacrifice to attain.

The importance of *la familia* was evident in the individual interviews, as well as in the group *plática* where the participants came to this conclusion as well. This supports and affirms similar findings by Gándara (1982, 1985) and Orozco (2003) which also recognized the importance of *la familia*.

Influential Educators

Every participant was able to identify one, two, or multiple educators who made a difference and changed the trajectory of their lives, and who not only provided navigational capital, but familial capital as well. Whether it took place in elementary school or in college, every participant shared the name and the story of a significant educator who changed their lives. From the fifth grade teacher who started holding Marina accountable for her learning, to the high school counselor who did not allow Ita to drop out of school when she was pregnant, to the community college counselor who went to Lupita's home and convinced her parents to let her go to college, all of the women shared powerful stories of support and encouragement that they received from educators. It was common to hear, "It wasn't until Mr. Ramirez." Or: "It wasn't until Adelante," or "It wasn't until Ms. Dodd." The participants were very much aware of the individual or

individuals who saw something in them, believed in them, and guided them. These individuals were not only there to help them navigate, but they became part of an extended family with a strong connection and sense of caring. Johnson (2011) found that Latina students need to feel a deep connection to those adults around them in order to invest in educational opportunities, and for many of the women in this study, adult role models filled this mentorship role. However, not all of the memories were positive; they also recalled, by name, educators who ignored them, doubted them, or challenged their potential. In some cases, the educators gave the impression that they did not care, that they did not believe in the participants. In each case, the participants sought to prove them wrong, and that became a strong motivating factor that manifested in transformational resistant capital. In summation, the power that educators hold, as mentors or as gatekeepers, was evident in individual interviews as well as at the *plática*.

Student Support Programs

Every woman in this study participated in and greatly benefitted from at least one student support program that supported them with navigational, social, and familial capital. Most of the participants are from farmworker families, and they all received Migrant Education services, many from elementary school through employment in college. Other influential support programs included the Puente Project, designed to increase the number of Latin@ community college students who transfer to universities, EOP (Extended Opportunity Program), and Upward Bound. Common components of these three programs include: high academic standards, intense supplemental and relevant instruction, ongoing academic monitoring and advising, consistent student centered support systems, connections with the community (mentors, community service, tutors),

long-term student commitment, and, perhaps most importantly, the development of small learning communities that provided a new *familia* for the participants. As Bañuelos (2006) found, the women in this study all found support and success in spaces of community and belonging.

The learning communities became safe and supportive environments where students were able to form meaningful connections with more than one committed, supportive, and well-trained adult (e.g. teachers, advisors, counselors, mentors, and/or tutors). Moreover, positive peer relations with like-minded individuals and positive peer pressure that placed a value on education and academic success contributed to the encouraging and supportive atmosphere. The sense of family that was created in each program was an integral component of each student support program.

Internal Personal Characteristics

Quite evident during the *plática*, each of the participants is a strong, wise, and inspirational *Mexicana*. A composite character that encapsulates the dominant character traits of the participants of this study is Citalin.

Citalin is a woman who came from humble beginnings. From an early age, she faced hardships and challenges that most children cannot imagine. Forces beyond her control took her from her childhood home in rural México and forced her to learn to survive in a foreign, new land, where the language, the customs, the pace, and even the food were at first shocking and intolerable. Citalin felt isolated and alone everywhere except for at home. At home, her strict but caring mother and father taught her to never take anything for granted, to value hard work, to live a life of integrity, to be proud of her culture, and to realize that education is a key to moving beyond a life of hard labor. Her

motivation to make the best of her new situation in the United States helped her to acculturate quickly. Within two years, Citalin was no longer lost in her new world. She was able to make friends and learn English at school, though she still didn't feel like there were many peers or adults who she could truly relate to. She dedicated herself to her studies and found academic success winning spelling bees and scoring well on math tests. Never wanting to lose her cultural or linguistic identity, Citalin was able to develop into a fully bilingual and bicultural individual, though during difficult times she sometimes felt like she had to choose one culture or language over the other, and sometimes kept one part of herself hidden while at school. Citalin was always a most determined and resilient student. She longed for others to see her potential, and they often did. However, if they doubted her, she always proved them wrong, and these traits continue to this day. Citalin stands up to challenges and sees them as opportunities. She has a deep appreciation for hard work and diligence. She is a workaholic. She has always found people who challenge and support her to become a better person. She has surrounded herself with networks of support, and in turn, she supports many others. She is actively involved in the community. She always sees the potential in others, and is saddened and angered when others haven't had the same opportunities or luck that she has. She is a passionate educator committed to social justice. Citalin is an intelligent, creative, and resolute woman. She is caring, loving, nurturing, and spiritual. She is rebellious and challenges the status quo. She always seeks to improve her life and the lives of those in her community. She greatly values education, learning, knowledge, and wisdom. Citalin is an inspiration to others. She has an appreciation for all of life's experiences, as painful or wonderful as they may be.

Experiential Capital

Yosso (2005) developed a model of community cultural wealth that includes familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, resistant capital, linguistic capital, and aspirational capital. These forms of wealth recognize and value the cultural, social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal assets that individuals, specifically from Communities of Color, develop and draw on throughout their lives. These forms of cultural capital acknowledge that lived experiences allow students from Communities of Color to develop multi-faceted strengths.

In the notes at the very end of Yosso's (2005) article, in which she lays out the model of community cultural wealth, she states, "I look forward to the ways that cultural wealth will take on new dimensions as others also 'run with it'" (p.83). I found great inspiration in her work, and as I reflected, analyzed and re-analyzed the data, read and re-read the literature, then reflected again, I found that I am ready to "run with it."

An additional form of community cultural wealth to supplement and complement Yosso's model, based on the data gathered throughout this research study, is *Experiential Capital*. Yosso, and many other LatCrit scholars, especially those who have found immense value in *testimonio* as methodology (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores, 2012; Prieto & Villenas, 2012; Carmona, 2010; Elenes & Delgado Bernal; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, 2003) have recognized that the voice, the perspective, and the truth of the individual is powerful and significant. One's *testimonio* may not reveal experiences that can fit neatly into a pre-identified form of cultural wealth (which Yosso acknowledges), but by adding an additional form of cultural wealth, which I term

Experiential Capital, all of one's experiences, positive and negative, can be seen as providing a form of capital that can enrich and strengthen an individual's life.

For example, in the *testimonios* shared by Lluvia and Ita, working with their families on farms in México provided them with an abundance of familial capital, and they learned from and contributed to the family. These early experiences also gave Lluvia and Ita vastly different skills and perspectives than any other participants in the study, and anyone else who does not know life on a farm in rural México. Yet the knowledge and skills that they had, that they brought with them when they started school in the United States, was never recognized. Educators never drew on or recognized the wealth of experiential capital that they brought with them; they were viewed as illiterate, uneducated children from impoverished backgrounds. Thus, it is important for students, as well as educators to identify, recognize, and value the various forms of Experiential Capital that students have gathered and developed through life experiences.

Recommendations

This was an extremely informative, emotional, empowering, and powerful study. I am honored to have been entrusted with the *testimonios* of the nine participants, but I acknowledge that they were not only entrusted to me as an individual scholar, but purposefully shared for the benefit of educators and students, now and in the future.

It is not only valuable but vital to continue to encourage and gather *testimonios* from Communities of Color. Educators and researchers must continue the far too recent recognition and acknowledgement of hearing and listening to our voices as students and educators of color. Rather than list one or two policy recommendations, I will echo and

add to the many thoughtful and heartfelt recommendations made by the participants of this study, whose expertise is founded on multiple and intersecting forms of community cultural wealth, academic knowledge, and professional experience. In their words first, followed by my reiteration and emphasis:

“When people doubt me, I want to prove them wrong, to prove to them and to myself that I can accomplish anything. That is what I hope to instill in my young students as well. As an elementary school teacher, I have high expectations for my first-grade students and a strong desire for them to love learning and education. I want them to realize that they have the potential to do anything. I often say, ‘If I can do it, anybody can!’” -Valentina

Valentina suggests that children need to have their potential realized from a very young age. Educators can supplement parental encouragement by having high expectations and holding children accountable, even from a very young age. It is important to note that when Valentina shares her sentiment, “If I can do it, anybody can,” which was echoed by several other participants in the study, there is an addendum that is invisible, yet very present. “If I can do it, anybody can,” *if* various forms of community cultural wealth, such as aspirational capital and navigational capital are recognized and developed. Thus, the first recommendation is that educators must recognize and foster forms of community cultural wealth among their students.

“Growing up, I never felt proud of my culture outside of my home. People couldn’t even pronounce my name right, and they Anglicized it. It makes me

proud to see people who are proud of their culture, because I felt I had to hide that part of me to fit in at school.” –Marina

Marina recommends that educators work diligently to provide a safe space that recognizes and values student identities and backgrounds, without forcing assimilation. Several participants felt like they had to assimilate to be successful, but in retrospect, assimilation was not necessary. It is important for educators to acknowledge this. For example, though learning English is vital, it need not be to the detriment of losing one’s primary language.

“The most life-changing thing has been that somebody believed in me and expected more from me; they saw my potential. One person can have a real impact, and we have to see that potential in kids, and really believe in them. We need to help them to believe in themselves.” -Marina Angel

“I’ve always had one person in my educational life that has kind of noticed me and supported me. I know I have the strength in me to continue to go on, but somehow there is always this angel there, this person that reminds me that I can do it, and pushes me forward.” –Lluvia

Marina and Lluvia remind us that individual educators have the power (and the duty) to not only recognize student potential, but to cultivate it, especially among children of color. We must notice and pay attention to our students! Educators, counselors, parents – we must never be too busy to reach out to our children. We must have safeguards in place so that no child feels he/she can slip through invisibly. In

practice, this would include making personal connections, connecting early and connecting often, and reaching out to students and their families. This recommendation is founded on a deep belief in the capacity and strength of our students, and their community cultural wealth.

“I know that someday I’ll be sitting in an office being the counselor that I want to be. I know that has a lot to do with people in my life have pushed me when I’ve given up on myself. There have been mentors, counselors, friends, and family members to push me.” –Lluvia

As Lluvia suggests, the power of providing a nurturing, supportive, and familial support system cannot be understated. And it is important to not just provide a support system that keeps students in their comfort zone, but one that challenges and pushes students to aspire and reach for more.

“As Latinas, we don’t have to conform to being that good, quiet, submissive wife. We don’t have to conform.” –Victoria

“One way [to help students believe in themselves] is to give them multiple opportunities to try something that is out of reach for them, so that they can see that they can do it, that they can achieve it. Educators, parents, and peers should encourage more Latina/os to participate in activities that challenge cultural stereotypes. Being the only Latina cheerleader was difficult, but if more students are encouraged and supported, cultural stereotypes and boundaries can be broken.” –Marina Angel

In this study of nine academically and professionally successful women, Victoria and Marina remind *mujeres* to reject any traditional stereotype that doesn't fit who we are. Breaking stereotypes, even those deeply embedded in a culture or generation, will allow children to see and aspire to new possibilities not previously imagined.

Furthermore, we should not try to make others, including our students, conform to our vision for them.

“I believe that educators need to start encouraging students at a younger age, especially those who don't see themselves as college-bound students....Students need to begin to visualize and imagine themselves going on to college, and they need the self-confidence to do so. Also, parents need to be taught how to be involved in their children's education. It is not enough to simply tell them to get involved, but to share what that means and what that looks like.” –Lupita García

The educator-parent partnership is essential, as is the ability for students to be able to believe in their potential and visualize their futures. Finding ways to reach and connect with families from a young age will help to foster and encourage a college-going expectation. Knowledge about college can become a form of community cultural wealth.

“Yes, it was worth it. Education does pay off. It is worth it. In the moment there might be a struggle, but for us Latinos where there is a scarcity of professionals who are bilingual and in education, it is definitely worth it.” –Angelica

In a time when the cost-value of higher education is sometimes questioned, Angelica responds to alleviate any potential fears or misgivings. Not only worth its monetary cost, Angelica reaffirms that the pursuit of higher education is worth the time, sacrifice, and effort that is required. For the participants in this study, and for millions more, higher education changes lives.

“I couldn’t wait to be perfect in English. That’s what I thought. Now I tell my students, ‘Don’t be perfectionists. You’re going to learn how to communicate. You’re going to learn what you need to. And if someone cares what you’re saying, they’ll ask you again. They’re going to ask for clarification. But don’t wait until perfection before you start using English.’” –MaJulie

MaJulie has important advice for second language learners and language educators: it will not work to “wait” to use English until it’s perfect. Practice, taking risks, and making mistakes is an important part of the learning process. Create safe and supportive educational environments where mistakes are not only allowed, but encouraged as evidence of risk-taking and the learning process.

“Children are so alone, especially Hispanics, and especially newcomers. They need to feel valued. That’s one of the reasons the class Spanish for Spanish speakers is so important! They need to feel security and a sense of self-worth. Right now they are lost. From young children, we should be telling them that they can do it. Don’t treat them like they’re stupid. Treat them like they are capable

and responsible. Self-esteem is missing, and it is so important. They don't value themselves. They need love and care, and parenting, and we all need to give it."

–MaJulie

"I believe that education has to be interesting and have meaning. It has to make the mind work. Education has to include creativity, passion, and love." -MaJulie

A passionate educator, MaJulie reveals that isolation (linguistic, cultural, socio-economic) and a culture of low expectations, both of which are rampant today, are exactly the opposite of what is needed. MaJulie, who despised her experiences with school and education as a child, restates and reemphasizes the importance of educators who are relevant, passionate, and caring. Educators can create this atmosphere by establishing a stimulating learning environment where students are challenged and supported. Students need to feel connected and valued. They need to feel that others hold high expectations for them. MaJulie also emphasizes the importance of loving and caring for students as our children. Our students need to know they are loved.

"I knew I could do more for myself, instead of just letting the current take me.

That's what I want for today's students. Students need to feel like they can achieve something. I've heard a lot of kids saying, 'I'm just going to work in the field. Big deal.' And I say, 'No big deal! Why are you telling yourself this?' I want them to know that they can do something more, at least to give it a try, and to know that there is more out there for them. They don't just have to stay in town and work. There is nothing wrong with that, but at least give school a try and get

informed about opportunities. Young people need support, confidence, information, and a sense of responsibility.” -Victoria

Victoria’s image of going with the current and letting herself be guided along is an important one for educators and students to learn to avoid. We don’t have to go with the flow! We can and must resist oppressive structures to transform our lives and the lives of our students. In practice, this may include offering before and after school opportunities for students. It may also include partnering students with professional mentors, providing internship experiences, and/or exposing students and families to meaningful project-based learning opportunities. I have found that students sometimes do not feel like the opportunities are for them, that they are for “others.” We need to encourage and connect students with resources and opportunities; sending out a mass flyer or making one announcement is not enough.

“It’s not about being smarter than others, it’s knowing about resources and how to use them. We need to instill a belief in children that they have unlimited ability.

We need to help kids believe in themselves to know that everybody has the ability and the intelligence. We need to teach them to use all of the resources available to them.” -Angelica

Angelica highlights the sentiment and recommendations of many of the women: the importance of explicitly teaching students how to continuously develop and pass on forms of community cultural wealth such as aspirational and navigational capital. The aspirational capital will allow students to see the many possibilities and opportunities available to them. Navigational capital will provide them with the tools and resources to

move forward. Sharing and encouraging this information can be done by individual educators in the classroom, in family meetings/trainings, via special academic success programs, through workshops, service learning projects, and in numerous additional creative and effective ways.

In summary, the recommendations shared by the participants in this study are as follows:

- 1) Educators must recognize and foster forms of community cultural wealth among their students.
- 2) Educators must work diligently to provide a safe space that recognizes and values student identities and backgrounds, without forcing assimilation.
- 3) Individual educators have the power (and the duty) to not only recognize student potential, but to cultivate it, especially among children of color.
- 4) The power of providing a nurturing, supportive, and familial support system cannot be understated. And it is important to not just provide a support system that keeps students in their comfort zone, but one that challenges and pushes students to aspire and reach for more.
- 5) Allow students to challenge cultural stereotypes, and to reject traditional stereotypes that don't fit who they are. Educators should not try to make others, including our students, conform to our vision for them.
- 6) The educator-parent partnership is essential, as is the ability for students to be able to believe in their potential and visualize their futures.

- 7) Parents and students need to be aware that the pursuit of higher education is worth the time, sacrifice, and effort.
- 8) Create safe and supportive educational environments where mistakes are not only allowed, but encouraged as evidence of risk-taking and the learning process.
- 9) Education has to include creativity, passion, and love. Students need to know they are loved.
- 10) Young people need support, confidence, information, and a sense of responsibility.
- 11) Students must be explicitly taught how to continuously develop and pass on forms of community cultural wealth such as aspirational and navigational capital.

Conclusion

As the researcher in this study, I am humbled, honored, and thankful for the opportunity to have captured and learned from the *testimonios* of the nine participants. I deeply value the relationships that were deepened and the sense of *comunidad* (community) and mutual respect that was developed, especially among all participants and friends at the group *plática*.

There are several implications to this study. First, this study contributes to academic knowledge about the value and power of *testimonio* as a valid qualitative methodology. There is also valuable information and several recommendations for educators to consider, so that rather than perpetuate the status quo, they begin to see aspects of community cultural wealth as assets rather than deficiencies. Another contribution that this study makes is the addition of Experiential Cultural Capital to Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth. The participants in this study, all educators, not only contributed to but learned from each other's *testimonios*.

Historically, the role of the *testimonio* has been to tell one's lived experience. Yet it is important to remember and recognize that along with each individual *testimonio*, there is also a powerful collective story. I recall Ribogerta Menchú's (1984) statement, "I'd like to stress that it's not only *my* life, it's also the testimony of my people" (p.1). One of the powers of *testimonio* as a pedagogy is that not only do individual experiences resonate, but the experiences of an entire community are conveyed. I am deeply grateful, as we should all be, that the participants in this study chose to share their *testimonios*. I will end with the voice of the participants, because it was truly a validation and an honor to hear these remarks at the group *plática*, about the powerful group *testimonio* that had just transpired:

"It was reaffirming and inspiring...I could just feel everyone's energy...It was powerful to be with such strong women who stood up to challenges and showed their resiliency. We learned to appreciate each other's stories and our differences...I walked away thinking, 'Gosh what a group.' It felt very empowering to be there. And then I was thinking, 'Where were you guys when I felt like I was the only one?' You know, because there were a lot of times when I had my doubts and I was like, 'I wonder how many other people are going through this.' There was so much laughter, and even tears. We had strong connections."

Finally, and perhaps most compelling,
"Even though we all had a different story, we all had the same story.... It was like my story was being told by others."

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER TO RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS

August 20, 2011

Dear Ms. _____:

My name is Luz Navarrette García, and I am a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco. I am conducting a study on Mexican American women who have pursued education beyond a baccalaureate degree.

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you have been identified as meeting the specific criteria of: 1) immigration to the United States from México, 2) experience learning English as a new language, 3) attainment of a baccalaureate degree, and 4) enrollment in a post-baccalaureate (graduate school) educational program. The names of possible participants were identified through professional and personal references.

The primary components of this study include two interviews and a focus group. You will also be provided a journal to record additional relevant thoughts and experiences during the course of the study. If you agree to participate, you will be given more detailed information and an informed consent form prior to beginning the study.

As you consider participation, please keep in mind that it is possible that some of the questions and memories make you feel uncomfortable. You will be free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or to stop participation at any time. Records will be kept as confidential as possible, and pseudonyms will be used.

While there may be no direct benefit to you for participating, the anticipated benefit of the study is a better understanding the experiences of Mexican American women who have pursued post-baccalaureate education.

There will be no cost to you, nor will you be reimbursed for your participation in this study.

If you have questions about the research, you may contact me at (707) 280-0000. If you have further questions about the study, you may contact the

IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

Thank you for your attention. If you agree to participate, please contact me by phone or email at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Luz Navarrette García
Graduate Student
University of San Francisco
lagarcia@usfca.edu

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background

Ms. Luz Navarrette García, a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is doing a study on Mexican American women and their experiences in education.

I am being asked to participate because I am a Mexican American woman who has pursued higher education beyond a baccalaureate degree.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will participate in an initial interview with the researcher.
2. I will keep a journal to record additional relevant experiences or memories that occur or that I recall between phases of the study.
3. I will participate in a focus group with the researcher and other participants in this study.
4. I will participate in a follow-up interview with the researcher.
5. The interviews and focus group will be audio-recorded.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. It is possible that some of the questions may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer, or to stop participation at any time.
2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records, including audio recordings, transcriptions, and research notes, will be safeguarded and kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files.

Benefits

There may be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the experiences of Mexican American women who have pursued graduate school.

Costs/Financial Considerations

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement

I will not be paid or reimbursed for my participation in this study.

Questions

I have talked to Luz Navarrette García about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at (707) 280-xxxx or contact her by email at lagarcia@usfca.edu.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Consent

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's Signature

Date of Signature

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date of Signature

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH SUBJECTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

RESEARCH SUBJECTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As a research subject, I have the following rights:

Research subjects can expect:

- ▶ To be told the extent to which confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained and of the possibility that specified individuals, internal and external regulatory agencies, or study sponsors may inspect information in the medical record specifically related to participation in the clinical trial.
- ▶ To be told of any benefits that may reasonably be expected from the research.
- ▶ To be told of any reasonably foreseeable discomforts or risks.
- ▶ To be told of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment that might be of benefit to the subject.
- ▶ To be told of the procedures to be followed during the course of participation, especially those that are experimental in nature.
- ▶ To be told that they may refuse to participate (participation is voluntary), and that declining to participate will not compromise access to services and will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.
- ▶ To be told about compensation and medical treatment if research related injury occurs and where further information may be obtained when participating in research involving more than minimal risk.
- ▶ To be told whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research, about the research subjects' rights and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject.
- ▶ To be told of anticipated circumstances under which the investigator without regard to the subject's consent may terminate the subject's participation.
- ▶ To be told of any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research.
- ▶ To be told of the consequences of a subjects' decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the subject.
- ▶ To be told that significant new findings developed during the course of the research that may relate to the subject's willingness to continue participation will be provided to the subject.
- ▶ To be told the approximate number of subjects involved in the study.
- ▶ To be told what the study is trying to find out;
- ▶ To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice;
 - ▶ To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes;
- ▶ To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be;

- ▶ To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study; To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study;
- ▶ To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complications arise;
- ▶ To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study;
- ▶ To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form; and
- ▶ To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study.

If I have other questions, I should ask the researcher or the research assistant. In addition, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS by calling (415) 422-6091, by electronic mail at IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to USF IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, Education Building, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

TESTIMONIO (INTERVIEW) PROTOCOL

The questions in bold will be asked in every interview to provide a baseline for analysis.

1. **Please tell about yourself. If someone really knew you well, what would he/she know about you? Tell who you are.**
2. How do you define education? Educación?
3. Please share about your informal and formal early education experiences, in México and in the United States.
4. **Tell about your language learning experiences (when you developed your native language and English language skills).**
5. What is an event that you remember when you first began school in the United States?
6. How did your family upbringing impact your education experiences in México and in the United States?
7. **What resources and support do you think most impacted your academic path?**
8. **When you think about the challenges that you've faced in terms of your educational path, does one story or experience come to mind?**
9. When and how did you make the decision to pursue a graduate degree?
10. **How has your advanced education impacted your life, and your family? How do you think it impacts your future?**
11. What is essential to know about your educational experiences?

12. If you were to write an autobiography, what about your education would you include?

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

In addition to additional, more specific questions that will be developed after an initial analysis of the first interview data, these list some of the guiding questions/prompts for the group:

- 1) Please introduce yourself to the group.
- 2) Please share your educational paths with the group.
- 3) Please share your linguistic journey with the group.
- 4) Think about the stories that you shared at our initial interview. Share one of the most impactful stories with the group.
- 5) Listening to the stories of your *colegas* here, what feelings or thoughts come to mind?
- 6) How do you think your personal path may be connected to paths that others may have gone through?
- 7) What support do you think you can collectively offer to young women who are just starting their educational paths?

APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL

IRB Application #11-088 - Approved

USF IRBPHS <irbphs@usfca.edu> Tue, Sep 20, 2011 at 8:23 AM

To: lagarcia@dons.usfca.edu

Cc: ehfuentes@usfca.edu

September 20, 2011

Dear Ms. Navarrette Garcia:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #11-088). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.
2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.
3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days. If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at [\(415\) 422-6091](tel:4154226091).

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP

Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

IRBPHS – University of San Francisco

Counseling Psychology Department

Education Building – Room 017

2130 Fulton Street

San Francisco, CA 94117-1080

[\(415\) 422-6091](tel:4154226091) (Message)

[\(415\) 422-5528](tel:4154225528) (Fax)

irbphs@usfca.edu