

NUESTRAS EXPERIENCIAS, OUR EXPERIENCES: TESTIMONIOS OF  
MEXICANAS IN THE U.S.

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Council of  
Texas State University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
with a Major in Adult, Professional, and Community Education  
December 2021

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## **DEDICATION**

Para mis padres, Roberto Javier Peña and Frances Rivera Peña, quienes me han dado todo el amor y comprensión para seguir adelante en mis estudios. Ellos me enseñaron que para sobresalir en la vida hay que luchar y no dejarse vencer ante nadie ni nada. Mom, esto es por todo tu esfuerzo y empeño en sacar a tus hijas/os adelante. I love you!

Y también, para mi abuelo, que en paz descansa, Felipe Rivera Hernández, porque el fue quien me enseñó que la fe a que tenerla a dios y en si mismo. Last, but certainly not least, my siblings; Blanca, Robert, and Albert, because even though I heard the constant grumble of “When are you going to be done?” you were still there for me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Ann K. Brooks; you have such a warm soul and loving heart. Thank you for guiding me through this dissertation process and giving me the creative freedom to stretch my wings and fly. Dr. Robert Reardon, you have the sweetest smile and always offer the kindest advice. Thank you for your academic support. Dr. Patricia L. Guerra, I may have met you late in my academic career, but I was immediately embraced by you. Thank you for coming on board and pushing a fellow Latina onward in her studies. Dr. Lilliana P. Saldaña, you have supported me since my years at UTSA. I could not have asked for more from you, my friend and neighbor. You always go above and beyond in your encouragement and support. Mil gracias!

My ride or die friends, Jessica M. Quintero, and Sonia “Rey” Lopez-Mader. I have the fondest memories with you two ladies. From flipping canoes over to our chats while carpooling to San Marcos, Texas. This chica appreciates your constant support and from the bottom of my heart, thank you for being great friends. Glenna Bruun, my travel bestie! Esther Pippins, Tess Pérez and Liz Castañeda, you are next in this doctoral journey. Thank you for having my back. *¡Chingonas por vida!* Humberto, my officemate, thanks for being such a kind person and being my writing buddy till the end. Thank you to Dr. Margarita Machado-Casas for being an awesome mentor and role-model in this academic world. Jose Rivera, you came into my life unexpectedly, but you have sat while

I wrote this dissertation even though you did not have to. Thank you for being just my friend.

Gracias a las participantes de este estudio. Sin Elena, María, Camilla, Clara y Cecilia, a quienes les cambie el nombre por anonimato, les doy mi mas sincera gratitud y aprecio. Sin ustedes yo no podría haber terminado mi carera como doctora de filosofía y letras. Gracias por abrirme sus hogares, darme el tiempo y sus historias para poder seguir adelante y darles el sueño que siempre anhelaron mis padres para mi.

And finally, the one person who I cannot forget, my Julie, “Julietta,” Olivares a.k.a de Peña and Liggins. I would not have made it this far without you. My sister gave me the greatest gift—to be an aunt to you. I received so much support and love from you that I thought I broke you at one point. I am glad to know that I did not. Everything you did was much appreciated. I am so blessed to have you in my life. I love you so very much!

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
ABE	Adult Basic Education
AERC	Adult Education Research Conference
AAACE	American Association of Adult and Continuing Education Conference
CASAE	Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education
CFE	Chicana feminist epistemology
CVT	Convivencia Testimonial
ESL	English as a Second Language
ELL	English Language Learner
ELP	English Language Proficiency
GED	General Educational Development
IRB	Institutional Review Board

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of my study was to document the educational experiences of adult *mexicana*<sup>12</sup> immigrants and their *convivencia* with others in public spaces. This study consequently addressed the interdisciplinary gap between adult education and Chicana feminist epistemology. I collected data through a *convivencia testimonial* and one-on-one interviews. Data analysis was done by inductively coding the transcripts into a collective story extrapolated from the themes found. I sought the opinions and thoughts of my findings with my participants to check for trustworthiness. The outcome helped gain a deeper understanding of adult immigrant women's experiences learning English in a community-based adult education program and its impact on their gendered identity.

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<sup>1</sup> *mexicana*: The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) requires capitalization of proper adjectives; however, I would like to be as authentic as possible to the Spanish language rules.

<sup>2</sup> The Spanish capitalization rules, per *Collins Spanish Dictionary* (2009), "while capitals are used for names of countries, they are not used for the adjectives derived therefrom" (para. 2).

## **I. LATINAS IN TEXAS: ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

In the year 2019, life grew challenging in preparing this dissertation because that year my mother became gravely ill. She was in and out of the hospital for half of the year. It was then that I questioned myself as to why I began my doctoral journey. As an adult, it was the second most traumatic situation I had to endure. The first when I was twenty-six years old, and I dealt with the death of my father. He passed on July 22, 2008, and it was when I learned what it felt like to say goodbye to one of the most important people in my life. He and my mother, both immigrated in 1969 seeking a better life for themselves and their future children. Life in Mexico during that period became difficult for them to navigate due to oppressive factors like their employable age, social class, gender, and family morals embedded with negative ideals. But it gave them the necessary push to immigrate permanently to the United States and soon after their goals became to sustain a life and legal residency here.

It was the mid 1970s when they finally obtained legal residency and their next goal became to obtain their U.S. citizenship. My mother began her pursuit when she discovered a local adult and community center held English as a second language (ESL) and how to study for the citizenship exam classes. She would send us off to school, prep for lunch and go to the morning classes. My mom did not tell my father about learning English but tried to convince him to attend evening classes with her. However, my father would get home from work tired because he was the primary breadwinner and so he did not go. He often recounted that he learned English informally through work and his peers. Finally, in 1990 their hard work paid off and both obtained their U.S. citizenship.

Their story established my parents as my role models. My mother became my muse because of her *enseñanzas* (teachings). My father modeled *coraje* (courage/guts) to keep going heedless of any of life's obstacles. They were also my reason to pursue a doctoral degree. So, yes, I questioned how I lost my balance in school, work and personal life after coming so far in my educational career with the support of two loving parents.

I quickly discovered that the stories of the situational barriers faced by adult education students were now also my own. I started dropping the ball, so-to-speak, because my responsibilities became overwhelming. My responsibilities now included, temporarily being my mom's caretaker while my academic pressures increased. I soon learned that the academic world was not so forgiving when your family life takes precedence. To quote one professor's advice on the future of my career path after I shared my situation and the reason that my work ethics were failing me, "Not everyone is so family oriented as you, Cindy" and that crushed my dream. I questioned if I should continue the PhD journey because it was much easier to walk away.

I also questioned if I fit into the academic world because my cultural ideologies were different, although when I spoke to my mom about what happened, she reminded me that not everyone wore their heart on their sleeve like me. She said that sometimes I would encounter people that would try to unknowingly deter me from reaching my goals. I would also always be *culturally* different and not to try fit in. She also reminded me that if she had given up when they faced deportation many years ago, I would not currently be so educationally privileged in comparison to other immigrants. Their story and mine are one of many that are either unknown or not heard about in adult and continuing education

literature. I searched for stories where I could see myself or my parents' lives and found that I was not depicted or written about in adult and continuing education literature.

I chose to open my dissertation with a story because stories drive individuals' ways of knowing, learning and teaching, and because *mujerista* (woman)-centered educational research is different from the traditional educational norms researchers stand by (Anzaldúa, 2007; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006). Through a Chicana feminist perspective, I call for stories that are desperately needed in the field of adult and continuing education: the stories that share the experience of *sobrevivencia* (survival) for Latina immigrant women pursuing their continued education in the U.S., specifically those in pursuit of learning English; the stories that we do not read about from adult education scholars researching the andragogy of immigrants in English as a second language (ESL) classrooms; the stories that hold *consejos* (advice), that teach you from your experiences, and give you the *capacidad* (power) to struggle through the pains of life.

### **Background of the Problem**

Apart from being a doctoral candidate, I was also an adult educator in the field of ESL instruction. One of my long-standing questions as an ESL adult educator was, what were the stories that resisted negative stereotypes of immigrant women in relation to their educational experiences with learning English? Several factors influenced my question and informed my qualitative research study.

One influence was that many of my ESL students were female. I taught in the morning and the demographics of this group were different from those of the evening classes. Many of these women took the opportunity of having their children in school and

their husbands at work. They did not have the obligatory afternoon responsibilities of making dinner or making sure the children had their homework done.

The second influence was my personal observation of how immigrant women (re)negotiated their identities in the U.S. There were obvious distinctions between long-term settled immigrant women and the newly arrived ones. It was also clear to me that the long-term settled immigrant women had enacted a change created by their surrounding environment and language learning. Oliva M. Espín (2006), in her article titled, “Gender, Sexuality, Language, and Migration” described language as what can profoundly influence the transformation of the sense of self and identity of immigrant women. It was important to understand how the (re)negotiations of identities can influence their educational experiences.

The third, and final influence, was the shared stories when we gathered around potlucks. These women felt safe in my classroom and their vulnerability was shared through the discussion of how they experienced life before and after entering my classroom. The stories told me about their experiences *de sobrevivencia* (of survival) in a world that was oppressive because of their social status, gender, skin color, or education. They recounted how they (re)imagined their lives to be when they became somewhat proficient in English. To *(re)imagine* is to juxtapose and enhance new roles or identities against previous ones. They also explained how because of the social embrace of their peers they were now able to connect with other women, inside and outside of the classroom, to empower themselves by forming a network of friends that gave them something to look forward to.

These informal gatherings led me to professional reflection, and I discovered that I had made changes based on my students' orally shared experiences. What I learned through their life stories was something I did not find in the adult and continuing education discussions or literature. It was important to share these and other stories for adult educators and the broader world.

### **Research-based Evidence of the Problem**

I conducted a literature review based on key words such as *ESL, immigrants, narratives, and adult education* that resulted in a piece beneficial to my study because it acknowledged the need to research how the life experiences of immigrant adult learners could be related to their learning (Lee, 2013). Yin Lam Lee (2013) was the only scholar in adult education stating that an abundance of ESL research is being done on learners in K-12, but research studies on andragogy were far and few between. Lee used an alternative approach to collect data that guided the analysis of the participant's narratives. Lee's research study stated a good point, unfortunately the method of applying Bahktin's chronotopic approach to collect narratives overshadowed the good intention of highlighting immigrant stories.

Though I did not find many narratives on immigrants' experiences, scholars agree that adult immigrant learners and adult and continuing education programs are interrelated because of their responsibility to teach English as a second language (Dávila, 2008; Muñoz, 2012; Ullman, 2010), principally teaching women, albeit through a deficit lens (Ruíz, 1991, 2006, 2008). Armed with the knowledge that past research problematized adult immigrants as a basis for instruction, I searched literature in the field of Chicanas/os Studies and any connections to adult education programs. I discovered

that many of the educational programs created for immigrants in the United States began with the surge of *Settlement Houses* during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century (Muñoz, 2012; Ruiz, 1991, 2006, 2008; Sanchez, 1995; Ullman, 2010). Newly arrived immigrants were educated to be integrated into the US society via these settlement houses (Muñoz, 2012; Ullman, 2010). Settlement houses were institutions that were developed to help the disadvantaged people of industrialized cities with a high poverty rate and European immigrants (Gibson, 2016).

In, '*Go After the Women*': *Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915-1929*, Chicano historian, George J. Sanchez (1994) pointed out that the Americanization of Mexican immigrant women became the answer to the mass immigration during that period. Sanchez (1994) also reported that Mexican immigrant women were the ideal candidates that could imbed a new U.S. cultural value system into their homes. Sanchez (1994) also argued that U.S. government officials decided to solve the Mexican *problem* by assimilation of the Mexican women, whom they believed were the holders and creators of cultural values. It exemplified the deficit thinking involved and they tried to eradicate it through the Americanization Movement.

The Americanization Movement upheld the ideology that by learning English, and U.S. civics, assimilation of the Mexican immigrant would prove successful in destroying the "Mexican problem" (Brantley, 2015, para. 2; Ruiz, 2006; Sanchez, 1994). In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in Contemporary Politics, Law, and Social Movements*, Allison Brantley (2015) wrote "The customs and traditions of Mexican immigrants were seen as impediments to thorough integration into the US social and political order" (Americanization section, para. 3). This led to increased funding for adult



education programs to teach immigrants English, although the funding was underpinned by a deficit lens problematizing Mexicans cultural roots (Brantley, 2015; Ruíz, 2006, 2008; Sanchez 1994).

Deficit thinking, according to Valencia (1997), is characterized by “1) blaming the victim; 2) oppression; 3) pseudoscience; 4) temporal changes; 5) educability; 6) heterodoxy” (p. 3). The deficit thinking model does not hold systemic influences as possible reasons that marginalized students fail in school. There is an ideology that marginal groups fail to succeed because of that groups’ genetic or cultural disposition; an oppressive fault is disregarded to keep the social hierarchy intact (Valencia, 1997). This ideology grows out of a false scientific method that concurs problems lie within a marginalized individual’s or group’s internal deficits, but the ideology can change depending on the context or era in which the deficit thinkers or educational policy makers are working. Educational policy makers often make decisions informed by the ideology that marginalized groups are culturally, economically, and intellectually disadvantaged, and only teachable within those constraints.

In 2014, Hanover Research predicted that due to the growing number of adult learners born in another country, adult education programs would become the most sought-after social service for immigrants. Moreover, they suggested that the goal for immigrants in adult education programs is not assimilation, at least not as explicitly as in the early twentieth century but being able to communicate in English as a skill for work (Hanover Research, 2014; McHugh & Doxsee, 2018).

Increasingly, adult education has increasingly become oriented toward social justice and has sought socially inclusive andragogy for immigrants due to the pressures of

globalization (Alfred, 2015; Guo, 2010, 2015). Earlier Americanization tactics for adult immigrant learners were put in place by deficit thinkers who believed assimilation through language learning was key to successful societal integration (Dávila, 2008; Fernandez & Gonzalez, 2003; Sanchez, 1994; Ullman, 2010). The racialization and marginalization of ethnic immigrant groups and the xenophobic sentiment prevalent during the early twentieth century led to a push for adult education to be socially inclusive and diverse (Alfred, 2015; Guo, 2015; Larrotta, 2017; Ullman, 2010). Recently, adult education scholars report that despite the rise in immigration, research into a culturally relevant and effective andragogy for adult immigrant learners has not kept up with the influx of newly arrived immigrants (Alfred, 2015; Alfred & Guo, 2012; Isserlis, 2008; Larrotta, 2017).

### **Problem Statement**

The problem this study addresses is that adult basic education classes serving adult *Mexicana* immigrants are not based on the lived experiences and needs of the women they serve. Educational research about adult *Mexicana* immigrants' experiences have been in short supply in adult education. Scholar Yin Lam Lee's (2013) argued that the life histories of adult immigrants studying English had not been frequently researched compared to K-12 ESL students. Lee explained that by collecting the educational experiences of adult immigrant learners, adult educators would gain insight into learners' educational journeys. This insight could potentially lead to voicing and amplification of the rarely heard immigrant experiences. It can also give an adult immigrant learner the opportunity to co-create knowledge for their educational needs.

In addition, Hanover Research (2014) reported that community-based programs statistically increase English language skills when they adapt to ESL students' needs, however scholars have failed to explain how gaining English skills do impact immigrants' daily lives. Learning about how English skills can impact the lives and gendered identities of ESL learners is important because it can lead adult educators to understanding the true needs of learners. Moreover, a disconnect exists between adult education literature and the Chicana/o pieces that provide an authentic history of Mexicanas/os. The literature by Chicana/o historians such as Vicki L. Ruíz (2006), George Sanchez (1994) and Zaragosa Vargas (2017) depict adult education taught in the early twentieth century in settlement houses as being problematic. Immigrant women were taught to assimilate into the U.S. culture because their culture was seen as inconsequential and as a problem (Sanchez, 1994). The women were also the ones believed to transfer the cultural ideals to the family and were deliberately chosen for the Americanization programs (Sanchez, 1994).

The literature by Chicana/o scholars was not in-depth because it did not delve into the changing trends of adult education for immigrants in the twenty-first century. It did not include first-person narratives on the impact English adult learners, specifically immigrant learners had when they learned English. It also did not address information on the how it may or may not have transformed the gendered identities of the women in the Americanization programs. Therefore, my research addresses this gap by centering first-person narratives of immigrant women's experiences learning English in a community-based adult education program and the impact on their gendered identity.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to document the educational experiences of adult *mexicana* immigrants and their *convivencia* (co-existence) with those they encounter in public spaces. This study consequently addresses was the lack of first-person narratives of immigrant women's experiences learning English in a community-based adult education program and the impact on their gendered identity. In addition, this research is embedded within a Chicana feminist epistemology theoretical framework as an alternative approach to collecting and analyzing the narratives.

## **Research Questions**

My research questions are,

1. What were the educational pathways of the immigrant women prior to entering ESL classes?
2. What were the experiences of adult *mexicanas* who have immigrated to the United States?
3. How have they (re)imagined their gendered identities since coming to the United States?

## **Design of the Study**

I did a qualitative study using a Chicana feminist epistemology and employing a *testimonio* methodology. *Testimonio* is the re-telling of oral stories that exposes the lived experiences of people subjected to an oppressive or marginalizing social framework (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). I gathered educational *testimonios* of adult immigrant women who attended adult ESL courses in South Central Texas in order to

explore the ways learning English in adult education ESL programs empowered their U.S. educational lived experiences and examined the relationship between learning English and their newly (re)imagined experiences in the United States. The word *(re)imagined* in this study is defined as how *adult Mexicana immigrants* created or transposed their identities and roles since arriving in the United States. It is important to understand the lived stories of immigrants in pursuit of continuing their education, specifically ESL, because the priority of immigrants coming to the United States is to gain English language skills to succeed in a country that demands English to communicate daily (Fuentes, Mas, Mein, & Jacobson, 2011; Wrigley, Chen, & White, 2009).

I collected testimonios in a group setting focused on their collective immigrant life and language experiences. Then, I conducted individual interviews with each mujer (woman) for two purposes: a) to reflect on the collective testimonios; and b) to go into more depth on their individual experiences and how these contributed to how they may have (re)imagined their identities. Data analysis included inductive coding of all transcriptions to arrive at an individual collective story of each participant. An “individual collective story” refers to the first-person narrative that is shared during a sharing of group stories.

I gathered the oral stories or *cuentos* (folk stories), as better known in Latino culture, through *testimonios*. These *cuentos* are poignant stories of first-hand experiences, traditionally recounted orally for listeners. *Cuentos* are also traditionally turned into folklore and carry specific meanings, sometimes it is warning listeners of treacherous paths ahead and at other times conveying stories of triumph and successes.

The convivencia testimonial and the one-on-one interviews were conducted in Spanish with one participant code-switching between English and Spanish. But my main concern was that *mujeres* felt at ease and comfortable talking because I did not want to lose the essence of their stories. I felt confident translating because my first language was Spanish, and I did not learn English until I attended elementary school. Being fluent in both languages helped me with data collection and the analysis.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were adult *mexicana* immigrants between 30-70 years old. Participation in the study required an English proficiency level (EPL) of intermediate to advanced, to be born in Mexico, to identify as a woman and to have lived in the United States for more than a year. The historical and geographical account of Mexicans in Texas is important here. Adult *mexicana* immigrants have continued their education in a part of the country that has historically ostracized their education, culture, language, and lived experiences (Ruíz, 2008; Sanchez, 1994). Throughout this dissertation, I will interchangeably use the terms participants, women, Latinas, Chicanas and *mujeres* to portray adult *mexicana* immigrants.

### **Definition of Terms**

When I refer to *Adult Basic Education (ABE)* in this study, it is education that guides “adults [to] get the basic skills they need, including reading, writing, math, English language proficiency, and problem-solving” to obtain high school equivalency diplomas, obtain jobs or advance in their careers, and communicate effectively with others in their social communities (Office of career, technical, and adult education: Adult education and literacy, 2020, para. 1). The adult basic education services in my study are

considered *Community-based Programs* which are federally funded by the state and offer services to adult students such as ESL and high school diploma equivalency classes, typically they are housed out of churches, educational institutions, or non-profit organizations (World Education, Inc., 2018).

In my study, *English as a second language (ESL)* is used in the context of a classroom where an adult learner is adding to her native language, such as making herself bilingual. The adult learner who is in an ESL class is considered an *English language learner (ELL)* or of *Limited English Proficient (LEP)*, that is an adult learner who speaks English *not at all, not well, or well* (United States Census Bureau, 2021). The person does not have to be in an ESL classroom to be considered at this level of LEP. When I refer to someone as *foreign-born* or *immigrant*, it is a person residing outside their birth country.

*Testimonios* are the shared, voiced, or retold subjective experiences, and as such, they help to deconstruct the power relations in society by forming a counternarrative. The stories of immigrants are typically ignored or are created about them through a deficit lens in the dominant society. *Testimonios* enable speakers to resist and challenge societal and institutional marginalization and oppression, including those found in educational institutions (Pérez Huber, 2012; Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). The *testimoniadoras* are the people re-telling the events of their lives and in the process enabling reflexivity and empowerment for the narrator and the listener (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012).

*Code-switching*, in my study, refers to a bilingual or trilingual individual interjecting alternating languages in their common speech. The most common use of

code-switching in Texas is commonly referred to as *Spanglish*. People blend English words with Spanish words from Mexico (McArthur, 2019).

Spanglish is a colloquialism that describes a combination of language, but the word to define the combination of cultures is cultural coalescence from Vicki Ruiz (2008). When “Immigrants and their children pick, borrow, retain, and create distinctive cultural forms” (Ruiz, 2008, p. 50) is what I also refer to as a mixture of two cultures.

Throughout this dissertation, the term *Chicana* will refer to a woman who is a native or descendant from Mexico residing in the United States. The term, *Chicano*, became popular in the 1960s during the Chicano Movement, which politicized the term by using it as a collective expression of culture, ethnicity and “community identity” (GENIAL, n.d.). However, the term Chicana specifically refers to a Latina born in the United States of Mexican heritage, self-identifies as one (Jackson C. F., 2009, p. 19) and has a *mestiza* consciousness (Anzaldúa, 2007). According to Anzaldúa (2007), *mestiza* can be defined as a Chicana who has developed a subjective state of being without constraints from colonization and marginalization

I use the term Latinas/os to encompass the diverse ethnic and Spanish-speaking groups who make up Latinas/os in the United States. The term Latino “coexists with ‘Hispanics’ as an ethnic label of self-identification..., who may use one or the other often depending on regional, generational, or ideological differences” (Torres-Saillant, 2005, Origins: Races, Nations and Languages sect., para 2). I use Latina/o/x to refer to people who are living in the United States and identify with Latin American heritage. I also use the term Latinx to refer to people who identify as gender non-binary and to disassociate from gender-specific language (Gamio Cuervo, 2016).



I, however, do not want to ignore our deep racialized heritage nor overshadow important ethnic identities. Thus, it is important to explain that our *Latinidad* is inherent in our ethnic and racial identities when paralleled against a White America but does not define us as one sole group. Each ethnic group is authentic to their culture and experiences and to claim *Latinidad* does not infer that we ignore those differences (Rúa, 2005).

### **Theoretical Framework**

A Chicana feminist epistemology guided my research study. This acknowledged the alternative ways of knowing for women of color in academia (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas, 1996). It is also through this framework that I created my research design because it offered the tools that were designed to bring awareness to the issues of Chicanas/Latinas (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Pérez Huber, 2012; Preuss & Saavedra, 2014).

This theoretical framework also co-conspired with other decolonizing methodologies. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) stated that disassociating indigenous scholar-researcher methods from an imperialistic Euro-centric male driven research methods informs our legitimate ways of knowing, hence, decolonizing methodologies. Deconstructing how traditional (colonized) research is done and piecing it back together, defines decolonial methodologies.

### ***Chicana Feminist Epistemology***

I positioned myself within a Chicana feminist theory to view race, class and gender inequalities within the personal stories of struggle, success and educational experiences of immigrant women. Chicana feminism is a theory that was born out of a need to resist the hegemonic discourses of Chicano men and White feminists and

dismantle systems of oppression based on race, class, gender, sexuality and other structures that sustain domination (Blackwell, 2015; Hurtado, 1998; Pasque, 2011; Ruíz, 2008; Segura & Pesquera, 1992). By working from a Chicana feminist lens, I am embracing resistance to a patriarchal ideology in society, where male dominance delegates women as their subordinates (Napikoski, 2019) and separates women of color from those still in a patriarchal society and of higher social class and race (Segura & Pesquera, 1992).

Chicana/Latina scholar-researchers should examine their own biases because they need to be aware of their own lived experiences (Villenas, 1996). They should also reflect on the ways they may have internalized oppression and whether and how they may have developed any unwarranted biases (Anzaldúa, 2007; Calderon, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas, 1996). This additional step in educational research prevents them from employing a colonizer role and may guide a Latina researcher to use a Chicana feminist lens (Calderon, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas, 1996). Recognition of these biases can inform Chicana/Latinas' philosophical assumptions and worldview and can therefore guide their research inquiry and design (Creswell, 2018; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas, 1996).

As Chicana feminist researchers, our biases as scholars in a colonized academic setting can transcend into our multiple realities as members of marginalized communities and take on a colonizer lens (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas, 1996). Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) and Sofia Villenas (1996) are two Chicana scholars that struggled with their multiple roles as Chicana feminist researchers in educational research. They argued

that Chicanas' identities and realities were not reflected in traditional Western educational research or feminist paradigms. Because of this, Chicana feminists developed an epistemology and research methodology to reflect their own ways of knowing and creating knowledge. This form of research methodology holds Chicana researchers accountable as researchers, instructors, community members and scholar-activists to resist and disrupt traditional research paradigms (Calderon, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012). This theoretical perspective provided the foundation for my research study because I was working with a marginalized group, namely Mexican immigrant women and I consciously take on the lens of a Chicana researcher.

Ruth Trinidad Galván's (2016) term *convivencia* (co-existence) also guided my theoretical framework because traditional Western methodology traditionally disconnects the researcher and participants. Convivencia is concept that describes how people can connect beyond the superficial polite talk and bond with others (Galván, 2011). This concept helped construct the convivencia testimonial in my methodology chapter.

**Borderlands Theories.** In *Borderlands: La Frontera/La Nueva Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) introduced borderlands theory into Chicana feminist research. In this theory, Anzaldúa (2007) depicted the dualities of identities for Mexican American women living along the southern border of Texas, both as a physical location and a subjective consciousness. Borderland's theory offers Chicana researchers a theoretical framework that can help deconstruct colonized identities, reconstruct them and explain the process. It can also serve as a guide for analysis that is not complicit in using deficit thinking in educational research (Elenes, 1997).

In other words, borderlands theory, is the literal and metaphorical in-between for people who face contradictory thoughts and feelings. It offers a third-space consciousness for people with two or more cultural identities and languages to meet and develop into a new subjective consciousness. Borderlands theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) described borderlands as “a vague and undetermined place... in a constant state of transition” (p. 3). Thus, it is both a physical location for those living in border towns, and a consciousness that can be in a constant state of flux and form new or (re)imagined identities.

I viewed these dualities as existing in adult immigrant women because they carry intellectual and experiential knowledge from two differing countries. From this perspective, the learning of a hegemonic language, English, according to Espín (2006), challenges an immigrant’s identity. Borderland’s theory helped me decipher how adult immigrant women enact agency as an effect of language learning and immigration. It also helped identify and navigate the racialized and gendered identities as they move between in their homes, school and work.

**Latino Cultural Citizenship.** The concept of Latino cultural citizenship, in addition to Chicana epistemology, which originally informed my study, provided a frame for answering my research questions. Latino cultural citizenship ultimately became the glue that held together my conceptual framework and supported the theories that I used. Latino cultural citizenship was a concept that Flores and Benmayor (1997) described to be the social and cultural practices of Latinas/os in the United States’ that are an oppositional response to the assimilationist’s prevailing notions. It informed my analyses of the social and cultural practices the mujeres described engaging in and helped me answered each research question. The concept of Latino cultural citizenship explains how

the mujeres experienced life in the United States post-immigration and their integration into the ESL classrooms.

### **Power/Knowledge Theory**

I believe that the power infused in every social structure is embedded in the threads that hold minority women in subordinate roles and ideologies. In my opinion when assimilation occurs, whether by choice or enacted upon them by another individual, power plays appear. With assimilation, power is infused in the dominant discourse by preserving the ideology that Others, like our fellow Latinx, are inferior. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) explained that “social structures and processes that shape our subjectivities are situated within discursive fields, where language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power exist, intersect, and produce competing ways of giving meaning to and constructing subjectivity” (p. 50). Therefore, a person’s subjectivity is made up of hegemonic social constructs that perpetuates negative ideology and oppressive situations for marginalized people.

In interpreting Michel Foucault’s (1982) power/knowledge theory, Jackson and Mazzei’s (2010) state that “knowledge is an *effect* of power” (p. 50) and power is not oppressive but a practice within power relations that produces knowledge. In other words, when a particular action (oppressive) is done to an individual and the action corresponds with a reciprocal act (resistance/push-back) it becomes the practice of power. The practice of power produces knowledge that then can induce transformation of or changes in an individual’s subjectivity. The Foucauldian term referred to by Jackson and Mazzei to express how knowledge about oneself is shaped by the lived experiences and relationships with another individual is *savoir*:

In this study, my intention in drawing on this power/knowledge theory was not to outline the oppressive conditions held in place by a dominant social group, but to explain the immigrant women's *savoir*. My intention was to draw out the stories of immigrant women in order to understand the multiple subjectivities expressed after they immigrated to the United States. I assumed that immigrant women who are English language learners (ELL) define English as the dominant language in the United States and once learned can make it easier to navigate social/public spaces. I also see ELLs as having multiple subjectivities when using English in social/public spaces, because as Jackson and Mazzei (2012) point out, "just as subjects do not possess power or knowledge, neither do they possess fixed identities" (p. 62). This was important to my study because the women have attended ESL classes in Texas.

### **Researcher Reflection**

Being a second-generation Latina, I bring an understanding of what it is like to live in two distinct cultural worlds. When I state *second-generation*, I refer to myself as U.S.-born but with immigrant parents. I was born in the United States, Texas to be more specific, but my parents immigrated in the late 1960s. I spoke Spanish at home but learned English in school. This experience gave me a perspective that can connect me with my participants and give me an insight advantage in that by understanding two languages, I have lived in two linguistically different worlds. I can see first-hand how my own identity shifts between the two, each allowing me to experience a separate social setting.

It all started with my choice to interview women of Mexican origin who attended ESL classes because this topic was dear to me. It was especially meaningful because my

parents immigrated from Mexico. They were also in an ESL classroom learning English at one point in their lives. My mom started formally learning English to get her citizenship when I was six years old. My father never formally learned English until he retired. But growing up listening to their struggles surrounding English and I having to mediate the language made me feel sympathetic for English language learners.

When I was growing up in Central South Texas, I thought that being bilingual would open professional doors. I was not wrong to think that, considering the location that I still live in is South Central Texas, which is close to the Mexican border. The advantage of knowing two languages has opened professional opportunities, but it has also shown me a social and cultural space that deems me as odd. I have learned to mask my accents to sound anglicized in my academic and professional lives. I use Spanglish and code-switch among friends who accept my dual identity as Mexican American. I speak fluent Spanish to my mother at home and in public spaces. In each space, I have witnessed and experienced acceptance and rejection of knowing two languages.

Cognizant that my first spoken words were in Spanish, I consider it to be my native tongue. I speak it when I am most comfortable, and it allows me to reveal a part of my identity that carries Latin beliefs and traditions. It is also how I communicate with my closest relatives to exhibit an emotional vulnerability that only we can share because when I speak Spanish, I cannot hide my Latinidad. It is also what exposes me to xenophobic individuals who sneer and stare.

For example, my family and I were traveling northeast to a conference in Memphis, Tennessee. We decided to stop at a gas station to stretch our legs and take care of our basic human needs. My mother and I headed towards the restroom, but my mom,

who likes to shop as much as I do, stopped to look at a coffee mug when we were inside the store. My mom turned to ask me in Spanish how much it was. I told her the price in Spanish and about how we might already have too many at home. As we finished and I started walking away from the area, I noticed that people were gawking at us. I can only assume that it was because I had spoken Spanish since prior to our conversation, no one had paid attention to us. I remember feeling self-conscious and understanding what it is like to be looked at differently and just for a moment, to walk in the shoes of my ESL students. I believe that if I had entered that store and spoken English, no one would have given us a second thought. I dare say this because my mother and I share the same fair complexion that can be considered as White passing. We have darker hair and brown eyes, but our skin tone does not necessarily betray our ethnicity.

This experience allowed me to understand the social spaces that we enter when we speak two languages. It also made me aware that experiences like this can chip or shatter our identities. I would be presumptuous in stating that speaking Spanish had a negative connotation, but experiences like this have happened one too many times in my life. Nevertheless, I took care not to make assumptions when analyzing my participants' experiences or the spaces they have entered speaking either English or Spanish. The insight of two language worlds gives me insight into the voices and stories of my participants. It also cautioned me to be careful of my own biases and to try to stay authentic to the experiences shared by the immigrant adult women in my study.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduces my qualitative research study of *adult mexicana immigrants'* lived experiences in the US. The problem this study addressed was that adult



basic education classes that serve adult *Mexicana* immigrants are not based on their lived experiences or needs. Therefore, the purpose of my qualitative study was to document the educational experiences of adult *mexicana* immigrants and their *convivencia* with those they encounter in public spaces. It also addressed the lack of first-person narratives of immigrant women's experiences learning English in a community-based adult education program and the impact on their gendered identity. My data were on the educational *testimonios* of adult immigrant women who attended adult ESL courses in South Central Texas, collected to explore the ways that learning English in adult education ESL programs affected their U.S. educational lived experiences and to examine the relationship between learning English and their newly (re)imagined experiences in the United States. I am myself a Chicana feminist researcher and drew on my experience as the child of Mexican immigrants living in south central Texas to understand race, class and gender inequalities within my participants' personal stories of struggle, success and educational experiences. The following chapter explains the literature relevant to my research study.

## II. (RE)NARRATING THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature on immigrants in Chicana/o and adult education disciplines. It attempted to connect these two disciplines and recount historical events that led to the U.S.-Mexican division of races. I titled it (re)narrating the literature because it offers an alternative perspective to traditional U.S.-Texas history. The guiding questions were the following: how were Mexicans portrayed in Texas after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848; how did Chicana feminism evolve into educational research; what does adult education state about the experiences of adult immigrant men and women learners?

The topics in this chapter were meant to focus on immigrant women who narrated their experiences learning English in the United States through *testimonios*. However, I experienced a challenging time finding adequate representation in both Chicana/o and adult education literature. I therefore sought to review three bodies of literature: historiography of *Mexicanas/os* in Texas; the Chicana feminist theoretical framework in educational research; and immigrants and adult education.

The first body of reviewed literature was on immigrants in adult education, exclusively in ESL classes. My keywords were *adult learner*, *adult education*, *continuing education*, and *English as a Second language*. The information I found led me to conduct a deeper analysis of the research and to my second body of literature. Please note that I do not discuss the first body of literature until the end of the chapter.

My second body of literature was the historical narratives of *Mexicanas/os* in Chicano literature. My keywords were *Chicana(s)*, *feminism*, *adults*, *education*, and *immigrants*, however, the combination of these words yielded few to any results. So, I

narrowed my search to the keywords *Chicana feminism*, *education*, and *adult immigrants*. This also did not yield results and led me to manually search for key concepts connecting adult education programs and Chicana literature. Keywords like *settlement houses*, *Chicanas*, and *Texas*, returned writing by Vicki Ruíz. Her work guided me to other authors such as George Sanchez, who did work on *mexicanas* as targets of Settlement Houses. Settlement Houses were a topic of discussion during my master's education work in bicultural-bilingual education studies. Whereas Chicana literature regarded adult education through a postcolonial lens, adult education did not look at the Latinx experience through this lens. Chicana literature discussed Settlement Houses as instituting assimilationist practices on immigrant communities.

The third body of literature stemmed from this ideology and focused on a Chicano/a critical perspective on Texas history. The keywords used for this search were *Texas history*, *mexicanas/os*, *Chicano scholars*, and *Chicano literature*. Unfortunately, these did not yield the results I needed, and I had to create a historical narrative that began with a compiled list of Chicano historians and others with a postcolonialism perspective. Some of the authors included Zaragosa Vargas, Manuel G. González, and Martha Menchaca, just to name a few. Again, it is important to note that the bodies of literature were the process to finding the three themes for my literature review, however, they are not outlined in the same order.

This literature review attempts to create an interdisciplinary understanding of adult women immigrant learners' unique educational experiences throughout history to the present. This study sought to document the counter-narratives of immigrant women about their educations with the hope of countering the deficit view that has historically

dominated the literature. The racialized existence of Chicanas is cause for consideration in adult education and other disciplines. I use the term Chicana in this literature review to define a woman native to or descendant of Mexico and residing in the United States. (Genial, n.d.).

### **Historiography of *Mexicanas/os* in Texas**

Cynthia Dillard (2012) stated that we must understand our roots to begin the ascension towards a critical consciousness. Her explanation of the act of remembrance supports the need to give a brief historical account of Texas history in this literature review to enhance my critical consciousness and help me authentically create a qualitative study through a Chicana feminist perspective (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas, 1996).

The main objective of this section is to successively construct a historical narrative from several Chicano historian scholars about Mexican citizens in Texas after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, and discuss how it racialized, shaped immigration/migration life patterns, and challenged Mexican citizens (Menchaca, 2011; Montejano, 1987; Vargas, 2017). It is essential to understand the historical significance of *Mexicanas/os* in this region because, according to several historian scholars, it was the land highly coveted by Anglo-Americans (Gonzales, 2009; Henderson, 2011; Menchaca, 2011; Montejano, 1987; Urbina, Vela, & Sánchez, 2014; Vargas, 2017). It also helps to give background knowledge of my participants who are regionally from Mexico and living in South Central Texas.

Zaragosa Vargas (2017) argued people should understand and interpret the full spectrum of North American history and develop knowledge of how Mexican Americans

(i.e., a term for both immigrants and US born) struggled for freedom and equality. His book, *Crucible of a Struggle: A History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era*, addressed such a warranted discussion about authentic North American history. He justified this statement by illustrating how Mexicans faced many economic, social, and political hardships that were omitted from mainstream U.S. history, regardless of Mexicans centuries of presence in territory that now is part of the United States. The author explains that Mexican Americans and their historical experience in the United States, as well as Mexico, creates a fight for equality in the present.

Manuel G. Gonzales (2009), a scholar of the history of the U.S. southwest and Europe, wrote, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States* and contrary to Zaragosa (2017), he critiqued Chicano historians. He did so because they were too invested in the politicized version of the Texas/Mexican history. He explained that he could not consciously be as subjective of the 1960s Chicano historiography if he was to create an accurate historical account of the struggle of Mexicans. Therefore, Gonzales (2009) tried to distance the descriptive statements made by Chicanos from himself. Gonzales' premise was to create a historiography that mainstream scholars could not attack but be authentic to the narratives of Mexicans through a Marxian stance.

Scholars, Gonzales (2009) and Vargas (2017) differed in perspectives as to what was considered valid Mexican history; nevertheless, they both attributed *Manifest Destiny* as the US ideology that motivated Anglo-Americans to declare war and gain territory for the US. In contrast, to both these historians, David Montejano (1987) in his groundbreaking historical account, *Anglos and Mexicans: In the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, gave a capitalistic perspective on how Texas became independent and annexed.

Montejano (1987) looked at Texas history through the lens of the world-systems theory of Immanuel Wallerstein, where a first-world country continuously exploits another lesser one. Regardless of what the reasons for Texas' annexation into the United States were (i.e., an expansionist vision or economic interest), these frameworks help to explain the expansive ideology of the United States and its financial successes. What is clear was how the annexation resulted in a national border that racialized people of Mexican descent and contributed to the rise of immigration in the United States.

### **Naming the Colonization of the West: Manifest Destiny**

Coined by John L. O'Sullivan in 1842, Manifest Destiny justified colonization of Mexican natives and a westward expansion in North America (Gonzales, 2009; Urbina, Vela, & Sánchez, 2014; Vargas, 2017). O'Sullivan was a journal editor and a key player in provoking a nationalist movement that claimed the superiority of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs; Gonzales, 2009; Vargas, 2017). Vargas (2017) depicted O'Sullivan as a journalist who was "a staunch defender of [the] Democratic Party positions on slavery, states' rights, and Indian removal", and he pushed his beliefs by way of his publications (p. 83). Vargas suggested that O'Sullivan was an idealist whose ideology proclaimed the true destiny of North America was to obtain as much land as possible.

Several literary scholars also agreed that O'Sullivan's beliefs evolved into a nationwide US ideology and consequently resulted in the expansionist birth of the United States and the transformation of Texas (Gonzales, 2009; Henderson, 2011; Montejano, 1987; Urbina, Vela, & Sánchez, 2014; Vargas, 2017). The land acquired by the United States was owed much to the ideology of Manifest Destiny and was the cause which incited the U.S.-Mexican war of 1846-1848 (Menchaca, 2011; Montejano, 1987;

Urbina, Vela, & Sánchez, 2014; Vargas, 2017). Urbina, Vela, and Sanchez (2014) in *Ethnic Realities of Mexican Americans: From Colonization To 21st Century Globalization*, also contend that the end of the two-year U.S.-Mexican war marked the destiny of many Mexican citizens. Mexico lost 55 percent of its land and received 15 million dollars from the United States, simultaneously displacing many Mexican residents and racializing them (Menchaca, 2011) by means of coercion on the part of the Anglo mercantile elite (Montejano, 1987).

Chicana scholar, Vicki Ruiz (1998) explained, "Mexicans on the U.S. side of the border became second-class citizens, divested of their property and political power" (p. 5). Vargas (2017) and Urbina, Vela, and Sanchez, (2014) reported that John C. Calhoun, the US secretary of state in 1845, expressed a distaste of Mexicans. Calhoun was responsible for the Texas annexation but contested seeking more Mexican territories. Urbina, Vela, and Sanchez (2014) wrote that President Polk wanted to conquer the entire region of Mexico by right of Manifest Destiny. John C. Calhoun convinced congress against advancement into Mexico and declared, "Ours is the government of the White man" not to be equaled with Mexicans' (Vargas, 2017, p. 102).

### **Second Class Citizens: Racialized Mexicans**

Several Chicano scholars concluded that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, implemented on February 2, 1848, established a divisionary U.S.-Mexican border along the Rio Grande and set the precedence for Mexican hatred (Menchaca, 2011; Montejano, 1987; Urbina, Vela, & Sánchez, 2014). Prior to 1848, when Texas won its independence in 1836, Mexicans above the Nueces River were treated as second class citizens and driven out of their homelands (Montejano, 1987). However, it was not until the official

annexation of the Republic of Texas in 1845 as the 28th state of the Union of the United States, the racialization of Mexican citizens reached its peak and the Mexican American War followed suit (Menchaca, 2011; Montejano, 1987; Urbina, Vela, & Sánchez, 2014). Menchaca (2011) claimed that unwritten laws and coercion stripped Mexicans of their rights and led many Mexicans to flee Texas. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo only cemented the racialization of Mexicans further (Menchaca, 2011; Montejano, 1987; Urbina, Vela, & Sánchez, 2014). Urbina, Vela, and Sanchez (2014) explained:

Along with the loss of land, the bitterness and hatred were intensified after the War [Mexican-American War of 1846-1848] as Anglos saw the timely War as a glorious and divine victory of conquest over the Mexican, further intensifying a legacy of hate and violence against Mexican Americans....Mexicans were stripped of their land, had their civil rights violated, and excluded from America's main institutions like education and politics. (pp. 49-50)

The divisionary border of the Rio Grande and the annexation of Texas would prove to play significant roles in the lives of Mexicans and their generations to follow.

Urbina, Vela, and Sanchez (2014) also reported how the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 included 23 legal Articles that established several stipulations for Mexicans who decided to remain in the newly annexed state of Texas. These legal Articles claimed Mexicans would be considered U.S. citizens, equals to the Anglo Tejanos. However, some of these stipulations would not be enforced but merely exist in the constitution.

Menchaca (2011) recounted that Mexicans were enticed to leave the United States to enter Mexico as refugees. The acting Mexican President of that period, Jose Joaquin de



Herrera, was approached by the US to support these new refugees in the years that followed the treaty of 1848. The options they were given if they became Mexican refugees were that either they were promised monetary government aid from Mexico for traveling expenses and resettlement in Mexico in the form of land grants (Menchaca, 2011), or if they stayed, they would automatically gain U.S. citizenship. However, U.S. citizenship had to be declared within one year after the treaty and on that basis, they swore allegiance to the United States and abided by their rules and regulations. Again, this was false because Mexicans were ruled and regulated in keeping with the colorism of the U.S. social strata.

Several literary and Chicana/o scholars presented their analysis of the racial caste system Mexicans became subject to after 1848 (Gonzales, 2009; Hernandez, 2010; Menchaca, 2011; Montejano, 1987; Ngai, 2014; Urbina, Vela, & Sánchez, 2014; Vargas, 2017). Menchaca (2011) stressed that after a year of the treaty only a handful of Mexicans were considered “white” and allowed full legal citizenship in the United States. Individuals who were “mestizos, Christianized Indians, and *afromexicanos* (mixed-race people of African descent) were accorded inferior legal rights" (Menchaca, 2011, p. 19).

Menchaca (2011) stated that Texas extended U.S. citizenship to Mexican nationals only if they were not descendants of Blacks. Before annexation, Mexican citizens could vote, marry regardless of socioeconomic status, run for any government office, and handle their own business affairs. Nevertheless, things changed drastically after the treaty for native Mexicans, so much so that the United States federal government gave the newly annexed states the right to decide who could have full rights as U.S. citizens (Menchaca, 2011).

Menchaca (2011) also stated that the U.S. failed to establish an immigration policy after the treaty but instead imposed discriminatory practices. Hernandez (2010), like Menchaca, argued that without an immigration policy, the border was an imaginary line controlled by Anglo-Americans. This imaginary line served the purpose of allowing discrimination against darker-skinned Mexicans “wearing huaraches” (p. 24) by Anglo-Americans. This was a direct attack against Mexicans with a certain phenotype and social economic status. Future immigration policies reflected the negative ideology created about Mexicans. Both Menchaca (2011) and Hernandez (2010) wrote that Mexicans, regardless of what side of the U.S.-Mexican border they were on, would always be typecast into the role of a subordinate—the second-class citizen of the United States.

### **¿Y Las Mujeres<sup>3</sup>? (Re)Imaging Them into Literature**

Until now I have generalized gender of Mexicans. My focus was on Mexican immigrant women in adult education ESL classes— a group that is invisible to in adult education. This specific topic is important to understand because immigration issues are not gendered in the Latino experience (Espín & Dottolo, 2015; Ruiz, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). When I began looking for historical literature showcasing women, they were either ignored, kept out of the literature on U.S.-Mexico history or written in following traditional gender roles. It was in Chicana literature that I found Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) and her revolutionary book titled, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*.

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) conducted a qualitative study on the key elements in migration and permanent settlement patterns of undocumented Mexican men and women

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<sup>3</sup> Mujeres: The English translation is “And the women?”

in the United States. This Latina historian-scholar was the first to call for an examination of gender roles and how a patriarchal system shaped Mexican immigration. She found it imperative to understand the difference in immigration experiences of men and women that lead to long-term settlement. Her book became a seminal piece that still stands to be understood today because she discussed how research about immigration typically focuses on men and forgets about the women.

Hondagneu-Sotelo proposed that the book could provide policymakers with the resources to understand gendered immigration. In turn it could create better policies to help the plight of sojourners. She also indicated that it could possibly help create a community that provided better resources for immigrants. She concluded that when families migrate together it is because of their middle-class status and the women's shared labor market. Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) research showed how gender relations are a factor in the Mexican immigration experience. This important research in Chicana historical literature led to more theories about the gendered roles imposed on immigrant women.

Almost two decades later, Luz Maria Gordillo (2010) authored *Mexican Women and the Other Side of Immigration*. Written in tandem with Zaragosa Vargas' work which started at the end of the Great Depression and ended with the close of WWII. The purpose of the book was to contribute to historical transnational studies of Mexican immigrant men and women navigating two worlds. Gordillo argued that there was a need for voices of marginalized immigrant women in literature. Her "transnational phenomenon" methodology of female narration focused on Mexicans in Detroit, Michigan and the town of San Ignacio Cerro de Gordo, Jalisco, Mexico (p. 160),

specifically, the women immigrants in both locations. She described and argued that the Mexican immigrant women play key roles in changing their sociopolitical, race, sexuality, and gender roles.

Scholars, Vicki Ruíz, (1998), Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), and Luz Maria Gordillo (2010), Chicana scholars also conducted qualitative studies on immigrant Latinas in the US. Their aim was to expose the influence gendered roles have on migration patterns. They concluded that men are traditionally the subjects of immigrant studies, and their experiences are better documented than those of women in immigrant literature. The authors asserted that immigrant studies focus on the influx of men migrating due to a gendered ideology. They wrote that most men trek north because it is traditionally viewed as a rite of passage, whereas women typically stay behind as caregivers (Gordillo, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Ruíz, 2008).

### **Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research**

A Chicana feminist epistemology is important when researching marginalized participants of Mexican descent within the geographical and historical location in which they reside. It not only creates a holistic and authentic study but incorporates the researcher's cultural intuition. Delgado Bernal (1998) argued that cultural intuition was important in any educational research working with other Chicanas/Latinas because it gave value to the rare viewpoint of a Chicana researcher. Thus, a Chicana feminist perspective is practical in this study.

Chicanas felt the need to develop a new lens for research in academia and the development of Chicana consciousness during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and

70s. It was then that Chicana feminist consciousness became an epistemology in educational research to decolonize traditional Euro- and androcentric methodologies.

In the following section, I will discuss Gloria Anzaldúa's (2007) *Borderland Theory* as background for my analysis of the binaries of Mexican women's experiences within the field of adult education. Several scholars will be mentioned who used Anzaldúa's Borderlands Theory as a springboard for their own Chicana theories. These Chicana scholars answer the call from Anzaldúa's book, written in 1987, to theorize alternative ways of knowing (epistemologies) for Chicanas in academia.

### **Coming into a Chicana Consciousness**

Mexicans were given an underhanded deal by the U.S. government for the land south of the union in 1848 (Vargas, 2017). Overnight Mexicans that lived in the United States became an Othered group, who were oppressed by a social and class hierarchy, stripped of their homeland, and seen as dirty Mexicans whose language was deemed dirtier (Vargas, 2017). Scholars, David Montejano (1987) and Zaragosa Vargas (2017) both claimed this in their books. They also addressed the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and explained the birth of the *movimiento* (movement). Both discussed the need for Mexicans to break free of the marginalization, resist subordination by Anglo Americans, and finally, give birth to *El Movimiento Chicano*.

The issue for Chicana scholars though was the erasure of Mexicanas from the *movimiento*. They pointed out that parallel to the Chicano Movement, a Chicana feminism was also born as a form of resistance to the patriarchal ideology in the Chicano Movement and resistance to the exclusivity of White women in American feminism (Blackwell, 2015; Pasque, 2011; Ruíz V., 2008; Segura & Pesquera, 1992). The Chicanas

within the *movimiento* (movement) Chicano filled supporting roles for the men while their true womanist issues were ignored.

Two of the first scholars to conduct a qualitative study of Chicana feminists were Segura and Pesquera (1992). They co-wrote an important piece titled, *Beyond Indifference and Antipathy: The Chicana Movement and Chicana Feminist Discourse* in which they presented their analysis on Chicanas' awareness of the American Women's Movement in relation to the needs of Chicanas. The authors claimed that because it was unknown how much Chicanas aligned themselves with American feminism, this study was necessary.

Their 1988 study collected data from Chicanas and Latinas in Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS), "an organization of Chicana/Latina women in higher education" (p. 75). One-hundred and one Chicana/Latina participants responded out of the 178 questionnaires they mailed out. The questionnaire wanted to know about Chicana's present-day interpretation of the American Women's Movement; what concerns they had; to what degree were their needs met by the Women's Movement and feminist theories; what was their familiarity with literature on the Women's Movement; to what degree was their involvement in feminist and women's activities; and what their social economic status was. The women were found to be in college during the peak of the American Women's Movement, and some were rooted in the Chicano/a Movement of the 1960s.

Segura and Pesquera (1992) discovered that approximately three-fourths of their participants were cognizant of the important attributes of the American Women's Movement and that their needs were not met by this version of feminism. They argued

that Chicanas were not represented racially or ethnically, and as a result, they formed their own Chicana feminism, apart from White and Black feminists. They also explained that Chicanas created a movement within the Chicano Movement because they were treated as subordinates instead of equals with the men.

The authors reported that their study also identified a tension between Chicanas, regarding Chicano cultural nationalism, and American feminism. They went on to explain that Chicano cultural nationalism was made up of Mexican Americans who venerated Mexican cultural symbols and advocated for racial, ethnic and class equality. Chicano cultural nationalists, despite emphasizing important racial and ethnic concerns, did not consider gender as a separate issue. They instead acclaimed *familismo* (familial), which frames men as head of household, and reiterated patriarchy. The same patriarchy that was also resisted by White women's feminism was parallel to Chicana feminism but did not align with Chicana racial and ethnic issues. Chicanas claimed that US American feminism was not inclusive of Chicana issues and neglected the intersectionalities of social class, race/ethnicity and gender.

Segura and Pesquera's (1992) study informed my research by explaining the need for a study like mine to be guided by a Chicana feminist epistemology. Adult education research is traditionally Euro and androcentric with major theorists being men such as Malcom Knowles and John Dewey. In fact, the history of all women in adult education has been neglected (Hugo, 1990). Jane M. Hugo (1990) framed the gender issue, stating,

Like many other disciplines, adult education has suffered from a gender bias that made white, middle-class men's experiences normative. The subsequent visibility of men as the principal makers and writers of adult education history assured that

others would hear men's thoughts through historians' methods of organizing and analyzing the past. In contrast, the near invisibility of women, like that of African-Americans and other ethnic or racial minorities, effectively silenced them. (p. 2)

White women's history, as well as that of other ethnic groups, were largely invisible. Immigrant's and Latina's histories need to be made visible in the discipline of adult education.

In a later study, Vicki L. Ruíz (1998/2008) used archival data and interviews to examine the extent of invisibility of Chicanas in the Chicano Movement and in American feminist history during the 1960s and 1970s. She claimed that Chicana feminism, while sharing certain traits with American feminism, began inside the Chicano Movement and combated male hegemony inside the organization. Chicanas tried first to join the US American feminist movement, but recognizing that their true racialized issues were ignored, distanced themselves from this feminism (Blackwell, 2015; Pasque, 2011; Ruíz, 1998/2008; Segura & Pesquera, 1992).

Awareness of these issues awoke a consciousness that was difficult to lay to rest. This was the beginning of the Chicana consciousness that soon evolved and entered the world of academia as Chicanas and Latinas began breaking barriers to make a space for themselves (e.g., see Anzaldúa 1987/2007; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas, 1998/2008).

### **A Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research**

As Chicana consciousness was awakened, Chicana scholars began writing of this awakening. For example, in "The Colonizer/Colonized Chicana Ethnographer: Identity, Marginalization, and Co-adaptation in the Field", a pioneering piece, Sofia Villenas (1996) described how she (re)discovered her external and internal marginalization and



(re)claimed her identity as a Chicana in educational research. Villenas described her indoctrination into educational research as a colonizer who was surreptitiously manipulated into a traditionally Eurocentric academic field. A colonizer is one who comes from privilege and holds power over a marginalized group—the colonized. She explained that her role as an indoctrinated colonizer/researcher, in a community of Latinos, was a rude awakening. While researching for her dissertation, she realized that she had become indoctrinated to be a colonizer through her social identity and upbringing.

Sofia Villenas (1996) recounted that when she first encountered the Latino community in a rural city, the community leaders problematized the community as “poor, disadvantaged, and language deficient” (p. 722). The community leaders coached Villenas into this ideology and distorted her view of the subjective-objective positionality. Villenas recounted that her alignment started with the “dominant English-speaking leaders” (p. 720), who led her to view her research participants as the Other. She entered the space of colonizer without reflecting on her experience as an immigrant Latina. Villenas regarded her position as a colonized colonizer, perpetuating a deficit lens on the immigrant population commonly used by privileged Eurocentric ethnographers. However, by reflecting on her research, she came to understand that she had become an imperialistic researcher. Soon after this discovery she started investigating how other Chicana scholars dealt with their roles as imperialistic researchers within their own marginalized communities and positionality. What she found was the need to disassemble her multiple identities as a colonizer and colonized Chicana ethnographer and employ her own Chicana consciousness.

Villenas' (1996) participation as a privileged Chicana ethnographer consciously made her understand how she was commodified by the dominant leaders of the rural community and by academia into becoming a Eurocentric educational researcher. When she challenged the dominant discourse about Latinos in both the community leaders and academia, she (re)claimed her identity as a Chicana ethnographer. Although Villenas claimed she had always considered herself a Chicana ethnographer, one from a marginalized community, she failed to question her position and identity in academia as a privileged researcher and member of a marginalized group. Villenas wrote,

Thus, it is important to continue theorizing on the researchers' multiplicity of identities and the implications of this for qualitative research in education. As members of marginalized groups assume more privileged positions in the educational socioeconomic structures of hierarchy, people who were once merely the exotic objects of inquiry are now the inquirers—the ones formulating and asking the questions. As some enter the ranks of teachers, administrators, and scholars, we are becoming the enforcers and legitimators as well as the creators of official knowledge (p. 728).

Her advice still rings true regardless of the time this piece was written because there are still several Chicana/o scholars in academia researching marginalized groups of which they are part. It is not until we come into a true consciousness of our multiple subjectivities that we can understand our positionality in the field of educational research and prevent the *Othering* of our own. As Villenas clearly stated, to forget is to insult the “gendered, racial memory” (p. 727) of our positionalities and multiple subjectivities in educational research.

Villenas' models show me how I must unpack my own positionality as a Chicana educational researcher when I am out in the field. I cannot forget that my position as a researcher privileges my status in the space of the participants' community. I must not abuse this privilege nor disconnect from my personal experiences and community roles. My participants share similar experiences with my parents, and reflection is key for me as a researcher. It is also the key to the prevention of Othering, colonizing, and objectifying.

### ***The Explanation of Using a Chicana Feminist Theoretical Framework***

Dolores Delgado Bernal's (1998) groundbreaking work, "Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research", inspired others to begin incorporating non-Euro, androcentric methodologies into their educational research. This pivotal article discussed how Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research can be used as a framework that resists and challenges traditional paradigms. She acknowledged the need for Chicana/Latina ethnographers to have a space for research that values and enhances the life experiences of their ethnic communities. Delgado Bernal reasoned that on the one hand, traditional educational paradigms were adopted from a White, andro-centric epistemology and often misdirected attention away from the "gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality" of Chicana students (p. 556). Traditional feminist research, on the other hand, collectively generalized the experiences of all women regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Delgado Bernal (1998) used Sandra Harding's (1987) explanation of epistemology, methodology and method to explain what Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) was. As Delgado Bernal defined it "[CFE] lies instead in the methodology employed and in whose experiences and realities are accepted as the foundation of

knowledge” (p. 558), meaning that when Chicana Latina’s engage in feminist epistemological work in educational research, the methodology employed must align with Chicana/Latina methods and the lived experiences that separate them from other races, ethnicities, and social classes. CFE was appropriate for my research because the methodology included testimonios as data, which considers the lived experiences of Latinas and reveals silenced voices through counternarratives (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Testimonios, is a methodological framework that is non-traditional, as pointed out by Delgado Bernal (1998) and Villenas (1996). Chicana’s realities are not supported by traditional educational and feminist paradigms. This feminist framework is not comparable to other women of color feminisms because of the distinguishing characteristics embedded in it by Chicanas (Calderon, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Hurtado, 1998; Villenas, 1996).

One of the “unique characteristic[s] of Chicana feminist epistemology is that it also validates and addresses experiences that are intertwined with issues of immigration, migration, general status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and the contradictions of Catholicism” (p. 561). Using this framework supports my use of participants’ stories as regards immigration policies, English language learning and their identities in the United States.

Delgado Bernal (1998) argued that Chicana feminist epistemology created a space that “places Chicanas as central subjects and provides a forum in which Chicanas speak and analyze their stories of school resistance and grassroots leadership” (p. 556), enabling

documentation of Chicanas' multilayered and historically unique intersectional identities (i.e., social class, gender, and race), which are often ignored, yet cannot be dismissed.

Chicana/Latina scholars should align their research and questions to Chicana experience and issues to legitimize it, support Chicanas in claiming their knowledge and life experiences and prevent Othering (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Therefore, using a Chicana feminist epistemology "grounds one's research within experiences of Chicanas [to] deconstruct the historical devaluation of Spanish, the contradictions of Catholicism, the patriarchal ideology that devalues women, and the scapegoating of immigrants" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 560). This makes for an important framework for Chicana educational researchers to use and for me to claim as my conceptual framework.

### **Decolonizing Methodologies**

Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1987/2007) in her highly influential book, *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, wrote an *autohistoria* (autobiography) interwoven with folklore around her own narrative. She reflected on the *Malinche*; the Nahuatl woman who interpreted for Hernán Cortés during the Spanish conquest. Malinche, as Anzaldúa explained, was the forbearer of a traitorous sell-out. Anzaldúa points out, however, that Malinche was in fact used as a pawn in a patriarchal system. It was reflections like this and others that contributed to a Chicana feminist consciousness. She paved the way for other Chicanas entering academia to practice alternative ways of thinking.

Anzaldúa (2007) established a foundation for those entering academia and launched a new *mestiza* consciousness. She pioneered new ways of knowing, theory creation and academic spaces free from Eurocentric research. Her use of *autohistorias* modeled an alternative methodology by incorporating her own *testimonios*. She used the

power of storytelling to create a new narrative and identity. Storytelling is a powerful tool, which follows a non-traditional way of doing educational research and urges the researcher to decolonize methodologies and claim our indigenous ways of knowing (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

Sofia A. Villenas (2006), like Anzaldúa (2007), framed and constructed a “third space” feminism with storytelling or life experiences. Her chapter in *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology* employed oral histories, also termed *consejos y cuentos*. Villenas explained that the *consejos y cuentos* mothers tell are a form of pedagogy through which those daughters learned from their mothers’ *enseñanza* (teaching). She analyzed her mother’s oral narratives in *Pedagogical Moments in the Borderland: Latina Mothers Teaching and Learning*, and her analysis presented readers with the knowledge that oral narratives and body language can be used as a tool for learning from mothers. Villenas’ findings show how “everyday actions and movements” are also forms of *enseñanza* (p.148). She (2006) argued that mothers convey their life experiences to help create Chicana/Latina identities. She also showed how the expectations of mothers towards their daughters were taught within their culture. They role model a way of life that daughters can either choose to live or seek to change.

Another important Chicana scholar-historian worth mentioning is Emma Pérez (1999). Her book, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* uses Foucault’s book *Archaeology of Knowledge* to create “an archaeology of discursive fields of knowledge that write Chicanas into histories” by taking the *his* out of the stories of Chicanas (p. xiii). She utilized the terms “decolonial imaginary” and “interstitial spaces”

to rewrite the oral narratives of Yucatan women. Exercising a post-modernist approach, Pérez ultimately changed how Chicana's were written into stories. Pérez heeded Anzaldúa's call by stating that post-modernist theory was the best way to (re)write Chicanas into stories because it challenged the traditional paradigm of literary history. What she created was a tool to disrupt the historical writings of Chicanas to (re)imagine them in an interstitial third space.

Gloria E. Anzaldúa (2007), Sofia Villenas (2006) and Emma Pérez (1999), relied on such methods as *testimonios* (testimonies), *autohistorias* (autobiographies), oral narratives, and storytelling. Each scholar embedded her data gathering tool to (re)create knowledge and make sense of their own and others' lives. Anzaldúa's (2007) methodology of *autohistoria* showed just how women were oppressed through their gender and sexuality. She her own version of testimonios to create a space for women to apprehend how stories can convey more complex and nuanced meanings. Villenas (2006) described the "pedagogical moments" mothers create while sharing their oral narratives, and she used Pérez's (1999) *decolonial imaginary* as her framework.

These three scholars used alternative tools and ways of learning, knowing and teaching to address a new theoretical need in educational research. These alternatives can be shared with future generations of scholars and Chicana historians wanting to (re)write Chicanas into history. It also informed my research study through the use of storytelling and modeling resistance to some of the traditional methods in educational research on adults. The teaching and learning of adults, specifically immigrants, needs to focus on the Chicana experience in the U.S. It was my goal to carry out this type of Chicana/Latina feminist research with my study.

## **Immigrants and Adult Education**

I found that many scholars in the field of adult education literature, tailored their description of immigrants' education with an historical explanation about how the U.S. created immigration laws to keep certain national-origin groups out (Alfred, 2004, 2001; Batalova & Terrazas, 2013; Joaquin & Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Ojo, 2009). These scholars also claimed that the rising need for adult education programs paralleled immigration laws. Specifically, both Alfred (2001) and Batalova and Terrazas (2013) asserted that immigration laws in the 19th century could be blamed on the xenophobia felt by Anglo-Americans towards immigrants of non-European descent. The legislative laws and acts were designed to privilege European White immigrants over other ethnic groups they claimed were inferior.

Another handful of scholars agreed that one of the first laws created out of the ideology of *Otherness* (i.e., a term ostracizing racial and ethnic groups of non-European descent) was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Alfred, 2004, 2001; Batalova & Terrazas, 2013; Joaquin & Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Ullman, 2010). In the late 19th century, Chinese immigrants found mining and railroad jobs in the United States, but xenophobic nativists pressured the U.S. government, and the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted (Alfred, 2004, 2001; Batalova & Terrazas, 2013; Ullman, 2010). The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was a law created exclusively focused on Chinese immigrants, specifically those who were laborers, and limited Chinese immigration (Wu, 2019). It was also part of the anti-miscegenation laws to prevent an increase in Asian births in the United States (Joaquin & Johnson-Bailey, 2015).



## **Immigration Trends in Adult Education Today**

Adult education literature also reported that current waves of immigration are now primarily from non-Western countries (Alfred, 2004, 2015), for the most part because of legislative laws and acts currently in place (Ngai, 2014). Alfred (2015) pointed to the fast rise of globalization as part of the reason for the changing demographics of immigrants coming to the U.S. (Alfred, 2001, 2009, 2015). Ullman (2010) agreed that the demographics of immigrants in the United States has changed, in part because of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Several other authors also agreed that the Act of 1965 changed immigration policies, giving access to countries in such as those in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and increased the immigrant population (Alfred, 2009; Batalova & Terrazas, 2013; Ullman, 2010).

While many countries benefit economically from immigrants, a xenophobic feeling still exists. Alfred (2015) cautioned that “Although nations welcome the phenomenon of globalization and human and economic capital they enjoy, they resist the accompanying unwanted migration and resettlement that result from globalization” (p. 92). The cycle of racialization and marginalization of certain ethnic immigrant groups and xenophobic sentiment existing among various parts of the U.S. population calls adult education to be socially inclusive and diverse (Alfred, 2015; Guo, 2015; Larrotta, 2017; Ullman, 2010). Immigrants’ educational experience is important to understand and further research is needed to help immigrants to be financially stable in the United States (Larrotta, 2017; Njenga, 2016) and also become their own agents of change (Carlock Jr., 2016).

## **Globalization and its Effects on Adult Education**

An important question for many adult education scholars is how adult educators can help the growing diverse population of immigrants coming into host countries (Alfred, 2015; Alfred & Guo, 2012; Guo, 2015; Isserlis, 2008)? Related to this question, Alfred (2015) asks,

how can education, especially adult and higher education, help adults develop capacities to challenge and counter the negative effects of neoliberal globalization, and at the same time develop the skills and competencies necessary to compete within such environments. (p. 93)

To address these two questions the perspectives of adult educators and adult students are both needed. I argue that both perspectives are needed to move towards a critical andragogy for immigrants since a classroom setting involves the instructor and student.

Another perspective is that of Carlock Jr., (2016), who argued that because adult education is the common denominator among immigrants, it is crucial to develop this resource authentically. Larrotta (2017) concurred that adult education should serve adult immigrants better, holding the establishment accountable. Lee (2013) took a slightly different approach, collecting narratives from immigrants in ESL classes. Lee (2013) built a chronological story using Bahktin's, *Forms of Time and of the Chronotype in the Novel* as the theoretical framework. Lee also advocated for further research on immigrants learning English as a second language:

Many of the ESL and TESOL programs in the U.S. overlook the rich lived experiences of the adult learners. Not only do these experiences help adult

learners in the learning process, but they are invaluable resources to the ESL/TESOL learning communities. (p. 33)

Lee found that all three of his participants had *Chronotopic Moves* or memories they shared when responding to the research questions. He also noted that sharing their lived experiences as a way of controlling their own learning could be empowering for adult ESL immigrants.

### **Immigrants in Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) Classes**

Several scholars emphasize that adult education was historically and socially inclusive and geared toward social justice for immigrants. They believe that immigrants were part of a marginalized community and critical andragogy could create an inclusive and effective ESL classroom (Alfred, 2015; Guo, 2015;). On the one hand there is a call for inclusive andragogy and on the other there is not much research on immigration issues in education (Alfred, 2015; Larrotta, 2017), especially in adult education (Isserlis, 2008).

Alfred & Guo (2012) conducted a survey of conference papers from the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC), the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE), and curriculums from different universities. They sought papers to help them determine if adult education programs had begun internationalizing their “research, curricula, and practice” (p. 56). They reviewed conference papers from 1995-2010 looking for “faculty engagement in international/intercultural research”, and they searched the curriculums from universities to find pedagogies that incorporate international perspectives (p. 56). Alfred and Guo discovered scant research on topics such as globalization and immigration during that period (Alfred & Guo, 2012; Isserlis,

2008). However, they also found that a surge in presentations had begun on international issues.

Several years later, Alfred (2015) discussed this same study and reported that “In advancing the agenda for the development of global citizenship, the authors failed to critically analyze how identity and place informed citizenship for members of the diaspora communities” (p. 94). Alfred (2015) and that immigration was still not given importance, despite their importance to globalization. Five years after the Alfred and Guo study, Larrotta (2017) repeated that still little to no research exists on the issues of educating immigrants.

### ***Culturally Relevant Pedagogy***

Several adult educators have pointed out that a deficit model, which focuses on a students’ weaknesses instead of their strengths, should not be how immigrants are taught (Alfred, 2009, 2015; Carlock Jr., 2016; Guo, 2015; Joaquin & Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Muñoz, 2012). The same scholars agreed that andragogy should not be about acculturating or assimilating immigrants into the dominant US culture (Alfred, 2009, 2015; Carlock Jr., 2016; Guo, 2015; Joaquin & Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Muñoz, 2012).

Shibao Guo (2015), in *The Changing Nature of Adult Education in the Age of Transnational Migration: Toward A Model of Recognitive Adult Education*, wrote that community-based adult education “fail to provide immigrants with education programs that are culturally and linguistically accessible and appropriate” (p. 13). In other words, Guo claimed that in a time when global transnationalism was occurring adult education was ignoring the needs and previous life skills of its immigrant learners. For example, the prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), Guo explained, became an

exclusionary tactic for immigrant professionals rather than an aide to recognize their prior skills (p. 12). The PLAR is an evaluation of an immigrant learners' previous learning and work experience for college credit or certification (CAPLA, 2021). His recommendation was that adult education forgo its deficit view of immigrants' previous life skills and the sameness approach that teaches all immigrant students alike disregarding their differences. Guo suggested that a recognitive approach based on recognitive justice and would reject the deficit model found in mainstream adult education and focus more on an assets-based curriculum.

### ***Prior Knowledge of the Immigrant Adult Learner***

Guo (2015) also examined how professional immigrants' prior knowledge is discredited. Alfred (2001) also pointed out that a preference for professional immigrants existed in the US immigration system. The US did not consider manual laborers as educated as professional immigrants. Alfred explained that upon arrival, professional immigrants must work their way up the professional ladder, and that professional immigrants faced challenges trying to climb up the ladder because of discrimination (Alfred, 2001).

Guo (2015) agreed that professional immigrants are highly educated, but contrary to Alfred (2001), he pointed out that many professional immigrants take jobs such as taxi driver. (Guo, 2015). The prior knowledge of professional immigrants is often discredited because they come from developing countries. The assumption that these countries' professional preparations are not comparable to the US diminishes many immigrants' prior knowledge. These ideologies perpetuate marginalization of immigrants, which in

turn “denies [them] opportunities to be successful in the new society” and forces them to take menial jobs (Guo, 2015, p. 12).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, adult education is inter-related to andragogical teachings of immigrants and as adult educators, policy makers, or program coordinators, it is important to holistically acknowledge an adult immigrant learner. I became consciously aware when Sofia Villenas (1996) described herself as a Chicana ethnographer/scholar who was the colonizer and colonized during her academic journey. I saw this as relevant literature to my study because she stressed the need to awaken our own multiple Chicana subjectivities. She explained that as researchers and scholars working in the educational field, we should avoid perpetuating the traditional White paradigm of educational research (Villenas, 1996). Therefore, as Chicana scholars, we should reflect on our lived experiences and historical roots before examining individuals coming from marginalized communities like our own.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed the historical context of Mexicanas/os in Texas through the narrative description of Chicanas/os scholars. I discussed the treatment and racialization of Mexicans after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and how it led to the shaping of immigration/migration patterns of Texas-Mexico border. Next, I discussed the theoretical framework of Chicana feminism and its importance and practical use in educational research. Lastly, I discussed the inter-relationship between adult education and immigration by some scholars in the field of adult and continuing education. I also discussed how the depiction of immigrants framed past and current andragogical

practices and the recommendations for a more inclusive andragogy. I determined that adult education is inter-related to immigrant andragogical practices, and that Chicana feminist epistemology can create an authentic researcher/scholar. In the next chapter, I will discuss my research methodology informed by my theoretical framework and the literature.

### III. TESTIMONIO AS A METHODOLOGY

This study is grounded in a Chicana/Latina feminist epistemology. This epistemology rebukes the gendered roles imposed by Chicanos in the 1960s and the issues faced by and generalized to all women by White American feminists (Blackwell, 2015; Calderon, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas, 1996) who ignored issues around race and ethnicity.

#### Research Questions

My main research questions were

1. What were the educational pathways of the immigrant women prior to entering ESL classes?
2. What were the experiences of adult *mexicanas* who have immigrated to the United States?
3. How have they (re)imagined their gendered identities since coming to the United States?

#### The Researcher's Positionality and Role

I define myself as a Chicana/Latina feminist educational researcher born in South Central Texas to immigrant parents. My first language was Spanish. I learned to read and write English in school. I came to understand that my cultural roots thus I was different from the dominant group in the US.. Those cultural roots originated in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico a large industrial city with roughly about 5 million people in its population (Population Stat, 2020). It was the place I visited for about 10 days every summer for as long as I could remember. It was there that I increased my Spanish vocabulary and shared conversations with my cousins about the differences in our lives. I was always curious to



find out how it was to live in Mexico, and they were always curious about how I lived in the United States.

My cultural knowledge and awareness come also from my experiences being born and raised in South Central Texas. In Texas, I was speaking English at school and Spanish at home. I ate U.S. food in public spaces, but Mexican food at home. It was from this alternating between spaces that my identity as a bicultural Latina began to form.

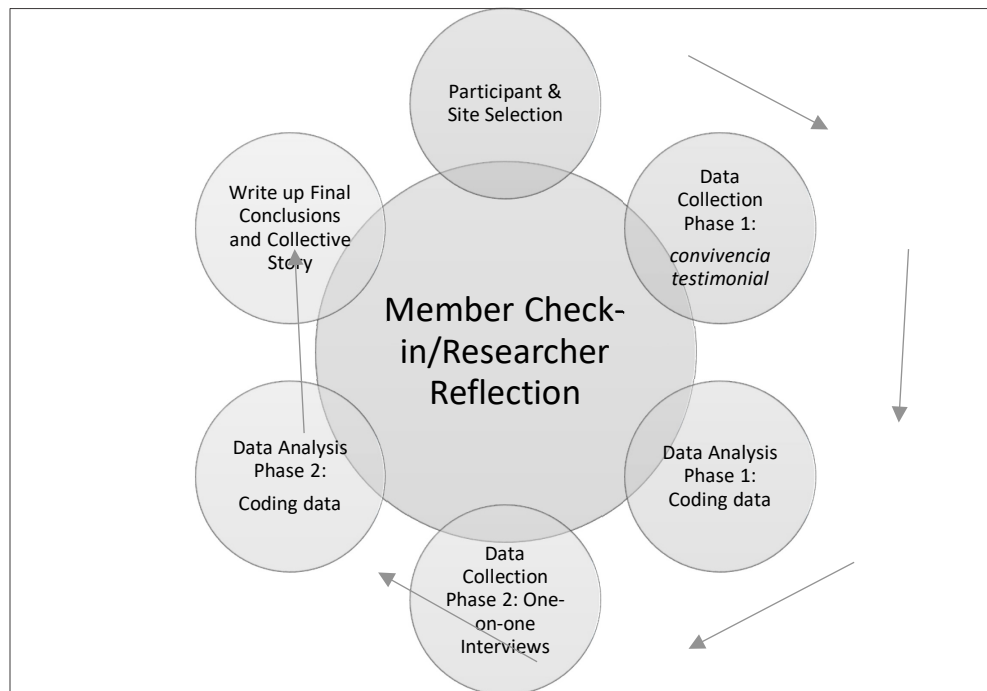
I learned that moving between two worlds was not so difficult if I could take what I wanted from each. This dual cultural identity allows me to understand and make inferences about other members in my Latinx community and is what Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) defined as “cultural intuition...a complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective, and dynamic” (p. 568).

Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) explained that cultural intuition recognizes Chicana scholars as researchers with an exclusive positionality referent to the world in which they navigate. This subsequently directs and informs the overall research design for many. Cultural intuition positioned me as a bicultural-bilingual woman with a Chicana consciousness and enabled me to guide my own role as a researcher in educational studies. It is this role that directed me to authentically document the stories, helped me translate conversations without losing their true meaning, and prevented me from essentializing my participants. However, I also thought it was important to self-reflect to help me prevent my biases from influencing my research.

### **Data Collection**

My qualitative data collection was “cyclical, emergent, and recursive” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 112). It was therefore iterative and consisted of a two-stage development.

In keeping with Chicana epistemology, it entailed two key components: the research questions reflect a Chicana feminist stance against oppressive issues and “the political and ethical issues [are] involved in the research process” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, pp. 558-559). Data collection was implemented in two phases to permit member check-ins for data analysis and researcher reflection to check for any unforeseen issues or re-strategizing that might be needed (see figure 1 in for a visual description of phases).



**Figure 1.** Data Collection Diagram

All of the interviews were in Spanish with the first *convivencia testimonial* occurring in early August of 2020. It was then transcribed using an online software program called Sonix AI. Preliminary themes emerged and I used them to create follow-up questions for the one-on-one interviews called *testimonios* throughout the remainder of this study. Soon after my initial analysis, I scheduled more *testimonios* to gain insight

into their personal herstories. This allowed me to individually evaluate each *mujer* (woman) and dive deeper into their educational and immigrant journey.

Personalities, especially social ones, can be difficult to assess during one-on-one interviews because their persona in interaction in groups with others like them could be missed. It is when they interact with one another that we can see more of their social identity shine through (Hogg & Tindale, 2005, p. 141). Convivencia testimonial became my method of choice because it enhanced their shared stories and the qualities of each *mujer*. Sharing through a method such as convivencia testimonial helped to expand on their personalities because while some had known each other for several years, others had only recently met. In this group setting it became apparent that each of the *mujeres* had different personalities.

The first testimonios were scheduled from the month of September through early November. During the interviews, several of the follow-up questions included some of my key reflections from the convivencia testimonial in order to check my initial analysis and check for participant agreement. It also ensured that my participants felt included and helped to avoid any misunderstanding on my part. Next, I hand wrote memos after each conversation, recorded my self-reflections, and uploaded the recordings of the interviews to the online software program for transcription. Finally, I quality checked each interview and assigned preliminary codes. It is important to note that none of the interviews were translated. I am fluent in Spanish and interpreted the Spanish transcriptions. This eliminated the possibility of losing pertinent details in the translation process.

After all the interviews were collected and transcribed, I hand-coded them to see what recurring themes I could identify as emerging in each narrative. Member checks

were done with each participant both at the beginning of the testimonios and after all the data had been collected. The transcriptions of the testimonios were then compared to the convivencia testimonial's preliminary themes for the purpose of triangulation. Data analysis was done throughout the study, but my final goal was to examine their testimonios to identify any oppressive situations that may not have been voiced in previous research and to shed light onto topics that revolve around the education of immigrant women from Mexico (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

### **Participant Selection**

A purposeful sampling strategy was used to choose participants from among those I encountered by opportunity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) also known as convenience sampling (Creswell, 2018). Participants were recruited from a local adult and community education program, where I had previously taught (see [Appendix A](#) for Recruitment Script). I was an ESL instructor from spring 2016 to spring 2019. During this time, I had met several of my participants and had the opportunity to build a rapport with them. The criteria for participation were that they were between the ages of 30-75, identified as a female, had an English proficiency level of intermediate to advanced, were of Mexican nationality, were enrolled in a local adult and community education program, and resided in the United States for more than a year. They were also asked to sign a consent form (see [Appendix D](#) and [E](#)). The participants were not compensated for their time in the study.

### ***Rationale for Participant Selection***

Creswell (2018) suggested choosing a sample size that will not necessarily enable saturation of the data, but rather would enable the researcher to obtain the qualitative

experience of the participants. Thus, I had a total of five participants. The participants were part of a group of women from an ethnically and racially marginalized community. These women brought to my research a gendered immigrant experience recounted with heartfelt stories. These women were also part of “Latino immigrant communities, which have historically been studied through objective approaches that have served only to essentialize them according to the white dominant gaze” (Monzó, 2015, p. 375) They were also learning English in a country that has historically ostracized their education, culture, language, and experiences (Ruiz, 2006, 2008; Sanchez, 1994). They were adult *mexicanas*, immigrants in the United States, that are part of a marginalized group (i.e., Latinx).

### **Testimonios as a Chicana Feminist Tool**

*Testimonios* is a word that translates to “testimony” in the English language, however as a methodology, the Spanish word means a lot more than the translation implies. *Testimonios* as a methodology center on the *testimoniadoras*, or *testimonialistas* (storytellers’) lived experiences in an oppressive or marginalized framework (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). The act of sharing, voicing, and re-telling of firsthand experiences helps to deconstruct power relations in society. The *testimoniadoras* (producers of testimonies) re-telling of events engenders reflexivity and empowerment to the narrators and the listeners (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). This in-turn is important because their documentation contribute to the development of culturally responsive adult educators and educational policy makers.

*Testimonio*, when used as a tool by Chicanas/os, disrupts and resists negative discourses about marginalized groups (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2012; Pérez Huber & Pulido, 2019). Testimonios is a tool that creates a communal space between the Chicana/o researcher and the participants and recognizes the co-creation of knowledge (Pérez Huber, 2012; Pérez Huber & Pulido, 2019). This untraditional research method provided me a way to co-create knowledge with my participants and to bring their educational stories, stories that are infrequent in the literature, to the forefront of adult education, (Larrotta, 2017; Lee, 2013; Monzó, 2015). I therefore gained a first-person perspective from Mexicanas learning in the United States.

### ***Convivencia Testimonial***

First, I met with a group of five to six participants in a *convivencia testimonial* setting and with a signed consent, I audio and video recorded through the online platform, Zoom. Convivencia testimonial entailed more than a focus group to gather data. This was a new term that I created because one does not exist to describe the type of method I used. A convivencia testimonial involved a social gathering of the participants, all of whom had previously shared a communal space— ESL classroom, work environment, and so forth. An English translation of this term is *testimony of coexistence*. Coexistence is defined in the online *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, as “To exist together, at the same time, or in the same place”. Trinidad Galvan (2011) and Sofia Villenas (2006) write about *convivencia* as a communal space where teaching and learning take place as representing a pedagogical moment of value. The communal space can be anything the participants make it (Villenas, 2006).

For this research, I had planned on gathering my participants from an ESL classroom to share in a potluck. The participants would have been free to share in conversations while enjoying food and drinks. I, as the researcher, would have had the responsibility of leading the group and also taking field notes from the free-flowing conversations in English and Spanish. Towards the end of the social gathering, I would have brought the participants together and asked any questions that were not answered during the beginning of the potluck ([see also Appendix B for Interview Guide Form](#)). The overall time it should have taken, sharing food and drinks, and gathering to discuss their lived experiences, would have been about 2-3 hours. Unfortunately, due to a worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to conduct my study face-to-face and had to move it to an online platform.

The change led to an online convivencia testimonial and because I wanted to stay true to critical research, the CFE need to build rapport with the group became the basis of the (re)design. My participants were already members the same community, and some rapport had already been built that made it easier to recruit participants. All of my recruitment was done via WhatsApp and when participants agreed to be in my study, I built a chat group. This enabled us to relay messages about scheduling Zoom meetings.

At the end of the convivencia testimonial, I asked participants to reflect and offer any themes they may have observed. These themes were noted and revisited when coding the transcripts. Member check-ins were done at the end of each phase of the data analysis. Researcher reflection was also done after each encounter with participants and phases.

## ***Interviews***

Second, I used questions I developed from the first phase to follow up with for the individual participant interviews (see Appendix C). These one-on-one interviews were audio and video-recorded.. Documents, pictures, messages via text or WhatsApp with my participants were also used as data. Participants were asked prior to meeting to provide any of these artifacts and to bring their food or beverage of choice; however, this was optional for all interviewees. Each interview was about 120-180 minutes long, after which I transcribed the interviews and resumed my data analysis. Each of these interviews took place via the online platform, Zoom. Member check-ins were also done at the end of the second phase of the data analysis.

Third, I met with participants to have a final member check-in. The final collective story was shared to check for authenticity of word meanings and correct language translations. Participants were asked if they had any concluding thoughts about the overall research study and that these would be included in my final researcher reflection.

## **Data Management**

I stored all data in an encrypted U-drive cloud storage that was property of Texas State University. The university also had an online storage system that I used to store my digital data. All physical data were stored in the University's education building, room 4050, which was always kept locked, and when not in use, inside a locked desk drawer. I used pseudonyms and the identities of participants were kept confidential.



## Data Analysis

During phase one of the data analysis, I concurrently gathered the data from the *convivencia* testimonials, a practice Ravitch and Carl (2016) refer to as precoding. The participants spoke in whatever languages they felt most comfortable. Like me, participants spoke English or Spanish. The *convivencia* testimonial data consisted of hand-written notes, and audio and video recordings from discussions during the gathering. Afterward, during the analysis phase, I transcribed and identified follow-up questions for individual interviews. I also reviewed any notes taken and observations made during the initial process of the *testimonios* to guide my research analysis.

Next, I inductively coded the transcripts from the *convivencia* testimonial and the one-on-one interviews. Then, in conjunction with the research questions, I extracted short words or phrases (Saldaña, 2009). I also noted any themes participants identified at the *convivencia testimonial* during the member check-in. The member check-in occurred after our discussion, and this was when I asked participants to identify any themes they may have observed from the shared narratives. These participant observations were noted and collected as data. Then, I began to develop a hierarchical tree diagram with the first codes on top and subsequent codes from additional data analysis to follow (Creswell, 2018).

Secondly, after conducting the individual interviews, I transcribed them. Then, I coded them following the same procedure as done for the previous phase. Subsequently, I clustered the codes into themes guided by my research questions and remaining cognizant of the themes the participants themselves had identified. The product was extrapolated from the themes to tell stories as a whole (see Figure 1).

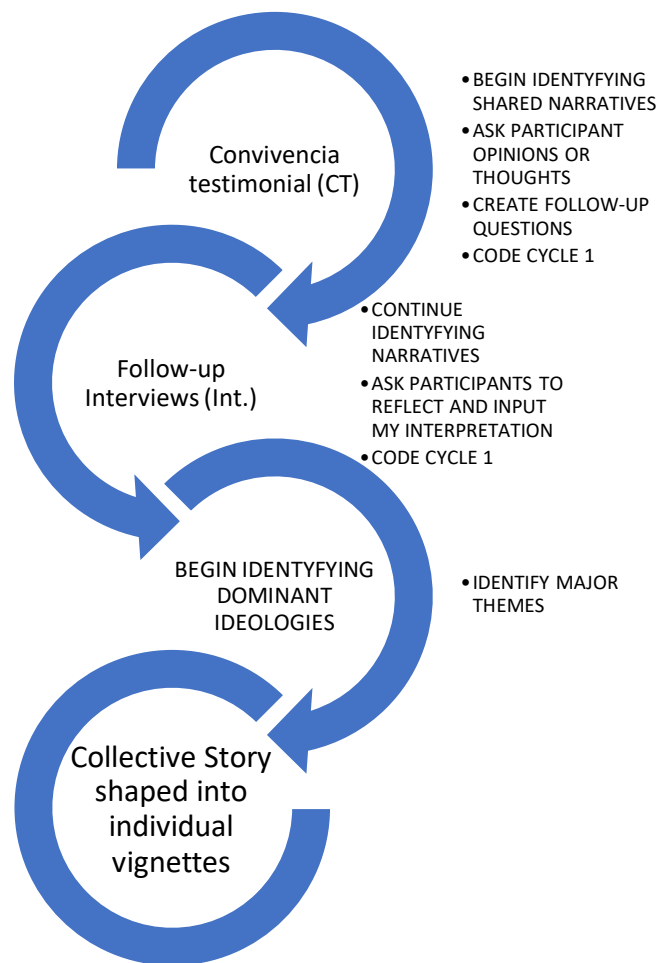
My Chicana feminist epistemology informed me as I analyzed the narratives in order to understand how their ethnic identities and English language learning informed their lived experiences. I combed through the narratives to understand any power relations they encountered and to observe any counternarratives that were embedded in their testimonios. Giving their testimonios enabled the participants to share the truth about their lived experiences and informed my analysis of how they resisted dominant ideologies. Borderlands theory also helped discern any identity dualities formed through immigrating to the United States, being women and learning the English language.

### **Representation**

My purpose was to document adult *mexicanas* immigrants' educational experiences and tell their stories as authentically as possible. Lilia D. Monzó (2015) wrote that when research about Latinx is conducted within a Eurocentric paradigm, the intention is to document what is *known* about this group. When Latinx immigrants' communities co-construct *with* a researcher who shares their experiences, language, commitment and vulnerability, the study becomes a way for others unfamiliar with this group to understand their experiences (Monzó, 2015). Monzó also explained that her own findings were constructed and interpreted with guidance from her participants "to rectify what they disagreed with and to help [her] see their lives through their eyes" (p. 376).

I also had member check-ins to cross reference the authenticity of their testimonios. To address the fact that my study is reported in English and my participants were limited in English, I went over every document with my participants via Zoom and checked for proper word meanings and misunderstandings.

My goal for this study was to understand each individual collective story recounting the unique life experiences of these adult *mexicana* immigrants and interpreted by me through a Chicana theoretical framework (see Figure 2 Data Analysis Diagram). The results of my analysis resulted in a well-rounded and authentic depiction of my participants' experiences and hopefully, amplifies their voices so that practitioners and policy makers can create a truly inclusive and integrative educational environment.



**Figure 2.** Data Analysis Diagram

### **Building Trustworthiness**

I built trustworthiness by adopting three of the four criteria Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended as: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I

used member checks and triangulation to add credibility to my research study. I also used reflexivity and transferability for confirmability. Thick description was used to help the transferability of my study.

I also used Creswell's (2018) three lenses to evaluate trustworthiness. The only difference between Creswell and Lincoln and Guba's evaluative criteria is the terms used. Creswell uses what he calls validation strategies in lieu of trustworthiness. He also suggests qualitative researchers use nine strategies grouped into three different lenses. They are the participants' lens, researcher's lens, and the readers' or reviewers' lens (Creswell, 2018, p. 408). I employed all three lenses for each of Lincoln and Guba's evaluative criteria for trustworthiness—credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

### **Credibility**

Credibility gave my research study the internal validity that positivist researchers seek (Guba, 1981). Credibility can be defined as the criteria used to discuss the process of trustworthiness in a study's findings (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The validity strategies that I employed were member-checking and triangulation. I chose these two strategies to enhance the active engagement of participants (Pérez Huber, 2012).

### **Member checking**

To establish credibility, I engaged my participants in member-checking by co-constructing knowledge at the end of the convivencia testimonial and during the one-on-one interviews of the second phase of data collection and analysis. During the first phase, I asked if they could reflect and share thoughts or opinions about the convivencia testimonial. For the second phase, I asked them one or two of the answers given to me

during the *convivencia testimonial*. Then, I gave them my interpretation to check for meaning from my findings. Lastly, I documented their comments and took their thoughts as part of my analysis.

Member checking supports Creswell's (2018) validation strategy of looking through the *participant's lens*. And as shown above in Figure 1, member checking played a large part in my research methodology. My goal was not just to interpret my findings alone, but to help amplify my participants' voices and their co-constructed knowledge (Perez Huber & Pulido, 2019). Authentically documenting their stories of their lived experiences helped me reaffirm and value their ways of knowing and did not risk discrediting their experiential (Preuss & Saavedra, 2014) and cultural knowledge (González, 2001) or their cultural intuition as Delgado Bernal (1998) termed it. Experiential knowledge is the way of knowing that grows out of the lived experiences of a person (Stokerson, 2009). Hence, the importance of member checking for my study.

**Triangulation.** Credibility was also established through triangulation or using different kinds of data and data-gathering methods (Guba, 1981). In lieu of Creswell's (2018) three types of lenses, this looks through the *researcher's lens* (p. 408). In my study, I used both *convivencia testimonial* and one-on-one interviews to engage with my participants.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) divided triangulation into four separate categories of credibility. The one my research was most aligned with was *methodological triangulation* (p. 195). This type of triangulation refers to different sets of tools (methods) for evaluating the results and obtaining a good description of the findings. The different data

I used were the *convivencia testimonial*, in-depth interviews, observation fieldnotes and artifacts gathered through WhatsApp.

### **Confirmability**

I worked to establish confirmability by reflecting on whether I had any underlying agendas that were biased or unethical (Guba, 1981). This reflection helped me to be somewhat neutral about the subject and made space for the participants to shape my study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Creswell, 2018) and co-construct knowledge (Perez Huber & Pulido, 2019).

**Reflexivity.** I built a reflexive practice into my writing to be as transparent in my biases as possible. Creswell (2018) explained that reflexivity is where the researcher “discloses their understandings about the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study” (p. 409). Creswell further suggested that reflexivity during and after the study is a good practice to acquire. I reflected on my own experiential and cultural knowledge and how it might be influencing the research study.

### **Transferability: Thick Description**

Additional artifacts such as observational fieldnotes and documents from participants obtained via WhatsApp helped me develop a thick description of their individual collective stories (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transferability is how a study is applicable to but not generalizable to other contexts (Guba, 1981). In Creswell’s (2018) last and final lens grouping, thick description falls under the *reader’s or reviewer’s lens*. One way I provided thick description for readers was by producing a short vignette where readers not only understand the story through the perspective of the participants, but also the researchers’ perspective.

## **Human Subject Protection**

The study posed no serious ethical problems for the adult *mexicanas*. Participants' confidentiality was not breached. All documents were kept in a secure, password protected external hard-drive, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identity. I also had participants sign an Informed Consent Form with my and my chair's contact information (see Appendix [D](#) and [E](#) for Informed Consent Forms). The study was approved by the Texas State Institutional Review Board (see Appendix [F](#)).

## **Chapter Summary**

In summary, my research study collected qualitative data and documented the educational experiences of adult *mexicanas*. A Chicana/Latina feminist methodological framework was used to inform the data collection and analysis research process. My cultural intuition also helped to positively frame my research study and not adopt a deficit model or use negative stereotypes of adult *Mexicana* immigrants. Several measures were considered for trustworthiness, credibility, confirmability, and transferability. An integral piece to my qualitative study was the incorporation of reflection to avoid inaccurately misconstruing stories. The following chapters present the findings and interpretation of the data.

#### IV. CONVIVENCIA TESTIMONIAL

The year 2020 changed everyone's life—mine included. What started out as a happy and prosperous year turned into a long-isolated waiting game. My Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sealed on February 18, 2020. I planned on recruiting participants and collecting my data in March. But life happened differently to what I had envisioned because of a deadly pandemic that halted life as we knew it. COVID-19 claimed many lives and continues claiming many lives, but this dissertation is not about a deadly virus. It speaks about the educational experiences of adult *mexicana* immigrants and how they interfaced their lives in public spaces.

In June 2020, I reached out to participants, months after my IRB approval. An amendment was added and explained that I would not conduct face-to-face interviews. What did this mean for my study? It meant that I needed to adapt my methodology. The convivencia testimonial (CvT), a method that I created and planned to use, would need to be changed (Quintero & Peña, 2020). This term was created to describe an innovative method presented at the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education Virtual Conference (AAACE) of 2020.

The main premise of CvT was to gather in a group to share food and conversations. Yet, how could I gather a group of 5-6 women, if there was a deadly virus rapidly spreading among the community? I was shattered at the thought that I would not be able to share in-live conversations with my participants and feared that data gathering could be compromised for my study. I questioned whether I would achieve a transparency and bond with participants to make our data rich with *testimoniales* via Zoom meetings.



Zoom became the platform used in 2020 to connect with people. It allowed users to meet in real-time and more than two people to join in.

Convivencia testimonial was modified, participants recruited, possible dates to meet sent out and Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms digitally converted ready for signatures. Then, a new problem arose when I asked if connected via Zoom would be an issue. As it turned out, these wonderful *mujeres* agreed to participate in my study although they did not have good electronic equipment to connect to Zoom. I scrambled to think and spoke to fellow colleagues about my situation. They shared great ideas and as luck would have it, a grant was offered through our program. This extra financial assistance aided in procuring Amazon Fire Tablets for each of the participants. The convivencia testimonial was scheduled for early August 2020 and participants were given tablets, advised to bring food, and asked to seek a quiet and comfortable area to sit in for 3 hours.

### **A Bilingual-bicultural Brain: A Walking Enigma**

I continuously referred to my study as a puzzle with intricate parts, however, I did not realize that I was also a walking puzzle piece. The process of this study gave me insight into my language background and ways of thinking that I did not know I had. I learned so much about myself and was shocked about it. My goal was to learn about the *mujeres* in my study, not gain byproduct facts about myself.

My study started out in English with sprinkles of Spanish. With time it developed into an amalgamation of English and Spanish because my participants felt comfortable speaking Spanish during the interviews. Fluency in both languages facilitated the group and one-on-one interviews. When it was time to code the data, my brain understood the

spoken Spanish, conversely, it was in English what I wrote in the margins. My brain did not stay in one language but became fluid. The languages met in the middle, in other words, in my brain, and easily translated what happened into English. I say that I am amazed because I doubted myself throughout this study. The imposter syndrome that one feels during the beginning years of your Ph.D. program and eventually subsides, came back with a vengeance. The time that elapsed of the approval from the IRB committee, the pandemic that ensued my graduate life, and the recurring thoughts that I was not “academic” enough led to my imposter syndrome.

I was not about to let myself down, nor my participants. It is my belief and ideology that we all have stories that should be voiced. These stories carry messages of wisdom, *consejos*, resilience, of *sobreviviencia*, lessons of life, and messages of love and peace to gain equality in an already oppressive world.

### **Participant Vignettes**

I would like to introduce you to the world and life experiences of my participants. In the following vignettes you will get to know the life stories of Elena, Maria, Clara, Camilla, and Cecilia. Each woman has unique characteristics that surface in their stories. They also share a common goal in life—to be successful in speaking English. It is important that I stay true to their stories as they were narrated to me. I tried to accomplish this goal as best as I could and hope that their lived immigrant and English language learner experiences shine through.

#### **Elena’s Vignette of Survival**

I met Elena a few years ago during my second-year teaching English as a second language (ESL). I taught classes in the morning to a group of about 18 students. She

came in looking a bit nervous asking about registration. My role, however, was not only to be the ESL instructor but also the person to register incoming students. I informed her that she could stay for the class and after a short break we would fill out the paperwork. This curly dark-haired slender woman who looked to be in her middle to late twenties was a thirty-eight-year-old immigrant from Ciudad de Mexico, Mexico. Elena attributed her nervousness to the fact that she was only going to stay for a few months because she was visiting on a tourist visa. Her goal was to learn English because she planned on permanently moving to the U.S. with her fiancé. But she was afraid that I would not accept her because of the temporary stay.

This short memory of her emerged when Elena recounted her own story of how she learned about the ESL adult education program. I was surprised when she recounted the story and discovered that Elena arrived at my ESL class by luck. Elena explained that one day she was walking and walking because she had grown tired of being indoors. That is when she saw a group of women standing around a school. "...so, I went between the streets, walking, walking, not knowing where they were going. Obviously, I was looking at where I was going and how to get there. So, that I could get back the same way I got there. And I got to a school and saw some ladies out there. It was like 5 or 6 in the afternoon. Some ladies who were there, who were going into the school, called out to me and said 'hey, you come to class?' But I was just passing by. And I asked them, 'Which classes?' They said, 'It's because at this school they have English classes.' And I told them, 'And how much do they charge for classes?' And they said, 'They do not charge they are free.' I said, 'really?' They said, 'Yes!' Well, I went in with them because I had nothing to do."<sup>a</sup> However, the afternoon ESL class was full, and the instructor offered

her an alternative morning class. Elena liked that idea better than going in the afternoon because it reminded her of compulsory school in Mexico. The next morning, she entered my classroom to register and instantly became part of a group of students who shared stories of their educational experiences in Mexico.

Elena was the reason that I chose to share stories of ESL students. I could see that there were many facets to my students. The vulnerability that they feel when entering classes, if not handled with care, can shatter their future educational path in the United States. I understood this when Elena shared that she had a lot of physical scars on her body. There were scars that I had not noticed before. But I didn't notice them until she pointed them out and I could see that they were significantly large. She shared that she had been in a car accident when she was a teenager and was alive by a miracle. Several months were spent in a hospital bed and that she grew from that moment to be the person whom she had become.

Elena's story of survival has not ended there. Recently, she shared that her husband had gotten injured at work and as consequence lost his finger. Her husband had a 50 percent chance of losing his ring finger also. In our one-on-one conversation, Elena confided that because of a language barrier she was not aware of the possibility that he could lose his finger. But despite not comprehending this information she still prayed to God and nursed him back to good health.

To make matters worse, a few weeks later, their car was stolen. It had to be picked up at the impound and yet again the language barrier was an issue. To remove the car from the impound they needed the car title, insurance and a valid driver's license. She discussed that she was met with rudeness from the receptionist and returned several times

before the car was released to them. Despite all this adversity, Elena has survived and attributed her strong spirituality to her survival.

This is the type of woman that Elena is, a charismatic, spiritual go-getter. She does not wish to come to the United States and be a burden to others. She chose to stay in the United States as an afterthought and because she liked living in a communal space with her boyfriend. Her intention when I first met her was to visit her then boyfriend of 4-5 years, whom she had met through an online chatroom. Their relationship was only friendship until he received a job offer to move him to the U. S. Elena moved to the United States about 5-6 years ago.

Her decision to marry him was not made until she was already attending ESL classes and had made friends. Living with a man beforehand is not a typical Mexican custom. Like the other traditional customs Elena spoke about in Mexico for single women, moving out of her parents' home was not socially accepted nor economically feasible. What is also not traditional is marriage and not having children. Elena's choice to not have children is not definitive but she wonders about having them because of her age. Elena has defied tradition in this custom too. She is aware of not following what is customary in Mexico and is fine with it.

In Mexico, Elena lived with her mother and stepfather, who she helped financially. As a young woman, she studied to be a nutritionist but did not follow through with her career. She claimed that as a young woman she thought the world was her oyster. Her job instead was at a call center for the local government calling patrons surveying them about their government officials. Her education ended there until she moved to the U.S. and entered ESL classes. She is currently trying to find classes that can

fit her schedule because she is now working, taking care of her household, and occasionally sending money to her mom. Elena said that she spoke to her mom daily and annoyed her so much that her mother calls her a psychopath. Her “kind” nickname is because Elena calls and worries more than her mother.

### **Clara’s Vignette of Sojourning**

Clara knew since the age of 12 that one day she would visit the United States. Twelve-year-old Clara saw her distant cousin bring Barbies and UNO games to her other cousins in Mexico. This was all she needed to ignite her dream of one day living and working here. Her dream became a reality not too far from this age. It was this determination and perseverance that led her into an ESL program. Clara was also my ESL student and I remember her fondly.

During her time in my class, she became pregnant, lost her mother, and laughed with such vivacity that it was contagious. Whenever she missed class I knew because she has a laugh that is hard to miss. One day, however, I noticed that she came in and did not have the same bubbly, energetic and catching laughter. After class I approached her and asked if everything was okay. To my surprise she opened up and shared that her mother had died suddenly. Her sister had called her to tell her that her mom was not feeling well and that they were transporting her to a nearby hospital. The next phone call was to share the bad news of her mother’s passing. From that moment on, Clara and I bonded. Her vulnerability permitted us to have a great teacher-student relationship, one in which we were able to learn from one another.

Clara’s story begins with her birth in Monclova, Coahuila. It was in this town that she first planned on visiting the United States. She went to work at a local grocery store

as a bagger at the age of nine to save up for her visa. Unfortunately, Clara's father was never responsible for his family and the little money they could obtain barely made ends meet. Any money that Clara got would then go towards her sisters' schooling and well-being.

At the age of 14, an aunt gifted her mother money to get her visa. This aunt had visited the U.S. and shown her pictures of what it was like *en el otro lado*. "El otro lado" is what Clara said they called coming to the United States. But Clara's mother inappropriately spent the money and did not use it towards her daughter's dream. Her mother did not support her and often called her crazy for having such foolish dreams.

The second time Clara saved money she was dating her future husband. He helped her come up with extra money by investing in a small business selling clothing at a swap meet. She dated him for about a year and it was during this year that Clara explained to him that she wanted to sojourn to the United States. She had saved enough money to pay for her visa and pay her mother off. At the time, Clara was still underage and needed her mother's signature. This was not the first time that her mother held something important to Clara.

Years before, when Clara was dating her husband, her mother believed he was a good for nothing bum. She would withhold Clara's school allowance because this was the only way she could hurt her daughter. As Clara explained, she was independent from a young age because growing up, she lived with her father's extended family members. Her father was mostly absent from her life and hardly worked to sustain the family.

Clara also explained that her mother rationalized that at the young age of 18 years they were not ready for children. Her mother, like her dad, liked to drink and go to dance

parties. Due to both Clara's parents' young status, she was permitted to stay for a time with different family members. Clara also justified this ease of restriction was because of her status as the firstborn grandchild and grandniece, it qualified her to be the most coveted and sought-after family member. Clara's first recollection that she would stay with her grandparents was at the age of 10. She bounced from one home to the next, until her mother wanted her to come home.

Clara would transition among extended family members' homes temporarily up until the age of 16. That was the age that she returned to live permanently with her mother because they were preparing the festivities for her sweet fifteen. It was during this time that she met her husband, the person who would become her benefactor and ticket to the United States at the age of 17. Clara described him as being a calm, respectable and well-mannered 18-year-old man. He was the youngest son of the family and missed out on his education because his parents couldn't afford it.

Jumping from one household to another as a child helped her pay for school tuition and uniforms. She reminisced that there was an aunt who asked she stay to live with her as if she were her daughter. Her explanation for the request was that this would ease the financial burden of the family. Clara's father accepted her request because he could never have the family in a financially stable situation. Her father and his extended family repeatedly sojourned to the United States, adding to Clara's lack of parental figure at home. When he would be in *el otro lado* (the other side), he would send fifty dollars every three months. He claimed that there were not many well-paying jobs in the U.S. and that was all he could afford to send. However, when Clara finally sojourned to the U.S. herself, she discovered that his claim was false. On her return to Mexico, Clara



confronted her father about the money and lack of job opportunities. The confrontation never led to a proper discussion that answered her questions. Unfortunately, her father no longer sojourns because of his age and now permanently resides in Mexico. Her questions may never be properly answered or dealt with.

Her father also missed the opportunity to obtain his papers through an amnesty in the mid-eighties because her mother wouldn't forward the documents he needed. His family did not disclose details as to why he needed the documents. Clara's mother assumed the worst and did not send them. According to Clara, every chance he got he would remind her mother that she made him miss the chance to bring the family over. Her father does not sojourn anymore because he is too old to travel back and forth.

Currently, Clara has permanently moved to the U.S. After many years of trying to send money to build a home in Mexico and the money used for everything but that, she and her husband decided they were better off staying in the U. S. Clara has four children, three little girls and a boy. The oldest daughter is 17 years old, the same age that Clara was when she first sojourned to the U.S. The difference is that Clara cannot imagine letting her daughter do everything she did. She does not leave her side and conversely depends on her daughter to help with English only situations.

### **Maria's Vignette of "Yo Me Aviento"<sup>4</sup>**

Maria is in her early seventies with four adult children and many grandchildren. She was born in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, Mexico. She married young and had three children in Mexico with exception of the youngest. He was born in the United States. Maria is also a dedicated, driven and determined woman who was blessed with being at

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<sup>4</sup> The English translation for "Yo me aviento" is I dare myself.

the right place at the right time and knowing people that could lend a helping hand.

However, her story was not that easy. Her husband, Rigoberto, sojourned to the United States in 1974. Maria was left behind in a two-bedroom house with their daughter in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Maria's mother-in-law owned a large property and had the house built on her land to be closer to them. This worked because Maria would not be alone while Rigoberto was away.

Maria sustained herself, while living on her mother-in-law's property, with the money Rigoberto sent every two weeks. She also worked in a toy factory for extra cash and to keep busy while her husband sojourned. Whenever possible he visited and often tried convincing Maria to immigrate with him. Yet, unlike her husband, Maria did not have any documentation to travel or claim permanent residency. Rigoberto had documents thanks to his uncle who was a U.S. citizen. His uncle became an acting guardian for Rigoberto when he was 16 years old, the age his father died. Maria also did not immigrate for lack of opportunities because they did arise. These opportunities were disliked because to partake in them was to cut corners that she knew were dishonest.

Maria finally immigrated with Rigoberto in 1978. Her prior stance of immigrating to the United States was that it was an unnecessary evil. She affirmed that life in Mexico was better and good jobs were available there. She also did not trust the U.S. because it was speculated that children born in the U.S. would be enlisted and forced into the military. Unbeknownst to Maria was that in the future, a son would voluntarily enlist to be a marine.

Maria, as a child, wanted to be a schoolteacher. She admired their drive and dedication. Contrarily, her parents did not believe that women should get an education

because women were supposed to fit a traditional gender role. Continued education for a woman meant that she would neglect her duties as a wife and mother. Her father expressed this ideology when a family friend complimented Maria's exceptional memory and intelligence. She additionally offered Maria's parents her home and mentorship. To which Maria's father answered, "Oh no, se va a casar y la van a mantener. ¿Paque va a la escuela?" (Oh no, she's going to get married and they are going take care of herself.) He saw no point in her education if she was to be married and it was the husband's job to sustain her.

Maria admitted that she heard this phrase so often as a teenager that she began believing it, too, more so because her parents did not have the money to continue an education past middle school. She decided to work rather than search for opportunities to resume school. Also, in the 50s and 60s in Mexico, resources or support needed to continue an education were scarce or non-existent. Although, to Maria, the biggest deficit was the absence of "animo" (motivation) from her parents. Still, the hindrance from her parents made her challenge herself more and *aventarse a sobresalir en todo lo que pudiera* (dare herself into everything to excel in all that she could).

Maria began challenging herself as she grew into an adult. After she married, her will grew more from the support of her husband. This confidence to *aventarse* (dare herself into things) enabled Maria to enter continued education evening classes. But when she told her mother, she had other thoughts about how a married woman should act. Her mother exclaimed, "Tienes que atender bien a tu esposo!" (You must take well care of your husband!) Her mother also said that Maria's husband should never be without a lunch,

“Que no se ande yendo sin lonche porque tú... O te fuisteis a la calle. O te fuisteis de compras, o esto, no. Tienes que atenderlo a él, porque él es el que, él es el de la casa y tienes tú que, ¡qué atenderlo!” (Don't let him go without a lunch because you ... or you went out and about. Or you went shopping, or this or that, no. You must care for him, because he is the one, he is the man of the house, and you must take care of him!)

Maria was ordered to take good care of her husband and pack him a lunch instead of roaming the streets. Her mother did not understand that Maria was trying to continue her education for her and the future of her family. Rather than uplift her spirits, she reprimanded her for going to school.

Maria's father was not any better. He told her that school was no place for a married woman. What would people think if they saw her there and who would make dinner for her husband? She needed to “atenderlo” (take care of him) and be dedicated to her home. However, Maria still went to night school and finished as much as she could before immigrating to the U.S.

Maria worked, went to night school and raised four children to be successful adults by rejecting her parent's ideology. Her aspiration was to be different from her mother. The advice given to her children was to get as much education as they possibly could. They were told to only focus on their studies and their parents would worry about the rest. Ultimately, she sacrificed her stance of living in Mexico for her children's future. When she joined her husband in the U.S., they agreed it was for the best because this would give their children a better future. Maria's prior reluctance to immigrate, also

changed because she feared losing him forever if she stayed in Mexico. In 1978, she left their home in Mexico and began her journey to the United States.

A close *comadre* (close friend) helped her gain legal entry into the U.S. with the promise that she would wait for her husband to become a U.S. Citizen. This would grant his wife and children permanent status. Unfortunately, he would not pass his citizenship test in June of 1979.

Determined to obtain her permanent residency, she never gave up hope and in 1986, an immigration amnesty was granted. Any individual who had entered before 1980 would be granted a governmental pardon that led to a permanent residency status. Maria was thrilled and began filing paperwork with help from her daughter. During their wait, her daughter Sonia learned enough English to help translate and mediate for her mother but that would be short-lived when she got married. Sonia still helps her mother but as Maria explained, she “was very dependent on her.” Without Sonia’s help, Maria forcefully had to learn English, at least sufficient English that she could get by on her own.

After the application was submitted, Rigoberto incessantly tried to dissuade her of going to the interview for fear that the government would entrap his family and deport them. He was so mistrustful of the amnesty that he waited for Maria to finish her interview in the parking lot at a far distance from the government building. Despite his protests, Maria bulldozed ahead. She obtained her permanent residency along with her children. Five years later, they all obtained their U.S. citizenship. In the intervening years, as her children grew older, her new sense of freedom led her to take up guitar and sewing lessons. Her sewing lessons helped her to make Sonia’s wedding dress.

Jobs came easy to Maria because of the network of friends accumulated throughout the years. Soon after Sonia got married, she entered English as a second language classes. She had to, as she put it, *aventarse* (dare) to learn more English. Maria has gotten to the point where she now incorporates a lot of English into her conversations. It is apparent how so during the interviews with her. She would interweave English with Spanish and often switch without thinking twice. Throughout this time, Maria also grew to love and create beautiful memories in the U.S. Maria recalled and reflected that if she had stayed in Mexico, she cannot imagine what her life would be like. She arrived at this conclusion many years later when Maria could visit her hometown in Mexico again.

At the bus station while waiting for the bus to arrive and take her to her hometown, she bumped into an old friend, Vicky. Maria did not recognize her. The young girl she had once known now had abundant fatigued physical features. Vicky failed to acknowledge Maria until Maria asked her if she was also traveling to the same location. This was the same friend who had married Maria's ex-boyfriend. When Maria moved from Ciudad Victoria to Matamoros, Tamaulipas, he went searching for the love of Maria only to find the love of Vicky instead. With the knowledge that it was Vicky, Maria shuddered at the thought that she could be the haggard looking one. Had Maria denied her now husband and married her hometown sweetheart, she would be that deteriorated. Upon her arrival to her mother's, Maria's sister greeted her and asked why she looked a bit shocked. Maria recounted how she bumped into Vicky at the bus station and was taken aback. Her sister proceeded to explain that her appearance was because of

her long workdays, and the time spent in harsh environments and blazing sun at the ranch.

Maria surmised that she would not trade her experience in the U.S. for Mexico because her personal growth could and would not be the same. Now, Maria visits her husband's remaining family because her parents are no longer living. She says that it is only to visit and not return to live there. Rigoberto, on the other hand, continuously tells her that he wants to retire to Mexico. Maria says she could not because when she visits, she feels suffocated and immediately wants to return to her home in the U.S. Their children also exclaim that their father is irrational to want to return to Mexico. They claim that their life in the U.S. is much better because of the ease and comfort compared to what they would be returning to. They also claim that to return would be detrimental to their family's bonding and well-being. Maria's only hope is that because her husband would not try to pass his U.S. citizenship exam, as a permanent U.S. resident, his stay in Mexico can only be temporary. Since this interview, Maria's mother-in-law has passed away. They were visiting and making burial arrangements in late December, early January. His mother was his direct connection to Mexico and Maria still awaits what is to come.

### **Camilla's Vignette of Vivan Sin Miedo<sup>5</sup>**

"To live without fear." That was the advice Camilla gave fellow Latinas immigrating to the United States. If you are constantly living in fear, then are you really living your life to its fullest potential? Camilla thinks not! Her personal creed? You should not deprive yourself of opportunities because you fear the unknown. Change your

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<sup>5</sup> Translation of "Vivan Sin Miedo" is to live without fear.

ideologies because life in the U.S. is different. If you fear suffering, well, you have already suffered by immigrating. The trick is to try to overcome the obstacles that are blocking your success in the U. S.

Those are Camilla's words that she lives by. They are also her thoughts surrounding life experiences in the United States. But her story is also unique because she is one out of the five participants that is a second-generation immigrant. This refers to any individual born in the U.S. who is born to one or both foreign parents. Like most second-generation immigrants, Camilla was born in the U.S. because her parents decided to immigrate either before she was born or during pregnancy.

In or around 1970, her father was offered a job in the U.S. and sojourned with a work visa. His wife and their three daughters stayed in San Luis Potosi, Coahuila, Mexico. They accompanied him once he was settled in Texas. Camilla was the lucky one to be born in the U.S. However, the time she spent here was only about two years because soon Camilla's father was offered a job in Mexico. After careful consideration they decided to return to their hometown. Taking with them Camilla, they raised her as Mexican national but never changed her status as a U.S. born citizen. Flash forward 21 years later and Camilla would find herself married and living in the U.S. again.

Her secondary education in Mexico was completed, and she went on to also complete one year of her university as a psychology major. She did not get to continue because funding policies changed, and she could no longer afford it. Her first year of college, Camilla worked part-time recruiting students for the university. This allowed her to pay the tuition and fees. It was also when she met her husband, Juan, and began dating him.



The second year, policies changed and the new director in charge discontinued the work program. Camilla and 15 other students were left without a job and money for school. Without resources for school, Camilla dropped out and began working. The following year she married Juan at the U.S.-Mexican border. Camilla had to get married at the border because like she plainly put it, "...yo me enamoré de un mexicano. ¿Como le hago?" (I fell in love with a Mexican. What can I do?) She fell in love with a Mexican national. This also meant she could not marry him on Mexican territory. She could not marry him in Mexico if in the future they wanted to immigrate to the United States. At the time Juan had a stable and well-paying job. It was not feasible to immigrate to the U.S. Instead, after the wedding at the border, they had a church wedding in their hometown, where they remained another year. Juan's employer began going bankrupt soon after. Camilla, then thought that because they did not have children, they could try their luck in the U.S.

After Camilla reinstated herself in the U.S., obtaining U.S. permanent residency for Juan became the priority, along with the rest of her family, also. She explained that her parents were as important as her brothers and sisters. She needed to immigrate her parents because they were getting older and living alone. The only issue with granting someone U.S. permanency was that you needed to provide proof of economic support. Yearly tax reports, of self or other family members provided proof that they made 9,000 dollars or more for each person immigrating. Camilla worked three jobs to meet the required tax bracket. Because Juan lacked proper documents, he could not work to help Camilla.

After working hard, Juan received his residency status and they settled in. They proceeded to relocate to Seattle, Washington. There, Camilla busied herself by borrowing library books and renting children's videos to learn English. She also began advising Juan that he needed to learn English because his next goal was to become a U.S. Citizen. English was a necessity to pass the official government test. However, for Camilla, her use for English was to advocate for herself and survive.

Advocacy is a good word to describe Camilla. Many of her stories are of times that she has advocated for herself or others. For example, she and her sister-in-law were mistreated at the supermarket by a deli worker when she lived in Seattle. Camilla told me that a young lady in the deli department was yelling at them. Camilla told the deli worker to calm down because there was no need to yell. The young lady proceeded to throw their order at them and harass them by yelling that she was a U.S. Citizen inferring that they were not. Camilla's sister-in-law voiced her concern and said she wanted to leave. Camilla on the other hand had other things in mind. She clarified to her sister-in-law that she knew enough English to make it known to the deli worker's manager about the mistreatment. She also surmised that she spoke better English because of her anger. The manager was called, and Camilla expressed her dissatisfaction to him. She told him that as a U.S. Citizen, she too had rights. The manager apologized profusely and sought the woman in question, but to his surprise she had disappeared. As a reconciliatory gift, he handed Camilla a coupon for five dollars from her next purchase. Following the ordeal, Camilla and her sister-in-law laughed at the compensation amount. They considered it ridiculously insufficient to the mistreatment they experienced.

As life would have it, the issue at the deli department would not be the last. Years later Camilla would once again be an advocate, this time for an elderly Korean couple that were spoken to rudely by a pharmacy technician. Camilla intervened and got the manager involved to help the couple. Her newfound confidence in speaking English for others developed from English as a second language (ESL) class. It was the first time Camilla entered a formal classroom in the U.S. It was also when I first met Camilla. By then, she had lived in Texas for a few years, birthed three children and set a goal of learning English to obtain a job.

I do not remember meeting Camilla. What I remember is her quick wit and dedication to learn English. She was also one of my best students. And before she befriended classmates, we bonded because she would stay after class to help me clean up. During this time, she shared many stories about life, love and marriage. When she started going out to lunch with her classmates, she often invited me. I went along to share my stories, break bread with them and let them see that I was a common human being. Yet, it was always Camilla's stories that stood out to me because of her perseverance, advocacy and unique immigrant story. It was also how she became one of my closest students outside of the classroom.

For Camilla, and many others, my classroom offered her the inspiration needed to build friendships, increase self-advocacy and survive in everyday life. Within the year and a half, she attended class, Camilla learned the English skills to confidently speak at doctor's visits and obtain the job she wanted. She became a receptionist at a local hospice but discovered that it was not her calling. Camilla was able to gain the necessary skills practicing English and later was offered a job within the company to become a provider.

As a provider she is responsible for caring for a patient in their home. Unbeknownst to Camilla, it would serve her well when her mother became ill with Alzheimer's disease.

Now, Camilla in her early fifties, we often speak about sick parents and the strain that it puts on primary caretakers. A few years ago, she lost her father to stomach cancer. He was gravely sick when he was brought to permanently stay in the U.S. After 9 months, he succumbed to the disease leaving his family dumbfounded. Mexican doctors had not advised them on the type of cancer nor how to treat it. Camilla rationalized their past experiences and decided it was better for her mother to stay in the U.S. after her dad died. When her mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease the decision for her to stay was a good one. Her mother has received the care she needs and her own daughter as a paid primary care provider. Unfortunately, Camilla also stopped attending ESL classes to give her mother full-time care.

The last time that I spoke with Camilla, her mother's health was worsening. The doctor's wanted to discuss placing her on a do not resuscitate (DNR) order. They explained that as her mind deteriorated more, she would become unresponsive. I could hear it in Camilla's voice and facial expressions that she was deeply affected by the news.

Nevertheless, Camilla will forge ahead with new goals for herself. She planned to study for her General Educational Development (GED®) exam in early 2020. The pandemic hampered her plans. Since then, she decided to reinitialize her plans in 2021. I believe Camilla can achieve her goal. She can also continue advocating for herself and others because of her kind heart.

### **Cecilia's Vignette of Dreaming to Be a Dentist**

*“Mi sueño era ser dentista.”* (My dream was to be a dentist.) These were Cecilia's words about the type of career she wanted. She completed 2 years then, dropped out. Her pregnancy prevented her from participating in radiology clinicals. The instructor also told her that she should not be in school if she was married or pregnant. She needed to be home caring for her husband and child.

At home, her husband was not always the best person to be around. Cecilia did not detail the type of abuse she received from her husband. She only stated that he began drinking himself into a drunken stupor and harassing her. Cecilia endured another 15 years after her daughter was born before Cecilia abandoned him. She went to live in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico with her parents. They supported her decision to leave and divorce him. After that many years under duress, Cecilia was finally free from an abusive marriage. She would become an entrepreneur and years later remarry.

Cecilia is a caring, sensitive, and soft-spoken woman in her early fifties. She was born in a small town named Xicotepec de Juárez, Puebla, Mexico that bordered Veracruz, Mexico. Her earliest memories revolving around school were of squeezing into her mother's car with 4 other children. In Mexico, seatbelt laws were nearly non-existent. People and children were sandwiched into cars and carpooled to save on gas. Every morning the first round of carpooling started with her mother driving over the state border to leave all the children at school. Cecilia remarks that her mother probably took that time to rest from them because they were precocious children. She also remarks that they felt like sardines with several arms and legs hanging out of the car window. *“Ahí íbamos todos, así como unas sardinitas y los chamacos sacando las cabezas o pateándose*

o jalándoles los cabellos.” Around 2 p.m., the second round of carpooling began as all 5 children piled back into their mom’s car to end the daily routing. This continued through Cecilia’s elementary and middle school years.

As a teenager in high school, the oldest children began working. Many would go on to find transportation on their own. They would dress for school about 5 or 6 a.m., trek to school and in the afternoon work until 11 p.m. or 12 a.m. This became a routine for them. Soon some would enter jobs or others, like Cecilia, enter universities. Cecilia, nevertheless, fell in love and married. She birthed her first child while in her second year in dentistry school. It started getting harder to balance, family life and school. When she was about to begin her third year, the instructor told her that if she was a lactating mother, she could not attend sessions. The radiology clinicals could affect her newborn child. It was then when the instructor advised her that she should not finish school. A stay-at-home wife and mother were a better choice for her. Without support and guidance to advise her to the contrary, she dropped out.

Her parents moved to Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, and she started learning about alternative medicine. She opened a store with close relatives selling aromatherapy, incense, and offering massage therapy services and much more. She excelled at her job but at home found it difficult to sustain her marriage. Often her husband reproached her long hours of work, lack of presence in their family home and busy schedule—factors that led to her divorce.

Cecilia decided to file for legal separation and ultimately divorce when her daughter, Anna, was 15 years old. She thought her daughter would be less impressionable and affected by a divorce at that age. Prior to leaving him, she discussed her situation

with her parents. They were the ones to encourage her to separate and move in with them. Cecilia stayed for only a short while because soon after she rented a home near a school of medicine. With help from her parents, Cecilia furnished it to become a boarding home for women attending the university. Cecilia did not only offer them room and board but housekeeping and cooking services. What began with a few college students immediately grew into a full house.

The woman who moved to Monterrey without a lot of resources and heartbroken, once more became a self-made entrepreneur. Then, about 3 to 4 years later, Cecilia and her daughter began visiting her sister in the U.S. As luck would have it, a small BBQ gathering would introduce her to her current husband. He caught her attention because of the similarities they shared. Cecilia was a single mother and hardly dated though, while he met many women. None compared to Cecilia, and they quickly decided to marry.

Cecilia's first order of affairs was to speak to her daughter about her recent match. Along with asking for Ana's, she asked for her parents' blessings to marry Joel. Next, she prepared her daughter for her absence. Cecilia knew that once married and an application was submitted for her residency status, she could not visit Mexico for a while. In the meantime, Cecilia's daughter stayed behind and found live-in college roommates to share the bills. Thus, Cecilia felt comfortable to travel and begin her journey to the U.S.

Living in the United States with Joel was an adaptation. She did not have a massage therapy license to treat in the U.S. The English she knew was a short greeting used to play among friends when they gathered and teased each other. Her husband was the sole provider during the first year and he worked most of the time. Life in the U.S. was lonely and difficult to get by without basic English.

Cecilia was also under the impression that going to the store would be easy. On her first venture outside their home to the store she thought get the items needed and purchase them without exchanging many words with the cashier. To her surprise, the cashier began asking something and used a word Cecilia didn't know. Cecilia could only answer, "What? I don't understand." When she got into her car she searched for the word "hanger" and found out it meant *gancho*, and the cashier was asking if she wanted to keep them. It was situations like this that motivated Cecilia to seek a program to learn English.

Joel, her husband, also encouraged her to look for English language learning programs. He could not teach her fast enough and thought it better to put her time towards learning English. With her husband's encouragement and a flyer found at a local restaurant, Cecilia ventured on to learn English until her permanent residency card arrived.

In previous weeks, I had visited local restaurants of the surrounding school perimeter and placed flyers offering adult community education. The serendipitous event placed Cecilia in my evening English as a second language classroom (ESL). Quickly she became a dedicated student, always asking questions and seeking help with confusing words.

About 15 years later Cecilia and I continue to keep in touch. Throughout the years, I have seen her grow to comprehend English far beyond a basic one. With the help of her husband, she also enrolled in a community college that taught advanced English skills. Joel pushed her to gain faster English skills because he is also supporting her goal to obtain her U.S. citizenship.



Unfortunately, Cecilia was also affected by COVID-19 in early summer 2020. Cecilia was visiting her daughter when the episode occurred. For about a month Cecilia could not get out of bed nor taste or smell anything. As she began recuperating and participated in our first phase of our study, she once again took a turn for the worse. Her gallbladder became inflamed, and she was rushed to the emergency room in Mexico. She went into surgery immediately after arrival at the hospital. Nevertheless, Cecilia was resilient and was able to walk out of the hospital without a gallbladder but in better health than she arrived.

Presently, Cecilia is working the evening shift cleaning and disinfecting an elementary school. She stated being happy with the job while also studying for her U.S. citizenship exam. Cecilia is also exploring her future career pursuits. She jokingly added that at her age, she should not be trying to get a career but wait for grandbabies, to which she added how proud she was of her daughter. Her daughter, Ana was nothing like her. Ana was confident, strong and knew what she wanted out life. Within recent years Ana was wise to break off an engagement with her long-time boyfriend of 5 years. Ana discovered that he was drinking alcohol almost every day after work. Cecilia boasts that her daughter saw beyond her years and presumed he would not be the proper man to raise children with. Cecilia believed that a decision of that stature was difficult to make because of the years and acquaintances with the families they had established. Cecilia also admires her daughter. She wished she had her determined nature when she was younger to finish her career as a dentist. Now, she understands that she never should have let the instructor get the better of her education. Yet, she is presently driven and determined to push forward with her next goals and accomplishments in life. She hopes

to one day excel in the English language and learn the perfect English needed to speak like a native U.S. citizen.

### Chapter Summary

The year 2020 had us amid a pandemic, lives were changed and throughout the year we had to forge ahead. My research was collected through the global crisis, but my participants' lives shone through their *testimonios*. I learned quite a lot of my identity as a bicultural-bilingual Latina. Comprehending two languages allows your brain to flow in and out of each one. I always thought that knowing two languages was compartmentalized. I believed that speaking one language in one setting made it void in another. It was not true, and I became a walking puzzle with piece that I had to put together to understand my study.

Free from language bias, I became a critical researcher. This new identity taught me that if I kept certain parts of myself hidden, I would not understand my participant's stories. By becoming a critical researcher, I learned that engaging and participating transforms my study into "our" study. The transformation begins when we recognize the intricate parts of ourselves that can and often remain hidden—our *papelitos guardados* (hidden documents)—that are long forgotten (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Sharing also uncovers truths and reveals knowledge that needs to be heard and experienced amongst a group of other *guerreras* (warriors) to forge ahead in any adversity. We need to understand English language learners like Elena, whose husband lost a finger, but her faith kept her strong. Or someone like Maria, who disliked the U.S. because of negative stereotypes but discovered that she became a stronger and more educated version of herself here. Or like Camilla that says one should not fear life but go

out and grab it! Or someone like Clara that discovered you must create and follow your own path to an education that better suits your needs. These women were and remain disciplined, strong, and resourceful. They only became a better version of themselves in the U.S.—not a different one.

## V. NARRATING THE FINDINGS

The previous chapter introduced you to the *mujeres* gracious enough to be my participants. Their vignettes explained their *sobrevivencias*<sup>6</sup> surrounding education in Mexico and the United States. Each vignette was a short snippet of their *herstory* from their first memories of getting an education in Mexico to those built in the U.S. The stories also shared a characterization of their personality, motivations in life, and goals.

### The Path to Answers

This study addresses three research questions:

1. What were the educational pathways of the immigrant women prior to entering ESL classes?
2. What were the experiences of adult *mexicanas* who have immigrated to the US?
3. How have they (re)imagined their gendered identities since coming to the US?

Through my analysis I identified four themes that answered my research questions, and they were:

1. Immigrating to The United State
2. Support–Familial or Community
3. English as A Second Language-Its Practical Application: and
4. Women’s Roles.

Table 5.1 presents the themes and subthemes I identified in answer to my research questions.

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<sup>6</sup> Sobrevivencia: the act of survival: the act of succeeding throughout adversity.

**Table 5.1: Themes and Subthemes**

MAIN THEMES	SUBTHEMES	LINK TO MAIN QUESTIONS
IMMIGRATING TO THE UNITED STATES	1. Permanency Not Required	RQ1. What were the educational pathways of the immigrant women prior to entering ESL classes?
	2. Life is Better in the U.S.	RQ2. What were the experiences of adult <i>mexicanas</i> who have immigrated to the US?
SUPPORT—FAMILIAL OR COMMUNITY	1. Continued Education Through Spousal Support	RQ2
	2. Community Support	
ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE: ITS PRACTICAL APPLICATION	3. Lack of Support and Resources in Mexico	RQ1
	1. Social Networking	RQ2
WOMEN’S ROLES	2. Social Setting	
	3. Familial Settings	RQ3. How have they (re)imagined their gendered identities since coming to the US?
	1. <i>Primero Mi Familia: Mis Responsabilidades</i>	
	2. <i>Auto-Agentes, Autosuficiente, y Sobresalientes</i>	
	3. <i>Consejos Para Otras Latinas: El Ingles Es Indispensable</i>	

What follows is a description of each theme and subtheme with selected quotes from the participants that are illustrating each one.

## **Immigrating to the United States**

All the mujeres immigrated and permanently reside in the U.S. out of necessity and for personal growth. They discovered that the U.S. provided better resources for themselves and their families. In the next two subthemes entitled, Permanency Not Required, and Life Is Better in the U.S., I explain the how and why of these women's immigration stories.

### ***Permanency Not Required***

Five of the mujeres decided to permanently reside in the U.S. *only* as an afterthought. They believed the U.S. was a place to which they could sojourn or visit as a tourist. Individual circumstances led to their decision to seek permanent status.

Elena, describes visiting her boyfriend in the U.S., but not thinking about staying permanently:

*Las primeras veces que venía a visitar a mi esposo venía con visa de turista para conocerlo y visitar; me quedaba un mes, dos meses y luego me volvía a regresar a México.* [The first couple of times I visited my now husband was with a visa as a tourist to get to know him. I would stay one month, two months and then I would go back to Mexico.]

Touring the U.S. was fun for Elena, who often visited her boyfriend in the U.S. When she met him about 4 years earlier, she never imagined that he would obtain a work visa for the U.S. When I asked her if she ever dreamt about living or visiting the U.S., she answered,

*No, nunca. Hasta que a él le abrieron las puertas de poder trabajar aquí y él tampoco pensaba quedarse aquí porque en el trabajo le dijeron que, que podía*

*probar tres meses y tres meses de pruebas si no le parecía, pues se podía regresar. Y él dijo sí y se vino. Y después como que dijo bueno, otro tiempo más. Entonces ya después el me dijo pues vente, yo empecé a sacar mi visa. Yo saqué mi visa de turista. Gracias a Dios me la dieron porque tenía un buen trabajo también. Entonces me la dieron y lo vine a visitar y me quedaba aquí, pero me gustaba de visita.* [No, never. Until he had the opportunity of being able to work here. But he didn't plan on staying here either because at work he was told that he could try three probationary months and after three months if he didn't like it, he could go back. And he told them yes and came. And then, he said, okay I'll stay a little more time. Then later he told me to visit him, I started the process on my tourist visa. I was able to get my tourist visa. Thank God, they gave it to me but because I had a good job, too. So, then they gave it to me, and I came to visit, and I stayed here, but I only liked to visit.]

Elena's permanency in the United States was unplanned. She did not enjoy staying too long here either:

*No me gustaba miss, porque no tenía como amigos, como que no conocía gente, como que no tenía una vida aquí. No, no, aquí no, no no hacía nada, no estudiaba, no salía, no tenía amistades.* [I didn't like it, Miss because I didn't have friends, like I didn't know people, like I didn't have a life here. No, no, not here, I didn't do anything. I didn't study, I didn't go out, I didn't have any friends].

However, after several visits, her boyfriend decided to propose marriage. Elena said that prior to making their relationship official, she did not want anything serious with him. It was visiting him in the U.S. that gave her a taste of what life as a live-in couple would be

like, and she gave in to his marriage proposal. As his wife her visa status changed, and she could permanently reside with her husband in the U.S.

Maria's story also immigrated for her husband. She also did not like the U.S. but immigrated since her husband showed no interest in returning. Maria recalled that he sojourned for many years and always tried to convince her to permanently immigrate. Instead, Maria patiently waited for her husband because her thought was to never immigrate to the U.S.: *Yo no, nunca pensaba venir a los Estados Unidos. Nunca pensaba.* [I never thought of coming to the United States. I never thought.]

Maria's intention was to wait in Mexico until her husband returned from sojourning. Her life path changed when she rationalized that if she did not join him, she would lose him forever. She reminisced that she joined him only because she thought:

*"Oh no, yo no me voy a quedar sin esposo. Mejor me voy por tantas cosas que se oyen [refiriéndose a el engaño de un hombre]. Pero si eso. Eso es. Yo era una de las que decía que, que para acá [refiriéndose a los EE.UU.], para nada. Y ahora digo que, para allá [refiriéndose a México], ¡no!"* ['Oh no, I'm not going to be left without a husband. I'd better go after him because you hear so many things [referring to men cheating]. But that, that's it. I was one of those who said that, that way [referring to the U.S.], not at all. And now I say, over there [referring to Mexico], no!']

Permanent residence as a lifetime goal was also not in Cecilia's plan. For her, things rapidly progressed after she married a U.S. Citizen. For example, she recalled:

*conocí a mi esposo... y luego ahí decidimos casarnos. Y ya, o sea, fue muy rápido todo lo que me pasó. Que a veces digo, o sea, yo no lo tenía planeado, tenía mi*



*trabajo, tenía todas las... ya tenía yo unas metas, ¿verdad? Y nada más de repente se cambió todo así mi mundo.*

[I met my husband... and we decided to get married. And already, I mean, it was very fast everything that happened to me. That sometimes I say, I mean, I didn't have it planned, I had my job, I had all my... I already had some goals, right? And suddenly, everything changed in my world.]

The transition from Mexico to the U.S. happened so suddenly for Cecilia that she could barely assimilate what was happening. She married and then came to permanently reside in the U.S. almost as an afterthought.

Clara's situation was a bit different because she had planned to sojourn to the U.S. since she was a teenager. She planned to earn and save money in the U.S. and raise a family in Mexico. Like the other mujeres, she did not plan on permanently residing in the U.S.

On more than one occasion in the early days, she sojourned alone, and then later she came with her husband. Then one day they decided to stop sojourning. She told me,

*nos vinimos y pos se fue pasando el tiempo. Teníamos dos años aquí cuando le dije a mi esposo 'pues mandamos dinero y nunca no lo guardan, se lo gastan o nos hacen trampa, como se dice.' Le digo, 'pues mejor vamos a empezar a hacer aquí.'*

[we came and well, time went by. Two years had passed when I told my husband, 'Well we keep sending money and they never save it for us, they spend it and they cheat us, like they say. I told him, 'Well, let's start making a life here.']

Unfortunately for Clara she was cheated out of money by her family and could never save the necessary money to make a life in Mexico. The better option at the time was to permanently reside in the U.S.

From the mujeres' stories, it seems they did not want or intend to immigrate but did so only as an afterthought. Contrary to the common belief in the U.S. that any and *all* immigrants who purposely move to the U.S., do so to permanently stay. But all of these mujeres decided to permanently reside in the U.S. because Mexico no longer held their lifetime goals. Their lives in the U.S. gave them better options for themselves and their family, as is seen in the following subtheme, life is better in the U.S.

***Life is Better in the U. S.***

After several years living in the United States, many of the participants have expressed that they could find better opportunities for themselves, their children and their spouses. In the U.S., they discovered that the opportunities for them to thrive financially and educationally were endless. For instance, Elena was surprised continuing education classes were free:

*Sí, aquí. Por eso a mí me sorprendió cuando me dijeron que aquí la escuela era gratis, porque yo pensé que se tenía que pagar. Y, y gracias a Dios me enteré antes mis, porque si no, hubiera pensado yo eso siempre y a lo mejor hubiera tardado más en buscar educación. Pero gracias a Dios no tardé mucho en que llegué a este país y empecé a ir a la escuela.*

[Yes, here. That's why I was surprised when I was told that school here was free, because I thought I had to pay. And, and thank God I found out, Miss, because if I hadn't, I would've thought that, and it would have taken me longer to continue an

education. But thank God it didn't take long for me to arrive in this country and soon start going to school.]

Elena arrived in the U.S. and soon after began free ESL classes. It was also evident that she compared educational experience in Mexico where a continued education was not free after compulsory school to the U.S. In essence, life in the U.S. was better because of the additional educational support Elena received upon her arrival.

When I asked Maria about her educational experiences in Mexico, she concluded:

*Y es que... Y al llegar acá pues, yo dije, pues aquí yo voy a estudiar algo. Yo este vi, vi más... más oportunidades de educarme yo aquí que en México, en México yo no tenía recursos para estudiar. O sea que yo todo lo que aprendí, lo aprendí ya de grande.*

[And it is that... And when I got here, then, I said, well, here I'm going to study something. I saw, I saw more... more opportunities to educate myself here than in Mexico, in Mexico I had no resources to continue my studies. So, I mean, everything I've learned, I learned as an adult.]

Like Elena, Maria too discovered there were better opportunities to get an education in the U.S. than compared to Mexico. Maria likewise attributed her adult learning to the U.S. and its better resources.

Clara had learned that the U.S. could provide better opportunities early on in her life.

*Entonces yo veía que--oía pláticas. También una hermana de mi papá se vino para acá. Mandaba fotos y luego fue para allá. Llegaba con cosas muy bonitas y yo decía, o sea, allá hay mejor futuro.*

[Then I saw that – I heard conversations about that. Also, one of my dad's sisters came over here, too (to the U.S.). She would send pictures back to Mexico and when she would go back (to Mexico), she would take very nice things. And I would say, 'I mean, there's a better future there (in the U. S.).']

Clara expressed that the U.S. provided better general opportunities. Like the other women, Clara viewed the U.S. as an integral part to succeeding in her life.

Unlike the other four mujeres, Cecilia told me she encouraged fellow Latin American immigrants to take advantage of free English classes. Although Cecilia did not explicitly state that the U.S. provided better opportunities or life for her, her words are suggestive. She explained to me in the following quote:

*Conozco a muchas gente de, Latinas, ¿verdad? porque no sólo de México, de Honduras, de, de El Salvador. Y me dicen 'No, ya tengo diez años y no he ido a una escuela de inglés.' ¿Se imaginan que les van a cobrar mucho o que no van a poder? ¿O? Entonces yo las animo, ¿verdad? 'No, ves, mira, no te van a cobrar, al contrario, hasta te dan tu lápiz, te dan tu hoja, te dan tus, tus copias. Tú nada más tienes que ir a sentarte y aprender.' O sea, yo las animo a que, a que tomen sus clases.*

[I know a lot of people from Latina America, right? Because they are not only from Mexico, but from Honduras, from, from El Salvador. And they say, 'No, I've already lived here ten years and I haven't been to an English class.' They imagine that they're going to be charged a lot or that they're not going to be able to keep up? Or? So, I encourage them, right? No, look, they're not going to charge you, on the contrary, they even give you a pencil, they give you paper, they give you,

your, your own copies. You just have to go, sit down and learn. I mean, I encourage them to take ESL classes.]

It was taking advantage of her own opportunities that led Cecilia to advise other immigrants about the easiness to continue learning in the U.S. She also shared that to learn in the U.S., you do not need anything but to show up. Hence, resources are more available in the U.S.

Overall, life in the U.S. provided better opportunities and resources. Except for Camilla, all the other mujeres described their experiences in the U.S. as compared to Mexico. Their decisions to permanently reside in the U.S. factored in the better resources and opportunities.

### **Support—Familial or Community**

Family support included the emotional, or economic help from the women's partner. Any monetary help for educational purposes was considered economic support. Any resources found or given by friends, neighbors or government assistance was categorized as community support. The sub-themes included continued education through spousal support, community support and lack of support and resources in Mexico. Each will be further explained in the following paragraphs.

#### ***Continued Education through Spousal Support***

The subtheme continued education through spousal support consisted of the husbands encouraging their wives to be successful in life whether it was in their educational or personal path. They motivated their wives to continue their education in the U.S., provided any relief of household duties, or offered some type of emotional or monetary support.

Elena, for example, moved to the United States after she got married. She stayed home alone while her husband worked. While walking to ease her boredom, she found an ESL program. She explained that she felt so supported by him when she registered for ESL classes that she knew he would not be an obstacle to her education:

*Bueno, pues en mi, en mi caso. Umm, bueno, yo no tuve ningún problema para empezar; a meterme en la clase de ingles, ni nada por que pues me apoya. Mi esposo me apoya mucho en todo lo que yo decida hacer, me apoya mucho.*

[Well, in my, in my case. Um, well, I had no problem getting started, to get into English class, or anything because he supports me. My husband supports me very much in everything I decide to do, he supports me very much.]

Elena's husband was also emotionally supportive and because she felt so supported in her decisions she was extremely elated about marriage. She also felt fortunate to have him as a husband and described him as an understanding man that would stand with her through the good and the bad:

*gracias a Dios, miss, desde que me casé, he sido, he estado muy contenta, he sido muy feliz. Mi esposo es una persona que me apoya mucho. Es una persona que, que me comprende, que está conmigo en las buenas y en las malas. Entonces, la verdad, me siento bien. Me he sentido bien desde que me casé hasta ahorita. No, me he arrepentido.*

[thank God, Miss, since I got married, I've been, I've been very happy, I've been very happy. My husband is a person who supports me very much. He is a person who, who understands me, who is with me in the good and the bad. So, actually, I feel good. I've felt good since I got married till now. I have not regretted it.]

Elena was able to continue educating herself in the U.S. because she did not need to financially contribute. In Mexico, she did not have the privilege of continuing her education because she also financially contributed to her parents' household. She was expected to help provide for the family and therefore could not afford to attend classes to further her career. However, in the U.S her husband made enough money to sustain them, and she took that opportunity to learn English, a necessity she believes you need to survive in the U.S.

Camilla was also supported by her husband. Like Elena, when she started ESL classes, her husband did not oppose her decision: *Y por supuesto mi esposo no me dijo nada de que no vas, ni nada de eso.* [And of course, my husband didn't tell me anything like you're not going, or anything like that.] On the contrary, when Camilla shared with him that she was able to advocate for and help an elderly Korean couple because of her English skills, he complimented her on attending classes:

*“Entonces fue cuando este, cuando ya, ya me encontré con mi esposo y le comenté y me dijo, ‘Pues qué bueno que estás estudiando inglés.’”* [That's when I, uhm, met up with my husband and I explained what happened and he said, ‘Well, it's a good thing that you're studying English.’]

In this way, her husband emotionally supported Camilla and gave her the extra motivation to continue learning English. From our conversation together, I surmised that when it came to bettering herself for her family and community, her husband does not impose restrictions to her education.

For Clara, her husband, Rolando, encouraged her to continue educating herself. Rolando always emotionally supported her by encouraging her to forge ahead in school

and in life. In Mexico, she could not afford to travel to school and Rolando gave her bus money as her boyfriend: “*Entonces conocí a mi esposo en ese tiempo y él me daba para los camiones.*” [I met my husband at that time, and he would give me for the school bus.] However, issues arose with Clara’s mother due to Rolando’s financial assistance. Her mother had a patriarchal mindset and assumed Rolando gave Clara money in exchange for physical intimacy. So, instead of Clara’s mother demonstrating emotional and financial support, Clara was chastised and punished.

Cecilia’s marriage, like Clara’s, provided her financial support. In the following quote Clara described how her husband financially supported her:

*Sí, no si, este de hecho el después me dijo, ‘Te voy a pagar las clases en el colegio.’ Porque veía que yo estaba muy lenta. Me decía, ‘Estás muy lenta,’ dice, ‘quiero que tomes clases así fuertes.’ Y fui a, según allá al, al Primo College. Y luego fui al Prima College por que ya estábamos de este lado. [Refiriéndose al lado sur de la ciudad.] O sea, ya Jackson Street ya me quedaba muy lejos. [Refiriéndose a la antigua dirección de la clase de ESL.] Entonces ya que me cambié acá al sur, ya fui para acá. Y este pues si a seguirle, a seguirle.*

[Yes, no, yes, uhm, he actually said later on to me, 'I'm going to pay for your classes at school.' Because he would see that I was too slow. He'd say, 'You're too slow,' he'd say, 'I want you to take heavier classes.' And I went to, according to me, Primo College. And then I went to Prima College because we were already on this side. [Referring to living on the south side of the city.] I mean, Jackson Street was already a long way away for me. [Referring to previous address of



community ESL classes.] So, since I've moved to the south, I've gone around here. And well, uhm, yes, I keep going, I keep going.]

In Mexico, Clara was not afforded the opportunity to solely focus on education, whereas when she married Clara attended community college in the U.S. to learn English because her husband financially sustained her.

Spousal support played an important role for most of the women continuing their education. This stood in contrast to the lack of support for and even hostility toward continuing their education from their families in Mexico. Except for Maria, all of the women explained that their main emotional or monetary support came from their husbands.

### ***Community Support***

Elena is the prime example of community support. She was simply walking by the building that housed the ESL evening classes, and several women motioned to her. She never met them before, but they were part of her community (i.e., women from the ESL class). They invited and welcomed Elena to a free ESL program offered by the city. Without the knowledge of the free program, Elena would have continued with her afternoon's walks. She recounted:

*Y llegué a la escuela y vi a unas señoras que estaban ahí afuera. ¿Eran como las 5 o 6 de la tarde, unas señoras que estaban ahí, que iban entrando a la escuela y me hablaron y me dijeron '¿Oye, tú vienes a las clases?' Pero yo nada más iba pasando. Y le dije, '¿Cuáles clases? Mi dice, 'Es que aquí en la escuela dan clases de inglés.' Y yo le dije, 'Ah, ¿y cuánto cobran por las clases?' Y me dijo, 'No, son gratis.' Y dije ¿Ahh en serio? Me dijo. Me dijo, '¡Sí!' Pues ya me, me*

*metí con ellas porque no tenía nada que hacer.* [And I got to a school and saw some ladies hanging out there. It was about 5 or 6 in the afternoon, some ladies who were there, who were going into the school called to me and said, 'Hey, are you coming to the English classes?' But I was just passing by. And I said, 'What classes? They said, 'It's just because here at school they teach English.' And I said, 'Oh, and how much do they charge for classes?' And they said, 'No, they're free.' And I said, "Ah seriously?" They told me. They said, 'Yes!' Well, I went in with them because I had nothing else to do.

Elena was the only one who spoke about the surrounding community guiding her to English as a second language classes. The other women received community support, but Elena's embrace by the community was unique because she does not have children tying her to the elementary school where the ESL classes were held. The other women's connection to the community was because of their children.

### ***Lack of Support and Resources in Mexico***

In Mexico, four out of the five participants recounted resources for school were not easily accessible nor was there someone who could offer guidance. Specifically, Maria who explained that Mexico lacked the proper resources for their citizens to continue in school:

*En México, porque cuando terminé la primaria para ir a la secundaria no había dinero para, para pagar, no había. Nadie se ofrecía que dijera 'oh, bueno, pues mira que acá yo le, compro, yo le doy...' O sea, no, no tuve yo información de que alguien me ayudara para hacer para seguir la escuela. No, no, no supe de ninguna como aquí que dicen, 'Bueno, mira, aplica aquí y puedes ir.'*

[In Mexico, when I finished elementary school to go to high school there was no money to, to pay, there was none. No one offered to say ‘Oh, well, look, I will buy him this [for school] or I will give it to him.’ You know? I didn't have any information or have someone helping me to continue school. No, no, I didn't know of anything like here that they say, ‘Well, look, apply here and you can go.’]

Because Maria’s family only afforded up to middle school, she needed to work to financially contribute to the family. Maria claimed that the lack of resources, guidance, money, and help prevented her from continuing her education. Nevertheless, Maria immigrated to the U.S. and learned enough English to defend herself if need be.

Lack of financial assistance was also one of the main obstacles for Camilla. The difference between her and Maria was that Camilla received funding. Compulsory school in Mexico goes as far as the first year in middle school. Any schooling after was considered a technical career that cost more money. Money that her parents, like many others, couldn’t afford. Camilla obtained funding for her first year in college and entered into an agreement with the university to work part-time job. Her job was to recruit students to the psychology program and depicted the following narrative:

*Bueno, en la escuela allá en México yo llegué hasta a primer año de universidad. Pero yo tampoco tenía dinero, entonces llegué a un acuerdo con la Universidad de que yo iba a trabajar medio tiempo con ellos para pagar nada más la mitad. Entonces yo recluté estudiantes para poder pagarme mi universidad. Estaba estudiando psicología, pero ya cuando llegué al segundo año cambiaron de director y ya no quiso hacer eso, ya el lo que quería, era el dinero. [Well, at school, over there in Mexico. I made it to freshman year of college. But I didn't*

have any money either, so I came to an agreement with the University that I would work part-time to pay for half of my school education. So, I recruited students in order to afford college. I was studying psychology, but by the time I got to the second year they changed department deans and he didn't want to do that (work study) anymore because what he wanted was the money.]

The lack of resources and institutional support in Mexico forced Camilla to end her career. Her educational pathway in Mexico stopped and about a year later she married at the Mexican border. This was the beginning of her new educational journey in the United States.

Money was also scarce for Clara even with scholarships that did not cover the extra expenses. In Mexico, Clara obtained a full scholarship to a prestigious high school and received help with her tuition and fees, and school uniforms. However, transportation fees were not included. This worry added to her daily financial stress and prevented her from concentrating at school. At that time, she also inaugurated a small pop-up retail shop at the local Swap Meet with her boyfriend, currently her husband. Ultimately her frustrations of little to no money and work demands proved too tiresome. As she recalled here:

*Era de que yo tenía que abrir el negocio a las ocho y media de la mañana, nueve de la mañana. Y pues el negocio cerraba a las ocho de la noche. Entonces le digo yo me cansé tanto de eso. De estar de como que diariamente tener que buscar para la escuela. Entonces decidí un día ya no ir, ya no ir, porque decía yo, o sea, ya ni siquiera me estoy concentrando. Ni estoy poniendo atención y me estoy estresando mucho para los pasajes, para las tareas. Me fastidié de eso.*

[I had to open the business at eight-thirty in the morning, nine in the morning.

And, well, the business closed at eight o'clock at night. So, I tell you, I got very tired of it. To be like. To have to look for the bus fare every day. Then, one day I decided to stop going, to no longer go, because I would say, 'I'm not even concentrating anymore. I'm not paying attention and I'm stressing too much for the bus fare, for the homework. I got frustrated with it.]

Clara decided to drop out despite calls from school administrators and teachers insisting she return:

*Entonces un día decidí ya no ir y me siguieron llamando y llamando que porque tenía buenas calificaciones y todo. Y a mi me daba vergüenza decirle a los maestros, '¿Sabes que, no tengo la, no tengo el dinero para la, para los camiones.? ¡Batallo!' Cuando ya, ya me daban uniformes, no me cobraban colegiatura. Yo tenía allí todo gratis.* [Then, one day I decided not to go anymore but they kept calling me and calling me because I had good grades and everything. I was ashamed to tell the teachers, 'You know that I don't have the, I don't have the money for the bus? I struggle!' When they already gave me uniforms, they didn't charge me for tuition. I had everything there for free.]

In Clara's situation, the resources were available: simply she felt shame in asking for more money. It was also the lack of family support and additional financial assistance that resulted in her final decision. Meanwhile, Clara planned her sojourn into the U.S. because her country could not financially sustain her or her family.

Cecilia on the contrary had monetary resources available but lacked the encouragement (i.e., emotional) support from her ex-husband in Mexico to finish her

education. Mexico is a patriarchal-led society with many disadvantages to women. Especially, women who want to succeed in their education. For example, in Cecilia's first year of dental school she became pregnant. She had to take a leave of absence until her daughter was born. Upon her return to school her ex-husband tried convincing her to be a stay-at-home mother. Here she explained the patriarchal mindset of her husband:

*Yo también cuando estaba estudiando odontología, aparte de que me casé y mi esposo, mi ex-esposo me decía, 'No, dice, 'ni vayas a la escuela ya nada más dedícate a cuidar a la niña. Yo trabajo, no necesitas ir a andar a la escuela.'* [I too, when I was studying dentistry, apart from getting married and my husband, my ex-husband would tell me, "No," he'd say, "do not even go to school, just take care of our little girl. I'll work, you don't need to go on to school."]

The lack of financial and sometimes parental emotional support, and resources in Mexico played an important role in the mujeres' educational pathway experiences. These barriers corroborated in the ease to compare and contrast their Mexican experiences against their U.S. ones. It unraveled the subtheme of spousal support that I found distinctive: since I assumed parents would encourage their children's education rather than hinder them. What was not too surprising was that after many of the mujeres married and lived with their husbands, it was usually the women's parents who expected their daughters to follow in traditional Mexican gendered roles and push aside their education. Traditional Mexican gendered roles will be discussed in in the following chapter.

### **English as a Second Language: Its Practical Application**

Many of the participants had experiences around their motivation to learn, practice and the use of English. The subthemes were real world social networking, social

setting and familial settings. They are pertinent because learning and speaking English was a central theme to the participants' lives in the U.S. English allowed participants to enter social spaces and network that otherwise were invisibly inaccessible. Familial settings became a subtheme because four out of the five participants had children who would interpret for them.

### ***Real World Social Networking***

Conversations aid us in communicating our wants and needs, sharing our thoughts, and bonding with others. However, language barriers complicate our communication. Language barriers kept four out of the five mujeres from social networking with others in their communities. They recounted stories about feeling less isolated after they attended ESL classes or engaged with native English speakers. Real world social networking thus became a subtheme to address what Elena, Camilla, Clara, and Cecilia experienced.

Elena told me that she identified herself as part of U.S. society after she learned how to use contextual clues in her ESL class to increase her language capability. For Elena, this meant picking out the context of the conversations and by translating one or two words she knew, rather than trying to translate each spoken sentence.

She also revealed that after feeling isolated for several months, she began to feel included in the community when she contextualized conversations:

*Porque cuando ya empiezas, aprende, a aprender y ya empiezas a entender a la gente con que ya empiezas a sentirte parte de este, de este, de este mundo donde estás. Porque, aunque no somos de aquí, pero vivimos aquí, entonces pertenecemos en este tiempo, aquí. Entonces ya te sientes incluida en, incluida en*

*todo esto, o sea, ya, ya, ya no te sientes tan ajena, tan anexa a esto. Porque así yo me sentí al principio. Me sentía mal, muy mal.*

[Because when, when you start to learn, learn and you begin to understand people around you, then, you begin to feel a part of this, of this, of this world where you are. Because, although we are not from here, we live here. So, then, we belong in this time, here. So, you begin to feel included in, included in all this, umm, you no longer feel so alienated, so ancillary to this. Because that is how I felt at first. I felt bad, very bad.]

*Alienated* was the word she used to express what it was like to not be included in the English-speaking community. For Elena, alienation meant invisible social lines drawn that kept her from feeling included. The moment she began to contextualize spoken English language was when the lines began disappearing.

On the other hand, Camilla began social networking while she was in her ESL class. Learning English not only allowed her to connect with local native English speakers, but it also allowed her to connect with people from around the world:

*Y también porque tengo. A raíz de que empecé a tener clases con usted [refiriéndose a mi clase de ESL], yo tengo amistades que usted conoce perfectamente. Que no hablan absolutamente nada de español. Mis amigos de Irak, de Persia, de, de África.* [As a result of having started classes with you [referring to my ESL class], I have friendships that you know perfectly well. That speak absolutely no Spanish. My friends from Iraq, from Persia, from, from Africa.]



Camilla introduced her new friends to her family. They too accepted her friends as part of her new social network. It was a network that expanded beyond the local community of Spanish speakers and races. For example, Camilla's association with a young man from Iraq expanded her children's social network. *Pero sigue siendo mi amigo, porque primero fue mi amigo y luego ya fue de mis hijos.* [But he's still my friend, because first he was my friend and then he was my kids'.]

Cecilia's story was different from others because she wants to expand her professional social network. She expressed her hesitance to social network before understanding English. When I asked her about future career goals and how English helped, she answered:

*Si me hablan muy rápido a veces no capto de que [murmura para asimilar lo que escucha] Así no lo capto, pero si me hablan más despacio, si lo, si entiendo que me están diciendo. Entonces yo digo, ya puedo entrevistarme, no tengo miedo, no tengo miedo de que alguien me pregunte o de que alguien me hable. Antes si les sacaba la vuelta de que no querían que me hablara. Pero ahorita ya no tengo miedo.* [If they talk to me too fast sometimes, I don't understand [mumbles gibberish to simulate the garbled English heard] So, I don't understand but if they talk to me slower then, I do understand what they're telling me. So, I believe I can do interviews and not be afraid. I was afraid of someone asking me something or someone talking to me. Before, I used to avoid situations because I didn't want them to talk to me. But now, I'm not afraid anymore.]

Cecilia, like the other mujeres, felt more confident after she learned basic English and felt no fear of talking with strangers. She, too, knew that English was important to

survive and live independently in the U.S. Her hope is that her attitude towards English will help her build her professional social network. Her life plan is to have a career in the U.S. and expanding her social network would allow her to establish relationships with peers and teachers. Cecilia tries to practice English and apply what she has learned in a social setting to professional networking.

Learning English also helped Elena gain confidence and independence. Elena expressed unease because she could not order what she wanted because of the language barrier. However, ordering on her own helped her to become more independent. It allowed her to feel proud of learning English and this acted as a prime motivation for her to continue learning:

*Me sentía mal, muy mal. No poder entender, ni siquiera pedir algo que me gustara o decirle como quería algún platillo o algo. Pero ahora que ya uno empieza [refiriéndose al entender ingles] como va a entender más. ... Y eso me, me ha traído como menos complejos. El entender un poquito más me ha quitado los complejos y como que animarme mas a decir, a pronunciar algo, aunque esté mal pronunciado. [I felt bad, very bad. Not being able to understand, not even ask for something that I liked or tell you how I wanted some dish or something, but now that you start as you will understand more [referring to understanding English]. ...And that has brought me less of a complex. To understand a little more has taken away the complexes and encouraged me to say more, to pronounce something, even if it is mispronounced.]*

Clara attended ESL classes but would often stop because of work and time constraints. She, unlike the other mujeres, found it difficult to communicate and expand

beyond her family network. Clara's potential social network could include people outside of her ethnicity. She moved to an area of the city where no other Latinos live and laments not speaking to her neighbors:

*Una de las cosas que también a veces como que me da un poquito de pena es, la verdad, si me ha podido mucho. Por que, por ejemplo, en el lugar donde yo me moví pues ya tengo dos años donde yo me moví, que es en este, ah, la verdad, nosotros somos los únicos hispanos que vivimos aquí. Todo a mi alrededor las personas son puros americanos.*

[One of the things that sometimes I feel a little sorry for is that, really, uhm, that has affected me a bit. Because, for example, the area where I moved, because I have already lived there for two years where I moved, which is in this, ah, the truth, we are the only Hispanics who live there. Everyone around me, the people are all Americans.]

Although Clara can understand basic English, she does not engage with native English speakers:

*Este hasta ahorita, pues los vecinos a veces, a veces se ofrecen y este, que, '¡Hola! ¿Cómo estamos?' Este pues si, lo que es una conversación corta, pero a veces la verdad. Si me he sentido mal en varias ocasiones de que no puedo entablar una conversación con ellos porque son muy amables.*

[Until now the neighbors sometimes, are sometimes accommodating and uhm, are like, 'Hi. How are we doing?' This of course is a short conversation, but to tell you the truth. I have felt bad on several occasions that I cannot engage in a conversation with them because they are very hospitable.

For Clara, allowing herself to apply the English she learned would expand her social network and lessen the shame she feels for not communicating with her neighbors.

These mujeres' experiences suggest that personal motivation is the key to learn English, which brings them confidence and independence. Inclusion in conversations with native English speakers and independence from translators gained through English language ability also served them in connecting with a social network. This suggests that through social networking, non-native English speakers can discover that being understood lessens the fear of being *Othered*. To be Othered is to classify people based on their differences and define it as a deficit rather than an asset (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 105). Furthermore, expanding their social network potentially connects them with community resources, like Cecilia talked about.

### ***Social Settings***

Many of these women needed to speak English in particular social settings such as their children's schools, restaurants or their neighborhood and community. To Elena, doctor's appointments were one of the important social settings in which she needed to understand English:

*Como le comento, ahora que estoy yendo a las citas con mi esposo, el doctor habla inglés y a veces no se le entiende, o a veces mi esposo sí lo entiende o yo. Lo entendemos con alguna palabra clave que diga. Ya podemos entenderlo.*

[Like I tell you, now that I'm going to appointments with my husband, the doctor speaks only English and sometimes you can't understand him, or sometimes my husband does understand, or I understand with some key word that he says. Then, we can understand him.]

Even though she was presented with challenges at the appointment, her need encouraged her to push forward. Her husband also helped, but Elena was the one who understood some of the language specific to the medical setting.

Camilla also needed to apply her English in medical settings. Camilla is a health provider for her mother, who suffers from dementia. She needs English to communicate with home health personnel on the progress of the disease: *La necesidad. La necesidad de comunicar. Cuando estuve, cuando estoy con el doctor con mi mamá.* [The need. The need to communicate. When I was, when I'm with my mom's doctor.]

Parent-teacher meetings or any children's school function is a social setting that could be a strain on a parent with little to no English. It makes it difficult to fully support their child's education. Communicating with school officials is also an important task for a parent. In Clara's case, she felt sadness because she could not communicate with her daughter's teachers:

*Me da mucha pena. Tengo una niña en high school. Este, yo siempre, siempre, mi esposo y yo, nos hemos hecho presentes, a pesar de no hablar 100 por ciento inglés. Pero una junta, este, algo en su escuela. Que conocer los maestros. Nosotros siempre nos presentamos.*

[I feel such sadness. I have a little girl in high school. Uh, I always, always, my husband and I, we make ourselves known. Despite not speaking English at 100 percent. But a meeting, uh, something at her school. Meet the teachers. We always make ourselves known.]

Clara especially felt this need as she has four children, with her oldest being in high school. One of Clara's goals is to one day learn enough to speak to her neighbors and her

children's teachers. For Clara and the other mothers in my study English was a necessity in an educational setting in order to communicate with teachers and other school personnel.

The border between Mexico and the U.S. is a social setting where English is needed to cross this invisible line. As can be seen in Cecilia's quote, she needed English to answer the scrutinizing questions and cross without additional harassment by officers:

*ahorita que paso por-por este, por el puente [refiriéndose a la frontera de Mexico-EE.UU.] donde están los oficiales que te dicen, ¿De donde vienes? ¿A que fuiste a México? ¿Quién está en México? ¿Donde vives? ¿Cuántos años tienes? Cosas que te empiezan a preguntar para ver tu identidad. ... Ya, ya sé que, de que me están hablando. Y lo puedo contestar en inglés.*

[Now, I cross over the bridge [referring to the Mexico-U.S. Border] where the officers are telling you, 'where are you coming from? Why did you go to Mexico? Who's in Mexico? Where do you live? How old are you?' Things they start asking you to verify your identity. I now know what they're talking about. And I can answer it in English.]

Cecilia's daughter, from her first marriage, and her parents reside in Mexico. To Cecilia the crossing of the border between the U.S. and Mexico is important and necessary in order to visit family members.

Another social setting for which Maria and many others need English is a restaurant. For these mujeres, pronouncing or using a word in the wrong context can lead them to ordering the wrong item. Using English in this social setting can save Maria and others the embarrassment of being misunderstood:

*Que no entendieron porque fue a ordenar una hamburguesa. Fuimos a Whataburger. Y yo, este, yo no la dije bien, que me la. Yo dije, 'Without Mayonnaise.' Me entendieron, 'minus', que sin nada. Cuando llego la hamburguesa venia la del puro pan y la carne. Y yo dije, '¿pues no te dije?' Pos tu dijiste, 'Without Mayonnaise.' [Maria se río.] La palabra se me queda. 'Minus,' es sin nada. oh, yo dije. Yo tengo que aprender ingles.*

[They didn't understand me when I went to order a hamburger. We went to Whataburger. And I, uh, I didn't say it well, that they gave me. I said, 'Without Mayonnaise.' They understood me say, 'minus,' that with nothing in it. When the burger arrived, it came with only the bread and meat. And I said, 'Didn't I tell you?' You said, 'Without Mayonnaise.' [laughter] The word stays with me.

'Minus' is with nothing additional. oh, I said. I have to learn English.]

Any situation where you are at the mercy of another person can feel overwhelming. The subtheme, social settings, shows how English is needed, learned, or practiced in society for survival. It becomes apparent that English learned in an ESL program can enable women like the mujeres in this study to grasp key words and put English in to practice in the native English-speaking community. Because English in the U.S. is the dominant language spoken in schools, many non-native English speaking parents have difficulty communicating their children's or even their own needs.

### ***Familial Settings***

Many of the mujeres in the study had a familial connection to learning and applying English because their families were their primary motivation to continue

learning the language. Additionally, the mujeres with children stated that their oldest child translated for them.

Elena's familial setting was her husband; she does not have any children. She was married about four years ago and considered herself a newlywed in our conversations. Because her husband is her only immediate family in the U.S., they try to help each other with the little English each knows.

*Yo se lo digo a mi esposo porque mi esposo tampoco sabe mucho inglés. Él lo entiende, lo entiende mas, bastante. Hasta incluso yo le digo, '¿qué dijo?' [refiriéndose a el mesero]. Y el me dice. Pero hablarlo todavía no sabe. Pero cuando vamos a un restaurante no se anima, como, a pedir las cosas así. Porque el me dice, 'yo no tengo buena pronunciación.' Y yo le digo, a mi me dijo la Miss, 'Tú pronúncialo. Tú, no te de pena decirlo. O sea, tu ámate, avientate, porque si no, entonces ¿cuándo vas a poder tú pronunciar algo?'*

[I tell my husband because my husband doesn't understand much English either. He understands it, he understands more than I, a lot. Even I ask him, 'what did he say? [referring to a waiter]. And he'll tell me. But because he doesn't yet know how to speak it. But when we go to a restaurant, he gets discouraged to ask for things like that [referring to ordering food] because he tells me, 'I don't have good pronunciation.' And I tell him, Miss said, 'don't be ashamed to say it, in other words, you encourage yourself, lean in, because if you don't, then, when will you be able to pronounce something?']

Elena and her husband have a complimentary relationship to English. She has the formal English skills whereas his skills were developed informally. From Elena's



perspective, her husband should lean in more and practice English like she was encouraged in her ESL classes. Encouraging her husband is a prime motivator for Elena to continue her education because she can provide the formal skills that her husband lacks.

For Maria, her daughter's marriage affected Maria's English learning, too. Maria relied on her daughter to translate and speak on her behalf. With her daughter gone, she was forced to seek English classes:

*Entonces cuando ella se casó. Porque todo, aunque yo sabía, pero prefería que ella hiciera las cosas. O que me escribiera una carta, que hiciera una llamada o llamar al doctor, me, me. Estaba muy como atendida. Y este cuando se casó.*

*Entonces si dije, 'ahora sí, eso me va a aventar a que yo aprenda.'* [So, when she got married. Because everything, even though I knew enough to get by. I would rather she did things for me. Like write a letter for me, make a call or call the doctor for me. I was very dependent. And, uh, when she got married. This is when I said, "Okay, now this is what is going to make me push myself to learn English.]

Three children and a husband are Camilla's prime motivation to learn English. Unlike the other mujeres, Camilla was a U.S.-born citizen with Mexican sojourning parents. The necessity of speaking to her children's teachers and communicating with her teenage son's school encouraged her to learn English:

*Una de las principales fueron mis hijos, que fueron creciendo y yo tenía que hablar con los maestros, algunos maestros, sobre todo en middle school no hablaban español, entonces yo tenía que esforzarme un poquito más para, para entenderles, para colaborar con ellos. Eh. A veces me hablaban por teléfono puro*

*inglés los maestros de los muchachitos y pues ahí yo tenía que esforzarme más.*

[The main reason was my children, who were growing up and I had to talk to their teachers, some teachers, especially in middle school did not speak any Spanish.

So, I had to try a little harder to, to understand them, to collaborate with them.

Uhm. Sometimes, my children's teachers, they'd call me and only speak in English. So, I had to try harder to communicate.]

Camilla played an active role in her children's education and so needed to be understood.

The older they got the more difficult it became to express herself and communicate the needs of her children.

Clara was motivated to learn English by both her children and husband: *Mi motivación son mis hijos, mis, mis niñas.* [My motivation is my children, my girls.]

Similar to Maria's experience, Clara's daughter assists in English-only situations.

*Siempre le decimos [Clara y su esposo] a ella [su hija] este, ¿puedes estar a un lado de nosotros?* [We [Clara and her husband] always tell her [the daughter] uhm, can you stay next to us?]. Clara can understand English but cannot speak it. She is also cognizant that she relies heavily on her daughter to help with language exchanges with native English speakers. For example, the following quote infers that her daughter will leave home someday, and Clara will need to rely on herself to navigate conversations with native English language speakers:

*A mi me gustaría algún día poder estar en la escuela sin que nadie nos traduzcas.*

*Porque pues, entendemos, pero las razón es para contestar, [se ríe] para contestar, como este contestar algo largo ahh y ella, casi siempre está con nosotros.* [I wish one day I could be in school without anyone translating for us.

Because well, we understand, but the reason is to answer for us, [laughs] to answer, like, uh, how to answer something that is a long conversation, ahh and she is almost always with us.]

Cecilia was prompted to learn English by her second husband, who is a native English-speaker and speaks Spanish as a second language. Learning and communicating effectively in English would help deepen her marriage relationship without a language barrier:

*El primer. Lo primero que me motivó fue que pues prácticamente, o sea, estoy casada con un americano que me habla en español, pero a veces me dice, 'Es que no puedo decirte lo que te quiero decir en inglés. Hay muchas palabras que no sé decirte, entonces no te puedo y esta, así como que trabado, ¿no? Entonces yo dije no, pues tengo que aprender para comunicarme con él y tener buena relación aparte.* [The first. The first thing that motivated me was that I am practically married to an American who speaks to me in Spanish, but sometimes he tells me, 'It's just that I cannot tell you what I want to tell you in English. There are many words that I do not know how to tell you, so, then, I cannot tell you. And he stays stuck, right? So, I said, no! I have to learn to communicate with him and have a good relationship.]

Hence, her motivation to learn and communicate in English successfully is her Mexican American born husband.

Native English speakers may not understand the terminology when speaking to a health professional, yet they do not have language barriers. Spanish speakers, however, have an added barrier—they neither speak the language nor understand the field

terminology. English for them becomes an important necessity when speaking to health professionals. Like the mujeres, foreign language speakers need to know the recommended plan of action for their health or their loved ones, the dosage for prescription medicines or simply, communicate their health concerns.

### **Women's Roles**

Most of the women experienced their gendered identities differently in Mexican and U.S. society, especially in how they positioned themselves in relation to their families and their responsibilities. In the following sections, I will discuss how the mujeres' ideology consisted of claiming a traditional gendered role as a wife and mother. Most often they positioned their needs second to their families. They also identified their family as their priority and responsibility rather than fulfilling their educational aspirations. They also ignored the fact that they held agency over their lives and succeeded by their own accord. You will also read about the advice given to other Latinas that hints at the underlying themes found in these mujeres' narratives.

#### ***Primero Mi Familia: Mis Responsabilidades***

All of the mujeres positioned themselves second to their families. It did not matter the situation, but all of them believed that their family obligations superseded their needs. Each of the women also believed that it was her responsibility to cook, clean or take care of the children if her husband was the primary breadwinner. They attributed their beliefs to the ways in which they were raised by their mothers. These notions of gendered responsibilities, in comparison to each other, manifested themselves in unique ways for each of the mujeres.

Elena's notion of *Primero mi familia* was based on her experiences in Mexico with her mother and in the U.S. with her husband. In Mexico she recalled how her mother obliged her to do household chores before she was permitted to go out. When asked about the difference in responsibilities from her parental home to the one that she shares with her husband, she remarked:

*Aquí (en EE.UU.) sí tengo mi responsabilidad de que tengo que hacer comida o desayuno, ponerle su lonche a mi esposo o ver qué hace falta en la casa. Todo eso es lo que son, responsabilidades diferentes. Ya de una persona que ya tiene, ya está casada, pero realmente... Pero en México estamos acostumbradas pues a que la mujer de la casa es la que hace el aseo. O los...o los hijos también. Porque yo me acuerdo que mamá me decía. Yo quería salir a pasear o algo, me dice, 'Si no lavas el baño o si no lavas los trastes o si no haces esto no sales.'*

[Here (in the U.S.), I have my responsibility that I have to make a meal or breakfast, make my husband's lunch or see what is needed for the house. That's all they are, different responsibilities for each person who is already married, but really.... But in Mexico it is common to see only the woman doing household chores. Or the... or the kids too. Because I remember Mom telling me. I wanted to go out or something, and she would say, 'If you don't clean the bathroom or if you don't wash the dishes or if you don't do this you can't go out.']

Based on Elena's experiences in Mexican society and conditions her mother modeled, maintaining the household was commonplace among married women. After she was married, Elena chose to keep those conditions in place. Elena further explained that her obligations as a married woman needed to be fulfilled before her day began. From

this, it seems that Elena's notions of gender roles are based on her upbringing and socialization in traditional Mexican roles of men and women. Although she did not explicitly state it, she innately puts her husbands' needs above hers when the situation arose.

Maria, like Elena, was aware that traditional gender roles existed. When I asked her where she believed the ideology of *primero la familia*—placing her husband's needs first—came from, she responded:

*En mi caso ya viene de mi mamá que dice, 'Tienes que atender bien a tu esposo.' Bueno, por decir ella me decía, '... Que no se ande yendo sin lonche porque tú... o te fuistes a la calle, o te fuistes de compras, o esto. ¡No! Tienes que atenderlo a él, porque él es el que, él es el de la casa y tienes tú que, qué atenderlo.'*

[In my case it comes from my mom who would say, "You have to take good care of your husband. "Well, that's to say, she would tell me, "... Don't let him go without having lunch because you... you went out and about, or you went shopping, or this or that. No! You have to take care of him, because he's the one, ...he is the man of the house, and you have to take care of him."]

Maria disclosed that she wanted to go to night classes, but she found herself being reprimanded by her mother who perceived that Maria wanted to place her needs above her husband's. Her mother's understanding of a wife's position in the family was that Maria was solely responsible for maintaining the welfare of the home and its inhabitants. Maria seemed to accept her mother's direction to always place her husband's needs above her own and follow the traditional gender roles that she was raised to practice.

Cecilia, too, felt compelled to choose her family over her career. She described her educational experience in Mexico as sexist with overbearing men that like to deter women from continuing their education. She gave a brief explanation of the difficulties she faced being a woman in Mexico trying to get her education:

*Odontología era desde las 7 de la mañana hasta las 7 de la noche— todo el día. Después me embaracé y me, me quitaron por que ya me tocaba las clases de radiología. Y me dijeron, 'Si estás embarazada, no puedes tomar las clases, vas a perder todo.' Entonces pues poco a poco me, me fui, ¿verdad? saliendo y, y cuando regresé, reprobé el examen de radiología. Bueno, me lo reprobaron y el doctor así muy también, así (Cecilia pone una cara seria). 'No,' dice, 'si ya mejor vete a tu casa a lavar trastes' dice, 'no sé que estás haciendo aquí.' O sea, muy machista. Y yo, así como que empecé a llorar y me salí y ya no quise regresar* [Dentistry school was from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.— all day. Then, I got pregnant, and I was unenrolled because I was not permitted to take radiology classes. And they told me, 'If you're pregnant you won't be able to take classes, you're going to lose everything.' So, little by little, I started attending less and less. Right? I took maternity leave and, and when I came back. I failed the radiology exam. Well, they failed me, and the professor, well very, well, uhm (Cecilia displays a serious face). He said, 'You know, it's better that you go home and wash dishes,' he said, 'I don't know what you're doing here.' I mean, very sexist. And I, well, I started crying and I left and didn't want to go back.]

Cecilia was aware that her experiences in dental school were sexist, and the professor held onto patriarchal notions of gender. Cecilia understood that she fell into the inherent

trap many women fall into when they are told to choose between a family or a career. In the end Cecilia, like the other mujeres, chose her family first.

Unlike the other mujeres, Camilla did not express that she was conscious of traditional gender roles. Instead, she understood that being supportive of her husband to be more of a labor of love than fulfilling a traditional gender role. This became apparent when I asked her to share her opinion on the idea that a husband needs a hot meal before his wife leaves for school:

*cuando te casas. Cuando realmente quieres a tu pareja y la comprendes. O sea, un-uno no puede hacerse tan irresponsable de que si es sólo una persona este que está trabajando y te está, que te provee todo lo necesario, que tú no tengas necesidad de salir de tu casa a trabajar. Es un apoyo .... Si mi esposo trabajaba, yo le tenía que tener su comida. O sea, tenía que apoyarlo. Levantarme a las 5 de la mañana, que comiera. Almorzara calientito, que tomara, que se llevara su lonche calientito también. Es como-es como una forma de, de compatibilidad. O sea, tú haces lo tuyo, yo hago lo mío como...tú, como esposo, trabajador, pues perfecto, que no nos falte nada. Yo como esposa y madre, que no te falte nada a ti. No te falte la comida y que no le falte la atención a mis hijos.*

[when you really love your partner, and you understand them. I mean, one can't be so irresponsible that if it's just one person who's working and he's, he provides you with everything you need, that you don't need to leave your house to work. It's being supportive.... If my husband worked, I had to have his meals ready. I mean, I had to support him. Get up at 5 a.m. so he could eat. Eat a hot meal, give him a drink, and pack him a warm lunch, too. It's like-it's like a form of,



compatibility. I mean, you do your thing, I do my things like... you, as the husband, if you're the breadwinner, well, perfect, then we should not fall short of anything. I, as a wife and mother, need to make sure you don't lack anything. That you are not lacking a meal and my children are not lacking attention.]

It was evident from Camilla's words, that she glorified her wifely duties of primero mi familia rather than questioning why she believed her needs come second. To her, responsibilities according to gender are determined by the primary breadwinner.

Clara expressed that her high expectations of herself as a mother often disrupted her education. When I asked if she could share a story about any challenges encountered or overcome when balancing her role as mother, wife or student, she described her parental decisions as the following:

*Al principio cuando empecé a estudiar inglés, empecé a ir en la tarde.... Yo creo que estuve yendo, no fue ni el año, fueron unos meses nada más. Este en eso me embaracé de la tercera niña y la verdad me sentía, me sentía muy, pues náuseas, sueño. Entonces sentía yo que no aprovechaba la clase y dejé de ir hasta que regresé....., pero si soy así mucho, como muy escandalosa con mis niños. Como de que no me gusta dejarlos solos. Este a veces me estreso mucho que me dice mi esposo, ya voy en camino, si quieres arráncate tú. Que se me llega la hora o algo y no me gusta. Nunca los dejo solos. Siempre estoy como al pendiente de ellos.*

[At first when I started studying English, I started going in the afternoon.... I think I was going; it wasn't even the year; it was just a few months. This is when I got pregnant with my third little girl and to tell you the truth, I felt, I felt very, well I had nausea, sleepiness. Then, I felt like I wasn't taking advantage of the (ESL)

class, and I stopped going until I went back again...., but yeah, I'm like that a lot, like a helicopter mom with my kids. Like I don't like to leave them alone. Then, sometimes I get so stressed that my husband tells me, 'I'm on my way, if you want to, take off.' Because it is nearing the time I have to leave or, or something and I don't like it. I never leave them alone. I'm always watchful of them.]

*Primero mi familia* (first my family), in Clara's point of view, came from her overprotective tendencies with her children. Especially, when her parental responsibilities intersected with her student responsibilities. Clara expressed that she understood her parental duties bordered on extreme. However, it did not stop her from pushing herself to place her family's needs above her own.

The notion expressed of *primero mi familia* (first my family) posed obstacles that prevented the mujeres from continuing their education. They additionally held onto these beliefs whether they lived in Mexico or in the U.S. I also discovered that the altruistic practices the mujeres expressed were similar to each other but the way they made sense of their practices were unique. For instance, some women understood that they conformed to traditional gender roles while others subconsciously conformed to them without hesitation.

### ***Auto-agentes<sup>7</sup>, Autosuficiente<sup>8</sup> y Sobresalientes<sup>9</sup>***

The subtheme auto-agentes, autosuficiente y sobresalientes became evident as part of the mujeres' agency to make decisions that determined a successful path. The meaning of auto-agente within the context of this study was characterized by the

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<sup>7</sup> Auto-agente: Self-agents.

<sup>8</sup> Autosuficiente: Self-sufficient.

<sup>9</sup> Sobresaliente: outstanding; excellent: of the highest quality.

empowering choices each mujer (woman) made that were independent of anyone else's influence. Autosuficiente (self-sufficient) was enacted when they could provide any type of support for themselves through what they believed represented their independence. The drive behind this notion was that they did not want to rely on others that offered unnecessary aid to them. Sobresaliente (successful) is a term that described how they excelled in their life trajectories. Through my observations all of the women enacted their own agency to overcome obstacles. I also saw that their subjective identities were inextricably tied to their families. These examples of these were evident throughout each woman's testimonio.

Elena incrementally (re)imagined her subjective identity once she had established a home with her fiancé. Life as a single woman living with her mother contrasted with the agency that developed after she left home, got married, moved to another country, and began building a life with her partner:

*Y..., tu ya no me pidas permiso, tu nada mas me avisas. Y éste y a la que le avisaba era mi mamá. A la que le aviso o a la que le doy mis..., las cosas que yo hago es a mi mamá. Entonces la única que pudo haber puesto peros era mi mamá. ...Ya después fue cuando me vine a vivir aquí (EE.UU.). Estuve con mi esposo. Bien o mal, la vida en familia es bien. Pero ya cuando uno empieza a ser independiente y hacer otra familia, para mí, me gustó mucho, miss. Para mí fue una experiencia. Al venirme aquí a este país. No, no. ¿Fue una experiencia para mí que me cambió definitivamente todo, sabe? O sea, el salir de mi casa. El vivir aparte. El ser un poquito más independiente es la mejor vida de tener una vida de pareja.*

[And..., you don't ask my permission anymore, you just let me know. And the one I let know (where I was going) was my mom. The one I let know or gave my... the things I do was my mom. So, the only one who could have stopped me was my mom. ... It was already later when I came to live here (the U.S.). And I was with my husband. Whether right or wrong, family life was fine. But when you start becoming independent and making another family, for me, I really liked it, Miss. It was an experience for me. Coming here to this country. It was an experience for me that definitely changed everything, you know. I mean, leaving my house. Living apart. Being a little more independent was the best part of having a life with a partner.]

Her sense of self-agency began growing when her mother advised her to stop asking permission to go out and to just let her know instead. Once in the U.S., she relied on being self-sufficient by providing for herself during her short visit with her fiancé. It was through her visits to the U.S. and relationship with her fiancé that Elena gained some freedom from the constraints of her mother. She gained enough freedom that Elena accepted the marriage proposal when she had been determined to remain single. Her path to the U.S. was hence her sole decision-making: her auto-agencia, and empowerment through auto-suficiencia to excel (*sobresalir*) from her life experience in the U.S.

Maria empowered herself and enacted auto-agencia through a phrase she repeatedly verbalized—*me aviento*— meaning to push oneself full force into what needs to be done without regrets or apologies. She, too, revealed that her independence made her autosuficiente (self-sufficient). When asked what motivated her she told me:

*No estar dependiendo de algo. Eso, eso me motivó a que yo buscara y buscara sobresalir. Que no, que no buscara de nadie que me ayudara, que yo sola podía ser. Me. Me motivó a aventarme, como dicen.*

[Not being dependent on something. That, that motivated me to look for and seek to excel. Not to, not to look for anyone's help, that I alone could do it. It. It motivated me to throw myself into it, like you say.]

Maria's outlook towards independence was where she drew the motivation to sobresalir in her life trajectory. She looked to empower herself by being fearless and forging ahead without the help of others. The desire to become autosuficiente has prompted her to continue her education.

Camilla, similarly, was fearless and forged ahead when she needed to work and provide permanent residence to her family and husband. She enacted auto-agencia and was autosuficiente when she worked three jobs. She explained this in the following quote:

*Mi esposo fue el primero en arreglar. El primero este porque era mi esposo y le pedimos income tax de mis tíos. Pedimos income tax de parientes también. Él no tiene ningún pariente aquí (EE.UU.), pero yo sí tenía parientes. Habíamos tenido pues no dificultad, sino que me pedían, me exigía, me exigían a mi, migración que ganara determinada cantidad al año de income. Entonces yo llegué a tener hasta tres trabajos..., hasta tres trabajos. O sea, yo trabajaba todo el día porque él no tenía papeles, entonces yo tenía que demostrar que podía mantenerlo.*

[My husband was the first to get his documents. The first one because he was my husband and I, and we asked for my uncle's income tax. We asked for income tax

from other relatives as well. He (her husband) doesn't have any relatives here, but I did have relatives. We therefore had no difficulty, but we were asked, demanded, required by immigration to earn a certain amount of income per year. So, I got up to three jobs..., up to three jobs. I mean, I worked all day because he didn't have documents, so I had to prove that I could sustain him.]

I was shocked that Camilla assumed the traditional male role of earning a living on her husband's behalf, which shows a lot of agency. However, she does not acknowledge herself as having an equal partnership in her marriage. Camilla previously explained that a women's role was to get up and cook her husband breakfast and pack lunch at 5:00 a.m. because that was supportive of a wife to her husband's role as a sole provider. By her standards she should be regarded as auto-suficiente (self-sufficient) and sobresaliente (successful) in her role as a wife, mother, and daughter. Camilla should also regard herself as having equal footing in her marriage.

Clara's auto-agencia (self-agency) was observed through the lifegoals she met such as owning her dream home:

*Entonces yo compré la primera, luego compré la segunda y luego compramos esta (refiriéndose a su casa actual). Que esta casa, o sea, era algo de lo que yo toda mi vida he querido. En un área bien, con espacio, con alberca para los niños, muchas recámaras. O sea, es algo como que una meta, como que se me hizo a mí desde muy chica, como que una meta. Y pos ya lo hice. Y luego hace un año compramos otra casa, pero todas las tengo hechas dúplex y las rento. En una tengo dos, en otra tengo cuatro y en otra tengo tres.*

[So, I bought the first one, then I bought the second one and then we bought this one (referring to their current home). That this house, I mean, was something I've wanted all my life. In a nice area, with space, with a pool for the children, many bedrooms. I mean, it's kind of like a goal, that was created when I was a very young girl, like a goal. And well, I already met it. And then a year ago we bought another house, but I had them [the three rental properties] converted into duplexes and rented them. In one (referring to a rental home converted into a duplex), I have two, in another I have four, and in another I have three.]

Building financial security and establishing a stable home for her family in the U.S. was strikingly different from her life in Mexico. The agency that Clara asserted in Mexico was (re)imagined, suiting her life in the U.S.

Agency to Cecilia was having the ability to communicate effectively in English. This, she asserted, provided her with the autosuficiencia to defend herself if needed:

*Ya sé que un verbo va normal con esto y así. Entonces hay la llevo, no estoy al 100, pero ya me defiendo. Dices, "¿ya puedes pelear? !Si! Ya puedo pelear.*

[I know a verb normally goes with this and so on. So, I'm kinda getting it, I'm not at 100, but I can defend myself. If you say, "Can you fight now?! Yes! I can fight now.]

Like the other mujeres, Cecilia wanted to be autosuficiente and not rely on English translators. Cecilia could feel empowered by this ability to defend herself in both languages. Cecilia did not seek English perfection, but rather a (re)imagined English proficiency to suit her needs and excel in it.

In my analysis I found that many of these women (re)imagined their agency in the United States. In other words, the mujeres possessed agency long before immigrating to the U.S., but as they adjusted to their new realities the context behind their agency changed. They were all capable of being autosuficiente to meet their set life goals. Sobresalir produced many outcomes for the mujeres as each interpreted autosuficiencia (self-sufficient) and autoagencia (self-agency) differently.

***Consejos Para Otras Latinas: El ingles es indispensable<sup>10</sup>***

That English is necessary to excel in the U.S. rang throughout the mujeres' testimonios. It was echoed when I specifically asked the mujeres what they wished they had known before immigrating. I believed that to truly know what these mujeres thought about their lived experiences, it was best to assess their reflection on their journey. The journey in this study refers to the path that these mujeres took from their younger years in Mexico to their current status in the U.S. I wanted to know whether their journey meant that they had to change traditional gender roles, learn English to survive or achieve their goal of owning their dream house.

Like the other mujeres, Elena, found it vital that other Latinas learned English promptly:

*es un poquito más tardado aprender inglés. Pero pues que empiece lo más pronto posible para que vaya avanzando poco a poco, poco a poco. Y que tenga paciencia. Y que tenga mucha paciencia. Porque a veces uno piensa que, ya entrando a las clases, ooh ya va a salir sabiendo, pero es, entendiendo. Es poco a*

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<sup>10</sup>Translation is: Advise for other Latinas: English is indispensable



*poco. Y pues que se trate de portar bien en este país, como para que las oportunidades que le ofrezcan sean buenas para esa persona.*

[it takes a little longer to learn English. But they should start as soon as possible so that they can gradually progress, little by little. And be patient. And have a lot of patience. Because sometimes you think that just by entering (ESL) classes, ooh they're going to come out already knowing, but it's only, understanding. It's little by little. And to try to behave well in this country, so that the opportunities they are offered are good for that person.]

I could see that the suggestions that Elena proffered were reflective of her lived experiences. One reason I could see this was that she mentioned English from the context of a conversation was a resource to carry a dialogue, and she had mentioned this related to her own English-learning. Her advice was simple but direct for someone first immigrating to the U.S.

In the following quote Maria revisited a conversation with a colleague:

*ya les he dicho. Yo tengo una. No, no sé cuánto tiene [viviendo en los EE.UU.], pero, no aprende el inglés. No aprende. Y siempre esta diciendo, 'Oh, yo no lo entiendo, no sé por qué no me, no me [entiende]. ¿Si tiene apellido en español, no sé por qué no me habla en español?' Y le digo, 'Mira, lo que tienes que hacer es aprender porque ya no estás en México. Tienes que aquí buscar la manera de, de educarte y buscar la manera de salir porque ya no estás allá (México).' Y dice, '¡Oh, es que yo allá en México soy esto!' Pero ya no estás en México. O ósea que si tú estudias el inglés y te revalúas tu carrera la puedes seguir aquí.*

[I've already told them. I have one. No, I don't know how long they [have living in the U.S.], but she doesn't learn English. She doesn't learn. And she's always saying, 'Oh, I don't get it, I don't know why I don't, I don't. If you have a surname in Spanish, don't I know why you don't speak to me in Spanish?' And I say, 'Look, what you have to do is learn because you're not in Mexico anymore. You have to find a way here (the U.S.), to educate yourself and find a way out because you're not there anymore (Mexico).' And she says, 'Oh, it's because in Mexico I'm this!' But you're not in Mexico anymore. I mean, if you study English and you revalidate studies equivalent to your career, you can continue it here.]

Maria highlighted the need to learn English as a necessity to live in the U.S. because better opportunities could arise simply by continuing to educate oneself and learning the native language.

Clara, similar to Elena and Maria also advised other Latinas to learn English, but went a step further

*Que aprendan, que trabajen, y que luchen por lo que, por lo que ellas quieran. Si pos el ingles es muy importante, miss. No mas uno de cabezona que le da prioridad a otras cosas. (Risa) Que realicen sus sueños, que le echen ganas. Que obstáculos siempre los van a tener, pero no por eso... pues hay que aflojarle si no hay se quedan.*

[To learn, to work, and to fight for what, what they want. And well, English is very important, Miss. Just us that are stubborn, and we give priority to other things.

[Laughter] To fulfill their dreams, to put some elbow grease into it. That obstacle you will always have, but not because of that...well, we must loosen up if not they will stay

stagnant there.] Clara would advise them to follow their dreams and achieve them by plowing through any obstacles. Her advice, like the other mujeres, seemed to come from Clara's own lived experiences. Clara achieved her dream home and fought for what she wanted. From her lived experiences, Clara inferred that English was necessary. However, when she reflected, she criticized herself for not following her own advice.

Cecilia, too, believed that that acquiring English was the key to success in the U.S. She observed that the English language dominated her surroundings. Cecilia also noted the need to have a basic understanding of the language to evade dangerous situations or places, since most signs and notices she encountered were only printed in English. She proffered her advice as the following:

*Es indispensable. ¿Por qué? Para cualquier trabajo, una entrevista empieza en inglés. Todos los anuncios de peligro de que no pase. Desde que... O sea, todo lo que esté en señalamientos está en inglés, no está en español. Entonces tú debes de conocer todo eso de que no entres aquí. No toques esto. Esto es peligroso. Te guardas silencio, entra por la otra puerta. Todo está en inglés. Entonces tú debes, debes de saber el inglés básico va. Para poder moverte. ¿Para que? O sea, puedas salir de tu casa. Para que puedas conocer otros lugares. Entonces, eh, el, el básico el, el inglés básico es indispensable.*

[It is essential. Why? Because for any job, an interview starts in English. All the danger signs that say do not enter. I mean, everything that's signaling you is in English, it's not in Spanish. So, then you must know all the signs that you do not enter here. Do not touch this. This is dangerous. You must keep quiet, go through the other door. It's all in English. So, then you must, you must know the basic

English. So, you can navigate yourself. Why? I mean, so you can get out of your house. So, you can get to know other places. So, uh, the, the basic, basic English is essential.]

Cecilia's message to other Latinas was rooted in her lived experiences as an immigrant woman who learned the language of her surroundings. Cecilia also specified that learning basic English was vital to independently navigate public spaces.

Contrary to the guidance shared by her counterparts, Camilla advised her fellow Latinas to find strength in the adversities they have experienced as immigrant women. She imparted:

*A ella yo le aconsejaría que tratara de ser más independiente, que no se quede estancada por miedo, que no se quede con las ganas, que no se quede reprimida. ¡Ándele, esa es la palabra! Que no se reprima en hacer unas cosas. Si otras personas no pueden ayudarla, buscando se encuentra, pero al dejar de hacer cosas por miedo se deja de vivir .... No tener restricciones. Vamos a batallar. Si, vamos a batallar, Teacher. Nos vamos a caer. Bueno, pues levántate. ¿Que voy a sufrir? Pues ya sufriste al venir acá (los EE. UU.). ¡Vívelo! Vivir sin miedo.*

[I would advise her to be more independent, not to be stagnant out of fear, not to be left wanting, not to be repressed. Aha, that's the word! That they shouldn't repress themselves to do things. If other people can't help them, then by seeking you will find what you're looking for, but when they stop doing things out of fear, you stop living.... Don't have restrictions. We're going to struggle. Yes, we're going to struggle, Teacher. We're going to fall down. Well, let's get up. Well, that I

am going to suffer? Well, you already suffered when you came here (the U.S.).

Live it! Living without fear.]

Camilla's phrase, "Living without fear", was the highlight of her advice. Unaware of the diversity of circumstances experienced by immigrant women, she suggested that her fellow Latinas pull themselves up by their bootstraps. I infer that Camilla's message was intended to encourage others to continue pursuing their English lessons despite personal struggles.

Overall, the theme of *consejos para otras Latinas: el ingles es indispensable* (advice to other Latinas: English is indispensable) highlighted English as a necessary skill to ensure success when navigating U.S. public spaces for other Latinas. Each woman's interpretation of the amount of English needed to be independent and meet life goals differed but the advice remained consistent. To sobresalir (succeed) in the U.S. meant that other Latinas should know enough English to defend themselves and continue the journey that led them to the U.S. through English language learning. When I asked them to share the advice, they would give other Latinas coming to the U.S, I was not certain of the outcome and was surprised to find that they all believed English was the most necessary skill to obtain in the U.S.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I described four themes and their analysis. My first theme, Support—Familial or Community, identified that participant's continued education through spousal support was provided through financial and emotional support. Husbands would also offer encouragement to their wives to be successful in life whether it was in their educational or personal path. This stood out to me because I assumed parents would

encourage their children's education rather than impede it. I often forget that life in Mexico is different and that everyone must work to support the family. But not too surprising was that after many of the mujeres married and lived with their husbands, it was usually the women's parents who expected their daughters to follow in traditional Mexican gendered roles and push aside their education. Community support or resources provided in the U.S. helped to go to classes for free. Lack of support and resources in Mexico thwarted participants from continuing any education.

The second main theme, English as a Second Language: Its Practical Application, identified that English was highly important to participants. English guided their educational experiences in the U.S. Language barriers complicated and isolated them from real world social networking. They felt alienated but for participants personal motivation was the key to learning English. They could expand their social network by speaking English and becoming independent from English translators. Becoming inclusive and independent suggested that participants lessen the fear of being *Othered*. In a social setting it becomes apparent that English classes can enable women to grasp key words and make practical use of English with native English speaking communities. Familial settings identified participant's families as their primary motivators and their eldest child as their interpreters.

The third main theme, immigrating to the United States, discovered that the idea of permanency was far away from the mujeres' thoughts. Sojourning and visiting were the only way they entered the U.S. prior to seeking permanent status. Four out of the five stayed because they saw the better resources and opportunities available to them and their families.

In the last and final main theme, Women's Role, explained that the mujeres posited their needs second to their families and followed traditional gendered roles. The women believed that their husbands need superseded their own if they were the primary breadwinners. It was also found that many of the mujeres stepped into this role due to their mother's teachings or advice. What was also evident and contrary to my assumptions was that the mujeres held the agency to make decisions to forge their pathway in life. They were auto-suficiente (self-sufficient) when it came to making decisions that involved the livelihood and well-being of the entire family. Their agency situated them onto a path of English learning. A path that led them all to a resounding suggestion for other Latinas that they needed to immediately learn as much English as possible. English was indispensable to immigrating Latinas to navigate U.S. English-only public spaces.

## VI. THEORIZING THE NARRATIVES

“The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 79).

In narrating my findings, I shared the *mujeres*’ *testimonios* that recounted and reflected their lived experiences in Mexico and the U.S, particularly in education. Documenting their lives and staying authentic to the *mujeres* were my main goals for my findings but that was easy. The difficulty I faced was my incessant need to doubt my work and continually ask myself if my study was good enough for adult education researchers, scholars, and practitioners. I could not stop the constant doubt and finally discovered it was because I felt like an imposter. I realized that my imposter syndrome came from the inability to identify with someone from my field and the “unusual” work that I was accomplishing, unusual because to use a Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) in this field is rare. Some similarities to other critical race epistemologies but none that contain the “cultural intuition” or the unique experiences and perspectives of a Chicana researcher and Latinx participants that can truly cultivate the resistance and authentic voice from educational research.

I was recently questioned about the difference between Chicana Feminism Epistemology’s (CFE) tenets and the original tenets of Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) and critical race theory (CRT) at a conference. I welcomed this resistance because it exposed the importance of this research study. Especially because I was questioning if my research would make a difference in the field of adult education. The recurrent theme for my inner monologue was, did I truly shed the light needed into the lived experiences of these *mujeres*? Was I, the adult education Chicana/Latina researcher,



employing the correct tools that makes space for my participants' rich herstories to shine bright and bring awareness to others of their needs as ESL learners? Yes, but I would rather you be the judge of that than having me tell you.

### **Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) in Adult Education**

The basis of my theoretical framework was a Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) that allowed me to use, what Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) called “cultural intuition” (p. 563). She describes it as an extended version of Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) theoretical sensibility that includes four concepts: personal experience; existing literature; professional experience; and analytical research process. The difference between their theoretical sensibility (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and Delgado Bernal’s cultural intuition is that cultural intuition includes “collective experience and community memory, and points to the importance of participants' engaging in the analysis of data” (pp. 563-564). As a Chicana, I used my cultural intuition to guide my study because my parents are immigrants, I work as an adult educator, I define myself as bicultural-bilingual and growing up I would interpret for my parents.

Cultural intuition allowed me to analyze my participants' narratives and draw on my own experiences to interpret theirs. Like Dolores Delgado Bernal, I believe that collective knowledge helped me to analyze and interpret the patterns emerging from my participant's narratives. During the one-on-one interviews in the second phase of data collection and analysis, I asked them to reflect upon one or two of their answers and my interpretations of their meaning. Cultural intuition and collective knowledge are both tenets of a CFE theoretical framework umbrellaed under Latina/Latino critical theory

(LatCrit) and critical race theory (CRT; Pérez Huber & Pulido Villanueva, 2019) as well. However, one tenet, especially central to CFE is *convivencia*.

### ***The Concept of Convivencia***

Ruth Trinidad Galvan (2011) defined *convivencia* as, “the coexistence necessary for creating relationships in the field and connections across nation-states” (p. 553). She also explained that *convivencia* is what allows any immigrant woman to achieve solidarity and similitude with other women to resist and survive the struggle of everyday life through “a state of coexistence and true connection” (p. 555). I share this information on *convivencia* because prior to my study I taught ESL for close to ten years and a pattern that often formed among my students was the building of a communal space with their peers. I understood that the women in my classes created a collective and communal space inside and outside of the classroom. However, I was unaware of how this came about since none of them were friends prior to my class. What became even more intriguing to me was to see them go out to lunch and do shopping together. Finding a *why* became a challenge to me.

### ***Latino Cultural Citizenship***

Finding out the reason the *mujeres* built solidarity around learning English was difficult. I struggled the most with finding a concept that identified what the *mujeres* in my study discussed during their testimonios and my previous observations. When I began this study, I assumed that the *mujeres* were assimilating into the United States culture and ideologies by learning English.

My literature review exposed the assimilationist practices in the early years of the settlement houses. I had assumed that the ideology behind learning English for ELLs

would convey an assimilationist message to the mujeres. Yet after my data analysis, I was certain that the concept of assimilation could not explain how Mexican immigrant women defined themselves outside of the ESL classrooms.

The concept of assimilation could also not properly describe what the mujeres experienced when they immigrated to the United States. Flores and Benmayor's (1997) theory of cultural citizenship neatly depicted their experience because it is a fusion of culture and citizenship, meaning that to claim citizenship is to be a member of a particular society and can be done so through culture. Therefore, what I discovered was the mujeres were forging communities, claiming space, and claiming rights—a Latino cultural citizenship (Flores and Benmayor, 1997).

To claim citizenship in the United States, specifically by Latinos, is not an easy feat. First, the Southwestern part of the United States belonged to Mexico prior to 1848 but after Mexicans were treated as second-class citizens (Flores and Benmayor, 1997). Second, to claim to be a citizen of a country is to adopt the dominant culture and ideology and become democratic participating citizens regardless of documentation status. Latinos, however, whether they adopt the dominant culture or not, are considered second-class citizens because of their cultural, ethnic, and linguistic background (Flores and Benmayor, 1997) and hypothetical immigrant status (Rosaldo, 1997). Hypothetical immigrant status, Rosaldo (1997) explained is how Latinos in the United States are stigmatized irrespective of their documentation status or birthright. Therefore, Mexican immigrants, regardless of their immigrant status, cannot easily claim to be citizens of the United States because of this stigmatization.

The mujeres in my study do not check the boxes, nor express the phenotype that identify them as a typical *American*. They speak another language, are immigrants to a space that was once considered their birthplace and have a different racial/ethnic hybridity naming them Mexicans. These are the exclusionary constraints not explicitly stated but inferred when the U.S. Constitution was written (Rosaldo, 1997). Henceforth, these mujeres faced exclusionary practices from the broader U.S. society when they crossed the border. Through cultural citizenship, these mujeres began weaving themselves into the social fabric of the broader U.S. community.

Latino cultural citizenship is a concept that Flores and Benmayor (1997) describe as the social and cultural practices of Latinas/os in the United States' that are an oppositional response to the assimilationist's prevailing notions. In other words, "cultural citizenship allows for the potential of opposition, of restructuring and reordering society" (1997, p. 15) when assimilation fails to narrate the Latina/o experience. Flores and Benmayor (1997) further explain that "Assimilation tended to devolve into absorption, assuming disappearance of ethnic and cultural identity" and when they reviewed their own research findings could not depict their participants' experiences in the United States. (p. 9).

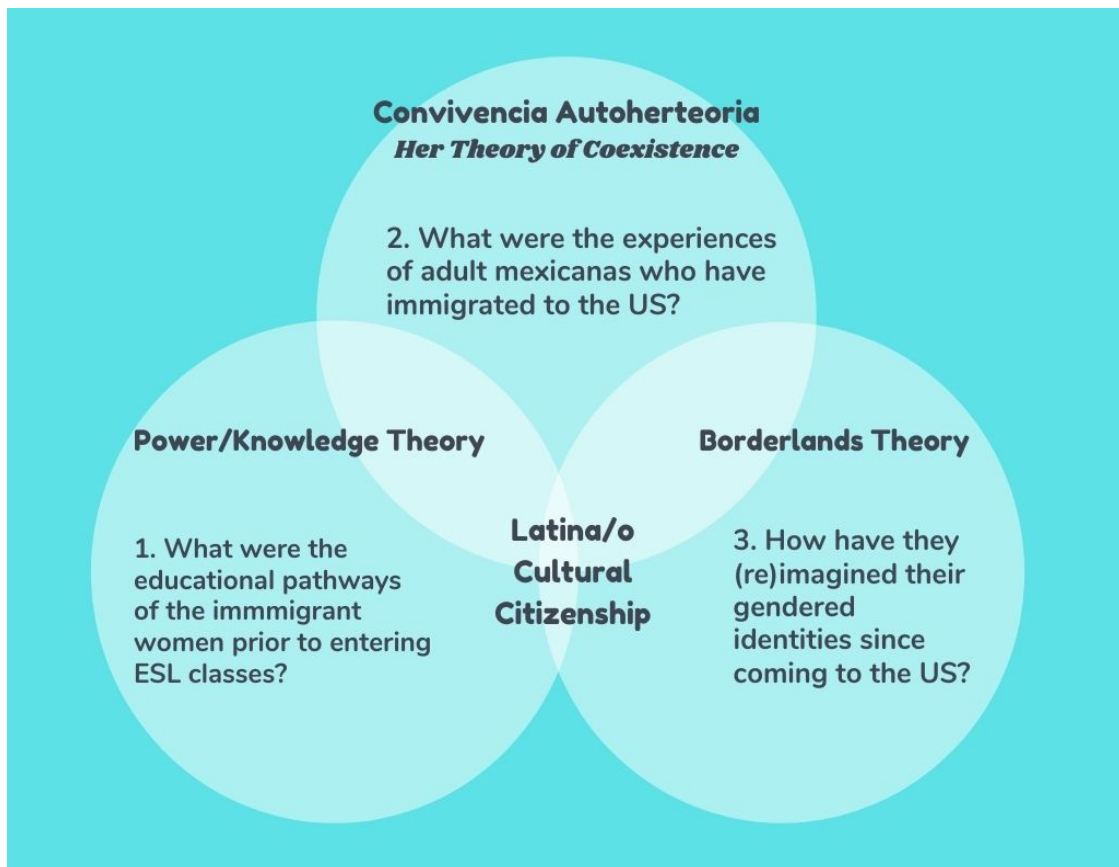
The experiences of Latinas/os in the United States are different, especially because in terms of race there is always the talk of the black/white dichotomy. Latinas/os are overshadowed by it and our intersectional ways of being forgotten. Latinas/os come with linguistic and cultural differences and strengths. The concept of cultural citizenship therefore helps explain how the mujeres in my study learned English to use as a tool to enter English-only spaces and obtain valuable resources they otherwise did not have

access to. The mujeres claimed cultural citizenship because they immigrated to a country that did not give them a sense of *belonging*. They felt lonely and isolated. They had immigrated to the United States with little to no language skills to expand their social network. But like William V. Flores' (1997) stated, "Latinos must have a space to think, to create, and to act in a way that reflects their sense of being" (p. 264) and consequently claim space.

Upon entering or exiting ESL classes, these mujeres carved a space to share with each other during lunches, shopping or simply sharing a communal space such as a classroom. On more than one occasion I accompanied them to have lunch and asked about their newly found friendships with questions like, "how often do you get together" or "what are your husbands' opinions of your friendships"? It was then that I became aware of how I had coincidentally built community in my classroom. Learning English was the common goal, yet their newfound friendships helped them acquire resources and support they had not found on their own in the United States.

They also advocated for themselves and others with the little English they knew. They became each other's resources for healthcare, school functions or other general help. In engaging in these social and cultural practices in the U.S., they addressed the concept of claiming rights and "defining their own communities and interests" (Flores, 1997, p. 275). For example, Clara attended PTA meetings where her daughter translated or interpreted for her. The PTA meetings did not accommodate Spanish speakers, but in choosing to be a present parent, Clara disrupted the institutional language repertoire. This, as Flores and Benmayor (1997) reported, was how Latinas/os gained a sense of belonging without assimilating to the dominant ideologies of the United States.

The concept of Latino cultural citizenship, in addition to Chicana epistemology, which originally informed my study, provided a frame for answering my research questions. Latino cultural citizenship ultimately became the glue that held together my conceptual framework and supported the theories that I used. It informed my analyses of the social and cultural practices the mujeres described engaging in and helped me answered each research question (Figure 3). The concept of Latino cultural citizenship explains how the mujeres experienced life in the United States post-immigration and their integration into the ESL classrooms.



**Figure 3.** Conceptual Framework Used for Analysis

## **What Were the Experiences of Adult *Mexicanas* Who Have Immigrated to the US?**

Through my analysis of data, I discovered that English was important to the *mujeres* because it enabled them to enter social settings that were English-only spaces. My analysis of my research question, “what were the experiences of adult *mexicanas* who have immigrated to the United States”, was informed by Trinidad Galvan’s (2011) theory of *convivencia*. Through the relationships they formed with each other or their *Convivencia*, they were able to socially network with each other and extend their networks to other native and non-native English speakers. With at least a basic knowledge of English, they became able to communicate their needs to their local community, and through interaction with their local community, they developed a sense of belonging as Latino Cultural Citizens.

Since English was the common factor for them to *sobresalir* (succeed) in the United States, they sought or found programs to learn English. In doing so, they combatted the isolation and loneliness felt from being miles away from extended family members. Learning to read, write, and speak in English enabled them to create friendships inside and outside of the classrooms.

In the United States they also received the educational support they did not have while living in Mexico. Their husbands’ and community gave them the needed educational or general resources to continue their education in the United States. Here they began creating experiences by doing what Ruth Trinidad Galván (2011) called, *convivencia*, a direct translation is co-existing. However, *convivencia* is much more than that because it develops interpersonal relationships with others in similar situations that ultimately determines their mode to *sobresalir*. They built their niches within the broader

community. These mujeres are also part of a WhatsApp group named, *compañeras de clase* (classmates). They added me and in it they share positive goal-oriented memes, update each other through uploaded photos and occasionally check-in on each other.

I also discovered that they gained a newfound freedom from their homelife and increased their visibility in the United States by attending school functions or family and friends' celebratory parties. The mujeres explained that they felt like they knew enough English to survive in the United States. But they also hesitated to speak more of it because they often understood more English than they spoke. They also shared that they attempted to speak English in social settings when needed.

In summary, their experiences in the United States revolved around learning English and attempting to learn and speak it. The support that they did not receive in Mexico was found here through their husbands' support. Engaging in ESL classes helped create their community of support, claim space, and claim their rights as Latina cultural citizens.

### **What Were the Educational Pathways of The Immigrant Women Prior To Entering ESL Classes?**

Interviewing these mujeres, I discovered that their educational support in the United States came from their family or newly built community. In Mexico, resources to continue their education were non-existent or they were unaware of them. Three out of the five women went to college in Mexico, but for one reason or another did not finish. The other two women were unable to finish high school because of financial constraints. Their continued education was halted due to financial burdens, familial obligations, or stereotypical ideologies towards educated women. However, when they immigrated to



the United States, they discovered that educational resources for adults were readily available for immigrants trying to learn English.

They were all working class status and four out of the five with some college. Three out of the five were married and the other two were married in the United States. In Mexico, the mujeres lived different lives because they never dreamt of living in the United States. In fact, their permanency was unplanned, and they thought Mexico could always be their homeland. Circumstances changed and they decided to start building their lives here.

In Mexico, their lives were different, and they may not have known each other, but they all experienced similar situations. Elena worked, went out with friends, and lived with her mother and stepfather. Maria worked, raised her children, and lived with her mother-in-law while she waited for her husband to return from sojourning in the United States. Camilla went to school until she could no longer afford to attend. She married and finally convinced her husband to immigrate with her to the United States once he lost his job. Clara struggled to survive economically and dropped out of school when the financial struggle became unbearable. Cecilia was a single parent who ran a boarding house for college women. These women's lives intersected when they began ESL classes and decided to learn English to one day obtain their General Educational Development (GED) or further their career.

My initial assumption was that my participants valued English as the dominant language in the United States. I also thought that once they learned the English language it would be easier to navigate social and public spaces, so that by entering these social

and public spaces, the mujeres would develop multiple subjectivities because of the English exposure and dealings with power relations from their new language.

In Mexico, they were met with resistance to continuing their education. This resistance is what Michel Foucault, in his article “The Subject and Power” (1982), would call a technique used in positions of power. According to Foucault, the resistance or struggle illuminates any form of power relations. The concept of power was not intended to be Foucault’s primary subject. Instead, he explained that his main concept was subjectivity and how the human becomes subject through objectification (Foucault, 1982). Foucault explained that his intent was not to conceptualize power, for power cannot be conceptualized without caution and precursors. Because while it is true that power relations can be discussed as the dominant society exerting force on or dominance over marginalized groups, it is more complex than that.

Power is better understood through our experiences in everyday interactions on a microlevel (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012). In Jackson and Mazzei’s interpretation of Foucault’s Power/Knowledge theory, they explained that power and knowledge were believed to have an inverse relationship. Knowledge was the byproduct or *effect* of power *relations* (p. 49). Therefore, for example, in Mexico the mujeres were held to standards that regarded them as “only” daughters, mothers or wives. This was the standard stereotype that women were supposed to continuously enact. Their behavior needed to accommodate what society deemed proper in Mexico. This interpretation of power relations was the catalyst for Cecilia’s decision to drop out of dental school when her professor bluntly told her to stay home. For Cecilia, her behavior to drop out of school

was the *power effect* of the gendered ideology in Mexico that women should not be professionals but stay home to raise families (Foucault, 1982).

This ideology was expressed in different ways for each of these women. Most of the opposition Clara experienced to her studies came from her mother. Ultimately, she was overwhelmed by the constant harassment from her mother and her financial struggle and so dropped out of school and never returned.

Overall, these mujeres' educational pathways in Mexico were stunted due to power relations that inhibited their ability to continue their educations. In other words, the mujeres' educational experiences prior to entering ESL classes were constrained or were unable to continue their educational training in Mexico for various reasons. This was the negative and disempowering effect of the power relations in Mexico. Despite their negative experiences in Mexico with sexist ideologies or financial constraints, they attended ESL classes in the United States. They also built a *convivencia* with their interpersonal relationships, and this act served as a countereffect to the power relations circulating through their educational experiences in Mexico. In the U.S., the mujeres renewed their interest and motivation for pursuing their educations. All the mujeres stated that one day they wish to obtain their GED. Their renewed interest was a positive action for the mujeres and their education. The constraint or gatekeeping was counteracted, and their identities (re)imagined.

### **How Have They (Re)Imagined Their Gendered Identities Since Coming to the US?**

To explain how the mujeres have (re)imagined their gendered identities, we need to understand how their language learning has influenced each of their roles as immigrant women in the United States. Olivia M. Espín (2006) believed an immigrant's identity is

challenged when they are learning a hegemonic language. While it may challenge the *mujeres'* immigrant identity, in the experiences the *mujeres* in this study described, it did so positively. Learning English permitted them to gain valuable and lifelong resources to continue living their lives in the United States. I use the word permitted because the English language is still a gatekeeper and the dominant language in the United States. However, the *mujeres* contested this by enacting Latina Cultural citizenship. They were no longer immigrant women but became a community of adult ESL immigrant women. They adopted the English language to engage with the broader community and gain better resources to improve their lives in the United States.

While each *mujer's* motivation to learn English differed, their main goal was the same: they began learning English to navigate their U.S experiences among family, peers, and native English speakers. However, engaging in the broader community now created another challenge to their gendered identities and efforts of self-agency.

It was my belief at the beginning of the study that agency was obtained through the *mujeres'* experiences in the United States and learning English. They did not *obtain* agency, but (re)imagined their gendered identities and in doing so enacted self-agency. Therefore, as I was interpreting the roles and identities of these *mujeres*, I considered how traditional gendered roles played into how the *mujeres* spoke about their responsibility as a daughter, wife, and mother. I wanted to know how, if at all, they modified their identity post-migrancy to the United States.

The *mujeres* did not leave behind their gendered identities, but instead used resources available in the United States to reach past goals unattainable in Mexico. In other words, these women came to the U.S. with a sense of self-agency because without it

their motivation to journey to another country or their sense of urgency to learn English would not have existed. However, it was in the United States that they found the proper financial, familial and community support to continue their education.

They began forming social networks with native-English speakers and entering social settings such as restaurants, their children's schools, and their own work settings because they started learning the dominant language. They began (re)imagining their identity as women in Mexico. They entered what Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) called *nepantlera* or an interstitial space between multiple and frequently conflicting worlds. The interstitial space as regards English learning for these women was where they could not unlearn what they already knew of English nor move forward fast enough to learn English like a native speaker.

Therefore, Gloria Anzaldúa's (2007) borderland theory suggests that these adult immigrant women enacted their sense of agency, not as a power effect of language learning and immigration, but as an evolution of their dual language identity. In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting identity, spirituality, reality*, Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) described identity as being relational and:

Who and what we are depends on those surrounding us, a mix of our interactions with our alrededores/environments, with new and old narratives. Identity is multilayered, stretching in all directions, from past to present, vertically and horizontally, chronologically, and spatially. (p. 69)

In other words, identity is multi-layered and holds multiple subjectivities through our experiences and interactions in our daily lives (Anzaldúa, 2015). I had thought that immigrant women empowered themselves "only" by learning English or that they

developed a sense of agency after using their interpersonal skills with native-English speakers in the United States. Rather the women in my study (re)imagined the identities they had developed in Mexico and with this (re)imagining they flourished into a different version of themselves in the United States. With their (re)imagining, their sense of agency thrived, and they pushed against their gendered identities as *mexicanas while* living in the United States. Fittingly, in the following brief paragraphs, I will discuss my interpretation of how each mujer (re)imagined her gendered identity in the United States.

Elena's (re)imagining began soon after she visited the United States for the first time. She married and started a life here without much regard to her previous one. When I asked her to describe any differences between her life in Mexico and in the United States, her simple answer was that she transformed herself from a daughter that lived at home to a wife. She further explained that she identified as a mujer that loved the married life and did not regret her choice to marry.

She also explained that in Mexico, her life was different in that she only *helped* do household chores. But as a married woman, even though her husband did not *expect* her to cook and clean, she took on that role. This transference of women's traditional roles is part of her (re)imagining and her mother's advice. Her mother always wanted Elena to start her day with food in her stomach because the mind could think on an empty stomach. Thus, Elena described providing daily meals for her husband and re-imagining her role as a daughter into one as a wife. Since last talking to Elena, her husband had been injured and she was nursing him back to health.

Maria (re)imagined her identity, too, after immigrating to the United States. But while in Mexico, she had patiently waited for her husband to return from his long work

trips to the United States. In Mexico, she had been constrained by her mother's ideology that her place was as a stay-at-home spouse and not sitting behind a desk amongst men. In the United States, Maria re-imagined her identity and became a person that works at a church as a bookkeeper. She also became the continuing education student that got cooking, guitar and sewing lessons, sewing lessons that she later used to sew her daughter's wedding dress.

Maria (re)imagined, not only her identity as a single parent, but also her perspective on never wanting to immigrate to permanently or becoming a U.S. citizen. During the one-on-one interview Maria disclosed that her husband wanted to move back to Mexico to be closer to his mother. She was unhappy about his wish and so were her children. She explained that she had built a life here and so had her children. She was a proud mother of a lawyer, marine, and firefighter. Returning to Mexico for Maria would be a loss of freedom and an identity. In the United States, Maria described having freedom to roam and do what she could not do in Mexico. She also disclosed that if her husband insisted on moving to Mexico, she knew of ways that could prevent that from happening. This was also a way that she (re)imagined her identity as a wife because in Mexico she accepted things. But after immigrating, she began resisting to her husband's demands. She insisted on putting in her application to get amnesty. She also claimed that she now directs her own life because if she waited on her husband, she would still be waiting in Mexico. Most recently her mother-in-law passed, and the possibility now exists that her husband changed his mind about returning to Mexico.

Camilla claimed to have always been a spitfire in Mexico and that immigrating did not change her. But Camilla was also reluctant to acknowledge a (re)imagined

gendered identity. Her ideology of what a woman's role should be was that a woman takes care of her husband and children. If her husband was the person earning the primary income, it was the wife's duty to make sure all his needs were met. However, when she worked three jobs to prove a sustainable household income as a citizenship requirement, her husband's role was not reflective of her gendered ideology. Yet, taking on the role of primary breadwinner in that period was reflective of her (re)imagined identity as a wife.

Camilla also presented herself as a person who voiced her opinions and advocated not only for herself, but for others. In Mexico, she commented that she was not as outspoken, but held her thoughts inside. It was not until she came to the United States that she started resisting injustices because of her gender, sex, race, and ethnicity. Along with resisting she also opened her heart, her familial spaces and spirit to different races and ethnicities.

In addition to the other roles, she has taken on, Camilla is also currently the primary care provider for her mother, who has Alzheimer's disease. Her mother and father received their permanent residence status in the U.S. through Camilla. When Camilla brought her mother to the United States to permanently stay, her father had passed several years before. Her mother moved to the states showing symptoms of Alzheimer's and was progressively worsening. This saddened Camilla because she disclosed in our interview that she wished Mexico provided some of the services the United States did because it could have extended her father's life. In the present day, Camilla may not see how she (re)imagined herself from a wife in Mexico to an advocate, primary breadwinner, or primary caretaker, but it is reflective in her actions.



The (re)imaging of Clara started when she decided to accept her husbands' emotional and financial support of her education in Mexico. Yet, it was not until she immigrated to the United States that she fully (re)imagined her identity as an entrepreneur, wife, mother, and student. It may be true that her husband helped her to thrive and *sobrevivir* (succeed) through struggles, but it was Clara's *ganas* (urge) that pushed her to resist the power relations she encountered. She was also conscious that she was a good student and loved school. Nevertheless, because of lack of familial support, Clara ended her educational path in Mexico. It was not until she was in the United States that she would try to achieve her dreams and (re)imagine her identity to be reflective of the roles she wished to fill—a student and entrepreneur. Clara also dreamt of obtaining a two-story house, complete with a pool and car in the driveway. Through her (re)imagining of identities she evolved into the businesswoman she is today. She became a successful homeowner of several residences, that are now rental properties and her dream home. Thus, Clara (re)imagined herself from a struggling student in Mexico to a successful entrepreneur in the U.S.

Cecilia began (re)imagining her identity when her first husband's relationship with her became hostile and unsupportive. She became a single mother when her child was thirteen years old. She got a divorce and moved closer to her parents. With her parents' support, she purchased a home, set up a small boarding house and became a full-fledged businesswoman. Her identity as a single parent had evolved, and she (re)imagined herself. But this was just the beginning because soon she found herself evolving and (re)imagining her gendered identities more.

With Clara, what I found interesting was how her testimonio attested to the reality that women were held to in Mexico. She lived through the power relations that pin women against the male standards. She lived through oppressive situations and was able to decipher the patriarchal society she was in Mexico. She was also conscious of the status quo for women when she recounted her interaction with her college professor in Mexico. In the United States however, Cecilia (re)imagined her gendered identity from one of dental school dropout to a *mujer* seeking a career with support from her second husband.

Several years after her divorce she met and married a Mexican American man who brought her to the United States. He gave the much needed support for her educational path and guidance in learning English. He made remarks about Cecilia not learning English fast enough and pushed her to enter faster-paced, fee-based educational institutions. Cecilia did not comment on this but seemed pensive as she recounted how he pushed her towards learning English. Nevertheless, Anzaldúa's quote stating that our daily interactions form our layered identities, depicted Cecilia's reimagined gendered identity through her daily interactions in the United States with native English speakers and other members of her local community. She evolved with each step she made toward her goals—learn fluent English and build a career.

Overall, these *mujeres* were *auto-suficiente* (self-sufficient) with little to no direct help from others in Mexico. However, when they immigrated to the United States, they built communities where they could share their collective knowledge and resources. They were headstrong, *aventadas* (daredevils), women capable of immigrating to the United States without needing their husband's citizenship, and as Maria did, filling out the

Amnesty application with her daughter to become a United States citizen. They could raise their children, and like Camilla did, work three jobs to report wages to prove spousal support to the United States citizenship and immigration services. They were all able to be *sobresaliente* (successful) in their *educación* (education) and support their children's education, too. They did this while staying humble and true to their goals in life. These women did not learn to be auto-agentes (self-agents), autosuficientes (self-sufficient) and sobresalientes (successful) in the United States. On the contrary, they learned to apply a different version of themselves here, adapting to the roles and identities needed to survive in their own *nepantlera* (i.e., the concept of being in between; Anzaldúa, 2007).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has looked at the narratives of five mujeres from Central South Texas through the theoretical lenses of Latino cultural citizenship, *convivencia*, borderlands theory and Foucault's theory of power and knowledge. Latino cultural citizenship is important because it defined the action of the mujeres in my research and connects with *convivencia*. The connection reveals the claiming of space and the building of community to gain a notion of belonging in the broader community. English was the tool that carved their names in the fabric of United States society and enabled them to claim rights as ELLs and citizens, thus materializing themselves as cultural citizens in an established Black/White racially dichotomous country. For these mujeres to *sobresalir* (succeed) in their *educacion* (education), it was important to build community through Latino cultural citizenship and (re)imagine their identities so as not to assimilate, but to evolve to another version of themselves in the United States.

## VII. LA CONCLUSIÓN<sup>11</sup>

In this final chapter, I will summarize my findings, discuss the future implications for theory, policy and practice in the field of adult education, give recommendations for future research, and close with a personal reflection. The purpose of this qualitative study began with using *testimonios* of adult *mexicana* immigrants to document their educational experiences and their *convivencia* (co-existence) in public spaces. One purpose for this study was to bring Chicana feminist epistemology as a theoretical framework to the field of Adult Education. I found a disconnect between the way adult educational research was conducted and my own lens as a Chicana doctoral student. It became my goal to be authentic to my Latina origin while also gaining a deeper understanding of the ways adult immigrant women navigated their lives in the United States and (re)imagined their gendered identity and roles. My main research questions were,

4. What were the educational pathways of immigrant women prior to entering ESL classes?
5. What were the experiences of adult *mexicanas* who have immigrated to the US?
6. How have they (re)imagined their gendered identities since coming to the US?

The following sections summarize my findings.

### Summary of the Findings

Much of my data collection and analysis were conducted during the pandemic that began in March of 2020. The pandemic forced me to change the way I collected data. It also limited my study because I did not have a guide on how to conduct a virtual

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<sup>11</sup> La Conclusión translates to “The Conclusion.”

methodology. Despite the inconveniences and modifications, my study resulted in narrating the lives of five mujeres. These mujeres ranged in ages from their late thirties to early seventies. I chose them through convenience sampling. All the mujeres had been in my ESL classes in previous years and stayed in touch with me via WhatsApp. Four out of the five were born in northern Mexico. One was born in the United States, but her parents returned to live in Mexico when she was two years old. She returned to permanently reside in the United States with her husband in her early to mid-twenties.

### **Research Question 1**

For research question one, the educational pathways of immigrant women prior to entering ESL classes were not all filled with struggles. What they lacked were the resources to continue learning in a formal environment in Mexico. Unfortunately, they were confronted with the disempowering effects of the gendered power relations there. Sexist ideologies propelled the mujeres to drop out of school. Financial hardships led them to seek jobs to support their families rather than continue their education. *El sueño americano* (the American dream) resonated for some of the women, but not for others. So, when they finally chose to immigrate, they did so for different reasons and not for *el sueño americano*. They also knew that when they left Mexico, they would leave behind what could no longer serve them.

Prior to immigrating and entering ESL classes, these mujeres were measured against the sexist standards of their parents, society and/or academic professionals. These standards constrained and bound them to certain expectations, blocking any continuation of their educational pathway. All the women wanted to continue their education in Mexico but lacked the financial resources or familial support. They had the *ganas* (the

will) but for one reason or other they could not finish school. Elena had to continue working to help her family financially. Maria was told by her mother that she should take care of her husband instead of going to school among men. Maria denied herself the opportunity to continue her education in Mexico because it was her mother's belief that a woman's place was at home taking care of the household. Maria was scolded by her mother for wanting to continue her education and soon after she gave up on the idea. Camilla and Clara did not have the monetary support but would have continued if they had. Cecilia's husband supported her education but continuously told her to stay home with their child. When she was divorced her financial means were not enough to be a single parent and go to school.

I also discovered that they never planned to permanently stay in the United States before or after they immigrated. Elena and Cecilia did not plan on getting married to someone who would immigrate them. Elena married because when she visited her then boyfriend their temporary status as a couple complemented their relationship. Cecilia thought she would never marry after her divorce but soon found herself married to a U.S. citizen. Maria decided that she would not wait for her husband to sojourn to the United States and immigrated with three children. Camilla became convinced that Mexico could not sustain the family she and her husband wanted to build. Therefore, all the mujeres compared their lives in Mexico to their lives in the U.S. and concluded that the resources were better in the United States. They believed that if they stayed in Mexico, they would not have the same opportunities as those in the U.S. Some of those opportunities came in the form of educational or financial resources for themselves and their children. All but one had children and those who did, wanted them to succeed in life better than they had.

## Research Question 2

Research question two explored their experiences after they had immigrated to the United States. Soon after deciding to permanently stay in the United States, they discovered that English was needed to navigate public spaces. All the mujeres serendipitously found out about the ESL classes and saw them as an opportunity to pursue their own educations. For example, in Elena's testimonio she recalled how she was walking to pass the time but happened to walk by the elementary school at the precise time that the ESL classes began. Elena's afternoon walk turned into an opportunity to learn English and have the means to communicate her needs to others in south central Texas.

What I also discovered was that their husbands were the mujeres' biggest supporters of continuing their education, especially of learning English. They all recounted that they had asked their husbands if they could attend the community ESL classes that were free. Their husbands did not object nor did they explicitly demand extra attention from their spouses. However, the mujeres went to school, but still cooked, cleaned and took care of the children because they believed it was expected even though it was not explicitly stated.

Two out of the five mujeres were astounded that the ESL classes were free. Elena and Cecilia knew about the classes by word of mouth and expressed surprise at finding out that they would not have to pay to learn English. Both explained that in Mexico if you did not have the financial means, you could not learn a foreign language. The other three mujeres had children in the elementary school and saw flyers advertising the classes. The

three mujeres with children were also the ones who reported wanting to learn English to communicate with their children's educational institution.

I also found that most of their social networking came from their ESL classrooms. They built friendships that continued years after they attended classes. They all explained that the interactions with their peers combatted their loneliness and the isolation they felt after immigrating. Not only did the mujeres make friends with their peers but learnt English. Learning English expanded their social networks to native English speakers.

English was at the center of the mujeres' testimonios because if they could not communicate their needs, they were dependent on translators. In a social setting this left them vulnerable and exposed to being taken advantage of. Yet, by learning English and the basic elements of the language, they could enter situations in different social settings without feeling embarrassed or ashamed of mispronouncing words and could advocate for themselves.

The experiences learning English for these mujeres gave them the opportunity to enter settings without being *Othered*. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2015) explained that "perceived distinctions, are frequently evoked to justify structures of inequality, differential treatment, subordinate status" and is a form of *Othering* (p. 105). The difference for these mujeres was speaking English not to assimilate into the American culture, but so they could learn it as use it as a tool.

For example, Camilla uses English to communicate her mother's needs to her healthcare providers. Elena orders food at a restaurant for her and her husband. In these two examples, the mujeres are no longer limited to interpreters, who could misinterpret valuable information. In Camilla's case, it is life-threatening if she does not communicate



her mother's needs. Elena's situation may not be life-threatening, but she is no longer limited to eating at home because she does not speak English.

### **Research Question 3**

The last research question examined their gendered roles and how they (re)imagined their gendered identities since coming to the United States. My findings suggest that the majority of the *mujeres* learned their gendered roles from their mothers. They learned that to be a daughter was to be obedient, strong, *auto-suficiente* (self-sufficient), *sobresaliente* (successful), responsible for child-rearing and when they married, the devoted wife. Their role as a mother, therefore, was to always put their children's needs above their own. The *mujeres*' careers, education and personal care would come second to the needs of the family.

Also, the *mujeres*' role as a wife, did not overwhelm them or challenge their notions of traditional gender roles. They reported that they fulfilled their role as a wife, not as an obligation, but as a reward to their husbands for being the primary breadwinner. Yet, four out of the five *mujeres* acknowledged that they fulfilled their duties aware that unfairness or inequality existed between a man and a woman. They knew that they were at a disadvantage when it came to their gender. However, it was difficult for them to internally battle the patriarchal ideologies regarding what it entailed to be a "good domesticated *mujer*." (*Una mujer hogareña.*)

Camilla, on the other hand, did not acknowledge unfairness or inequality between the sexes and upheld her ideology that the duties of a loving wife are contingent on the duties of the husband being fulfilled. She explained that when you love your husband and he provides all the necessary provisions for the household, then it is your responsibility as

a woman to make sure that your husband is well taken care of. Camilla also explained that her husband never told her to stop learning English and supported her throughout her classes. Camilla's husband did offer her a word of caution that she should always have their children well attended, especially when they were still young.

These roles, nevertheless, were modified, or (re)imagined, after they immigrated to the United States. One of the *mujeres'* roles was now that of student and the fact that their families were their primary motivation was not surprising. In the United States they quickly learned that to *sobresalir* in the United States meant you first learned the dominant language. This need resounded through their *consejos* to other *mujeres* in similar situations.

Learn English, *porque el ingles es indispensable*. Indispensable. That is what English is to these *mujeres*. They did not look at English as a doorway to assimilate into the American culture. They believed that to survive, advocate for your rights, and have a *convivencia* among English native speakers, English was important. Therefore, they knew to advise newcomers to first learn as much English as they could because it would help them gain resources and overcome language barriers in the United States.

They also believed, and rightfully so, that to *sobresalir* (be successful) in your education in the United States without learning or knowing English, would be difficult to navigate in English dominant public spaces. For example, Maria was embarrassed when she incorrectly ordered a plain hamburger at a fast-food chain restaurant. Since then, she managed to learn English and communicate her food choices correctly. Elena explained that knowing English makes you unbound to a specific location. She reported that traveling and knowing English helped her communicate her needs with others that did not

know Spanish but were English as a second language learners in Italy. Camilla continuously advocated for herself, but with English she was able to advocate for others as well. Clara explained that a person needs to take risks in order to win, if not for themselves then for their children. Cecilia continues learning English to enter and graduate from a technical career and aspires to be a professional.

The testimonios and their consejos showed these mujeres to be *auto-suficientes* (self-sufficient) amongst the demanding gender power relations in Mexico. Their *auto-suficiencia* (self-sufficiency) also helped them overcome the situational and language barriers encountered when they immigrated to the United States. Breaking down barriers helped them to further develop their *auto-agencia* (self-agency). The discovery that their agency was not new but being enriched in the United States challenged my assumptions. It is my interpretation that these mujeres claimed their strength to forge ahead before immigrating, and their auto-agencia (self-agency) propelled them to continue their life's journey and continue their educational pathway.

### **Implications for Theory, Policy and Practice**

This section describes the implications of my study to the theory, policy, and practice of Adult Education field. I attempt to explain how I added to the disruption of adult education theories centered on Whiteness. I also explain that our immigrant population should have a voice and be seen in order to disrupt their invisibility in policies.

#### **Theory**

First, adding to adult education theories, Chicana feminist epistemology is a new alternative framework for members of Chicana/Latina groups in the field of adult education. It is not a secret nor are scholars unaware that the field of adult education,

although progressive in nature, has centered on Whiteness. Just recently Elaine Manglitz and Stephen D. Brookfield (2020) wrote about how “the racialization of adult education theorizing—the way it is viewed through the lens of Eurocentric Whiteness, with Whiteness regarded as the positively valued, unspoken norm— [and how it] is rarely commented on” (p. 429). These authors discussed the history of adult education as fraught with Whiteness and privilege ignoring other racial groups until recently. I agree with these authors and believe that for change to occur studies like mine and others pushing theoretical boundaries should bring down the invisible gate that keeps *Othered* groups away.

Second, my study, though very specific to my ethnicity and heritage, can disrupt methodologies and acknowledge alternate ways of knowing for both researcher and participants. What I mean is not that what I did was completely new, but that decolonizing adult education can only be achieved if we, as adult educators, begin questioning the way we do research (Hanson & Jaffe, 2020). Hence, a Chicana feminist epistemology in adult education, as a theoretical perspective can help start the discussions.

The third implication is for Chicana feminist scholarship rather than adult education because it adds to Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2007) call for Chicana activist-scholars to continue expanding on concepts, methodologies, and other ways of knowing. Chicana feminist activist-scholars like Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) and Lindsay Pérez Huber (2012) do educational research on Chicana/Latina higher education students. A few like Sofia Villenas (1996) and Emma Pérez (1999) situate their studies on immigrant communities and women. No one has attempted to incorporate a Chicana feminist epistemology

conceptual framework into adult education research studies (Peña et al., 2020). It is an honor and a privilege to ground my research in this framework and add to the growing Chicana feminist scholarship in educational research.

### **Policy**

My finding about resisting assimilation informs adult education policy makers by highlighting the true needs of our immigrant population. My participants were students from adult education ESL courses with an interest in learning English to navigate public spaces that were not immigrant friendly. I found that they practiced Latino cultural citizenship by forging a community from their ESL classes and learning English to claim rights in English-only spaces rather than to learn English to enter the *American* culture. The mujeres claimed cultural citizenship because they immigrated to a country that did not give them a sense of *belonging*. What I mean was that they were English-only public spaces where most of the individuals could not communicate in Spanish with my participants. Understanding the cultural and educational practices of my participants, stakeholders in the adult education community of immigrant learners, can expand to include other immigrant groups. Traditionally, a deficit model has informed policies and problematized the need of immigrant groups to use learning resources to continue their education. They are informed by a colonizing mindset like the one with which adult and continuing programs began (Hanson & Jaffe, 2020).

Cindy Hanson and JoAnne Jaffe (2020) explained that “In the past, ACE [Adult and Continuing Education] participated in colonizing adult learners largely because it operated within domains financed and led by state- and church-related institutions” (p. 343). Colonization is hegemonic toward subjugated groups because the dominant group’s

cultural practices and ideologies are valued more than their subjugated counterparts. In my study's case, my participants were navigating through the culture that valued and privileged White cultural practices and ideologies in South Central Texas. But regardless of the location, implications for other subjugated groups in adult education programs can be similar. Furthermore, implications can inform adult education instructors by considering the experiential and cultural knowledge that I discussed in my study of immigrant students that can be displayed as assets rather than deficits.

Richard Valencia (1997) explained that “deficit thinking typically offers a *description* of behavior in pathological or dysfunctional ways – referring to deficits, deficiencies, limitations or shortcomings in individuals, families and cultures” (p. 7). Although Valencia (1997) spoke about school failure in the general sense of school aged children and young adults, deficit thinking applies to adult learners, too. It affects adult learners because it reinforces and potentially perpetuates negative stereotypes for racialized groups. For my participants, their educational struggles held notions of deficit thinking from previous educational institutions in Mexico about women's education and their inherent value in being taught. They entered U.S. classrooms believing that any knowledge they contributed was pointless to share. However, in speaking with these mujeres and listening to their stories, I discovered that they held a lot of experiential knowledge. The lives they lived in Mexico gave them the tools to succeed educationally in the United States. They understood that they needed to learn English if they wanted to be visible within the U.S./Texan culture and role models for their children.

## **Practice**

My study can inform adult education practitioners by reminding them to check their biases regarding negative stereotypes regarding immigrant learners. Adult learners, for this and other future studies, specifically ESL immigrant learners, hold a lot of knowledge that can be tapped into by an adult education instructor. My study supports adult education scholars call to incorporate culturally relevant andragogy (Alfred, 2015; Carlock Jr., 2016; Guo, 2015; Joaquin & Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Muñoz, 2012), but to also incorporate *convivencia* among peers and the use of reflective narratives. Lastly, ESL classes can be designed as student-centered andragogy premised on authentic experiences such as those described in this study. My study also therefore implies that adult education instructors should act as and practice being facilitators. By collaborating with students and asking them what they need rather than telling them, we can give students the opportunity to share and have a sense of belonging in the adult education classroom.

My findings also add to the scarce information found on Latinas, especially mexicanas, and their lived experiences, pre- and post- the journey across the U.S.-Mexican border, particularly on how they find educational and financial resources through their *convivencias* (co-exisiting) with other members of their ESL classroom community. I discovered that their communal experiences make them stronger than they already were. The mujeres unknowingly practiced Latino cultural citizenship to help resist negative stereotypes associated with Latina/o communities and their claiming of public spaces and sense of belonging. In my findings I explained that they were learning

English to survive in the United States not to assimilate but claim community, rights and space.

Finally, because my study collected testimonios of immigrant women through the theoretical framework of a Chicana feminist epistemology. The participants were women from Mexico who attended adult and continuing ESL classes. Their testimonios were valuable to my study because much of the adult and continuing education literature, adopts a one-way lens narrating stories of adult educators in ESL classrooms neglecting the first-person narrative of the student (Lee, 2013). Thus, my study demonstrates the potential value to adult education instructors of collecting narratives from students so as to better understand their lives and to bring an awareness of differences in power structures that their students may have previously encountered and thereby legitimize their students' experiential knowledge when writing and reflecting on their personal stories. Doing so can also create a better student welcoming in the ESL classrooms.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations for my study were that I focused my research on Mexican women. The criteria for my study included women who immigrated to the United States and permanently resided in Texas for a minimum of two years. They were women whose ages were between 35 to 70 years old. They were also students in an adult education ESL program in an urban area of Central Texas.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of my study were that I could not interview my participants face-to-face. After I received my internal review board (IRB) approval, the entire nation went



into a lockdown due to COVID-19. My methodology was modified to be done via an online platform. My plan was to meet and share a communal space with my participants to make the study more personal. Unfortunately, for health and safety reasons we met online as a group. This restructured the way participants interacted with one another because it limited my study to a two-dimensional setting.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was created, observed, and written through a female Chicana perspective and included the voices of female immigrant participants. I gained insight into how learning English was the steppingstone they needed to enter the job or career force, feel confident in ordering at restaurants or combatting their loneliness. A future study could include immigrant men and the formal and informal ways they learn English in the United States. A Chicana/Latina perspective could provide in-depth insider knowledge from these men's stories. It could shine a light on the amount of education and the whys of learning English for men.

For my study, I did not interview the husbands, but another recommendation for future research is to get men's viewpoint on their wives' educations. A male perspective is especially important because my study discovered that husbands were the biggest supporters of their wives' educations both in Mexico and the United States. On more than one occasion the mujeres stated that their husbands depended on them learning English to help them with the language barrier, implying that their husbands depended on their wives for language support. Future studies could explore this further.

Another recommendation for future research is to recreate the convivencia testimonial with the participants face-to-face because the one-dimensional virtual setting

did not allow for participants to mingle and properly *convivir* (co-exist) with each other. Including a get-to-know-you activity would enhance a *convivencia* among the participants. Future virtual methods might also include an activity that incorporates break-out sessions among each participant to encourage rapport building.

### **Closing Statement of Personal Reflection**

Bringing this study to a closure is bittersweet because it was a lot more personal for me than I thought it would be. This study was meaningful to me because one of my participant's testimonio was like my family's own life story. When I listened to Maria for the first time, her story resonated because she reminded me that the person who has pushed me was my mother. Maria had similar life struggles and ideologies which made it difficult for me to detach myself from her testimonio. I tried to leave any biases or personal narratives from tainting my analysis. Yet in the end, I was able to thoroughly listen to her testimonio and understood that her similarities and my inside knowledge helped me decipher what she truly was speaking about.

### **Chapter Summary**

Overall, this chapter discussed a summary of my findings by answering my three research questions. My findings reviewed what their educational pathways were before they entered an ESL program and discovered that the mujeres experienced a lack of familial support and financial resources to continue their education in Mexico. It was not until they immigrated into the United States that they experienced learning as an adult. They enrolled in ESL classes and learned English which gave them the confidence to communicate their needs. The familial support, in the United States was given by their husbands who encouraged them to continue studying English. English served them in

connecting with a social network to find additional resources. It was through social networking and their interactions with native English speakers that being *Othered* lessened. These mujeres, thus, (re)imagined their identities as daughters, mothers, wives and English language learners. The mujeres were *auto-suficiente* (self-sufficient) and built communities where they could share their collective knowledge and resources. They were headstrong and *aventadas* (daredevils) all along but adapted their roles and identities as they needed to survive in their own *nepantlera* (i.e., the concept of being in between; Anzaldúa, 2007).

This chapter also considered future implications for theory, policy and practice in the field of adult education. Theoretically, conducting a research study that disrupts traditional Western research gives scholars a better way to decolonize adult and continuing education. Adult educators can take notice of the testimonios as a good practice to incorporate into their classrooms and build classroom rapport. Policy makers should also consider that people that are learning English are not doing it to assimilate, but to feel a sense of belonging in a foreign place. I then gave recommendations for future research to expand my study to include men's narratives. Finally, I close with a personal reflection on how this study resonated with me and my family's narrative.

## APPENDIX SECTION

### APPENDIX A

#### INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

**Study Title:** *Nuestras Experiencias*, Our Experiences: *Testimonios* of *mexicanas* in the US

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Ann Brooks    **Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor:** Cindy Peña

*Investigator will collect consent forms.*

**For focus groups:**

“Welcome and thank you for participating in this convivencia testimonial.”

**For interview:**

“Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.”

The purpose of this focus group/interview is to get your feedback about how we can better serve adult education students, specifically English as a second language (ESL), such as yourselves. Specifically, we want to understand what your experiences were as an English as a second language (ESL) student were in your home country and after arriving and living in the US and continuing your educational journey. We want to understand what some of your successes and possible barriers were, and what you did or do to overcome those barriers.

“We’d like to remind you that to protect the privacy of focus group/interview members, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms, and we ask that you not discuss what is discussed in the focus group with anyone else.”

“The focus group will last about two to three hours, and the interview will last about 30-60 minutes. Both sessions of the discussion we will audiotape to make sure that it is recorded accurately.”

“Do you have any questions for us before we begin?”

## APPENDIX B

### *Convivencia testimonial/Interview Guiding Questions: Nuestras*

*Experiencias: Testimonios of mexicanas as ESL Learners*

**Date:**

**Location:**

**Principal Investigator:** *Dr. Ann Brooks*

**Co-Investigator:** *Cindy Peña*

**Respondent Alias:**

**Gender:**

**Explanation of study:**

*This interview is completely confidential and will be used for educational purposes only. Your help in answering these questions will provide a framework for understanding and documenting of adult mexicanas. If at any moment you do not understand a question or need it repeated please let me know. It is also your right not to answer and skip a question.*

### **Questions:**

1. Reflect on a time when you went to school in Mexico. Tell me about it.
  - a. Highest educational level attained?
  - b. Interactions with teachers, or classmates?
  - c. resources (financial, familial or institutional support)?
2. Many times, we put on different hats, play roles, in our lives. We must be a good student, great mother, devoted daughter, team player to your spouse or simply just be a good person in society. Share a story when one of those roles interfered or supported your educational goals?

- a. Where did you experience this, in Mexico or the US?
- 3. In the US, English is important for communication. Many ESL students say that they want to learn English because it can help them advance. Share a story of the exact moment that motivated you to learn English in the US?
- 4. Share a story of how you kept yourself motivated to learn English or the moment that you decided ESL classes were not for you.
- 5. Upon arriving to the US, what behaviors did you notice other women had that were different from yours?
  - a. For example, some women in the US are considered to have a certain level of freedom from family constraints. They do not have such pressures on them to be dependent on their husbands or work to help with the finances. Some women become equal partners in the relationship if they both work and share the responsibilities of the children, cooking or house chores. Or if they are single may not have to rush to marry and can continue their education.
- 6. Reflect on a time when you successfully spoke English outside of the ESL classroom.
  - a. How did that experience make you feel?
- 7. Reflect on a time when you unsuccessfully attempted to speak English, you were stuck and unable to get your point across.
  - a. How did that make you feel?

## APPENDIX C

One-on-One Interview Questions [2020]: GENERALIZED FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS		
<p>[Immigrant Journey] ¿Cuándo tomo la decisión de venir a los EE. UU., que dijo su familia? [When you decided to immigrate, what did your family say?]</p> <p>¿Fue fácil o difícil? [Was it easy or difficult?]</p> <p>[Immigrant Journey] [Customized question for participant being interviewed.]</p> <p><b>I WANT TO KNOW WHAT HER LIFE WAS LIKE IN MEXICO BEFORE IMMIGRATING TO THE US.</b></p> <p>[Immigrant Journey] How long ago did you come to the United States? When you decided to permanently move to the United States, what did your family say?</p>	<p>[Education] ¿Cómo cuanto tiempo le tomo aprender ingles para comunicarse con personas de EE. UU.? [How long did it take you to speak English in the U.S.?]</p> <p>[Education] [Customized question for participant being interviewed.]</p> <p>[Education] ¿Sigue yendo a clases de ingles? Si- y que tal son? No - Porque razón ya no regresaste?[Do you still go to ESL classes? Why or why not?]</p> <p>[Education] When I was younger, my mom would tell me stories about her struggle in getting me to like kindergarten. She claimed I cried every day. Now we laugh because she says that she struggled to make me stay in school when I was younger but now, she can't get me out of it. What was school like when you were a kid? Do you have any stories?</p>	<p>[Gendered Identity] [Customized question for participant being interviewed.]</p> <p>[Gendered Identity] ¿Que consejo le daría u otras Latina o inmigrante?</p> <p><b>HOW DOES SHE FULFILL THE ROLES SHE'S EXPECTED TO PLAY?</b></p> <p>[Gendered Identity] Can you tell me what a typical day in your life looks like? If you were to compare it to your mother's, Is it different or similar to yours'?</p> <p>How about your sisters or cousins that are not in the US? Do they lead different or similar lives?</p>

## APPENDIX D

### INFORMED CONSENT: PHASE ONE

English Version

**Study Title:** *Nuestras Experiencias*, Our Experiences: Testimonios de *mexicanas* in the U.S.

<b>Principal Investigator:</b> Dr. Ann Brooks	<b>Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor:</b> <b>Cindy Peña</b>
<b>Email:</b> abrooks@txstate.edu	<b>Email:</b> c_p317@txstate.edu
<b>Telephone Number:</b> 512-245-1936	<b>Telephone number:</b> 210-367-5586

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

You are invited to participate in a research study to help document the educational experiences of adult *mexicana* immigrants and how they commune their lives in public spaces. The information gathered will be used to create a collective story about the different lived experiences of *Mexicana* immigrants for a doctoral dissertation. You are being asked to participate because you are between the ages of 30-55, identify as a female, have an English proficiency level of intermediate to advanced, be of Mexican nationality, are or were enrolled in a local adult and community education program, and have resided in the US for more than a year. The research study consists of two phases for data collection. If you participate in phase one and choose to opt-out of the second phase, please let the co-investigator know. The second phase of the study is also crucial and will hinder the outcome of the study if you are not able to participate.

### PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in the following:

- Two phases of this research study.
  - o **Phase One** is the ***CONVIVENCIA TESTIMONIAL***
  - o **Phase Two** is the **follow-up interviews**

We will set up a time for you to meet one of the investigators at a local community classroom or library conference room. You will first sign the Phase One Consent Form.



We will invite you and 4-5 other participants to meet and discuss their lived educational experiences in the U.S. The discussion topics include your lived experiences in Mexico prior to immigrating and after immigrating to the US; any obstacles that you encountered while continuing your education, how did you overcome any obstacles, your role as a *Mexicana* in the US, an immigrant and an English language learner and motivations for learning English. A member of the research team will help guide the discussion. To protect the privacy of focus group members, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms, and we ask that you not discuss the conversation in the focus group with anyone else. The focus group will last about 2-3 hours and we will audio tape the discussion to make sure that it is recorded accurately.

### **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

The study poses little risk as you will be asked only to explain your lived experiences in front of participants with similar backgrounds. Please note that you may choose not to answer any questions in which you feel uncomfortable answering. In the event that some of topics discussed make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating you may seek counseling services by calling 2-1-1/United Way Helpline. They are located in San Antonio.

### **BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide a collective story that will inform adult education practitioners and program policy makers.

### **EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

### **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

### **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may

withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Ann Brooks: **512-245-1936** or **abrooks@txstate.edu**.

This project was approved by the Texas State IRB on [date]. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-245-8351 – ([dgobert@txstate.edu](mailto:dgobert@txstate.edu)) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - ([meg201@txstate.edu](mailto:meg201@txstate.edu)).

### DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Your participation in this research project may be recorded using audio and video recording devices. Recordings will assist with accurately documenting your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio and video recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio/video recording:

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Printed Name** of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX E

### INFORMED CONSENT: PHASE TWO

English Version

**Study Title:** *Nuestras Experiencias*, Our Experiences: Testimonios de *mexicanas* in the US

<b>Principal Investigator:</b> Dr. Ann Brooks	<b>Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor:</b> <b>Cindy Peña</b>
<b>Email:</b> abrooks@txstate.edu	<b>Email:</b> c_p317@txstate.edu
<b>Telephone Number:</b> 512-245-1936	<b>Telephone number:</b> 210-367-5586

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

#### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

You are invited to participate in a research study to help document the educational experiences of adult *mexicana* immigrants and how they commune their lives in public spaces. The information gathered will be used to create a collective story about the different lived experiences of *Mexicana* immigrants for a doctoral dissertation. You are being asked to participate because you are between the ages of 30-55, identify as a female, have an English proficiency level of intermediate to advanced, be of Mexican nationality, are or were enrolled in a local adult and community education program, and have resided in the US for more than a year. The research study consists of two phases for data collection. If you participate in phase one and choose to opt-out of the second phase, please let the co-investigator know. The second phase of the study is also crucial and will hinder the outcome of the study if you are not able to participate.

#### PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in the following:

- Two phases of this research study.
  - **Phase One** is the *CONVIVENCIA*

#### *TESTIMONIAL*

- **Phase Two** is the **follow-up interviews**

We will set up a time for you to meet one of the investigators your home or local library conference room. You will first sign participate in Phase One of this research study.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in 1 in-depth interview **after completing the *convivencia testimonial* and following-up with the co-investigator.** Each interview will last approximately **30-60 minutes.** During the interviews, you will be asked **questions or topics discussed in phase one.** The interview will be audio, and the researcher may take notes as well.

### **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

The study poses little risk as you will be asked only to explain your lived experiences in more detail than in phase one. Please note that you may choose not to answer any questions in which you feel uncomfortable answering.

In the event that some of topics discussed make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating you may seek counseling services by calling 2-1-1/United Way Helpline. They are located in San Antonio.

### **BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide **a collective story that will inform adult education practitioners and program policy makers.**

### **EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

### **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

### **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

## QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Ann Brooks: **512-245-1936** or **abrooks@txstate.edu**.

This project was approved by the Texas State IRB on [date]. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – ([dgobert@txstate.edu](mailto:dgobert@txstate.edu)) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - ([meg201@txstate.edu](mailto:meg201@txstate.edu)).

## DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Your participation in this research project may be recorded using audio recording devices. Recordings will assist with accurately documenting your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio and video recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio/video recording:

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX F



*The rising STAR of Texas*

In future correspondence please refer to 7040

February 18, 2020

Cindy Pena  
Texas State University  
601 University Drive San  
Marcos, TX 78666

Dear Cindy:

Your IRB application titled "Nuestras Experiencias: Testimonios of Mexicanas as ESL Learners" was reviewed and approved by the Texas State University IRB. It has been determined that risks to subjects are: (1) minimized and reasonable; and that (2) research procedures are consistent with a sound research design and do not expose the subjects to unnecessary risk. Reviewers determined that: (1) benefits to subjects are considered along with the importance of the topic and that outcomes are reasonable; (2) selection of subjects is equitable; and (3) the purposes of the research and the research setting is amenable to subjects' welfare and producing desired outcomes; that indications of coercion or prejudice are absent, and that participation is clearly voluntary.

1. In addition, the IRB found that you need to orient participants as follows: (1) informed consent is required and signatures will be obtained; (2) Provision is made for collecting, using and storing data in a manner that protects the safety and privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the data; (3) Appropriate safeguards are included to protect the rights and welfare of the subjects. (4) Compensation is not provided for participation.

**This project is therefore approved at the Exempt Review Level  
Category 2 Surveys, Interviews, or Public observation**

2. Please note that the institution is not responsible for any actions regarding this protocol before approval. If you expand the project at a later date to use other instruments, please re-apply. Copies of your request for human subjects review, your application, and this approval, are maintained in the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance.

**Report any changes to this approved protocol to this office. All unanticipated events and adverse events are to be reported to the IRB within 3 days.**

Sincerely,

Monica Gonzales  
IRB Specialist  
Office of Research Integrity and Compliance

CC: Dr. Ann Brooks

OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH  
601 University Drive | JCK #489 | San Marcos, Texas 78666-4616  
Phone: 512.245.2314 | fax: 512.245.3847 | [www.txstate.edu](http://www.txstate.edu)

*This letter is an electronic communication from Texas State University-San Marcos, a member of The Texas State University System.*

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