Quieren Mi Labor Más No Mi Intelecto They Want My Hands Not My Brains: Mapping the Gendered and Racialized Journeys of Adult English Learner Immigrant Latin American Women in the US Higher Education System

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Abstract

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This qualitative study examines the gendered and racialized educational experiences of eight nontraditional, adult English learners (EL), Latin American, and immigrant women. The study focuses on those that after migrating as in adults age to the United States, have eventually continued their higher educational attainment, disrupting the conventional narratives about adult immigrants and their lack of aspirations in higher education attainment. Such experiences have been largely excluded from U.S academic literature, as they are a minority within a minority. Nontraditional, adult EL, Latin American, immigrant students entering the United States higher education system are navigating college access in a system new to them as their access path is very different from international students or Latinx peers who attended the K-12 education system. Factors such as age, the digital divide, and typically being monolingual for the first 20-30 years of their lives increase exponentially, often becoming the first barriers on their path to higher education. They are navigating a new education system while facing

immigration challenges such as family and financial responsibilities in their country of origin and receptor country. The data collected from eight qualitative testimonio interviews sought to capture information about their access path to higher education and the path access that they followed, the gendered and racialized experiences and their impact on the participants' education, and lastly, to identify how the participants successfully navigated the United States higher education system at the undergraduate and graduate level as they were either recently graduated or currently enrolled in universities and community colleges.

The study was intentional in utilizing testimonio as a method of research, a qualitative approach that gave participants a space to share their individual experiences and to collectively reclaim their invisibilized academic journeys as they resonated with one another. Conceptualized through a Latino Critical Race Theory and intersectionality lens framework provided an interdisciplinary perspective to examine how identity markers such as race, class, gender, national origin, phenotype, etc., and complex structures of oppression such as institutionalized racism and white privilege impacted the educational experiences of nontraditional, adult EL, Latin American immigrant, women. Migration studies theory illuminated allowed me to better understand the different contexts for migration from countries in Latin America, and finally, grounded in Chicana feminism allowed me to center the women's experiences and draw from their experiences as a source of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998). The study provides recommendations for universities administrative & faculty personal in practice & policy, advocating for different ways to positively create educational access for nontraditional, adult English learner students.

To perform a thorough analysis of their journeys, the following questions guided the study: a) What were the educational paths that adult Latin American immigrant women followed to access and succeed in the U.S higher education system? b) How do their testimonios reveal the gendered and racialized journey to college attainment? And c) How can an intersectional discussion of their academic journey depict the privileges and barriers that came into place for immigrant Latin American women to

defy spaces where they have only been seen as laborers? These questions were informed by my own journey as an adult immigrant woman from Mexico who grew up monolingual and acquired English as a second language to enroll and obtain a college education in the U.S. I am also informed by the minimal literature on the subject and the historical context of the practices of exclusion from higher education institutions and how those continue to affect the experiences of underrepresented students in the United States (Long 2016). My testimonio, joined by eight others of nontraditional adult English learners, Latin American immigrant women, are critically analyzed to shine a light on the intersectional journeys of accessing and surviving in the U.S. higher education system, a system. that, according to the data produced in this study, severely ignores this small but growing population of adult English learners seeking access to postsecondary education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

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DEDICATIONS

This dissertation is dedicated to my partner, my daughter, my biological and my chosen immigrant families.

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“Migration is a one-way trip. There is no “home” to go back to”
-Stuart Hall

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1 Her story was my story: testimonio of a nontraditional student, adult English learner, immigrant, Mexican woman accessing and surviving higher education system.

I would like to start this dissertation by sharing my testimonio of what it was like to attend a community college, then transfer to a research one university to complete my undergraduate work and then embark upon the graduate school journey. According to John Beverley's pioneer work on testimonial literature in Latin America, a testimonio is a "novel or novella-length narrative told in the first person" coming from a person that has witnessed and survived traumatic events such as civil wars or genocides (Beverley 1996). Rooted in Latin America's resistance to oppression, testimonio has been used as an alternative narrative, giving space to the voices of subaltern subjects. My dissertation was born out of the juxtaposed experience of feeling very isolated when accessing higher education as an English learner adult, Mexican immigrant, and nontraditional student, yet completely amazed every time I came across other students with my similar profile and to find out how our experiences of navigating higher education loudly resonated with each other. My own experiences as an adult immigrant to the U.S. have directly informed the path in my academic career and the reason for my graduate studies. I was the first person in my immediate and extended family to graduate college and continue to graduate school. This dissertation is a documented testimonio of struggle, the resistance, and the hope that it will serve as a guide to others seeking to walk the same path

I migrated to the United States through the Family Based Petition program, which allows U.S. citizens or naturalized citizens to sponsor immediate family members. This program was established by the Immigration Act of 1965, a United States immigration policy that allowed my father, a Mexican

immigrant and a naturalized American citizen, to petition for an immigrant visa for me, and under the family reunification act, I arrived in the country with documented status.

When I immigrated to the United States my dream was to learn English and attend a university so that I could return to my country and pursue better opportunities. Lacking the language skills, I was unable to enter the university system within my first few years in the country. Instead, I worked jobs in the service and care work economies as a housekeeper and a childcare provider. Working fulltime did not allowed me to enroll in school full-time. Instead, I occasionally took ESL classes (English as second language, also known as ELL English language learner classes). It took 8 years from arrival before finally setting foot on a college campus. As the years passed felt the dream slip out of my hands, as I did not feel I would ever reach the level of English required to enter a university. I had almost given up on my dream when a coworker (an immigrant from the Ukraine) enrolled in college level classes and told me "If I can do it, you can too". She had a similar story to mine; she had already been in the U.S. for a few years before finally beginning her college journey: my story was her story. Along my educational path I would meet other nontraditional, English learners[1], immigrant, Latin American students a minority within a minority, we immediately formed supportive friendships as a coping mechanism for the loneliness we had experienced.

Working in a community center allowed me to learn how to be an advocate for the Latinx[2] community, as it gave me access to different educational trainings. I felt empowered and more secure

[1] This dissertation uses the term **English learners (EL)** as is used by the federal government and most states to describe students who are exposed to a language in addition to English. New research points out that the term "English learner" focuses more on students' deficits of learning a language while ignoring the strength of their home language (García, 2009; Zacarian & Staehr Fenner, 2020). Educators in the K-12 education system are currently using the terms "English learner" (EL) and "multilingual learner" (ML) interchangeably, while indicating that ELs and MLs share some, but not all, characteristics. Multilingual learners are mainly based on young students whose parent or guardian reports speaking one or more languages other than English at home. MLs may or may not qualify for English language support, depending on their level of English proficiency (Snyder & Staehr fenner, 2021).

[2]The *x* in the term Latinx addresses the limitations of the masculine and feminine gender identity binary and encompasses gender identities fluctuating across different spectrum points. It also recognizes the cultural and racial diversity within Latin America, challenging the Hispanic/ Latino dominant U.S. terminology created by the U.S. census, which only embraces Spaniard and Mestizo heritage while erasing or hiding African and Indigenous ancestry (Brammer). The term Latinx has claims to be originated from activists in Central America and Brazil but

with my English skills -I could finally try to enroll in a community college. I had never enrolled in college level classes before, as my experiences with community college were limited to ESL classes. Prior to entering my graduate program at the University of Washington, I worked full time while attending school. I had a successful career as a community organizer where I supported women who struggled with language skills, domestic violence, and unstable housing. Overall, I spent over ten years as a program coordinator for a Latino Resource Center in Everett, Washington. Once I was accepted into the doctoral program, my life, as I knew it went through difficult changes. I was completely ecstatic for continuing onto graduate school, but on a personal level I was devastated. Leaving the support of my community left me very isolated. It was then that the support of my advisors, and other graduate students became my lifeline to the PhD.

However, as a nontraditional, English learner student the support I needed was difficult to find as I was someone that is typically not thought about when the university's student services designed their support programs. For example, although categorized as a Latina in the U.S. I did not go through the same process of racialization or attended the K-12 education system in the U.S. like my Latinx peers nor was I an international student, which are groups of population universities tend to center around when thinking of the "other" students. I was an immigrant that arrived in adult age, and after being monolingual for 19 years, I navigated undergraduate and graduate classes with the English language skills acquired in ELL classes. Those classes are designed for immigrants who are expected to go on to technical or short certificate careers, not college classes. These classes do not prepare the ELL students with college readiness skills, there is no "academic jargon" in their curriculum. Even the college and career readiness standards established in 2013 by the Office of Career Technical and Adult Education

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became widely used by Latin American descent U.S.-based scholars, community activists, and across platforms social media spheres, with Elizabeth Horan to be one of the first documented U.S. scholars to use it in 2004 (Rivas, 2017).

(OCTAE) were not written with language learners in mind (Egan, 2019), leaving English learners with no college preparation classes or programs tailored to their needs.

Navigating the college classes was not easy, and I was made aware of how "unwelcomed" I was from the moment I set foot into a college-level classroom. When I finally made it to English 101 there were other two Latinas in a class of 30 students. Although I was much older than them and had not grown-up in the United States like they did, our being first- generation students bonded us. We bonded, in part due to our need to survive the class. The professor, an Asian immigrant woman and self-proclaimed Republican would often perform microaggressions in the classroom and the Latinx students in the class were typically the receptors of her racial aggressions. Wishing to discuss current topics the instructor brought into the classroom conversation the topic of undocumented immigration and made all students aware of her political posture about undocumented immigrants not getting at the "back of the line" the line -is a metaphor used to refer to presumedly fair access-to-resources process of migrating to the United States, (Hochschild, 2016). From then onward it was clear that we were not just speaking of undocumented immigration only, we had to speak up to justify our presence there in the classroom. Often there were statements about "Mexican illegals and the jobs they steal" thrown into the classroom conversations, but it was beyond that. In a class where we represented "diversity" (along with the instructor, ironically) those statements were escape valves for our White peers and for how out-of-place we seemed to them. Not only were "Mexican illegals" stealing jobs, in their minds we were now also stealing seats in college classrooms.

Six quarters later I transferred to the University of Washington to continue my undergraduate coursework and I experienced structural racism. There I quickly learned about how the university's restrictive policies worked against me instead of "valuing" the diverse experience I brought to the institution as a non-white student, Spanish native speaker. For example, on orientation day, I found out I could not get credit for being a bilingual Spanish native speaker (even though I attended the K-12 Mexican school system completely in Spanish), yet my non-native Spanish "bilingual" sophomore-peers

that had taken Spanish classes in a United States high school would be given up to 30 credits worth of language knowledge. These credits translated to a considerable tuition discount equivalent to two full-time quarters' worth. At the same time, as a non-native speaker of English, I was asked to satisfy the English proficiency requirement established by the university before being able to take university coursework.

Interestingly, the requirement back then was waived for U.S. citizens regardless of their English level. The university's self-designed and enforced language policy did not consider that I had already taken prior college level courses in English for six consecutive quarters at the community college where I was transferring from. When I think back to this moment, I know this could have been the policy that eliminated my chance to access a college education in the United States. The English proficiency requirement could only be satisfied by testing out of it. If I had failed the test, then my only options were to enroll in the university's English Academic Program. This would have presented another significant barrier. In the academic year of 2008-09 (when I transferred to the university), these English preparation classes were not covered by financial aid and were about $1500.00 per class. If I had not successfully passed the test, I would have needed money to pay out of pocket to enroll in however many English courses the university deemed necessary to access education at the University of Washington. I would have been effectively weeded out of higher education.

Twelve years later the university still enforces the English requirement, for students not being able to test out of it, although luckily, they now offer different options including financial aid coverage of the classes offered by the English Academic Program. I must reiterate that this policy is not a requirement from any educational regulatory institution above the university. These types of policies are self-implemented and irregular, as some universities require them and not others. Some of these barriers I have mentioned in my testimonio are indeed used to regulate and place boundaries in the spaces people of color occupies in academia (Delgado 2006). The structural "norm" which can be modified because of its structural origin such as the English Proficiency Requirement, is used as a mechanism to weed out

undesirable students in higher education, or students that are stepping out of the space designated for them, in my case an immigrant woman slipping out of pre-established concepts for immigrants (i.e. working as a housekeeper instead of attending college).

Education is central to so many other women's immigrant journeys that begin by searching for economic, political, and social mobility. My academic journey can best be understood by using an interdisciplinary and transnational analysis framework. My testimonio allows me to publicly share how immigrants like me break out of the preset pathway. My testimonio joins others as a way to move past resistance, collaborating with others in naming our experiences as a demographic of students whose challenges are not visible. Speaking up to break an imposed silence is claiming the space I worked hard to obtain -despite the educational system's gatekeeping practices because community colleges and universities have to serve *all students equally*, providing spaces where a student can thrive.

Latinx immigration to the United States grew by millions of immigrants as it entered the feminization era[3] of migration during the 1990s and 2000s, immigrants in the newer waves had different demographics, and migratory gender patterns have been interrupted where now women from Latin America account for almost half of the immigrant population (American Immigration Council, 2020). A considerable number of these adult immigrants are women likely to be interested in continuing an education in the United States, as they are arriving with better schooling and some even already have a college education. However, the need for community colleges and universities to acknowledge this new and growing population has yet to take place. Immigrants to the United Statesare changing **their** pre-established narratives within systems that are not ready to see them occupying other spaces than the

[3] The feminization of migration points out to the increased movement of women across borders, which was very visible at the turn of the millennium. Women began migrating independently due to different structural, social, and gender-related factors (feminicides for example). The feminization of migration is directly linked to a shift in migration when socioeconomic changes in sending countries, along with labor markets changes in receptor countries. Mexico and other sending countries from Latin America experienced a dramatic rise in female migrants as processes of globalization and neoliberal policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) had a direct impact on women's lives in the global south, functioning as a catapult for migration for those already experiencing economic precarity (Donato et. al. 2005)

preferred labor extraction spaces. In the United States labor demand-driven policies were established and historically used for the employment-based admissions of immigrants (OECD, 2019).

Through my testimonio and that of eight other immigrant women, this dissertation seeks to examine and disrupt conventional narratives of immigrant women from Latin America occupying a large of the labor force in a variety of service and light industrial occupations (American Immigration Council, 2017). The study focuses on those who, after migrating as adults to the United States, have continued their path through higher education. Such experiences have been largely excluded from U.S. academic literature. Documenting our experiences through testimonios will shine a light on the experiences of nontraditional adult immigrant women students, accessing and surviving U.S. academia.

1.2 A Nation of Immigrants? Brief Immigration & Racial Context of the United States.

In 2019 the United Nations reported[4] that the number of international migrants throughout the world reached 272 million, which was an increase of 51 million since 2010. This is a number that brings to light a harsh reality; 272 million people are no longer able to live in the country where they were born. In the United States little is known about the complicated system of legal immigration and its connections to neoliberal policies (American Immigration Council, 2021). Ironically, in a country where immigration has been fundamental to its formation and development as a settler colonial and capitalist nation, there are countless historical and contemporary factors about immigration that do not fit neatly into the prevailing national narrative. Immigration in the United States has been a strategic and recurrent topic of debate for the advancement of political agendas that make visible xenophobic patterns throughout its history. The U.S. has encouraged or discouraged migration according to its benefit and need for labor. Historically, the labor of immigrants is behind the significant transformations in the country and supports the everyday development of this nation. In 2019 there were 28.4 million

[4] There are an estimated 272 million international migrants around the world. And while that equals just 3.5% of the world's population, it already surpasses some projections for 2050. Since 1970, the number of people living in a country other than where they were born has tripled. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/iom-global-migration-report-international-migrants-2020/

foreign-born people in the U.S. labor force, comprising 17.4 percent of the total American labor force. However, in a capitalist society, the need for certain kinds of cheap labor has encouraged the hiring of documented and undocumented immigrants fueling the anti-immigrant sentiment already existing since the foundation of this nation (Saxton & Avrich, 1971).

To deconstruct current narratives about migration from Latin America, it is crucial to understand the historical context and unique patterns of immigration to the U.S., and why utilizing immigration as a national threat has been essential for the nation's political and racialized agendas. Since the 18th century, the discourse about immigration to the United States has been characterized by two unique postures: embracing economic growth and development that immigrants bring to the nation and hostility towards immigrants. Immigration scholars have focused mainly on adaptation and acculturation processes faced by different immigrant groups, while race scholars have focused on structural barriers encountered by the newcomers as well as indigenous people in a system founded on the protection of the White settlers (Donato et.al, 2004, Durand et.al., 2001, Lipsitz 2018). Xenophobia has been present since the foundation of the United States, White Anglo- Saxon Protestants (WASPs) from Britain, northern and central Europe were the original settlers and often unreceptive or welcoming of other groups of immigrants who closely followed in the journey to the "new world". In the United States the rejection and fear of others has been systematically institutionalized by creating and establishing laws targeting specific groups of people at moments in country's history. This is not a new practice as xenophobia like racism has evolved and adapted carefully aimed at the protection of Whiteness[5] (Lee 2020).

[5] "Whiteness" is used to refer to the racial status shared by all whites in the United States as a group regardless of their income level, citizenship status, gender, sexual identity, physical ability, etc. Michel Foucault explains and defines as genealogy of whiteness where systems and structures inscribe and uphold white domination over Blacks and other nonwhites. It was first coined during the first wave of White Studies in the 1980s, where the concept racialized White people for the first time in the United States, in the same way that Black and other people of color had been defined by their race for centuries. In this sense, "whiteness" challenges the perception that being white is "normal." The concept of "whiteness" allows for an understanding of all the benefits that whites enjoy simply for being white. Although different disciplines address whiteness from varied perspective, White Studies has centered on "drawing attention to the valorization of whiteness and the constitutive factor of white-skin privilege, allows whiteness studies scholars to summon all whites to face up to their privilege. In fact, these scholars point to specific epistemologies, ideologies, and practices that are in place to systematically authorize and safeguard white privilege (Pinder, 2015. Pg. 10)."

Regulating Black and Brown bodies in the Americas has been central to the notions of power and domination, which centuries later shaped laws and policies in the United States. For example, the concept of Manifest Destiny rationalized the murder and/or removal of Native Americans from their land, arguing that U.S. expansion was "was divinely ordained, justifiable, and inevitable" (Heidler & Heidler). The expansion exceeded geographical borders, while the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, prevented the European re-colonization of Latin America. The U.S. ironically, assumed the role of protector of the western hemisphere while Latin Americans were fighting for independence from the Spanish, Portuguese, French & British among other European powers.

The framework of self-appointed guardian of the law and order in the Americas, this was the framework used for the never-ending policing and U.S. involvement with Latin America, which later contributed in Latin American migration to the U.S. From the foundation of this country, migration has been essential in every chapter of this relatively young nation, labor exploitation to laws enforcing limiting quotas on selected countries, and enacting policies criminalizing people's lives for coming into the country without documents. These elements have played an essential role in the racialization process of who are considered permanent immigrants and who will be able to become "Americans." So much of the context of the migration process and its connection to racial formation in the United States is often invisible or missing from the national narrative. Despite being historically hostile towards certain groups of immigrants, the U.S. has always had a specific interest in declaring itself a nation of immigrants (Rampell, 2015), as it serves the purpose of erasing the experiences of Native Americans and enslaved Africans, effectively erasing how this country was built on Native American occupied land. Similarly with Latin America, it is fundamental to understand and deconstruct the genealogy of race as it intersects with immigration and the national imaginary about immigrants. The current national narrative

has not changed much since its origins; the country wants and needs their hands and their labor but not the rest of them.

The following section provides several missing pieces of the immigration narrative, shining a light on the missing context left out of the broader immigrant narrative as understood in the United States. I trace where and how the contemporary immigrant journeys from Latin Americans begin. Highlighting recent U.S. foreign policy with specific regions of Latin America such as Mexico and Central America and the ripple effect these policies have on people entering the migration stream since the 1990s. These specific and at first glance isolated policies acted as economic and structural forces creating the desperate circumstances most immigrants are trying to flee from their countries of origin. Understanding the context of current immigration journeys will serve as a framework not only to help conceptualize current intersectional transnational immigrant journeys but also to hold the United States accountable for its imperial practices and their effect of destruction in Latin American societies (United Nations 2017).

1.3 Latin American migration to the United States changing social, economic, and political factors propelling Latinx women for the first time into transnational migration.

The current immigration demographic trends from Latin America to the United States have dramatically changed over the last twenty years. Each Latin American country presents a different context for migration, as it shifts depending on the social, political, and economic factors influencing the trends. However, what is always consistent is the United States' direct and indirect involvement in the catapult of Latin American migration. Scholars across different fields have linked neoliberal policies with socioeconomic disparity and a correlation with the shift in immigration patterns and demographics (Gonzalez 2000, Massey and Durand 2003, Pessar 1999, Schmidt-Camacho 2008). As neoliberal policies affect employment, education, health, etc., new segments of the population are thrown onto the migration stream. In 2020 female migrants originating in Latin America and the Caribbean accounted for almost half the total immigrant population; this demographic change started occurring in the 1970s

(Donato 2010). “Mirroring Female migration patterns in the 19th-century Irish migration to North America – females, mostly young and unmarried, migrated in equal or greater numbers than male counterparts due to the potato famine and Irish gender roles in rural households. The famine can also be traced to oppressive policies imposed by the Protestant English government.” (Yee, 2022).

According to the Migration Policy Institute, demographics on recent immigrants show that there has also been an increase of college-educated immigrants as “it more than tripled between 1990 and 2015, from 3.1 million to 11.1 million overall. During the same period, the proportion of college graduates among all immigrant adults rose from 20 percent to 30 percent, mirroring the trend among U.S.-born adults (2017)”. The arrival of a growing segment of the immigrant population that possesses higher educational levels and gender patterns and includes Latin America, also presents a new version of transnational immigrants. They have different backgrounds, experiences and are aided by technological communication advances unavailable to their previous waves of immigrants given those facts many of these newer immigrants seek to access education while in the United States. For many recent immigrants in the latest immigration waves, the new version of the “American” dream included education. For example, this is highly visible in community centers and elementary schools around the country, offering English classes to adult immigrants seeking enrollment. Although education had been viewed as only accessible to the children of immigrants the advancement U.S. educational system in the last 50 years has opened new possibilities. These new immigrants were likely thrown into the migration stream due to national and multilateral policies taking effect in their country of origin (Papademetriou et. al. 2005). The United States' foreign policies, trade accords, and involvement in Latin America’s economy and political agendas have dramatically altered the demographic background of immigrants arriving in the United States throughout the first decade of the new millennium. The following are examples of continuous U.S. presence in Mexico significantly influencing the numbers of immigrants from the country to the United States.

In the case of Mexico, the United States shares a complex and complicated relationship with Mexico, rooted in the unique imperialistic genealogies of the two nations including the geographic dispute between Mexico and the United States through the Mexican American War (1846-48), which resulted in the annexation of more than one-third of Mexico's territory to the U.S in 1848 under the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (Sanchez 2011). Contemporary and historically, Mexican immigrants have traveled to its neighbor to the north. In the twentieth century, the Bracero Program (1942-1964) reshaped how the United States imported its labor. Through a series of bilateral agreements, the Bracero Program was the largest labor contract in U.S. history (even up to date), importing nearly five million young Mexican males in a twenty-two-year span. The temporary workers were placed across 24 U.S. states to work in the agricultural sector. Born out of the demands of U.S. farmers after World War II had consumed most of the U.S. labor force, the program welcomed the presence of temporary Mexican workers, as it was crucial for the survival of the agricultural sector of the U.S. economy (Durand 2007).

The next large and significant migration wave took place in 1994 after the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The neoliberal treaty had promised economic and social development. Instead, it delivered "grave consequences in Mexico for the majority of businesses and society, causing profound damage across various branches of the national economy such as the agricultural and industrial sectors weakening the internal market" (Zamora 2014, pg 14). NAFTA profoundly changed the immigrant demographics, which not only included the lower economic classes such as farmers, miners, and factory workers entering migration for the first time in many decades, but also teachers, diverse professionals, and many other semi-skilled and skilled workers belonging to the Mexican lower middle-class, who uprooted and headed north within the first ten years of the agreement (Cypher & Delgado 2010). By the beginning of the new millennium violence in Mexico escalated with the war on drugs and the militarization of Mexico funded by the U.S. 2007 Merida Initiative Plan. It is estimated that in the first decade of implementation, close to three hundred thousand Mexicans migrated fearing kidnapping, drug-related violence, and extortion among other security issues (Contreras 2014).

NAFTA altered the traditional gender dynamics of migration, as the binational labor market increased opportunities for women within Mexico and the United States. Thus, Mexican migration was no longer predominantly male or agricultural communities: women and new migrants from metropolitan areas entered the migration stream (Contreras 2014).

1.4 Overview of Recent US Immigration Policies and Impact on Latin America.

U.S. immigration policies over the last twenty years had unintended consequences; instead of deterring people from entering the country, they drastically impacted previously established patterns of seasonal migration, influencing immigrants' decisions to settle in the U.S. even under the category of undocumented migrants (Massey & Pren, 2010). My interest in analyzing recent U.S. restrictive immigration policies is to connect them with their influence in reshaping migration flows and how it eventually created an undocumented population that was forced to extend their seasonal work stay into a permanent settlement in the United States.

As mentioned above, the Bracero Program was the largest labor contract that at its peak years, 1955-1959, had ~~around~~ approximately 450,000 temporary workers coming to work in the United States, the program ended in part by its exploitative practices and was phased out by 1968. Millions of young Mexican men had previously built relationships with growers who to satisfy U.S. production needs, would task Braceros to tell their male family members and acquaintances that there were jobs waiting for them (Massey et. al. 2011). Mexico guest-worker visas for migrants evaporated, yet the need for workers in the U.S. continued. The United States effectively criminalized Mexican workers by ending the Bracero Program. According to Douglas S. Massey and Karen A. Pren, "the end of the Bracero Program corresponded exactly in time with the rise of illegal migration. From a figure of around 40,000 in 1965, the number of apprehensions per thousand agents peaked at around 460,000 in 1977 (Massey & Pren, 2010)." The Bracero Program was essential for the survival of the agricultural industry during WWII as it worked to satisfy the need for labor in the U.S.; at the same time, it gave Mexican workers economic opportunities that their own country could not. On the other, deregulating the program made

exploitative practices even more common while setting the foundation for the criminalization of the migrant worker.

In the decades to come, the U.S. would enforce legislation that centered on the militarization of the border to end migration. These impacted immigrants in various ways, shifting undocumented population flows and creating a population that had to remain in the U.S as seasonal migration became unachievable. Massey and Pren, best illustrated this phenomenon in their publication *Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America*, highlighting the how the immigrant population had fewer options to return to their countries of origin shifting the paradigms of Mexican migration to the United States: "For any given number of undocumented entry attempts, more restrictive legislation and more stringent enforcement operations generate more apprehensions, which politicians and bureaucrats can then use to in-flame public opinion, which leads to more conservatism and voter demands for even stricter laws and more enforcement operations, which generates more apprehensions, thus bringing the process full circle. In short, the rise of illegal migration, its framing as a threat to the nation, and the resulting conservative reaction set off a self-feeding chain reaction of enforcement that generated more apprehensions even though the flow of undocumented migrants had stabilized in the late 1970s and dropped during the late 1980s and early 1990s." (p. 6). The ***1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act***, for example, increased resources for border enforcement, narrowed criteria for asylum, and increased the income threshold required to sponsor immigrants. The ***1997 Nicaraguan and Central American Relief Act*** allowed registered asylum seekers from Central America (mostly Nicaraguans) in the US for at least five years since December 1, 1995, to obtain legal status but prohibited permanent residency legalization and ordered deportation for those who lacked a valid visa or who had previously violated US immigration laws (primarily Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans). The ***2001 USA PATRIOT Act*** created the Department of Homeland Security, directly increasing funding for surveillance and deportation of foreigners and authorized the deportation of noncitizens without due process, and the ***2004 National***

Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Protection Act funded new equipment, aircraft, Border Patrol agents, immigration investigators, and detention centers for border enforcement. In terms of border militarization operations, the following had a direct impact in transforming the geography of border crossing and decreasing season migration due to increasing border crossing costs and life-risking level: 1993 ***Operation Blockade*** militarization of the El Paso sector, 1994 **Operation Gatekeeper** militarization of the San Diego sector 1998 ***Operation Rio Grande*** restricting migrants in Texas and New Mexico border with Mexico1999 ***Operation Safeguard*** militarization of the Tucson sector (Massey & Pren, 2010 pgs. 26-27). As the militarization of the border increased, putting a halt to circular migration (in the case of Mexico) these policies and operations effectively created and caged in a new segment of the undocumented population that would make the United States their home, regardless of their documented status. The U.S. undocumented immigrant population rose rapidly from 1990 to 2007 as a direct result of these strategies to decreased immigration, before declining sharply for two years and stabilizing at 11 million in 2017 (Lopez et. al., 2021) seasonal circular migratory patterns of mostly male immigrants became entire families permanently settling in the United States.

1.5 Racial and gendered experiences of contemporary transnational immigrant journeys.

A report titled Immigrant *Women and Girls in the United States: A Portrait of Demographic Diversity* produced by the American Immigration Council identified that in 2018 five out of the ten top countries sending women immigrants were in Latin America: Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Colombia. The report simply reaffirmed the drastic shift in immigrant demographics from Latin America to the United States in the last few decades. The migration process from Latin America to the United States has been a central theme for many feminist scholars who revisit traditional migration theories that previously ignored the importance of gender in their studies. Thus, I ground my research in U.S based feminist scholars that have contributed new theoretical developments, methods, and approaches to the study of immigration by adding not only gender as an analytical category but integrating an intersectional perspective in their analyses of migration processes. The intersection of

race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and other socially constructed identifiers, provides frameworks that raise new questions and to generate new insights into the distinctive and constantly evolving transnational journeys of migration. The early 1990s, trends shaped by multilateral economic foreign policies dramatically altered the demographic background of the immigrants, which rapidly increased new waves of immigrant sectors of the population that previously were not expected to migrate. In the case of Mexico, the lower economic classes, which included farmers, miners, and factory workers, weren't the only groups entering the migration stream. The most recent findings by the U.S. Census Bureau on educational attainment show that 47% of recent immigrants (2010-19) hold a bachelor's degree or higher, a 15% increase from the previous foreign-born population who entered the country before 2009 (Census Bureau, 2020). Unfortunately, the research on immigrant adults seeking access to higher education is almost non-existent, as most research centers on first-generation Latinx and access to education.

1.6 Problem Statement: the invisibility of the growing number of Latina adult immigrant students in higher education research.

Currently, Latinxs are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the U.S. however, they are among the lowest educational attainment and college completion rates among students of color (Fry 2004, Perez Huber et al., 2015). Latinx students are not a monolithic group with one experience that applies to all. Instead, their educational experiences vary by documented status, national origin, class, race, language, etc. Nontraditional students, English learners, females, and adult immigrants from Latin America are far less represented on college campuses, as they are a newer population and for many of these immigrants obtaining an education is the key to successfully build a better life in their new country (Mukherji et al., 2017).

Adult English learners, immigrant Latinas, and nontraditional students are slowly entering the ivory tower and, through much resilience, are overcoming multiple barriers they face in their journey toward obtaining a degree. Many are the first persons in their families to graduate with a bachelor's

degree. Very little work has been done to understand the complex experiences of foreign-born and raised adult immigrant populations seeking higher education in the United States (Mukherji et al., 2017; Chisman & Crandall, 2007; Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2011). Previous studies tend to conflate adult immigrants with international students or assume that all Latinx students enter higher education from U.S. high schools. Thus, adult immigrant Latinas who grow up as monolingual speakers in their countries of origin are not distinguished from Latinas raised in the U.S. who are native or close to native speakers of English and obtained their K-12 education in that language (Chisman & Crandall, 2007; Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2011). These are essential factors that must be integrated into the analysis as each group possesses different types of social capital. Institutions of higher learning must learn about the different needs newer student populations face on college campuses (Kim & Diaz, 2013).

1.7 Significance of the study: making visible the struggle of Latinx immigrant women in the U.S. higher education system.

This dissertation seeks to disrupt the conventional narratives about nontraditional English learners, adult, immigrant, and Latin American students and their aspirations and higher education attainment. Foreign-born and raised immigrants, specifically adult immigrant Latinas, have begun to access U.S. academia despite structures serving as gatekeeping entities; structures that have served as barriers based on race, class, gender, and cultural ascriptions, ranging from cultural expectations to racialization as Latina immigrants (Delgado-Bernal 2001). While extensive literature exists on the experiences of Chicanas and first-generation Latinas in higher education s (Perez Huber et al. 2015, Contreras 2009, Felix & Castro, 2018, Espino 2020), very few academic scholarly articles explore or document the experiences of Latin American immigrants that, after arriving as adults, are invested in pursuing attaining a degree in higher education. This study utilizes testimonio as a research method grounded in Chicana Feminist Theory, Migration Studies Theory, and Latino Critical Race Theory. It focused on interviewing eight Latinas, adult immigrants to the United States, either recently graduated

or currently enrolled in universities and community colleges. Their testimonios shine a light into the intersectional journeys of accessing and surviving in the U.S. higher education system by paying particular attention to the structural barriers those institutions presented to them. Their narratives break mainstream misconceptions of adult immigrants and the value of education in their lives.

1.8 Research Questions

As mentioned above, this study aims to understand the journeys of Latin American immigrant women better after arriving in the United States in adult age and seeking to attain a college education. To perform a thorough analysis of their journeys, the following questions guided the study:

A. **What were the educational paths that adult Latin American immigrant women followed to access and succeed in the U.S higher education system?**

B. **How do their testimonios reveal the gendered and racialized journey to college attainment?**

C. **How can an intersectional discussion of their academic journey depict the privileges and barriers that came into place for immigrant Latin American women to defy spaces where they have only been seen as laborers?**

These questions were informed by my own journey as an adult immigrant woman from Mexico who grew up monolingual and acquired English as a second language to enroll and obtain a college education in the U.S. I am also informed by the minimal literature on the subject and the historical context of the practices of exclusion from higher education institutions and how those continue to affect the experiences of underrepresented students in the United States (Long 2016).

1.9 Research Objectives: their testimonios as an important interdisciplinary contribution to the literature in the fields of gender studies, American ethnic studies, immigrant studies, and education.

The immigration experiences of this set of women can be best observed and analyzed through their testimonios. Testimonios, as well as in-depth interviews, help illustrate the process of migration the living transnationally, and for the first time in this study, their testimonios share how is it for them to

access and survive in U.S. academia. As testimonios are analyzed in a broader political and social context, it facilitates the understanding of the many factors shaping their experiences with migration, transnationalism, and U.S. education. The testimonios presented in this project represent only some of the voices of some adult immigrant Latinas who challenge the silencing of their individual stories and help us understand their collective realities, mapping the gendered and racialized experiences that are left invisible when using traditional Western academic methods of research. In this study, testimonio as a method of research is a feminist praxis that creates a space for politically reinserting immigrant narratives left out of the national immigration debate, as it gives. At the same time transforming the experiences of immigrant adult Latinxs settling in the United States and entering the U.S higher education system in sites of knowledge production. Their testimonios best capture the lived experiences of the students by presenting an opportunity better understand the oppression and privileges they face in their journeys and how they navigated around institutional gatekeeping practices as well as the support they received in their path to attaining a higher education degree.

1.10 Dissertation structure

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. This chapter establishes the broad context for the proposed study: the waves of immigrants leaving Latin America and the long history of U.S. involvement in Latin American governments that dare not to follow U.S. best interests (Cole, 2015). Chapter two provides my theoretical framework and literature review of the literature on Latinx in higher education, the origins, and history of the uses of testimonio in Latin America, and analyzes key testimonio works developed in and within the United States context. In the United States, testimonio has emerged to denounce and publicly expose the everyday violence racially diverse Americans experience right at home. Chapter three address the philosophical background of testimonio as a method of knowledge production. Chapter four presents the testimonios of eight testimonialistas connecting them to the research questions, and finally, chapter five is the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations presented in this study.

1.11 Terminology: definitions and clarifications

Adult English learner: Adult English learner, sometimes referred to as English as a Second Language learner, is the term used in the United States to describe English language instruction for adults who are nonnative speakers of English; they can range from age 16 onward (National Institute of Literacy).

Adult immigrant: This study exclusively applies the term ***adult immigrant*** to differentiate between persons who were born and socialized in another country and who immigrated as adults to the United States (Rumbaut 2004). Scholars across different disciplines use the term "first-generation" interchangeably with adult immigrants; this I find a very problematic practice because it technically includes the foreign born regardless of their age at arrival. Therefore, you could place a foreign-born person raised in the United States that acquired a primary education through the K-12 system and "lump" them into a recent immigrant arrival who is monolingual and may or may not have had access to primary education.

Ethnicity: a shared way of life, cultural practices, traditions and cultural elements that are taught not inherited.

Gender: a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions of learned behaviors that are considered male or female.

Gender role: society's concept of how men and women should behave.

Hispanic: a term created in the 1970 census to group all people of Latin American origin (anyone south of the U.S. southern border) relating to Spain as a colonial power, used as a common denominator for Spanish-speaking people.

Latinidad: Social construct unique to the U.S. shaped by external forces such as marketing, advertising, pop culture, U.S. census, and through the individual subjectivity, and communal cultural expression of people claiming Latina/o/x.

Latino/ Latina: Gender specific (o) male or (a) female.

Latin@s: Gender inclusive.

Latinxs: Gender neutral and inclusive of racial recognition and validation of African and Indigenous roots in people of Latin American origin.

Nontraditional Student: the definition varies from discipline to discipline; however, the common factors among the population are students being over 24 years old, having family financial commitments, being employed full-time while enrolled in college, and being enrolled in mostly nondegree occupational programs (NCES 2019).

Race: Latinxs can be of any socially constructed race.
Sexism: the prejudiced belief that one sex should be valued over another.

U.S. born or raised Latinx: This study exclusively applies the term to the U.S. born or raised Latinx to a person of Latin American origin who was raised in the United States attending primary school within the 50 political constituent states.

Testimonialista: The performative process of giving testimonio either in public or one-on-one in-depth interviews, the process can involve powerful healing through the act of bearing witness, the collective identification that emerges when struggles are voiced to those with a shared lived experience (DeNicolo & Gónzalez, 2015; Elenes, 2013; Pérez Huber, 2009).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Same oppressions, different struggles: nontraditional Latinx adult immigrants in higher education.

This chapter provides an overview of the current state of Latinx students in the United States higher education and addresses my literature review and theoretical framework.

The first section gives an overview of Latinx students and their various subgroups, highlighting the importance of disrupting the idea of Latinx students as a monolithic group by exploring their experiences in relation to structured systems of power and privilege through an intersectional lens. The second section of the chapter focuses on reviewing the literature on the origins and history of the uses of testimonio in Latin America and performing an analysis of key testimonio works developed in and within a United States context. It is of most importance to pay close attention to how in the United States, testimonio emerged to denounce and publicly expose the everyday racial violence and microaggressions experienced by immigrants and racially diverse Americans in institutions of learning. This section also provides my conceptual framework delving into the importance of using Chicana feminism epistemology as a grounding theory.

2.2 A primer on the state of U.S. Latinxs in the higher education system: profile and demographics.

In the last few years, the educational system of the United States has seen a growing number of Latinxs applying for entrance into higher education. Latinxs are currently the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority group in the U.S., however they are among the lowest in educational attainment and college completion rates among students of color (Fry 2004; Hinojosa et al., 2016; Nuñez et al., 2013). It is estimated that by the year 2050 the Latinx population will reach 98.2 million, accounting for 24.3 percent of all Americans, according to the 2020 Census. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has projected a slight increase of undergraduate Latinx students in higher education from 16.8 to 17.2 a mere growth of 3% (McFarland et al. 2019). This is because Latinx students continue to face particular challenges when accessing higher education, such as socioeconomic status, cultural

expectations, families lacking academic skills to support their students, and poor academic preparation, among others, become barriers to achieving the diploma. When structural challenges are rooted in systemic oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, etc., the road to higher education becomes extremely difficult to navigate (Gándara, 1982, Rodriguez et al., 2000). For the latter part of the twentieth century, much of the research centered on Latinx students failed to address the myth of Latinxs as a monolithic group, as analysis has been traditionally assessed through strict racial U.S. categories based on the Black/ White binary.

Contrary to mainstream belief, Latinx people in the United States come from various backgrounds, nationalities, languages, racial, and class groups which ultimately may influence their English proficiency and assimilation levels. Race, class, citizenship, and gender, among other, are categories of identity that must be critiqued to expand our understanding of the myriad Latinx experience in higher education (Garcia-Louis, 2018); even within the same subgroup, these structural differences that can drastically change access to education. For example, student holders of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals permit (DACA) may face different structural barriers to tuition cost and access to financial assistance, depending on the education policies enforced by the geographic location where they reside (Amuedo-Dorantes & Sparber, 2014). As of 2022 current DACA holders also have to complete complex immigration paperwork and pay a $495 processing fee every year.

The increased number of Latinx students accessing higher education in the 20th century gave birth to the label Hispanic Serving Institution (HIS). These are two or four-year colleges with a minimum enrollment of 25% Latinx students (United States, White House Hispanic Prosperity Initiative, Hispanic-Serving Institutions). While some HIS institutions have as a goal to design classes and develop their curriculum based on the cultural and linguistic assets of their students, others ignore the context and profiles of their students, making for missed opportunities (Schall et. al, 2020). According to the NCES, Latinx students are now the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S. public school system; the changing demography of the United States is calling for a re-evaluation of the higher education system

and its approaches to Latinx and other growing ethnic minorities (Museus et al., 2021). Although there is extensive research on the experiences of first and second generation Latinx accessing higher education in the U.S., little is known about nontraditional, adult immigrant, English learner students. Community colleges and universities are yet to understand their particular journeys and barriers in pursuing and education as these are adult, immigrants from the newer immigration waves with often different educational profiles than their past counterparts. This is the population I center in this research, Latinx, adult (foreign-born and raised), immigrant, nontraditional students that are English learners but are not considered international students nor are they familiar to the United States education system since they did not attend the k-12 system in this country.

2.3 Latinx adult immigrant women in the 21st century.

Migration has primarily been documented through men's experiences, and it was not until the late twentieth century that the histories of women migrants from Latin America became relevant for scholars and researchers (Hesse-Biber et al 2004). As women become recognized agents within the transnational migration flow, new literature has emerged presenting diverse points of view and different methods and concepts about the active role of women in transnational migration in the 21st century. The study of transnational migration processes from Latin America to the United States has been expanding to address gender but also to look at how gender is organizing these processes (Pessar 1995, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Toro-Morn 1995). The use of gender analysis in relationship to work access and gender-based inequalities experienced by male and female migrants has opened new channels of inquiry looking at key concepts such as “care work,” “global care chains,” and “transnational motherhood,” where the use of intersectionality theory has been fundamental to the understanding of women’s experiences as subjects in a gendered, and racialized process of global migrations (Oso, et al. 2013). Migrants in the late 20th century began experiencing new migration journeys as globalization spread throughout the world. Transnationalism as a social process allows the immigrant to maintain familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and other connections - across two or more

societies: the home country and the new nation of settlement (Sanchez & Machado-Casas, 2009). For the first time in the history of immigration, transnationalism gave immigrants new tools to analyze their journeys. It gave them new perspectives to evaluate their situations and accessing education in the receptor country has been one (Sanchez & Machado-Casas, 2009).

There is not a monolithic profile either that can be highlighted for Latinx, adults, immigrant, women, given that identity ascriptions such as class and citizenship, for example, can significantly change their immigration experiences, language acquisition, and integration to the receptor country. However, census survey data depicts educational changes in the profile of the adult immigrant population to the United States since the 1970s (Lowell & Suro, 2002). These changes can be attributed to relevant factors such as the younger age of newer immigrants with better schooling overall, the aging of older immigrants with less than primary schooling, and women entering the migration stream with generally more education than their male counterparts (Lowell & Suro, 2002). According to the United Nations Population Division, female migrants from Latin America reached an all-time high in 2020 by representing 49.5% of all immigrants, as they were slightly outnumbered by their male counterpart at 50.5 %. The number of new immigrants arriving with better schooling than immigrant waves in the late 20th century is growing. This is due to different factors such as economic displacement and internal migration in some of the sending countries, some advances in Latin America's education, and newer migrants coming from metropolitan areas. In 2018 immigrants from Latin America were just as likely as the U.S.-born to have a bachelor's degree or more 32% and 33%, respectively (Budiman, 2020). Within the Latinx subgroups, foreign-born and raised Latina immigrant women are even far less represented on college campuses than, U.S. born/ raised Latinx students. However, as globalization has increased the number of immigrants that arrive every year in the United States, for many of these immigrants obtaining an education is the key to successfully building a better life in their new country. This is represented in the testimonios provided in this dissertation, where adult, immigrant, and nontraditional English learner student Latinas narrate how they are slowly entering the ivory tower. With much

resilience these women are overcoming the different barriers they face in their journey to obtaining a degree, typically becoming the first person in their families to graduate with a bachelor's degree, not only from a university but from the higher education of the United States.

2.4 Intersectional approach to understanding privileges and oppressions operating in nontraditional students, English learners, adult Latinx immigrants, and their journey to higher education.

Every 7 out of 10 Latinx students are "first-generation," indicating that they are the first in their families to reach higher education, which translates to a disadvantage for those with no familial knowledge about navigating higher education (UnidosUS 2019; Museus et al., 2021). Latinx students are typically grouped as one, however the college academic journey looks very different for Latinx students and their different identities. Their varied subgroups hold different identities, which can even shape experiences among members of the same family (ex: different migration statuses or racialized markers). Latinx students enjoy different privileges as their social positions in relation to power vary. They face different structural oppressions depending on their identity backgrounds and even geographic location in the U.S. For example, student immigrants with documented immigration status, such as being permanent residents or citizens, have full access to federal financial assistance programs in the form of subsidized loans or grants across the country. While student immigrants lacking a documented immigration status do not have similar access and are at risk of being deported. A different group demographic located between the documented and undocumented groups would be students benefiting from the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The immigration program eligibility is limited to applicants that must prove they arrived in the United States before the age of 16 and have lived in the U.S. for at least 5 consecutive years. The program grants work permits yet provides liminal status where students are protected from deportation but ineligible to receive any public benefits such as access to federal student assistance, with the exceptions of states enforcing education policies that cover DACA students (Rodriguez & Rodriguez 2020).

The English language is another variant for the Latinx student community accessing higher education. U.S. universities have different policies in place that often-become structural barriers for some students but not for others, this is especially true for youth English Learners (EL) as well as for adult immigrant students (also English learners). For example, some universities require adult immigrant students to take English proficiency placement exams or extra English classes even if the immigrant adult student is fluent in English and already possesses an associate degree (2-year colleges) or has taken college classes somewhere else. In this sense, the English placement test of the university for EL students becomes a structural barrier when the institution refuses to recognize that the same immigrant student has been attending college level classes in English. These classes are typically linked to the English language departments of the universities, these departments are structured differently, and their classes may or may not be covered by financial assistance. English monolingual students that attended the K-12 education system in the U.S. are not subjected to this requirement. However, because there are no guidelines from the Education department of the United States on this subject, universities are left unregulated to create their own individual policies that potentially become barriers for non-White, non-English monolingual students.

A rapid growing demographic in the U.S. college campuses are nontraditional students, although the definition varies from discipline to discipline, the common factors among the population are students being over 24 years old, having family financial commitments, being employed fulltime while enrolled in college and being enrolled in mostly nondegree occupational programs (NCES 2019). Latinx, adult, immigrant and English learner students can also be categorized in this group, as their intersecting identities create very specific experiences and barriers, however very little research on this student demographic exist up to date (U.S. Department of Education 2011; UnidosUS 2019; Museus et al., 2021). The most common route for adult, immigrant students to enter 4-year colleges is to transfer institutions after having attended the first two years in a community college, and prior to that English as a second language classes are most likely to be attended. Undoubtedly attending a four-year institution

as a Latinx student can automatically force students to face systemic structural barriers (UnidosUS 2019; Museus et al., 2021), and those barriers might increase or decrease depending on the student's intersecting identities. In the case of adults, English learner, immigrant, Latina, and nontraditional students, their identities might place them at higher risk of experiencing isolation and systemic discrimination among other overt and subtle forms of exclusion, preventing them to attain their much-desired college degree.

2.5 Career Pathways & breaking out of the skilled trades pipeline for adult immigrant students in higher education.

Historically the immigrant population from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean to the United States has been characterized solely as those, entering the agricultural and service sectors of the economy (Bach 1978; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Menjivar 2003, Oso 2013; Pessar 1999). Although in the past this was due to the lack of schooling from previous immigrant generations or due to binational agreements such as the Bracero Program. Where Mexican labor (male specifically) was extracted to maintain the agricultural sector of the United States during WWII, hence its name "Bracero" alluded to the arms of Mexican males. In contemporary times an essential factor for this route of employment has been linked to the phenomenon known as "brain waste" as immigrants with foreign college degrees face employment limitations due to the lack of English proficiency, and difficulty in obtaining credential recognition by U.S. employers and educational entities (I will speak more on this topic in chapter 5), among other barriers to employment at their level of education (MPI 2016).

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) passed by congress in 2014 established that education and training for adult learners should be focused on training adult students for high-demand industry sectors and occupations (United States, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education). This education-workforce policy is known as Career Pathways and its primary goal is to create education skill attainment opportunities for adult learners to enter the workforce with specific service sector job skills. This is indeed a great opportunity for employment training, however policies such as Career Pathways is what drives many of the 2-year colleges curricula

to channel adult English learner students only into career-readiness training certificate shorter than the associate degree, invisibilizing any opportunities for postsecondary education. These barriers have produced an over generalized perception that new immigrants merely aspire or are satisfied to enter the service-oriented workforce only. This added to the familiar narrative of the immigrant parent sacrifice in countless studies about first-generation Latinx students accessing college education and sustained by a lack of academic literature on adult immigrants entering higher education these laws and practices have contributed to the image of the adult immigrant as uninterested on their own education in the United States.

Media representations of immigrant adults and contemporary narratives of pre-established occupations and lack of college opportunities for newly immigrant adults, contribute to the reinforcement of these images, that eventually become a reality for invisibilized adult immigrants interested in higher education. This type of media representation is reasserted by events that invisibilized adult immigrants as contributing members of U.S. society, such as the rejection of the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA), also knowns as Deferred Action for Parental Accountability. This was a proposed immigration policy to grant deferred action status to certain undocumented immigrants who were parents of American citizens or lawful permanent residents and had lived in the United States since 2010. While the policy failed to gain support for the parents, their children received access to the DACA program, sending a clear message about the value of immigrants in U.S. society. Driven by neoliberal policies, the higher education system of the United States can only place the adult immigrant population in a laborer category from where is almost impossible to get out. Very little is known about their strategies and experiences of those immigrants that have managed to do just that. What will it take for scholars across different disciplines to see the academic potential of adult immigrants? Is the U.S. higher education system able to see the presence of immigrants on their campus in roles other than laborers? As a nontraditional student, adult immigrant, and Latina student attending a predominantly white institution (PWI), I had unique experiences while on

campus living this dichotomy. Every time I set foot on campus during the day, I saw the demographics of a PWI. Yet, on my long days of work, I would see the drastic change in racial demographics at night, where I end up striking conversations with the night cleaning crew: mostly adult immigrants like me.

As stated above, existing information about adult immigrants entering higher education is almost inexistent, and if gender is added to the inquiry the scholarly work disappears. These are new areas of research that haven't received much attention from scholars. However, with changing immigrant demographics, it's a new opportunity to research and expand knowledge in the areas the new wave of immigrants is entering. The omission of gender in migration studies was only remedied because a feminist lens was introduced to the mainstream research (Pessar 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Menjivar 2003). This dissertation contributes to the literature gap by analyzing the experiences of nontraditional, English learner, adult immigrant, students, seeking access to higher education. To better learn about new immigrant journeys, I have chosen testimonio as my method of inquiry, a qualitative method of research executed by collecting in-depth open-ended interviews (testimonios). Their testimonios placed in a broader political and social context can facilitate an understanding of the many factors shaping their experiences with migration, transnationalism and educational journeys in the United States higher education system. The second part of this chapter provides a literature review of testimonio, its origins in Latin America's revolutions and its use in the United States as a method of research in documenting the experiences of Latinx students in the education system.

2.6 History and Uses of Testimonio: Latin America Origins

Testimonio is a genre of authentic first-person narratives and counter stories, in oral form where its primary goal is to share a *vivencia* (an experience) about a significant event or episode in the narrator's life. The narration is shared with a listener, an interviewer, or an audience. In the academic process, it includes a recording of the session and transcription of the narration to be used as a source of *conocimiento* (knowledge), *conocimiento* that is shared from the lived experience. John Beverley's pioneering work on testimonial literature in Latin America, identified testimonio a "novel or novella-

length narrative told in the first person" coming from a person that has witnessed and survived traumatic events such as civil wars or genocides (Beverley 1996). As indicated by Beverley, in Latin America testimonio has been used as an alternative narrative, as an account that denounces injustices and draws attention to the voices of subaltern subjects.

Testimonio breaks with imposed silences when it shares the experiences and voices of those systematically silenced. Their experiences differ and challenge the official narrative, it calls out state-sanction violence as well as every-day systemic violence in all its forms. Creating a space for naming silenced or invisibilized experiences is a distinctively feminist approach of testimonio, as those with silenced experiences being made public are a clear disruption of systems that invisibilized them by voicing and humanizing those life narratives that systems of oppression diminished. The act of giving a testimonio or *testimoniar*[6] already implicates truth, because of its legal and religious base (Nunez-Janes & Robledo 2009). Testimonio's validity can also be traced back to appearing in the public judicial audiences for crimes against humanity committed by fascist and Nazi governments, where the witness was described as the "keeper of memory" or "survivor" aiding in producing knowledge of historical events. Outside of academia or judicial hearings, testimonios are commonly used in religious congregations with the purpose of sharing the ways in which people experiences God. Religious testimonios are a way to evangelize others by making testimonios public, as it might influence the listener to convert after witnessing direct accounts of the faithful and their experiences. These narratives are told before an audience carrying a tone of authenticity, as those are indisputable because they are *their* accounts. The testimonio word itself implies an act of legal or religious sense, the act of bearing witness, therefore distinguishing testimonio from simply recorded narratives (Beverly & Zimmerman 173).

[6] The process of giving testimonio either in public, or one-on-one in-depth interviews Nunez-Janes & Robledo 2009.

2.7 Contemporary Testimonio: from the 1950s revolutions to the 1980s civil wars

Rooted in oral history, struggles, and revolutions testimonio and testimonial practices have been around in Latin America since the sixteenth century (Cruz, 2012 & Forcinito, 2016). Testimonio is known in Latin America as a personal and collective narration, as a first-person narrative that has a distinctive urgency to voice injustices in public. Oral testimonial practices have a component that invites the listener to bear witness to a particular event usually traumatic and unjust in context (Forcinito, 2016). Cindy Cruz connects the importance of the oral history in political narratives that in the practice of testimonio is associated with the subaltern and the voices that are erases in the official narratives as she says "Testimonio is political narrative, oral history, traumatic memory, pedagogical, radical methodology, and is part of the cognitive requirements for new radical literacies and subjectivities (pg. 469)". Latin America produced a large number of testimonios that began to be read in academic circles, many of them coming from South and Central America where the testimonios narrated the effects of state-sanctioned violence on vulnerable populations affected by civil wars. These testimonios were mostly from people facing military repression, torture and death who resorted to guerrilla movements to combat state-sanctioned violence (Beverley & Zimmerman 1990). The state-sanctioned violence was supported by the United States' foreign policies favoring oppressive governments and looking after U.S. economic interests by sponsoring coups in Guatemala, Brazil, Chile, among others (WOLA). However, contemporary testimonio has been around for a few more decades. In 1952 Ricardo Pozas published a biography *Juan Pérez Jolote: Biografía de un tzotzil* narrating the realities of the struggles of indigenous peoples' in 1950s Mexico. The biography depicted the nuances of cultural mestizaje while also highlighting forms of resistance to the Mexican government and society that regularly infantilizes and oppressed indigenous peoples in Mexico (Urrutia 2018). Five years later the journalistic investigation of Rodolfo Walsh's *Operación masacre* (1957) published in Argentina narrated and documented through interviews of the survivors the clandestine execution of five people in a failed Peronist uprising.

A few more publicized testimonios would eventually serve to anchor testimonio as an alternative narrative and form of inquiry in Latin America prior to the 1970s. From Cuba Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de*

un cimarrón (1966) and *Canción de Rachel* (1967), and from Mexico as well with Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco: testimonios de historia oral* (1971). These key texts in the testimonio genealogy came to provide voices to those who had not been heard before.

Academic legitimation for the testimonio genre in Latin America came in 1970 when the prestigious Casa de las Americas added the testimonial narrative to be consider as a prize category (Denegri 2014). Another decade would pass prior to the publication of canonical *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (Menchú and Burgos-Debray 1983) and with John Beverley's "*Anatomía del testimonio*" (1987) testimonio finally entered the U.S. academy. Menchú's work was particularly important because how "controversial" the United States' academy found it, by using a nonwestern method such as testimonio to produce knowledge. The academy's refusal to accept other knowledge producers from outside the Western epistemes, highlighted why testimonio is "firmly rooted in liberation struggles in the Global south" (Derocher, 2018, pg 5), while the work of John Beverley would serve as foundation for testimonio in the United States.

2.8 Testimonio's evolving definition

John Beverley, a founding scholar of testimonio very narrowly defines testimonio as "novella-length narrative, told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the actual protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts. The unit of narration is usually a life or a significant life episode e.g., the experience of being a prisoner (Beverley and Zimmerman, 1990., 173)." He places emphasis on the account being transcribed because traditionally the narrator might have come from limited schooling "Since in many cases the narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer or intellectual, the production of a testimonio generally involves the recording and/or transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is a journalist, writer, or social activist (Beverley and Zimmerman, 1990., 173". Testimonio's definition continues to expand since first appearing in academic circles for two reasons: a) its interdisciplinary context and b) narratives of personal experiences are not fixed. Over the years there has been much controversy and debate about the

perimeters of testimonio, it has been established that it ranges from novella narration to political statement and now to include personal experience (Yúdice, 1991, 1992., Beverley and Zimmerman 1990; Delgado Bernal, 1998). This was the case of Juan Francisco Manzano (noted above), where his writing was "polished" to enter circles of the powered and privileged. Rooted in White supremacy, different mechanisms of racialization run through the United States economic, political, and social systems, and education is not the exception so contextualizing the history of testimonio in Latin America is key to understanding why in the United States testimonio become a strategic tool of speaking about the everyday systemic devastating violence non-white people face in the United States institutions of learning; from the K-12 education system to institutions of higher education.

2.9 *Testimonio in the US academy:* testimonio in a U.S. context literature overview

When Rigoberta Menchú was recognized with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 more than 30 years ago, with the publishing of *I, Rigorberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala,* the genre of testimonio officially re-entered the U.S. academy[7]. This alternative method of knowledge production sparked a new trend among academic work being produced in the United States, especially among people of marginalized backgrounds in academia. According to authors Katheryn Blackmer Reyes and Julia E. Curry- Rodriguez testimonios and testimonio methodology reflected an explosion of the genre by appearing in 36 dissertations from 1990-1999 and skyrocketing from 2000-2009 by being featured in 835 U.S. based dissertations (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). Testimonio as epistemology in Chicana feminism where many of these dissertations were anchored, prioritized the importance of naming our histories (Anzaldua 1987). These works became essential for Women of Color in the United States, as the use of personal theoretical insight also emerged in Black feminism, with the paramount work of Patricia Hill Collins in her 1991 book *Black Feminist Thought* (p.525, Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012), and the feminist work of the Combahee River Collective. Over the last 30

[7] According to Merriam-Webster the academy refers to institutions of higher learning, focused on the advancement of art, science or literature.

years the use of testimonio and testimonial style writings in the U.S. academy have become a tool to expose the lived realities of those being left out of official narratives. Differently than the very public state-sanction repression and exploitation of Latin America's populations; the U.S. as a well-established imperialistic system is able to enforce dominant and exploitative institutionalized relationships with non-white groups across the nation, especially in a racially rapid changing country.

2.10 Testimonio, a tool to denounce systemic oppression in the U.S. systems of learning.

Testimonio in the United States also serves to recognize historical modes of resistance by non-dominant racial groups. For people falling outside of the norm either in dominant or non-dominant groups, testimonio has become a tool to bring to light experiences of exclusion within their home communities and the society at large. This section of the chapter will center on surveying key testimonio works developed in and within a United States context. Testimonio has emerged as a way to denounce and publicly expose the everyday violence racially diverse Americans experience right at home. In the 1960s the United States experimented dramatic political and demographic changes with the enactments of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the 1965 Immigration Amendment (Bach). Civil rights organization seeking the advancement of diverse gendered & racial U.S., based groups made great advancements, yet failed to see politics of intersectionality resulting in the silencing of women's voices at the time. For example, when the Women's and Chicano movements were finally given public spaces to demand equal treatment, both movements failed to include U.S. based racialized women of color (or global south women and racialized others), and the women's lived experiences remained in silence, as they were yet to find spaces of validation. The incorporation of testimonio as research methodology came to be a changing factor in exploring those narratives that were previously omitted even from public spaces of denouncement. Many of these works do not specifically fit the narrow definition of John Beverley's testimonio, but the narratives of U.S. women of color in these works serve to continue to address the precarious and unequal of their position as national subjects in the United States, while becoming groundbreaking works in establishing testimonio as a method of research.

2.11 *In the Flesh* Epistemologies

Identity politics have been present in the research of disciplines such as education, gender, labor or migration studies, and with the introduction of testimonio, they began to explore the personal narratives of marginalization as well as the resistance of non-white women living in the United States. The epistemology of Chicana feminism grounded in the identities and narratives of women of color or women of the global South., has produced a long list of literary works centering on speaking about the interlocking oppressions and privileges people have in society from their lived perspective. The 1981 *This Bridge Called My Back* edited by Cherrie Moraga & Gloria Anzaldúa is a core piece of Chicana feminism where epistemological knowledge is created from the experiences of the brown body, as the literary project declares the body as a material location. In the flesh epistemologies allows the marginalized body to produce knowledge of the lived experience. Theorizing the brown body as a site where women of color and racialized *others* experience and feel the tangible consequences of living in specific social and geopolitical territories, is best explained in the following lines:

"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 in our experience.

We are the colored in a white feminist movement.
We are the feminists among the people of our culture.
We are often the lesbians among the straight.
We do this bridging by naming ourselves and by telling our stories
in our own words." (p. 23).

It has been almost four decades since *Theory in the Flesh* first appeared as a critique of western epistemologies and theories that invisibilized the marginalized body (typically the Brown and Black body) and not only was ignored, but also erased. *Theory in the flesh* interrupts and decolonizes western epistemology that only validates "universal", scientific, and historically Eurocentric pre-established notions, methods and theories research. It highlights and proposes that emotions, affections, kin support, and activism are also conceivable elements in academic theories –starting with its disruption of the English language as the only conductor of knowledge for example. Author Mayllei Blackwell in her

book *¡Chicana Power!*[8] Brings attention to the political aspect of telling in *This Bridge Called My Back* by utilizing creative writing, rooted in testimonio essays centering on "histories and genealogies of the contested histories of gender and sexuality in Chicana/o and Latina/o communities" (p.32). The visionary work of *This Bridge Called My Back* has continued to serve as a lens in Chicana feminism to produce new literary works that shed light on the experiences of US Latinx women as well as their Latin American adult, immigrant counterparts and their positionality in contemporary nation-state discourses of migration and migration rights. Using this lens has significatively advanced research in migration studies where scholars finally began documenting the different gendered journeys of migrants. For example, we now know more of the risks' women migrants face while in-route to the United States. Where besides being economic displaced or forced to migrate because violence in their home countries just like their male-counterparts, women migrants also face direct sexual violence inflicted by either their male migrant counterparts or other males (Taylor). We know that women facing such modes of oppression while migrating such as rape, are situated at the bottom of the social and legal structures and hierarchies where they are "racialized as population excluded from the law and its protections, and its processes of legitimation" (Cacho 2012, pg 5). These women continue to carry *theory in the flesh* as they experience the attacks of the state on their bodies, attacks that undermine and mutilate their rights, yet paradoxically they also embody resistance which can take different shapes. For example, by telling their experiences of challenging the policies of nation-states and/or by crossing stipulated borders whichever they might be, especially in a time where *borders* act as filters for undesirable black and brown bodies to the Western empires.

Furthering the exploration of *theory in the flesh* in 1998 education professor, author & testimonio researcher trailblazer Dolores Delgado-Bernal utilized a new form of feminist epistemological framework that spoke about the importance of centering Chicanas lived experience in educational

[8] Maylei Blackwell continues the path of decentering English as the only recognized academic language in U.S. based academia and utilizes inverted exclamation mark in the title of her book following the rules Spanish punctuation.

research to fully understand their experiences of marginalization and strategies of resistance in their educational journeys. She stated, "I describe Chicana epistemological perspective by providing an example of my research, which places Chicana as central subjects and provides a forum in which Chicanas speak and analyze their stories of school resistance and grassroots leadership (pg. 556)." Delgado-Bernal highlighted how Chicana feminist epistemology showcased the different experiences of Chicanas from their male and white female counterparts. Using Chicana feminist epistemology, Delgado-Bernal addressed how "issues of immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency (pg. 561)" influenced experiences in school settings experiences. Delgado-Bernal's contribution piece highlights the importance of listening and validating the knowledge we carry in our experiences across different spheres. Delgado-Bernal's work on testimonio as a source of knowledge is significant to better understand the racialized experiences of non-White students in the United States systems of education. According to recent research schools can be sites of institutionalized racial violence where normalized facets of racism play a role in disparities students face in K–12 schools (Kholi et.al., 2017).

Only a few years later in 2001 members of a collective of U.S. Latina feminists produced the groundbreaking text of *Telling To Live* by The Latina Feminist Group who approached testimonio as a way to analyze their intersectional experiences with systemic violence in academic educational spaces, but also in their own communities (Jupp et al. 2018). The theorization of *latinidades* in academia through their testimonios centered the nuance and complexity of their experiences when intersecting with race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, and immigrant generation among others. *Telling to Live* offered a way to communicate the audience what it was like to be a faculty of color in White centered institutions, but also it told the stories of how they survived, the strategies, the overcoming of structural barriers as they faced racist, patriarchal systems of organization at home and at work. The literary works presented an opportunity to understand the different *Latinidades* they experienced, their testimonios at the time highlighted the mythical Latinx monolith (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

In 2009 Lindsey Perez Huber highlighted the benefits of using testimonio in Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) to disrupt Western epistemologies which devalue forms of knowing situated outside the rigid system of academia. In her article *Disrupting apartheid of knowledge: testimonio as methodology in Latina/o critical race research in education*, she argued that by merging LatCrit and testimonio as methodology, she was able to capture the role of social institutions (universities) play in the educational experiences of undocumented and US-born Chicana college students by carefully listening to 40 testimonios. Perez Huber stressed the importance of the researcher's background and personal narrative as it influences how they interpret and make sense of the testimonios, as a Latina in higher education her insight is significant in the analytical process of *testimoniar*. In 2012 Delago-Bernal among with authors Carmona & Burciaga in the article "*Chicana/Latina Testimonios: Mapping the Methodological, Pedagogical, and Political*" added clarification on the pedagogy and methodology of how testimonio was contributing in researching inequality in the field of U.S. based education. A key-point of their article centered around how lived experience can be used as "data" in analytical processes (pg. 365). Similar to Perez Huber, the authors highlighted the rise of the researcher as a participant as an important feature of testimonio in U.S. research (pg. 366). The researcher/ *testimonialista* can bypass the role of interlocutor in order to narrate their own stories of survival theorizing about oppression, resistance and subjectivity (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

In the United States testimonio has taken a different turn from Latin America, in the sense that Latinas and Chicanas have been utilizing testimonio for the last 30-40 years to write about their experiences centered around the barriers they face in the political, social, historical, and cultural spheres of their lives in this country. Their experiences shed light on what does everyday life looks like within institutions with racialized and gendered systems. What are the *vivencias* of non-white children attending primary and secondary public education in the United States where 80% of the institution is represented by white teachers? (The Condition for Education, 2019). How are experiences of race and gender integrated into the academic life of non-White children, youth, and adults in the U.S. public

systems of education? Especially when teacher's preparation programs lack a racially diverse curriculum (Ridgeway) and there are no requirements from the department of education in the United States in order to train future teachers on the racially changing demographics of the country. Interestingly, there are no formal protocols or diversity training for overwhelmingly White homogenous teachers enrolled in elementary and secondary preparation programs (*The State of Racial Diversity*). As non-white children reach higher education, they still face an over representation of White faculty in universities granting associate degrees and higher. For example, in 2017 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that White faculty in postsecondary education accounting for 76% compared to 55% of White undergraduates, in contrast 24% of postsecondary faculty were non-white (24%), versus 45% of students (PEW 2019). Testimonio methodology then allows us to understand better the educational experiences of non-White students within *othering* systems.

The most important aspect of utilizing testimonio in the United States as a method of research is its value as a pedagogical tool through which collective experiences of some can function as a guide to others when facing similar barriers, and conditions of oppression as they learn tools of resistance. In the United States, testimonio scholarship has served a vital role in education research, previously published work has clearly depicted the inequality in education attainment faced by students of color. The incorporation of testimonio in academic research is an important step in the testimonio genre for the advancement of people of color in education settings. Higher education institutions play essential roles in facilitating academic integration and a sense of belonging through diverse social experiences that integrate the students into the institutional academic community, but what does that look like for non-White students in predominantly White institutions? The degree to which the student integrates into the academic and social systems dictates the student's success in graduating from college (Swail et al. 2003). The use of testimonio in the United States has taken a different form from its origins in Latin America, yet still preserves its elements for condemnation of inequalities. The use of testimonio in the

U.S. academy is essential to fully support the diversification of the student population taking place in a dramatically racially changing nation

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter centers on establishing testimonio as my methodological approach to reveal how the educational experiences of the participants were shaped by their different social locations [9]as they are analyzed through an intersectional lens. I utilize Chicana Latina feminist epistemologies to learn about my participants' knowledge gained in their higher education journeys as they encountered systematic oppression and created strategies of resistance. First, I situate my positionality within the research and how the lack of existing literature documenting nontraditional, adult English learner, adult immigrant, Latinas experiences in higher education informed my desire to produce a testimonio-based study. Second, I provide the framework to understand the epistemic value of my participant's experiences as a source of knowledge and testimonio as a method of knowledge production. Finally, I describe my research design, participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis. My intention in this chapter is to highlight the different components of testimonio as my selected decolonial feminist method of research as "Feminist standpoint epistemology requires us to place women at the center of the research process: Women's concrete experiences provide the starting point from which to build knowledge (Hesse-Biber, pg. 4)." In my research, testimonio serves as a counternarrative that allows the creation of spaces where invisibilized voices left out of the official narrative disrupt the educational discourse about adult immigrants and their educational attainment. The testimonios presented in this study challenge the homogenized understanding about Latina students, by theorizing and documenting their experiences "connected to *conocimiento* (recognizing), as it allows one to enter the process of healing through

[9] The groups' people belong to because of their place or position in history and society. All people have a social location that is defined by their gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic location. Each group membership confers a certain set of social roles and rules, power, and privilege (or lack of), which heavily influence our identity and how we see the world ("People's Experiences of Oppression").

reflecting, recounting, and remembering the past (Perez Huber and Cueva, 2012, p. 397.") producing knowledge that becomes resources for survival.

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Positionality as the "insider"

The researcher's positionality is used to "describe and delineate the researcher's positioning in relation to others including research participants (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014.)" Social scientists have explored the concept of positionality and how researchers subjectivities influence their points of view and interpretations "this is true in both qualitative and quantitative work, as our ideas and beliefs affect what questions we choose to study, our method for studying those questions, and to whom and how we present our findings." (Morales & Monzo, 2014). To understand the role of my position in my study as a nontraditional student, adult English learner, immigrant Mexican woman, and now researcher, it is crucial that I provide context about my experiences as an immigrant Mexican woman in the United States. Over the past few decades, the world has become familiar with individual stories of migration and displacement, with stories of entire communities being uprooted, including first-hand accounts of refugees from all across the world. One of those stories of migration belongs to me as in the late 1990s, I joined millions of Mexicans migrating north in search of better life opportunities. Upon arrival in the United States and over the years, I was captivated by the different, yet similar journeys of migration other immigrants followed. In particular, I noticed all the similar transnational experiences I shared with immigrant women. Now, as I look back, I am amazed by the social networks I established to learn about the new social, political, and economic realities I would face as an immigrant to the U.S. (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

I clearly remember one instance when I wanted to call my mother in Mexico, but my father was not home, and he was typically the person who would dial the phone and place the call for me when I would call my mother (as I was still learning about international dialing codes). It had only been a few months after I arrived in the country and by then I had established a friendship with my immigrant

Dominican neighbor, so I approached her and asked her for any information about placing an international call. In response, she gifted me a calling card and explained what that was, being a recent arrival, I was not familiar with calling cards in the U.S., she then taught me how to dial internationally and look up the country code on the phonebook. From that moment on, I never again depended on my father to call my mother because an immigrant woman from the Dominican Republic had given me the tools to do it for myself. Throughout the time that I have lived in the U.S., I have accumulated similar stories because as a Mexican immigrant my social and economic mobility has often depended on my social capital[10]. My experience as a transnational immigrant to the United States is precisely what inspired me to produce a research study that centers on collective knowledge, but specifically on the knowledge shared by other immigrant women like me accessing and surviving in the U.S. higher education system. Being an adult English learner, immigrant, and nontraditional student, implicated that much of the existing literature on first-generation Latinx students did not help me better navigate the ivory tower, as the experiences of those who went through the k-12 education system in the U.S., and adult English learners are vastly different because the social capital each group holds involves different challenges, oppressions, and privileges.

My unique points of view shaped by my experiences, certainly influenced my position as a researcher, where my voice is in conversation with my participants. I pay close attention to making critical inquiries centering their lived experiences to learn how differential access to social capital can reveal multiple perspectives and experiences of what it is like for nontraditional students, adult English learner, immigrant Latinas to navigate the ivory tower. I am not interested only in stories of oppression, but on the ways in which adult immigrant Latinxs nontraditional students have challenged systems of marginalization through their different experiences and abilities. My "insider" perspectives were utilized

[10] In the social sciences social capital is described as the exchange of knowledge, and resources that individuals can access through social networks (Coleman 1988 & Portes 1998).

to produce critical inquiries that analyzed how the lived experience becomes knowledge and how knowledge transforms into tools of freedom**,** such as my calling-card experience. Researchers following strict westernized academic practices of inquiry centering on "objectivity and detachment" influenced by Eurocentric and androcentric realities (Rosaldo 1989), may have overlooked the issues of gender oppression and resistance that a simple story about the exchange of social capital can reveal about patriarchal societies (Hesse-Biber, 2006). Through testimonio the *vivencias* of nontraditional, immigrant, English learner Latinas entering the higher education system in the United States can be used for their advancement as a group, regardless of what label and value are placed on their lived experiences by institutions such as the U.S. academy.

3.2 Experience as a source of knowledge

The notion that canonical western knowledge can only be established and disseminated by academic disciplines is interrupted when testimonio method is applied; in this case, to better understand the journey of non-White students in majority White predominantly institutions (WPIs) whether in faculty or student representation. The epistemological value of experience is grounded in feminist theorizing emphasizing that knowledge is gained through social position, therefore experiences are valuable knowledge acquired through the social locations we occupy including instances of oppression. This theory emerged as feminist scholars identify how women and groups marginalized as *others* lacking social and political power had access to important knowledge obtained through their different lived experiences (Smith 1987, Rose 1983, Haraway 1998, Harstock 1983 & Hill Collins 1990). In her 1991 canonical book "Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives" author Sandra Harding speaks about the importance for feminist epistemology and the inclusion of women's experiences. "For a position to count as a standpoint, rather than as a claim equally valuable for different reasons- for the importance of listening to women tell us about their lives and experiences, we must insist on an objective location -women's lives -as the place from which feminist research should begin. We would not know to value the location so highly if women had not insisted on the importance

of their experiences as voices (123)." Typically, academic disciplines have rejected experience as a source of knowledge, claiming that subjective interpretations of events cannot be deemed as such. Standpoint feminist theorists disputed that claim, citing precisely that women's voices as well as other populations falling outside of the margin must center their claims because knowledge is socially situated in societies organized around hierarchies of race, gender identity, gender expression, class, and many other socially constructed categories. These types of research centered on people's narratives have led to the social sciences and the humanities to experienced a rise in research using testimonio as a method. In education research for example, testimonio aids in the process of understanding the intersectional experiences of faculty, staff and students of marginalized communities accessing and surviving in the higher education system.

3.3 Critical Race Theory & LatCrit

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed in the 1970s (Fay 1987 & Tierney 1993) as a theory that examines how racism is woven and is part of our everyday realities. The theory highlights the notion that overt racism (front lawn cross-burning) is not the only type of racism that exists, but instead, racism is subtle and permeates through all spheres of society because it is normalized and hidden in all the structures of society. In education, Daniel G. Solorzano and Tara J. Yosso define CRT in education research as "theoretical, conceptual, methodological and pedagogical strategy that accounts for the role of race and racism in US graduate education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal to eliminating other forms of subordination such as gender, class and sexual orientation" (pg. 472). They identify five fundamental themes that are present in CRT in educational research: 1) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, 2) the challenge to dominant ideology, 3) the commitment to social justice 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge and 5) the transdisciplinary perspective. Of particular interest to my project, is the recognition of the centrality of experiential knowledge; acknowledging that marginalized students can speak up about their lived experiences of racial discrimination and other areas of oppression such as

class, gender etc. CRT is also a tool that recognizes how systemic racism is part of our everyday lives through institutions such as colleges and universities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Latina/o Critical Race theory (LatCrit) is created in order to add context for Latinx people and address their experiences departing from their Latin American racial formation and subjectivities. LatCrit highlights the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, immigration status, language, ethnicity, phenotype culture, and social justice (Delgado Bernal & Solórzano, 2001; Delgado Bernal 2002). CRT/ LatCrit is a fundamental framework for my research because it allows to produce a better analysis of the intersectional experiences of discrimination the participants lived through in educational settings in the United States.

3.4 Chicana/Latina Feminist Theories

Chicana feminist groundbreaking works such as *This Bridge Called My Back,* edited by Cherrie Moraga & Gloria Anzaldúa, paved the way through testimonio-style essays contesting the oppression they experienced within their communities, as well as in Anglo-Saxon dominant culture. The visionary work has continued to serve as a lens in Chicanx feminisms to produce new literary works that shed light in the experiences of different sub-groups within groups already categorized as others. Chicana / Latina scholarship is deeply informed by the concept of *cultural intuition*, which refers to "A Chicana researcher's cultural intuition is achieved and can be nurtured through our personal experiences (which are influenced by ancestral wisdom, community memory, and intuition), the literature on and about Chicanas, our professional experiences, and the analytical process we engage in when we are in a central position of our research and our analysis. Thus, cultural intuition is a complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective, and dynamic (Delgado Bernal 1998, pg. 567)". These evolving theories highlight the importance of incorporating experiential & embodied knowledge into the research process.

Gloria Anzaldua's groundbreaking 1987 text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* is a foundational text theorizing on intersecting invisibilized identities and a call to resist by speaking up our

own stories. Her entire work reminds us of the importance of one's words and the validity those words carry, throughout her book, she emphasizes not waiting for outside acknowledgments, especially when those would be coming from well-established systems of oppression such as the Western academy. Years after its publication, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* is still producing life-changing moments for those who read it and can see their struggles reflected in Gloria Anzaldua's canonical work. Silenced narratives suddenly found a collective voice in Gloria's journey, as she admonishes the reader that if we wait to be accepted to speak in patriarchal societies, that moment might never arrive. Gloria navigated away from the traditional Mexican and Chicano male-dominated discourse of sameness, and instead highlighted the different experiences of belonging to different groups of marginalization acknowledging multiple and often contradicting identities. These narratives resonated with people from marginalized groups, but specifically in those growing up in the United States and connected to multiple worlds, and languages which she depicted so clearly in the following paragraph:

> "I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess –that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name (pg. 75)"

In this short extract of her narration, Gloria demonstrates the importance of testimonio tradition, when she remembers and acknowledges the microaggressions in the form of linguicism[11] she experienced as a Mexican American child in an Anglo-Saxon classroom in the1950s. Her testimonio resonates with students of color in contemporary U.S. k-12 settings as these subtle everyday racial microaggressions produce racialized experiences with negative impacts such as loss of identity (Kholi & Solorzano 2012). Testimonio provides centrality to the witness, the act of witnessing, but most importantly shares the very different lived experiences. It provides the researcher with an individual narrative as well as historical

[11] "The unfair treatment of an individual based on their native language, dialect, accent, vocabulary, word choice, syntax, etc." (Fotheringham)

context where the *testimonialista* narrative is located. It allows the recognition and validation of the voices that typically have been silenced when the "experts" speak for the "others" (hooks, 1990). In the case of Gloria, her testimonio gives us a glimpse into what a U.S. classroom could have been for Mexican American children in the 1950s. Gloria's truth depicted a classroom scene that no survey could have captured unless the question was explicitly looking for racial violence to Mexican American children in classroom environments originated by English only policies

3.5 Intersectionality

The literature in intersectionality analysis provides us with frames to uncover the multiple oppression and violence immigrant women experience as they enter the migration journey. In my particular research, giving context to their politics of identification is essential to understand their experiences of inclusion or exclusion in their quest for higher education. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is the theory/concept that **recognizes** race, class, and gender as categories we subscribe to and that when intersecting has the power to create barriers for those who fall in the margin of the privileges of the dominant culture. Crenshaw situated the experiences of women of color at the intersection of multiple oppressions: "My focus on the intersections of race and gender only highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (1245). By looking at the structural, political and representational aspects Crenshaw analyzes the multiple dimensions of women of color identities, which have typically been left out of feminist or anti-racist agendas. Patricia Hill Collins is another author that tackles the foundation of intersectionality theory by addressing the matrix of domination as a way to understand the unique social locations of women of color and their relation to power, oppression, and social domination. She argues that socially constructed categories of stratification such as race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, etc. shape the life experiences of non-white women by functioning as interlocking systems of oppression.

My interest in utilizing intersectionality theory in my research work serves a twofold purpose. First, by addressing my engagement with *cultural intuition* as I am being guided in my research by my multiple positionalities as a nontraditional student, adult English learner, and immigrant Mexican woman reflecting on my own college experience directly challenging the traditional research process. The acknowledgment of my positionalities not only informs my research design but is aimed at recognizing the legacies of colonialism in the narratives of adult immigrant women like myself participating in transnational processes of immigration and the spaces we occupy within patriarchal societies in both countries: of origin and destination. Second, by wishing to produce a decolonial intervention that clearly highlights the similitudes and distinctions between the different subgroups of Latinx people that U.S.-based academic research tends to depict as racially and culturally homogeneous by following the Black-White United States racial binary. In this manner, intersectionality allows me to better analyze the experiences of Afro-Latinx participants in my study, a population that "as a whole remains largely invisible in academic research since the majority of researchers adhere to monoracial and homogenous perspectives of race and ethnicity (Garcia-Louis 2018).

3.6 Migration Studies

It was not until the 1980s & 90s when transnational studies of migration expanded from their traditional views of women as only migrating when accompanying male migrants with familial ties. The change was due to the intervention in migration studies by feminist migration scholars like Pierrete Hondagneu- Sotelo and Patricia Pessar who were publishing research around transnational care work and gender relations among men and women entering the migration journey. In light of the growing feminization of labor migration caused by neoliberal capitalism at the turn of the century, their ethnographic research has addressed the impact of migration on gender-relations of labor & transnational motherhood, gender-oppression and hence, providing developing insights of new gendered dynamics. The scholarship being produced at the time explored the complexities of globalization as a new element in the narratives of female migrants' experiences, giving a glimpse into the ways that

gender shape migration. Literature on migration has grown to include the transnational process of migration and its multiple concepts of displacement analyzing how people are psychologically, emotionally, and physically affected by such processes.

Women from Latin America entering the transnational migration process are faced with new challenges of the current globalized realities. New oppressions come in the form of multilateral racialized and gendered migration polices, in all the geopolitical spaces women inhabit. The case of the long-standing humanitarian crisis happening in the southern border of the United States helps illustrates how Central American women and children immigrants are criminalized for choosing survival over violence and death. Transnational immigrants from these countries must transit through Mexico to arrive in the United States, becoming receptors of multiple acts of state-sponsored violence along their journey. Immigrant women and children from Central America and the Caribbean are currently experiencing acts of violence and policing from multiple nation-states, such as governments in the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico and finally the United States. The already significant (and growing) literature with feminist perspectives in migration studies is paying close attention to the complexity at the intersection of gender, race, class, culture, resistance, and politics of identity, areas that are challenging traditional and simplistic theories of migration.

Placing transnational women in a social, political, and economic context, which is also informed by cultural knowledge leads to new questions paving the way to establish new spaces of visibility (Anzaldua 1987; Delgado Bernal 1998; Suarez- Orozco 1995). With the immigrant population in the United States shifting and increasing since the turn of the century, it is imperative that there be a better understanding of immigrants lives in the social, political, and economic spheres of society. Although in the past immigrant population had been overwhelmingly Mexican due to the unique U.S.-Mexico, historical and complex relationship, and foreign policies driven by U.S. labor consumption needs, two decades migration changed drastically. Immigrant demographics started shifting, as a result of multiple factors, one being the multiple U.S. interventions in Latin American governments in order to protect its

economic interests. The testimonios of immigrant women from Latin America, placed in broader political and social context, can facilitate the understanding of the many factors shaping their experiences with migration, transnationalism and educational journeys in the United States higher education system.

3.7 Collective Testimonios for Healing: A Decolonial Praxis Research

In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* author Linda T. Smith, talks about the process of storytelling as decolonizing methodology. "Each individual story is powerful but the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place (145)." The collective telling in testimonios is a path for healing the trauma that one has been lived. Alejandro Cervantes in *Testimonios* (2020) highlights the role of relational resiliency as a component of testimonio work, since testimonios build connection by validating one another's experiences (Aron, 1992; Comas-Diaz 2006, Delgado-Bernal et al., 2012, Latinas Feminist Group 2001). Cervantes talks about testimonios as a psychotherapeutic tool, underlining the work of Adriane Aron (1992) who worked with women survivors of psychological trauma under state terrorism from Latin America using testimonios as "a cultural intervention to recover the speech, trust, and value of those with whom she worked to expose the injustices they encountered" (Cervantes, 2020 pg. 138). Demonstrating that testimonios can go beyond the realm of collectivity, as when testimonios are shared in safe and sacred spaces will contribute to build communities that are funded on consciousness-raising and social justice, creating communities that heal together by valuing the experience of each member of the community.

We are reminded of the power of healing in stories told through the Latina Feminist Group, a collective of 18 women who documented their experiences in academia through autobiographical narratives, short stories, and poems seeking to validate similar yet different subjectivities as Latinas in academia. The collective memory provided by testimonio (Smith) also serves to share the experiences of pain with other people, speaking in collaboration and not assuming universal identities. Cultural

historian Carolyn Steedman highlights the act of telling any story and the effects on both the person sharing the story as well as the person listening "visions change, once any story is told; ways of seeing are altered. The point of a story is to present itself momentarily as complete, so that it can be said: it does for now, it will do; it is an account that will last for a while. Its point is briefly to make an audience connive in the telling, so that they might say: yes, that's how it was; or that's how it could have been." (22). Testimonios of nontraditional students, adult English learner immigrant Latina women seeking access to higher education initiate a communal process that centers on individual agency and produces new ways of knowing derived from their experiences of oppression but also of resilience, as testimonio has the capability of providing collective memories that challenge larger structures of power in society.

Testimonios construct solidarity among *testimonialista* and researcher. The Latina Feminist Group (2001) described testimonio as a form of expression resulting from intense repression or struggle "where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere (p.13)." The *testimonialista* enters in a reciprocal relationship with the researcher, who will reach out to community. Another specific way of testimonio being a decolonial praxis, is the researcher can also occupy the *testimonialista* space. Testimonio as methodology provides a framework to contextualize having experienced racism, discrimination, oppression, and marginalization (Delgado Bemal et al., 2012). It is these qualities of testimonios that convinced me that testimonio is the most adequate approach to learn from a population of students that is completely ignored. I use testimonio as a feminist methodology because it allows for non-dominant perspectives located on the margins of Western constructions of power and privilege to name the experiences product of their intersecting oppressions and privileges, thus providing a most appropriated framework of approach. The epistemological value of testimonio in the U.S. based academy has not reached its full acceptance, as it remains in the *alternative* form of knowledge section of research. We must remember that the western academy remains organized around the same structural categories of power and oppression as society at large in order to understand why a method that brings to light the multiple

intersections of racism, classism, ethnocentrism, sexism and others, is not yet officially integrated and recognized as valuable.

3.8 Testimonio, oral history, autobiography, and testimony

Chapter two detailed the evolution and origins of testimonio emerging in Latin America to speak up about injustices, highlighting the popularization of testimonio during the 1960s and 70s as a way for the subaltern to resist state sanctioned violence and to document narratives of injustices silenced by those in power (Reyes and Rodrıguez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona, 2012). Author Michelle A. Holling in *‘‘So My Name Is Alma, and I Am the Sister of . . . ’’:A Feminicidio Testimonio of Violence and Violent Identifications* reminds us that testimonio should not be simply translated into English as on page 316, she states “translating and referencing testimonio as ‘‘testimony’’ is discouraged for two reasons. First the ‘‘complexity and richness’’ inherent in testimonio requires treating it on its own terms (Scholz, Rhetorical 2). Second, the ‘‘English counterpart, testimony, does not capture the theoretical underpinnings of this term’’ (Reyes and Curry-Rodrıguez 529)”. Merriam-Webster defines testimony as “a solemn declaration usually made orally by a witness under oath in response to interrogation by a lawyer or authorized public official”, clearly denoting the importance of not simply translating testimonio into testimony as the act of *testimoniar* and giving a testimonial are not the same for reasons listed above.

Testimonios are also different from oral histories and autobiographies in that testimonios are expected to be shared with individuals or given in public by people who have experienced and/or bear witness to injustices perpetrated by structural regimes of power, and such injustices affect entire communities or groups (Menchu and Burgos-Debray 1984., Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991., Delgado-Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona 2016). For authors Reyes and Curry Rodriguez “Testimonio allows the narrator to show experience that is not only liberating in the process of telling but also is political in its production of awareness to listeners and the readers alike” (p. 527). Testimonios are an extension of the *personal is political*, as the experiences and struggles being shared

are directly connected with the larger social and political structures of society. In the United States testimonio as a research method is particularly important to educational research as it is a direct form of data collection that comes from the "struggle of people of color for educational rights and for the recovery of our knowledge production" (Reyes & Curry-Rodriguez p. 526). Testimonio provides flexibility to adapt and produce knowledge in different variations such as research method, teaching pedagogy, or healing therapy among other, each with distinct objectives and functions. The need for testimonios to expand into different fields of theorizing and research is a response to the everyday injustices that as author Linda Tuhiwai Smith says, "Imperialism still hurts, still destroys and is reforming itself constantly" (pg 20). While testimonio is flexible and adapts to different academic fields there are salient distinctions of testimonio that sets testimonio apart from biographies or memoirs. Testimonio tends to be about specific experiences about someone's life journey, while biographies or memoirs are about entire life journeys.

Independently of the variation of the testimonio format being used there are always essential components such as the *testimonialista* engaging in a critical reflection of their own experience "As such, testimonio is pragmatic in that it engages the reader to understand and establish a sense of solidarity as a first step toward social change." (Delgado-Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona 2012), with the ultimate purpose of disrupting and decreasing injustice and thus achieving material change as people's *vivencias* are shared collectively (Benmayor, Torruellas, & Juarbe, 1997). Testimonio is a feminist Latin American approach in which the subaltern speaks from their personal/intimate experiences of structural violence and publicly name its oppressors (Burgos-Debray 1984). Scholars utilizing testimonio become mediators who listen, write, and bring to light these previously silenced experiences. This disruption of power by those who have been marginalized explicitly situates testimonio as ***inherently political*** (my italics) and acts as a bridge through which knowledge from the margins reaches establishments of knowledge production such as academia (Sanchez 1995). The parallels in narratives of past experiences from *testimonialistas* and their audience, create a sense of

solidarity among them when their testimonios are made or even performed in public. Testimonio allows people to name their oppressors, to call out injustices and to collectively resist systems of oppression. Another distinction is that the goal of testimonio is to create solidarity between the person giving testimonio and the reader/ listener.

3.9 Bear witness and the active listener

The interviewer or audience in testimonio plays an active role, unlike the reader in a biography, as they must engage with the *testimonialista* to completely understand what is being shared (Delgado-Bernal et al 2012). It is not only about respect but about empathy, compassion and consciously engaging in the gift that the t*estimonialista* is offering; their *vivencias*. The centering of the listener as well as the speaker is rooted in decolonial practices of knowing, according to author Carlos Lenkersdorf in the 2008 book *Aprender a escuchar: enseñanzas maya-tojolabales* he states:

> la cultura europea, expresada en una lengua que no puede concebir el escuchar porque su estructura egocéntrica se lo impide, ha generado y reforzado situaciones de comunicación que silencian, reprimen y destruyen toda manifestación popular que subvierta el orden instituído.

"European culture is expressed in a language that can't conceive the act of listening because it is limited by its egocentric structure, it has generated and reinforced situations that silence, oppress and destroy all popular manifestations that subvert institutional order (my translation)". Testimonio in Latin America is a tool to denounce the atrocities of governments from Argentina, Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay among others, that inflicted on their people civil wars and dictatorships in the 1970s (Bustos, 2010). In nations where state violence is the domination mode against those most vulnerable, testimonio gave everyone access to subvert and challenge systems that routinely use violence as means of control. Indigenous Knowledges for example "conveyed formally and informally among kin groups and communities through social encounters, oral traditions, ritual practices, and other activities. They include: oral narratives that recount human histories" (Bruchac, 2014). Hence, testimonio presenting similar components to Indigenous knowledge allows for a relationship to develop between the narrator and the listener as the act of *testimoniar* takes place "to the

extent that listeners-to-witnesses internalize the narrated violence, the possibility of opposing such violations and being transformed into agents of change opens up (Holling 2014, pg. 326) and that, in itself, is a decolonial act of resistance. Testimonios offer the testimonialista the opportunity to express their experiences of subjugation by reclaiming the right to speak, and the listener becomes an extension of that reclaimed voice by potentially becoming agents for change in the quest for more just societies.

3.10 Method: research design

Although extensive literature exists documenting the experiences of Chicanas/Latinas/Latinx first-generation in higher education institutions, there is a lack of academic scholarly articles about nontraditional student, adult English learner, immigrant women from Latin America and their journey to attaining a degree in higher education. This scant research highlights the invisibility of this population in education, gender studies, and migration studies literatures among others. My dissertation project sought to explore the experiences of eight self-identified nontraditional students, adult English learners, immigrant women from Latin America accessing and surviving in higher education by utilizing a qualitative research approach and guided by **testimonio methodology** to document and understand their experiences. Author Kalina Brabeck defines testimonio as a tool that resists, aims at consciousness-raising and challenge oppression as "people who were once the objects of anthropological and psychological study began to write and speak for themselves (p. 252, 2003)." The power resides with the testimonialista, no longer with the researcher because as Brabeck explains "the marginalized voice [can] to speak on its own behalf." In this manner the experiences of nontraditional students, adult English learners Latinx immigrant women seeking access to higher education can be best analyzed through their testimonios, collected through in-depth open-ended interviews (Garcia, Nichole M, et al. 2021). The primary goal of this research was to understand their specific experience in higher education and the use of their voices be able to carve and claim a space that has invisibilized them (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Jupp et al., 2018).

3.11 Testimonio procedure

This section of the chapter will center on the execution and procedure of the research such as participant recruitment, demographics, data collection and transcription. I initiated **recruitment** of the participants in the fall of 2017 by creating recruitment flyers in English and in Spanish with the main name of the dissertational thesis in Spanish as *"Quieren Mi Labor Mas No Mi Intelecto"* and showing the IRB ID # STUDY00002363 on both flyers (Appendix A). I posted the flyers in several online communities for Latinas in higher education, online groups of immigrant women to the United States and by word of mouth, as I reached out via email to colleagues and former professors to let them know about the recruitment phase of my research and shared the flyers in both languages. The flyers provided information about my research and a link with instructions on how to participate in the study by first by registering their information and taking a screening survey (Appendix B) to meet study eligibility. The screening was done to recruit my specific population: nontraditional student, adult English learners, immigrant and self-identified women from Latin America. The criteria for participation were as follow:

1. Have migrated as an adult to the United States (18 years or older & with or without documents).
2. Not having attended the United States K-12 system.
3. Have arrived in the United States with incomplete or completed high school, and /or incomplete or completed college.
4. Have obtained or currently be pursuing degrees in institutions of higher education, such as community/ junior colleges and universities (in both undergraduate & graduate programs).

I created a research Intake Log to process the information coming-in from the survey from the interested possible *testimonialistas*. Once I processed the information and evaluated eligibility, I contacted them via the information they provided and set the appointment time for those eligible for their testimonio to be recorded (Latinx that attended the k-12 education system in the U.S. and international students were not eligible to apply as their paths to higher education differ greatly). I emailed them a consent form (Appendix C) to be signed and returned to me prior to the recording of their testimonios.

The **collection** of interviews initiated once participants had gone through the screening process. The interviews took place in person or via Skype or Facetime, lasting approximately 1.5-2 hours and they were recorded by audio only, no video footage was ever recorded. I provided the participants with a series of questions about their experience in the U.S. higher education system. The participants received a $25.00 gift card for Target or Amazon in exchange for their time, which was either delivered in-person or electronically if the interview was remote. Six testimonios were mostly collected during the winter and spring of 2018, and two testimonios were collected in spring 2019. The **in-person testimonios** took place in either public library meeting rooms or in the testimonialistas living-rooms. It was previously specified that there would be no other people around if the testimonio recording was to be recorded at the *testimonialistas* homes, as for the remotely testimonio recordings same specification applied. Creating **sacred testimonio spaces** was foundational for my testimonio recording process (Aron, 1992; Comas-Diaz 2006, Latinas Feminist Group 2001; Perez-Huber 2009; Delgado-Bernal et al., 2012). I utilized open ended questions and prompts (see appendix D) then would begin each meeting by thanking them for their time and explaining about how my own academic journey and the lack of finding research on the educational experiences of adult immigrant women from Latin America was the reason to propose my study. This would be followed by my recommendations to make themselves comfortable and have handy water and tissue paper, as revisiting life experiences brings up emotions; for the in-person taken testimonios I would provide the water and tissue paper even if we were at the *testimonialista's* home. At this point I would ask for permission to record from this point forward to go over and explain the consent form. Here I would extend an invitation to participants to deliver the testimonios in the language that they were most comfortable with between English and Spanish, I would do this by speaking in Spanish first then utilizing code switching in the next few sentences to indicate that either language was welcomed. Participants were given directions by me utilizing a protocol set of open-ended questions that would help them speak about different aspects of their lived experience (Appendix D).

All testimonios except one were given in Spanish with a few English code-switching words or phrases that linguistically came easier to the testimonialista, or that we as a team (researcher & *testimonialista*) could not find the Spanish translation with the pertinent English context. By the end of the testimonio process I would thank them again and stop the audio recording, off the record we would chat informally for another 10-15 minutes usually it was about sharing resources horizontally based on our identities of nontraditional students, English learner, immigrant women from Latin America. During the collection of testimonios I would take informal notes, a few hours after collecting a testimonio I would listen to it again and this time my notes would include time stamp on the testimonio conversation. The testimonio transcription from my testimonialistas was done by me and by a transcription company that highlighted their specializing and knowledge about the different dialects of Spanish (Mexican, Peruvian, Argentinian etc.). Audio files and transcripts were saved in a password-protected computer utilizing pseudonyms for all files.

3.12 Coding & Analysis

I analyzed the collected data using a three-phase analysis process. In the first phase, all interviews were manually coded by familiarizing with the material, reading while listening for different voice tones & pace voice. I made initial notes when collecting the interviews; once the interviews were transcribed I highlighted common terms and phrases and made notes of participants statements. In the *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research*, Johnny Saldana establishes that "A code in qualitative data analysis is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data." (2009). Once I **analyzed** the material, preliminary codes were assigned to different sections of the interviews. In the second phase, I reviewed the comments, highlighted words or sentences and preliminary codes and placed them into categories; from these emergent themes of the testimonios were identified. Finally, in phase three I had a second coder (also familiar with testimonio methodology) perform the same process and we then discussed the results to find commonalities across themes that would produce the final

codes (Saldana, 2009). The final codes were connected to the theoretical concepts applicable for this research project.

3.13 Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credibility for this project was established by an extensive review of key related works on testimonio as a method of research which was the basis for the coding process, and a follow-up discussion with secondary coder (Saldana 2009). Trustworthiness was addressed by disclosing and continually analyzing my positionality in relation to the participants. Furthermore, I continued to meet periodically with my research advisor to designed, collect, and analyzed the collected data.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FINDINGS

4.1 The testimonialistas entering higher education

This dissertation project sought to explore the experiences of nontraditional, English Learner, adult Latina immigrants and their higher educational attainment. As a minority within a minority, adult immigrant Latinxs entering the United States higher education system are navigating college access in a system new to them. This study utilized the testimonios of eight nontraditional students, English learner, adult immigrant women from Latin America, to shine a light into the intersectional journeys of accessing and surviving in the U.S. higher education system, by this small but growing population of adult English learners seeking access to postsecondary education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The testimonios presented in this project illustrate the difficult road that lays ahead of them to achieve their degree. Their in-depth interviews revealed how foreign-born and foreign-raised female Latin American immigrants have begun to access U.S. academia despite patriarchal and racial structures where gatekeeping practices are constantly found (Delgado-Bernal 2001).

This chapter will provide an overview of the testimonialistas and the themes that emerged from their testimonios as they were analyzed applying Chicana feminist theory, Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) along with migration studies theory to better understand the trajectories of the testimonialistas in their journey to higher education. Then the analysis section centers on the themes that surfaced uncovering the support they received, and the barriers faced on their path to obtain the degree at the undergraduate and graduate academic level. The following section gives biographical information of each of the testimonialistas and summarizes key emergent themes from their testimonios, testimonios that were collected in person or via Skype in one-on-one interviews.

4.2 The Testimonialistas: English learner Latin American adult immigrant students

Nontraditional English learner adult immigrant Latina students are a sub-group in the Latinx student community (a minority within a minority). They are students who as English learners are new to

the educational system of the United States, did not attend the k-12 education system and are not attending post-secondary education as international students. The analysis highlights adult, immigrant women who after migrating to the U.S. sought access to higher education in search of social and economic mobility in the receiving country. Adult English learner students often shatter multiple barriers as they follow nontraditional paths to access undergraduate and graduate higher education. The testimonialistas that participated in this study were primarily from Mexico; other countries represented in the study were Argentina, Panama & Peru. Arrival in the United States took place in their early twenties through their late thirties, and time of length living in the country ranged from 10 to 25 years. The reason for migration was overwhelmingly economic displacement along with themes of safety such facing domestic violence or exposure to violence due to cartels. Five out of the eight testimonialistas came with a tourist visa. The remaining immigration statuses were through other visa categories; fiancée visa and work visa (HB2), and one testimonialista was undocumented. At the time of the interview the majority of the testimonialistas were married or partnered, and five out of the eight had young to adult children. The different identities of the testimonialistas reflect the complicated structures of power and domination in both, their countries of origin and in the United States. These gendered and racialized identities are factors that first shaped their experiences of displacement and migration to the United States. **Table 1** identifies the testimonialistas and their educational level in the United States at the time of the interview, followed by a short profile.

Testimonialistas	**Education level in the United States**
Mariela	Community College
Alondra	Community College
Lina	Bachelors
Rosalia	Bachelors
Ana	Masters
Laura	Masters
Martina	Masters
Celia	Doctoral Degree

Table 1

Mariela

Mariela was born and raised in central Mexico, she immigrated to the United States with her two children at age 26 in search of better economic opportunities. She married at an early age but became a single mother after getting divorced as Mariela's ex-husband failed to provide any support to their children. She had acquaintances in the United States that talked to her about better life opportunities in the country. After being granted a tourist visa for her and her children, she immigrated to the United States. However, by not speaking English she was limited in her employment opportunities and for a few years only found work in the service industry. For Mariela and her children, the migration process was not easy, she faced domestic violence from a new partner in the U.S., and after overstaying their tourist visa the fear of being detained by immigration was permanent in their lives. Although she considered returning to Mexico at some point, due to the struggles of assimilation and cultural shock experienced, she knew that her children would have better lives in the United States. After a few years in the country and learning the language through her various work experiences in the non-profit and community organizing fields, she became a bilingual and bicultural worker for a family support center, there she helped others like her navigate life in the U.S. She had attempted to study medicine in Mexico, but she was only able to complete the equivalence of an Associates in the Arts degree. In her mid-forties she was placed in workforce retraining and given the opportunity to study at a community college, this was the first time Mariela had access to higher education in the United States. In her testimonio she self-identified as an immigrant, bisexual woman part of the LGBTQ community. At the time of Mariela's interview, she was a first-generation student, working towards a bachelor's degree at a community college with plans to transfer to a four-year institution and continue onto graduate school

Alondra

Alondra was born and raised in central Mexico, she immigrated to the United States at 25 years of age. Growing up in a rural area near Mexico City, Alondra always made efforts to obtain an education such as traveling long distances to attend primary school. In Mexico she graduated with a bachelor's in communications, she was the first person in her family to graduate from a university, however after graduation she was not able to find steady work. Alondra was married an at early age and as her situation turned more precarious, her husband decided to emigrate to the United States in search for work and Alondra followed a year later. Alondra entered the country without inspection (meaning she entered the United States without the inspection of a U.S. immigration officer) due to the lack of a path to legalization she has remained undocumented. Alondra and her husband had three children and settled in the United States as their new home. Despite not having documents she was able to complete her General Educational Degree (GED) and eventually continued onto college classes. At the time of her

testimonio, Alondra was working towards completion of an Associate of Applied Arts and Sciences in Accounting (technical degree), but with the goal of transferring to a four-year university and complete a bachelor's in accounting.

Lina

Lina is originally from Peru, she grew-up in a remote rural area of the country where at the time she had no access to electricity. She was initially raised by her grandmother; at age seven she went to live with her biological mother and stepfather who were high school teachers in a neighboring town. There she was exposed from an early age to social justice as her parents would typically promote adult education and her mother specifically would educate local women about birth control. Lina was studying to become a Doctor of Veterinary, however after getting married in her late teens and having two children she had to drop out. Unfortunately, domestic violence was present in Lina's life and was eventually part of the reason for her migration to the United States. Lina was forced to become a transnational mother to be able to provide for her children, leaving them behind in the care of her mother. Lina arrived in the United States when she was in her mid-twenties, she came into the country without inspection. As many immigrants do, she held two jobs at the same time and took English classes at night, it took several years for Lina to acquire enough English knowledge to go on to college level classes. At the time of Lina's testimonio she had obtain a bachelors in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies and a minor in Human Rights.

Rosalía

Rosalia was born and raised in Panama, she arrived in the United States at age 29 with her two children. She came to the United States after meeting a U.S. citizen and getting engaged consequently arriving on a fiancée visa. Rosalia self-identifies as a mix-race, light skin, Black Panamanian woman, non-binary. It was important for Rosalía to state these identities during her testimonio as she highlighted the drastic transition she felt as she came to live in the United States. In Panama because she had light skin she was never seen as a Black woman, while in the U.S she is read as a Black woman regardless of her light skin. This was just one of the many experiences Rosalía would have with race as it is understood in the United States. Growing-up in Panama Rosalia experienced a different version of being in-between, her mother and her mother's family never fully saw Rosalia as Black. While her father and his side of the family as White Panamanians never saw her or treated her as White either, although the rest of society there would extend White passing privilege on her. Rosalia comes from a working-class family; for Rosalia's mother education was important so she made a point of sending Rosalia to private schools for her formative education. The importance of education was always present in Rosalia's life, both of her parents attended but did not graduate from college, her mother would eventually finish college in

Panama as a nontraditional student as well. After migrating to the United States Rosalia undertook the long journey to higher education which was often full of racial and gendered microaggressions. At the time of Rosalia's testimonio she was about to complete her bachelor's in psychology.

Ana

Ana and her family arrived in the United States as economic displaced immigrants from Argentina, she was 39 years of age at the time. Ana grew-up in a small rural town in Argentina, being the eldest of three children and only daughter meant that her brothers received more support from their father when it came to education. Ana graduated with a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering, she was the first and only person in her immediate family to graduate from a university, although her brothers attended college as well neither of them graduated. After graduation Ana tried to find work but struggled as she was trying to enter an area of work primarily dominated by males in her country. When she couldn't find employment, she set up her own consulting business centered on providing analysis and insights on environmental protections to the private industry, however it was unsuccessful. By this point Ana had married and had two children, as the economy worsen in southern Latin America, Ana and her family migrated to Bolivia in search of better business opportunities. When the economy did not seem to get better, they thought about the United States as Ana's brother-in-law had already migrated to the United States and at the time Argentina was listed in the Visa Waiver Program, where people from selected countries can travel to the United State without a visa on a tourist stay for up to 90 days. Once her tourist visa entrance expired Ana became undocumented and went through a series unfortunate events and discriminatory practices because of her undocumented status. After a few years in the country Ana was able to adjust her status to resident and decided to pursue a degree in higher education, she took ESL classes followed by community college courses and eventually obtaining a master's on Organizational Leadership. Ana's journey through higher education gave her better perspective about the educational system of the United States and its intersection with race and ethnicity.

Laura

Laura was born in the United States where she remained until age five, at that time her Mexican immigrant parents decided to return to Mexico. Although Laura and her sister were born in the United States, they both were raised in Mexico as their parents wanted them to grow-up with in the tradition and values of Mexican culture. Growing-up in middle-class Mexico, Laura was aware of the importance of higher education through her parents' reminders that higher education was expected from her and her sister. Laura completed a bachelor's degree in Mexico prior to relocating back to the United States to join her sister, who had previously moved back. After moving back to the United States Laura wanted to continue with graduate school, although she knew the language it took Laura several attempts to remain

in a master's degree program. Laura identified as struggling with the cultural shock of having grown-up in Mexico and at the time not understanding the different experiences Latinxs in the U.S. go through. When Laura's testimonio was collected, she was completing a master's on bicultural counseling.

Martina

Martina was born and raised in central Mexico, she immigrated to the United States at age 27 when her brother who had previously migrated invited her to come. Martina entered the U.S. on a tourist visa, and three days after her arrival her mother in Mexico passed away. This was the catalyst for her decision to remain in the United States to stay and work. In Mexico she worked in the tourist industry, so she had intermediate English skills when she arrived, which she quickly sharpened as she started working where no one else spoke Spanish. Working on a Starbucks Coffee located on a college campus influenced Martina's desire to someday attend higher education in the United States. She met her Polynesian spouse and established a life here, unfortunately as Martina overstayed her tourist visa she was eventually deported to Mexico where she had to stay a few years while sorting out the immigration issues she faced, she eventually received a green card through marriage. After coming back to the United States, she decided that she was ready for higher education, and she began by completing her General Educational Diploma (GED) at the time of Martina's testimonio she had obtained a master's in social work.

Celia

Celia is originally from northern Mexico where she grew-up middle class and attended private schools throughout her primary education. Being that both of her parents were teachers, education was never out of the question it was expected that she obtained a university degree. She attended *Tecnológico de Monterrey*, the most prestigious private university in Mexico and completed a degree in journalism. It was precisely her job that placed her on the path to eventually migrate and settle in the United States, while working for a newspaper in Mexico she would be sent to the U.S., to do pop-culture news coverage. In the U.S. she met her Cuban American husband and decided to permanently stay after marriage. Although for Celia assimilation into U.S. society was not difficult, she felt rejected by other U.S. raised Latinx people who were not used to seeing Mexican immigrants arrive with professional careers and already speaking the English language. At the time of this testimonio Celia had completed her graduate studies, obtaining a masters in Bicultural and Bilingual Studies and a doctoral degree in Culture, Literacy and Language.

The above profiles provided some context of the individual background of each of the testimonialistas that participated in the study. Their different identities and experiences show how their individual

journey to academia is connected to hierarchies of power and social systems based on race or ethnicity, gender, class, immigration status etc. **Table 2** below provides further details of the testimonialistas biographies, such age of arrival as foreign-born and raised immigrants, reason for migrating to the United States and length of time living in the country. It also depicts recurrent themes such as how economic displacement played a central role in their migration journey.

Pseudonymous:	Mariela	Alondra	Lina	Rosalia	Ana	Laura	Martina	Celia
Country of origin:	Mexico	Mexico	Peru	Panama	Argentina	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico
Age at arrival:	26	25	25	29	29	23	27	31
Length in U.S. (years):	25	15	24	10	18	20	20	18
Marital Status:	Partnered	Married	Divorced	Married	Divorced	Divorced	Married	Married
Children:	3	3	2	3	2	None	None	None
Continues to send economic support to country of origin:	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Reason for migrating:	Economic displace-ment.	Economic displace-ment & Safety	Economic displace-ment & Domestic Violence	Marriage to U.S. citizen	Economic displace-ment	Family reunifi-cation	Economic-displace-ment	U.S. employer hired
Documented status at arrival:	Tourist visa	Without inspection	Tourist Visa	Fiancé Visa	Tourist Visa	U.S citizen by birth	Tourist Visa	Work Visa HB2
Current documented Status:	U.S. Citizen	Undo-cumented	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Citizen	U.S. Citizen	U.S Citizen

**Laura was born in the U.S. where she lived until age five then came back to the U.S. at 23 years old.*

4.3 The testimonialistas voices: findings

Chicana feminists over the last few decades have used testimonio as a principal method to gather data and highlight aspects of women's lives that have been invisivilized (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012, p. 364, Hurtado 2020) These collected individual testimonios gave a glimpse into the lives of immigrant Latinas who sought educational attainment after arriving in the United States as adults. The telling of their testimonios created spaces where their voices were not limited to preconceived frameworks of study and instead, they dictated what aspects of their journey was most important or detrimental for them. The qualitative approach of testimonio as research, allowed me to engage with the data collected as a political witness of our similar struggles listening how their testimonios resonated with mine repeatedly, as we disrupted racial and gendered hierarchies encountered from our immigrant positions. Our individual but collectively told testimonios in this research project

captured the struggles of the migration journey and navigating a country that is not set up for immigrants' success outside of the prescribed roles for adult immigrant Latinxs. For example, linguistic limitations and other structural barriers faced as new adult immigrants to the United States typically leave no other options but to enter the service industry where the insatiable need for social reproduction labor the United States welcomes us (Hondagneu-Sotelo,2007.;Flores-Gonzalez, 2013.; Mata, 2014). Historically, this extracted labor from immigrant women have created spaces in the "care-work" industry where immigrant women are preferred to do domestic work because "they are" more caring, and compassionate (Leadingham et. al. 2004). Their testimonios illustrated what happened to those Latinx immigrant that venture outside of that margin.

The findings below identify barriers and tools of agency and empowerment that the testimonialistas used to navigate academic spaces where adult immigrant women's presence had only been visible as part of the cleaning crew. Seven themes emerged from their testimonios told individually but becoming collective voices connected through similar journeys, struggles and survival skills as they navigated higher education as nontraditional, English learner, adult Latin American immigrant students - this is a population of students not in the radar of community colleges and universities. The overall findings in this research project provide an opportunity for administrators and faculty to learn and create spaces for a new population joining their classrooms across the nation. The research questions were answered through the following emergent themes: migration (subthemes: acculturation & transnationalism), gendering experiences, educational systems (two major subthemes: educational attainment and structural barriers), discrimination, motivation/*ganas,* social capital as support, and lack of resources.

Migration Six out of the eight testimonialistas shared that they were forced to enter the migration stream based on economic displacement and work opportunity. These participants mentioned how migration was the solution to pressing problems such as the lack of employment or economic precarious existing employment. The traumatic emotional impact of the immigration journey was very visible during the

part of the interview that addressed questions of migration as almost of all of them cried. Speaking about their immigration journeys meant.

Ana who was originally from Argentina, specifically mentioned her reaction to the forced displacement component in her migration journey:

> *La gente cree que uno se quiere venir desesperadamente aquí. Yo cuando me vine aquí, me vine enojada con mi familia, con mis amigos, digo "¿Puta madre, no me pudiste ayudar a encontrar un trabajo?" No sé por qué es tan traumático cada vez que lo cuento lo sigo llorando y digo, "Ya lo tengo superado", y no, no lo tengo todavía.*

"People think that one wants to desperately come here. When I came here, I was mad at my family and my friends, I said, motherfucker you couldn't help me find a job? I don't know why every time I tell this story I cry, and I say "I have overcome this [this episode] but no, not yet"

For some of the testimonialistas their migration process involved other family member and social ties with males already residing in the receiving country, however not for all as other based their migration on accepting professional employment offer in the United States.

Acculturation was a dominant subtheme in migration as a component factor on their journeys. Each testimonialista expressed their sense of better understanding life in the United States and attributed it to being acculturated into U.S. society in specific aspects of their lives such as being bilingual, having been in the country a decade or more and making emotional and cultural connections in the United States, and some by establishing relationships with monolingual speakers of English or being more involved in their communities, yet still feeling connected with their place of origin (Page. 2006). Alondra expressed that adapting to life in the United States was easy for her and attributed it to the globalization of American culture as she said:

> *"Si lo legal no fuera un requisito para identificarte, yo diría que soy de Estados Unidos, porque así me siento, para mí fue muy fácil adaptarme.*
> *Yo no sé si es porque en ese tiempo estaba yo más joven, pero fue algo como que, "De aquí soy yo", aunque yo sé qué soy de México, aparte cuando yo veía la tele, yo veía programas, series americanas como Beverly Hills 90210*[12]*, yo decía, "Las casas", cuando nevaba, "Cómo nieva, yo*

[12] Beverly 90210 was an American show that became a global sensation by bringing Western pop culture around the world by depicting the aesthetics of what Sussanne Hamscha calls 'Cool Americana' (2014).

quisiera vivir allá", en mi mente me imaginaba ya viviendo en esos paisajes, cuando llegué aquí dije, "Yo debí haber nacido aquí"

"If the legal aspect of the process of identification wasn't required, I would say that I am from the United States, because that's how I feel, for me it was very easy to adapt. I don't know if it was because I arrived younger, but there is the feeling of belonging, even though I am from Mexico. When I watched television [in Mexico], I watched American shows like *Beverly Hills 90210*, I say to myself "wow the houses when snows, how it snows, I would like to live over there" and in my mind, I imagined myself living in those landscapes, when I arrived here, I said "I should have been born here".

Trasnationalism: all testimonialistas expressed the importance of remaining connected with their families in their home countries. Their connections are reinforced by economic responsibilities, technological communication advances such as social media applications like Facebook or WhatsApp, the interest in political life of the homeland and finally for those who have access traveling back and forth to the home country. Four out of the eight testimonialistas still have economic responsibilities to their families in their home countries. Martina's testimonio highlighted the communal aspect of Latin American cultures in terms of resources. Martina shares how she still financially supports as much as she can to those who were left behind:

"La situación económica de mis hermanos sigue siendo muy precaria, tienen lo básico pero muy fácilmente se atrasan con pagos de luz, de esto, no hay manera que ellos tengan un ahorro para emergencias, casi siempre las emergencias se han manejado con los hermanos que estamos acá apoyando a los que están allá, no se siente como obligación, es parte de lo que eres y ya, pero sí."

"My siblings' economic situation continues to be precarious; they have the basic but very easily they can fall behind in their electricity, therefore there is no way they can save for emergencies. The way that we have managed emergencies is that the siblings who live here [United States] support the siblings over there [Mexico], it is not an obligation, it is part of who you are."

Celia an immigrant from Mexico, shares how she remains connected with her family and homeland as she makes usage of advances in communication like Facetime:

"*Eso sí me ha pasado de que he ido conociendo más cosas, aparte por los mismos estudios y todo eso, digo, aprendes a ver las cosas de otra manera, ¿no? Estoy muy conectada con mi país, con la cultura, me considero una persona bicultural, porque digo, "Si funciona, trabajo aquí, vivo aquí", mi esposo es cubano, nosotros aquí en la casa hablamos inglés y hablamos español, pero si mantengo bastante, toda mi familia está allá, la mayor parte de mis amigas siguen siendo de México y todo entonces sí estoy muy conectada con los dos países… Luego también, por ejemplo, de que se puede votar acá, por ejemplo, con el voto en el extranjero. Yo he votado acá que es a veces lo que les explico a mis alumnos, cada vez que los regaño yo les digo "¿Cómo*

dicen que no les interesa la política? Imagínense yo voto en dos países por dos presidentes y tengo que estar al tanto en los dos países". Sí, estoy al tanto y si trato de, por ejemplo, políticamente hablando digo, "Estoy activa también allá". Hago todos los trámites para poder votar, los de acá y todo eso. Voto aquí y voto allá y tengo que estar al tanto y sí que lo estoy.

"One thing that has happened to me is that I have gotten to know and learn more [about her home country] precisely because of my studies, I look at things differently now. I am very connected to my country, with the culture, I consider myself a bicultural person, because I think "It works, I live and I work here", my husband is Cuban, we speak Spanish and English at home. But yes, I am connected, all my family are there, most of my friends are still in Mexico so, yes, I am very connected with both countries…Also, one can vote from here. For example, with voting from abroad, have voted from here, that's one thing I explain to my students, every time I scold them, and I say to them "How you're going to tell me that you don't care about politics? Just imagine, I vote in two countries, for two presidents, therefore I must be up to date in both countries". Yes, I am up to date, and I try that, politically speaking for example, "I am active over there too [Mexico]". I do all the process so I can vote here as well. I vote here and I vote there, and I must be up to date, and I am"

Gendering experiences

The women on this research project identified gendering experiences intersecting with their access to education in their life journeys, experiences that first began within the family structure. Their testimonios highlighted how gendered dynamics in the home in their countries of origin ultimately influenced their path to higher education in the United States.

Ana mentioned how her father, who grew-up in a small town in Argentina did not see the importance of education in her life, when she told him she needed to go study at university far away from their small town. While her mother on the opposite offered her all her support:

"Mi papá, cuando yo le digo que yo quería estudiar, ir a la universidad, me dice, "¿Para qué estudiar tanto? Podés ser maestra en Argentina con dos años-- Después de tu secundaria hacés dos años más eres maestra". Dice, "Tú vas, dos años, vuelves, te casas con un muchacho de aquí y te quedas cerca de la casa", imagínate tú a mi papá. Ese era el plan de él para mí. Mi mamá, "No, vete, si quieres ir tú, tienes alas, tienes todo mi apoyo."

"When I tell my father that I wanted to go study at a university, he says to me, "Why do you want to study so much? You could be a teacher here in Argentina, it only takes two years, after high school you can just do two more years and you will be a teacher" he says "you can go two years, come back, marry a guy from here and you stay close to home" Just imagine that [says to Elizabeth] that was my father's plan for me. My mom was like "No go, if you want to go, you have wings, you have all my support"

Alondra talked about how the difficulties of meeting traditional gender role expectations as a mother and wife and a student at the same time

> *"Ahorita voy a terminar estos dos años, y si hay la oportunidad y la posibilidad de seguir, yo sigo, porque es pesado, es duro, más para una madre de familia, tú lo sabes, ser esposa, la verdad es que nosotros crecimos en ese rol. Yo crecí en ese rol de que la mamá, la casa, la comida. Así crecí y hay muchas cosas que no he podido dejar. Por ejemplo, hacer comida en mi casa, tengo que hacer comida en mi casa porque quiero que mis hijas coman comida de mi casa."*

"I am about to finish these two years and if there is an opportunity to continue [in higher education] I will continue, because it is heavy, is difficult even more so for a mother, you know [to interviewer] to be a wife, and it is because we grow up with that [gender] role. I grew up with those gender role dynamics of the mom, the house, the food. That's how I grew-up and there are still a few things that I can't stop doing. For example, homemade food. I must cook at home because I want my daughters to eat homemade food"

Laura, talked about how she postponed going back to school when she was married because as a stay-at-home wife, she depended financially from her husband who's poor money management never let them have the needed funds for her tuition:

> *"Mi esposo a pesar que era doctor-despilfarraba el dinero a lo bestia y entonces también sentía que había esa obligación como de no desviarme con una maestría o algo así, entonces también por eso lo puse en pausa y también después mi esposo se enfermó muchísimo y lo tuve-tuve que ayudar, si era la enfermera yo."*

"Even though my husband was a doctor, he wasted money like there was no tomorrow and so I felt that there was that obligation of not add any spending with a masters or something like that, so that's why I put a pause on continuing on. Later my husband fell ill very badly, and I was basically his nurse -yes I was his nurse"

Educational system structure subthemes: educational attainment and structural barriers.

All testimonialistas described struggling to access higher education in the United States, they expressed feeling a lack of support from their institutions in colleges as they were not seen as potential students. This lack of support was experienced at the different levels of education, from English language classes to undergraduate and graduate studies. Isolation was present in all their journeys from feeling invisible to faculty and administrator who were not familiar with nontraditional, English learner, adult Latin American immigrant students facing gatekeeping practices.

Martina's testimonio can best capture an everyday interaction where English learners, adult nontraditional students are invisivilized in the educational system of the U.S. Her testimonio recounts an experience when she was already a student at a community college. She attended a transfer college fair

to find out information about local bachelor's programs, at the time she was in her early forties when the staff attending the information booth could only see Martina as a mother seeking information for their children:

> *"Te ven medio raro, te dan el mínimo de información, te ven la edad, dan el mínimo de información y no se presta para una conversación, es muy rara la persona que trata y no sé si sea en sí simplemente por la personalidad de la persona que está a cargo de la mesa, o si así es la cultura de la institución, no sé, pero esa era una de las cosas al pasar por todas las mesas o la gente preguntándote, "¿Es para su hijo?" Inmediatamente te ven así como que, "No, no es para mi hijo, es para mí," y te daban inmediatamente la información que era para personas que están trabajando todo el tiempo, te daban la opción de seis años, en las tardes, en las noches, en línea y ya parele de contar. Cuando tú te metías y decías, "Es que yo quiero seguir pero durante el día, quiero seguir como los demás estudiantes," te daban la información pero muy someramente, "Aquí tienes y si tienes preguntas nos contactas," pero muy cortante, esa era una de las cosas que yo pensaba que me cohibían para seguir haciendo más preguntas, para seguirme acercando a muchos lugares*."

"They look at you weird, they give you the minimum information, they look at your age and they give you the minimum information and it is not conducive to have a conversation, rarely does the person tries, and I don't know if it's about the personality of the person attending the booth, or if it is the culture of the institution, I don't know, but that was one of the things that happened as I went around the booths or people asking you " Is this for your son?" Immediately they give you this look, and I would respond "No, it not for my son, is for me" and they immediately give you information for students working fulltime, they give you the six years, evening program or online option and they shorten the conversation. Then you tell them "I want to go but during the day, I want to go like the rest of the students," then they would briefly give you all the information "There you go and if you questions contact us later" but being very short, that was one of the things I felt happened to me, so I felt it held me back to keep asking and approaching so many more other places".

Mariela and ***Alondra's*** experiences at the community college depict a lack of understanding from counselors. Mariela's experiences as a nontraditional, English learner student have been full of frustration as she notes that community college advisors and counselors are not familiar with students like her and her needs. She remembers being given the run around when she had questions about what classes she should take:

> *Esta persona no está, pero te mandaban con otra. Fui con la otra, dice, "Ay no, yo no, yo nada más me encargo de todo lo que es deshabilidades, de la gente que tiene deshabilidades", ¿entonces quién?, "No, pues regrésate otra vez a la oficina central". Si yo no hubiera tenido las ganas de seguir estudiando, a la primera ya no regreso. Es un obstáculo, porque hasta mi hijo me dijo-- Porque me acuerdo de que a veces Mario iba conmigo y me dijo, "Pero ¿por qué te mandan a todos esos lugares?", digo, "Pero yo no me voy a dejar, yo tengo que seguir, si me dicen aquí, yo regreso".*

“This person [advisor] is not here. I went with the other [advisor] and she said, “No I can’t [help you] I only work with students with disabilities” So who do I got to? “Well go back to the main office [that send you here]”. If I would not have the ganas [motivation] to keep studying, after the first rejection, I would not have come back. It is an obstacle, because even my son told me “Why do they send to all those places?” I thought “I will fight back, I have to keep [studying] if they tell me here, I will return”.

Alondra, mentioned how surprised she was to feel that as an undocumented, nontraditional student her advisor would speak to her in Spanish when topics about her undocumented status came-up. The advisor told her she would do that to protect her, which left Alondra perplexed as she details the negative experience:

> *Me dijo, "Si quieres, vamos hablar en español para protegerte", yo le dije, "¿De qué me vas a proteger?", me dice, "Para que si tú quieres no tienen que enterarse de tu situación" y que no sé qué. Después yo me quede pensando, ¿por qué si para una persona que no tiene documentos legales puede tener derecho a una beca o a una opportunity grant? porque no es un requisito ser legal o tener un seguro social. ¿Por qué la misma institución lo sigue ocultando? ¿Me entiendes? Como que no, como que no es ser macho, como que si ya fuera algo malo de por sí.”*

She said, “If you want let’s speak in Spanish to protect you”, and I said to her “From whom are you protecting me” and she said “so no one else have to know about your situation” and I don’t know what else. After, I kept thinking “Why is it that if a person is undocumented, they can’t have access to a grant or a scholarship?” “Because it is not a requirement to be legal or to have a social security [to study]”. Why is the institution itself hiding it [undocumented students]?” “Do you understand? [to researcher]” “That did not settle well with me. “Like that was not right, like something is already wrong with me”.

Educational attainment: The women in this research project shared about their educational journeys in their countries of origin and in the United States. The testimonialistas had different levels of educational attainment by the time they arrived in the United States. Four of the women had graduated with a college degree, two of them had partially attended a university or college and the final two had graduated from high school. Educational attainment in the United States for adult English learners as they face predetermined academic pathways depending on the different types of programs placed in-practice by community colleges, where the goal is to help transition the adult English learner population into the workforce through short certificate programs or vocational training (Shaetzel & Young 2008). The women in this study experienced similar situations in their English as a Second Language programs, Lina remembers that she expressed interest in continuing into higher education and she would inquire with teachers and/ or counselors at the community college, however, she would never receive the information needed. Lina's interview was in English, here is an excerpt of her testimonio:

> *"In ESL it was mostly to learn the very basic of ESL things of ESL to me when I was going in the evenings. They were very concern to teach people for their jobs and their goal was teaching people about their specific jobs, or like going to the grocery store, you know very basic. There was a lot of emphasis to learn English to help people at work. Then as the level went higher in ESL then you would just learn about the language of course, but nobody ever talked to in any of my classes, not in California because I took some classes in California and then in Seattle. There was never a talk "Okay you guys these are some ideas for some of you who want to go to universities" that was never ever a talk about that, it was only just people learning because they need to learn English to be in this country, so they never talk about universities."*

Educational Structural Barriers The testimonialistas shared about their complicated and confusing experiences trying to navigate the United States higher education, because of how little is known about the population of study in this research project. Their experiences shed light on how the lack of knowledge from the institutions about this population of students, creates structural barriers for those wishing to enroll in higher education. Martina, talked about how she was incorrectly advised to study the General Education Development (GED), regardless that she had graduated from high school in her home country. She also shared how no institution or organization one could give her an orientation about entering higher education.

> *"No tenía la menor idea de cómo funcionaba el sistema académico aquí en Estados Unidos, yo decía, "Sí, voy, saco el GED, son tres meses, ya lo saqué," y De ahí fue preguntar mucho, aparte de leer los folletos y todo lo que te manda el colegio fue preguntar mucho, "¿Cómo hago esto? ¿Cómo hago lo otro? ¿Para cuándo necesito tener esto? ¿Qué más me hace falta?" Todo eso, esa fue una de las mayores barreras que puedo decirte que la tuve incluso hasta el bachelors todavía."*

"I didn't know how the United States academic system worked, I thought "If I go get the GED, it takes three months, and I got it" and from there it was just asking about everything, reading all types and brochures that the colleges send, it really was to continually ask. "How do I do this? How do I do that? When do I have to have this ready? What else do I need?" all of that was one of the major barriers I can tell you I faced, even at the bachelor's level"

Similarly, ***Lina*** talked about how she felt alienated as a nontraditional, English learner, immigrant student when she tried to find support at the university to enhance her computer literacy skills. After searching without luck then institution simply told her that it is expected for students to already have those specific skills Lina was searching for support with:

> *"Economic is one, lack of access to guidance, advise and support in the sense of academia provide tutors that are available and understand your needs. I was an older student, I was in my forties and so age was one issue, and other was accessibility and flexibility. Accessibility to guidance. Lack of understanding from faculty of the universities, the differences between a student who is like me, who was in her forties, also not being from the United States, being an immigrant how we entered this realm of study. Teachers seem to disregard every time that I would tell them that I needed support or help with this clarification, a lack of support in understanding where I was coming from. I remember I didn't have a lot of time so I had to do so much readings and homework, and I was in such need and desperation for support, I one day I went around knocking on people's offices asking for help and guidance with different struggles that as an older student applied to me, That time I felt like a ping-pong going from one end of campus to other, just trying to find support on how to access certain information, like with technologies. For example, as a laborer as an immigrant I had no training on computers, but if you're in a university you're expected to know all have all those skills. In the end I gave up asking for help because I realized they were just sending me around to go to one office to another, and no results. I decided to go to the library and ask for books that could assist me to in computer literacy, when they did not have them, I ask why, and they said "it is because it is expected that students already have these skills when they come to a university"*

Mariela and Ana's, testimonios resonated with Lina's experiences in terms of facing faculty that are not familiar with nontraditional, English learner students at the undergraduate and graduate level respectively:

> Mariela: *"Cuando uno es bilingüe, uno va a aprender el mismo tema en dos idiomas, cuando a mí me lo están diciendo yo me lo estoy aprendiendo en inglés pero yo te lo puedo explicar en*

español. Mi aprendizaje va a hacer más lento quizás que una persona que solamente habla un idioma, pero el maestro eso a veces no lo ve, él te quiere al mismo nivel que una persona que ha vivido aquí toda su vida".

When a person is bilingual, one is going to learn the same theme in two languages, "When I am being taught a topic and it is being taught in English, I can explain it in Spanish. My learning process is going to be slower than a monolingual person, but the teacher doesn't see that, he wants you to be at the same level of a person that has lived here their whole life"

Ana, similarly, felt that her professors at the master's program could not see past her grammatical mistakes in her academic work and ignore the content of her essays. She remembers being told to go back to ESL classes by these professors, to which she answered them that she was a monolingual speaker for 39 years and had already taken all available ESL classes.

Discrimination This was an emergent theme that I anticipated would come up, based on my previous experiences at the community college and university level and many other conversations with students of color and their experiences of discrimination in academia. The testimonialistas shared various types of racial and gendered microaggressions that they experienced as they navigated through hostile academic environments.

Rosalia, remembered in her testimonio one instance where an academic counselor at a community college advised her against joining an Honors Program. Rosalia felt the advisor undermined her abilities without knowing her life's experience:

"Una experiencia muy fuerte fue de hecho con un counselor, fue antes de que entrara al programa de honores de psicología. Ella me hizo unas preguntas y yo le explique tengo una hijita y otros hijos mas grandes y entre todo lo que hablamos después de un rato me dice muy claramente y eso nunca se me va a olvidar dice: "Yo tengo una hija, y si yo fuera tu, yo no entrara al departamento de honores, eso no es para ti." Así me dijo, "that it's not for you" exactamente sus palabras. Me dijo en ingles "I have a young daughter like you and If I were you I would not try the honors program, it will be too much work for you the thesis is thirty-something pages, so it's not easily done, is a lot of work for you". En ese momento yo no reaccione como debí haber reaccionado, no pude porque fue el shock me dio muchas emociones que hasta dude. Yo sentí como con su tono dudaba de mis capacidades y fuerzas, y pensé ¿y tu que vas a saber de lo que yo soy capaz? Fue una mujer blanca y para mi fue muy importante eso, porque digo, tu no entiendes un carajo lo que paso ya para que me vengas a decir eso.

"In fact, I had a difficult experience with a counselor, it was before I joined the psychology honors program. She [the counselor] made a few questions and I explain to her that I had a young daughter and older kids, and from everything we talked about after a little while she said something that I will never

forget “I have a daughter and if I were you, I would not enroll in the honors department” those were her exact words, she said in English “I have a young daughter like you and If I were you, I would not try the honors program, it will be too much work for you the thesis is thirty-something pages, so it’s not easily done, is a lot of work for you”. At that moment I didn’t react like I should because of the shock that gave me all types of emotions, that I ended up doubting myself. I felt how with her tone demeaned my capabilities and I thought to myself “What would you know of what I’m capable of?” It was a White woman and that’s important because, I thought, “You don’t know what I go through, for you to come and say that to me”

Rosalia shared that as an Afro-Latina, English learner, Panamanian, immigrant, these types of encounters have been typical, where she is left in shock and affected in multiple levels, even when she has officially made complaints about these interactions at the university, yet her experiences have been that no follow-up or action are taken by departments or universities. She shared that a year after this incident took place, she finally made a complaint in a departmental survey, but to her surprised there was never a follow-up with her.

Celia, shared feeling discriminated by her professors in graduate school when they argued Celia’s spoken accent was difficult to understand, Celia had to ask her advisor to speak on her behalf with the professor to be able to complete the course needed for graduation. She realized that the professor was being intolerant due to his own biases:

> *“Por ejemplo, con unos sí tuve problemas, tanto que mi asesora sí tuvo que ir a intervenir, porque él decía que yo no entendía las cosas, ya casi al final de mi doctorado, era Estadística. Total, al final terminé con una A y hasta me terminó felicitando, pero al principio de la clase fue-- yo sí me cuenta de que él tenía un prejuicio. Un prejuicio por mi acento y por el hecho de ser latina, o mexicana, lo que fuera. Que él se formó ese prejuicio. Cuando hablé con mi asesora, porque él me decía, "If you don't drop the class, you are going to fail". Yo fui a hablar con mi asesora. Mi asesora me dijo, "¿Sabes qué? Lo que pasa es que no es la primera vez que le pasa eso a una alumna que es latina". Mi asesora, que te digo que es una Chicana, tal cual se le echó encima. El profesor era anglosajón. Es que estás rompiendo las ideas que ellos tienen sobre un grupo particular de personas. Les incomoda, porque no hay en donde ponerte, porque es lo que a veces nosotros platicamos, de que aquí están muy acostumbrados a poner a la gente en categorías. Si tú eres esto, eres esto; pero cuando no te pueden poner en una categoría es como que, "¿Tú que eres? ¿De dónde vienes? ¿Qué estás haciendo? No sé dónde ponerte"*

“For example, I did have problems with some [professors], so much so that my advisor did have to intervene, because he said that I didn't understand things, almost at the end of my doctorate, it was in statistics class. At the end I ended up with an A and he even ended up congratulating me, but at the beginning of the class I realized he had a prejudice. A prejudice against my accent and for the fact of being Latina, or Mexican, whatever it was. It was his own bias. I talked to my advisor about this issue because he [the professor] told me, "If you don't drop the class, you are going to fail." I went to talk to

my advisor. My advisor told me, "You know what? This is not the first time that this has happened to a student who is Latina." My adviser, I tell you she is a Chicana, so she went and talk to him. The teacher was Anglo-Saxon. It's because you are breaking the ideas that they have about a particular group of people. It makes them uncomfortable, because there is nowhere to put you, because that is what we sometimes talk about, that here they are very used to putting people into categories. If you are this, you are this; but when they can't put you in a category it's like, "What are you? Where do you come from? What are you doing? I don't know where to put you."

Laura's testimonio shared experiences where at the intersection of ethnicity, and class were driving factors in shaping her first attempt at a master's level and her eventual drop out of the program. Laura remembers working with a Latino professor and experiencing class and ethnicity tensions as although both were Latinos, the professor would remind Laura that she didn't know how this country worked. Her experience touches on the myth that the Latinx community holds one common identity.

> *"Aunque nos llevábamos bien, había esa tensión y siempre que podía, me remarcaba, "Sí, tú serás la verdadera mexicana, pero no tienes el conocimiento que yo tengo ni la has hecho en este país", entonces como que había siempre esa tensión entre los dos".*

"Even though we had a good relationship, that tension was always there, and whenever he remarked "Yes, you might be the authentic Mexican but don't have the knowledge nor have succeeded in this country" so then there was always that tension between the two of us".

Martina, share an experience where the microaggression did not take place at a college campus, however it was centered around the people's reactions to the disruption of the idea that the immigrant can be a student:

> *"Hubo alguna vez que llevando yo mi playera de la Universidad de (X) muy acá, te dicen, "Sí, ha de ser bonito tener la playera sin tener que ir a la escuela." Sin provocarlo, sin nada, pero pensando así, "Tú no sabes cuál es mi experiencia, tú no sabes si realmente yo fui a la escuela, o si la compré de segunda o de tercera, o lo que sea." Mucha gente así que la verdad casi que tienes que enseñarles tu transcript o algo así para que te crean que sí tienes una Carrera"*

There was one time that while I was wearing a university of (x) shirt, very blatantly someone said, "It must be nice to wear the t-shirt without having to attend the school". It was unprovoked, with no reason but thinking like "You don't know what's my experience, you don't know if I really went to that school, or if I bought from a second or third hand store, or whatever". There is a lot of people like that that you have almost show them your transcript or something like that, so they believe you, you have a career.

Motivation the testimonialistas in this study shared in their testimonios, different factors that contributed to their self-motivation and determination to continue with their college journey despite the messages of invisibility, intolerance, and blatant acts of discrimination they experienced. Five out of the eight

testimonialistas mentioned their mothers as principal propulsors encouraging them to further their educational experiences. These encouragements took place early in their lives and they ranged from seeking access to enrolling them in private schools through scholarships or finding extra resources to pay for after school English classes, to openly supporting them and in the disruption of gendering barriers to education such as going against paternal figures limiting their possibilities of education. Two out of the eight participants talked about generational wealth in terms of how it translated into education, for ***Celia*** and ***Laura*** growing up middle-class in Mexico and having parents that had completed some college or graduated from a university meant that going to higher education was always expected of them, as both completed their bachelors in Mexico. Alondra, is a clear example of concept of *ganas*, which can be understood as desire and internal motivation that fueled their persistence despite the challenges they faced in their educational journeys (Gamez et. al. 2017). ***Alondra's*** testimonio highlighted how she's always been an individual focused on academics, which was the driving force that help her obtain a college education in Mexico. ***Lina***, ***Mariela*** and **Ana** specifically mentioned their *ganas* to stay on their respective programs despite feeling unwelcomed or invisible. Becoming *role model* for others resonated among the testimonialistas including being a role model to their children and to the members of their communities in the United States. Finally, family support was an important factor in their determination to attain an education. This type of support took place often on their everyday basis or for some with romantic partners monolinguals of the English language received support with the English language in the forms of editing or reviewing academic materials for submission.

Social Capital as Support

Social capital was the main support all the testimonialistas mentioned on their educational journey in the U.S. higher education system. Social capital can be understood as networks of people and community resources where they trust one another to build cultural capital through the cultivation of personal relationships and acquisition of networking skills that helps them navigate society's institutions in all

realms (Stanton-Salazar 2001 & Fits & McClure, 2015). All testimonialistas highlighted the importance of social capital in their academic experiences and how they made a point to specifically be of assistance to others to encourage them to either enroll in higher education or continue their journey.

Alondra has made it her mission to share her knowledge with other immigrants in her position as much as she can with them about how to access higher education in the United States, as she remembers how difficult it was for her to obtain information, in her testimonio she mentioned:

> *"Yo conozco como dos personas que les dijeron, "Es que tú no puedes estudiar", y ahí se quedaron con su sueño roto y yo ahora lo que estoy haciendo es-- Mi misión es decirles, "¿Sabes? Sí puedes, sí puedes y sí se puede, busca a fulano, busca a fulana de tal, ellos te van a orientar, porque sí hay los fondos, sí hay los recursos y sí lo puedes hacer"".*

"I know two people [another adult immigrant English learners and undocumented] that were told "You can't study [here]" and they were left with their broken dream, so now what I'm doing, it is my mission, to tell them "You know? Yes, you can study here and it's possible, go look for x person here or x person there, they will advise you because there are funds and there are resources, and yes you can do it".

Lack of Resources The women in this research project reported feeling a lack of resources to meet their individual needs as Nontraditional English learner adult immigrant Latina students. The testimonialistas mentioned how their invisibility at the campus translated in a lack of resources for them. This lack of resources varied from lack of knowledge about their specific population of students to the inability to help them. For example, while Lina was trying to enhance her computer literacy skills, the school simply were under the assumption that their student population already have mastered those skills before coming to campus. The testimonialistas mentioned how they could not find academic advisors and tutors that were familiar with their journey or department providing information about financial aid or counselling services within the colleges and universities.

4.4 Significance of the study for the testimonialistas

Documenting the experiences of nontraditional, English learner, immigrant, adult Latina students explored the myth that Latinx are a monolithic group (Adames & Chavez-Dueñas, 2017), stressing how different sub-groups within the Latinx communities in the United States face different access to education when issues of gender, language, immigration status, ethnicity, culture, identity among others

(Delgado Bernal & Solórzano, 2001). The findings in this study were of particular interest to the testimonialistas, as they expressed their interest to participate in the study specifically because of the invisibility they have felt in their journeys to higher education. The last open-ended question in the section covering questions about higher education from the in-depth interview, ask participants if there was any other information that they wished to add or share about their life or journey in higher education. The participants used this space to name several topics, but one theme that kept coming back was the significance of this study for them. Here are their testimonio extracts on the importance of this type of research, and based on their individual narrative what specifically was meaningful to them in this research that addressed the different experiences of Latinx in higher education, highlighting the invisibility of nontraditional, English learner, immigrant, adult Latina students:

Celia
(Invisibility of immigrant professionals in higher education)

> *"Se me hace muy interesante tu estudio, por eso fue que me intereso participar. Porque si he visto y he sentido como mujer y como mujer inmigrante, que somos una población invisible. O sea, mujer inmigrante y profesionista es así como que no existimos. No están nuestras voces, no nos escuchan. No nos preguntan, entonces se me hizo muy interesante por eso fue que me intereso participar y creo que es de lo más importante y es lo que nos hace falta. Somos una población invisible, usualmente no se habla del inmigrante que es profesionista, el que está en higher education, el que está en otros niveles, en otras industrias. No somos una minoría, pero no contamos, no se nos hablan de nosotros. No se habla de nuestras historias ni nada, entonces por eso se me hizo importante."*

I think your study is very interesting, that's why I was interested in participating. Because I have seen it and I have felt it, that as woman, and as an immigrant woman we are a invisible population. I mean, being an immigrant and a professional is like we don't exist. Our voices are not there, we are not heard. We are not asked, then that's why I thought it was so interesting, it is important, and it is something that has been missing. We are an invisible population, usually the immigrant that is also a professional is never spoken about, the one that is in higher education, the one that has reached other levels, in different industries. We are not a minority, but we don't count, no one talks about us. No one talks about our stories, so that's why I thought it was important.

Mariela

(Equal access to education for nontraditional, English learner, immigrants)

"Es un tema muy importante que tú estás tomando y que te agradezco mucho, porque no hay de este tipo de trabajos que se estén haciendo, cómo este trabajo puede ayudar y que a lo mejor es el primero de muchos más que vengan en el futuro, porque espero que este sea el pie o el comienzo de una nueva etapa donde podamos abrir más puertas y hacer más fácil la entrada a la gente que quiere seguir estudiando. Estoy hablando de las mujeres de color, la mujer latina, la mujer negra, estamos hablando porque sabemos que la gente blanca tiene el acceso prácticamente a todo, pero nosotras no, no porque hablemos dos idiomas vamos a-- Son gente que puede decir, "O son más lentas o aprenden más despacio," sí, está bien, pero eso no impide que nosotros seamos inteligentes igual o más que otro tipo de personas, eso es lo que me gustaría agradecer, el trabajo que estás haciendo y creo que este es el comienzo de algo mayor que va a venir, porque la gente tiene que escuchar lo que estamos viviendo. Cómo hacer que el acceso a la escuela sea más fácil, sea menos complicado, para que la gente tenga más ganas de estudiar y que no tenga pretextos de que, "No voy porque no puedo" porque sí les creo [ríe] Otros dicen, "Es que no puedo porque no me aceptaron, o ¿por qué tú sí?" Sí te lo creo, pero que no haya pretextos, que la gente pueda tener acceso a la educación porque se lo merece."

This is a very important topic that you are exploring, and I appreciate very much because there are not studies like it being conducted, like this one -that can help and maybe is the first ones of many more to come in the future, because I hope this is the foundation or the beginning of a new phase where we can open more doors and to help make easier the access [to education] to the people that want to continue studying. I am talking about women of color, Latina women, the Black woman, we are talking about it because we know that White people have access to practically everything, but not us, not because we speak two languages people can say "they are slower or they learn at a slower pace" yes, probably, but that's not an impediment to be as smart as anyone, and this is what I would like to thank you [to the researcher] for the work that you are doing, and I think this is the beginning of something bigger, because people has to listen what we are experiencing [in higher education]. How to make access to school easier, less complicated, so people will have more determination to study and drop the excuses like "I am not going because I can't [get in] because, yes I believe them [she laughs] or others may say "I can't go because I did not get in, or how come you got in?" I know is true, but there should not be excuses, people should have access to education because they deserve it.

Alondra

(Testimonio process as source empowerment & healing)

"Lo único que quiero decir es gracias, porque como tú dices, a veces hay cosas que tú las sabes y las tienes, pero cuando las cuentas, dices, "Es cierto, ya no me acordaba de esto". Como que te reconectas con tu ser, contigo, con lo que estás haciendo. A lo mejor si no estás bien conectada, te planteas si lo que estás haciendo, te está haciendo sentir bien. Yo soy afortunada porque lo que estoy haciendo me hace sentir bien. Ojalá que otras mujeres que tú entrevistes se replanteen también si lo que están haciendo, las está haciendo sentir bien. Si se sienten exitosas, como dices. Muy agradecida"

The only thing I want to say is thank you, because like you say [the researcher], sometimes there are things you know and you have, but when you tell them, you realize "it's true, I'd forgotten about this". You reconnect with your being, with yourself, with what you are doing. Maybe if you are not well connected with yourself, you consider if what you are doing makes you feel good [education path]. I am lucky because what I am doing makes me feel good [about myself]. I hope the other women you will interview also take a moment to consider if what they are doing, is making them feel good about themselves. If the feel successful, like you said. I am thankful.

Laura

(Importance of positionality in research)

"Lo que estás haciendo para mí es como-- Siento que la verdad estás haciendo historia, porque estoy aprendiendo que la investigación es personal- que no se ve asi-- ¿Me entiendes? Tiene que ver con eso. Y que es una cuestión social, ¿no? Y quien hace la investigación es muy importante, es lo que he aprendido. Entonces, que tú lo estés haciendo, una mujer, mexicana, viviendo aquí, para mí-- Se me enchina la piel- y digo, "Guau, qué-qué afortunados somos de tener a alguien como tú que pone atención a estos puntos" so, muchas gracias."

What you are doing, for me is like, I feel honestly that you are making history, because I am learning that research is personal, although that's not how it is seen –you know? But it has to do with it [personal]. And that it is a social issue, right? And that is very important who conducts the research, is what I have learned. Then, the fact that you, a Mexican woman, living here [United States], for me -it gives me goosebumps and I think "wow, how lucky we are to have someone like you paying attention to these topics" so thank you very much.

Rosalia

(To help and empower other immigrant women)

> "Gracias por hacer esto, esta tan necesario, tan necesario yo espero que tu estudio sea usado para ayudar a otras mujeres inmigrantes y solo…solo empujar… hacer llamado, aun cuando se vea muy duro, aun cuando se vea imposible, porque yo lo veía así, yo lo veía imposible, seguir poquito a poco. Poquito a poco, aun si toma, agarrar, ay, Dios mío, quedarse en la escuela a agarrar un diploma que le tome mucho más de cuatro años, bueno le tomo más de cuatro años, pero lo obtuviste, es la jornada y ese conocimiento lo que le va a abrir más puertas a uno"

Thank you for doing this, it is very needed, so needed and I hope your research is used to help other immigrant women and only…only to keep going, I want to say that even when things turn difficult, when it looks almost impossible, that's how I saw it: impossible, keep going, little by little. Little by little even if it takes longer than four years to get a degree, well so what it took more than four years, but you got it, it is the journey and the knowledge that is what will open more doors for one.

Six of the eight testimonialistas, shared in their testimonios the importance my study had for them. All the testimonialistas made comments throughout their testimonios about how participating in the interview gave them a space where they could look back at their journey and appreciated the battles fought as they gained new perspectives of empowerment in recognizing their resilience. By following the testimonio tradition in my role as a listener departing from my specific positionality also as a nontraditional, English learner, immigrant, adult Latina, I created and provided a space where the testimonialistas reclaimed their voices and visibility in a journey that often gave them a sense of not belonging. During the call for participants, I was very surprised to discover that there was another Latinx subgroup of students who wanted to participate in the study: international students. I received several emails from various international students in different phases of their academic journeys who were extremely interested in participating in my research, unfortunately the study design did not allow (I will speak more about this topic in the future work section). The significance of my study as noted by my participants is that testimonio as a method of research can satisfy the need to closely analyze how inequalities surface in the journeys of a unfranchised groups of students. My study engages in pushing forward with methodologies that can effectively analyze and reflect in the institutional system and the

unequal access to education for different groups of people, particularly from a gender studies perspective. A feminist methodological approach such as testimonio can highlight the different oppressors and their impact on people's lives, not only in education, but across different spheres such as labor, political systems, access to health etc., while shedding light on strategies of resistance to access the coveted resources.

4.5 Testimonialistas Journeys

It is important to consider that the journeys of the women that took part in this research are more complicated than these findings can highlight. Their journeys involved the sacrifice of leaving family and friends behind in some cases to never to see them again. It is nearly impossible to breakdown their life journeys in a few themes because that is leaving out the heartbreak of leaving one's homeland, and it can't possibly showcase the resilience needed along the journey or the state of feeling afraid and isolated in a new country yet getting strength every day to find a brighter future for them and their loved ones. Chapter four analyze the educational journeys of eight Nontraditional English learner adult immigrant Latina students. Their testimonios help collect the data needed to answer the research questions but also to shed light in their educational journey as they face racial and gendering experiences while navigating academic invisibilizing hostile environments of education. The next and final chapter will discuss the implications and educational impact of these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE:
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND SIGNIFICANCY OF THE STUDY

5.1 Overview and review of the study

This dissertation project explored the experiences of nontraditional English learners (EL), adult Latina immigrants, and their higher educational attainment, a research topic that has received limited coverage across academic disciplines. In this final chapter, I revisit the study overview and the three research questions that guided the project. Second, I present the significance and contributions of my study, and finally, I provide recommendations and address limitations and future research. This research project, guided by the testimonios of nontraditional students, English learner, and adult immigrant women from Latin America, sought to capture information about their path to higher education and the access that they followed, the gendered and racialized experiences, and their impact on the participants' education and finally it sought to identify how the participants successfully navigated the United States higher education system at the undergraduate and graduate level. As a minority within a minority, nontraditional, EL, adult immigrant Latinx students entering the United States higher education system are navigating college access in a system new to them. Their access path is very different from that of Latinx peers who attended the K-12 education system in the United States or international students for whom universities create paths such as passing the English as a Foreign Language test (TOEFL) before applying to a United States university. The study was intentional in utilizing a methodology that gave participants a space to share their individual experiences in the U.S. higher education system and to collectively reclaim their academic journeys as they resonated with one another. My testimonio along with the testimonios of eight other nontraditional student, English learner, adult immigrant women from Latin America become a way to move past resistance collaborating with others in naming our experiences as a demographic of students whose academic challenges are currently invisible in the higher education system of the United States. This next section examines the impact of racial and

gendered microaggressions on the participants experiences as they share individual and collective experiences within the academic institution of higher education.

5.2 Me quieren para barrer no para aprender: testimonios revealing the impact on their educational experiences.

In the last decade researchers across different social sciences disciplines have broadened their scopes to include a framework of analysis that can reveal the impact of race, class, and gender among other labels of categorization in our everyday life. Scholar and researcher Lindsey Perez- Hubber points out that in education research testimonio works as a "verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, class, gendered, and nativist injustices that they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a humane present and future" (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 644). This section will discuss the major findings framed through an analysis of Chicana/ Latina feminists theories, critical race & latcrit theories, migration studies, intersectionality and positionality as the insider, I employed these frameworks to better understand the testimonialistas experiences in education when impacted by issues of race, national origin, ethnicity, phenotype, class, gender, gender orientation among other categories of identity in their journey to attain higher education while attending on its majority historically White institutions.

This dissertation captured emergent themes that analyzed through a feminist and critical race frameworks highlighted how systems of oppressions directly impacts the educational experiences of nontraditional students, English learner, adult immigrant women from Latin America currently facing in higher education. The seven emergent themes as listed in chapter four were: migration (subthemes: acculturation & transnationalism), familial gendering experiences, educational systems (two major subthemes: educational attainment and structural barriers), discrimination, motivation/*ganas,* social capital as support, and lack of resources, provided examples to better understand how intersecting forms of oppression take shape in the academic lives of the participants.

Migration (subthemes: transnationalism & acculturation)

The connection between unequal educational access and migration vas highlighted for all participants as people who migrated in adult age. The characteristics of adult immigrants are often most visible by the fact that they will experience linguistic oppression (Fotheringham, 2017), as immigrants who typically are monolingual for the first 20-30 years of their lives. ***Celia's*** testimonio highlight the biases faced by English learners in higher education. Her graduate academic journey reflects the particularities of being an immigrant, she remembers feeling discriminated by her professors in graduate school when they argued Celia's spoken accent was difficult to understand, the gravity of her situation at the time could have threaten her academic career as the professor was asking Celia to drop the class because he was sure she was going to fail. Fortunately, Celia had a supportive advisor who advocated but her and help her remained in the class after speaking to the biased professor.

The testimonio of ***Ana*** also highlighted this linguist biases that is faced by adult immigrants. She mentioned how her professors at the master's program could not see past her grammatical mistakes in her academic work and ignore the content of her essays. She remembers being told to go back to ESL classes by these professors, to which she answered them that she was a monolingual speaker for 39 years and had already taken all available ESL classes. Ana, was able to advocate for herself and to not let these unsupportive and damaging comments made by the professor affect her decision to seek and education. Similarly, own experience as an immigrant in my first community college level class provided me with a hostile and culturally insensitive academic climate, when the professor (an immigrant but self-proclaim republican) would encourage academic discussions in the classroom where my peers that shared her views would feel comfortable speaking about how "Mexicans were illegal and stealing jobs". As an adult Mexican immigrant this caused me to feel unwelcome and physically feel the impact in my body when I would sharp stomach pains prior to entering the class. At the time my native English speaking-life partner was my only source of support to face these types of academic hostile environment. The testimonio of the Ana & Celia added to my testimonio highlight the rejection in

higher education of immigrants who present linguistic markers that easily identify them as immigrants, but in particularly those who migrated in adult age. The impact on our educational journeys is directly felt as rejection, as not being worthy of attending higher education in particularly when the immigrant experience already includes the traumatic emotional impact of journeys of displacement.

Transnationalism (subtheme):

All the testimonialistas reported the importance of remaining connected with their families in their countries of origin, especially those who had economic responsibilities to fulfill. ***Martina's*** testimonio highlighted the communal aspect of Latin American cultures in terms of responsibility and resources, as in her testimonio she shared how she still financially supports as much as she can to those who were left behind. As a transnational immigrant myself and first generation to graduate from a university, I face family responsibilities as I am expected to help navigate situations that arise in my family, I both side of the border; in my family in the United States and in my family located back in my country of origin. The impact of transnationalism practices in my population of research is highly visible as transnational immigrants not only do we face learning new education systems but also family responsibilities and financial pressures from both, our countries of origin and our receptor countries.

Acculturation (subtheme):

As mentioned in chapter four, each testimonialista expressed their sense of better understanding life in the United States and attributed it to being acculturated into U.S. society in specific aspects of their lives such as being bilingual, having been in the country a decade or more and making emotional and cultural connections in the United States, and some by establishing life-partnership relationships with monolingual speakers of English or being more involved in their communities, yet still feeling connected with their place of origin (Page, 2006; Yrigollen-Robbins, 2022). When I asked the participants if they saw a return to their countries of origin in a future, the answer for all of them was "not completely". They have invested in establishing a life in the United States, many of them have raised children here or came with children who were young teens at the time and now those children

grown and established and formed families of their own. All the women mentioned their involvement with their communities as volunteers with organizations involved in activities that aim at helping new immigrants learn to navigate the United States society.

Alondra, specifically has made it her mission to share her knowledge with other immigrants in her position and she shares as much as she can with them about how access higher education in the United States. Alondra pointed out that the road to education in the United States is very complicated for adult immigrants, she noted that higher education institutions are not familiar with adult immigrants wanting to go into higher education. The impact on their educational journeys is that this type of information is left out of the classroom, this is valuable information that could help universities' staff (faculty and personal) not only see the participants' struggles but will help them understand their triumphs and their investment in being a member of the United States society, just like the rest of their national origin students. The least a university is informed about the groups of population on their campuses, the less they will be able to equally serve them. This lack of knowledge in-turn transforms in the failure to properly train their faculty and staff about the populations they will be serving.

Gendering experiences:

The women that participated in this research identified gendering experiences intersecting with their access to education all throughout their life journeys, experiences that first began within the family structure, yet continued throughout their lives and especially in higher education. Their testimonios emphasized how gendered dynamics took place in their everyday lives and impact their experiences with higher education. For example, Laura's testimonio highlighted the fact that she kept on postponing her going to graduate school because she felt that as a stay-at-home wife did not have sources of her own to pay for tuition and although her husband was a doctor making a comfortable salary, his poor money management never let them have the needed funds for her tuition. At a different point she was about to finally return to school, when her husband felt-ill and she was expected to take on a nurse-like responsibilities, so she postponed her graduate school journey once more.

The following testimonios analysis were originally reported in the data under different categories, however the common denominator for both of their differential and discriminatory experiences was gender, so it is important to analyze them from a gender standpoint as well. For example, ***Martina's*** testimonio about the simple act of seeking information as a nontraditional, English learner, immigrant Latina student, about transferring to a 4-year university from a community college is impacted by how gender is read in immigrant women by U.S. society at large (Hurtado, 2005; Lopez 2013). Martina's interaction captured an everyday interaction where English learners, adult nontraditional students are invisibilized in the educational system of the U.S. Her testimonio recounts an experience when she was already a student at a community college. She attended a transfer college fair to find out information about local bachelor's programs, at the time she was in her early forties when the staff attending the information booth could only see Martina as a mother seeking information for their children. The fact that she's immediately read as a "mother" is rooted on stereotypical notions of adult immigrants, effectively invisibilizing them as potential students. College campuses very much like the rest of society uphold stereotypes about adult immigrants, they are only seen as part of the labor force or as parents trying to find out information for their children.

Testimonio methodology as a qualitative method of research allows for an in-depth analysis of the educational challenges' adult immigrant encounter on college campuses because it takes into consideration the *social location*[13] and context of the testimonialista positionality (Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). ***Rosalia's*** testimonio revealed how interactions with a White, female community college advisor were impacted by the advisors' social constructs of gender, directly interfering with Rosalia's education opportunities. Rosalia recalled how the counselor at a community

[13] The groups people belong to because of their place or position in history and society. All people have a social location that is defined by their gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic location. Each group membership confers a certain set of social roles and rules, power, and privilege (or lack of), which heavily influence our identity and how we see the world ("People's Experiences of Oppression").

college advised her against joining an Honors Program because the advisor knew that Rosalia had a young daughter at the time. The counselor said to Rosalia "I have a daughter and if I were you, I would not enroll in the honors department", Rosalia was never clear about why she said that to her. The advisor's salient notions of gender directly interfered with Rosalia's education plan. Both Martina and Rosalia's testimonios present an opportunity to examine how gender was a factor for receiving differential treatment while trying to access an equal education. For both women, the way others made assumptions about their real or imagined motherhoods became a roadblock in their journey to higher education.

Educational systems (two major subthemes: educational attainment and structural barriers):

The testimonialistas in this research project reported how difficult it was to navigate a system that has not register having students with their specific type of profile and their needs. Isolation, feeling invisible, lack of support and an overall struggle to navigate a system that doesn't recognize nontraditional, English learner, adult Latin American immigrant students as a demographic group in the United States higher education system. All testimonialistas reveled having a hard time finding information to learn about how the U.S., higher education system works because when they would approach the schools and staff. Their experiences highly resonated with mine, where I remember trying to find information on financial aid and the financial aid officer telling me that I did qualify to fill out a FAFSA form (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), or meeting with academic advisors who would discourage me from continuing to higher education because they had no training in serving students like us.

Similar Lina, Martina, Mariela and Alondra all had specific interactions where they were simply could not obtain information from community colleges and universities about becoming a student there. While community colleges and universities have designated programs to provide orientation about the process of becoming a student, a group demographic such as the foreign-born and raised, nontraditional students is not in their radar. As mentioned in chapter two, the current existing structural process of

higher education severely ignores the adult immigrants that never entered the k-12 education system in the U.S. and are not in the country as international students. Instead, this population is addressed in policies such as Career Pathways driving the two-year colleges curricula to channel adult English learner students only into career-readiness training certificate shorter than the associate degree. These types of policies are managed by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), where access to higher education is not offered to their target population.

The current U.S. system of higher education simply does not equate adult, immigrant arrivals as potential students; they are only seen as producers of labor and through institutionalized polices treated as such. In the case of the Latinx community, unfortunately the population in this research project is equally absent from the research work of national organizations and institutions leading the advancement of *all* Latinx students. For nontraditional, English learner immigrant Latina students, not being a recognizable demographic has detrimental repercussions for their path to access higher education, as we learned through the testimonios offered by the women of this research project. The impact on their education is immeasurable as this is a population that must rely on their determination to successfully enroll and remain in the United States higher education system without established institutional support.

Educational attainment:

Vast literacy research on new immigrants have established that educational attainment can vary extensively depending on the country of origin (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015). For the Latinx community in the United States, Mexicans and Central Americans have typically been at the lowest of the educational attainment (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015., pg. 249). However, in the last few years several demographic reports on new immigrants have revealed that immigrants today are most likely to be better educated than their counterparts of 50 years ago (Lopez, Mark Hugo et al. 2015). Falling in line with these recent reports, the women that took part in this study had higher levels of educational attainment when they arrived in

the United States. From the eight women that participated, four arrived with a college degree, two had partially attended a university or technical college and the final two had graduated from high school. It is important to highlight that high school completion was the lowest educational attainment for the testimonialistas when they originally arrived, placing them at an advantage over the general percentage of immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean who have less education than a high school degree (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015., pg. 252).

However, differently from prior waves of immigrants, completing a high school education has become more feasible than in the past. Immigrants in the United States now have access to high school completion programs from local community colleges and programs sponsored by governments of different countries from Latin America with a high number of immigrants in the United States. Such is the case of Mexico, where it has established academic partnerships with local non-profit organizations to bring high school completion and online remote learning college education for their nationals residing in the United States (Gomez, 2022). The testimonialistas educational journey in the United States greatly benefited from arriving with more education than the typical demographics, as it facilitated enrollment in graduate studies for three of them, and possibly more tools to the remaining testimonialistas as they navigated through post-secondary education.

Discrimination:

As mentioned in chapter four this was an anticipated theme. All the testimonialistas named negative interactions with faculty or administrative personal not only in the classroom but on campus. The interactions listed below are undoubtfully rooted in institutional racism, impacting the testimonialista's journeys in multiple levels and creating sentiments of from isolation, hostile teaching environments to limiting learning opportunities. Some of these examples were:

Race & gender: Rosalia's interactions with a White academic counselor who limited her educational options based on how the academic advisor read Rosalia's social location.

Ethnicity: Laura's interactions with a Latino professor whose own issues of identity were reflected on his negative treatment towards Laura making unacceptable statements such as "Yes, you might be the authentic Mexican but don't have the knowledge nor have succeeded in this country".

Nationality: The testimonialistas reported issues of conflict with other Latinx groups debunking the myth of the one unified identity. In chapter one I as well recounted the microaggressions I faced in class with the professor who would hold discussions on "illegal immigrants from Mexico" and as self-identified republican, she made sure her classroom was not a welcoming space to Mexican and Mexican-American students.

Immigration status: Alondra shared not feeling safe when in a meeting with her office her academic advisor she would switch to start speaking in Spanish, according to the advisor this was done to protect Alondra undocumented status from other personal or staff from finding out. These types of statements would let Alondra wondering about why she would not be safe around them, what could they do if they find out about her undocumented status.

Language proficiency (English): Celia spoke English when she arrived in the U.S., as she graduated from *Tecnológico de Monterrey* the most prestigious university in Mexico which instructs some of its classes in advanced English. However, at a point in her graduate studies she had to ask her advisor to speak on her behalf with a professor that claimed Celia's English to be inadequate for the university classes. The professor was asking Celia to drop out of his class, a class that Celia needed for her program requirements. In her testimonio Celia theorized that the professor's biases were driving his thought process in the sense that he was not familiar with immigrants who spoke with marked accents and were his students, enrolled in higher education classes.

Motivation/ganas: As explained in chapter four, *determination* was a key factor for all the testimonialistas to remain in their paths seeking higher education access.

Lack of academic resources & social capital as support:

These two themes highlighted the impact of on equal access to education and presented a glimpse into the strategies that the women in this research project executed to remain in their search for higher education. The testimonios named a lack of resources to meet the testimonialistas individual goals and needs as Nontraditional, English learner, adult immigrant, Latina students. Their educational journeys found unequal access to education and invisibility due to the lack of understanding about students with their demographic profiles by colleges and universities. For example, the poor understanding about immigrant monolingual speakers and their imperfect language skills after being monolinguals of Spanish for 20-30 years, the low level of technical literacy for some students that differ from the traditional students' skills, and the Lack of transparency on educational paths for this specific demographic. Social

capital was the main strategy that the testimonialistas embody to navigate teaching environments lacking support. The women reveled in their testimonios the importance of the practice of social capital, always asking questions an even if they received a negative response, the cultivation of relationships that would facilitate a better understanding about the lack of transparency of the higher education system for Nontraditional, English learner, adult immigrant, Latina students.

5.3 Findings analysis: answering the three research questions

This study utilized testimonio as a method of research with the intention to allow the researcher to seek truthful accounts based on first-hand witness reports, and to allow the participants the freedom to highlight the impact of their educational experiences. The themes that emerged from the testimonio interviews captured an array of issues including of race and gender in their journeys to higher education. I approached the data analysis using Chicana feminist theory, Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) along with migration studies theory to better capture, understand, validate, and honor the women's experiences in higher education. The following section reviews the three research questions that guided this study and provides answers based on the findings.

***Question One:** What were the education paths that adult Latin American immigrant women followed to access and succeed in the U.S higher education system?*

This question aimed at identifying and understanding if there is a specific pathway for college access. First it was highlighted that six out of the eight testimonialistas experienced a ten-year timeline from time of arrival before accessing higher education. Factors such as acquiring the English language and learning to navigate their new country (settling in the U.S.) played an important role in the delay. The data showed that five out of the eight testimonialistas first enrolled in community colleges first when seeking access to undergraduate education and eventually transferred to four-year institutions, the remaining three testimonialistas enrolled directly in graduate programs as they had completed their undergraduate education in their countries of origin. However, the testimonios collected indicated that structural barriers were present all along their pathway to education. The testimonios detailed a lack of information, administrators and staff provided insufficient and incorrect information, or simply were told that there was no place for them in higher education. The testimonialistas experiences including

myself, demonstrated that the higher education system of the United States it is yet to provide a clear path to education for nontraditional, English learner, adult immigrant students.

<u>Question two:</u> How do their testimonios reveal the gendered and racialized journey to college attainment?

This question was designed to highlight the systems of oppression immigrant adult women from Latin America face in their everyday life, added to the systemic racism and other forms of oppression they encountered in their educational journey. As anticipated the emergent themes from their testimonios provided examples of gender oppression in their countries and communities of origin. First, beginning within the family structure by having males potentially influence their access to education by statin low expectations and lack of support to continue studying. The gendered experiences continued in higher education where the testimonialistas experienced stereotyping in college campus as they were seeing as adult Latina immigrants who must be "mothers" looking for information for their children. Their classroom experienced was racialized, as the testimonialistas encountered hostile classroom environments, microaggressions based on race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, language, age and phenotype. These microaggressions resulted in isolation, education inequities, experiencing hostile-teaching environments where they did not feel welcome.

<u>Question three:</u> How can an intersectional discussion of their academic journey depict the privileges and barriers that came into place for immigrant Latin American women to defy spaces where they have only been seen as laborers?

This question was designed to amplify the voices of struggle, and the voices of resilience as the testimonialistas faced different sets of inequities in education based on their social location while they navigated systemic racism and other forms of oppression. I utilized an intersectional analysis, critical race theory (CRT) framework, and immigration studies to better understand how the testimonialistas intersecting identities facilitated or complicated access to higher education and what strategies of survival were employed by the testimonialistas to help them not only access a college education but remain there and obtained a degree. Two out of the eight testimonialistas arrived in the United States with enough language skills to enter higher education before the ten-year timeline. Both of these

testimonialistas came from middle to higher economic classes, while the remaining six testimonialistas did not have language skills when they arrived in the country. Racialized experiences were more prominent when the testimonialistas had visible markers of othering such as darker skin color or were racialized black. Speaking English with a Spanish interference also place the participants at risk for biased interactions with faculty and administrative personnel. All testimonialistas experienced oppression based on different categories of identity, which ultimately plays an important factor in facilitating access to higher educated in the United States. All testimonialistas experienced decreased sense of belonging based on different biased interactions with faculty and personnel, and a sense of invisibility based on their main identity ascriptions in this group such as being a nontraditional student (older student), English learner adult student. Determination played an important role on their persistence to education despite facing innumerable racial and gendered microaggressions.

5.4 Significance and Contributions

Qualitative research across disciplines strives to present information that captures all dimensions of the lived experience (Denzin & Norman, 2005) Over the last few decades scholars have incorporated new categories of analysis to create methodologies that can effectively reflect the reality of their study subjects. My research project selected testimonio as a method of research, precisely to reveal how the educational experiences of the participants were shaped by their different social locations. I was equally interested in learning about the knowledge gained in their higher education journeys and on the strategies of resistance they created as they encountered systematic oppression. This was achieved by using a theoretical framework that included, my positionality as "insider", Chicana/ Latina feminist epistemologies, intersectionality, critical race theory and latcrit and migration studies to analyze and learn about my partcipant's different journeys connected to the attainment of education in the United States. Engaging in the process of *testimonear* created a space where the women documented their own stories of struggles and resistance as they gave visibility to their lived experience, they had the

opportunity to physically be heard by the researcher to symbolically "denounce racial and social injustice and allows for the repositioning of power in the traditional academic roles of researcher (Perez-Huber 2009, p.644). The contributions of this study highlighted three areas of interest: 1) to use testimonio as a decolonial method of research where alternative knowledges are valued and produced to be used as strategies of resistance and survival. 2) to denounce education inequalities in a system that severely ignores or denies them and 3) to create a participating process that allows the participants to voice their memories connected with painful experiences, but also opens a space to reflect on their resilience producing a counternarrative that disrupts the educational discourse about adult immigrants in the United States and their educational attainment journeys.

5.6 Study recommendations for universities administrative & faculty personal in practice & policy

Educational institutions in the United States face a small but growing number of adult English learners seeking access to postsecondary education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015, 2017, 2019), yet little is known about the best ways to support them successfully. As an intersectional group of students, the nontraditional, English learner, immigrant, adult Latinx student group faces a severe gap in education research were little is known about them. Research applicable to this group tends to center on Latinx students transitioning from high school to colleges and universities or the nontraditional student's population tends to reflect the experiences U.S. born and raised monolingual students that previously went through the k-12 education system (Tinto, 2012). The existing literature about different groups of underrepresented students reveals a clear gap in research regarding intersectional groups such as the nontraditional students and English learner, immigrant, adult Latina students (Sims & Barnett, 2015).

The testimonios in this research project are significant for educators, researchers, and policy makers to better understand systematic racism in higher education and how nontraditional, English learner, immigrant, adult Latina students navigated around institutional gatekeeping practices such discriminatory English policies applicable to English learners (Ramirez Arreola, 2015). My immediate

goal is to publish the findings of this study (in Spanish and English) via the appropriate journals, I will also be participating in workshops and conference panels to disseminate and share the results to higher education institutions. I have created new curriculum utilizing the pedagogical teaching practices of testimonio where I teach my students to engage in digital scholarship by creating digital testimonios, centering on their higher education experiences. I will be directing the project *Testimonios of Education*, which it will be an educative, online resource that will showcase the digital testimonios of non-White students and their experiences in primary, secondary and post-secondary education in the U.S. from an intersectional mode of analysis. Finally, I will continue to teach workshops for nontraditional, English learner, adult Latinx immigrants interested in seeking access to higher education.

The data findings established through the method of testimonio revealed a climate of invisibility and marginalization experienced by the testimonialistas, where institutional injustices were part of the academic journey as they sought access to attain a higher education degree. College and universities must acknowledge the tremendous growth in diverse groups of students seeking access to higher education and revise their current institutional policies and practices that will have a positive impact on guiding the student to navigate higher education, instead of acting as gatekeeping practices as many currently do (Sims & Barnett, 2015). The following are **strategies in practice** to establish equal education access to nontraditional, English learner, immigrant, adult Latinx students:

1. College and universities must provide intersectional diversity mandatory trainings to their faculty and administrative personnel centering around understanding the nuances of different nontraditional student group demographics such as English learners.
2. College and universities must provide mandatory trainings to their faculty and administrative personnel that address the serious impact of hostile academic climates which often can signify the end to students' academic journeys.
3. Academic institutions in the United States must become knowledgeable of their international and immigrant student population from an intersectional perspective, contextualizing different labels of identity such as race, class, gender etc. This can be done by tapping into local resources and

establishing partnerships with local organizations working with the state's different immigrant populations.

4. College navigation offices must be a permanent resource in campuses across higher education, services provided must address the different needs students with intersectional profiles have, such as international students, English learner immigrant students, first generation, and 1.5 generation students. Understanding the different needs based on their intersectional profiles can help assess the resources and support needed by the student, while helping the student engage with the campus academic life.

The following are **strategies in policy** to establish equal education access to nontraditional, English learner, immigrant, adult Latinx students:

1. Establish institutional policies that evaluate and analyze educational inequities in program access impacting marginalized and underrepresented communities, such as enforcing the requirement of English language classes regardless of already competent English skills.
2. Utilize testimonio methodology to collect student data through exit surveys in a two-fold manner, a) by applying open ended questions that allow the students to name obstacles and support in their college experiences; b) exit surveys applicable to students dropping out and successfully graduating students, this data can critically access the areas where the institution needs to expand to provide better services for its students.
3. The creation of policies that specifically addresses services and support to the nontraditional college population and their needs, by staying up to date on current research inquiry about this population.

These are only a few recommendations based on this research findings that reflect the many complexities and nuances of the different and unique college journeys. College and universities understand that the demographics are continually changing in the academic landscape, especially after the COVID-19 world pandemic of 2020 where there was an increase of nontraditional students' demographics across campuses around the nation (Bab et al., 2021; Fitzgerald, 2022).

5.7 Limitations

The design of this research study limited the population to self-identified immigrant women from Latin America who came to the United States in adult age (after age 18) and did not attend the United

States K-12 education system. Although the participants were represented four Latin-American countries, they were mostly of mestizo identities (the dominant ethnic national group in Latin America). The study lacked racial representation by not locating participants that self-identified as indigenous, and only had one self-identified person of African descent. The study excluded the participation of U.S. raised women of color of Latin American descent and eliminated the participation of male students. All participants were from public colleges and universities, lacking data from private academic institutions. During the interview there was full disclosure of my positionality as a fellow nontraditional, English learner, Mexican immigrant, adult this was necessary to create a space where participants experiences would feel validated.

5.8 Future Scholarly Work

The findings presented in this research project highlighted the forms of racialized and gendered experiences in nontraditional, English learner, adult immigrant Latinas seeking access to the U.S. higher education system. The following recommendations for future research are based on this research project expanding on the collective experience of invisibility and its impact on this group of growing students' demographics.

1. ***Expand research on nontraditional students:*** nontraditional students is still a fairly well-establish concept, however researchers must use an intersectional framework of analysis to expand the term definition and incorporate other identities to the nontraditional student profile such as adult immigrants to the United States, who are English learners and seeking access to higher education.
2. ***International students focused research:*** during the open call for this research project for nontraditional, English learner, adult immigrant students there was a surprising number of international students that contacted me eager to tell their experiences with race and gender as international students in the United States.
3. ***Self-identified male group:*** at the time of writing this dissertation I was not able to find case study focusing on nontraditional, English learner, adult immigrant male students seeking access to higher education. It is of outmost importance to document their male experience to have a

more nuanced understanding of what the racialized and gendered experienced looks like for adult immigrants in the U.S. higher education system.

4. ***Increase of testimonio as a research method in understanding the gendered and racialized experiences of non-White students in the United States systems of education:*** future research ethnographic projects with other Latinx subgroups should considered qualitative testimonio research. The work pioneering work of Dolores Delgado-Bernal on testimonio as a source of knowledge is significant to better understand the racialized experiences of non-White students in the United States systems of education. Especially, where recent research has depicted how schools can be sites of institutionalized racial violence where normalized facets of racism play a role in disparities students face in K–12 schools (Kholi et.al., 2017).

5.9 Conclusion

As demographics and immigrant waves continue taking different shape, there is a great need for new inquiries documenting new areas of incursion for adult immigrants to the United States. This research project sought to investigate and learn about the experiences and strategies of survival for nontraditional, English learner, adult immigrant Latinas entering spaces in the U. S higher education system. The project was born out of the need to seek others like me, in spaces where we felt invisible. I selected testimonio as a research method to uncover those individual narratives and struggles that collectively formed realities for a group of invisibilized students. Our voices, our testimonios allowed to map the gendered and racialized experiences that otherwise would have been left invisible if other dominant Western academic methods of research were utilized instead. Testimonio, as feminist praxis shed light in education inequities we faced, when the testimonialistas and me as the researcher and student spoke about the institutional impact of gender and other categories of oppression in our lives while we pursued an education.

Testimonio as a feminist method of research, revealed different possibilities and alternative strategies for those groups of marginalized populations entering spaces never meant for them. In this research project, the nontraditional, English learner, adult immigrant Latinas, documented their journeys through the educational pipeline of the United States higher education system and reinserted the

invisible immigrant narrative left out of the national immigration debate. A very different narrative, where social and economic mobility through education is not only sought by the second and third generations, but also by the adult immigrant arrival as well.

Testimonio as a method of research allowed me to transform their experiences into sites of knowledge production for other students, educators, and policy makers. The findings in this dissertation captured the struggles of the testimonialistas in their individual journeys, the collective sense of invisibility as they navigated institutional gatekeeping practices and with their sole presence challenge systemic racism as they step into institutions of higher education in the U.S., spaces that had only seen them as part of the cleaning-crew before. This dissertation captured the importance of highlighting the presence of not only nontraditional students, but English learners Latina immigrant adult arrivals because of the disruption of mainstream notions and the typical immigrant narrative where education is only desired for the next generation. Celia, one of the testimonialistas, examined the bias she encountered from a professor, bias that reflects the education-climate across higher education when it comes to nontraditional, English learner, adult immigrant Latinas: "What are you? Where do you come from? What are you doing? I don't know where to put you". Finally, the testimonialistas looked at their own resilience and strategies and gave us an opportunity to learn from their determination as they continued in their path to attaining a higher education degree.

5.10 Para las que vienen/ To those who come after us

Ramirez Arreola, Elizabeth. Photograph of educational workshop, 13 May. 2017. Author's personal collection.

I took the picture above in 2017, as I stood in front of a group of forty-five adult Latina immigrant women who had come to the *Simposio de Mujeres Latinas* and came into my workshop to hear me speak about accessing education in the United States. These women came to learn about the possibilities of entering the United States higher education system for themselves. This picture visually demonstrates the argument made in this dissertation. The narratives of the testimonialistas in this study illustrated the process of migration, the living transnationally, and taught us about the importance of social capital valuing their *conocimiento*, about how they accessed and survived in U.S. academia. Their collective experience loudly told us that they are not invisible, demonstrated strategies of resistance, and experienced spaces of healing as they heard their own voices validate their journey. The sheer determination that kept them pursuing their college degrees, is the determination they want others to have. They want other nontraditional, English learner, immigrant, adult Latina/x students to remember no to give up, to keep trying because as Rosalia stated *"it is the journey and the knowledge that is what will open more doors for one".* For those who will come after us, the *conocimiento* in this dissertation is for you. We know you are there; we see you, keep knocking because these walls will eventually come down. **¡Échenle ganas compañerxs, porque sí se puede!**

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyers (English & Spanish)

"Quieren Mi Labor Mas No Mi Intelecto"

IRB ID # STUDY00002363

Querida Hermana Latinoamericana:
My name is **Elizabeth Ramírez Arreola**, I'm a candidate in the department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies at the University of Washington. I'm currently working on my dissertation, which seeks to examine the conventional narratives about adult immigrant women from Latin America and their interest in higher education. The study focuses on those that after migrating in adult age to the United States have eventually continued their higher educational attainment. Such experiences have been largely excluded from U.S academic literature, as they are a minority within a minority. Documenting their ***testimonios*** will shine a light on the experiences of non-traditional adult immigrant students, accessing and surviving U.S. academia.

Participants must self-identify as women immigrants & meet the following eligibility:

- ➔ Have migrated as an adult to the United States (18 years or older & with or without documents).
- ➔ Not having attended the United States K-12 system.
- ➔ Have arrived in the United States with incomplete or completed high school, and /or incomplete or completed college.
- ➔ Have obtained or currently be pursuing degrees in institutions of higher education, such as community/ junior colleges and universities (in both undergraduate & graduate programs).

Non-immigrants & international students are not eligible to apply

To participate:

I will be collecting ***testimonios*** during fall 2018; participants will receive a $25.00 gift card for Target or Amazon. The participants will be provided a series of questions about their experience in the U.S. higher education system. The interviews will be in person or via Skype or Facetime, lasting approximately 1-2 hours and they will be recorded and kept for 6 years. Personal information and responses will remain confidential. To participate please register in the link provided, and for any questions please contact me directly.

https://catalyst.uw.edu/webq/survey/lagunera/348026

Elizabeth Ramírez Arreola, PhC
lagunera@uw.edu

"Quieren Mi Labor Más No Mi Intelecto"

IRB ID # STUDY00002363

Querida Hermana Latinoamericana:
Mi nombre es **Elizabeth Ramírez Arreola**, y soy candidata a doctorado en la facultad de Estudios de Género, Mujer y Sexualidad en la Universidad de Washington. Estoy trabajando en mi tesis doctoral que tiene como propósito, el investigar y documentar las historias y narrativas de las mujeres inmigrantes de América Latina y su interés en educación superior. El estudio se enfoca en todas aquellas que después de migrar a los Estados Unidos en edad adulta, han eventualmente continuado con sus estudios superiores en el sistema educativo estadounidense. Dichas experiencias se encuentran mayormente ausentes de la literatura académica estadounidense por tratarse de una minoría dentro de una minoría. El documentar estos ***testimonios*** permitirá empezar a vislumbrar las experiencias de estudiantes adultas inmigrantes no-tradicionales, tratando de entrar y sobrevivir en el sistema de educación superior estadounidense.

Participantes deben auto-identificarse como mujeres inmigrantes & reunir las siguientes características:

- ➔ Haber migrado en edad adulta a los Estados Unidos (18 años ó más & con/sin documentos).
- ➔ **No** haber ingresado al sistema K-12 en los Estados Unidos.
- ➔ Haber llegado a los EEUU con bachiller incompleto o terminado y/ó carrera universitaria incompleta o terminada.
- ➔ Estar ó haber estado en el sistema de educación superior estadounidense como lo es una universidad comunitaria (Community / Junior College) y/ ó universidad formal de 4 años ó más, tanto en programas de licenciaturas como posgrados.

No-inmigrantes & estudiantes internacionales no son elegibles

Para participar:

Los ***testimonios*** serán recolectados durante el inverno de 2018, las participantes recibirán una tarjeta regalo con un valor de **$25.00** para ser usadas en *Target* ó *Amazon*. A las participantes se les proveerá una serie de preguntas sobre su experiencia en el sistema de educación superior de los Estados Unidos. Yo conduciré las entrevistas, las cuales serán grabadas y mantendré por 6 años después de concluir el estudio. Las entrevistas pueden ser en persona ó vía Skype ó FaceTime; con una duración de entre 1- 2 horas, y la información personal se mantendrá en total confidencialidad. Para mas información por favor contácteme directamente en:

Elizabeth Ramírez Arreola, PhC
lagunera@uw.edu

Appendix B: Screening Survey

Q1: Name:
Q2: Country of origin:
Q3: Age at time of arrival/ migration to the U.S.?
Q4: Did you attend the K-12 education system in the U.S.?
Answer choices:
a. Yes
b. No
Q5: If yes, what grades did you attend? Please check all that apply.
Answer choices:
a. Elementary school
b. Middle school
c. High school
Q6: Did you graduate from high school in the U.S.?
Answer choices:
a. Yes
b. No
Q7: What levels of higher education did you pursue or are you currently pursuing in the U.S.? Select all that apply.
Answer choices:
a. Certificate program (non-degree classes that are typically not- transferable to colleges or universities, yet provide
specialized skills).
b. Associate degree (two-year college degree).
c. Bachelor's degree (four-year degree).
d. Advanced academic degrees (masters or doctoral degrees).
Q8: Did you go through the admission process to higher education in the United States while in your country of origin & prior to migrating to the U.S.?
Answer choices:
a. Yes
b. No
Q9: Preferred method of the interview?
Answer choices:

a. In person (if located in the Seattle metropolitan area).
b. Remote (Phone, Skype)

Q10: Please provide your contact information phone, email, or Skype ID (if the interview will be via Skype):
Q11: Best days & times for interview (approx. last 1-2 hours):
Answer choices:
a. Monday, Wednesday, or Friday 8AM-8PM PST
b. Tuesday or Thursday 8AM-12PM PST
c. Saturday or Sunday 8AM-8PM PST
Q12: Participants will receive a $25.00 gift card for their participation. In-person interviews will receive a Target gift card, while remote interviews will receive an e-gift card for Amazon via email. However, if you are doing a remote interview and prefer to receive a Target gift card please enter your address below so it can be mailed to you.

Appendix C: Consent Form

University of Washington
Informed Consent Form

"*Quieren Mi Labor Mas No Mi Intelecto*:" Mapping the Gendered and Racialized Journeys of Immigrant Latin American Women Accessing and Surviving in the U.S. Higher Education System.

My name is **Elizabeth Ramirez Arreola**, and I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies at the University of Washington. I am working on my doctoral dissertation, and I would like to interview you about your experiences in higher education as adult immigrant women from Latin America.

Purpose of Study:
I am asking voluntary participation in my study of adult immigrant self-identify women from Latin America in the U.S. Higher Education System. The purpose of my research is to record the histories and narratives to better understand the higher education journeys of adult immigrant women from Latin America. By collecting *testimonios* (life histories) my project aims to document their experiences as non-traditional students accessing U.S. academia. This project is part of my dissertation, and it will serve to provide more information on these narratives that so often are ignored.

Procedures:
If you participate you will receive a series of questions about your journey in the U.S higher education system detailing the path you have followed to a U.S. University. I will conduct the interviews and record oral histories in-person, over the phone, via Skype or FaceTime, and audio-record them. The entire interview should take between 1-2 hours. At all times your confidentiality will be respected and I will only use your first name (or a pseudonym if you prefer) in my dissertation.

Risks:
Your academic experiences will be recorded in order to better understand the academic journey of adult immigrant women from Latin America in the U.S. higher education system. No one except the researcher team will know your identities.

Benefits:
I am writing about these oral histories to provide insight about what barriers are present in the journey of immigrant women wanting to access education in the United States, and in order to provide guidance and create community for other immigrant women involved in the same process of entering institutions of higher education. I also hope to suggest some ways to smooth that transition in the future, and believe the material will be useful for institutions hoping to increase their immigrant women population rates in the future.

Confidentiality of Research Information:
Your personal information and responses will remain confidential. I will use first name only or pseudonyms for identifying information and you may refuse to answer any questions you believe will be damaging, and will be able to review the article and ask to eliminate any answers you deem damaging or change any information you believe will lead to your identification. I will retain the audio-recordings until they have been transcribed at which point they will be destroyed.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate you may do so without penalty. Please be aware that if you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time, and you may decide not to answer any specific question.

Subject's Statement:
I understand the nature of this study. I_____ volunteer to take part in this research filed under IRB ID # STUDY00002363
If I have any questions about this study or questions about the research I can contact Elizabeth Ramirez Arreola at 206-853-8759. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

If you have read and understand the information above and freely give your consent to participate, sign and return this form, or send by email to lagunera@uw.edu to confirm your consent.

Name:_____Date:_____

*Please note that I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of email.

Appendix D: Interview Prompts

This questionary was inspired by the previous work of Dr. Monica Irene Sanchez

Testimonios for "Quieren Mi Labor, Mas No Mi Intelecto"

Meeting criteria questions:

1. Country of origin:
2. Age when arrived/ migrated to the U.S.?
3. Did you attend k-12 system in the U.S.?
4. What levels of higher education did you or are you currently pursuing in the U.S.?
   A) Certificate programs (Non-degree classes are typically not- transferable to colleges or universities, yet provides specialized skills).
   B) Associate degrees (two year college degree).
   C) Bachelor degree (four year degree).
   D) Advance academic degrees: masters or doctoral degrees.

Interview Questions:

Do you consent this interview?

Introduction /Background:

Would you like to tell me about you?
Name, age, sex, gender?
Where were you born?
Where did you grow up?
What is your mother language?
For how long were you monolingual?
How do you identify in the United States (Latina, Chicana, Mexicana, Hispanic etc.)
What was the economic and social status of your family while growing up?
What is/was your parent's employment/ profession?
What was your role in your family while growing- up?
Did you experience any family obligations growing-up?
How was your life like in your home country (work, school)? Can you describe it?
What's your marital status?
Do you have children?
Please tell me about your childhood and life in your country of origin; what was growing-up like in _____? For example tell me about how do you identify, your role in your family, economic status, etc. Anything that you like to share and that was an important part of your formative years.

Immigration

What was the reason for moving to the United States?
Do you have family in the U.S.? Do you have family in your home country?
When did you move to the United States, and for how long have you live here?
Did you have a documented status at time of arrival?
Are you documented now?
How often do you go back to your home country (If able to travel)?
How often do you practice transnationalism (view media, read news, or stay in touch with family/ friends from your home country)?

Do you see/ hope for a future return to your home country?
What language (s) do you speak at home in the U.S.?
Could you tell me about your transition to the U.S.? When did you move here and what was the motive to migrate? Are you connected to your home country? How so? Do you see yourself returning to your country in the future?

Education
What was your educational experience in your home country (k-12, college, technical)?
What's the highest level of education you attained in your home country?
What is your parent's educational level?
Are you the first in your family to attend a Community College or a University?
How did you know, you wanted to access higher education?
How did you learn English?
Where did you attend English classes? Can you tell me about your experience there?
How soon after moving to the U.S. were you able to utilize English in your everyday?
Did you have to obtain a GED?
Did you feel supported by your ESL teachers or staff?
Were there any efforts from ESL programs to connect you or place you into higher ed. or any other educational/ technical programs?
How did you transition to college level classes? Can you describe how was that experience?
What motivated you to start or continue with higher education in the U.S.?
When did you start college level classes? How many years after you arrived?
How did you choose the particular school (s) you are attending (affordable, proximity to home/ employment, family)?
Can you tell me about your life's educational journey? What was the highest educational level in your country origin, your parents, and what was like to transition to the US (ESL, GED, college transitional classes etc.) Why did you decide to continue with your education in the US?

Employment:
Did you work in your home country? What kind of work did you do?
What do you do for a living currently?
What kind of jobs have you held in the U.S. since your arrival?
Did your employer provide any accommodations so you could continue your education in the U.S.?
Could you tell me about your employment life experience? If you worked in your home country what kind of work did you do? What about in the US? How was working and studying at the same time?

Social or Academic Support
Did anyone inspire /encourage you to obtain a higher education?
Can you tell me about your community? Please define it, and are you involved/ active in your community?
What types of activities are you involved with outside of work/school?
Is there people in your life that provide any kind of support to help you attain your educational goals (mentors, or other)?
Is your family in the U.S. or home country able to provide emotional or financial support?
Have you found sources of support in schools (institutional level)?

Can you tell me about your support system in school or in your community? Who do you see as people (family, friends or institutions that are helping you towards your educational goals?

Barriers

What kind of family obligations do you currently have in the U.S or to your family in your home country?
Can you tell me about the COMPASS placement test? How did you find out about it? Where did you place? Can you tell me about the experience of taking it?
Did you have to take an English placement test when you started at your current university? Can you tell me about that experience?
Can you tell me about the taking the GRE? What was that experience like? (If applicable)
Can you tell me about your previous or current classes? Where there any kind of challenges (emotional, educational, financial)?
Did you or are you facing any challenges with pursuing higher education? How did you overcome them, or are overcoming them?
How do you financially manage accessing higher education?
How do you identify when you are in a college campus?
How do you feel about how Latinas are viewed or treated on your college campus?
Do you have any kind of support from other Latinxs in your college campus? Or are you a source of support for other Latinxs on campus?
Are you involved with Latinx or other organizations geared for minorities in your college campus?
Have you ever experienced situations of discrimination or felt racism in the classroom or school? Can you tell me about these experiences?
Have there been situations where you felt treated differently because your gender or ethnic background?

What are some barriers you face such as economic, family responsibilities & obligations, academic etc.?
Have you encounter discrimination in academia? Are you connected with other Latinxs on campus or Latino organizations? How do think Latinxs are viewed in higher education?

Attaining Higher Ed.:

Do you have access to financial aid or scholarships?
How do you interpret or define success?
How do you see higher education contributing to your success?
Can you tell me of experiences where you have felt successful in school or outside school?
What is your goal (s) in attaining a higher education?
What are your immediate future employment plans based in attaining a college degree?

Can you tell me about why you wanted to access higher education? What goals do you have for your education? How do you finance your education? Anything else you would like to add or share about your life or journey in higher education?