



## Testimonios from the Border-Shattering the Notion that Women of Color Don't Do Theory

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*TESTIMONIOS* FROM THE BORDER:  
SHATTERING THE NOTION THAT WOMEN OF COLOR DON'T DO THEORY

A Dissertation Presented

by

GLORIA GONZALES BARRAGAN

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Approved as to style and content by:

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Laura A. Valdiviezo, Chair

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Sally Campbell Galman, Member

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Mari Castañeda, Member

---

Christine McCormick, Dean  
College of Education

## **DEDICATION**

For Richie and Cristina,

My hero and my soul mate:

You are the blessing of a lifetime.

This is for you.

To mom, who left us far too soon:

I think about you every day and I miss you very much.

Thank you for your strength.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.*

Albert Schweitzer

I thank the Lord for the abundance of blessings in my life, beginning with the two children who honor me daily. No parent could ask for more. Cristina: your gentle way and your technological expertise were a godsend, as always. Richie: your questions, your humor, and your strength were, as always, very reassuring to your mom.

To the women in my study; thank you for sharing your stories. They were important. Others will benefit from reading them. To Dr. Laura Valdiviezo, my chair: the soft and reassuring sound of your voice saying “*tranquila*” will always stay with me. Dr. Mari Castañeda, inviting me into your reading group was the most valuable welcome any new doctoral student could hope for. Dr. Sally Galman, thank you so much for your valuable feedback. Dr. Donaldo Macedo, you recognized and rekindled a passion that was apparently waiting for yet another outlet: just as I thought I was ready to retire... you turned my life upside down in wonderful ways. Dr. Judith Carmona, it was by your passion about *testimonio* that I came to believe in the power of the genre - what a blessing it was for you to come to the Southwest! Dr. Jennie Luna, I am grateful for the reminder to “take my time” because my work was important. Dr. Theresa Cortez, your guidance was very much appreciated. Linda Guthrie: more than you know, you were a godsend for so many of us at the School of Education...our heartfelt thanks and love!

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## ABSTRACT

*TESTIMONIOS* FROM THE BORDER:  
SHATTERING THE NOTION THAT WOMEN OF COLOR DON'T DO THEORY

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GLORIA GONZALES BARRAGAN, B.S., UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

M.Ed., UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

Ed.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Assistant Professor Laura A. Valdiviezo

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of 10 Chicana scholars who live and work on the southwest border of the United States. The literature reveals a severe underrepresentation of Chicanas in higher education over the last 40 years as well as a critical need for more current research and methodologies that have a potential to validate the lived experiences of this group. This study is based on a Chicana feminist epistemology as it explores institutional, economic, and cultural challenges and interrogates issues related to ethnicity, gender, social class, culture, political practice, and how these have impacted the lives of 10 women on the southwestern border of the United States. *Testimonio* serves as *process* (interviewing and transcribing), as *product* (audiotapes and transcriptions), and as *pedagogy* as it re-envision the sites of learning for Chicanas. Analysis and results from *testimonios* demonstrate that Internalized Oppression, Patriarchy, and Support and Coping played a role in the experiences of most of these women. Implications include the need for social justice studies in higher education, particularly for educators, and inclusion of Mexican American history in textbooks. *Testimonio* can also become a powerful tool in efforts to involve parents in schools by providing them with opportunities to identify challenges related to their



children's academic progress. *Testimonio* has the potential to become an effective way open dialogues that further encourage parents to become agents of change in partnership with schools.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

When I was two years old, my father was murdered by two White men. He was robbed, shot in the back of the head, and burned in the taxi cab that he drove for a living. This was my first and most significant experience with White supremacy and racism. The men who murdered my father sealed the fate of my family for the rest of our lives. My siblings and I grew up without a father. My mother fought depression the rest of her life and did her very best to support us with only a fifth grade education. I grew up watching her sadness, but I never knew how to make her feel better. Instead, I think I internalized feelings of fear and doubt; feelings that took center stage when I became a doctoral student at the age of 55.

As I began the review of the literature for this dissertation, I was captivated by five scholarly articles. I read and re-read these and repeatedly highlighted and meticulously color coded my notes on the margins. I made 3x5 index cards and then re-copied these onto 4x6 cards, then made detailed charts recounting what they said. When I realized the summer had gone by, I regretted spending so much time on these few readings and wondered why I would cling to them for so long, losing precious time. Today, I know why. They provided affirmation. They gave me confidence because they were written by women of color like me. I reached a turning point when I read the work of Villenas (1996) and Zurita (2001). I thought: Wow, these very famous and accomplished Chicana scholars writing in the likes of the *Harvard Education Review* about confusion and self-doubt when conducting research? So these were legitimate objects of academic study? What an affirmation this was for me.



But there was something else about these stories that captivated me that I could not name at the time. Unbeknownst to me, I was reading *testimonio*, a genre of writing that contributes to feminist thought as it gives voice to and honors the women who share their *papelitos guardados* (silenced histories) (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 3). *Testimonio* also rejects patriarchy and has the powerful potential to reveal and document those histories as it sets the stage for the voice of the oppressed to emerge; to contest; to “talk back” (hooks, 1989, p. 5). I had some “silenced histories” of my own that I had come to unveil over a long period of self-interrogation and deep reflection, after completing a mini study my second year at UMass. In the process of conducting that study, I had positioned myself above my own participant, a Mexican immigrant. A year later, when I fully realized what I had done, I moved into an intense level of curiosity about why I would think I was better than this immigrant. As I struggled to understand my arrogance, I discovered histories that had to do with fear and doubt; histories that went back to my childhood. It was then that I unveiled my own *papelitos guardados*.

I had come to the doctoral process after raising two kids alone. I had moved out of the housing projects into my own home and had stepped “up” and away from food stamps. Because finances were very tight in those years and food stamps did not cover things like toilet paper, I once decided to “take” two rolls home with me in my big book bag from the bathroom in the college I was attending! I justified “taking” those two rolls by boldly telling myself: “This institution will not be hurt in any way whatsoever if I take this paper.” Of even much more importance to me than finances in those days was the concern about how I would raise my kids after my recent divorce. Therefore, many years

later, when I decided to pursue a doctorate, I thought: Compared to raising two children all by myself, just how difficult can a doctorate be?

Self-doubt and fear set in within days of beginning my course work. I spent hours deciphering one page. This was an entirely new language. At first I wondered if I was just too old to do this. Who goes after a doctorate after retirement? But this uncertainty was due to something deeper than my age: it was self-doubt that haunted me. I have since come to understand that my doubt was rooted in experiences related to my ethnicity, gender, and social class. My fear of the doctorate had everything to do with where and how I was brought up; everything to do with what I heard daily as a child living on the border; everything to do with how I elevated myself over my study participant. It had everything to do with what I have since come to understand as internalized oppression.

In a discussion about the meaning of internalized oppression, my good friend, Dr. Nelida Matos, shared a powerful insight: “*Es una inferioridad siempre metida en el alma de nosotros por el sistema. La han puesto con clavo y martillo—fluye por nuestras venas*” (Internalized oppression is an inferiority deeply engrained into our soul by the system with hammer and nails. It flows through our veins). This is an authentic and partial albeit passionate explanation of internalized oppression; not the sort of explanation that I found anywhere in my review of the academic literature. I find this problematic because the reality is that a myriad of emotions come into play in the process of earning a doctorate. Some scholars concur. For example, Zurita (2001) argues that we should write passionately, and if not, why write at all? Furthermore, Florio-Ruane (2001) argues that in order to think critically about a topic, one needs to be touched emotionally by it. Yet, the academic literature makes no mention of passion. Instead, states Florio-

Ruane, emotions are placed on a shelf, much like the “hot lava” (p. 116) topic of racism. While not easy to name one’s pain, it can be empowering. My story is not unique, but it is a collective story of many.

### **Background of the Study**

Because less than 1% of Chicanas ever earn a doctorate as demonstrated in Figure 1 (Yosso, 2006), the focus for this research began with two major impressions that remained with me after I completed my review of the literature. The first was the alluring call by leading scholars for newer and unique methodological approaches to the study of Chicanas (Cuadráz, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas, 1996; Zurita, 2001). Second, I found no studies in a university on the Southwest border of the United States with the unique historical, political, social, and cultural landscape of El Paso, Texas, my home town. Instead, the literature focuses on universities in California and other institutions of higher education throughout the country. While it was affirming to find so much in the scholarly literature about women of Mexican descent like me who had surpassed many challenges while in graduate school, the bleak doctoral completion rates left me with even more questions: Why not focus on the reflections and experiences of those Chicanas who do earn a doctorate? What has been the experience of Chicana scholars in my own unique part of the country? I began this investigation with questions and interviews in an informal, exploratory pilot study that evolved into this dissertation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Less than 1% of Chicanas in this country ever completes a doctorate (Yosso, 2006). Closely related to this problem is the fact that deficit theories have too often been utilized to explain the academic experiences, particularly the challenges, of Chicanas (Cuadráz, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Medina & Luna, 2000). To counter traditional methods that focus on deficit approaches, I turn to an overarching theoretical framework based on Chicana feminist epistemology and *testimonio*. This framework positions the Chicana at the center of the research process as opposed to the problematic, more traditional approach that positions the researcher as the expert who interprets and speaks on behalf of someone else or on behalf of an entire community. Moreover, as the largest subgroup of all minorities of Hispanic origin, females of Mexican descent have a key role in the education of future generations (Yosso, 2006). The attainment of a doctorate degree has the potential to place women in important policymaking roles that can impact the educational trajectory of this group.

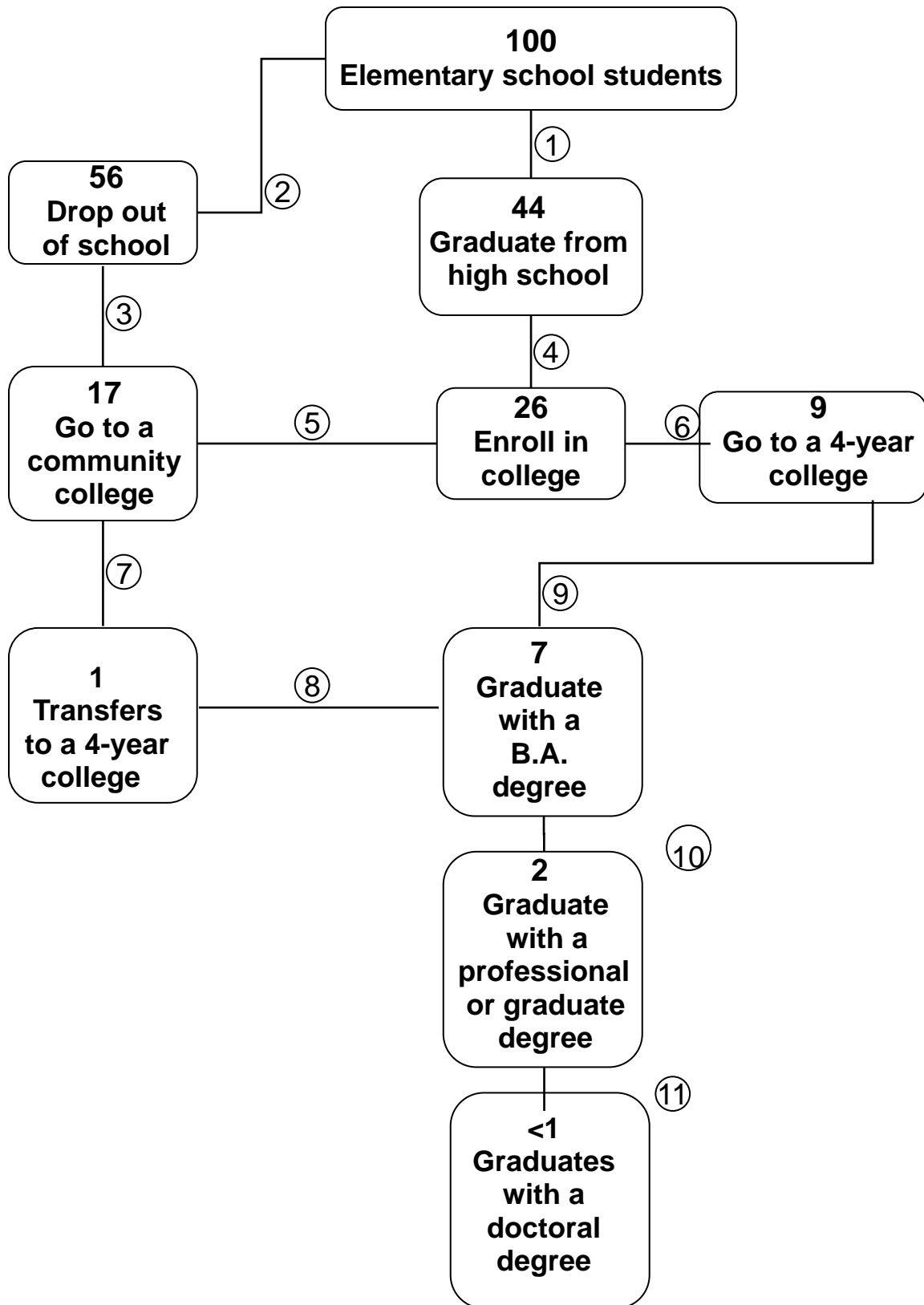


Figure 1. The Chicana/o Education Pipeline  
(Yosso, 2006, p. 3)

## **Research Questions**

In light of the fact that less than 1% of Chicanas completes a doctorate in this country, this dissertation explored the following questions:

- a) In what ways do academics who are part of this group make sense of the ways they negotiated their experiences in higher education?
- b) What were their most memorable experiences and why?
- c) How do their experiences contrast with Chicanas from other parts of the country who have earned a doctorate?

## **Significance of the Study**

As the largest group of all minorities of Hispanic origin and Mexican decent specifically, Chicanas will influence the educational attainment of future generations; it is critical that the academic level of this group be raised (Gloria Cuadráz, personal communication, March 22, 2009). One of every two Chicanas under the age of 18 lives in poverty, which often goes hand in hand with a lack of formal education (Yosso, 2006). In higher education specifically, Chicanas are the most severely underrepresented. Less than 1% of Chicanas earn a doctorate in the United States (Arce, 1978; Casas & Ponterroto, 1984; Yosso, 2006; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Furthermore, this severe underrepresentation has remained unchanged for over 40 years (Casas & Ponterroto, 1984; Cuadráz, 2005; Yosso, 2006). At the very least, further educational attainment will increase the likelihood of Chicana participation in the economic, social, and political functions that promote democracy and/or touch upon relevant issues, such as employment that greatly impact their lives. This study also responds to a number of scholars who argue for the need to move beyond traditional research methods, particularly when studying disenfranchised groups (Cuadráz, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas, 1996;

Zurita, 2001). By employing an innovative and culturally appropriate research approach, this study also questioned “Whose theory counts?” and compelled me to “look in non-traditional places for our theory” (Saldívar-Hull, 2000, p. 46). This approach aims to challenge research approaches that often misrepresent or leave out the first-hand experience and knowledge of Chicanas (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

### **Summary of Chapters**

I began Chapter 1 with a background of the study followed by the Statement of the Problem, which revolves around the bleak doctoral completion rates for Chicanas. Next, I listed my research questions and discussed the significance of this study. As well, I cite a number of scholars who concur that the discourse about Chicanas in the academy needs to be expanded along with new research methodologies that do not view Chicanas through a cultural and linguistically deficient lens (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Chapter 2 contains a Review of the Literature that includes a Historical Overview and two other major categories of findings. I combine Critical Self-narratives and *Testimonios* as the first category and Empirical Studies as the second. This chapter also includes my Theoretical Framework, overarched by Chicana feminist epistemology and *testimonio*. Chapter 3 presents the purpose of this study and data matrixes that include additional details, data collection methods, and analytical tools I used for this study, followed by a detailed discussion about *testimonio* and my other data collection strategies. I then provide a description of the research site and my participant selection criteria and conclude with a discussion of how I analyzed my data. Chapter 4 presents my findings. *Testimonios* and narratives demonstrate how my theoretical framework contributes to

understandings about how Chicanas in my study negotiated their experiences in higher education. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation with a discussion and a section on implications for further research.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Primarily, in light of the severe underrepresentation of Chicanas who achieve a doctoral degree, from this review I want to know: What was the experience of these women in higher education? What can we learn from their experiences? Also, in response to the call from scholars for more current research approaches, what do these newer approaches look like? How do these approaches address Chicanas' ways of being, knowing, and learning in ways that traditional methodologies do not?

I begin this review with a grim picture on the status of education in this country as portrayed at an important teleconference held primarily for a Latino audience and attended by prominent policymakers at the state and federal level. Taking a critical stance, I follow this message with a commentary on the dangers of situating the status of Latino education within a "crisis narrative" (McCarty, 2010, p. 2) as the beginning of this teleconference did.

To situate Latinos within the broader picture of education in this country, the following message was the driving force behind the Latino Education Advocacy Day (LEAD) summit held at the California State University campus in San Bernardino, California in Spring 2010. In the keynote address, the overarching theme was that the United States is facing a crisis with regard to the lack of academic success of Latinos (Sepúlveda, 2010). Another of the summit speakers emphasized the urgency even further in his beginning statement: "Today's profound message is that the crisis is not somewhere off in the future; it is here today" (Izaguirre, 2010, n.p.). This summit was broadcast to an international audience of leading education scholars from the academy as

well as from local, state, and federal agency officials, including the director of the White House Initiative on the Educational Excellence of Hispanic Americans. What is the danger in using an alarming and crisis laden discourse and the continual appropriation of such discourse throughout the field education? Is this discourse worse when Latinos use it among themselves? Does it cause us to become de-sensitized to the critical, social, and educational inequities we face in the area of education when we promote the use of such a discourse?

McCarty (2012) argues that narratives like these serve to reinforce a recurring dilemma for education researchers: how to counter the hegemonic discourses about the “enduring inequities” (p. 2) in education. She argues that these discourses detract from grossly unfair policies that misuse similar crisis narratives, for example, to portray poverty as “a failure induced by deficient parents and pathological communities” (p. 3). In a similar vein, my review of the literature demonstrates how the discourse about Chicanas in the academy portrays them in negative ways and, for example, often views their writing as subjective and non-scholarly. Indeed, the discourse mostly evolved around explanations for the low retention rates and/or failure of Chicanas, blames their culture and family, and neglects to portray the lived experiences of Chicanas in authentic ways. Researchers need to be aware of McCarty’s (2010) warning about these “enduring dilemmas” (p. 1) to respond responsibly as they navigate the discourse(s) about Chicanas and other minorities in the academy. In a response to McCarty, Villenas (2012) argues that our “ethnographies *de lucha* (of struggle)” (p. 13), while serving to expose inequality, are not enough and urges us to become part of the current social movements that promote the human dignity of everyone.

### **Who is the Chicana?**

For the purpose of this dissertation, I use the following definition for the label Chicana: A woman who is 1) usually of Mexican descent, 2) usually from the Southwestern part of the United States, and 3) who is always committed to social justice and in solidarity with other Chicanas. For the purpose of this literature review, and to clarify any confusion that the interchangeable use of Chicana and other labels throughout this review may pose for the reader, I offer the following example. When a source that I cite uses “Hispanic” or “Latina,” I honor the use of that term by doing the same in my citation of that source. When I, myself, reference a scholar of Mexican origin, I use the term Chicana for two reasons: First, I argue that the work of the scholars I reference in this review of the literature embodies, to various degrees, the political activism, commitment to social justice, solidarity, and self-determination that is associated with the label “Chicana” (Casas & Ponterotto, 1984; Urrieta, 2007; Vásquez, 1982; Villenas, 1996). Second, my research seeks to extend the body of knowledge about Chicanas in higher education with an emphasis on the unique southwestern border of the United States, inspired by Yosso’s (2006) research. In my findings (Chapter 4) and my discussion (Chapter 5), I continue the use of the term Chicana for the reasons listed above, while I also address why, based on my data, some of my participants self-identified as Chicanas, while others did not.

I find it important and necessary to provide clarification about my earliest findings regarding the perplexing use of the labels Hispanic, Latina/o, Latina/o and others throughout the literature. That is, much of the research often subsumes the following subgroups under the labels Hispanic and Latina/o, Central and South Americans, Puerto

Ricans, Cubans, and/or Chicanas/os. For the Chicana, solidarity is based on a political consciousness that comes from a collective history of oppression that climaxed with the *Movimiento* (Movement) in the 1960s, equivalent to the Civil Rights Movement for Mexican Americans (Delgado Bernal, Elénes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006). While this unique history defines the Chicana, the discourse in the literature is confusing, as this group is often identified by different labels, for example, Latina, Hispanic, and Mexican American. My findings indicate that for researchers, a real dilemma of this practice is that articles and studies that use labels, like Hispanic and/or Latina/o, disregard in-group diversity, such as class, ethnicity, and specific heritage (Arce, 1978; Cuadráz, 2005; Escobedo, 1980; Gimenez, 1997; Medina & Luna, 2000; M. Reyes & Halcón, 1988; Solórzano, 1993; Torres, 2004; Villalpando, 1996). In turn, this practice diminishes language differences, unique concerns, historical domination, and language and visibility of specific groups (Keating, 2006). Moreover, this practice also makes it difficult to obtain statistical data and limits cross-cultural comparisons among groups. Consequently, inappropriate generalizations and unsubstantiated stereotyping often occurs (Arce, 1978; Casas & Atkinson, 1981; Casas & Ponterroto, 1984; M. Reyes & Halcón, 1988; Escobedo, 1980; Villalpando, 1996). Thus, the use of labels is “fraught with dangers of stereotyping whole populations of minority students” (Achor & Morales, 1990, p. 281).

The following statistics speak briefly to these subgroups and are evidence of the need to explore and expand the discourse about the experiences of Chicanas in higher education specifically.

## Statistical Data

Current United States Census Bureau statistics indicate that by 2050 Hispanics will number 132.8 million or 30% of the total population of this country. The term Hispanic includes several subgroups: Central or South Americans (14%), Puerto Ricans (11%), Cubans (5%), and other Latinas/os, (7%) (Yosso, 2006). Of these subgroups of Hispanics, individuals of Mexican descent are the largest and fastest growing, remain the most undereducated, and have the highest poverty rates (Murillo, 2010). In high school, among all racial and ethnic groups, students of Mexican descent make up the highest dropout group (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002).

Of these individuals of Mexican descent, one of every 2 women under the age of 18 live in poverty and are the most undereducated of all other subgroups of Hispanic descent combined (Casas & Ponterotto, 1984; Gándara, 1982). Moreover, this group continues to experience exponential growth across most metropolitan areas (Casas & Ponterotto, 1984; Chacón, Cohen, Camarena, & Strover, 1983; Ponce, 2002; Vásquez, 1982; Villalpando, 1996; Yosso, 2006).

Ironically, while females of Mexican origin represent the largest minority subgroup of Hispanics, less than 1 of every 100 receives a doctorate, in severe disproportion to individuals from other subgroups (Chacón et al., 1983; Yosso, 2006; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). They are the most severely underrepresented (Arce, 1978; Casas & Ponterotto, 1984; Yosso, 2006; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

Given these statistics, numerous scholars express the need to expand the discourse on the role of identity for groups whose backgrounds and perspectives differ from those from the White mainstream who have always dominated the field of educational research

(Achor & Morales, 1990; Casas & Ponterotto, 1984; Chacón, et al., 1983; Elénes Gándara, 1982; González, Figueroa, Marin, & Moreno, 2001; Ponce, 2002; Xae Reyes, personal communication, June, 2009; X. Reyes & Rios, 2005; Solórzano, 1993; Turner & Thompson, 1993; Vásquez, 1982; Zurita, 2001). Addressing the issues underscored by these scholars, this review seeks to expand the discourse in the academy by exploring Chicanas' academic experience in higher education in the Southwest part of the United States specifically.

The implications of the underrepresentation of Latinas in higher education are dire, making educational opportunity and progress critical for Latinas of Mexican descent in particular. This is because as the largest and fastest growing subgroup of Hispanics in the United States, Chicanas will play a key role in influencing the educational attainment of future generations (Gloria Cuadráz, personal communication, July 22, 2009). The consequences for the future of this group are serious, as poverty and lack of education often go hand in hand. At the very least, raising the educational level of this group increases the likelihood of their participation in the economic, social, and political functions that promote democracy (American Association of University Women, 2001).

### **Design of this Literature Review**

The following question drives this literature review: What has been the experience of Chicana scholars in higher education? Specifically, the purpose of this review is to explore the research and academic discourse surrounding Latinas in the academy in relation to issues of severe underrepresentation and institutional retention. I also pay attention to how issues of the Latina identity appear in the academic discourse of

the academy. This review demonstrates that history and the poignant voices of Chicanas reveal much about their experiences in higher education. There is a noticeable gap in the literature; that is, stories of success are scarce. Instead, studies draw attention mostly to the low retention rates and/or academic failure of Chicanas. To a large extent, prevailing stories of struggle seem to greatly diminish the role that institutions and institutional barriers play in the severe underrepresentation of Chicanas in higher education.

Therefore, I argue that the severe underrepresentation of Chicanas in higher education is, to a large extent, a systemic and institutional issue.

Delgado Bernal et al. (2006) propose new ways to affect positive change early in the educational lives of Chicanas. They promote New Conceptual Beginnings, New *Mestiza* Theory, and other research methods that delve into Chicana ways of knowing the world by incorporating our unique epistemologies and pedagogy into schools. By underscoring culture, these newer approaches pull away from deficit views and give meaning to the diverse and everyday life of Chicanas as members of families, communities, and the greater society. My findings reveal it is precisely these methods that are not often found in the scholarly literature, much of which is also outdated, about Chicanas.

### **Methodology and Scope**

During the development of a review of the research literature, articles related to Latinas in higher education were canvassed extensively, drawing from a number of sources. These include empirical studies, scholarly journals, counterstories, dissertations, periodicals, news magazines, books, personal communications, poetry, book reviews,

critical self-narratives, journal reviews, government documents, and *testimonios* (life stories of class struggle).

The search for information took place primarily on Academic Search Premier, ERIC and Education Complete. Key words included Latinas, Hispanas, and/or Chicanas in higher education, educational attainment, marginalization, and graduation rates. I developed detailed grids that were critical to the organization, analysis, and synthesis of articles. Alphabetical and numerical indexing of articles facilitated cross-checks for accuracy of publication dates, authors, and recurring themes.

Beyond restricting my search to published research literature, I also include phone and personal communications/interviews with several of the sources cited in this review. These sources add an important authentic dimension to this review that aligns with a new methodological approach to understanding Chicana experiences in higher education. As with self-narratives and *testimonios*, I scrutinized all notes and themes to represent scholars' voices as accurately as possible. In the case of empirical studies, I looked for similar and contrasting methodologies, conceptual frameworks, interpretations, and claims. A recurring process of "stepping away" from my writing helped me distinguish between major and minor themes, key concepts, terms, and labels.

Scholars portrayed throughout these studies, articles, and self-narratives vary; many are doctoral candidates; others are professors. These individuals work primarily in the field of higher education and share similar ethnic, class, and racial backgrounds of Puerto Rican, Colombian, or Peruvian descent. Many are first generation American citizens and doctoral recipients who live in the United States. Most are of Mexican descent and self-identify as Chicanas.



## Organization of this Literature Review

I organize findings for this review under three categories. Each provides a different perspective on the experience of this group. The first is a historical overview that covers the emergence of the Chicana in the academy and her seminal works. The second category attempts to convey the voice of Chicanas as they share their experiences in the academy through critical self-narratives and *testimonio*. The third category covers empirical studies and looks for strengths, weaknesses, gaps, and common methodological, theoretical, and conceptual frameworks. I conclude this section by proposing new directions with the potential to advance the agenda for research about Chicanas, paved by New Conceptual Beginnings (cultural constructs) and New *Mestiza* Theory as a way to “leave behind the defeated images” (Bernal et al., 2006, p. 1). These newer methodologies and conceptual models foster accurate interpretations of the Chicana experience and are specific to her unique epistemology.

Throughout the review, major themes consist of institutional, economic, and cultural challenges. These appear in the form of patriarchy, unfair hiring, racism, scarcity of mentors, stereotyping, multiple identity struggles, and marginality due to the triple minority status of Chicanas that fall under the categories of gender, class, and race (Casa & Ponterotto, 1984; Cuadráz, 1996). I begin the following section with a historical overview that provides important and useful insight into the emergence of Chicanas into the field of higher education over 40 years ago.

## **Historical Overview and Seminal Works**

It was through the Civil Rights and Feminist Movements of the 1960s and 1970s that a reexamination of equity in education for diverse populations in the United States made way for Latinas in higher education. During these decades, studies of class inequity, sexism, and racism evolved in response to group protests and demands from diverse populations (Medina & Luna, 2000). The demands from these populations resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (Medina & Luna, 2000). Between 1966 and 1994, the GI Bill and the National Education Act also make it possible for populations who previously had very limited resources to obtain a college education (Cuadráz, 2005). After the enactment of these laws, the number of Latinas with conferred doctorates increased from 139 in 1976 to 366 in 1990 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

While the number of conferred doctorates began to increase, Chicanas found themselves omitted from the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. They were excluded by their male counterparts in the Chicano movement and by the feminist movement, which ignored the distinctive standpoints and enormous internal differences among women of color (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). As a result, Chicana feminism evolved, with a strong political stance that challenged patriarchy and defied all forms of disempowerment that silences others, such as homophobia, racism, and class inequity. From this stance, Chicanas began to challenge the silencing of their place and voice in the activist movements through their writings (Arredondo, Hurtado, Klahn, Najera-Ramirez, & Zavella, 2003).

One outlet for these writings was the first Chicana journal, the *Encuentro Femenil* (*Hijas de Cuauhlemoc*, 1973). This journal is critical to the Chicana experience because it witnessed the emergence of feminist print culture communities as a site for this group to assert their unique voice. Journal essays show early evidence of the group's concern with the scarcity of their own numbers in higher education (Cuadráz, 2005). Written by the *Hijas de Cuauhtemoc*, a group of California college students, the journal's primary role was to promote awareness about the state of education of Chicanas in higher education. To promote this awareness, the *Encuentro* capitalized on the momentum of the Feminist and Civil Rights Movements. In a noticeable connection between scholars who write in the *Encuentro Femenil* and scholars of today, the deep concern for the promotion of education for Latinas with a focus on their scarcity and retention in the academy is prominent throughout this journal.

This journal is also worth noting because its only issue contains the first writings that I was able to find on the topic of Chicanas and higher education. My copy was difficult to obtain, proving to be one of the "marginalized journals" to which Saldívar-Hull (2000, p. 46) refers, and not found on the library shelves of most institutions of higher education. Only eight libraries in the world own this journal (UMass Inter Library Loan Service, July 2009). Published 38 years ago and typed on a typewriter, one gets a sense of how old it is, but more importantly again, how statistics of today mirror the relatively same shortage of Latinas in higher education then.

Also typed on a typewriter, *La Red* (The Net), a second journal published in 1983, presents details of the first comprehensive study to address the lack of academic progress of Chicanas. Commissioned by the Ford Foundation in 1978 (Chacón et al., 1983), study

results list several factors found to contribute to the lack of academic progress for Chicanas. I discuss this study and the following book in depth, under empirical studies, later in this review.

Another seminal work that drew attention to the study of Hispanic women and education was *The Broken Web* (McKenna, Ortiz, Castillo, & Frederickson, 1988). This was the first full-length book to address the concerns of Hispanic women and education, and a by-product of a forum organized to address the exclusion of Hispanic females from the discourse of education reform in an initiative launched by the U.S. government in the 1980s. *The Broken Web* covers the following critical points: 1) research on Hispanics too often subsumes men and women under the larger ethnic category of ‘Hispanic’ with no distinction provided, 2) gender studies subsume the experiences of Hispanic women under the category of “women” (Both practices have resulted in a limited amount of data about Chicanas from which researchers could draw and analyze), 3) Hispanic women are to blame for poor academic progress; institutional factors remained ignored, 4) Hispanic women consist of one group, with no specific information to address the needs of Mexican American women specifically, and 5) a conceptual model that would foster accurate interpretations of the educational experiences of Hispanic women is lacking. *The Broken Web* is discussed in further detail under Empirical Studies.

*El Encuentro* and *The Broken Web* are among the seminal works that highlighted the educational experiences of Hispanic women and paved the way for the Latina as professor today, with a call for new research methods and the development of new theories. For example, Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1981) landmark book, *This Bridge Called My Back* was responsible for formulating the “woman of color” identity

and theory. Also referred to as “homegrown,” the theory comes from ideas grown on one’s soil; ideas that entail deep reflection, sharing, and validation of one’s life with its discomfort and pain (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 27).

Moraga (1983) refers to the woman of color theory as “Theory in the Flesh,” developed through the form of *testimonios*; life stories of class struggle, survival, and resistance, which also serve as a basis for developing theory and political practice as a form of resistance. The phrase “in the flesh” refers to the idea that our brown body is a site for knowledge and language and thus, we embody the theory. Creating our own theory frees us to question how we conduct research. Because this theory is unique to our own lived experiences, it is difficult to define. Thus, Theory in the Flesh presents a more accurate interpretation of our experiences—our class struggles and traumas—and has the power of becoming communal. Theory in the Flesh allows us to scream out to the world (Carmona, 2011).

Another relatively new theory that espoused resistance was Anzaldúa’s (1999) classic *Borderlands*. The borderlands metaphor describes a third space where one’s complex identities are situated and is most often used to refer to someone who straddles two cultures at once, usually on the southwestern border of the United States (Anzaldúa, 1999). The significance of these theories from Anzaldúa and Moraga is that they present a way to depart from the thinking of earlier cultural deficit theorists and others who viewed the writing of Chicana scholars as subjective and non-scholarly. These more recent theoretical approaches bring us to an era of new conceptual beginnings that merit and receive particular attention in the final section of my findings.

My conclusion from this historical overview is that little has changed for Chicanas in higher education, as is reflected in the dismal statistics cited thus far. The glaring discourse about the severe underrepresentation of this group is reiterated by an overwhelming number of scholars, past and present (Achor & Morales, 1990; Arce, 1978; Casas & Ponteroto, 1984; Chacón et al., 1983; Cuadráz, 2005; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Elénes et al., 2001; Escobedo, 1980; Gándara, 1982; González et al., 2001; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Medina & Luna, 2000; M. Reyes & Halcón, 1988; X. Reyes & Rios, 2005; Solórzano, 1993; Turner & Thompson, 1993; Vargas, 1988; Vásquez, 1982; Yosso, 2006; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). What is striking is that while the discourse about inequity for this group is loud, it is dated. The vast majority of scholarly articles on the topic of Chicanas in higher education appears prior to the year 2000.

Moreover, while the underrepresentation of Chicanas in higher education remains severe today, what is also evident throughout the literature is that there is a difference in the tone and voice of scholars of the last 10 years. Statistics show only part of story; qualitative studies and the review of feminist publications and narratives show a collective response that consists of an analytical, politically astute, and passionate voice. In an attempt to convey this voice, the following section focuses on a group of scholars who write about their experiences in the academy. These reflections, some framed as critical personal narratives (Burdell & Swadner, 1999), others framed as *testimonios* (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001) provide a close and personal view of the Chicana experience in higher education.

### Critical Self-narratives and *Testimonios*

Critical self-narratives analyze social structures and relations of power (Burdell & Swadner, 1999) and represent an activity that is academic in nature and repels the act of othering (hooks, 1989). Like critical self-narratives, *testimonio* is about lived experiences and serves as a basis from which to theorize. It connects personal oppression to domination by those in power in society and serves to “document silenced histories” (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 3). A unique and collective process, *testimonio* generates new understandings based on familiar and familial memories, and *consejos* (advice)—the kind generated at our mothers’ “kitchen table” or on the church steps (p. 12). In what I consider a deeply profound statement, Moraga (1983) claims that *testimonio* has the power to give our own life experience more authority than we give books.

Chicana scholars and activists connect their *testimonios* to the larger political picture in society in a way that exposes how social injustice at the personal level is perpetuated at the societal level (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). For a number of Chicana scholars, *testimonio* has served as a basis for developing theory and political practice as a form of resistance (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Additionally, *testimonio* represents a “more organic way of collecting and generating knowledge” (p. 12) through stories from oppressed groups that bear witness to experiences of immense struggle.

Valdés (2001) claims that the life experiences of many immigrants demonstrates that they have traveled very long distances of the psychological, emotional, and physical kind. The following narratives, some told in the form of *testimonio*, suggest that for these

scholars (some of them immigrants), the journey has been a long one that has not ended with their physical arrival to this land.

### **Both Colonized and Colonizer**

Many from the dominant mainstream, the academy, and the doorkeepers who provide or deny access to the research site view minority scholars as “others.” In turn, these “others” find themselves in a unique and problematic position when they share the same background as their own study participants; the dilemma is that they must deal not only with the oppression of their participants but with their own oppression and marginalization as well (Escobedo, 1980; López, 2001; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; M. Reyes & Halcón, 1988; Torres, 2004; Villenas, 1996; Zurita, 2001). Thus, they sometimes ask themselves whether they must choose one identity over another. The tension that comes with this question is evident in the writings that follow.

Villenas (1996) self identifies as a Mexican American and claims membership in a low status and marginalized group within the greater society. She argues that while other researchers theorize about their own privilege in relation to their participants, native ethnographers must deal with their own marginalization and multiple identities. She adds that the “we,” in the tradition of qualitative research, are not the same people; that we do not all come from the same privileged position. Villenas describes how her own race and ethnicity shaped the nature and quality of her research. As a novice ethnographer, she eventually came to view herself as the colonizer in her “university cloak” (p. 712), out to study her own community (which she “othered” when she presumed to speak as the expert on their behalf). Unknowingly, she ensured that her participants, members of her



own community, observed her in the elevated role of researcher, to project her position of power. After deep reflection and much emotional turmoil, she came to recognize that she was the colonizer *and* the colonized: in both the dominant privileged institutions and the marginalized communities from which she came. In a painful awakening, she was finally jolted out of what she thought of as an unproblematic identity as a researcher when she realized her construction as an “other” by the stakeholders in her school.

Similarly, Zurita (2001) felt conflicted about whose side she was on in “*La Mojada y el Coyote: Experiences of a Wetback Researcher.*” Torn by the academic struggle of her new immigrant middle school participants, her professor denied Zurita’s request to tutor them because it could affect the integrity of the data and study in progress. Zurita was then compelled to ask herself, “Whose side am I on?” Because students trusted and confided in her, school administrators considered Zurita an instigator, there to incite students to protest offensive treatment by school officials. To make sense of this treatment, Zurita draws from her ethnic and cultural history and uses a striking metaphor to illustrate her role as researcher. She is a *mojada* (wetback), attempting to cross the river into the occupied territories of the academy, seeking out the *coyote* (professor) to smuggle her safely into the terrain of the academy and the research site (Murillo as cited in Villenas, 1996, p. 711). *Mojada* and *coyote* as used here are derogatory terms that allude to the struggle that *mojadas/os* (wetbacks) undergo as they attempt to cross the river illegally into the United States, often unwelcome, but nonetheless exploited for financial gain.

Zurita (2001) also feels exploited when called upon as the expert on the “Mexican problem” (p. 23). She claims her young age and graduate student status partly explains

the lack of respect but asserts that her Mexican heritage and accent was most responsible for this treatment. At first, both Villenas (1996) and Zurita unknowingly allowed the dominant gatekeepers at their research site to define their role in accordance with the stereotype that views them as weak and unscholarly until they realized what was happening. Like Villenas and Zurita, the scholars in the following section fiercely aim to re-define their identity, which they claim is too often defined by others.

### **Identity, Silence, and Voice**

Torres' poetry promotes her own re- definition of the Latina identity with its heritage of tenacity, family closeness, and sense of community, friendship, and spontaneity. She challenges the American definition of Latina with its "racist, classist, xenophobic and Spanish-phobic" connotations (Miriam Torres, personal communication, July 22, 2009). Representing herself as a Latina with tremendous resilience and ability to resist and denounce imposed definitions of her Latina identity, she titles one of her poems "Phenomenal Latina." Like Torres, Lopez credits her own resilience, tenacity, and "spine of steel" (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 80) for keeping her in graduate school. She recounts an experience of near expulsion for openly criticizing the colonial and ethnocentricity of anthropology in one of her papers, then becomes mindful of the threat that a female minority student can pose for the male professor. Later, Lopéz questions whether silence would have been a better option.

Two other professors, X. Reyes and Rios (2005) canvass their graduate student journals, response papers, and course evaluations with the intent to give voice to the discourse about Latinas. It is a "silent discourse" (p. 378), they claim, that discourages

discussions about issues Latinas face in the academy, such as low expectations, isolation from majority students, an overreliance on mentors, and the fostering of co-dependency by professors who attempt to dictate courses and course loads. They claim the Chicana discourse remains silent due to the fear of sounding “weak, confrontational, self-pitying or unscholarly” (p. 378). In support of this claim, Ruiz (2008) maintains that Mexican American women have always remained in the shadows, while Alvarez (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001) claims there is an alarming gap in the academy, where silence or simplification of Latina perspectives still prevails. Regarding the discourse about the Latinas, Escobedo (1980) applauds the increase in objective and theoretical writings by and about Chicanas. Noting emotional and evangelistic sounding outbursts that in a book she edited, Escobedo argues that trite passages, themes of oppression, and search for identity diminish the message of unity and political activism necessary and crucial to the future success of Chicanas.

The literature shows a relatively long list of scholarly work in which the discourse by Chicanas resonates with themes of activism, oppression, and resistance. The following books and journal articles, some mainstream, reflect this prevalent discourse in the academic literature about the experience of Chicanas in higher education. With the exception of one, they were all written over 20 years ago. What do these article titles mean? Upon close scrutiny, the tone throughout these stories portrays the experience of Chicanas as solely one of struggle. This is problematic because it diverts attention away from the positive stories of those who have succeeded in their quest for a doctorate. Moreover, these articles do not address solutions or policy recommendations that might alleviate the challenges faced by Chicanas in the academy. The titles are telling, as they

signal struggle, anger, and resistance: “From Scholarship Girls to Scholarship Women” (Cuadráz & Pierce, 1994), “Passing thru the Eye of the Needle” (Gándara, 1982), “Are We the ‘Forgotten’ Woman?” (Delgado, 1971), “Are Hispanic Women in Higher Education the Non-Existent Minority?” (Escobedo, 1980), “Profiling an Invisible Minority in Higher Ed” (Casas & Ponterrotto, 1983), “The High Cost of Being Latina” (Torres, 2004), “Hispanic Women: Making Their Presence on Campus Less Tenuous” (Nieves-Squires, 1991), “Dissonance in the Academy: Narratives from Latina Professors” (X. Reyes, 2005), “Confronting Barriers to the Participation of Latinas in Education” (Vásquez, 1982).

### **Triple Minority and Culture Shock**

To expand upon the barriers to the participation of Latinas, Cuadráz and Pierce (1994) explore their own experience of multiple marginality; class, gender, and race, in what Casas and Ponterotto (1984) refer to as the triple minority status. Cuadráz, as a Chicana professor, struggles with alienation, marginalization, financial need, and locating her voice, while Pierce, a White professor, does not. Cuadráz credits “endurance labor” (p. 31) for her survival, a concept that describes Chicanas’ relentless drive to persist in spite of and because of adversity. The concept refers to a deep, inner strength that comes from a deliberate and powerful emotional decision to push against adversity.

A Chicano doctoral student’s reaction to the culture shock in the academy draws a strong response from two Chicana scholars. Rodriguez (1982) recounts his experience as a “scholarship boy” (Rendón, 1992, p. 5) who gains entrance to a prestigious institution of learning but soon faces a contradiction between his own culture and that of the

academy. Intent to fit into his new environment, he rejects his Spanish language, Mexican culture, and intimate relationship with family members only to face rejection by members of the new privileged class around him. In response to Rodriguez, Vásquez (1982) challenges the idea that to identify with one's culture is detrimental. She maintains, instead, that it is through the identification with one's ethnic group, language, family, and culture that the chances for academic success and adjustment to the culture of the academy increase. Rendón (1992) a graduate student, also responds to the culture of the academy in a different way from Rodriguez. Although she, too, recalls the pain that comes from leaving her family, home, and barrio in south Texas for an Ivy League university, she refuses to be changed by the academy. Instead, she declares that her language, culture, and family will always be a part of her.

More Chicana scholars, like Rendón and Vásquez, need to write and represent themselves in ways that reflect their experiences of marginalization as well as success. This discourse is critical; there is a need to continue to “talk back” (hooks, 1989, p. 5) to counter the narrative of the White, male, dominant voices in higher education (Medina & Luna, 2000; Torres, 2004). Talking back involves a gesture of defiance for the oppressed and those who struggle for social justice. More than words, it is the expression of the liberated voice that has moved from object to subject (hooks, 1989). Whereas these narratives reflect the experiences of Chicana doctoral students, the following describe specific institutional challenges faced by the Chicana professorate in higher education.

## **Chicana Faculty**

In the case of Chicana faculty, the following essays, studies, and scholarly articles describe issues of patriarchy, racism, unfair hiring practices, and responsibilities due to ethnicity (Arce, 1978; Blackwell, 1975; Cuadráz & Pierce, 1994; Escobedo, 1980; Medina & Luna, 2000; Padilla & Chávez Chávez, 1995; M. Reyes & Halcón, 1988; X. Reyes, 2005). The culture of higher education often fosters feelings of marginalization and tokenism in a space where Latinas struggle to find their own voice in a culture that is often alien to them (Arce, 1978). The few who do hold doctorates and work in higher education often experience cultural shock, marginalization, and weak support systems, if any at all (Padilla & Chávez Chávez, 1995). Hispanics receive more service activity and translation- related assignments than other junior faculty, which minimizes time for research and scholarship. Moreover, Hispanics also have a smaller number of colleagues of similar backgrounds because the hiring of Hispanics is at minimal levels across many institutions (Blackwell, 1975). According to Escobedo (1980), the reason some institutions do not hire Hispanics is that their credentials are not from prestigious universities. This practice ignores the fact that prestigious universities are often beyond the financial reach of many minorities. Policies like these are common because Hispanics are in the periphery of management where decisions are made and do not participate at the levels where they can effect policy related, for example, to hiring practices (M. Reyes & Halcón, 1988). Moreover, policies such as these are too often developed with little input from Hispanics and reflect how dominant, White, mainstream policies perpetuate in higher education (Medina & Luna, 2005).

## **Patriarchy, Racism, and Academic Colonialism**

Viewed as a world that mirrors the broader society in negative ways, some scholars refer to the academy as a massive system in which the White, male elite defines himself in positive ways that result in positions of leadership. Conversely, this group defines the subordinate group in disparate and negative ways, which justifies the continual self-promotion of its own dominant group (Medina & Luna, 2000). Cuadráz and Pierce (1994) refer to the dominant group in academe as a “men’s club” (p. 22), designed to give White, middle-class males access to positions of power. Once they enter the club, they determine the criteria by which others can join. Furthermore, they claim the men’s club does not recognize or value the attributes, possessions, and qualities that they and other Chicanas bring to the table.

In a narrative that paints a picture of how the attributes of Chicanas/os are overlooked in the “White male dominated system” (p. 300), novice professors M. Reyes and Halcón (1988) admit to their initial and naive belief that a doctorate might guarantee them entry into the academy. Instead, they find their credentials challenged by a racist mentality. They refer to this challenge as a form of “academic colonialism” (p. 300). Academic colonialism (Arce, 1978) refers to the “selective imposition of a set of intellectual premises, concepts, methods...on a subordinate group and/or the uncritical adoption of these ideologies by selected members of that group” (p. 77). The phrase originated from Colombian sociologist and activist Fals Borda who defined peasant politics in Colombia. Inherent to this definition is the notion that the dominant entities allow little or no input from the subordinate group.

## **Internalized Oppression**

A helpful framework to understand the experiences of subordinate group members is the concept of internalized oppression. Based on his comprehensive review of the literature, Williams (2012) found that internalized oppression is a significantly under-theorized concept that has resulted in much theoretical ambiguity. Because he found no frameworks from which to provide a comprehensive explanation of internalized oppression, Williams draws from and synthesizes a number of definitions. He defines internalized oppression as “the conscious or unconscious states, processes and actions that directly or indirectly influence or cause subordinate groups to support, collude with, perpetuate, or otherwise help to maintain the systems of oppression that target them” (p. 37). In Chapter 5, I draw from the three elements: *process, state, and action*, to explain how the data point to the phenomenon of internalized oppression.

## **Hidden Hiring Practices**

In their characterization of racism in higher education as academic colonialism, M. Reyes and Halcón (1988) use the metaphor of “the old wolf in sheep’s clothing” (the academic institution) to illustrate how racism raises its head in new forms to lock Chicanas/os into certain roles. These scholars list the following beliefs that they claim prevail among White, male faculty and often surface during the hiring process.

The Typecasting Syndrome refers to the belief that minority related fields and positions, such as Bilingual Education, teaching Spanish and Chicano Studies, are the main positions to which Hispanics should aspire. The One Minority per Pot Syndrome consists of the hidden practice of not hiring more than one minority for departments other



than Ethnic Studies, Bilingual Education and/or Foreign Languages. The Hairsplitting Concept refers to the practice of using highly biased and arbitrary reasons for not hiring of Chicana/o professors. Such was the case when a Chicana candidate learned of a “new policy” (new hiring paperwork requirements) upon accepting a position in an all-White faculty department for which she was the top candidate. Offered instead a bilingual position, for which she had not applied, she denied the offer. Only after voicing her objection to the hiring committee with a threat to sue, did she receive the position she earned (M. Reyes & Halcón, 1988).

When X. Reyes (2005) chairs hiring committees, she learns how positions are filled and the extent to which her own interview process differed from mainstream candidates who were offered standard benefits denied to her. She claims that academic assignments and material surroundings of new professors make a difference because students are observant and judgmental about such things; her own assigned office space and furniture was sub-standard. Hiring practices like these contribute in other ways to the already low numbers of Hispanics in the academy. For the few numbers of junior professors, what results is a shortage of tenured professors who can provide guidance (Escobedo, 1980). In yet another challenge that results from the shortage of minority professors, Medina and Luna (2000) and Escobedo (1980) find unwarranted challenges for the few numbers of Latina professors due to their ethnicity.

One such challenge is the higher demand for help from students of similar ethnic backgrounds. Another entails assignments to “minority-related/diversity” committees and requests for translations of official documents due to their presumed status as diversity experts. Padilla (1995) refers to these requests as burdens of “cultural taxation,” claiming

they result in less time for scholarship and research, which in turn affects tenure. In opposition to this cultural taxation, Blackwell (1975) suggests that all faculty members should share mentoring minority students because mentoring adds to already tight time constraints. In opposition to this practice, Blackwell argues that the academy does not appreciate or reward the practice of mentoring minority students.

Also in opposition, X. Reyes and Rios (2005) credit these types of unwarranted challenges to “an exoticism that envelops our presence” among others in the academy (p. 383), while Cuadráz and Pierce brand these types of requests and challenges as a call “to act as the bridge for the guilt of our supposedly progressive colleagues and students” (p. 38). These declarations reflect the frustration that Chicanas experience when faced with challenges that they claim are due to their ethnic status in higher education. Furthermore, Jacobs Cintrón, and Canton (2002) claim that it is through these narratives of self-interrogation, inequity, resilience, re-definition, and success that these scholars are slowly gaining entrance into the academy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The literature appears to demonstrate a larger number of poignant narratives and *testimonios* than empirical studies. The challenging experiences of Chicana scholars compel us to advocate for more empirical studies and re-theorizing of the researcher’s multiple identities. There is also a need for more studies that focus on the marginalization of scholars who teach and research their own communities, manipulate their own identities, and how they in turn find themselves manipulated by others (Villenas, 1996). Cuadráz (2005) expresses serious concern specifically about the lack of empirical research about Chicanas in academia. The next section, also organized by themes in the studies, demonstrates what the empirical research does show thus far.

## **Empirical Studies**

The following empirical studies explore the experience of Chicana scholars in higher education. I provide a brief summary for each study and discuss similarities and limitations in the conceptual, methodological, and theoretical frameworks. Throughout most of these studies, the major limitation I found is that many of these lack detail in the sections on methodology and/or theoretical framework and thus limit more scrutiny in these two areas. I include commentary that reflects the significance of each of these studies on the way(s) I think about or frame my dissertation. Scrutiny of these studies has been helpful in thinking about how I framed my research as I entered the next phase of my dissertation work. In this section, studies are grouped by the frequency of the themes they represent. I begin by discussing individual studies and conclude with additional comments about this empirical work as a whole.

### **Marginality, “Problem” Areas and Tokenism**

In an in-depth study that challenges the simplification of the Latina perspective, Cuadráz (1994) compares the early and higher education experiences of 10 Chicana scholarship recipients. She uses the conceptual framework of marginality and the experience of struggling between two cultures to explore the role that these play in the attainment of a doctorate. Cuadráz draws from Stonequist (1937) to emphasize that marginalization gives one the ability to experience what “not belonging” feels like. Findings indicate the experience of being “inside in an outside” way (Cuadráz, 1992, p. 32) actually privileges participants with a unique opportunity to affect social and positive change for both the dominant and marginal group. Cuadráz draws from Bourdieu’s

(1977) concept of cultural capital to understand how schools perpetuate existing class conditions. Financial aid, mentoring, and political awareness were found to be critical to the academic success of Chicanas in higher education. Cuadraz's (1992) idea of how being an insider can work in one's favor surfaced in my dissertation. By insider, I mean that someone like me, with one foot in the academy and another in the marginalized community of immigrants, can benefit by knowing how to navigate in both worlds. This realization has occurred as I have come to realize that I too am a part of an academic community while I have also lived and worked around immigrants from Mexico my entire life.

Commissioned by the Ford Foundation, Chacón et al.'s (1983) study sought to investigate "problem areas for Chicanas" (p. 4) at five institutions of higher education and allowed for a wide selection in accessibility and tuition cost and a mixed gender sample that included Chicanos to compare their success rate with that of Chicanas. Self-administered, multiple choice, mail questionnaires yielded 679 responses out of a potential 1,214. Results showed discrepancies with favorable conditions, opportunities, and financial privileges for White students from private and state institutions. In contrast, findings indicated the following impeded academic progress for Chicanas: a) excessive hours spent on domestic labor, b) more support for Chicanos than Chicanas from mothers, c) Chicanas' higher stress levels than Chicanos, and d) intervention to various degrees by institutions involved in the study.

The Chacón et al. (1983) study merits attention in this section for two reasons. First, it is one of the very first to focus on the subject of Chicanas in higher education. Second, it gave credibility to the study of Chicanas by placing them as the central unit of

analysis (Cuadráz, 2005). Thus, they no longer fell under the umbrella of Chicanos, Hispanics, or other women in research studies as was the previously the case.

Medina and Luna (2000) interrogate meaning from interaction with their participants, drawing from Seidman's (1991) in-depth interview process and phenomenology as a research tool. From participants' three 90-minute interviews, researchers learned of early school years that reveal feelings of marginalization and painful, judgmental remarks from teachers. Told that she could not write at an early age by one of her teachers, one study participant recalled that her teacher refused to read a poem she wrote. Thus, she internalized "I cannot write" thoughts throughout her entire dissertation process.

### **Family Support and Socialization**

Contrary to the Chacón et al. (1983) findings a number of studies demonstrate that full support from family, often the mother specifically, plays a critical role in the lives of Chicana doctoral students. These studies indicate that support and socialization contribute to successful transition into graduate school.

For example, Gándara's (1982) study of 17 Chicanas who obtained doctorate degrees seeks to identify commonalities among the group to explain their academic success. Findings demonstrate one major factor: the positive influence of mothers and other family members who support non-traditional roles for their daughters. The study design included a "retrospective" instrument developed for the study and specific criteria for participation. Participant selection was random from lists of doctors, lawyers, and Ph.D.s, most teaching in universities and born in the Southwest or Mexico.

One hundred doctoral recipients with Hispanic surnames, but mostly of Native American heritage, participated in Achor and Morales' (1990) study. Because a comprehensive list of Chicanas could not be located, study findings do not apply exclusively to this group. However, questionnaires inquired about Mexican customs, family roles, and food preferences. Participants came from traditional and Spanish-dominant, Catholic families. The large majority of respondents indicated that family was supportive and critical to their attainment of academic goals. In contrast, respondents identified institutional and administrative policies as discriminatory, reporting entry restrictions, unequal allotment of assistantships, discriminatory admission criteria, and the lack of support from dissertation committees and in the area of publication. More common were responses indicating prejudice from university personnel including faculty and other students. This study clearly demonstrates ways that institutional policies contribute to the severe underrepresentation of Chicanas in higher education.

Pérez Huber et al. (2006) acknowledge the critical role of family in their report "Critical Transitions in the Educational Pipeline." These scholars recommend that institutions of higher education target and bring families into the graduate school experience. The report cites other recommendations that include housing, childcare, and an increase in financial support for families with children. What I gather from this study is that it recognizes the importance of younger families in the graduate school process. The study recommends ways that institutions can support and draw graduate students' families into academe. This is an unusual but valuable recommendation in light of the fact that family obligations are one of the factors that curtail doctoral students with limited means from completing a doctorate.

Villalpando's (1996) dissertation shows that 35 Chicanas and Latinas from working-class backgrounds indicate a strong connection between emotional support and family. Findings show that mothers, especially, play a pivotal role in the academic success of Chicanas. Interviews also reveal that survival in academe is dependent upon an understanding of the socialization process and making personal sacrifices. In Medina and Luna's (2000) study as well, participants credited strong connections with family as crucial to their perseverance. Latina mothers, in particular, showed higher levels of support for their daughters. Researchers in the study point out that because many minorities are the first in their families to enter college and beyond, they are not knowledgeable about the rules and culture of the academy. In light of the absence of role models in higher education, findings indicate mothers' contribution to their daughters' socialization process is crucial.

Interestingly, only one study reveals a less than supportive stance from families: González et al. (2001) investigated the experiences of six Latina/o doctoral candidates from a number of Tier 1 universities. Findings indicate graduate students' experiences to be tenuous. That is, that Latinas: 1) have families who "are not understanding," 2) struggle to adjust to the new world of the academy, 3) have very few role models, 4) have an "outsider within" status, 5) struggle to adjust to multiple identities, 6) have a need for affirmation, and 7) experience tension between their own culture and that of the academy.

In their research about the culture of academe, Turner and Thompson's (1993) study investigated the socialization processes of majority and minority women doctoral students. The objective of the study was to see whether a difference existed between the two groups. Majority women reported considerably more mentoring, co-authoring, co-

presenting at conferences and more research and teaching assistantships. In this study, majority women were defined as those who did not self-identify as Black, Native American, Asian American, or Hispanic, according to questionnaires sent out by researchers in this study. Unlike many of the other studies I found, the methodology and theoretical groundwork sections receive careful attention. Institutional data reflects nine years of information with scrutiny that includes detailed explanations of results for majority and minority women participants. In-depth demographic data covers a detailed breakdown of participant responses. Findings also show that professors introduced majority women to influential people who could then assist with entrance into the job market. Escobedo (1980) argues that these types of support networks are precisely what Hispanic women need. Her recommendations include increasing funds for assistantships to promote faculty-mentoring, co-submission of scholarly articles, and extending student knowledge about professional journals, organizations, and conferences.

### **Mentoring and Financial Support**

From his study of 66 Chicana and Chicano Ford Foundation Fellows who earned a doctorate, Solórzano (1993) provides a quantitative and qualitative illustration of their educational career trajectory. Scholars listed important factors in their successful completion of the doctorate; among these were financial assistance, faculty advice, and support from spouse and friends. Specifically, financial assistance in the form of grants, more than loans, proved helpful, a finding also supported in studies by Achor and Morales (1990) and Turner and Thompson (1993). The most important factor in the completion of a doctoral degree was a positive mentoring experience. What I found



unique to this study is that it represents detailed quantitative charts and information, unlike most of the studies in the literature, which consist of qualitative studies primarily. In addition, Solórzano's investigation covers a span of over 10 years during which the educational trajectory of his students provided fascinating insight into their road to the doctorate. In a more current setting, at the 2011 American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference, doctoral students reiterated their profound gratitude to Dr. Solórzano for his support and guidance as they presented their papers. In what is a testament to his mentoring of these students, Solórzano is ensuring that they will be the next generation of scholars to continue his research and the research of others (Daniel Solórzano, personal conversation, April 2010).

While Solórzano's (1993) study touts the importance of financial assistance, findings also demonstrate that mentoring from the dissertation committee chair is important and critical to the completion of a doctorate for Chicanas. Conversely, study participants reported the biggest obstacles related to burnout due to stress, personal problems, and lack of support from the participants' committee chair. Mentoring is a process by which a professor demonstrates an interest and respect for the work of her/his students. This entails honest discussions that include the expectations early in this relationship from both parties. Reading students' work, providing feedback, co-writing, and co-presenting at conferences are valuable parts of mentoring that provide important opportunities for graduate students as well. I believe the reality is that the "publish or perish" mentality in the academy diminishes the frequency with which most professors can tend to the mentoring of students.

## **The Role of Adversity**

Another predictor of academic success in the Solórzano (1993) study was the reaction to prejudice and discrimination. That is, the doubts cast upon Chicanas in these studies served as a great motivation to succeed. Their narratives show that in some cases, rage propelled them to persevere. Put another way, “*No hay mal que por bien no venga*” (Resilience is the antidote to adversity for many Chicana scholars) (Miriam Torres, personal communication, July 25, 2009). It appears that often, painful exclusions fueled awakenings about their own cultural and ethnic identity and propelled many of these Chicana scholars to engage in and to promote transformative action in their communities and within themselves.

As I conclude this section on empirical work, I find the theme of resilience is an area I want to explore more deeply. My comprehensive exams heightened my interest on issues of identity, New Conceptual Beginnings and New *Mestiza* Theory, which are now surfacing with a new generation of scholars. I did not find these theoretical approaches used widely in any of the studies I examined, but I believe there is a strong connection between transformation, resilience, rage, and New *Mestiza* Theory, in particular, which I did not find discussed in any of the studies I covered. I see this as a clear gap in the empirical work about Chicanas in higher education. This gap represents new research that needs exploration; research that is based on the unique epistemological stance of the Chicana.

### **Findings of this Review**

Overall, the discourse in the literature paints a disappointing picture about the experiences of Chicanas in higher education, with a doctoral completion rate of less than 1% nationwide (Yosso, 2006). While these narratives poignantly portray the experiences of Chicanas in higher education, they do not utilize newer methodologies from which to conceptualize the unique, lived experiences of this group. Overwhelming evidence shows that newer methodologies are scarce. A cursory review demonstrates relatively few writings or studies since the year 2000, with most conducted or published in the 1980s, the other half in the 1990s. Without question, research with more current methods would present a more timely, accurate, and authentic picture of this group. I suspect the lack of current research is due to the lack of momentum after the 1960s, when the Chicana/o Movement and the *lucha* (struggle) began to subside. Moreover, policies, such as the G.I. Bill and other federal legislation, expanded opportunities for non-traditional groups to enter the higher education arena. Without question, diminishing support provided by the federal government in the form grants and other education funding assistance also has contributed to the severe underrepresentation of Chicanas as well as other minority groups in higher education (Yosso, 2006).

The findings of this review also show that an increase in the area of publication in mainstream scholarly journals is necessary. Chicanas' stories need to reach a broader audience. Otherwise, they remain within the confines of a few publishing outlets. Broader audiences would increase channels that allow for the dissemination of new theoretical developments and research findings critical to the understanding of issues relevant to Chicanas. One journal's recent response to this need is the special issue of *Equity in*

*Excellence in Education* (Volume 45, 2012), which was dedicated entirely to the genre of *testimonio*.

This review also reveals that mainstream scholars, some in policymaking positions, do not write about the obstacles for Chicanas in higher education. What does this mean? Do they acknowledge the obstacles? To what extent do White, mainstream academics advocate for Chicanas? Another observation is that the literature demonstrates a wealth of statistical data about Chicana scholars, which at times overlaps to the extent that it almost appears contradictory. In line with this, Vargas (1988) claims statistics over race and ethnicity are “slippery” in studies about faculty of color in higher education because there is no distinction between native born and foreign-born professors. This, Vargas argues, makes institutions appear compliant with demands of native-born minorities for increased representation.

Casas and Atkinson (1981) cite other statistical weaknesses in the literature. They conclude that data from small groups is not representative of the whole population, often leading to unwarranted use and interpretation. This often reflects the culture blame syndrome and draws attention away from institutional oppression. As early as the 1970s, Arce (1978) and Casas and Ponterotto (1984) argued that empirical data that would promote understandings about the Chicana are almost non-existent.

Too many studies focus on the reasons for failure and investigate the barriers, while few look for the success factors that positively influence the academic success of Chicanas and what we can learn from their experiences. This often points to cultural deficit theories that place blame on Chicano culture and families and often portray Chicanas as passive and lacking ambition (Cuadráz, 1994) or weak, self-pitying and

unscholarly (Medina & Luna, 2000). While deficit and resistance theory models exaggerate the role of individual agency in structures of inequality, social reproduction theories use cultural capital (i.e., how different types of capital pass from one generation to another) as a lens to explain academic achievement of minority groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Moreover, these deficit approaches draw attention away from institutional factors that influence the academic progress of Chicanas (Cuadráz, 2005).

Some studies conclude that resilience is the answer to the question: Why do some from minority groups succeed? Investigations that focus on resiliency are good, but they need to move beyond the notion of resiliency. Specifically, with Chicanas, how does resiliency come about? Is it related to Chicanas' unique epistemology? I argue that we can learn from the experiences of Chicanas if we conduct research with their epistemology and pedagogy as a basis. Chicanas' ways of learning and knowing are unique and can affect new research in positive ways. For example, *New Conceptual Beginnings* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) and *The New Mestiza Consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 1987) provide a relatively newer lens from which to research this group to reach more authentic understandings about the experiences of Chicanas in higher education in future research endeavors.

### **New Directions: Advancing the Agenda**

New Conceptual Beginnings and New *Mestiza* Theory are powerful because they speak to the epistemology of the Chicana. In generating new data, might we find any connections between today's Chicana and the New Conceptual Beginnings and New *Mestiza* Theory? This review of the literature concludes by touching upon the ideology of

a new generation of scholars that, in the last 10 years, highlights the importance of the epistemology of the Chicana from her unique “*mujer*” (woman)-centered definitions of teaching, learning, and ways of knowing. I argue that by moving in new directions that explore new research methods with a potential to validate the Chicana experience in higher education, we will advance an agenda that contributes to our understandings of this group. The theoretical framework for this study consists of a multi-faceted approach that contributes to a better understanding of the complexities inherent to the lived experiences of Chicanas.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives; our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions of our experience. (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 23)

The relatively new and underutilized theoretical approach to this study that I use consists of an overarching framework based on the Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) and *testimonio* (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). In this section, I discuss this framework, which weaves Latina critical theory (Lat Crit) (Solórzano, 1998); the New Conceptual Beginning/cultural construct of *consejos* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) and New *Mestiza* Theory (Anzaldúa, 1999) in depth.

### **Chicana Feminist Epistemology**

The Chicana feminist epistemological (CFE) framework is relatively new, unacknowledged, and underutilized in the field of educational research (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Pizarro, 1998; Scheurich & Young, 1997). Delgado Bernal states that surprisingly,

while a number of Chicana and Chicano scholars receive their Ph.D. in education, few acknowledge CFE in their research, despite CFE's appropriateness to expand the discourse on the role of identity for Chicanas in higher education. What is unique to CFE is that it includes and validates issues specific to Chicanas, such as immigration, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and the contradictions of Catholicism, including the expectation of virginity from the woman prior to marriage (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). Also unique to CFE are the conceptualizations of borderlands (Anzaldúa, (1999) and *xicanisma* (Castillo, 1995). In the terminology of CFE, borderlands refers to socially constructed barriers of the psychological, sexual, and spiritual kind present wherever two or more cultures, races, or social classes co-inhabit a space (Anzaldúa, 1999). A *mestiza* is defined as a woman, usually of Indian, European and/or of African ancestry. Anzaldúa (1987) asserts that, to be a *Mestiza* is to have a Chicana consciousness that includes an ability to live between and juggle two worlds that are full of contradiction. Delgado Bernal et al. (2006), The Latina Feminist Group (2001), and Castillo (1995) concur that the term *xicanisma* also alludes to Chicana feminisms generated at the kitchen table and on the church steps, often by our mothers. Pizarro (1998) asserts that love, family, honor, respect, and the pursuit of social justice, as grounded in oral tradition, are fundamental to CFE, while West (1993) adds, "A love ethic has nothing to do with sentimental feelings or tribal connections. Rather, it is a last attempt at gathering a sense of agency among a downtrodden people" (p. 19).

Also unique to the CFE framework is that it not only places Chicanas as central subjects, it also brings them into the documentation, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of data. Consequently, their lives are portrayed in authentic ways (Delgado

Bernal, 1998). This is in contrast to the deficit-centered research approaches and explanations, absent of the voice of study participants, which often blame the culture and/or family for the academic failure of Chicanas (Cuadráz, 2006; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Medina & Luna, 2000).

CFE reflects the unique historical, political, cultural, and social conditions of Chicanas that are omitted by traditional research and rejected by traditional scholarship (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Pérez Huber, 2009; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). CFE also responds to how liberal educational scholarship has failed to embrace epistemologies that examine the intersection of issues related to gender, ethnic, and class oppression for Chicanas (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). In the past, studies that focus on various education or school-related issues have focused primarily on White, male students with a traditional patriarchal-based epistemology and little, if any, attention to the working-class male or female (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). History shows that mainstream scholarship has omitted the ways that race, class, gender, and sexuality can impact practices and/or policies in schools and for minority groups in this country. Pizarro (1998) claims that CFE assists us in the attack on the racism that is entrenched in traditional epistemologies, past and present, while Scheurich and Young (1997) refer to this racist trend as “epistemological racism” (p. 4) because assumptions embedded in scientific knowledge are racist. Liberal feminist scholars have also failed to provide a model that delves into the gender, ethnic, and class oppression of Chicanas from a working-class background. While feminist scholars focus on patriarchy, they also fail to recognize and write about the cultural, economic, and institutional barriers for Chicanas in the academy. Moreover, feminist scholars approach analysis with a focus on



commonalities, which draw attention away from the institutional and economic factors that limit opportunities for Chicanas in the academy.

Furthermore, Villenas (1996) argues that the “we” in the literature needs to be re-theorized because it does not include the voice of the Chicana. Villenas issues a call for new methodologies that acknowledge the epistemology of the Chicana and urges the newer generation of scholars to recognize and respond to the serious need for diverse and rich models with which to conduct research. New theories and models, Villenas argues, lead to emancipatory and transformative possibilities for Chicanas as creators of an authentic knowledge base about their own lived experiences.

Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002) concur; adding that traditional and liberal feminist scholars have failed to use a paradigm that examines the reality of everyday lives of Chicanas and disrupts an “apartheid of knowledge” (p. 1) that prevails in higher education. Pizarro (1998) claims that while mainstream faculty in academe equate CFE with “poor training and substandard scholarship by unqualified, affirmative action faculty” (p. 65), the time for employing our own unique epistemology has come.

In line with the principles of CFE and the call for newer research methods, Delgado Bernal et al. (2006) propose new ways to affect positive change in studies that focus on the academic lives of Chicanas in higher education. In an effort to expand and enhance existing traditional research frameworks in the terrain of qualitative inquiry and to promote authentic understandings about this group, Delgado Bernal et al. pose a critical question to researchers whose work focuses on issues of education and Chicanas: “Why not transform the conceptual beginnings themselves?” (p. 4).

### **New Conceptual Beginnings (Cultural Constructs)**

New Conceptual Beginnings (NCB) are cultural constructs that refer to Spanish terms that come from the everyday lives of Chicanas. These terms signal ways of learning and teaching and indeed honor and validate Chicanas' ways of being and knowing (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). It is by underscoring culture that these New Conceptual Beginnings pull away from deficit frameworks and give meaning to the diverse and everyday lives of Chicanas as members of families, communities, and the greater society. Thus, to utilize CFE and cultural constructs in our research is to resist traditional paradigms that often misrepresent or exclude the knowledge and overall experience of the Chicana. Most importantly, CFE places the Chicana at the center of the development of authentic knowledge.

Delgado Bernal et al. (2006) list and briefly define these new beginnings as follows: *educación* (holistic and moral education), *la facultad* (knowing through experience and intuition), *pensadoras* (creative thinkers), *consejos* (narrative storytelling), *testimonios* (testimonials), borderlands (the geographic and symbolic spaces between countries and differences), *sobrevivir* (survival and beyond), *convivir* (the praxis of living together in community); and *valerse por si misma* (to be self-reliant).

Delgado Bernal et al. (2006) argue that these concepts have a powerful potential to transform classrooms, educational programs and support services in colleges in positive ways. These concepts focus on strengths and resilience and not on the deficit approaches that have often portrayed the Chicana as passive, with little ambition, and blame their culture and family for their academic underachievement (Cuadráz, 2006; Medina & Luna, 2000).

## Latina/o Critical (LatCrit) Theory

What is considered theory in the dominant academic community is not necessarily what counts as theory for women of color... *Necesitamos teorías* (we need theories) that will rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries – new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods. (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 25)

LatCrit theory is an expansion of critical race theory. Both are derived from critical theory and share the goal of promoting transformation in society by advocating for individuals who have suffered oppression (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Critical race theory originated in the latter part of the 1980s in schools of law and sought to interrogate, document, and challenge racism, race, and the legal system in this country (Yosso, 2006). Legal scholars looked for “both a critical space in which race was foregrounded and a race space where critical themes were central” (p. 6). Their argument was that critical legal studies ignored the lived experiences of people of color and thus could not contribute to the transformation of society without an analysis of race and racism. Legal scholars argued that civil rights legislation did not fulfill the promise of legislative efforts on behalf of Black and White communities. Ethnic and Women’s Studies scholars in the social science, history, Marxism studies, cultural nationalism, and internal colonialism studies also participated in the development of critical race theory over 30 years ago.

In the past however, critical race theorists have ignored issues that are critical to Chicanas, including immigration, bilingualism, and the contradictions of Catholicism. In response, LatCrit overlaps with critical race theory to shed light on specific issues of immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, language, and sexuality. It is important to point out that LatCrit does not compete with CRT (Huber, 2009; Solórzano

& Delgado Bernal, 2001). Instead, it complements and supplements CRT by foregrounding issues mentioned here that are critical to Chicanas (Valdés, 1996) and provides a sharper lens from which to examine the experiences of Chicanas (Pérez Huber, 2009). In 2000 at the Fifth Annual LatCrit Conference, LatCrit was

conceived as an anti-subordination and anti-essentialist project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community... This is accomplished by placing multidimensional identities within the intersection of sexism, classism, racism and other forms of oppression at the center of our research. (LatCrit Primer, 2000)

Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) list the five themes that comprise the basic research methods and pedagogy of a CRT and LatCrit framework in the education field:

1. The centrality of race and racism and inter-sectionality with other forms of subordination.
2. The challenge to dominant ideology.
3. The commitment to social justice.
4. The centrality of experiential knowledge
5. The interdisciplinary perspective. (p. 314)

With regard to the centrality of experiential knowledge, it is important to point out that studies based on LatCrit and CRT explicitly seek to know about the lived experiences of Chicanas and to view their knowledge as strength. To accomplish this, researchers draw from methods, such as chronicles and narratives, storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, (stories), *consejos* (advice), and *testimonio*. Together, CFE, NCB, critical theory and LatCrit merge effectively. I draw from one more theory that corresponds with and complements those discussed thus far.

### **New *Mestiza* Theory**

It was only by reading about the life of Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands* (1987) that my understanding of New *Mestiza* Theory, based on a *mestiza* consciousness, began

to develop in meaningful ways. (My observation is that New *Mestiza* Theory and *mestiza* consciousness are used interchangeably in the literature. For the purpose of this paper, I will use the first). To know about the personal, professional, and political life of Gloria Anzaldúa is to further understand her work and her theory.

Anzaldúa's childhood in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas was impacted by religious beliefs, assumptions, and rejections that greatly inhibited the development of her sense of self. She rejected childhood Catholic customs in favor of her ancestral Aztec indigenous traditions, icons, and rituals to re-conceptualize the way she views history and the world. Thus, she is propelled into adulthood with a raging and inner *guerra de independencia* (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 37); a battle for independence. As an adult, Anzaldúa proclaims she is lesbian by choice and embraces a radical turn toward the Aztec Indian tradition that views alterity as power in what she considers the ultimate act of rebellion for lesbians of color: sexual resistance and rejection of male-dominated roles (Anzaldúa, 1987; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). The rigidity of her upbringing, in a community that believed that sexuality was to be feared and men were to be served, stressed a patriarchal view. A woman's desire to improve her own life was considered a selfish act. This form of patriarchy evoked the "shadow beast" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 38): a feminist rebel that rejects authority and is feared and devalued by men.

Anzaldúa embraces her Aztec roots and language, which also provide important insight to the understanding of New *Mestiza* Theory. Turning to her ancestral customs and language provides her with a different way to view history and lays a unique foundation for the conceptualization of her consciousness. The complexity and uniqueness of New *Mestiza* Theory lays partly in the way Anzaldúa uses her language(s)

and Indian customs and traditions to reclaim and re-conceptualize the Chicana's place in history. Using these tools, she unveils her vision for a better world for all women in which social justice and respect for diversity prevail. In what is a trademark feature of New *Mestiza* Theory, Anzaldúa weaves her languages in distinct ways that include Aztec terminology, poetry, code switching, *testimonio*, *caló*, and *pachuco* terms and *corrido* lyrics, all variations of the language of the *barrio* and the border. Anzaldúa notes with pride that Chicano Spanish, one of the seven languages she commands, arose from the need for Chicanas/os to identify and convey their uniqueness. In response to criticism by other Latinas and Latinos for "mutilating" Spanish, she asserts that Chicano Spanish is a border tongue that developed naturally, that it is not incorrect, and is instead a living language. She takes assaults on her language personally: "So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language...I am my language" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 81). Aptly entitled "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (referring to Anzaldúa's critical discourse), the fifth chapter of *Borderlands* reflects the passion about her language with a powerful quote by Ray Gwyn Smith (unpublished book): "Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?" (p. 75)

Another unique feature of New *Mestiza* Theory lies in its *transfrontera* consciousness, which advocates for unity and forward movement with and for Chicanas and all women of color across nations and borders. This consciousness stems from Anzaldúa's continual movement between and among multiple and often conflicting worlds, which informs her perspectives and shapes her work. She describes her worlds as follows:

What am I? A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings...one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the

man's world, another in the working class...who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me. (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 205)

It is her experiences among these worlds, on both sides of the U. S. border, that are the base for her inclusive trans-cultural advocacy and her aim for social justice.

Anzaldúa is a risk taker who, as a result, benefits by developing innovative and transformative insights and attempts to awaken these insights in others through her radical writings. It is her rage against lifelong oppression and her own community's rejection of her decision to become a lesbian that makes Anzaldúa's theory above all a feminist theory. Drawing from her Aztec roots in what is a striking use of the metaphor of corn, Anzaldúa (1999) describes the strength and resilience of the *Mestiza*:

Indegenous like corn, the *Mestiza* is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions. Like an ear of corn – a female seed bearing organ – she is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture. Like kernels she clings to the cob...she holds tight to the earth...she will survive the crossroads. (p. 103)

Intensely spiritual and political, Anzaldúa's work is widely published and often discussed in the political spaces of progressive scholars. According to Keating (2006), Anzaldúa's theories offer much to social scientists who seek to merge cutting edge theoretical insight with social justice. Keating adds that Anzaldúa's is a radical vision for social change. Thus, Anzaldúa has become the focus of university courses dedicated to the study of her theories that promote social justice for Chicanas, Latinas, feminists, queers, and all women of color. The National Gloria Anzaldúa *El Mundo Zurdo* Conference, held annually, revolves around the study of her work exclusively. Thus, in a study such as this, where I seek to understand how the Chicana persists against a less than 1% doctoral completion rate in this country, LatCrit and New *Mestiza* Theory represent a very appropriate theoretical approach.

## *Testimonio*

*Testimonio* is a form of personal testimony with roots in Latin America that has often been used to document and denounce the experiences of oppression or violence committed against oppressed groups from that region of the world (Beverley, 2004; Gutierrez, 2008; Pérez Huber, 2009; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). As a foremost scholar in this area, Beverley offers inclusive and extensive understandings on the discourse of *testimonio*. Beverley uses several theoretical lenses from which to theorize and expand our understanding, including Marxism, feminism, post-colonialism and the subaltern. Alluding to the Spanish meaning, Beverley writes that to “*dar*” (give) *testimonio* is to bear truthful witness...to testify” (p. 16). Theory in the Flesh, a phrase used interchangeably with *testimonio*, presents an authentic thus accurate interpretation of the unique experiences, class struggles, and trauma of many Chicanas. This phrase refers to the idea that our body is a site for knowledge and language and thus, we create and embody theory. That is, because we are not bound by someone else’s theory, we are not bound to someone else’s interpretation of our story. We are free to question how we conduct research and not bound by Western standards of what constitutes acceptable research methods. In light of the findings in my review of the literature, which point to institutional economic and cultural challenges for Chicanas in the academy, I am driven to draw from *testimonio* with its base in a CFE because it recognizes and legitimizes the Chicana as a source of knowledge and will lead to a fuller understanding of the experience of this group. Among Moraga (1983), Carmona (2011), and other Chicana scholars, *testimonio* and Theory in the Flesh are often used interchangeably. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will use the term *testimonio*.



Both complex and rich in meaning, *testimonio* is difficult to define. Several scholars argue there is no one clear meaning and thus presents a challenge to scholars who attempt to define it (Beverley, 2004; Carmona, 2011; Pérez Huber, 2009; Scholz, 2007). This is partly because *testimonio* does not fit into any one specific literary or rhetoric type (Scholz, 2007). In agreement, Beverley (2004) argues that *testimonio* is not a literary genre but is instead a cultural concept or practice, which causes confusion in the literature. While there is no universal definition for *testimonio*, a number of scholars from various fields today present a range of perspectives surrounding the concept. For example, *testimonio* is viewed as a verbal journey of one's life with a focus on the effect of injustice (Brabeck, 2001). Yúdice (1991) refers to *testimonio* as "authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation" (p. 17), while Cienfuegos and Monelli (1983) claim that *testimonio* allows one to transform past experience and personal identity into a new present and better future.

The Latina Feminist Group (2001) considers *testimonio* a vehicle for the creation of knowledge and theory via the personal experience and realities of women of color. *Testimonio* is based on life stories of class struggle, survival, and resistance, and thus serves as a basis for developing theory and political practice as a form of resistance. *Testimonio* has the power to become communal and allows us to shout at the world (Carmona, 2011). Finally, Carmona concurs with other scholars that, because it speaks to our own unique lived experiences, *testimonio* is difficult to define.

Thus, for the purpose of my dissertation, I define *testimonio* as a story of struggle and injustice in the academy, with its present day consequence/s as told in the first person by my study participants. While a universal definition may not exist (Beverley, 2004;

Carmona, 2011), I anticipate the life experience/s of my participants may shed even more light on the definition of *testimonio* from my perspective as a Chicana educator. The following chapter on methodology speaks to how I employ the theoretical framework discussed here.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The terms “a-risk” and (lack of) parent involvement...signal attention to Latinas as having “problems requiring attention. Very little research, however, paints nuanced and complex portraits of Chicana/Latina lives from which we can consider their cultural or gendered perspectives, resources, and resilience in interaction with institutions of power. (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 4)

This chapter outlines the qualitative data collection tools I used for this study. I begin with a summary of an informal explorative pilot study I conducted, followed by the rest of the chapter, organized as follows: 1) purpose of the study and research question and sub-questions, 2) research question and analysis matrix, 3) discussion about *testimonio* as method and the cultural construct of *consejo*, 4) steps for data collection, 5) data analysis, and 6) the research site and participant selection criteria.

Prior to moving back to the southwestern part of the country from the New England area where I completed my doctoral coursework, I conducted an informal pilot study after several discussions and gathering of preliminary data. Driven by findings from my review of the literature, I was curious about Chicana scholars in my hometown, which sits on the border between Mexico and the United States. Specifically, I wanted to know whether Chicanas on the Southwest borderlands had encountered similar experiences and or challenges as those in my review of the literature. If so, how did they negotiate these challenges? Discussions and initial information peaked my interest further and led me to develop and conduct this dissertation study.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

Maxwell (1996) argues for the inclusion of three purposes when designing a study. These include a personal, research, and practical purpose. This research will explore the following three questions: First, in light of the fact that less than 1% of Chicanas complete a doctorate in the United States, how did academics from the southwest border of the United States negotiate their experiences in higher education? My curiosity stems not only from the challenges in my own personal experience but from a sincere desire to positively impact the academic experience of other Chicanas working toward a doctoral degree. Maxwell's research purpose, which compels us to enhance our understanding about what is happening in the study and why, aligns with my two sub-questions: What were the most memorable experiences of the Chicanas in my study and why? How do their experiences contrast with Chicanas from other parts of the country?

Finally, with regard to Maxwell's practical purpose, which focuses on the accomplishment of a goal, I aim to fill a gap in the way research has been conducted in many of our institutions of higher education; namely from a traditional Eurocentric perspective. I draw from Delgado Bernal et al.'s (2006) Chicana Feminist Epistemology that aligns with the unique theoretical method of *testimonio* (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). This approach responds to the call for newer research methods, from a number of scholars who view this gap as critical to the scholarship of future Chicanas (Achor & Morales, 1990; Casas & Ponterotto, 1984; Chacón et al., 1983; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Elénes et al., 2001; Gándara, 1982; González et al., 2001; Ponce, 2002; X. Reyes & Rios, 2005; Solórzano, 1993; Turner & Thompson, 1993; Vásquez, 1982; Zurita, 2001).

The following matrix shows a synthesis of my data collection and analysis. It explains what I needed to know and how I was going to analyze data from interview responses. The matrix also lists cultural constructs and analytical tools I utilized for this study, followed by a detailed discussion of *testimonio*. I conclude this chapter with information about my research site and participant selection criteria.

Table 1. Research Question Analysis Matrix

Research Question						
In light of the fact that less than 1% of Chicanas completes a doctorate in the United States, how do academics who are part of this group make sense of the ways they negotiated their experiences in higher education?						
Data Collection and Analysis Matrix						
What do I need to know?	Why do I need to know this?	What data will answer this question?	How will I collect this data?	Who will answer this question?	What theoretical concept am I addressing?	How will I analyze this data? *FIRST, I will ask: Does my data...
1. Basic personal & family background for each of my participants;  "Tell me about your family history"	This may contribute to understandings about how participants' background may have impacted (& how they negotiated) their doctoral experiences	Age, birthplace, education debt, married status & children – as noted on the Personal Demographic Chart	Interview 1  Personal Demographic Chart  *Artifacts that may represent memories/hardships/joys etc.  Example: pictures, old or new items, etc.	Participant	1.Tenets of <i>testimonio</i> , (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001) *Listed directly across from this column (#1).  2. Cultural constructs; (Delgado.Bernal et al., 2006) **Listed directly across from this column, (#2).	1....demonstrate a sense of social/political urgency? Is it applicable to the wider community of Chicanas?  2...signal education, teaching, learning and ways of being & knowing?  <u>Possible ex's/words./expressions:</u>  "It's not easy to admit fear about the doctoral process"... "The ideal daughter would get a job - not go to college"... "I simply wanted to scream..."  <b>SECOND</b> see Tables 2 and 3, last columns.
2. When & why did you decide to pursue a doctorate?	Responses may contribute to understandings about the drive to succeed.	Detailed answers and memories	Interview 1  *Artifacts	Participant	<i>Pensadoras</i> (Delgado.Bernal et al., 2006)	Do data show participants' creative/independent thinking?
3. Who, (if anyone), impacted your decision to...& how so?	May reveal how key players' <i>consejos</i> were used to negotiate Chicanas experiences	Detailed answers & memories about key players	Interview 1  *Artifacts	Participant	<i>Consejos</i> (Delgado.Berna et al., 2006)	Do data reveal advice related to education, teaching, learning, or ways of being & knowing?
4. What role, if any, did your mother/father play in your decision to pursue a doctorate?	May reveal how key players' <i>consejos</i> were used to negotiate Chicanas experiences	Detailed answers and memories	Interview 1  *Artifacts	Participant	<i>Consejos</i> (Delgado.Bernal et al., 2006)	Do data reveal advice related to education, teaching, learning, or ways of being & knowing?
5. Education-related information & background for each of my participants	May contribute to understandings of how educational trajectories may have impacted how participants negotiated their doctoral experiences	Parents' educ'l level & profession, public or private sch attendance, field/s of study, level of education-related debt, age during & after doc. completion	Educational Demographic Chart	Participant	1. Tenets of <i>testimonio</i> (.Latina Fem Grp, 2001)  2. Cultural constructs; (Delgado.Bernal et al., 2006)	Do data:  1. Demonstrate a sense of social or political urgency or is it applicable to the community of Chicanas?  **2. Signal education, etc.?

Table 2. Data Collection and Analysis Matrix Sub-question 1

What were the most memorable experiences for these Chicana scholars and why?						
Data Collection and Analysis Matrix						
What do I need to know?	Why do I need to know this?	What data will answer this question?	How will I collect this data?	Who will answer this question?	What theoretical concept am I addressing?	How will I analyze this data?
1. What was your most difficult course & why? Did it result in any type of tension or trauma for you?	May reveal how participants negotiated any emotional pain, trauma, racism or marginalization	Interview transcripts w. detailed answers, memories, and/or explanations	Interview 2	Participant	<p>1. <i>Testimonio</i></p> <p>2. Cult. Constructs</p> <p>For each question:</p> <p>“memories reconstruct epistemology and are an important characteristic and part of the role of <i>Testimonio</i>” (K. Reyes &amp; Rodríguez, 2012, p. 527)</p> <p>Do any of the answers/memories to these questions fit the tenets of <i>Testimonio</i>? (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001)</p>	1. I will do a recursive reading of all transcripts and all field notes
2. Did a “least favorite” professor/s cause any tension or trauma during your doctoral experience? How so and why?	May reveal how participants negotiated any emotional pain, trauma, racism, or marginalization	Interview transcripts with detailed answers, memories, and/or explanations	Interview 2	Participant	<p>*Artifacts that may represent memories, hardships, joys, etc.</p> <p>Example: pictures, old or new items, etc.</p>	2. I will code manually, all salient themes and quotes & conduct member checks; an electronic copy of each interview transcript will go to every participant with an optional invitation to review & revise.
3. Overall, what was your most positive experience?	Will contrast with any trauma	Interview transcripts with detailed answers...	Interview 2	Participant	<p>*Artifacts</p> <p>...or fall within the Cultural constructs of:</p>	3. I will contact participants whose *quotes will be used to ensure accuracy of my description of their experiences.
4. Overall, what was your most negative experience?	May reveal deep feelings of frustration and/or resilience	Interview transcripts with detailed answers...	Interview 2	Participant	<p>*Artifacts</p>	
5. Did you ever feel oppressed by anyone on the basis of race, gender, class, or sexual preference? If so, what was that like?	May reveal how participants negotiated any emotional pain, trauma, racism, or marginalization	Interview transcripts with detailed answers, memories, and/or explanations	Interview 2	Participant	<p>*Artifacts</p>	
6. Did you ever give any thought to the idea of quitting your program?	May reveal deep feelings of frustration and/or resilience	Interview transcripts with detailed answers, memories, and/or explanations	Interview 2	Participant	<p>*Artifacts</p>	

*Convivencia?*  
*Consejos*  
*Conocimiento*  
*Nepantla*  
 (Delgado Bernal, 2001)

Table 3. Data Collection and Analysis Matrix Sub-question 2

How, if at all, do these experiences of Chicanas on the southwest border mirror (or contrast) with what is found in the literature about other Chicanas who have earned a doctorate?					
<b>Data Collection and Analysis Matrix</b>					
<b>What do I need to know?</b>	<b>Why do I need to know that?</b>	<b>What kinds of data will answer the question? How will I collect this data?</b>	<b>Who will answer this question?</b>	<b>What cultural construct am I addressing to delve into responses to my questions?</b>	<b>Analytical tools</b>
<p>How are the experiences similar?... why?</p> <p>How are they different?... why?</p> <p>Do they identify as “Chicana”?</p> <p>How do they define “Chicana”?</p> <p>Are these women politically active?</p>	<p>Am searching for introspection and a triggering of <i>*memories</i> that will provide, expand, &amp; enrich the data about the educational &amp; personal experiences of the lives of my participants as relates to their pursuit of a doctorate...</p>	<p>Transcripts; Interviews</p>	<p>Participants</p>	<p>...<i>*memories</i> reconstruct epistemology and are an important characteristic and part of the role of <i>testimonio</i>... K. Reyes &amp; Rodriguez, 2012, p.527</p> <p>Do any memories/stories fit the tenets of <i>testimonio</i>? (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001)</p> <p>Do responses demonstrate any evidence of the <i>*cultural</i> constructs I use to investigate my research questions? Delgado Bernal, 2001:</p> <p>*Ex: <i>Convivienza?</i> <i>Consejos?</i> <i>Educación?</i> <i>Conocimiento?</i> <i>Nepantla?</i>...</p>	<p>Interview Transcriptions, Field notes, Interview tapes, Manual coding for: themes &amp; quotes, Member checks; An electronic copy of both interview transcripts will go to each participant with an optional invitation to review &amp; revise Participants whose quotes will be included in final dissertation will be contacted to ensure accuracy of the description of their experiences</p>



### Discussion of *Testimonio*

Historically, *testimonio* emerged as a voice for those who were persecuted by the government and/or other political entities in Latin America (Burciaga, 2007). As such, *testimonio* unveils, in first person, the political, social, and cultural accounts of individuals on the margins of society with the intent to promote social movement and positive change in the lives of others (Burciaga, 2007; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Also inherent to *testimonio* is that it challenges silence as it reclaims a voice and a space in which previously omitted, ignored, and unheard social justice issues can be debated. Finally, in this dissertation, *testimonio* promotes collective understandings with regard to how Chicanas have navigated their experiences in higher education, is accessible to larger audiences, and most importantly, it provides a different lens from which to view the lives of Chicanas; *testimonio* “provides another way of seeing” (Burciaga, 2007, p. 66).

There are three elements of *testimonio* that contributed uniquely to its use in the framework of my methodology. First, it served as a process: initially, participants were interviewed and tape recorded. Secondly, the audio-tape and transcription of the interview served as a product. Finally, *testimonio* served as pedagogy in the sense that it defined the way Chicanas often learn, through *papelitos guardados* (silenced histories) generated “on the church steps and on the kitchen table that “speak to *mujer* (women) centered definitions of teaching, learning and ways of knowing rooted in Chicana /Latina theories and visions of life, family community and world” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 2). A note on the process: I emphasize here that the researcher does not “do” a *testimonio*. Instead, the researcher conducts an interview. Only after the interview was

conducted did I determine whether the tenets of *testimonio* had been met (Benmayor, 2002; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Tierney, 2000). I

looked for the following tenets as I analyzed my interviews. *Testimonio*:

- is told and reported in first person
- has a sense of political or social urgency
- is generalizable to others; we learn about the conditions of many from the story of one
- carries a desire for social movement and change, in contrast to oral history
- helps retrace, document, and organize our political, social, and cultural histories

Like oral histories, *testimonio* looks for information about life experiences through the use of interviews and transcription. Unlike oral histories, however, *testimonio* clearly calls for social movement and change (Benmayor, 2002; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). In line with this assertion and relevant to higher education, leading scholars like Pérez Huber (2009) argue that *testimonio* has the power to disrupt the “apartheid of knowledge” in academia, which favors dominant Eurocentric ideologies and ways of knowing (p. 639) as she also promotes *testimonio* for researchers who want to talk back to racism. Moreover, Keating (2006) refers to *testimonio* in the arena of higher education as “cutting edge theory” (p.7).

While *testimonio* has been underutilized in educational research in the past, this genre is just now seeing resurgence in the field (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). K. Reyes and Rodríguez (2012) offer extensive information on the use of *testimonio* as research methodology, with a discussion that covers *testimonios* in dissertations by Chicana/o and Latina/o scholars.

In the August 2012 issue of *Excellence & Equity in Education*, dedicated exclusively to the genre of *testimonio*, Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) “maps out the methodological, pedagogical and the political” uses of *testimonio* in education (p. 411) in

an in-depth discussion of how Chicanas are shaping *testimonio* today. Moreover, scholars grapple with how to “fit” *testimonio* into the established way of laying out one’s methodology in educational research. In one example, with regard to using *testimonio* as research method, scholars urge researchers to be cautious when they translate the words of their participants, taking great care to translate conceptually rather than literally. If not, they assert, researchers run the risk of “reproducing language marginalization” (p. 365); that is, meanings can shift and nuances can be lost. Thus, these scholars make clear that culturally specific knowledge is important when we use *testimonio* as method.

### **Discussion of Cultural Constructs**

In addition to the tenets of *testimonio*, I looked for Delgado Bernal et al.’s (2006) theoretical cultural constructs in my analysis of interview data, constructs that signal education, ways of learning and teaching, and ways of being and knowing in the lives of Chicanas. By emphasizing culture, these constructs move away from deficit frameworks to give meaning to the diverse and everyday lives of Chicanas as members of families, communities and the greater society.

Delgado Bernal et al. (2006) list and briefly define these new beginnings as follows: *educación* (holistic and moral education), *la facultad* (knowing through experience and intuition), *pensadoras* (creative thinkers), *consejos* (narrative storytelling), *testimonios* (testimonials), borderlands (the geographic and symbolic spaces between countries and differences), *sobrevivir* (survival and beyond), *convivir* (the praxis of living together in community), *valerse por si misma* (to be self-reliant), consciousness,

(Several of the women in my study spoke of the *consejos* that came from key members of their family, particularly the mothers. I discuss these *consejos* in Chapter 4, Findings.

### **Pilot Study, Data Collection: Demographic Forms, Interviews, Email Journals**

As part of the initial effort to garner support for my study, I e-mailed a former colleague (Appendix A) to request her help upon my return to El Paso. Over the course of a few months, I met with several other academics and a former professor to discuss the feasibility of a study such as mine. With their help, I conducted an informal poll to see if I could locate enough women who met my criteria. I secured approval for my proposal, then began with a list of potential participants. I made phone calls to introduce myself and to provide preliminary information about my study. If and when the participant agreed, we scheduled a time, date, and place for the first interview during this initial phone call. As a follow up to this phone call, I mailed three items to each participant: an abstract, an initial demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) and consent form (Appendix C), Participants were asked to complete these three forms by the first interview at which time I collected them.

The abstract consisted of a short paragraph, and the consent form was very specific with regard to the amount of time I would need from each participant. The consent form also addressed the minimal risk involved from participating in this study. The demographic form gave participants the option to provide me with a pseudonym to be used in this study and requested basic information such as age, title, and certifications held. In this initial demographic form, I also asked questions related to how my participants self-identify when asked about their ethnic identity. This question (about how

my participants self-identify) was important for several reasons. First, there is a big difference in how people on the Southwest border (who are of Mexican descent) self-identify ethnically. Hispanic, Mexican American, American of Mexican descent, American, and Chicana/o are some of the labels used; the latter is seen by many as an out-dated label. Second and more importantly, based on the findings of my review of the literature, I saw a connection between how some Chicanas self-identify and their experiences in higher education. That is, when they identified as Chicana, most demonstrated a political awareness and resentment about the inequality experienced in higher education. This very resentment seems to have factored into how they negotiated some of the more challenging experiences in their quest for a doctorate; it drove them to persevere. I address this further in Chapter 4, Findings and Chapter 5, Discussion.

All interviews were tape recorded and consist of a semi-structured format designed to provide an in-depth view of the experiences of my participants. In the first interview, I inquired about participants' personal and family background and history. I asked questions related to participants' reasons for pursuing a doctorate and about surrounding key players who might have impacted their decision to pursue a doctorate, including parents.

Prior to beginning the second interview, I verbally requested short answers to the logistical questions found in my Personal and Educational Demographic Charts (Appendix F and G). The answers to the questions on these charts were designed to be short. I needed this information to provide a snapshot/demographic sample/short biography of each participant intended to help the reader to get to know the women. This also allowed me to dedicate the majority of time to my open-ended interview questions.

Email journaling (Burciaga, 2007) was used for the purpose of allowing me to follow up on questions, clarifications, or verification that I needed after interviews were completed.

### **Data Analysis**

After all interviews were recorded and transcribed, I underwent a process of recursive reading of all transcriptions and field notes. Specifically, in the transcriptions, I looked for the tenets of *testimonio*: elements of political or social urgency that are applicable to others from a collective group; a desire for social movement and change, or, stories that might help retrace, document, and organize a political, social, or cultural history and a description of how these impacted the way Chicanas negotiated their experiences. Data were coded manually and then organized into themes depending on the frequency of occurrence.

Within the *testimonios* of the women, I also looked for elements of Delgado Bernal et al.'s (2006) cultural constructs of *consejos*, *pensadoras*, and *nepantla*. In several *testimonios*, the women spoke primarily of *consejos*, constructs that signaled education, teaching, and ways of knowing and being in their lives. The *consejos* that emerged from the *testimonios* related to advice given mostly by mothers and professors.

Delgado Bernal (1998) asserts that under the framework of Chicana feminist epistemology, the Chicana is brought into the analysis, interpretation, documentation, and reporting of her *testimonio*. That is, the Chicana is at the center of the development of this authentic knowledge. In line with this, I sent an electronic transcript after each interview upon request, to 2 participants, as per my consent form. Participants whose quotes were

selected for the final dissertation draft were notified and asked to review their quotes to ensure accuracy.

My review of the literature demonstrated that the use of Spanish, often in the form of *consejos* and *dichos* (advice and proverbs) was embedded in the daily language and writing of many Chicana scholars. Because Spanish is the mother tongue for most of my participants, I suspected it would surface in the interviews, and I was right. Therefore, I made sure to translate and transcribe with participants' feedback to ensure accuracy and authenticity. My intent was to honor not only *what* they were saying to me but also to honor the language of my study participants. *Testimonio* paved the way for me to paint a more "nuanced and complex portrait" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 4) of the women in my study.

### **Research Site**

The location for this study is the city of El Paso, located in far West Texas. The context of El Paso is relevant to this study because of its unique cultural diversity and geographical location. Anzaldúa (1987) likens living in a borderland, like El Paso, to "living in a state of psychic unrest" (p. 95). To further understand this unrest and reasons that the context of El Paso is relevant to this study, it is useful to review the demographics and history of this part of the American Southwest. I provide extensive detail on the demographics and history of El Paso under my Findings, Chapter 4.

## **Participant Selection**

Participants in this study consisted of 10 female doctorate recipients from University A, University B, and University C. They were selected on the basis of four criteria. First, they had to be women of Mexican descent who identify as Hispanic, Mexican American, Chicana, or Latina. Second, they must have earned a doctorate degree. Third, they must live along the Southwest border. Fourth, all must have worked in the field of education. I attempted to vary the group in age, experience, and years of having held a doctorate. Unlike current doctoral students, individuals who had already earned a doctorate were most acquainted with the full process related to the acquisition of a doctorate. By varying age, experience, and year of completion of a doctorate, I hoped to display a range of experiences to attain a rich data base from which to analyze experiences.

Working from the three demographic forms (Appendix F and G) and the initial questionnaire (Appendix B), I developed a participant profile that included age, birthplace, how they self-identified, marital status, and other relevant data. Educational and family demographics also contribute toward a comprehensive collective portrait of these scholars.



## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

What happens when members of low-status and marginalized groups become university sanctioned “native” ethnographers of their own community? ...I did not even consider the multiplicity of self and identity until I had to confront my own marginality in relation to the dominant majority culture. (Villenas, 1996, p. 712)

Like Villenas (1996) the doctoral process has unveiled much about my own marginality in the eyes of the dominant majority in this country. This doctoral process entailed a long and deep self-interrogation that brought me to understand the phenomenon of Internalized Oppression and how it undermined not only my own progress in the academy but, based on my review of the literature (Chapter 2), the progress of the larger community of Chicanas. As I set out to “study my own,” I saw images of myself in what I was learning about some of the women in this study. In their *testimonios*, I heard self-doubt that was disturbingly familiar, but I could not name it. “It” was internalized oppression, which I have had to make sense of to become one of the 1%. What caused these women to envision and then persevere in their doctoral studies?

In light of the fact that less than 1% of Chicanas in this country ever complete a doctorate (Yosso, 2006), the findings in this chapter address the following research questions: a) In what ways do academics who are part of this group make sense of the ways they negotiated their experiences in higher education? b) What were their most memorable experiences and why? c) How do their experiences contrast with Chicanas from other parts of the country who have earned a doctorate?

I sought participants in my study with the following criteria in mind. Participants 1) must be females of Mexican descent who identify as Hispanic, Mexican American, Chicana, or Latina; 2) must have earned a doctorate degree; 3) must live along the Southwest border; and 4) must work in the field of education. The rationale for selecting women who have already earned a doctorate is that they are acquainted with the full scope and process of acquiring of a doctorate. Also, by varying age, experience, and year of completion of a doctorate, I had a range of experiences from which to draw and analyze my data.

Historically, the lived experiences and everyday practices of marginalized groups have been seen as devoid of theory in the academy (Elénes et al., 2001). The findings in this study reveal how theory can be informed and shaped by the very lives it presumes to explain and understand (p. 63). Moreover, the experiential knowledge of the women in my study, shared through their narratives and *testimonios*, connects to theoretical frameworks that challenge the dominant deficit discourses about Chicanas, specifically in the context of higher education.

Studies and articles about the educational pipeline (Figure 1) and the experiences of Chicanas in academe overall allude to the dismal numbers of those who do not attain a doctorate in the United States (Burciaga, 2007; Yosso, 2006). In contrast, this study explores the experiences of 10 Chicanas who did attain a doctoral degree. Furthermore, the rationale for selecting women from the southwestern border of the United States is to learn from Chicanas who have attained a doctoral degree in a specific region of this country with a unique historical, political, social, and cultural landscape that is mostly invisible in existing research studies.

## **Overview of the Chapter**

I begin with a description of the research site. I present demographics, followed by how tourist pamphlets typically describe the region, and then provide historical background for El Paso. I then follow with a description of my own lived experience as a 63-year-old resident who has lived on the border my entire life. To further contextualize the research site, I then provide a description of the universities where 9 of my participants earned their doctorate. I add a third description for University C where only 1 of my participants earned her doctorate. Next, I introduce the reader to the women in my study with a collective portrait of the group followed by a short biography of each of the participants. In the following section, I summarize the methods I used to determine the three major themes that emerged. I then provide a definition and a discussion for each theme. Finally, through narratives and *testimonios* of the women in this study, I delineate how each theme relates to (and in some cases profoundly impacts) their doctoral experiences. It is by revisiting memories that the narratives and poignant *testimonios* emerge as these women relate how they negotiated their experiences in higher education.

## **Research Site**

This study took place in a region of the country with a unique historical, political, social, and cultural landscape. The site is El Paso, located on the southwestern border of the United States. Census Bureau statistics for 2011 list 81.4% of the population of the city as Hispanic or Latino and estimates the city's population at 827, 398 for the year 2012. Among those over the age of 25, 22.5% are high school graduates, 12% hold a bachelor's degree and 6.2% have earned a professional or graduate degree. From the

years 2007-2011, the median household income average is listed at \$38,259 while the per capita income is \$17,618. Twenty five percent of the city's families are listed as living below the poverty level (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013).

Pamphlets written for the tourist seeking “a unique international experience” usually describe El Paso as a bilingual and bicultural city, where across the border; Juarez, Mexico and Mexico as a whole are viewed more as neighbors than two different countries. Both cities are promoted as being part of an international metropolitan and industrial region. Many branches of U.S. major corporations are jointly based in Juarez and El Paso with twin plants that operate under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Thus, speaking Spanish is more of a necessity than a luxury for residents from El Paso because many of them work in Juarez at these plants. Most businesses in the El Paso's downtown area cater to residents of Juarez and El Paso by advertizing in Spanish and English. Overall, the influence of the Mexican culture is deeply embedded in El Paso as seen by the prominence not only of the Spanish language, but by the strong presence of Mexican restaurants, various other business establishments and most noticeably, the large population of people of Mexican descent in this desert territory. However, tourist pamphlets make no reference to the historical facts about how this terrain was acquired by the U.S. government almost two centuries ago or about the extreme surveillance of the border, clearly visible and marked by an 18-foot fence today.

## Historical Background

By looking through a historical lens, one can retrace and document the political, social, and cultural landscape of El Paso. Indeed, it is El Paso's unique history which, to a large extent, defines its people today. This terrain was once a part of Mexico in the 1800s and was also a pass to the northernmost part of Mexico. In the war between the United States and Mexico that ended in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States acquired 8 of its present day states: Texas, New Mexico, California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming. Today, these states are known as the American Southwest. Espousing the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, the U.S. government empowered itself to redraw the boundary of Northern Mexico, proclaiming these lands as new American territory. In the power shift that evolved, White hegemony became established in Texas with new and discriminatory land laws that worked to the advantage of the Anglo. This colonial expansion and acquisition of an enormous territory by the United States government paved the way for a non-White labor force that consisted of a new ethnic identity: the Mexican-American (Anzaldúa, 1999). With the aftermath and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, a line was drawn to demarcate the border. Today El Paso sits on that line, marked by a fence that divides the two countries.

In what she considers; "an unnatural boundary and topography of displacement," Anzaldúa (1999) refers to the borderlands as *una herida abierta* (p. 2), an open wound, as a result of the historical assault on Mexico after the war between the countries. More than the taking of land, this acquisition of land represents the imposition of American supremacy over people, like Anzaldúa's grandmother; on her own land. Anzaldúa's

personal *testimonio* represents a radical departure from the way history is taught in U.S. schools. Moreover, the official story of how our country's western expansion unfolded is omitted from textbooks. Anzaldúa describes the borderlands:

where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds...Before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture...set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. (p. 25)

Anzaldúa (1999) asserts that “the borderlands” are a region full of contradiction.

On a very personal level, I see this every day. It is a region where many pledge allegiance to the United States when we know we walk on land that was brutally taken from our ancestors. While many of us have benefitted from a formal education, we watch as “Texas style accountability” (Maxcy, 2006, p. 1) fails our youth and often dismisses them as lazy and under achievers (Valenzuela, 1999). We cross the bridge and go back and forth mundanely to buy groceries or to visit our relatives on a weekly basis. Juarez, with its drug cartels, is referred to as the murder capital of the world, while El Paso is considered one of the safest cities in the country (Martinez, 2014).

What follows is my embodied history of El Paso through my own lens as a 63-year-old woman who has lived on this U.S. Mexican El Paso her entire life. I describe how my own view of the city and general frame of mind has changed profoundly as my own process of leaving for a different part of the country to work on a doctorate unfolded. It was my exposure to and learning in New England for five years that challenged my views and widened my perspective about the profound effects of social injustice. This learning experience away from my El Paso forced me to face elements of racism and sexism in my own community of El Paso and the world in general that I never

saw before. What follows is an auto-ethnographic account that reveals some of the realities of living in the borderlands my entire life.

### **A Lived Experience on the Border**

The Gonzales's (my maiden name) are Mexican Americans. Our grandparents were all born in Mexico. My father was born in Shafter, my mother in Marfa, both small towns in far West Texas. My parents moved to El Paso in 1948 so my father could attend school and earn a certificate in mechanics. He attended school by day and worked as a cab driver at night. As stated in my introduction, he was robbed and burned in his cab by two soldiers who were based at the military installation located in El Paso in 1952. The two men were later convicted and sentenced to life in prison. At the time, I was two years old. My mother, with a fifth grade education, was left to raise me and my three siblings by herself; two boys and two girls. With the exception of my older sister, my siblings and I have resided in El Paso our entire lives.

Crossing the border from El Paso into Juarez, Mexico to visit our relatives was a regular weekend activity. We visited my *tio* (uncle) Mingo and *tia* (aunt) Delia who lived with their three children in a large one-room structure that looked like a large shack. My *tia* would pack the dirt floor down by sprinkling water on it every day, so the house usually smelled like dirt after a rain. The walls were covered by big sheets of cardboard—the kind refrigerators are packed in, which served as insulation during cold winters and hot summers. There was no bathroom, so we always used an outhouse when we visited.

Back across the border in El Paso, living conditions were better for my family and me. Although we lived in the housing projects, it never occurred to me that we were also poor, just not quite as poor as my relatives in Juarez. As a child, the immigrant struggle was familiar to me as I saw our relatives and other immigrants cross the *Rio Grande* (illegally) or the international bridge (legally) into El Paso daily in search of work. The bridge was a 30-minute trek to the housing projects where I lived, so these immigrants sometimes knocked on our door in search of work or food. To me, it seemed theirs was always a life of poverty and struggle, and ours was definitely a more comfortable one. As a weekly border crosser, I learned many lessons in those early and most impressionable years of my life. As I interacted with immigrants, including my relatives, they would say things to me in awe and admiration: “*Aaah, tú eres del otro lado,*” followed by, “*Aaah, tú hablas ingles*” (aaah, you are from the other side – aaah, you speak English). By “the other side’ they meant the other side of the bridge/the border into El Paso. They put me on a pedestal because I spoke English and because I was from the other side. The lesson for me was that I was somehow “better.” I’ve learned that this is very possibly how and when I began to feel that I was better than my own people at such an early age. It was a precursor to the ways I came to see myself as someone with a higher status than immigrants, a sad and disappointing discovery I made about myself after a very deep, personal, and perplexing self-interrogation when I was writing a reflection for my comprehensive exam paper. Unbeknown to me at the time, within the first five years of my life, I had positioned myself above Mexican immigrants. My elevated positioning began to shift in elementary school, where I then began to learn some other lessons. Now, White people, in contrast, were positioned above *me*.



When I attended public grade school in El Paso, I read about Dick and Jane and the beautiful green meadows where they “frolicked” (an English word that fascinated me as a child). I do not remember one picture or one story about a *Mexicano*, a *Mexicana* or any historical figures who came from my own background or any other members of my community in any of the books we read. Instead, I read about Dick and Jane and their meadows, with no relevance whatsoever to my own desert terrain of Far West Texas. Only at the age of 55, when I first saw the white picket fences, steeples, pointed roofs, and April showers of New England, did the reading books of my earliest years come to life for me.

When I began first grade in 1956, English was the only language I was allowed to speak in my school. My brother Beto’s hand was once slapped with a wooden ruler by a teacher who overheard him speaking Spanish. I feared this kind of treatment, and I think that is why I may have stopped speaking Spanish. Today I know that this is how so many of us have come to lose our native language. Thirty years later, as a bilingual teacher on my very first parent teacher conference, I realized I could not communicate in Spanish at a level befitting a professional bilingual teacher. It was then that I began the long process of taking back my Spanish, a process that continues still today.

It was also in those early school years that I somehow came to learn that the language, food, and the white skin color of the *Americano* were better than mine. *Americano* was the label we used for White people—if they were nice to us. *Gringo* was the label we used if they were not nice. My sense now is that little about my own people, language, and customs were deemed worthy to include in the curriculum. After all, the *Americanos* were given prominence in our textbooks, and *Americanos* held the positions

of teachers and administrators in our school. *Americanos* were all I ever saw on the screen when we got our first black and white television. *Americanos* just always seemed to hold those visible positions of authority and fame, so I think that is how I began to think of them as special as or maybe even better than myself. Now, in these most formative years of my schooling, it was *I* who was putting *Americanos* on a pedestal, just as the Mexican immigrants who I had encountered had put *me* on a pedestal. I had put *Americanos* on a pedestal because, from my perspective as a child, they were always visible and in charge.

This prominence of *Americanos* in my life continued throughout high school. When my principal suggested to his wife that she hire me, I became a switchboard operator in what was a low level civil service government position at the federal courthouse in downtown El Paso right after I graduated from high school. It was there that for the first time in my life at the age of 18, I interacted with a number of *Americanos* on a personal basis. I remember very clearly thinking “how nice these *güeros* (Whites) are!”

Within the next seven years, I began my undergraduate studies, married, became a mother of two, and then divorced. To finish my bachelor’s degree, I moved into the housing projects with my children and successfully applied for food stamps so I could work part-time only, so as to earn a bachelor’s degree more quickly. This degree, with a specialty in bilingual education, led me to a 27-year career working primarily with children of Mexican immigrants. Toward the end of my career in education, and eight years prior to retiring, I worked as an English language instructor to adults, many of them Mexican immigrants, at the community college level. They inspired me to teach my heart

out because they were so motivated and eager to learn English. They became the impetus for my doctoral aspirations. This is the El Paso that I knew and grew up in until I moved to New England, temporarily, at the age of 55 to work on a doctorate degree.

Only by moving away to New England for five years to work on a doctorate did I come to see my own city in a different light. By moving away to what was a virtual new world, I came to see things from a different perspective every time I came home to El Paso for a semester break. For example, I once attended a Christmas banquet held by the District Attorney's office. After the introductions, what was glaring to me is that most of the attorneys were White. Most all of the special investigators, like my brother, were Mexican American retired police officers. Why was that? This observation triggered lingering questions that came to rest when I surmised that the White attorneys had perhaps had more opportunities to secure an education than the special investigators who did the grunt work for them, such as locating witnesses or serving subpoenas. Most assuring to me was that there was no question in my mind that the Mexican American special investigators were every bit as intelligent as the White lawyers and that they either did not want to become attorneys or perhaps they had not had the same educational opportunities. Up to this time in my life, I would not have made such an observation, let alone come up with some possible answers.

On another occasion while in El Paso I ran into two different school principals on two different occasions. Former good friends as well as colleagues, they excitedly asked about the focus of my course work in graduate school. I got a notable reaction from each of them (their facial expressions revealed a level of awkward discomfort) when I responded that much of my coursework revolved around the notion of racism. After I

responded that I was learning a lot of fascinating things about racism, one of the principals blinked her eyes, looked down, then asked if I would like to see pictures of her grandchildren, while the other asked: “We don’t have any of that racism here (in El Paso), do we”? Only because I was studying racism did I find their responses fascinating.

On yet another holiday at home, I noticed a huge grey haze covering the skyline as I drove on the freeway. The haze was coming from Juarez, visible on the other side of the freeway. I wondered if the smoke was from the many American factories located there that pay average daily wages of \$5.00 to assembly workers. I have come to learn how these low wages result in huge profits for corporate America. These corporations also benefit greatly from the unregulated discarding of toxic wastes that pollute the air in Juarez. Unfortunately, due to our proximity, this waste pollutes our own skyline as well. The haze also made me think about how environmentally conscious I was becoming as I saw how many people in the little towns of New England feel it is their responsibility to protect nature and their environment and keep out the Wal-Mart Corporation, a notion that was new to me and which I came to learn more about.

Moreover, I have had to re-examine my own conscience with regard to the wages I pay to people from Juarez who cross the bridge into El Paso in search of work. I am one of the thousands who have, in the past, paid a \$40.00 daily wage for a maid to clean my entire home or \$50.00 a day for yard work. Today, I think twice about how much I should pay and, more importantly, with the dignity of these workers in mind, I ask what they think would be a fair wage for the work they will be doing for me.

These experiences of traveling back and forth from New England to El Paso during my doctoral studies made me confront my, until then, unchallenged perspectives

of the city I have always called home. My exposure to different epistemologies that stress a critical way of thinking as a result of the doctoral process as a whole shaped a new way of understanding my home town and myself. It was also by leaving El Paso and moving to New England for a number of years that I experienced entering a politically progressive community of scholars. During this time I was exposed to what, for me, was a new form of awareness: advocacy for social justice. Today I ask questions about social justice in my city and in the world that I never knew to ask before. Leaving the comfort of my home town has become the opportunity to expand my view of the world, a different world filled with academic, environmental and cultural perspectives in New England, in contrast to the southwestern part of the United States and particularly my own home town of El Paso.

As described below, unlike my own experience, 9 of the 10 women participating in my study have stayed in the same academic and cultural environment and in the same city most of their lives. Might this be a factor in how they make meaning of their present environment and more specifically, their academic experience in higher education? Enrolling in a university with a focus on social justice and language, literacy, and culture in a politically progressive New England town exposed me to many of the ideas that caused me to interrogate my own views as well as those of my community and the world. In the following section I describe the academic institutions that the participants in my study attended.

## University A

Seven of the 10 participants in this study earned their doctorate degree from University A. A microcosm of the city of El Paso, University A is located in one of the largest bi-national communities in the world and enrolled 22,740 students in the fall of 2012. Seventy seven percent of the students are listed as Hispanic, 2,165 as White-non Hispanic and 1,226 are Mexican who commute from Juarez and other parts of Mexico daily. The number of degree programs includes 70 bachelor's, 75 master's, and 19 doctoral degree areas. Spending over \$76 million annually on research, University A's aim is to become the first national research university that serves a 21<sup>st</sup> century student demographic profile. In 2012, the *Washington Monthly* magazine named University A 12<sup>th</sup> among the finest universities in the nation. With a student body made up of Mexican-Americans primarily, this university touts an education that transcends borders and caters to industries and organizations that look for a diverse work force and graduates who are educated in a highly multicultural setting. University A offers academic and research programs that help fill a critical regional and national demand for experts in education, health, environmental science, and homeland security. This university is clearly visible to residents from one of the poorest *colonias* (neighborhoods) directly across the interstate. Of the 1,226 students at University A who are Mexican, many are Juarez residents and cross the bridge into El Paso daily to attend classes on University A's campus.

*The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education Magazine* has rated the College of Education as third in the nation for awarding bachelor's degrees to Hispanics and fourth for awarding master's degrees. At the College of Education's Leadership and Foundations department, where the majority of my study participants attended graduate

school, there is a new policy that allows for doctoral dissertations to be written and defended in Spanish. The policy stipulates the required criteria to ensure the standards and integrity of scholarship as determined by the dissertation committee, committee chair, and the dean of the graduate school. This policy was discussed by one of the participants in this study, who despite her struggle with English, opted instead to face the challenge of defending her dissertation in English.

For almost 16 years, University A's unique Ed. D. Program has served one of the largest bi-national and multicultural communities on the U.S.-Mexico border with the goal of preparing educational practitioners and researchers in higher education and K-12 systems. The aim is to integrate academics with skill development needed in professional practice. Alumni of this program are expected to hold high level positions in schools districts and other educational settings (Vera, 2012).

### **University B**

Two of the participants in this study graduated from University B which is a land grant, Hispanic-serving institution. The university's website lists satellite campuses in 5 counties. One satellite learning center is located in the capital and has extension offices in 33 counties and 12 research and science centers via its distance education program. The university serves a multicultural population of over 29,000 students and is listed as one of *U.S. News and World Report's* best universities in the country. Because of its historical ties to Spain and descendants who were Spanish colonists, students at University B are more likely to self-identify as "Hispanic" versus Mexican American, Latina/o, or Chicana/o (Personal communication with Dr. Judith Flores Carmona, August, 2013).

### **University C**

I wanted to locate at least 10 participants for my study and I had trouble finding participants who held a doctorate and met my participant criteria from University A and/or University B. Thus, I approached an individual who earned her degree at University C. Therefore, within my participant criteria, only one of the participants in this study (who holds the doctorate degree for the longest amount of time) earned her degree 35 years ago, in 1978, from University C. According to the Office of Information Management and Analysis web page, 51,112 students were enrolled at University C in the fall of 2011. Half of these are White, while 17.6 % are listed as any combination of Hispanic, and 80% are listed as Texas residents. Of interest to minority students, the university's website states, as part of its mission, that it must tap into the diversity of color that is reflective of the state. In an online welcome message the University's President touts University C's Division for Diversity and Community Engagement as a Division that works to ensure the university is free from discriminatory practices, harassment, and misconduct in a fair and equitable environment. The website lists a number of initiatives dedicated to the fulfillment of this part of its mission.

### **The Women: A Collective Portrait**

A collective portrait of the 10 women in this study reveals many similarities. All have earned a doctorate degree. With an average age of 51, ages range from 38- to 68-years-old. The majority of the participants were born in or very close to the El Paso area. Of the two who were born in Mexico, one became a citizen 50 years ago when she and her family moved to the United States, and the other is an international student currently



working to obtain her citizenship. As such, the majority are first-generation American citizens whose parents were born in Mexico, immigrated to this country, and worked primarily as laborers or farm workers. Formal education levels of participants' parents varied from a grade school education to one father who earned an associate's degree from the local community college, and one other who earned a bachelor's degree. Two of the mothers attended, but did not finish, college. All but one of the women has resided in or around the El Paso area for most of their lives. In their *testimonios*, they reveal how living here has, in the majority of cases, shaped how they have made sense of their experience of earning a doctorate.

With the exception of one, the women in this study have worked in the education field their entire career; primarily as teachers of children and/or adults who were non-English speakers. Only 4 of 10 women originally selected the education profession as their first career choice. Three are married or in a relationship, 3 are divorced or single, and 4 are married with children. One received a scholarship, and the rest received help in the form of financial assistance/assistantships or incurred debt from loans. As a whole, the women in this study were unfamiliar with the concept of a doctorate while growing up or even in their early college years. The notion of earning a doctorate was never mentioned in any of their homes, but they all recall a strong inner drive to push forward with regard to their education. All had a need to excel academically; not necessarily because their parents had done so but because of advice from parents and other mentor figures. Advice was given mostly in the form of *consejos* (advice), mostly in Spanish, which the women discuss in their *testimonios*.

All but one of the women in this study came from a two-parent home with the number of siblings ranging from three to seven. In several cases, it was older siblings who paved a way to the college route. Only 2 of the women were the oldest child in their family. Other key figures, often mothers, provided support and *consejos* (advice) that helped paved the way for these women to pursue and persevere on their road to the doctorate.

One of the women was classified as an international student from Mexico while working on her dissertation. She received her bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees from University A's School of Education and spent her primary K-12 education years in schools across the border from El Paso in Juarez. In addition, the participants' individual narratives offer a glimpse to their experience. In the following, I provide an introduction to each of the women that includes specific and individual information about family, education background, and current research interests.

### **Participants' Backgrounds**

#### **Paula**

Paula is 47 years old. She and her two brothers were born in El Paso. Due to her father's administrative job with the federal government, the family moved extensively during her childhood, living in various small and urban towns throughout Texas and California. She learned from both parents who attended college that "education is the key to everything" and aimed to be a "doctor" since childhood. She attended and taught in Catholic schools and received her bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees from University A where she is a visiting assistant professor today. Her doctorate, completed

11 years ago, investigated dropout rates among high school females. Her present research revolves around using technology to prepare new teachers for the classroom.

### **Andrea**

At 60 years of age, Andrea was the 5<sup>th</sup> of 7 children, all boys, born in El Paso to parents who emigrated from Mexico. Both parents were pulled out of school at an early age to help support their respective families in small rural towns in Mexico. While Catholic schools were a priority for Andrea's parents, little emphasis was placed on the importance of an education beyond high school, and it was instead her oldest brother who motivated and inspired Andrea and her siblings to attend the university and who set an example by completing his doctorate. While she completed her doctorate at 35-years-old at University C, she has resided in El Paso the majority of her life. Her doctorate and her research interests have always revolved around adult education and English as a second language. Andrea is phasing into retirement this year from University A.

### **Mercedes**

Mercedes was born to migrant workers in a small town on the outskirts of El Paso, is 61 years old, and has resided on the Southwest border her entire life. She is the oldest of 4 girls and 1 boy and the first in her family to earn a high school diploma, a master's degree, and a doctorate. While both parents attended grade school only, it was with her mother's support, against her father's desire, that Mercedes received an education beyond high school. He believed marriage and a husband to support her was what Mercedes should strive for. Her entire career was dedicated to English language

learners, after beginning as a teacher's aide, then as a teacher and as a trainer of teachers. She will soon retire as her district's director of Title I programs 12 years after earning her doctorate.

### **Liza**

The youngest of all the women in my study, Liza is 39-years-old, has two younger brothers and was born in California to parents who emigrated from Mexico. Her father was pulled out from elementary school to help support his family, while her mother left her student teaching in Mexico to join her sisters in the United States. Eventually, moving to a small rural town on the outskirts of El Paso, Liza and her brothers grew up knowing that going to college was never an option; it was "just what you did." Currently her school district's evaluator for several federal programs, Liza's passion is around policy and evaluation. She obtained her doctorate in May 2012 and aspires to become a director of Research and Evaluation in one of El Paso's school districts.

### **Christine**

Born in El Paso to parents who graduated from high school and held clerical jobs, Christine is 44-years-old and has lived in the Southwest her entire life. While her parents never talked to their children about college, Christine states it was somewhat of a "hidden directive" for herself, her two sisters and her brother. Watching her father earn his associate's from the Community College had a big impact on Christine and her siblings. She said it was in this way that her father set a powerful example of the importance of an education to his children. After teaching at several grade levels and serving as a principal

at the Pre-K and elementary level, she completed her doctorate in Spring 2012 and is currently the principal at a middle school.

### **Ella**

Ella is one of two participants in this study who was born in Mexico. She is 63-years-old, the second of seven children, and entered public school in El Paso as a non-English speaker at the age of 6. Ella remembers that although she knew how to read and write and knew her multiplication tables, she was made to feel inferior because she did not speak English. Because Ella's mother wanted to understand her children at the dinner table, she made her children speak Spanish at home, going against the school's recommendation. Ella interprets this as her mother's way to promote the family's interaction and communication and is very proud of her mother for bucking the system in this way. A lifelong resident of El Paso, Ella earned her doctorate after retiring from her school district 10 years ago, took a teaching job in a northwest university and recently returned to El Paso to live.

### **Bertha**

Bertha is 43-years-old and a veteran of the military. Her parents were immigrants from Mexico, and she was born in what is considered the poorest section of El Paso, the south side, also known as *el segundo barrio*—the second ward. The youngest of three children, she remembers growing up in a tight knit community located within the pecan orchards in a small rural town outside of El Paso. Her fondest memories include playing outdoors amid the orchards and *arroyos* surrounding her community. She has vivid

memories of how all the neighbors took responsibility for each others children. With assistance from the GI Bill, she obtained her doctorate six years ago and now teaches at the university where she earned her doctorate.

### **Monica**

At 68 years of age, Monica is the oldest of all the participants in this study. She earned her doctorate late in her career, in 2001. Monica is the oldest of five children, all born in El Paso. Both of her parents received a high school education in one of the oldest neighborhoods in El Paso, where she has lived most of her life. A retired principal from one of El Paso's largest school districts, she works as a consultant with expertise in school improvement and student learning through teacher/principal leadership development. She owns a summer cabin close to El Paso, and today works in central Texas where she recently moved to be close to her grandchildren.

### **Esther**

Esther is the second participant in this study who was born in Mexico. Raised there by her grandparents in a very loving home, she came to live with her parents in El Paso at the age of four where she attended K-12 schools. At 43, she was an international student and held a master's from the Universidad de Mexico across the bridge in Juarez where she is a professor with expertise in program evaluation. Esther she earned her bachelor's and doctorate from University A. Her doctorate focused on the educational experiences of alumni and graduate students. Esther commutes daily to work in Juarez

and back into El Paso, where she resides, to work on various research projects and publications with her former chairperson.

### **Deena**

Due to her father's job as a Border Patrol agent, Deena grew up living on several border towns along the Southwest border between Texas and Mexico. At 38, she is the most recent recipient of a doctorate, in May 2013. The focus of her dissertation was the educational access for Mexican Americans in higher education in Texas. With two master's degrees and an interest in criminal justice, she works in various capacities in her brother's law office. Deena is also a middle school teacher who works with emergent bilinguals in a rural town on the outskirts of El Paso.

### **Theme Development**

Three major themes emerged from the analysis of *testimonios* of the women in this study: (1) internalized oppression, (2) patriarchy, and (3) support and coping mechanisms. The major theme that I named internalized oppression prevailed across the interviews of 8 of the 10 women, surfacing often, albeit in different forms as evidenced in the *testimonios* of the women. From a more reflexive stance, this theme seemed strangely familiar to me, yet initially I did not know what to call it. The ability to name this theme developed as part of a frustrating and puzzling process through which I was finally able to name what had constituted my own struggle since the day I began graduate school. "It" was the phenomenon of internalized oppression. I had often felt it, I had read about it in my doctoral courses, but I had never used it to make sense of my own experience as a

Chicana pursuing a doctoral degree. Internalized oppression generally occurs when individuals from minority communities (e.g., women, people of color, etc.) value a different group of people (generally a group with privilege and power) to the extent that one devalues their own identity and aspires to become like them (Mason, 1990). One of the most prevalent characteristics of internalized oppression is the preference to align one's self with the norms and values of the dominant White culture. This reminded me of the way that I had sometimes preferred to align myself with the White members of my cohort because they seemed more knowledgeable about the dissertation process than the minority group members in our cohort. In a somewhat related example within this chapter, one of my participants had also spoken about consciously giving up the Mexican part of her identity to belong to the White dominant group in graduate school. While every participant spoke fluent Spanish, several chose to speak no Spanish at all during our various greetings, informal verbal exchanges, or during the interviews. Indeed, a few stated that while Spanish was the language most often spoken in their homes while growing up, it had been replaced with English as the language most spoken in their home today. Two women stated they disliked the term Chicana, saying it was connected to lower class people. I sometimes identified with the feelings of self-doubt from some of the women in my study: one said she did not feel worthy of being called an academic, while another expressed an urgent need to omit any trace of a Spanish accent when she spoke in English, particularly in graduate school. Two others alluded to the Crab theory/myth in reference to how Chicanas as a group are not supportive of each other. This folk myth/theory speaks to how people of Mexican descent pull each other down when they see each other succeeding in business/academe/financial standing.



In Chapter 5, I discuss the phenomenon of internalized oppression in depth by offering a comprehensive definition. I also discuss how the *testimonios* of some of the women exemplify this phenomenon. In what developed as a second theme of Patriarchy, two of the women in this study stated that the idea of obtaining a doctorate was not tolerated, let alone supported, by their husband to the extent that it had cost them their marriage. Another participant has spent her entire life trying to please her father for a mistake she made as a teenager, while another still believes the negative stereotypes about poor Mexicans that she heard from her father when she was growing up. A third speaks about her experiences with sexism in the military, only to face it again in the academy as a graduate student. The very poignant *testimonios* from these women show how overbearing men in their lives pointed to the theme of Patriarchy.

The final theme of Support Systems developed in answer to questions about how, over time, these women came to negotiate their experiences throughout the doctoral process. I wanted to know how they dealt with the self-doubt, the negative influence of overbearing males in their lives, and other challenges they faced in graduate school. Turning to various sources of support to get through some of their most challenging experiences, some spoke of professors who guided them with patience and helped them with coursework while maintaining rigorous academic standards and high expectations. Others shared *consejos* (advice from mothers or other key figures in their lives) that remain with them to this day.

I drew from the words of my participants' *testimonios* to determine the three themes of internalized oppression, patriarchy, and support systems. As words, phrases and themes began to repeat during my recursive reading of every transcription, I began to

determine and categorize possible major and/or minor themes by coding these salient words, ideas, and phrases, then wrote these on charts that allowed me to organize and “see” recurring themes. I cross-listed research questions, recurring themes, data sources, and theoretical frameworks and constructs on these charts. This ensured that I would adhere to the theoretical frameworks and could also record where, in my transcription binder, I could find these data. This chart also helped ensure that quotations that I might cite were aligned with transcription page numbers and cross referenced with participant’s pseudo names. Whenever I had a question about a specific quote or theme, these charts enabled me to see snapshots of information without having to go into the cumbersome binder where I kept the entire tabbed transcriptions. As stated, these charts not only helped me manage the growing amount of information I was obtaining, but made it easier to “see” themes as they began to emerge. Prior to each interview I had mailed an initial Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix B) to each participant while at the beginning of every interview I conducted two short one-answer surveys for every participant (Appendix F: Educational Demographics Chart and Appendix G: Personal Demographics Chart). I entered participants’ one-word/phrase responses on these two charts and consolidated all the information with individual pseudo names that corresponded to their answers. This facilitated access in one place, for example, for the age and place of birth of all participants. I used as much information as possible to construct a Collective Portrait that provides the reader with a snapshot of the group as a whole. The information from these charts, along with other details from conversations and interviews contributed towards the individual biography that I provide for each participant. It was very important that I “paint” a picture of the group as a whole as well as a biography of every participant

so the reader could familiarize her/himself with each person. It was my hope and my intent that the reader could connect the stories with the individuals as I had come to do.

I begin this findings section with an example that illustrates the phenomenon of internalized oppression. Some of the women in this section speak about immense inner struggles and self-doubt as they dealt with obstacles, not from the academy, but from within themselves.

### **Internalized Oppression**

On a basic economic level, being Chicana meant being “less”. It was through my mother’s desire to protect her children from poverty and illiteracy that we became “anglicized”; the more effectively we could pass in the white world, the better guaranteed our future. (Moraga, 1983, p. 28)

In *La Güera*, Moraga tells the story of her experience growing up in California as the *güera* (light skinned) daughter of a Mexican mother and Anglo father (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). She grew up knowing that “White was right” (p. 28) because being light skinned was a valued trait in her family, who were all Chicanos except for her father. While her mother spoke Spanish, Moraga never learned it at home but instead picked up the language from school and family members as she was growing up. She also grew up hearing descriptions of lower income Mexican Americans as “wetbacks,” “*braceros*” (manual laborers), and “a different class of people.” Ironically, Moraga’s family was also poor. From her mother, Moraga learned that being Chicana equated to being “less.” *La Güera* is a story of a woman who came to realize that her light skin and the negative stories about Mexican Americans she heard as a child played a big part in how she came to deny her native language and much of what was Mexican in her life into adulthood. Not only did Moraga feel negatively toward her own people, but she also

placed a higher value on White people, and for many years, she wanted to become like them. Several elements of Moraga's story are echoed by some of the women in this study.

**“I couldn't see a Chicana being an academic”**

Even after she had fulfilled a tour with the military by which she proved herself to be a good mechanic in spite of resistance from her male counterparts (discussed later) Bertha recalled how she was recruited into the military in the first place. With resentment, she remembered the presence of army recruiters “all over the place” in school districts like hers with predominantly minority populations. In spite of her experience and success in the military, Bertha had to reconcile the idea of being a Chicana *and* an academic when she began the process of earning a doctorate.

I was going...struggling within me; the Chicana idea—to me, being a Chicana was like uh, coming from the *barrio*, coming from working class, hard worker, and I struggled with the idea of becoming an academic *and* being a Chicana, for some reason, I couldn't see a Chicana being an academic....When I was a student, I felt that sense of powerlessness. You're just a student...what can you do? What can you say?

Bertha saw herself as the only Chicana in her cohort who came from a working-class background. This greatly contributed to her feeling out of place in a doctoral program and very much like an imposter. She felt very disconnected from the other students in her cohort as well as from her professors. She spoke about not having the right social or cultural capital because she often had no idea what the discussions around her were about. Several of the students from her cohort came from high socioeconomic backgrounds and spoke of things like the opera, which their families frequented. Increasingly, she felt out of place and wondered if she even belonged in graduate school.

In Bertha's world as a child, the memories consisted of playing barefooted in the fields with friends, watching airplanes flying over them. She recalls a sticky residue on her arms, which today she recognizes as pesticides, sprayed all around the pecan orchards that were a playground for her but a workplace for her father.

For me it was all about *El Chespirito*, *El Chavo del 8*, *el Día de los Muertos*, *Los Tigres Del Norte* (A Mexican TV personality, the Day of the Dead holiday, and a famous musical group whose music reflects the injustice that immigrants who cross the border face in this country)...I would feel a disconnect. They would talk ...about paradigms and I was like, "What is a paradigm?" Even though I had the experience of the military, I still felt a disconnect. Even as a professor, I see it now. I see very clearly that I come from a working class. It's obvious to me now.

While Bertha held three jobs while in graduate school, she remembers feeling angry about the fact that she could not attend the parties held by her fellow cohort members. She remembers they had few financial responsibilities; their expenses including rent, were often paid by their parents. In what is a stark contrast, her mother had lovingly given Bertha a \$100 bill to help with expenses when she began her graduate studies. On another note, out of all the women in this study, Bertha was the only one who self-identified as a Chicana, in writing, on the initial demographic questionnaire I provided to each participant.

### **"Chicana? Not now or ever!"**

Before all of my interviews, I asked participants to fill out a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). As I studied Monica's questionnaire prior to our first interview, I noticed something interesting in her response to question #12, which reads, "Do you now or did you ever identify as a Chicana?" Monica's response was followed by a written exclamation point and read exactly as follows: "No, not now or ever!" In New

Mexico, for historical reasons related to the conquest and subsequent ties to the Spaniards, many people of Hispanic origin self-identify with the term Hispanic, as was the case for Monica, who had done research on her family roots. In contrast, others who shun their Mexican heritage prefer and claim ties to Spain as opposed to Mexico.

I brought up Monica's response to this question, telling her I was very curious about it. Gingerly, I asked her if the exclamation mark after the word "ever" meant anything. With a gentle smile, I asked her, "Was I correct to detect some kind of emotion behind that exclamation mark?" Monica responded that prejudice does not exist now, but during her mother's years it did. Also, related to the question of self-identity on the questionnaire, Monica wrote the following, "I never identified with the Chicano Movement of the 1960s. I am not a Chicana and so this question does not relate to my identity. Adding that she had done some research on her genealogy, she had traced her family roots to Spain, ending with, "Therefore, I am Hispanic." She further stated that she did not identify with being Chicana because she had no negative feelings about who she was and that she felt proud and was a recognized person. In another written answer on the questionnaire about whether she had ever been active politically, her response was "No, I was busy getting an education." When Monica brought up the Chicano Movement in our interview, I asked what she perceived the movement to be about and whether she remembered what the demands were.

Yeah, it's political – it's a movement – it's riots – it's carrying the flag; returning to your roots. What roots? Well, the Mexican roots. The roots of the mother country – Mexico...and I saw and that was fine – but I didn't identify with it...Well, I think like Chavez, you know...they were going on in California and it was for those that were new people that had come in documented or undocumented. They had issues. I felt for them. I read about it. It was all over...they wanted pride – to be accepted. They wanted opportunities just like everyone else...jobs, ability. They were experiencing prejudiced

activities...barriers were being placed for them...the same thing I had heard my mother talk about when she was a young person...this was only one of many movements...now it's a whole different situation.

As our discussion progressed, Monica indicated that in our schools, kids of Mexican descent needed more opportunities than Anglo children. I asked for a clarification: "So does this mean you believed they were getting fewer opportunities than other children?" She responded as follows:

Not me, because my opinion was not important – it's how *they* feel or how their parents feel, that there would be this – in my school, and in the El Paso area, it was not an issue. Parents did not feel they were glad to be here. They wanted every opportunity for their children...if there was a need in my bilingual parents, then I would be part of that collaborative communication and see what their needs are and providing for them.

On the subject of parents, Monica encouraged those bilingual parents who could not speak English to work as volunteers in the cafeteria, saying that speaking to the children was where the learning (English) would take place. She was proud that many of her volunteers attended community college after she encouraged them, saying, "Become a bilingual teacher – that's your language." Toward the end of our interview, Monica went back to my question about the exclamation mark on her demographic form and addressed it as follows:

So as far as saying, "Not now-not ever," I guess what I really wanted to say in a very succinct manner is I never identified with it in the early years, and now that I have my doctorate, I feel even stronger with the term for me – of being Hispanic. I identify with it because of my research and things that I was doing.

In the following *testimonio*, Ella talks about how, through the process of earning a doctorate, she learned about the history of Chicanos. She expressed a contrasting view, in contrast to Monica's, about the subject of the Chicano's history.

**“I was giving up who I was”**

Ella indicated the most positive thing about her doctoral experience was learning about her history. She spoke specifically about Chicano history, indicating that learning about it was both a positive and a negative thing. She was elated to learn about her roots from a historical perspective, but yet she felt cheated and resentful.

Why had I not been taught all that through my years in schooling? I had been robbed of that – robbed to what I consider my identity...I felt I was trying to do what the system wanted me to do so that I could survive and belong and I felt bad that I was giving up who I was just to belong to a system. It was kind of like I had suppressed all those feelings and now I was kind of like peeling the onion. I was taking off those layers of suppression and the true self coming up... and it was so powerful that I mean I started crying...it's the colonized mind...we still have that with a lot of our ethnic group.

Like a few other women in this study, Ella was resentful as evidenced by the anger I sensed in her words during this interview. The anger in her voice struck me again as I was transcribing her words. In the following interview, Liza also expressed resentment and anger as she brought up the idea that to progress, women need to be supportive of each other. However, she further argued, a supportive atmosphere does not often happen within our own ethnic group. She thus attributes our lack of success as an ethnic group to the phenomenon of the *craw daddy syndrome*.



### **“Yeah, the whole crow daddy syndrome”**

In a discussion that veered into post-doctorate aspirations, Liza indicated that in El Paso, there are many opportunities that Hispanic women do not give each other, making professional advancement difficult. She concluded that her doctorate degree has been of little help in El Paso and that applying for jobs (that would mean a promotion) had been a useless endeavor for her. When I asked her to elaborate on the comment about Hispanic women specifically, she made a clear distinction between her professional experiences in El Paso versus another state where she has lived. She was resentful about this situation as she named several jobs for which she had applied.

Yeah, the whole crow daddy syndrome...Instead of helping Latinos and Latinas I think we hinder their progress...Hinder our own progress, yeah...I think that sometimes Latina women instead of helping each other, resent each other. They're *celosas* (jealous).

Liza's sentiments were echoed by Deena, who referred to the crow daddy syndrome by another name: the crab theory. Deena lived in Laredo, Texas prior to moving to El Paso, where her observation is that the power structure is dramatically different in these cities. She stated that in Laredo, it is the rich Mexican Americans who hold positions of power in business and local politics. In El Paso, her opinion is that a large number of Mexicans look up to Whites, not only in business and local politics, but at University A as well, in perpetuation of the “crab theory.” When I asked for an explanation to this theory, she claimed, “The crab theory is if you see a Mexican going up, you say *pues no*, (well no) I'm gonna pull you down with me, you know?”

The crab theory myth originates with the idea that literally, one need not cover a barrel of crabs to prevent them from escaping because they are all too busy pulling each other down and climbing on each other's backs to think of working together (Mason,

1990). This is a popular sentiment that I grew up hearing among Mexican Americans. Put another way, Liza means that all Mexicans, especially women, pull each other down in an effort to keep one another from succeeding. When I asked if she believed this is true for all Mexican American women, she clarified by saying that most of them behave this way. Both Liza's and Deena's references to the crab theory and the crow daddy syndrome refer to the same thing—the myth that Mexicans will always pull each other down instead of helping each other. In a sense, this myth exemplifies part of what internalized oppression is largely about; looking down at one's own people and distancing one's self from them.

Deena's and Liza's reference to the crab theory also echo the sentiments of one of Anzaldúa's (1990) writings, in which she claims that Chicanas no longer need White women (partly in reference to the Women's Liberation Movement, which she claims was a White women's movement) to suppress them because "Now we do it to each other" (p. 142). Anzaldúa offers an explanation for this behavior. She blames it on the indoctrination that we Chicanas have always undergone at the hands of the colonizer since the era of the Aztec conquest of the Indians. From this indoctrination, Anzaldúa claims, we have learned to adopt the colonizers' ways of conquering and dominating. We then turn against each other and use the same tactics. Stated another way, Anzaldúa argues that we internalize and utilize the ways of the Western culture against ourselves as a result of being colonized for centuries. In a different form of oppression, Esther felt resentment from several professors who were judgmental of her due to her Spanish accent.

## Nativist Racism

### **“They were discriminating because of my language”**

In a new development toward the end of the 20 interview sessions, I interviewed two participants whose *testimonios* follow. One of these women is different from all the others in this study. That is, while she was classified as an international student from Mexico during her time at University A, Esther is in the process of securing her U.S. citizenship today. Esther and Deena brought up a topic that had not surfaced before related to the experience of international students at University A and specifically, international students from Mexico. While the following data surfaced toward the final phases of my interviewing process, it surprised and disappointed me that it had not been brought up before. In the discussion in Chapter 5, I elaborate on how the *testimonios* from these two women point to Racist Nativism (Solórzano, 2010). While only these two women brought up the subject of racism attributed to the presence of an accent in one’s speech, I include this topic because it is a powerful one that is prevalent in the graduate school as evidenced by some important data that I provide at the end of this section.

As a 43-year-old international student, Esther received her first master’s degree at a university in Mexico. At University A, she received a bachelor’s and a second master’s degree as well as her doctorate. Of all the women in this study, she is unique in that she is literally a border crosser, having been an international student for over 8 years. She was a doctoral student at University A while, at the same time, working as a professor across the bridge in Juarez and commuted daily until the past year when she took up residence in El Paso. When she earned her doctorate in 2012, she was encouraged by her chairperson to defend not only her proposal but her final dissertation in Spanish. While University A

gives doctoral students this option, in what is a newly developed policy, Esther decided to take on the challenge of defending her dissertation in English instead. When interviewing Esther, it is obvious that communicating in English poses a challenge for her. In spite of this, she told me early on that English was her language of preference for all communications between us, so I immediately accommodated her. I had initially spoken to her in Spanish, assuming she might prefer that. This is often a mistaken assumption, albeit one of courtesy, with people who are Spanish dominant. While Esther does speak English with an accent, I understand her well. However, she prefers living in El Paso saying that it is a much easier and faster place for her to perfect her English. A highly experienced professor in Mexico, she talked about her expertise in program evaluation and her vast experience as a professor, administrator, and evaluator of university programs in her own *Universidad de Juarez*.

I was an administrator, kind of like a coordinator on different programs always serving professors and in continuing education for professors also. I decided I wanted to lead by example...that's when I decided I needed a master's and a doctorate.

In one of her graduate courses, Esther proposed to do a final paper that consisted basically of a comparative study between the education system in Juarez and the education system in El Paso, but her professor made her change to another topic. I asked her why.

Because he say he isn't aware of what is going over there...and he didn't felt like it was interesting for the K-12 system here. Really...he didn't know anything about the system over there – in Juarez. Write something about the education in the U.S., he said. He said something like this: he won't be able to help me if he don't understand the concept.

When I asked how she felt about his response, Esther indicated that the knowledge and the experience that she brought to the table was not valued by some of the professors at University A. She felt that all her expertise in her own university in Juarez was concealed (kept hidden deliberately) as if it did not exist. In addition, she said this particular professor who opposed her idea of comparing the education systems from both cities was very ignorant about border issues and preferred to skip the topic. Notably, in another *testimonio* that follows, Liza also brings up the subject of speaking with a Spanish accent.

Esther talks about additional instances during which she strongly sensed and in fact was sure that professors resented her accent. She acknowledges that English is a challenge but not an obstacle for her. She was fully confident that she could handle her dissertation defense in English. When she did so, she was barraged with questions by audience members and the members of her committee when she presented her proposal.

When I defended my proposal it was a complete and holistic evaluation of University A's doctoral program. One of the committee members who was the director of the program said I wasn't able (capable) to do this. I was planning to interview staff, faculty, dean, even the president of the university, students of course, and alumni of the community. So I had to switch completely the focus of my proposal...I had to start a new proposal. They recommended me to narrow the focus on my study...that make sense but on the other hand, they told me like...it was something like I wasn't ready for that kind of evaluation ...because I don't know...because they say "it will be too much for you...the complexity of the study". The whole committee thought this except my chair. They talk about it in the defense. The implication was: How do I wanna interview the dean and the president if I have some barriers...language one of them?

Esther's chairperson, who is also the department head, had approved this proposal but was overruled by the rest of the committee. I asked how she and her chair had felt about this; they were both very angry because the committee refused to negotiate in any

way. A very calm and mild mannered individual, Esther was the one who requested they move forward by changing the focus of her dissertation, even though she felt demeaned.

I felt like they were discriminating because of my language and they felt like how a student can evaluate them, you know? I really felt confident that I could do that. Planning and Evaluation – that’s my area at the university in Mexico where I am working now...of course...that’s one of my expertise areas.

Esther stressed that this treatment was common for international students from across the border. She also emphasized that her chairperson, who is also the chair of the department, was entirely supportive of her work. She credits him for all the support and assistance through her time as a graduate student. Deena, a member of Esther’s cohort who often witnessed the discrimination lodged against Esther as well as other international students, expressed anger over this treatment of international students. With much anger and resentment, Deena defended Esther as well as other international students and asserted that “having an accent does not equate to being dumb.” In another interview, Liza also touched upon two other related issues, including the perils of speaking with an accent in the academy.

### **“You gotta speak ...not with an accent”**

Liza expressed anger because she was never told about schools like Stanford and other elite institutions that she might have attended and wondered if this was related to her ethnicity. In addition, she also alluded to how a Spanish accent was frowned upon in the academy. Today, she wonders if there was a connection between being Hispanic, her lack of confidence in some areas, and the concern over speaking with an accent.

I don’t know why I would always underestimate my writing skills. I don’t know if it’s because I’m Hispanic or I don’t know... You gotta make sure that you work

hard – make sure that you’re a good writer and speak not with an accent; that I spoke English just as well as they did; that I could use an advanced vocabulary.

In a discussion about where Liza’s lack of confidence might have come from, she made distinctions between her own social class and that of other people of Mexican descent who were poor. She referred to material things that she was privileged to have. Overall, some of Lisa’s responses seemed to point to a connection between poverty, her lack of confidence, and speaking with an accent.

I didn’t come from a family that was poor - like my parents never asked for welfare, my parents always worked. They – I had a chimney to put it into perspective, you know, like poor kids...the barrio? I didn’t come from a class struggle; it wasn’t a poverty struggle; it’s an ethnicity struggle, if that makes sense to you...we always grew up middle class, I never did any field work. If I wanted Guess jeans, my parents would buy me that... so I was lucky in that respect.

In another discussion of the potential to be judged for speaking with an accent, Deena indicated that many international students tend to speak more slowly and with a heavy accent when doing presentations due to their language barrier. Her observation was that Hispanic professors tend to favor Whites and discriminate overtly, not only toward other Mexican Americans but also toward international students from Mexico who speak with a heavy accent. For example, at dissertation defense hearings, which are public and where several doctoral students present their work in the same day, Deena witnessed international students, “getting bombarded with questions from professors and other attendees.” At this same proposal defense hearing, one White student who proposed to do a migrant study with one participant received no comments or questions publicly but was told to increase her sample size by her professor, in a private setting, after the defense was over. According to Deena, this same student graduated with a dissertation that had a sample of three students in a study about migrant education.

In affirmation of Esther's, Deena's, and Liza's comments about the issue of speaking with an accent, Vera's (2012) study investigated the experiences of doctoral candidates at University A. In this comprehensive quantitative and qualitative research study of the Ed. D. program, respondents included alumni and current doctoral students as of Spring and Fall 2011. One of the areas of investigation dealt with students' challenges and specifically, the topic of the English language. The researcher considered this topic important due to the high prevalence of bilingual students at University A and more specifically, because of the number of international students who commute from Mexico and are enrolled in the doctoral program. Of the respondents, 81% stated that language "was not an obstacle" (p. 78). In contrast, 9.1% of the respondents, who comprised the international student cohort sample, indicated that language was a major obstacle. Interviews of these international students revealed that dealing with limited English was not only difficult, but they did not know how to deal with this issue. Asked to elaborate, one student felt the recruitment program did not address the cultural or language barriers faced by international students. Another student indicated that due to this language barrier, his participation in class had been limited and yet another stated he had many problems interacting with his cohort due to his inability to pronounce words correctly in English. To address these issues, some of the students responded that they had enrolled in courses to improve their language and writing skills.

Furthermore, in the survey responses and interviews of Vera's (2012) study, international students referred to difficulty understanding the organization of the program, the structure of the departments and the institution of the College of Education. Moreover, students pointed to a lack of support from staff as well as the need to have



office hours extended to evenings when required courses were held. In an informal conversation with one of the participants in this study who is currently a professor at University A, she confirmed (to me) that there is a pressing need to hire faculty who are stronger Spanish speakers to more effectively meet the needs of the population of international students from Mexico and in particular, those who choose to defend their dissertation in Spanish. The professor who shared this information with me had been asked to read a dissertation that was written in Spanish but regrettably had to tell her student that her own Spanish proficiency level was not high enough to accommodate the request. The findings from Vera's study not only list a number of concerns from graduates who are international students from Mexico including language-related "major obstacles," but also affirm a great deal of the information relayed by Esther, Deena, and Liza about the marginalization of students based on their accent.

### **Patriarchy**

If a woman rebels, she is a *mujer mala* (a bad woman). If a woman doesn't renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish. If a woman remains a *virgen* (virgin) until she marries, she is a good woman...only the nun can escape motherhood. Women are made to feel total failures if they don't marry and have children. (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 39)

Anzaldúa's quote depicts one of the tenets of LatCrit theory that entails the contradictions of Catholicism, which emerged in Liza and Mercedes *testimonios* dealing with virginity, to be discussed in this section. As interviews progressed, some participants began to uncover memories that had been forgotten after initially referring to the doctoral process in mostly positive ways; memories about how dominant males in their lives began to emerge. This second theme revolves around the issue of patriarchy and how it

impacted the road to the doctorate for the women in my study. Oppression from the institution of family, specifically fathers and/or husbands, is revealed in the *testimonios* of Mercedes, Liza, Bertha, and Christine as they remember how overbearing male figures in their lives profoundly impacted their decision to pursue and then persevere in their quest to earn a doctorate. As she argues against the tradition of male dominance in the Mexican culture, Anzaldúa (2009) asserts that patriarchy prevails when “limitations are placed on subaltern women under the rule of fathers” (p. 34). For two of the women in this study, the pursuit of a doctorate came at a high price: their marriage.

**“Aunque se me inque aquí” (Even if you kneel here)**

In her poignant *testimonio*, Mercedes, now 62-years-old, recounts how both her father and her former husband caused her unbearable sadness and pain that she has struggled with her entire life. She stated that everything she ever did in life was to please her father, who had preferred a perfect marriage and a husband for Mercedes over an education. Mercedes referred to her husband as “one of those machos who was not gonna let me go to school.” When she expressed an interest in getting a bachelor’s degree after marrying, she remembers his words, “*le va costar*” (it’s going to cost you). To her, this meant she would have to iron, cook, and make tortillas from scratch for him every day. Soon after, he had an affair and asked her for a divorce. She remembers his painful words after pleading with him to stay. As he pointed to the floor he said: “*aunque se me inque aquí, no le hace cuanto llore...no me voy a quedar. No quiero estar casado*”. (even if you kneel right here, no matter how much you cry, I will not stay. I don’t want to be

married). Mercedes had to tell her unsuspecting parents, who had helped him obtain a passport, the bad news. Her father then lent her money to pay for the divorce.

The most difficult part of this was that my dad told me that I had brought shame to his family...and that he was gonna have to watch over me more than my other 3 sisters who were at home because now people were talking about me because I was divorced - even though I was not the one who wanted the divorce....I was a virgin when I married this man...*mi vestido blanco, mis azáres- dicen que los mereces si eres virgen....*(my white dress, my pearl crown...they say you deserve these if you're a virgin).

Soon after her divorce, Mercedes married a second time, primarily to leave her father's house, and two years later, divorced again. To please her father, she took back her maiden name after both divorces and went one step further, again to please him.

My personalized license plates say "Arce." For 25 years I have kept my plates...because I wanted to prove to my dad that um....and it took my father years to eventually tell me how wrong he had been - how wrong he had been to criticize me, to blame me, to say that I had brought shame to the family name.

In a conversation with her father regarding her license plates, she told him that even if she ever remarried, she would keep her maiden name. With tears in her eyes she remembers that day, when he told her he finally realized how wrong he had been. Soon thereafter, one of her mentors, a former university professor, encouraged her to apply for a doctorate.

You know what?...my dad was very proud of the fact that I used to teach at University A ...and then, you know, one time I sat down and figured how much I was making an hour and I told him and he said Oh my God, like, and he even told my mom, like you know; *mira nomás lo que Mercedes gana en una hora y todo lo que ha hecho* (look how much Mercedes earns in an hour and all she has done) and this and whatever, so I started to think and I said you know, why not? Why not work on a doctorate?

It was then that Mercedes made up her mind to pursue a doctorate...again, with her father in mind. Her thinking was that her personal life had shamed him, so she wanted to make him proud of her professional life. Yet she still felt conflicted because, while

going for a doctorate was something she also did for herself, the thought of pleasing her father always loomed in her mind: I still wanted to make my father proud: “As old as I was; I was 40, I still wanted to make my father proud.”

After beginning her doctorate, hopes of a third marriage for Mercedes were ruined after she found out her fiancé was separated and not divorced as he had told her. His deception impacted her doctoral studies profoundly in negative ways after she ended the relationship. Concentration and writing became impossible for her. Clearly, her experience with these overbearing men left Mercedes scarred, but she persevered and earned her doctorate two years later. When I asked whether she ever thought about quitting her doctoral program, she responded softly and slowly, “Never, never, never, never.”

The final interviews with Mercedes were difficult and sad for both of us. Six months prior to our first interview, her father had died, so unveiling memories about him was emotional for her. Then a few days prior to our second interview her mother also passed away. Memories about the crucial academic support that her mother had provided in spite of her father’s opposition (during our first interview) were fresh in her mind on the day she helped her siblings write the obituary that announced her mother’s death.

**“In your face sexism...It was very clear”**

Exposure to sexism in graduate school was not a new experience for Bertha, who had been recruited to join the military right after high school. She recalled the incessant calls to her home by recruiters during her senior year in high school, an introduction to the heavy presence of military recruiters in schools with high minority populations.

Today, she recognizes this as a discriminatory practice that targets minority groups.

Bertha refers to her experience in the military as “in your face sexism.” Her expertise was in the area of airplane mechanics, and she endured harsh treatment from her peers who often assumed she was assigned to their unit to do paperwork.

I would usually be the only woman and they would try to give me the paperwork and I would say no – I’m a mechanic. It would take them a while to know I was willing to get dirty – to get the idea that I knew how to be a mechanic...but at first they would see me as a paperwork person.

After her military experience, Bertha earned her bachelor’s, her master’s, and continued on to graduate school where, as a doctoral student, she faced more sexism. For example, when she served as the only female on various committees, she was rarely asked for her opinion or feedback. Still today as a faculty member in the same university where she earned her doctorate, Bertha faces sexism but regrets that in spite of her experience and familiarity with sexism in the military, she continues to struggle with this issue.

I’m doing a lot better now, but sometimes I do struggle a lot...I still have a lot of issues...with people who are in positions of authority over me. I get back into that internalized oppression – maybe my own – *me achicopalo* (I clam up) - mostly when they are White males.

Bertha’s experience in the military included some tough situations in which she had to confront face-to-face racism around her male colleagues. While boot camp and the military had prepared her in a real sense to deal with colleagues like these, she still fails to speak up on her own behalf at times. She remembered growing up in a male-dominated environment.

I don’t know if that goes with the upbringing. I grew up in a – like gendered household where the man was the man and the woman, you know, she just did what the man said. You didn’t go against him or whatever, right? So I’m thinking maybe that’s why I didn’t speak up....so when I look at my courses here, I ask

myself: Why didn't I say anything? Why didn't I speak up? Why did I just let people say comments like that and I just went with it? I was not speaking up for the things that I was teaching.

Like Bertha, Liza remembered several incidents of sexism while working on her doctorate. Two of these occasions specifically involved several of her peers in a class where she was the only female.

**“Of course, if you're aggressive... they say, ‘She's a bitch’”**

Liza recalled two instances when males posed a threat to her in graduate school. In one class, she was the only Hispanic, while the other four students were White males. Liza felt threatened and compelled to prove that she could measure up to their standards.

I had to make sure that I was just as good as they were...that I spoke English just as well as they did...that I could use advanced vocabulary...that I could write just as well. I understood what was going on and I even remember thinking: wow, I'm smarter than they are. I know a lot more.

Later, in another specially designed class for which Liza was hand-picked by the professor along with three other males, she again had to take an aggressive stance.

I was selected to be part of this more elite group; my professor would call us the “fab four.” I was the only female in that group of three males, and I could take on any one of those guys...in any argument in any theoretical perspective – I don't know – they never intimidated me...and of course if you're aggressive, you know, they say, ‘She's a bitch’ or whatever...just because I knew my stuff, and I wasn't afraid to show it to them.

As an afterthought when we were finishing this interview, the subject of Liza's father came up. She remembered some of the things he had told her that left some strong impressions on her mind as she was growing up. She heard many stories from him and believes she internalized some ideas and stereotypes about poor people and minorities

from those stories, ideas that propelled her to advance academically so as to surpass poverty.

We were never allowed to eat ground beef at our house because my dad said that only poor people eat ground beef - because it's the scraps of all other meat that was left over...but then when I started cooking, I found I could make hamburgers, I could make *guisado* (stew)... the farm workers/immigrants – whatever you call them...*peones* (peons) they ate what was left over after the cow was stripped, so yes, I do now think it's true.

In answer to what she thought of her father's distinction between what poor people ate, Liza responded that banning ground meat altogether is ridiculous. However, it appears that his comments still linger because today, she justifies eating ground meat by purchasing 90/10% fat content ground meat as opposed to 70/30% fat content! From another story told to her by her father, Liza learned her grandfather had been de-loused at the bridge as he crossed into this country, a story that she indicates "makes my blood boil." In yet another story about when her father was almost jumped by *cholos* (hoodlums), Liza came to despise *cholos* after she was warned by her father about ever associating with them. This story made her want to be different and better than *cholos*, so she set her sights on educational goals to avoid being like them; as if to make a distinction between her class and theirs. Additionally, Liza stated that she hates the term Chicana because it reminds her of *cholas* (female hoodlums) and lower class people.

Liza claimed she was driven to earn a doctorate, to a large extent, by what she heard from her father and her internalization of his negative way of thinking. As a result of his stories and to make it through graduate school, she worked hard to eliminate any signs of an accent, learned to use the advanced vocabulary she believed was expected of her, and worked very hard to become a good writer. Liza added that for some reason, she always thought that if she was outside of this city, she would be able to get a job as a

director, unlike the opportunities that might be available to her in El Paso. In contrast, Christine's father, while overbearing in some areas, also left indelible memories in her heart after he passed away.

**“I thought this would be a great tribute to him”**

Christine, a principal of a middle school, recalls how her goal of going to law school after being accepted was blocked by her father because she would have to live in Houston, a city he considered unsafe. He did everything he could to discourage her even though she was adamant about her desire to leave El Paso. Her parents were very old-fashioned and strict and in her father's eyes, to have a daughter leave home was unheard of. Her acceptance to law school came as she was finishing her master's degree in administration, but due to her father's refusal to allow her to go, she opted to finish her master's and continued in the education profession.

In spite of this occurrence Christine's relationship with her father continued to be a very good one, and she often talked with him about her goals. In one of those talks, she told him about wanting a doctorate. His response was that he was very proud of her already, that a doctorate could not make him any prouder. Christine completed her doctorate degree after her father's death. On the day she graduated, her father was very much on her mind.

I thought this would be a great tribute for him...and I would also be focused on something else other than missing him so much. Graduation day was so hard because it was like I had to put closure to the death of my dad. And even now, you know, it's hard. I still cry about it. It's been seven years (tears).

Christine's parents never talked directly about going to college, but it was somewhat of a hidden directive in their home. She remembers how she and her siblings



saw him earn an associate's degree at the local community college, a huge accomplishment in their eyes. She and her siblings knew it was expected and as a result, each of them earned a college degree. With a smile, Christine also recalled always wanting to outdo her brothers and sisters and attributes this drive to her competitive spirit.

In conclusion, these *testimonios* collectively demonstrate how the male figures in the lives of Mercedes, Bertha, Liza, and Christine impacted their doctoral experiences. Christine's dream of attending law school was deferred due to her father's wishes. Liza struggled with but was able to stand up to the overbearing males in her classes. Bertha is a professor who teaches issues related to social justice today, which makes her wonder why she had such a difficult time talking back before. What caused these women to persevere? How did they overcome the challenges they faced with issues such as patriarchy? In the following final theme, the *testimonios* of the women demonstrate the support received from key figures in their lives. For several, the support surfaced in the form of *consejos*, which consisted of advice from key figures in their lives, often mothers (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). Others relate how, through the support and mentorship from others, they faced the toughest challenges and overcame obstacles through the most challenging of times during the process of earning their doctorate.

### **Support and Coping Mechanisms**

At the beginning of the first interview, some of the women could not think of a negative experience on the road to the doctorate. Indeed, every participant gave a resounding "No" to the thought of ever quitting the doctoral process. However, as

interviews progressed, many different vignettes began to emerge. The third theme of support systems surfaced with evidence of the cultural construct of *consejos*, defined as advice or life stories often heard at the kitchen table or on the church steps that often come from key women in our lives (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Often passed from one generation to the next, these *consejos* have a powerful impact as evidenced in the *testimonios* of the women in this study (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). *Consejos* re-situate the sites and sources of the construction of knowledge as *mujer to mujer* (woman to woman) centered ways that demonstrate how learning and teaching occur in the everyday lives of Chicanas (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006).

Most of the women in this study shared stories of advice from mentors that profoundly impacted their decision to pursue and or persevere through the doctoral process. The majority attributed their successful completion of a doctorate to a family member, often a mother, or often to a professor or a key close friend who mentored them. Since all the women in this study are bilingual, as are many of their colleagues and/or other cohort members and parents, advice often came in Spanish and in the form of the cultural concept of a *consejo* (advice that often comes from a female role model or another key person in one's life). The women told stories of how their lifelong educational trajectories came to unfold as the result of the caring people in their lives and the advice they provided. Stories of challenges began to unfold as some of the women shared how, through various support systems; they coped with these challenges in the most difficult and frustrating times along the process of earning a doctorate.

**“Tu tienes que trabajar con tu mente, y no con tus manos”**  
**(You must work with your mind and not with your hands)**

Several of my participants gave credit to their parents, who worked hard to motivate their children, albeit in different ways, to pursue an education and a career. Liza, whose father worked in construction, remembers the hot summers when, even though he made good money, he would come home very tired from working in the heat. He would stress, “*Tu tienes que trabajar con tu mente, y no con tus manos*” (You must work with your mind and not with your hands). Therefore, she also recalled that in their home, going to the university after high school was never an option: “It was a must.” The fact that her father attended the local community college and earned an associate’s degree reinforced the advice about education that he had given his children all throughout their childhood. Witnessing this accomplishment was a memorable experience for the whole family and for Liza; it was an amazing example of what she had to do in the future and more importantly, it represented the high expectations to which she adhered as she laid out her education goals for the future.

In another example of high expectations, the first messages Bertha ever got about going to college came from an eye doctor for whom her sister worked as a secretary. Bertha’s mom had encouraged her to work as a secretary also, in perpetuation of the gendered idea that secretarial work was ideal for a woman. The doctor advised that it was fine for her sister to work as his secretary for the time being, and then added that later on; “*ELLA puede ser la doctora!*” (*SHE can be the doctor!*)

It was this kind of advice that prompted Bertha, her sister, and brother to think about an education beyond high school. While her parents had emphasized the importance of education, she did not remember an emphasis on the idea of attending

college because it was financially out of reach. It was the advice from the doctor, along with learning about the availability of financial aid, which made it possible for all three to earn college degrees. “*Para que no tengan que trabajar en el fil,*” her father would say (so you all don’t have to work in the fields). Along with the notion of high expectations from her father, Bertha’s mother provided unconditional support. Given the family’s limited resources, mailing jalapeños and giving her daughter a \$100 bill was a sacrifice for Bertha’s mother. In this interview, Bertha became emotional when she remembered that she kept the money in a drawer, never used it, and returned it to her mom on the day she of her graduation. With a big smile, she remembered telling her surprised mother: “*No lo necesité, mami.*” (I did not need it, mamá).

It was Mercedes’s mom who would announce to the family that Mercedes should go to college, in spite of the fact that her father preferred marriage and a husband for his daughter: “*Si Mercedes quiere ir al colegio, va.*” (If Mercedes wants to go to college, she will go). In her soft spoken way, her mom came to remind her adult children thirty years later that it was Mercedes who had paved the road for the rest of her siblings to attend college. Mercedes stated that her mother shared three qualities with two of her mentors, both college professors: high expectations, a visionary spirit, and persistence. Indeed, it was her mother’s high expectations, hope, and vision of her daughter going to college that helped Mercedes focus on each of the degrees she earned, and her doctorate in particular.

What drove Mercedes to persevere? She claimed her father had the most to do with her drive to earn her doctorate and to be the best in her profession. That is, her own desire to make up for the *vergüenza* and *humillacion* (shame and humiliation) she had

caused him was a major force that made her persevere. She also recalled a particularly special moment before she began her doctoral work. Mercedes recalls she was teaching an undergraduate course when a student mistakenly addressed her as “Dr. Arce.” She loved the way it sounded and from time to time, would repeat the phrase to herself in a gentle whisper. For Mercedes, the simple, whispered sound of the phrase “Dr. Arce” often became a major motivating factor every time she felt frustrated or emotionally drained by the doctoral process.

While the following narratives do not meet the tenets of *testimonio* as defined in Chapter 3 (that is, their responses spoke of the whole process of earning a doctorate in glowing terms, with minor challenges if any), they are powerful for two reasons. First, they speak very clearly to the women’s experiences in higher education. Second, they are not indicative of the experiences that many other women have undergone, according to my review of the literature as indicated in Chapter 2. While I was puzzled by this, I later stumbled upon a possible explanation for why the process was seemingly flawless for some of my participants and not for others, after interviewing my two last participants, Esther and Deena. I discuss this explanation in detail in Chapter 5.

### **“The whole thing was very positive”**

For the entire duration of this study, two women indicated that the doctoral process was, for them, almost flawless. Christine indicated that because her professors knew she was working full-time as a principal, they were sensitive to her needs and worked around her schedule. She enjoyed the drive to and from classes in the evenings and found these to be therapeutic, along with the idea that the dissertation was something

she was doing for herself. It provided an escape from being a mom and being a principal. She compared the doctorate to having a baby.

The whole thing was very positive...I can't say I had a negative experience... You just do it – just like when you have a baby and you get up in the middle of the night, you take care of your kid. You think back years later and you think how did I do it? You just do it...You just do it!

Christine felt that the worst thing about the whole process was losing contact with the peers with whom she had developed close relationships. Her cohort had begun as a group of 10 people but at the end of the second year, several cohort members had fallen behind, dropped out of the program, or went on to graduate at a later time. Christine was the only one to graduate from her cohort and spoke of the royal treatment she and those from other departments were given, along with their relatives, at a dinner in the home of the university's president. She spoke glowingly about this dinner, which she considered another very positive aspect of the process as it came to an end.

Two of the women felt very positive about the whole experience of earning a doctorate specifically because they had “great professors” who listened to them. Monica, who is an experienced educator and the oldest of all the participants in this study, provides mentorship training for school principals throughout Texas. In the trainings, she provides for principals, she singles out ‘listening’ as one of the most important qualities of a mentor. It is also the quality that she attributed to one of her favorite professors. After taking several classes with this professor, Monica became his graduate assistant in his statistics class and found this the most challenging class in graduate school. She remembers having a really difficult time when he asked her to teach several classes, but because of the assistance and support from him, she asked that he become her official mentor and later her chairperson.

He listened to me! He was my stats professor. He had a sense of humor...he always looked out for my interests ... involved me in conferences. I asked and he became my mentor to make it official. He became my chair and was also one of my resources technology-wise.

This professor ensured that Monica had many additional opportunities such as critiquing his teaching, attending conferences, and became one of her resources when she had to grapple with the writing phase of her dissertation. She also talked about the advantages of having professors that she could communicate with.

### **“The professors always took time to talk to me”**

Communicating with professors in some cases was encouraging while in others, it was disappointing for some of the women in this study. Andrea, who has held her doctorate degree the longest of all the women, since 1978, responded she “would have to think hard” to come up with an experience that stood in her mind as a negative one., but did recall some condescending remarks by some of her professors.

Well, let me go back...We were going through a lot of the Chicano um...you know, I think I was just too naïve – there might have been some hints of...if you want to call them racism or slander or whatever. I was Mexican or Chicano or whatever you want to call it...I think there may have been one or two or a few condescending comments by instructors at that time but I mean that’s the worst of it...I try to look at the good side of things all the time.

While Andrea indicated that she never felt the presence of racism or marginalization on the basis of ethnicity or sexism, she indicated this may have been due to her naïveté at the time. Yet, in spite of the fact that she never felt marginalized in any way, Andrea viewed the Anglos’ world as a separate one from her own and always socialized with Arabs because they were her main source of support and social events. Parties were a regular occurrence and the times of cooking different ethnic foods in their

dorm were filled with laughter that helped alleviate the stress of heavy course loads. With her Arab friends, she felt a commonality of traditions and a focus on family. Andrea added that her best experience with graduate school was the idea of meeting people from all over the world; her Arab friends were on top of the list. As an afterthought, Andrea added that her affinity and closeness to her Arab friends “may have been due to the color of our skin...I don’t know, you know?”

The data from Andrea, Christine, and Monica remained consistent throughout all interviews. That is, they encountered very few challenges/obstacles while working on their doctorate and viewed the overall process as very positive. On the other hand, in one of the toughest experiences of all the women, Paula had to deal with an extremely difficult ordeal that entailed one of the faculty members of her committee. This experience in particular was so traumatic that it caused Paula to put away her dissertation for years after she graduated. After one of her committee members had left for a job at another university, Paula began to send her email updates on her progress and drafts toward the very end, a few weeks before her final defense. Paula sensed this was a committee member was not reading her work, but she continued to send it anyway. In a shocking response to her emails and attached chapters, the committee member sent Paula an email asking her to stop clogging up her email box, adding that her paper had no merit. Paula, a soft spoken individual, was stunned.

And I literally, that’s when I lost it. That’s when I thought that’s it - I’m not gonna do this anymore. Then I took my paper to a friend and mentor, asking her to read it and I asked her to please, please tell me where and how there was no academic merit to this paper.

In lieu of clogging up her committee member’s email, Paula decided to drive to the Fed Ex Office and spend \$9.00 several times a week to send her committee member a



hard copy. She also paid for this professor's expenses to fly back for the dissertation defense itself. In the end this difficult professor commented, at Paula's dissertation defense, that it was one of the best dissertations she had ever read. Paula was the only participant in this study who spoke of the physical toll that this challenge took on her health. She lost 40 pounds over the last four months prior to defending her dissertation.

Like the majority of the women in this study, Bertha knew very little about the concept of a doctorate and entered the process with little knowledge about what it would entail. In graduate school, she became a graduate assistant to a professor who had very high standards and expected much from her. He asked her to think hard about what she wanted to do with her doctorate. When she indicated she wanted to teach at the university level, he took her under his wing. She shadowed him constantly, sitting in his class and meeting afterwards so she could critique his teaching. He asked her for suggestions on what he could do to improve and about what she saw as his strengths and weaknesses. He advised her that the work of a professor, like the work of earning a doctorate, was all about preparation and that if she was well prepared she would always do a good job. Today, he is a colleague, and he jokingly reminds her, “*¿Te acuerdas cuando te hice llorar?*” (Do you remember when I made you cry?) Bertha views the relationship with him during the process of earning her doctorate as the best and yet the toughest thing to endure during her time as a doctoral candidate.

We spent a lot of time talking about his teaching...learned a lot about that...really made me understand what being a professor is all about; publishing, grading, office hours, research out in the field, etc. etc. He'd use a lot of metaphors and he would always tell me: *Está en la prepa...está en la prepa* (it's all in the preparation...it's all in the preparation).

In Liza's case, one professor singled her out for doing good work and invited her to enroll in a special class he had designed for advanced students. Other than the sexism she faced in some classes, she spoke about her program and the whole experience of earning a doctorate in very positive terms, saying she did not have any negative experiences and that she loved her program and the whole process of learning., adding, "The professors always took time to talk to me because I guess they knew I wasn't fooling around."

The participants in this study negotiated their challenges in different ways. When Andrea's educational trajectory in graduate school was not going as planned, she thought of her mother's *consejo* (advice). This *consejo* came in the form of a proverb-like saying, *No hay mal que por bien no venga*. Loosely translated, this means that out of adversity, something good is sure to come. Two other participants spoke about the hooding ceremony, which became a wonderfully uplifting experience during their most challenging times. Whenever Monica was stressed by the whole doctoral process, she envisioned her grown daughter watching her mom get hooded. In turn, the first time Bertha saw someone being hooded, it made "a huge" impact on her.

I remember that the hooding ceremony got me through a lot of the hard times while I was getting my PhD. When I would get really frustrated I would go to the hooding ceremony even if I didn't know anybody! I would say ah, I'm gonna do that! ...and that would just motivate me and re-energize me! ...to see them get hooded.

It is remarkable that an occasion such as a hooding would become so meaningful and uplifting during trying times for these women. At my request, several of them shared an artifact with me that held a special meaning for them. From the looks on their faces when I approached the subject, it was clear that those artifacts brought back special

memories of the different stages on the road to the doctorate for these women. I share two of these artifacts.



Figure 2. Mercedes' Artifact: Family Photo



Figure 3. Esther's Artifact: Cross

Mercedes's office is filled with family photographs. Figure 2 shows her parents and adult siblings. She stated that because she had never been blessed with children, she had always been very close to her immediate family, even more now as adults. For Mercedes, this family picture represents what is most important in her life. Another one of the women in my study and a devout Christian, Esther attached this cross (Figure 3) to her key chain and kept it very close by. When she defended her dissertation proposal as well as the dissertation defense, she held it in her hand while waiting for her time to present her work. In her acknowledgment page, she credits her faith and her religious community for getting her through the dissertation process.

## Summary of Findings

The *testimonios* and narratives in this chapter speak to the experiences of Chicanas in higher education on the southwest boarder of the United States in myriad ways. Some of the women spoke of institutional challenges, while others spoke of patriarchy within the institution of family and within the academy. When asked specifically about the most difficult aspect of their doctoral experience, responses from participants varied from one extreme to another as the different questions were posed. Esther's and Deena's *testimonios* speak of challenges due to citizenship status and the reaction of professors due to Esther's accent in Spanish. Bertha's, Liza's, and Ella's *testimonio* speak to cultural shock, marginalization, and self-doubt related to their ethnicity. Anger, sadness, confusion, frustration, and marginalization prevail in their *testimonios*. Liza, Mercedes, and Bertha talked about challenges related to the dominant male figures in their lives. In contrast, Christine and Andrea spoke of the whole experience as entirely positive, with little reference to difficulties or challenges; instead, they were singled out and selected for elite classes and/or attendance at conferences by very supportive professors. These *testimonios*, also referred to as "*papelitos guardados*" have served, for several of these women, as a way to document the "silenced histories" (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 3) that continue in the hearts of some of the women in this study. For Mercedes in particular, the scar, the pain and the sadness have lingered for a very long time.

These *testimonios* demonstrate many of the features of my theoretical framework in a weaving that includes LatCrit Theory, New *Mestiza* Theory, the Feminist Chicana

Consciousness and the cultural construct of *consejos*, one of the New Conceptual Beginnings to which The Latina Feminist Group (2001) refer.

Through LatCrit theory and the eyes of Mercedes, we see a glimpse of the beliefs and contradictions of Catholicism, with its expectation of virginity until marriage as she sadly speaks about how she dutifully adhered to virginity through the symbolism of her white dress and *azares* (veil pearls). From Liza, too, we learn about the fear of her father's wrath at the thought of becoming pregnant out of wedlock. It is through the words of Bertha, Mercedes, and Liza that we see the need to reject the patriarchal conditions that oppress many women. Told in first person, these *testimonios* reveal a sense of urgency for the wider community of women whose lives are impacted profoundly in negative ways by dominant male figures in their lives. In the *testimonio* shared by Esther, we see instances of racist micro-aggressions (Solórzano, 1998) when her Spanish accent works against her in the eyes of some professors and other doctoral candidates. The *consejos* discussed by several of the women revealed how the teachings from mothers and other key figures had a powerful and supportive impact on these women as they remembered the learning that came from those *consejos*.

These *papelitos guardados* (silenced histories) “evoke the process by which we contemplate thoughts and feelings, often in isolation and through difficult times” (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 1). Revealed here through the method of *testimonio*, these *papelitos* provide for researchers a relatively underutilized genre of writing that in the past was seen as unacceptable and/or ignored in academe. Moreover, these stories demonstrate the complexity of Chicanas' lives and how we can learn from their lived experiences in order to leave the “defeated images behind” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006,

p. 1) and in these cases, demonstrate the strength it took to overcome their challenges. Negative images of Chicanas in the academy have, for too long, permeated in previous research and studies as discussed in Chapter 2.

In this chapter, the women in my study revealed much about their most memorable experiences on the road to the doctorate and how they negotiated these experiences. In the following chapter, I discuss whether and how these experiences mirror what is found in the literature about Chicanas in other parts of the United States who earned a doctorate. As well, with regard to their positioning on the southwest border of the United States, I theorize as to why the experience of earning a doctorate may have seemed so positive for some of these women, while traumatic for others.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter presented my analysis of how my study participants made sense of their experiences and support systems during their trajectory of obtaining a doctoral degree. In this chapter, I discuss the origin of the study, followed by a summary of the chapters covered thus far. Next, I discuss the findings juxtaposed within the major themes and my theoretical framework. I then provide a reflection on my role as a researcher, a section on implications and reflexivity and finally, a short conclusion.

#### **Origin of the Study**

Because the literature reflects a dismal picture of the experiences of Chicanas in higher education, the focus of this research is based on two additional major impressions that remained with me after I completed my review of the literature. First, many scholars cite the critical need for newer research methodological approaches with a potential to generate authentic understandings about the lived experiences of Chicanas (Cuadráz, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas, 1996; Zurita, 2001). Second, I found no studies in a university on the southwest border of the United States with the unique historical, political, social, and cultural landscape of El Paso, my own home town. Instead, the literature focused mostly on universities in California and other institutions of higher education throughout the United States. Although it was affirming to find much in the scholarly literature about Chicanas and their challenges while working on a doctorate, the bleak doctoral completion rates for this group (Figure 1) left me with still more questions:



Why not focus on the overall experience of those who do earn a doctorate and are now a part of the 1%? What has been the experience of Chicana scholars in my own unique part of the country? I began this project with questions and interviews in an informal pilot study that evolved into this dissertation.

### **Summary of the Study**

My interest in conducting this study revolved around the bleak doctoral completion rates for Chicanas in this country (Yosso, 2006). As well, I was intrigued by the need to pull away from the prevalence of deficit theories used as frameworks to explain the academic experiences of Chicanas. The significance of this study is substantiated by the fact that Chicanas constitute the largest subgroup of all minorities of Hispanic origin and those of Mexican descent specifically. I stress that ironically, while Chicanas comprise the largest subgroup of all minorities, they are the most severely underrepresented in higher education: less than 1% of the women from this group ever complete a doctorate (Yosso, 2006).

Two bodies of literature included in this dissertation (Chapter 2) explain the historical and sociopolitical contexts in which we can situate the Chicana experience as framed in this study. The first body of research literature provides a historical overview of the Civil Rights, Feminist and Chicano Movements of the 1960s and 1970s as well as the seminal writings by Chicana scholars. Critical self-narratives and *testimonios* reveal issues of patriarchy, racism, and tokenism, while relatively few empirical studies challenge the deficit thinking and stereotypes about the Chicana experience in higher education. The second body of research literature introduces the theoretical framework

that informs this study. To shed light on the experiences of Chicanas, I wove a framework based on the Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) and *testimonio* (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). I drew from Latina/o Critical Theory (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), New Mestiza Theory, and the New Conceptual Beginnings construct of *consejos* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006).

In response to the critical need for newer research methodological approaches; I drew from *testimonio*, a relatively underutilized method in the field of educational research (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). As a unique three-pronged methodological approach, I utilized *testimonio* 1) as the *process* by which I interviewed and recorded my study participants, 2) as the *product* that provided the audio-tape and transcription of the interview, and 3) as the pedagogy that defined the way Chicanas often learn. It is important to point out that in this study I also refer to data from three of the women I interviewed as “narratives” because they do not meet the tenets of *testimonio*. That is, the data drawn from these narratives do not convey a sense of political or social urgency nor do they call for social movement or change. These data, however, do provide insight into the participants’ experience and are therefore included and discussed in depth. The corpus of data is drawn from 20 interviews that consisted of two interviews that ran from approximately one to two and a half hours with telephone and/or e-mail journaling as needed for additional details and/or clarifications.

The findings of this study are organized into the major themes of Internalized Oppression, Patriarchy, and Support Systems. Within these major themes, I then discuss Racist Nativism and Racist Nativist Aggressions as found in the data from my participants. I include two sections about the women in my study: a collective portrait of

the group and individual biographies of each participant. My intent is that these two sections will provide a multidimensional picture of the women behind the *testimonios* and the complex ways in which they make sense of their doctoral trajectory.

In this final chapter, I discuss my thoughts relative to the findings and themes and juxtapose these with my overarching theoretical framework and the *testimonios* of these women. I conclude the discussion with a section on reflexivity, and implications for educational institutions.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

In answer to questions related to the women's experience of earning a doctorate, the initial data from my first few participants were both compelling and perplexing. The participants provided a wide range of meanings concerning their experience in this regard that reflected the contradictions and complexities that shape the identities of those living on the border (Anzaldúa, 1999). Moreover, while the research literature has tended to point to issues of struggle and exclusion, several of my participants seemed to make sense of their experience in ways that differed from the literature I reviewed. Monica expressed the idea that "the whole experience was very positive," while Andrea stated there may have been merely "one or two condescending comments" from a professor throughout her whole experience in graduate school. Christine had nothing but praise for her professors and their support. I was somewhat confused. How could the doctoral experiences of the women in my study be so free of challenges? The notions of culture shock, silencing, tokenism, and marginality that had emerged in my review of the literature were not present in the women's initial narratives. I even began to wonder if I

was asking the right questions. I also wondered if there was something they were not telling me. These initial findings helped turn the gaze of the study toward my identity as researcher, causing me to question my own positionality. Was I *looking* for stories of struggle? I soon realized that indeed I was. I had romanticized the Chicana experience. I was compelled to review an article about the role of the researcher, examine my own biases and expectations, and made a conscious decision to proceed with caution in ways that were critical and reflective.

As interviews progressed, the majority of my participants did indeed begin to share the stories I had expected, stories that mirrored many of the challenges faced by the Chicana scholars in my review of the literature. During the subsequent analysis of my participants' *testimonios*, I began to grapple with frustration because what I was beginning to hear was strangely recognizable, but I could not *name* it; I did not know what to call it. As patterns began to emerge suggesting this recurring theme that I did not have the language to name, there was a sense of deep self-doubt coming from my participants. After several weeks of not knowing what this strangely familiar theme was, I realized "it" was internalized oppression. It was never named, but only described in the literature I had reviewed (Chapter 2). Like Padilla (1999) internalized oppression was a concept I had been familiar with in the past, but that I could not name. I was not even aware of it until I began my doctoral studies. It was a recurring theme in my review of the literature, but why would Chicana scholars not name this internal oppression that apparently hovers over so many of us? In a discussion about this, a former professor provided some insight:

We do not like to name it. We don't like to discuss the deeply entrenched hierarchy within our communities (based on class and/or phenotype and/or immigration status) or how we somehow still perpetuate a "caste" system--where lighter is better or where we'd rather claim a Spanish ancestry than our own "*sangre negra*" (Black blood) as Lovell Banks (2006) writes about. (Dr. Judith Flores Carmona, personal communication, August, 2013)

Dr. Carmona's response led me to further research that resulted in an exceptional contribution to my own understanding of internalized oppression. Banks' (2005) essay, which discusses the evolution of *mestizaje*, argues that for Mexican Americans, there is no "*sangre negra*" (Black blood). In essence, this constitutes a denial of the African part of our ancestry due to the (often negative) consequences of being Black in the United States. In support of this claim, Anzaldúa (1999) also argues that we seldom claim our Black ancestry and refer to ourselves as Spanish "when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when copping out" (p. 84). Banks further posits that the reasons for the denial of the Mexican American's third roots are complex. Indeed, for those of us who live on the border, the discourse is contradictory on a daily basis. The media and much of society pay tribute to the attributes of White America mostly. Daily, our children are required to pledge allegiance to one flag by a school system and a curriculum that has all but erased the history of their ancestors. This constitutes a contradiction, because simultaneously, we experience the beauty of our own culture and our different but very authentic ways of being, teaching our children, and learning.

Does claiming to be part Indian and part Spanish deny the other ethnicities in our ancestry, the African ancestry? What else do we deny in order to belong? At what cost do we assimilate? Why did Liza think it was crucial to remove any trace of a Spanish accent when she spoke in the academy? Why would Ella reject who she was in favor of belonging to a system that favors White people? What did it really mean that Bertha

could not see a Chicana being an academic? Some of the women in my study, like most of the scholars in my review of the literature, expressed deep feelings of self-doubt during their process of earning a doctorate. Therefore, because responses to my questions suggested the phenomenon of internalized oppression, I addressed this as a major theme. Feeling shame about one's accent, favoring a White system over one's own, and doubting one's place in academe warranted this theme, as the following discussion of internalized oppression will demonstrate.

In the next section, I further illuminate the understanding of this phenomenon with contributions made by Chicana theorists who shed light on how the contradictions and complexities of living on the border can shape identity and contribute to the phenomenon of internalized oppression. I then delineate how, based on the *testimonios* of my participants, internalized oppression played a part in their graduate school experiences. I begin with a discussion on how internalized oppression is defined in the academic literature and then proceed with a discussion that includes answers to a critical and very important question: How is internalized oppression perpetuated?

### **Internalized Oppression**

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, Williams (2012) found that internalized oppression is a significantly under-theorized concept resulting in much theoretical ambiguity. Furthermore, he found no frameworks with which to provide a comprehensive explanation of internalized oppression. Therefore, Williams draws from and synthesizes a number of definitions of the concept and offers a useful conceptual framework that can be used as a starting point for understanding internalized oppression.

According to Williams, a comprehensive model of internalized oppression requires three elements. The three elements, drawn from theorists who have examined internalized oppression across a number of social identities and theories, consist of: (a) *process*, (b), *state*, and (c) *action*. The following points explain these three defining elements.

- (a) *process* (i.e., the individual, societal, and group processes through which internalized oppression is instilled, perpetuated, and maintained),
- (b) *state* (i.e., the characteristics, thoughts and feelings that are consistently displayed by subordinate group members when internalized oppression is present and in operation),
- (c) *action* (i.e., outcomes or patterned behaviors that characterize and/or help to perpetuate both the external dynamics of oppression and its internalized consequences). (p. 4)

Drawing from these three elements, Williams provides a definition of internalized oppression as “the conscious or unconscious states, processes and actions that directly or indirectly influence or cause subordinate groups to support, collude with, perpetuate, or otherwise help to maintain the systems of oppression that target them” (p. 37). Williams asserts that the three elements of internalized oppression are dynamic and evolving; they do not operate independently of each other, nor do they form a linear process. Instead, internalized oppression creates a complicated and many-faceted system. To further expand the reader’s understanding, I draw from two other scholars.

Internalized oppression is not the cause of our mistreatment; it is the result of our mistreatment. It would not exist without the real external oppression that forms the social climate in which we exist. Once oppression has been internalized, little force is needed to keep us submissive. We harbor inside ourselves the pain and the memories, the fears and the confusions, the negative self-images and the low expectations, turning them into weapons with which to re-injure ourselves, every day of our lives. (Mason, 1990, p. 1)

Remarkably, Mason’s (1990) research indicates that by the age of three, Black children want to be White and that both Black and White children value their White

friends more than their Black friends. Mason further argues this phenomenon occurs not only in this group and/or or with children with learning deficiencies but among those from working-class families. Mason defines internalized oppression:

[as] seeing that one group of people is valued more highly than another, and wanting to become like them...it is very common to also feel bad about the group one belongs to, and try to merge into the group which is perceived as superior in the hope that the difference will become invisible. (p. 1)

It was interesting that I could find references to internalized oppression in several law review publications, very possibly because critical race theory evolved from the field of law as litigation related to racism. According to Padilla (1999), this form of oppression occurs when we unconsciously turn on ourselves, our families, and our own people and display the negative patterns of behavior that result when we, the minority group, are oppressed. In this way, we perpetuate self-destructive behaviors and negative stereotypes about ourselves.

The data from several *testimonios* of the women in my study suggest the elements of internalized oppression. In the following discussion I delineate those elements from my data as outlined by Williams (2012). I further illuminate the understanding of this phenomenon with contributions from Chicana theorists whose expertise lies in writing about the lived experiences of this group. I begin with some compelling stories about how some of my participants deal with obstacles, not from the academy, but from within themselves:

Coming from the *barrio*...coming from the working-class...hard worker; for some reason, I couldn't see a Chicana being an academic....When I was a student, I felt that sense of powerlessness. You're just a student...what can you do? What can you say?



As I transcribed her words, I thought about the fact that Bertha's childhood had been a very happy one with a strong sense of community throughout her neighborhood. However, coming from the *barrio* also made her feel unworthy of being an academic, saying she was "only a student" with a strong sense of powerlessness in many of her classes. In another experience in the military, Bertha had been reminded of the perils of speaking her native language. She was ordered to perform a series of pushups along with another *Latina* from Ecuador whenever they were caught speaking Spanish. I was struck by the fact that this happened only 15 years ago and how this penalty for speaking Spanish resembled the insidious education policies in Texas that punished children for speaking Spanish in the 1950s as well as how "Texas-style accountability" (Valenzuela, 2005, p. 1) fails Latino children even today by downplaying the importance of their native language (Valenzuela, 2005). Related to Bertha's experience was Ella's story of how she felt angered and cheated in her early school years by the education system.

Ella's memories about her early school years provide insight into feelings of self-doubt and sheds light on how negative ideas about one's native language are instilled, perpetuated, and maintained. Her early days in grade school provided a backdrop for much of what she would feel as an adult about "her place" in the academy. In a poignant story about her first experience in public school, Ella recalled her mother's incessant reminders that the reason for going to school was to learn English. After Ella's first week, she noticed that some of the other children in her class already spoke English. She then went home and asked her mother the following profound question: "Some children in my class already know English; *so what do they go to school for?*" In a very real sense, many Spanish dominant children hear this from their well-intentioned parents daily: that their

job in school is to learn English (which too often happens at the expense of all the other subject areas). Ella also remembered when children were admonished for speaking Spanish. The message was that Spanish was not acceptable, and English was preferred because it was better. Related to this type of message, Anzaldúa (1999) asserts: “So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language” (p. 81).

Ella’s story demonstrates Williams’ element of *process* by which we come to learn that our language is inferior to English—a message that often begins in childhood and is internalized as a form of oppression of the heart and mind. It is no wonder, then, that Ella would feel out of place in the academy and that she would “give up who she was” in graduate school in order to belong to a system.

I felt I was trying to do what the system wanted me to do so that I could survive and belong and I ...I felt bad that I was giving up who I was just to belong to a system. It was kind of like I had suppressed all those feelings and now I was kind of like peeling the onion. I was taking off those layers of suppression.

It was by learning about the history of Chicanas/os, not in public school but at the university level, that Ella’s “layers of suppression” began to peel off. The new knowledge about her heritage was coupled with anger about not having had access to this information for so many years. This is another example of how, through the curriculum in many schools, history omits our stories. What does it mean for the children in our schools that history does not reflect their own history, culture, norms, or values? It is only now as an adult that Ella realizes the implications of such a practice.

Giving up one’s identity, in order to belong to the dominant group as Ella did, strongly suggests evidence of Williams’ (2012) element of *action*. As well, her story shows a lifelong *process* that perpetuated and maintained her feelings of internalized

oppression for many years. Throughout her second interview, Ella consistently expressed anger at the thought of not being taught about her own history in all her years in public school. This anger exemplifies Williams' element of *state*. In affirmation of the anger felt by Ella about the omission of her ethnic group's history by the public school system, Anzaldúa (1999) states, "You strive for power over us; you erase our history and our experience" (p. 108).

The historical denigration of one's language, particularly as a young child, during the most impressionable years, is an example of the "forced cultural penetration" to which Anzaldúa refers: "the rape of the colored by the white, depositing their perspective, their language, and their values in our bodies" (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 143). Furthermore, Anzaldúa affirms Ella's voice as she reminds us that "a misinformed people are a subjugated people" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 108).

The imposition of negative discourses about poor people of Mexican descent by Liza's father and other family members throughout her childhood exemplify the element of *process*; it explains how Liza's negative views about her heritage began to form. She equated the people in her father's stories with the term "lower class" when hearing he had almost been jumped by *cholos* (a Mexican word for hoodlums). Her father's firm belief that ground meat was for poor people only, and absolutely not for their own family, is another idea that Liza internalized that may have contributed to her sensitivity about her ethnicity today. Williams' (2012) element of *state* is evident in Liza's lack of confidence due to her writing skills and the idea that there might be a connection between her lack of confidence and being Hispanic. The element of *action* is evident in how Liza made a concerted effort to erase her Spanish accent, not only in graduate school but for the

remainder of her life. These combined elements of *action* and *state* are intertwined in Liza's words as, whether consciously or unconsciously, she draws a clear distinction between her own socioeconomic status and that of poor people.

Two other women in this study draw a distinction between women of Mexican American origin in particular. Liza spoke in-depth about the crow daddy syndrome, while Deena called it by another name: the crab theory. Liza claimed that Latinas do not help each other but instead hinder their own progress, resent one another, and are *celosas* (jealous). Deena compared El Paso's residents to Mexican Americans from the lower valley of Texas where she claims it is the Mexican Americans that hold positions of power in business and local politics. She further stated that in El Paso, many Mexicans look up to Whites not only in business and local politics but at the university as well. When I asked each one of these women if they thought this was true for all Mexican American women, their answer was that they meant "many, but not all women."

Related to the idea of the crab theory, Anzaldúa (1990) writes that Chicanas have reached a point where we no longer allow other women to hold us back. Instead, she states, "Now we do it to each other" (p. 142). According to Anzaldúa, the reason for this is that we have been dominated for centuries and as a result, have been indoctrinated to the tactics of the colonizer. We then use the same tactics against each other as a result of internalizing the ways of the Western culture and even embrace the attitudes and values of the dominant group over our own. She offers a rationale for this.

It's not that we have been "won" over by the dominant culture, but that it has exploited pre-existing power relations of subordination and subjugation within our native societies....One of the reasons for this hostility among us is the forced cultural penetration: the rape of the colored by the white, depositing their perspective, their language, and their values in our bodies. (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 143)

Unique compared to the rest of the 9 participants in this study, Esther is a doctoral student from Mexico who, during the process of earning her doctorate, commuted back and forth between Juarez and El Paso while working on her doctorate. A true border crosser, she is in the process of securing her American citizenship. Esther had two very negative experiences during the process of earning her doctorate that were of great interest to me. I regretted not meeting other students like her because her *testimonio* revealed a profound injustice that is oppressive to many Mexican students due to their race and immigration status. This injustice points to another form of oppression, based on immigration status, which I had to research as I began to develop the themes for my findings section: racist nativism and racist nativist microaggressions.

### **Racist Nativism and Racist Nativist Microaggressions**

While critical race theory (CRT) permits the researcher to focus on communities of color by positioning race and racism at the center of the analysis, LatCrit allows one to focus on the study of Latina/o communities. In an extension of CRT, racist nativism is a conceptual tool that allows for an examination of the intersection of race and immigration status in the experiences of Latinas/os (Solórzano, 1993). According to Solórzano, the racialization and colonialism of Latinas/os is a historical as well as a contemporary process that demonstrates how various minority and immigrant groups in this country have been left out of the “white American national identity” (p. 394). Promoting fear and contempt for these groups causes them to be viewed as not belonging in this country and gives them a non-native status. To further clarify the definition of racist nativism, Solórzano claims it is a form of racism that a) occurs within a historical and

contemporary context, b) intersects with other forms of oppression, and c) is based on real and perceived immigration status (p. 394).

In yet another extension of racist nativism, Solórzano offers a second conceptual tool that has emerged from CRT: racist nativist microaggressions. This tool was helpful as I examined the experience of some of the women in this study who have now or in the past held an immigrant status. Directed at people of color, microaggressions are layered, understated, and subtle. They take the form of verbal and non-verbal assaults and are used in a matter of fact way and often without thought. Solórzano's model for understanding microaggressions includes the following elements:

1. Types of racial microaggressions – how one is targeted by microaggressions, which can be based on race, gender, class, language, sexuality, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname.
2. Context of racial microaggressions – how and where the microaggressions occur
3. Effects of racial microaggressions – the physical, emotional and psychological consequences of micro aggressions.
4. Responses to racial microaggressions – how the individual responds to interpersonal and institutional racist acts and behaviors. (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012, p. 394)

When Esther proposed to write a paper for one of her final courses based on a comparative study of the education system in Ciudad Juarez and the education system in El Paso, her professor asked her to change her topic. The rejection of Esther's topic was ill-conceived. Each year, thousands of students enter El Paso from Juarez. Her topic would have had the potential to help understand how their transition into El Paso schools could be made more fluid and successful. Information about the school system in Ciudad Juarez would be helpful to El Paso school personnel in placing students in appropriate classes and in developing relevant educational goals for them. In addition, trainings with

a potential to help school administrators understand what immigrants bring to the table academically could be developed as a result of Esther's proposed paper. As someone who worked for the public schools with immigrants and/or their children for almost 30 years, I can attest to the reality that border crossing in El Paso is extremely fluid and very common, particularly for children in our schools. Children often reside with relatives during the week and return to Ciudad Juarez for the weekend. Furthermore, school districts throughout the El Paso County have, for several years, been under investigation by the Texas Education Agency for cheating violations that consist of keeping non-English-speakers from testing to keep district scores up (Sanchez, 2013). It would seem that any and every kind of intervention to improve the academic performance of the children of immigrants from Mexico deserves serious consideration. The information from Esther's paper could have been used in a variety of ways to benefit those children.

In another incident, Esther was fully confident that she could handle her dissertation proposal defense in English. When she did so, she was barraged with questions by audience members and the members of her committee when she presented her proposal. Unlike Esther, other individuals who presented their proposals in that same public forum received very few comments and or questions that afternoon. She was told publicly, by her committee, that she was not ready for that kind of evaluation, that it would be "too much" for her, and that the complexity of the study was more than she could handle. Esther was told this, in spite of the years of expertise she holds in the area of evaluation in her university in Mexico. Esther was told she had "some barriers" in spite of the fact that her chairperson, who is also head of the department, had given his approval. The "barriers" were never spelled out by her committee. Esther is absolutely

confident that the refusal to approve her dissertation topic was connected to her heavy Spanish accent. She also believes her immigration status, in spite of her expertise in her native university, played a role in the dismissal of her proposed dissertation topic.

Esther's experiences are not unique. In a comprehensive study that examined the role of microaggressions throughout the doctoral experiences of Chicana and Chicano Postdoctoral Fellows, Solórzano (1993) stated that selecting a topic is a very important phase of the doctoral process. In Solórzano's study, the theme of low expectations from professors surfaced in discussions of dissertation topics. One of Solórzano's participants stated that the lack of support from her department was hard to overcome and the effects of this experience remain with her today. Another participant spoke of having to defend her dissertation topic after choosing to research Chicanos exclusively. Another respondent submitted a "very sensitive finding" (p. 129) under the category of low expectations:

I have a Spanish accent, and it is pretty pronounced. When I spoke in class, it's as if I was speaking another language or worse, that I wasn't saying anything important. People wouldn't listen to me. But, when someone without this accent mentioned the very same thing, people would respond, "Oh, that's so profound." These people didn't even hear me, and it continues today.

Solórzano's findings affirm Deena's sentiments (discussed in Chapter 4: Findings) about the negative consequences of speaking with an accent. Because Esther and Deena were the only participants to speak to this issue, I did not consider it a major theme. However, it is worthy of mention for two reasons. First, it is a collective story of many as seen by the powerful *testimonios* presented in Solórzano's study participants as well as my own. Secondly, another study with a focus on this issue came to my attention,



a study that looked at the very population at the university that Deena and Esther's *testimonios* speak to.

Vera (2012) investigated the experiences of doctoral candidates at University A with results that confirm much of what Esther and Deena shared in their *testimonios*. In Vera's quantitative and qualitative study, female and male participants were surveyed and interviewed. Respondents included alumni and current doctoral students from Spring and Fall 2011. One of the areas of investigation dealt with students' challenges and specifically, the topic of the English language. The researcher considered this topic important due to the high prevalence of bilingual students at University A and more specifically, because of the number of international students who commute from Mexico and are enrolled in the doctoral program. Of the respondents, 81% stated that language "was not an obstacle" (p. 78). In contrast, 19% of the respondents who comprised the international student cohort sample (students from Mexico) indicated that language was a major obstacle. Vera's interviews with these students revealed that dealing with limited English was not only difficult, but they did not know how to deal with this issue. Asked to elaborate, one student felt the recruitment program did not address the cultural or language barriers faced by students, primarily from Ciudad Juarez. Another student indicated that due to this language barrier, his participation in class had been limited, and yet another alluded to many problems interacting with his cohort due to his inability to pronounce words correctly in English. To address these issues, some of the students responded that they had enrolled in courses to improve their language and writing skills.

As a whole, in the survey responses and interviews of Vera's (2012) study, students referred to difficulty understanding the organization of the program, the structure

of the departments and the institution of the College of Education. Moreover, students pointed to a lack of support from staff as well as the need to have office hours extended to evenings when required courses were held. In an informal conversation with one of the participants in this study, a professor at University A confirmed the pressing need to hire faculty who are stronger Spanish speakers to more effectively meet the needs of the population of international students from Mexico and in particular, those who choose to defend their dissertation in Spanish. She herself had been asked to read a dissertation that was written in Spanish but regretfully had to tell her student that her own (the professor's) Spanish proficiency level was not high enough to accommodate the request. The findings from Vera's study not only list a number of concerns from graduate students from Mexico, but it affirms the information relayed by Esther and Deena in their *testimonio* as well as the toxic and crippling feelings described by one of the participants in Solórzano's study:

My success must be a mistake, an aberration...Racism disempowers us by inflecting individual consciousness with self-doubt....Minority scholars struggle to find a place in a world to which they were not invited and in which they did not anticipate living. (p. 1884)

These words, like the words of the women in my study, demonstrate that racism, whether subtle or not, can have a powerful and negative effect on the lives of scholars and that subsequent self-doubt can result in profoundly negative consequences on one's educational dreams and goals. According to Solórzano (1998), forms of inequality and discrimination in the higher education setting are more subtle in spite of the fact that often, at this high doctoral level of accomplishment, diversity is promoted. Anzaldúa (1990) also states that racism especially prevails in places where knowledge is produced,

such as academic institutions that promote diversity. Furthermore, she states, the peril is that “diversity” is a vague and ambiguous term, often defined in different ways.

### **Patriarchy**

Mercedes tells her poignant life story, a story of a 63-year-old woman who has spent her life trying to make her father proud after he informed her that she had brought shame to the family by marrying and divorcing at the age of 19. This lifelong shame caused her to believe she was not worthy of his love or respect. Earning a doctorate and putting the family name on her license plates were among the things she did over the years to prove that she was worthy of being his daughter and could make him proud. While she also views the doctorate as something she did for herself, pleasing her father has always prevailed in her mind and in her actions.

Bertha is consciously aware that she grew up in a gendered household. Upon entering the military, she faced what she referred to as “in your face sexism.” While she worked as a mechanic, fellow soldiers had a difficult time accepting this and instead wanted her to “do paperwork.” Today, as a professor, she stated:

I’m doing a lot better now, but sometimes I do struggle a lot...I still have a lot of issues...with people who are in positions of authority over me. I get back into that internalized oppression – maybe my own – *me achicopalo* (I clam up) - mostly when they are White males.

Liza felt threatened by the males in her graduate classes, held her ground, and strived to handle the situation well. Hand-picked by a professor along with three other males, she learned to take an aggressive stance.

I was selected to be part of this more elite group; my professor would call us the “fab four.” I was the only female in that group of three males and I could take on any one of those guys...in any argument in any theoretical perspective – I don’t

know – they never intimidated me...and of course if you're aggressive, you know, they say she's a bitch or whatever. Just because I knew my stuff and I wasn't afraid to show it to them.

True to one of the tenets of *testimonio*, the stories of Mercedes, Bertha, and Liza represent a sense of social urgency that is applicable to the wider community of Chicanas who are confronted with dominant male “*machos*,” in Mercedes’ words. Liza conveyed fear of her father at the thought of ever getting pregnant out of wedlock, while Mercedes’ *testimonio* reveals sad memories as she told about wearing a white wedding dress and placing *azares* (pearls) atop her veil. The white dress and the *azares* both represented a sign of virginity to her husband and the community. They also represented the loyalty and devotion she felt for the husband who left her after she helped him become a citizen. While Zavella (2003) states that even women who are not Catholic are admonished to guard their virginity so as not to appear as damaged goods out of respect for their families, virginity before marriage and divorce are still a serious issue in many traditional Mexican families. Anzaldúa (1999) discusses *machismo* in the context of racism in the United States and the impact it can have.

“Machismo” is an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem. It is the result of male dominance...In the Gringo world, the Chicano suffers from excessive humility and self-effacement, shame of self and self-deprecation...The loss of a sense of dignity and respect in the macho breeds a false machismo, which leads him to put down women and even to brutalize them. (p. 105)

Moreover, when Anzaldúa (1999) explains the extremes to which patriarchy can extend, she does not excuse it but instead declares, on behalf of all women, that it will no longer be tolerated. Furthermore, she argues that the term *macho* and the meaning assigned to it was invented by the White man and is part of a hierarchy of male dominance where the Anglo transfers his feelings of powerlessness and inferiority to the

Chicano by shaming him. In the world of White people, the Chicano suffers. In the Chicano's world, Anzaldúa argues, the Anglo suffers discomfort due to his non-familiarity with Spanish. She further states that around Native Americans, the Anglo suffers from a racial amnesia and the atrocities he committed and because the Spanish part of him stole their land and their dignity.

While my own vignettes about how I came to recognize and interrupt the notion of patriarchy in my life are unique to my own experience, some of the *testimonios* of my participants as well as the narratives in my review of the literature demonstrate that ours is a collective story of the community of Chicanas. I believe, as Anzaldúa (1999) asserts, that change begins within each of us. This is how my own transformation around the notion of male dominance occurred. This interruption of our culture's way of elevating men will inform many of my own daughter's decisions in the future; it can impact the decisions of many other women as well.

Anzaldúa (1999) argues that culture is made by those in power, namely men who make the rules. In South Texas where she grew up, women were expected to honor those rules. Our beliefs, she claims, are formulated by our culture, and we perceive them as reality, whether they are unquestionable paradigms or concepts. She adds that our culture and the Church promote the idea that women should be subservient to their husbands and that virginity until marriage earns one the title of "a good woman." In turn, a woman who rebels is a *mujer mala* (a bad woman) and refers to these practices as Cultural Tyranny. To surpass this tyranny, Anzaldúa promotes education and career goals for all women.

## Support Systems

In Solórzano's (1993) landmark study of Chicana and Chicano Ford Foundation Fellows who earned a doctorate, a quantitative and qualitative illustration of their educational trajectory in graduate school demonstrated that positive mentoring was the most important factor in the completion of a doctorate. All of the women in this study indicated that mentoring was a crucial factor that helped them through the challenges as evidenced in the themes of internal oppression, patriarchy, and racist native microaggressions. In response to how the women dealt with these and other challenges, the cultural construct of *consejos* (advice) emerged in the *testimonios* that revealed how the teachings, most often from mothers and other key figures, had a powerful and supportive impact on these women. Moreover, through the *consejos* and stories related to them, important messages about work, survival, sacrifice, *cariño* (love), and educational goals were transmitted to all of the women in this study.

A number of the participants drew from family stories and especially *consejos* to envision and then persevere in their doctoral studies. The artifacts provided by the women were revealing. Photographs provided memories of family unity, pride, and strength. Religious artifacts demonstrated the faith to which several of them turned in the most strenuous of times. Painful memories of difficult times played a role; they propelled these women to complete their goal of earning a doctorate. In several cases, it was older siblings that set the stage for these women to envision and then persevere in their doctoral studies. Then these women, who were the first in their family to pursue the doctorate, in turn set an example for younger siblings who followed suit. As a whole, all the women spoke of how the work and sacrifice of their parents influenced them to work hard in

school and to think carefully about their aspirations for the future. In every case, participants demonstrated an awareness of and gratitude toward those family members and others who helped them along the process of earning a doctorate. Several indicated that some of the *consejos* were life changing and remain with them to this day.

Delgado Bernal et al. (2006) argue that little attention has been paid to the lived experiences of youth of color. Instead, scholars traditionally draw from the Euro-American experience when researching adolescents, girls, or mothers. In contrast, these scholars stress that in spaces where teaching and learning for Chicanas occurs, whether at the kitchen table or on the church steps, these spaces should be taken into consideration and valued because they are “Chicana controlled spaces of teaching and learning” (p. 3). These spaces constitute different yet ordinary sites of knowledge construction that re-envision the sites of pedagogy; where *mujer to mujer* (woman to woman) conversations unveil the diverse, complex, and everyday lived experiences of Chicanas as members of the community, the world, and most significantly, the family.

### ***Testimonio***

K. Reyes and Rodríguez (2012) claim that memories reconstruct epistemology and are an important characteristic and part of the role of *testimonio*. Moreover, these scholars add that for researchers in the field of education, the most important contribution from *testimonio* is that it provides memories and oral histories from which to draw as we challenge and reshape theories that for too long have portrayed the “problem” with public education as one of individual rather than systemic oppression. In line with the thinking of these scholars, interview questions were partly framed in a way that would allow me to

capture the best and worst memories that may have impacted my participants' experiences in higher education. In this way, I hoped to encourage them to elaborate on how they might have negotiated, for example, experiences of resilience as well as frustration or experiences that were institutionally related as opposed to personal. Theoretically, I looked for ways that memories might fit the tenets of *testimonio* or fall within the cultural constructs of *consejos* (advice) or *educación* (values). Since all my participants had already earned a degree, either in recent years or in one case, over 25 years ago, all of the information they provided was based on memories that revolved about how they negotiated their entire experience in higher education.

Monica and Bertha indicated their best memories were connected to the hooding ceremony, which became a source of motivation. Both indicated that picturing themselves attending this ceremony helped them retain their focus, stay motivated, and propelled them to persevere. Several of my participants remembered great professors who played a critical part in their successful completion of a doctorate. Bertha teared up in my presence when she remembered how on graduation day, she returned the \$100 bill that she had kept in an envelope in her desk all along. With a great deal of emotion, and gratitude, she thanked her mother, while Andrea remembered the friends she met from all over the world and the support from her Arab friends specifically. Ella stated the best part was learning about her own history, but did so with anger about how, to this day, public school curriculums omit the history about her ancestors' lands as well as their treatment at the hands of the United States government.

When asked to share the most difficult of times, Monica recalled the stress she underwent in the last few days prior to finishing her doctorate and becoming ill due to the



pressure she felt during that time. She stated that at the end, after typing her last phrase, she “exploded inside” and burst into tears. Bertha shared that due to a problem with some of her participants, her study was almost compromised toward the end, while Paula’s most difficult challenge came when one of her committee members would not read her drafts and instead asked that she stop clogging up her email box. This resulted in a very expensive solution when Paula, in an act of resistance and resilience, decided to mail her drafts through the U.S. mail two times a week.

It is by remembering; reflecting, and recounting the past that *testimonio* allows us to enter the process of healing (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). The memories for most of my participants were profound, insightful, and for several, they were painful but therapeutic. I wondered how I could make their words come alive. How would I capture the feelings; the passion, I sensed from them? Their resilience in the face of challenge, whether institutional or personal, flies in the face of theories, policies, and explanations that leave out the role of systemic and institutional practices of oppression.

### **Straddling the Borderlands**

On one side of us, we are constantly exposed to the Spanish of the Mexicans, on the other side we hear the Anglos’ incessant clamoring so that we forget our language...we don’t identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don’t totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 85)

I approached this study with great curiosity about the experiences of Chicana scholars, all doctoral recipients, on the southwest border of this country and how their experiences might compare and/or contrast with those in the academic literature (Chapter 2). There are major differences among them. The scholars who informed my review do

not live in a southwest El Paso; their writings indicate they are from various parts of the United States. In contrast, the participants in this study, like me, grew up and lived in the same border city of El Paso most of their lives, minutes away from Mexico. On a daily basis, we hear the language that is very often the dominant language of our parents and grandparents. Whether the perpetual reminders come in the form of the language, food, the customs, our relatives or the celebrations, they are always reminders of the Mexican part of us.

Furthermore, in El Paso we have a particular contention to live with: while we are the numerical majority, we must abide by the rules and norms of the dominant, White culture in every major institution with which we interact. This constitutes a real contradiction and resembles the very definition of a colonial state, where a few make the rules and set the parameters for the many that live among them. When we enter the halls of academia, some of us change our very essence in order to “belong” as several of the participants in this study did. It is understandable, then, that vestiges of the colonial mentality that was imposed on us collectively and historically might emerge, a mentality that would explain why some of my participants would feel inferior in their role as doctoral candidates after growing up in one world while interacting on a daily basis with an entirely different one.

After all the interviews were completed, and two of my participants still described the entire experience of earning a doctorate as virtually free of challenges, I had an epiphany as to why the experience of earning a doctorate may have seemed so positive for some, while traumatic for others: the *testimonios* in this study suggest that the less acculturated and assimilated participants were, the more likely to feel marginalized.

Moreover, the women who felt marginalized also had a basic awareness about issues of racism. Conversely, the more acculturated and assimilated participants were (as the two women whose experiences were entirely positive) the less likely they were to feel marginalized.

Esther's two experiences of marginalization due to her Spanish accent and Mexican citizenship brought on a sad realization for me, based on 30 years of experience with an education system that is situated on the border: the children of Mexican immigrants frequently receive a treatment similar to Esther's. When they do not speak English, they are often placed in remedial classes. In this way, the academic strengths they bring to the table in their native language are, in the words of Esther, "devalued and dismissed." These are policies intent on teaching English at the expense of one's native language. Anzaldúa (1999) states that people of color suffer when they do not acculturate and then there are other psychological implications to contend with. My participants' *testimonios* confirm this: the implications, most often in the form of self-doubt, are with them for many years.

Some of the *testimonios* from the scholars in the literature (Chapter 2) sound strikingly similar, in theme and in tone, to those of the women in this study. Echoes of academic colonialism (Arce, 1978), whereby institutions impose intellectual concepts on a subordinate group that are in turn adopted, as was the case during Ella's and Bertha's early years in school, are evident in the *testimonios* of my participants. Recurring observations of the two groups revealed that while both describe the elements of internalized oppression in their doctoral experiences; the phenomenon itself is not named. This is highly problematic because the overarching themes that hover over both groups of

scholars are marginalization and silencing. Since marginalization and silencing are manifested in internalized oppression, how can this phenomenon be disrupted if we are oblivious to what it is or how it occurs? I can only draw from my own experience to answer this question. In the following section, I reflect upon how I have learned to interrupt the phenomenon of patriarchy and internalized oppression.

### **Reflexivity**

#### **Interrupting Patriarchy and Internalized Oppression**

Anzaldúa (1999) states, “Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (p. 109). To interrupt patriarchy and internalized oppression in my own life, three things have had to occur. First, I had to develop awareness, then an understanding of both. My graduate studies contributed to that end. Secondly, I had to learn about how, specifically, they emerged in my own life. This occurred through a long and deep self-interrogation of my own “silenced histories” (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Third and most importantly, I welcome every opportunity to share lessons about patriarchy and internalized oppression with my own children. My grown daughter is aware of the consequences of subservience, gleaned in part from the *consejos* I share with her.

The Latina Feminist Group refers to Chicana feminisms as those often generated at the kitchen table and on the church steps, often learned from our mothers. Ours is not merely quaint or anecdotal knowledge but knowledge that places power and politics at the center of all teaching and learning. Our ways of teaching, learning, and being come from our own theories and visions of life. We base these on a hope for a better future for

our own families, communities, and the world (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). Thus, I draw from two vignettes of my own experience to demonstrate the process by which my life was dominated by gendered ideas around patriarchy, how these ideas were instilled and perpetuated for many years and, most importantly, how I interrupt patriarchy in my own life.

I once had a conversation with my mother, in my kitchen, about my oldest brother, Beto. I jokingly teased her as I said, “C’mon mom, we all know Beto’s your favorite!” She answered by saying, “*No no – no es verdad*” (No, no – that is not true). She then stared at the floor and after a few moments added: “*Bueno pues, ...pero mijo si fué a Viet Nam*” (...Well, ok, but my son *did* go to Viet Nam!). It was as if she justified that he could be the favorite because he had gone to Viet Nam. There was a very powerful message in her words: Because my brother was a man, he could go to war, which made him worthy of being the favorite. In another gendered practice, my mother’s preference was that my sister and I serve and hand our husbands their plate at the table. The idea of patriarchy, although I was never conscious of it, was deeply instilled in my mind and in my way of thinking. Today I defy some of my mother’s preferences, but I also pass on to my grown children an awareness of why I do so.

As a professional, I have always worked primarily around women in the teaching profession. My sister, in contrast, has worked primarily in the White, male-dominated structure of corporate America. Due to the high level of her position, she interacts frequently with White males in authority. While we were both raised in the same home, she has, by virtue of the very nature of her workplace and frequency around authoritative males, learned to survive and indeed thrive, in the corporate world. I believe this is how

she has “unlearned” that which we both grew up hearing: that we should be subservient to males around us. My daughter faces similar challenges with authoritative males in the corporate world. Due to my learning about patriarchy, often shared through *consejos*, she is now aware of the potential pitfalls of working in the White, male-dominated corporate world. Several of my participants shared that they, too, grew up in a gendered household and how it impacted not only their educational experience in higher education but their lives as a whole. True to one of the tenets of *testimonio*, ours is a collective story.

According to Kleinsasser (2000), it is impossible to separate reflexivity from the process of conducting research because it is one’s experience that brings a deep and rich meaning about one’s own epistemology to the research questions we seek to answer. He argues that reflexivity is dynamic, creative, and “gives qualitative research its pulse” (p. 155). He further states that reflexivity enables the researcher to step away from a rigid distinction between what is personal and theoretical, so that one’s voice can emerge, a voice that acknowledges the multiple identities often inherent to one’s role as a researcher. Indeed, in my researcher role, I had expected the experiences of my participants to be similar to my own or to those of the scholars in my review of the literature, and I was perplexed when they did not. I hoped to find challenges that I could write about. I soon realized that I had romanticized the experiences of Chicana scholars. Additionally, I had other concerns.

In my field notes, concerns surfaced often, especially in the first few months of the interview process. For example, I worried that it would be presumptuous on my part to claim that any of my participants were oppressed in any way. Also, because *testimonio* is often associated with individuals whose voice has traditionally been silenced, I felt

intimidated. After all, I would be interviewing strong women who had earned a Ph.D., women who were way ahead of me in the doctoral process and who were not from some maligned third world country. I had to remind myself that it was the *data* that suggested oppression, not me. It was also helpful when I realized, as I was getting acquainted with these women, how very different our institutions were with regard the fields of study offered at the doctorate level. My field of study consisted of a concentration of courses related to social justice, language, literacy, and culture. In contrast, all of my study participants attended a university that, while diverse in its population, did not offer a social justice field of study. It was no accident that I had developed, through extensive coursework, an acute awareness about social justice, the role of language, culture, and power and about my own community of Chicanas and their severe underrepresentation in the academy. Our fields of study, and therefore our perspectives, were simply different.

A final issue with which I wrestled was the use of the label “Chicana.” In my review of the literature (Chapter 2), I defined Chicana as a woman who is: 1) usually of Mexican descent, 2) usually from the southwestern part of the United States, but who is 3) always committed to social justice and in solidarity with other Chicanas. While a unique geopolitical history defines the Chicana, the discourse in the academic literature is confusing because different labels are used continually to identify the same group of women of Mexican descent, labels, such as Latina, Hispanic, and Mexican American. To clarify any confusion that the interchangeable use of these words might have posed for the reader, I honored the use of whatever label was used by the scholar I cited.

In Chapters 4 and 5, whenever I referenced the participants in my study, I referred to them in one of two ways: 1) the women or 2) the participants, partly because of the 10

women I interviewed, most did not self-identify as Chicana in a written questionnaire prior to beginning the interview process. This did not surprise me. Today, many women of Mexican descent do not self-identify as Chicanas because, to a large extent, the label is seen as outdated and/or carries the same connotation as the term radical; thus, to self-identify as a Chicana can be also damaging in some sectors of our society. My review of the literature (Chapter 2) speaks to how many scholars wrestle with the labels Chicana, Latina, and Hispanic in their search for a term to adequately describe and portray Mexican American women who concern themselves with the political and social implications of living in a society such as ours. Without question, every one of my participants meets this criterion. Every single one holds a leadership position with a potential to impact teachers, professors, and administrators and most importantly, children. Moreover, they deal with the political and social implications inherent to this daily work, which profoundly impacts children (in our case mostly from the Latino community) in our schools.

Until I learned the historical significance of the term, I did not identify as a Chicana either. Until then, I associated the term with fist-waving radicals in the 1960s, as did Monica, one of my participants. In the 1960s at the time of the Chicano Movement, I was a “good girl”; just out of high school and did not associate with those I saw as rabble rousers. I did not question the way the Chicano Movement was portrayed by the media and much of society, while today I do. Albeit in this second half of my life, my coursework and consequent learning has resulted in one epiphany after another that has caused me to espouse the term Chicana. I have actually advocated for this group my entire life, on a personal as well as professional level. In other words, I was always a



Chicana; I just did not know it. I am convinced, based on the *testimonios*, that this was the case with a few of the women in my study.

Finally and most importantly, I use the label Chicana as a symbol of what the term has always signaled: solidarity with other Chicanas centered on the hope that we will continue to promote educational aspirations for others. It was primarily by way of a formal education around issues of social justice that I came to learn about and interrogate my own oppression. It was the interrogation of my own *papelitos guardados* (silenced histories) (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001) that gave me clarity of mind. In affirmation, Moraga (1983) argues that there is a danger in attempting to rank or understand oppression from a purely theoretical stance and that unless we face our own oppression with all its emotion and heartfelt struggle, we will not name the enemy within us and outside of us. My own *papelitos* were not wrapped in elaborate academic ideas but in the experiential knowledge born of my own brown flesh. This is precisely why my story and the story of many others matters.

### **Implications for Education Institutions**

The phenomenon of internalized oppression needs to be interrogated in scholarly articles in the academic literature about Chicanas. In higher education journals specifically, this phenomenon is seldom mentioned by name, let alone interrogated. Understanding internalized oppression may have lead to a better understanding of why the doctoral completion rate for our group is so low and more importantly; how resiliency and individual agency comes into play in the successful completion of a doctorate for this group. This is important because without question, the women in my study demonstrated

resiliency – they are after all, a part of the 1 % (Yosso, 2006). Yet, their major obstacles sometimes came from within.

History textbooks at every level in all public education institutions must include our experience. There is much to learn from the Mexican American War and specifically from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The *herida abierta* (open wound) to which Anzaldúa (1999) refers is real; it is deep, and it has impacted many people of Mexican descent profoundly to this day. Our government, in adhering to its Doctrine of Manifest Destiny, left a wound in our collective psyche, but it is a wound that can begin to heal if we understand how, when, and why it was inflicted. Regrettably, many of us do not know our history, yet it has impacted us collectively; and so we search in other places for other answers to profound questions that, for example, might help explain the high dropout rates among our youth.

More colleges of education should require coursework that focuses on social justice issues. I thought it ironic that my participants, who all work in the field education, were not required to enroll in courses that focus on social justice when in fact; schools are a microcosm of our society with its complex issues of race and class.

*Testimonio* can be powerful in schools. In our efforts to involve parents, it can be used as a tool which provides opportunities to identify challenges related to their children's academic progress. This would be an effective way to open dialogues which encourage parents, in partnership with schools, to become agents of change and lead to better educational outcomes for children. Additionally, with regard to the underrepresentation of women of color discussed in this dissertation, *testimonio* may

potentially inspire conversations between parents and their daughters; conversations that promote the idea of earning a doctorate.

My next goal is to be a motivational speaker for Spanish-dominant parents in our schools, using *testimonio* as a tool. Rather than use a presumptuous tone, as our schools often do, I wish to remind them of the power of their role as parents in schools. Most importantly, I wish to provide affirmation of the work they are already doing with their children. Music, love, and humor will be my tools.

## APPENDIX A

### EMAIL CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Hi Teresa,

I hope all is well with you and your family! As I indicated before in our meeting last month, I will return to El Paso soon. We have discussed my possible dissertation interests at length, so I'm glad you have a sense of where I'm going with this research. Nevertheless, I can send you the final proposal once it's done I'm glad you've agreed to help me find my study participants.

Here are the criteria that I'm using for my participants so far:

Females who self-identify as Mexican American, Hispanic, Latina or Chicana who:

- ...have completed their dissertation
- ...work in the field of education
- ...work on the southwest border

Thanks so much,

Gloria

**APPENDIX B**

**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. What pseudo name would you like me to use for this study? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long (years) have you lived in the Southwest? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What other degrees have you earned and from what state/university? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What other certifications do you hold? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your birthplace? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is the birthplace of your parents? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Where did you attend elementary, middle, and high school?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What is your present profession? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What is your present title? \_\_\_\_\_
10. How do you self-identify when asked about/for your ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. How do you define the term "Chicana"? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Do you now or did you ever identify as a Chicana? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. If so, what does being a Chicana mean to you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. Are you now or have you ever been active politically? If so, how and to what extent?

## APPENDIX C

### UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST, COLLEGE OF EDUCATION HUMAN SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

#### Consent Form

**Study title:** *Testimonios* from the border: Shattering the notion that women of color don't do theory

**Introduction to the study:** I am inviting you to participate in a research study that I, Gloria Barragán, will conduct as a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, College of Education. The purpose of my study is to explore the experiences of doctoral recipients to contribute to understandings about what drives Chicanas to succeed, in light of the fact that less than 1% from this group completes a doctorate in the United States.

**What will happen during the study:** I will conduct two interviews and audio-taped sessions over the Spring to Summer of 2013 that I will transcribe. Each of these interviews will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Here is a representative sample of the kinds of questions I will ask:

1. Why did you decide to pursue a doctorate?
2. Tell me about your most wonderful and your most difficult experiences while pursuing a doctorate.
3. While pursuing a doctorate, did you experience any marginalization? (Ex: gender, race, or class)

**Participants' privacy: information recorded during these sessions will:**

- be confidential and kept in a locked cabinet; only the researcher will have access to the cabinet
- be shared with my advisor and committee at UMass only for dissertation research purposes
- use pseudonyms to protect confidentiality
- possibly lead to publication in a research journal or be used for my dissertation completion
- be coded with codes known only to me and not traceable to you
- be destroyed immediately after transcription is completed

**Risks and discomforts:** Participation in this study is of minimal risk. You may find yourself uncomfortable being tape-recorded. Similarly, benefits are also minimal; you may enjoy the opportunity to talk about our experiences, but the study itself will not directly benefit you.

**Your participation is voluntary.** You are free to discontinue or refuse participation at any time for any reason or no reason at all. You have the right to review materials used in this study and a summary of the results will be made available to you upon request. You will receive one copy of your consent form and the original is for me.

**Review Board approval:** The University of Massachusetts-Amherst College of Education Review Board has approved this study. If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the College of Education Review Board at, 123 Furcolo Hall, 813 North Pleasant Street, Amherst, MA 01003 or via telephone at (413) 545-6984.

**If you have any concerns/questions,** I can be reached at 915 503-4155 or [gbarraga@educ.umass.edu](mailto:gbarraga@educ.umass.edu). The chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Laura Valdiviezo, can be reached at [lav@educ.umass.edu](mailto:lav@educ.umass.edu)

I have had the chance to ask any question I have and my questions have been answered. I have read the information in this consent form and I agree to participate in this study.

---

Study Participant Signature

---

Date

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW 1 QUESTIONS

Beginning: Tell me about yourself; include upbringing; family, career path up to now, etc.

1. What kinds of messages regarding higher education were conveyed to you in the past?
2. Who conveyed these messages to you and in what context?
3. At what point in your life were these messages conveyed to you?
4. When did the notion of working toward a doctorate first present itself to you?
5. Why did you want to pursue a doctorate?
6. What was your most positive experience in your quest for a doctorate?
7. What was your most negative experience?
8. Name and discuss briefly, three things to which you attribute your successful completion of a doctorate.
9. Did you ever give any thought to the idea of quitting your doctoral program? If so, what made you change your mind?
10. What advice would you give to an aspiring doctoral candidate today?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **INTERVIEW 2 QUESTIONS**

1. Can you share any memories that have come up since our first interview?
2. Tell me about your most wonderful memory related to your doctoral process, and why it is your most special memory.
3. Tell me about your most difficult/painful or traumatic memory during the time you were pursuing your doctorate.
4. What was your favorite course and why?
5. What was your most difficult course and why?
6. What was your favorite professor like – why was she/he your favorite?
7. What was your least favorite professor like – why was she/he your least favorite?
8. Can you share an artifact that represents the best of your doctoral experience?  
...and/or
9. Can you share an artifact that represents the worst of your doctoral experience?



**APPENDIX F**

**EDUCATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS CHART**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Mother's Educ &amp; Profession</b>	<b>Father's Educ &amp;Profession</b>	<b>Attended Public or Private Schools... ?</b>	<b>Undergrad Field of Study</b>	<b>Span Prof'y: Rdg 1-3 Writ 1-3 <u>1= best</u></b>	<b>Educ Debt?</b>	<b>Attended Comm'y College ?</b>	<b>Year began &amp; Year completed Doctorate Age at beginning &amp; at end</b>	<b>Research Area</b>

## APPENDIX G

### PERSONAL DEMOGRAPHICS CHART

Name	Identify as	Age	Birth-place	Birth order	Order of Siblings	THEN: While working on doctorate: Married/Partner? Number of Dependents/ Children	TODAY: Married/Partner? Number of Dependents/ Children	Age at begin.& end of doctorate

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