**GENE ESTUDIADA: LATINA/O STUDENTS CONFRONTING AND ENGAGING HOME/COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE WITHIN/OUTSIDE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**BY**

NORMA ANGELICA MARRUN

**DISSIDATION**

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Cris Mayo, Chair
Professor Alejandro Lugo
Professor Dolores Delgado Bernal, University of Utah
Associate Professor Wanda Pillow
Abstract

As a group, Latinas/os are transforming the demographic profile of U.S. colleges and universities. More Latinas/os are pursuing postsecondary education with a total of 69% of Latina/o high school graduates enrolling in college compared to 67% of whites (Fry & Taylor, 2013). However, data shows that Latina/o students generally graduate at lower rates compared to whites, and controversies over undocumented young people entering higher education continue. Utilizing a Chicana/Latina feminist approach, this dissertation explores the K-16 lived experiences of Latina/o youth and the ways they grapple with the contradictory nature of education, and their desire to transcend cultural, social, political, and educational boundaries. By infusing a Chicana/Latina epistemological perspective, we can better understand the complex ways Latina/o students contest and navigate the contradictory spaces of home, community, and school. This dissertation critically examines the factors that enable first-generation Latina/o students—documented or undocumented—to persist in higher education and most importantly, to graduate and encourage other community members to also aspire to higher education.

A Chicana/Latina feminist ethnographic design was used, and drew upon individual in-depth interviews with ten, first-generation Latina/o college students attending public, 4-year research and teaching universities in California and Illinois, participant observations at various sites (i.e., campus events), classroom observations of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies courses, and an analysis of educational and immigration policies. In addition to their educational experiences, my project builds upon the students’ home and community knowledge, connecting these pedagogies of the home to their college success. Rather than assuming all Latina/o students deal with the same issues, this study examines the influences, challenges, and contradictions of home (family), community, and university from multiple perspectives.
As I explored Latina/o students’ narratives of ambivalent but energetic participation in higher education, I learned that there is an untold story about the ambiguity that stems from what Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) refers to as the “new mestiza consciousness,” a consciousness that “sustains contradictions” and “turns the ambivalence into something else” (p. 101). As participants reflected on the pain and growing contradictions between their families and schooling experiences, they sought out spaces like Latina/o and Mexican American Studies courses where through inquiry, reflection, and dialogue, students made sense of opposing ideas and knowledges. These courses helped students acquire the ability to confront and navigate the contradictory spaces of home and school, as well as the language to make sense of their personal and educational experiences.

My work introduces the term *gente estudiada*, a term used in the Latina/o community to refer to people who are college educated. I used this term, not yet part of academic discourse, to underscore the necessity of grounding our understanding of Latina/o higher education in the community that uses this term. My work draws from the resources found in Latino communities, but like Anzaldua’s call for ambiguity, I also critically analyze the very communities that provide support for Latina/o college goers. Findings highlight the ways participants used their families’ stories, *dichos* (popular proverbs), and *consejos* (advice) to share the ways they overcame challenges at home and in school. For example *dichos* were used to teach the children important lessons about being proactive and how to confront and overcome difficult situations in one’s life. My dissertation also examines the ambiguities that constitute undocumented students’ experiences and the ways they navigate higher education *sin papeles*.¹ Specifically, I highlight the story of one undocumented Latina student’s activism, most notably

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¹ Translation: without papers or without legal documentation.
her participation in Atlanta, Georgia where she and six other students were arrested for protesting against the Georgia Board of Regents for banning undocumented students from enrolling at the top five public universities in the state. I conclude this dissertation with recommendations for academic and student affair practitioners working to support and improve the retention rates for first-generation Latina/o students, as well as immigration advocacy. My work provides useful strategies for improving Latina/o retention by recognizing the important links between home, community, and university experiences.
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# Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction: Latinas/os Students’ Ambivalent and Energetic Participation in Higher Education ................................................................. 1

Chapter 2 Literature Review: Latinas/os Value Higher Education ................................................................. 29

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework and Methodology: Grappling With the Tensions and Contradictions ................................................................. 76

Chapter 4 *Familias Fuertes*: Learning Through Stories, *Dichos*, and *Consejos* ................................................................. 109

Chapter 5 School Stories: Latina/o Students (Re)claiming Their Education ................................................................. 143

Chapter 6 Latina/o Students Carving out *Un Sitio* (a Space) and Claiming *Una Lengua* (a Language and/or Discourse) in Mexican American and Latina/o Studies Courses ................................................................. 173

Chapter 7 The Undocumented Student Movement: Andrea’s Story ................................................................. 206

Conclusion We Are *Gente Estudiada!* ................................................................. 250

References ..................................................................................................................... 262

Appendix A Number of LLS and MAS Courses Taken by Participants ................................................................. 274

Appendix B Estimates of Undocumented Immigrants ..................................................................................................................... 275
Chapter 1

Introduction: Latinas/os Students’ Ambivalent and Energetic Participation in Higher Education

The Context of Education for Latinas/os

As a group, Latinas/os are showing academic progress in high school graduation and college enrollment rates and are transforming the demographic profile of U.S. colleges and universities. A recent Pew Hispanic Center study showed that the high school dropout rate among Latinas/os has dropped to 14%, from 28% a decade before (Fry & Taylor, 2013). More Latinas/os are pursuing postsecondary education with a total of 69% of Latina/o high school graduates enrolling in either a two- or 4-year college compared to 67% of whites. In addition, for the first time, Latinas/os are the largest minority group in 4-year colleges and universities (Fry & Lopez, 2012). The trend demonstrates that more research is needed about the experiences of Latina/o students in public 4-year institutions in order to improve their retention rates. While Latinas/os are making significant gains in education, research shows that they are less likely to attend a selective institution, less likely to be enrolled full-time, and less likely to persist through graduation and earn their bachelors’ degree (Fry & Taylor, 2013; Swail, Cabrera, Lee, &Williams, 2005). Research has also shown that Latina/o students at less selective institutions have lower persistence and completion rates (Alon, & Tienda, 2005; Nuñez & Crisp, 2012). Given the increasing number of Latinas/os who go on to postsecondary education, but who fail to persist and graduate, it is vitally important that colleges and universities analyze the factors of why students are more likely to attend less selective institutions, why they are more likely to be enrolled part-time, and why they are more likely to dropout of college.
Merely providing access to postsecondary education for Latinas/os is not enough. Latina/o students and their families are negatively impacted by the significant disparities in their educational experiences well beyond entering postsecondary education. Previous research has indicated that Latina/o students must overcome a plethora of challenges to get to college as they continue to face further challenges in their undergraduate education (Becerra, 2010; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005). For example, many Latina/o students cannot consult their parents and/or other relatives for academic or college guidance because historically they are more likely to come from families with less formally educated backgrounds (Contreras, 2011; Hernandez, 2002; Lopez, 2009; Pérez, 2012; Rincón, 2010). Latinas/os are also more likely to be first-generation college students who have limited information about how the higher education system works including financial aid, so they are also more likely to work more hours and risk not graduating (Becerra, 2010). For many, the family expectation is that they will live at home while attending college. Furthermore having no one in their family or community to explain in advance how higher education works, they cannot anticipate the academic demands of college or the contradictions between home and school.

**Crossing Home and School Borderlands**

Too often, discussions about the retention of Latinas/os focus on the lack of academic preparation and affordability among other obstacles cited by Latinas/os to completing higher education. While these issues are important, they do not capture the complex ways in which Latina/o students must effectively negotiate and navigate the oppositional and often contradictory ways of belonging within the multiple worlds of home and school. From an early age Latina/o students must learn how to cross physical, social, and cultural borders between
home and school. In the last two decades, Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1999) work has offered new ways of understanding how we look at borders and those that live in the borderlands. She uses the border as a textual metaphor to show us how to challenge, (re)imagine, and transgress borders. Anzaldúa describes the borderlands as the place where two or more borders and cultures meet; she writes:

In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (preface)

Borderlands are experienced when one is being pulled back and forth between two or more cultures, thus, creating “una herida abierta” (an open wound) where one feels alienated from one’s home culture and rejected from the dominant culture. At the same time, the borderlands offers a space of resistance and transformation. For Anzaldúa, borderlands offered a space to imagine herself beyond the margins and a symbolic crossroads for multiple voices, ideologies, identities, and knowledges to emerge. Similarly, participants in my study sought out spaces like Latina/o (LLS) and Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses where they were able to blend separate and disparate parts of themselves. Furthermore, as I explored Latina/o students’ narratives of ambivalent but energetic participation in higher education, I learned that there is an untold story about the ambiguity that stems from what Anzaldúa (1999) refers to as the “new mestiza consciousness,” a consciousness that “sustains contradictions” and “turns the ambivalence into something else” (p. 101). In this way, crossing borders offers regenerative possibilities and a new space where “mestiza consciousness” develops a tolerance for ambiguity and contradictions. In this way, the new mestiza survives and thrives within the borderlands by embracing the isolating spaces of the borderlands and works to break down paradigms.
Contradictions and tolerance for ambiguity stretches across my work as a theoretical lens for understanding how undergraduate Latina/o students exist in an ambiguous space between home and institutions of higher education. This ethnographic study explores how first-generation undergraduate Latina/o students move between and beyond the tensions, contradictions, and desires to transcend boundaries. Participants’ families, most particularly parents, were supportive of their decisions to pursue a college education; however, the students also experienced subtle and painful remarks and were often accused of acting like they are better than their family. For participants in this study, the process of becoming college educated often meant struggling with the contradictions of their home culture (i.e. patriarchy, family obligations) with the dominant culture of higher education (i.e. racism, competitiveness). Participants also described a desire to develop stronger ties between their home culture and the dominant culture. Like Anzaldúa, I find that the process of bridging these worlds together requires following a path of (un)learning and (re)learning knowledge.

Subjugated Knowledges

Schools continue to privilege white Eurocentric cultural practices by devaluing the knowledges of marginalized students. When I address “subjugated knowledge” I am referring to the knowledge that has been erased, devalued, and perceived as hierarchically inferior knowledge by schools. Michel Foucault’s work on the production and circulation of knowledge has been influential in Chicana/Latina feminist work, but they have moved from his critique of subjectivity into a fuller embrace of subjugated knowledges. Many Chicana/Latina feminist scholars have challenged the production and circulation of knowledge within their families, home communities, and the academy in order to uncover the intersections among multiple
systems of oppression within the Chicana/Latina culture and the dominant culture. At the same time, knowledge cannot be discussed without addressing issues of power and resistance. Foucault (1982) is particularly concerned with the dualities of power as both global and local and both transparent and unintended. In his work, Foucault (1982) seeks to move beyond the ways in which knowledge circulates, functions, and its relation to power. For example, the tensions and contradictions that Latina/o students in this study experienced from both drawing and critiquing home and community using the tools acquired from higher education allowed them to open up new epistemological possibilities.

With regard to the importance of allowing Latina/o students to draw from home knowledge to inform how they know and feel, the work of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars is vital. These scholars have expanded conceptions of knowledge by confronting epistemological colonialism within the field of education (Anzaldúa, 1999; Córdova, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 1998; González, 1998; Pérez, 1998; Yosso, 2005). Chicana/Latina feminists have questioned the production of knowledge and have offered new theories and methods to “uncover and reclaim their own subjugated knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 574). They have questioned the production of knowledge by interrogating the stakes of whose knowledge is privileged and how it is applied. Chicana feminist scholars speak to the implications of the production of knowledge and their struggle to find their voice within the academy. They have identified collective solutions through their research and scholarship to bring social change to poor and working class Latina/o communities. Teresa Córdova (2005) explains, “Difficult as it may be, our lives within the university are also opportunities to engage in the battle over what constitutes legitimate knowledge” (p. 224). Precisely because of this battle over power and knowledge within institutions of higher education, Chicanas/Latinas have asserted their agency. Their voices,
presence, and scholarship have transformed institutions of higher education by (re)claiming and
(re)defining notions of teaching, research, and service that is meaningful to the communities they
come from.

Participants in this study experienced both alienating and engaging spaces of knowledge
disruption and production. As such, their longing for pedagogies of the home and desire to
decolonize epistemologies grew out of the necessity to move away from the vulnerability and
pain caused by las heridas abiertas (the open wound). For many in higher education, la heridas
deepen, but for others las heridas create an open space for healing, (un)learning, and
transformation. Above all, both pedagogies of the home and decolonizing epistemologies
provided a transformative space for students to be heard and to be understood. Through their
stories, I seek to both learn and also unpack the ways Latina/o students confront, negotiate, and
attain a sense of belonging unsettled by ambivalence. This study offers insights to student affairs
professionals and postsecondary educators about how first-generation Latina/o students
transition to college, how their identities as college students evolve, how to create more
supportive spaces to help students straddle the borderlands between home and school, how to
find ways to value their lived experiences, and to validate their presences in higher education.
Nevertheless, Collins (2009) reminds researchers that “[a]lthough subjugated knowledge
provides critical insight into understanding how oppressive social relations operate, we must
acknowledge that each unique, situated standpoint is only a partial perspective as there is not one
way, but many ways of knowing” (p. 503). The work of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars, the
narratives of undergraduate Latina/o students, and my own personal and academic experiences
are interwoven to understand what it means to belong to a group of gente estudiada.
**Gente Estudiada**

Higher education has exposed many Latinas/os to different knowledges and truths than the cultural ones in our families and communities. Many of us understand why laws are passed against *nuestra gente*. Higher education has exposed many of us to our history and learned about *gente bien chingona*\(^2\) like the leadership of Dolores Huerta, Ernesto Galarza, and Gloria Anzaldúa. So many of us in higher education have asked ourselves, are we part of *la gente*? Although many of us face similar barriers, we understand that the inequalities in higher education are not the same ones that *our gente* face because we experience the tension between these two different worlds. ¿*Porque te quejas*?\(^3\) You don’t have to clean other people’s toilets or work at a factory without any health benefits. You get your own desk and you get to sit in a big comfy chair. You read books and they give you scholarships so you can get *una buen educación*. It was painful to know that I was slowly becoming part of what Latina/o families consider belonging to a group of *gente estudiada*\(^4\).

I am part of *mi gente* because my sister does not have the right to a driver’s license because the Republicans in California feel that undocumented people should not have access to one, although car dealerships will willingly sell a new car to undocumented people. My *tía* works at a factory in East Chicago, Indiana making instrument parts for less than minimum wage. And my *tíos* and *prímos* remodel apartments in downtown Chicago, but sometimes there is no work and sometimes they don’t get paid on time. Latinas/os in higher education face different challenges, but we are we part of *la gente*. We are *gente estudiada*!

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\(^2\) Bad ass people.

\(^3\) Why do you complain?

\(^4\) I use the term Latina/o as a more inclusive term representing individuals with backgrounds from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. In my work, I also believe it is important to include both genders by writing Latina/o. *Latina* refers to female and *Latino* refers to male. Also, the term Latina/o is often viewed as a more politically progressive pan-ethnic label than is the term Hispanic. I also use the term Chicana/o to represent a specific political ideology associated with Mexican Americans.
Nuestra gente can tell by the way we dress and speak that we are gente estudiada. We may have different goals, but we aspire to be treated con respeto and we continue to fight for educational, economic, social, and political mobility. Some gente estudiada forget where they came from and they never come back. Should I return to my community and help out mi gente or should I choose to live on the other side of tracks away from mi gente? Gente estudiada are always crossing fronteras between institutions of higher education, home, and community. There are also fronteras between gente estudiada. Las mujeres are told by their gente to get una buena educación and valerse por sí mismas (Villenas & Moreno, 2001), but when some of us challenge our mother’s ways of treating los hombres in our familias, we are told to be quiet. We are gente estudiada living between fronteras trying to make sense of the contradictory expectations, working to find ways to stay connected to our homes and community and working to find ways to create social change for nuestra gente.

In this opening I draw from my own personal struggles as a first-generation college student and as the first mujer in mi familia to pursue higher education. My work grows out of Chicana/Latina feminist literature; it comes from engaging in my own process of becoming critically conscious as a result of learning about my racialized, gendered, classed, and immigrant identities. My work introduces the term gente estudiada, a term used in the Latina/o community to refer to people who are college educated; although within the Latino community there are people or personas that are mal educadas/os and there are personas bien educadas/os. Una persona mal educada/o is formally educated and can hold advanced degrees, but may still be disrespectful, ignorant, dishonest, and insensitive. Una persona bien educada/o might not be formally educated, but is acknowledged by the Latino community as being generous, kind, well mannered, and honest. Una persona educada is a person that is perceived as being preparada (or
more highly prepared/formally educated); in essence, a college education is seen as the gateway
to better opportunities.

The term *gente estudiada* is cohesive and gender neutral. It is about developing a critical
consciousness, a strong sense of community commitment, and responsibility to take action. So
far, the term *gente estudiada*, has not been used in educational or Chicana/Latina feminist
scholarship; hence, my work draws from the resources found in Latino communities, while I also
carry out a critical analysis of these communities. I want to mark the respect of where I come
from by showing the stories found within Latino communities and using terms like *gente
estudiada* even if they are not yet academic terms. *Gente estudiada* is a useful analytical concept
because it carries discursive meanings of both empowerment as well as otherness, so it helps to
keep the tension around education clearly in view. Because it comes from how communities
name students, it also recognizes both the community origins of learning and the sometimes
present community-based suspicions about those who have been educated. That is, *gente
estudiada* marks one’s status as educated and thus admired by one’s family and community for
one’s accomplishments. It often marks one as a person who is the exception, especially if she/he
is the first in their family to attend college. At the same time, because of their status as college
educated, students often experience a lack of sense of belonging within and outside their home,
community, and university campus. As a result of pursuing a college education and enrolling in
courses addressing issues within their home and community, students experience a process of
(un)learning home and community knowledge.

Belonging to a group of *gente estudiada* creates a distance from home and community
that results in a productive tension. One can say that college changes the ways in which we
engage and confront our family, community, and institutions of higher education. At the same
time, when we enter institutions of higher education we become conscious of the assets we bring from our home, from bicultural capital, academic resiliency, and vibrant social skills to serving our family and community. We also become more aware of the social inequalities we experience. However, institutions of higher education continue to ignore and devalue the knowledge we bring with us. At the same time, the knowledge and tools we acquire in college are not always perceived by our home and community as practical. Our critiques of family and community are sometimes perceived as offensive devaluations of home knowledge. For those of us living in this tension, learning to be critical can be painful and exhausting, and so can failing to find real solutions to the social inequalities within our home, community, and institutions of higher education.

This process of reflecting from within and outside one’s home and community is part of belonging to a group of gente estudiada, an ongoing process of crossing-over into multiple knowledges, paradigms, ideologies, and values. In her writing, Anzaldúa (1999) describes a longing to be with her family and home community. At the same time, she writes about the fear of “going home” which she also refers to as “home/phobia.” She was the first one in her family in six generations to leave her home in Texas. Anzaldúa goes on to write about her desire to “leave home so I could find myself” by “way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous” (pp. 38, 39). While she walked away from her home, she was also afraid of being “abandoned by the mother culture” for critiquing its patriarchal constrains placed on women and its homophobia (p. 42). Choosing to leave her home in order to find herself came with a cost of being marked as a traitor and and creida (conceited or stuck-up) to her family. She writes, “If you don’t behave like everyone else, la gente will say that you think you’re better than others, que te crees grande” (p. 40). Like in Anzaldúa’s narrative, many of the participants
simultaneously experienced moments of acceptance and rejection from their families and home communities. Many of the parents expressed their support and encouragement for their daughters’ and sons’ college success, while many of their extended family members often made discouraging remarks.

It takes courage to leave our home and community, especially because many of us have partial knowledge about what to expect in college. We know it is the right thing to do, but we are not always psychologically, emotionally, and financially prepared. For example, if you are the first and only one in the family to attend college, it can be exhausting to explain to family the obstacles one faces in higher education. Similarly students returning to their home and community may create tension when they draw from their college education to address issues of inequalities within the home. Thus, students’ new perspectives and critiques of home and community knowledge could be perceived as pretentious. Within the Latina/o community gente estudiada are sometimes perceived as self-absorbed, arrogant, and disconnected from the issues of the poor and working class\(^5\) people.

Here is my own dilemma: in my home and community I am the first and only one to pursue higher education. I grew up speaking Spanish at home and English at school. I have attended both teaching-intensive and research-intensive institutions of higher education. Having first lived in this country as an undocumented person, I am now a naturalized U.S. citizen. I was also the first one in my family to move out on my own because traditionally the women in my family were only allowed to leave the home to be married or to work in other peoples homes. I am marked as an outsider by my education, but I am also the pride of the family. When I stay quiet and smile during family gatherings, I feel a strong sense of belonging. However, when I try

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\(^5\) I use the term working-class to refer to individuals who work for hourly wages rather than fixed salaries and require performing manual labor. Some examples of working class jobs include agriculture, construction, food-service/manufacturing, and domestic industries.
to engage with my family about issues such as gender inequalities, racism, and immigration policies, I am marked as an outsider and I feel like I do not belong. As an undergraduate student, I struggled with the guilt and contradictions I felt for choosing to pursue higher education. In college, I am also marked as an outsider by the way I look and speak. According to Alejandra Elenes (1997), to live in the borderlands, is to live in constant flux of “belonging and not belonging” (p. 363), but I refused to remain caught in such a place of contradiction and ambiguity by seeking out spaces where I was able to confront these feelings. When I enrolled in Mexican American courses as an undergraduate student I acquired the tools and language to describe and make meaning of my experiences. I also learned how to embrace different aspects about my identity and sense of belonging. It was an exciting process of (un)learning and (re)learning about my history, social inequalities, and patriarchal structures that allowed me to become critically conscious.

La Familia: A Source of Inspiration and Contention

For many Latina/o students, family plays a central role in their aspirations to attend college. Although many immigrant Latino parents are unfamiliar with the U.S. education system, they remain optimistic that their children will attend college. For this reason, the starting point for any study on Latina/o students must be on familial influences because family tends to be central to their lives and a strong source of inspiration. A key form of this inspiration for the students are family stories. Parents and other family members told stories about the struggles they encountered in Mexico and in the U.S., and the lack of schooling opportunities available to them. Hearing these stories whenever participants faced challenges in their lives inspired and motivated them to stay focused on their educational goals. My research shows that the family’s
role in undergraduate Latina/o students’ lives is complicated and contradictory. For instance, parents are often unprepared for the transition and changes in values that their children adopt in college. On one hand, the family can be a strong source of support. On the other, it can also place excessive obligations and/or send mixed messages that hinder Latinas/os from graduating college. For example, while parents praised their daughter’s or son’s achievements, they would also make subtle comments about them focusing too much on their education and not making enough time to spend with the family. My study includes the contentions between students’ family and home communities in order to learn how some Latinas/os are able to negotiate those moments of disjuncture. Thus, contention becomes a means for students to form new ways of knowing, being, and becoming.

My study is also connected to the broader stories of Latina/o educational aspiration, complicating ideas about retention and academic resilience. I hope that this work offers new insights for student affairs professionals, professors, instructors, and policy makers, as well as students and community members intent on supporting the development and academic success of undergraduate Latina/o students. Now that Latina/o college enrollment rates surpass that of whites, we need to make sure that they are graduating and that we work towards closing the college achievement gap. While the aspirations for pursuing higher education are evidently present among Latina/o students, they are at a disadvantage in terms of knowledge about college and a strong support system at home. As aforementioned, Latina/o parents and their children have high aspirations for their education and want to graduate from college. We need to pay attention to what it is that they are struggling with, and what colleges and universities can do to facilitate their persistence and graduation.
Background of the Study

This study examines the K-16 educational experiences of first-generation Latina/o students who enroll in Latina/o (LLS) and Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses in both teaching and research institutions. My work focuses on the narratives of five undergraduate students in California and five undergraduate students in Illinois, and how home, community, and institutional knowledge influences and/or challenges the ways they come to perceive their race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, sexuality, and legality. I focus on the ways Latina/o students negotiate their relationships with family, friends, and home communities, and institutions of higher education through resistance and agency. I address how the term *gente estudiada* may serve as lens to examine how first-generation students mitigate the contradictions and ambiguity of their multi-positionalities. This dissertation is about a new generation of Latina/o students that are mastering the skills to navigate through the opposing forces of the borderlands of home and school.

Pursuing a college education can be a lonely and exhausting journey for many first generation Latina/o college students, but what is more difficult is leaving home for college and having to confront our families’ ways of knowing and home culture. Many Latinas who make the decision to leave home for college, face parents who tend to have a more difficult time letting go of their daughters, even though they want them to take advantage of the educational opportunities. Moving out from home without being married can create conflicts within the family; however, moving out to pursue a college education can ease some of the tensions. Thus,

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6 Although culture can be difficult to define, I will be discussing culture as the everyday practices and attitudes of how people have been socialized to think, act, and feel. Thus, culture is not static and constantly changing. Latina/o culture is always being influenced by the dominant culture, immigration from Mexico as well as the diverse Latino cultures of Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Caribbean, Central and South America. Latina/o children regardless of their environment and language at home, are constantly being exposed to U.S. American popular culture, products, and social values.
confronting our families, friends, and communities back home can be a painful experience because our earlier perceptions and beliefs might seem problematic and uneasy to challenge. When we enter institutions of higher education, suddenly, we begin to perceive places and others differently as we ourselves begin to change the ways we reflect and come to understand our strengths, courage, and persistence for our rights to an education.

Both documented and undocumented Latina/o students are (re)claiming their educación and education by (re)imagining the meaning of gente estudiada as they draw, reflect, and negotiate different forms of knowledge merging together. Latina/o college students are reflecting on the experiences of their families and community members, as well as their own along with the knowledge they are acquiring in courses such as MAS and LLS. These courses have an impact on how an individual’s experience changes within their consciousness. Many of them are realizing that although The Civil Rights Movement and the Chicano Movement ended, their families and communities continue to experience educational, economical, and political inequalities.

For undocumented Latina/o students, there is an even stronger contradiction between their inclusion to education and exclusion from other social arenas. They have attended schools in the U.S. and have educational aspirations similar to those of their documented family members and peers. Their undocumented status or deferred action status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program places them in an ambiguous space. Despite the growing anti-Latino sentiments and criminalization of undocumented youth in schools, they are excelling academically and have mobilized a powerful student movement. Documented and undocumented Latina/o high school and college students across the country have become

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7 In June 2012, the Department of Homeland Security granted deferred action to immigrants who entered the U.S. as children. DACA provides temporary relief from deportation and does not provide a path to lawful permanent resident status or U.S. citizenship (National Immigration Law Center).
critically conscious of the racial discrimination of Latinas/os in schools and have united together to raise awareness about the 65,000 undocumented high school graduates who each year are being denied access to higher education. An important aspect of student advocacy groups has been their efforts to pass The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, also known as the DREAM Act. After decades of attacks on their families and communities, both documented and undocumented students, workers, and immigrant supporters have mobilized to address the growing criminalization of Latinas/os. Despite many students’ openness about their undocumented status and contradictory situation, they understand that in order for them and their families to have a chance in this country they have to focus on their education and continue to fight for social change.

I am most interested in understanding undergraduate Latina/o students’ abilities to engage in a kind of storytelling that reveals the ways they confront and negotiate contradictory constructions of knowledge within the context of their home, community, and the university. For example, students possessed the kind of curiosity that heightened their desires to both draw from and critique home knowledge. Drawing from Dolores Delgado Bernal’s (2001, 2002) theoretical work on critical raced-gendered epistemology and pedagogies of the home, I argue that courses in MAS and LLS provide a supportive and nurturing space that instills confianza (Veléz-Ibáñez, 2010), sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005), and academic self-confidence (Nuñez, 2009). MAS and LLS courses also provide a critical space for students

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8 Under the DREAM Act, students who entered the country at age 15 or younger at least 5 years before the date of the bill’s enactment and who maintained good moral character since entering the U.S. would qualify for conditional permanent resident status upon acceptance to college, graduation from a U.S. high school, or being awarded a GED in the U.S. (National Immigration Law Center, 2011).

9 The word confianza tends to be taken as a commonsense word or as a direct translation of mutual trust. The term confianza has been described by anthropologist and educators as an important social construct within the Latino community. The work of Carlos G. Veléz-Ibáñez (2010) demonstrates how confianza gets established from positive personal interactions, generosity and intimacy and grows from personal investments in each other (p. 45). In his work, he also found that confianza is essential in reducing power hierarchies in the research process.
to reflect on their home knowledge, cultural values, and communities. My work privileges the knowledges of undergraduate Latina/o students whose standpoints arise from positions of intense subordination. In my work, I bring together the subjugated knowledges of undergraduate Latina/o students to examine the ways they navigate and negotiate their experiences between home, community, and institutions of higher education.

Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) writes about the process of (un)learning home and community knowledge as it relates to intellectual development. She explains, “[k]nowing is painful because after ‘it’ happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before” (p. 70). Along with gaining access to a college education, Latina/o students must immediately learn how to negotiate their home culture with the culture of the university. Hence, institutions of higher education are exciting places of learning, especially for Latina/o students who are exposed to the history of their ancestors and for many women it might be the opportunity to move out from home without having to get married to gain a sense of independence. At the same time, Latina/o college students draw from the educación they learn at home and in their community in critical ways to help them navigate their way around institutions of higher education. Thus, these institutions can serve as powerful spaces of learning for Latina/o students, but they can also compromise students’ intellectual development, relationships with family and friends, and perhaps most importantly, their relationship with themselves.

**Home and Community Knowledge in Higher Education**

emphasizes the need for a Chicana feminist epistemology in education to “raise more appropriate research questions and avoid asking questions based on cultural deficit models and incorrect stereotypes” (p. 575). Thus, the theoretical and methodological contributions of Delgado Bernal (1998, 2001, 2002) have challenged the academic boundaries of what is considered “knowledge” by disrupting traditional research practices and producing new narratives of empowerment. Furthermore, according to Lisa Flores (2000) there are two general principles that inform a Chicanas feminist critical perspective: (a) using intersectionality to analyze the interconnectedness of gender, race, class, and heterosexuality; and (b) the use of decolonization to replace silence with voice. Drawing from a Chicana/Latina feminist perspective provides a discursive space to privilege the voices of undergraduate Latina/o students and the theoretical tools to analyze how they make sense of their race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, language, immigration status, their educación and education. Although educación is a direct translation of the English word “education,” its meaning is much broader than just succeeding academically; the Spanish term embodies moral and ethical values and social behavior (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Rodríguez-Brown, 2010; Valdés, 1996). This Chicana/Latina feminist ethnographic study brings the voices of first-generation Latina/o college students to the center of educational research and recognizes Latina/o students “as holders and creators of knowledge who have the potential to transform schools into places where the experiences of all individuals are acknowledged, taught, and cherished” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p.121).

My work seeks to expand the work of Delgado Bernal’s (2001, 2002) theoretical work on critical raced-gendered epistemology and pedagogies of the home. I will take insights from her gendered-focused research to address similar dynamics in Latina/o college experiences, focusing on the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and immigration status in my
analysis. Additionally her work on critical raced-gendered epistemologies will guide this study to better understand the different knowledge(s) that Latinas/os bring with them to college. In her work, Delgado Bernal challenges educators to view “the community and family knowledge of communities of color as a strength” (p. 107). She explains strategies that Chicanas learn at home and how skills such as bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to communities, and spiritualities, can help them navigate their way around educational obstacles. Her work also captures the ways Chicana and Latina students draw from household knowledge to challenge deficit notions about their language and culture. In addition to showing how Latina/o students draw from home knowledge, my work will help provide an understanding of how Latina/o college students draw from community knowledge to challenge racialized discourses about the Latina/o community. Having a strong understanding of home and community knowledge can provide a better understanding of the aspects that are bringing together Latinas/os as well as the issues that are dividing them.

Statement of the Problem

Since Latinas/os are the fastest growing population in the nation’s public schools, it’s imperative that we address the challenges they face. Although they represent the largest minority group in 4-year colleges and universities, only 13.4% of Latinas/os have a bachelor’s degree (Cuddington & Lopez, 2013). These statistics demand that policy makers, education administrators, and professors understand that getting into college is only the beginning of the numerous challenges that Latina/o students will encounter during their undergraduate education. Thus, more works needs to be done to better understand the retention of Latina/o students and
the factors that support and hinder Latina/o students’ decision to pursue, persist, and graduate from college.

Research on college retention and persistence points to students’ academic, social, and cultural integration in the institutional setting as a major determinant for student retention (Corwin, & Tierney, 2007; Rendón, Jamolo, & Nora, 2000; Seidman, 2005). Institutions of higher education, then, need to prepare for the different academic, social, and cultural needs of the students they are attracting. How connected Latina/o students feel to the campus, their families and home communities is an important factor when examining why students persist or drop-out. For many Latina/o students, staying connected to family and their home communities matter greatly in their retention and successful college experience. For many first-generation Latina/o students embracing their multipositionality between the university and their familias and home communities can be considered both a vital source of support and encouragement, but can also be a source of emotional distress and financial burden on students. For example, undergraduate Latina/o students constantly have to negotiate family and school responsibilities differently than traditional middle class students. Several studies have shown how Latina/o students are often “pulled home” to attend to family needs or are expected to contribute financially (Barrera, 2010; Castellanos & Gloria, 2010; Rendón, Jamolo, & Nora, 2000). As a result, student affairs professionals, professors and instructors might misinterpret Latina/o students’ choosing to attend to family needs as a lack of commitment to their education. Many Latina/o students worry that in order to succeed in college they will have to spend less time away from their families and home communities. They might also fear that higher education will change the ways they relate to family and friends back home. However, institutions of higher education can intervene by taking an active role in retaining Latina/o students by developing a
campus climate that affirms their cultural identities, and their connections to family and home communities.

The retention of undergraduate Latina/o students has been a focus in higher education research; however, retention has been examined almost exclusively from within institutions of higher education. The work of Alan Siedman (2005) offers some insights about minority student retention. He explains, “satisfaction with one’s environment leads to increased academic success” (p. 13). Thus, it is important to examine Latina/o students’ satisfaction within the college environment and within their families and home communities. Institutions of higher education cannot resolve the issues that Latina/o students face within their families and home communities; however, it is important to be aware of them in order to encourage students to become “agents of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 113). Understanding the issues that Latina/o students are experiencing within and outside institutions of higher education is critical to helping them achieve their academic and personal goals and remain connected to their home and community.

**Mexican American and Latina/o Studies**

Many campuses now require that undergraduate students take at least one diversity course in order to graduate. Students can fulfill these requirements by taking courses in Latina/o Studies, Mexican American Studies, and other programs. As Latina/o students enroll in institutions of higher education, we learn that it is often not a rarity that courses in ethnic studies and/or gender and women studies are some of the first academic spaces where students of color get exposed to social and political issues that have a direct impact on our lives (Cacho, 2010; Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Garavito, 2009; Holling, 2006; Nuñez, 2011).
My work expands on Paulo Freire’s (1973) theoretical concept of *conscientização* (critical consciousness) by connecting his work to Chicana/Latina feminist theorists Emma Pérez’s (1998) concept *sitio* (a space) and *lengua* (a language and/or discourse). In education, Freire’s concept of *conscientização* (critical consciousness) has been used to understand how marginalized students come to perceive social, political, and economic oppression and their ability to make critical choices that transform their reality (1970, 1973). According to Freire (1973) critical consciousness serves as the motor of cultural emancipation. My work examines the experiences of Latina/o students who enroll in LLS and MAS courses and how these courses serve as a critical *sitio* (space) and provide them with *una lengua* (a language and/or discourse) to reflect and understand their race, gender, class, language, and legal status as they move across different spaces. These courses create safe and critical spaces for students to engage in dialogue and to bring home and community knowledge into the classroom. It also provides a space for students to make sense of the contradictory nature of education and transcend cultural, social, political, and educational boundaries. Thus, through these courses and their participation in higher education, Latina/o students are able to perceive the contradictions between home and school knowledge, a key step in the process of becoming critically conscious. I examined the process of how the courses facilitated the development of students’ critical consciousness, in particular how they come to perceive and connect their personal experiences to larger social, historical, economic, and political structures.

These courses offer a safe yet challenging place for Latina/o students to bring home and community knowledge into the classroom and a space to reflect on their educational journeys. These courses are important in the retention of Latina/o students because the courses are reflective of students needs and make connections between their lives, community, and society.
They also offer different opportunities and activities that bridge together classroom knowledge with student interests, community, social, and political issues that have a direct impact on their lives. For example, Latinas may have already questioned gender roles in the home prior to attending college, but becoming exposed to gender politics in the classroom provides them with the language and tools to challenge gender roles within their home and community and by doing so, inspire other young women to seek independence by pursuing a college education. These students are raising important issues about their home and community in their courses and perhaps engaging their families with the knowledge they learn in college. Being away from their home and community can help Latina/o students understand the resources within their home and community that they may not notice from the inside. At the same, having that critical distance away from home community can give Latina/o students time to reflect on its problems.

**Research Questions**

This study will address the following research questions:

1. What counts as home and community knowledge for Latina/o students?
2. How does home and community knowledge support and hinder Latina/o students’ decision to pursue, persist, and graduate from college?
3. How does knowledge acquired from Mexican American Studies and Latina/Latino Studies courses influence Latina/o students views on race, class, gender, sexuality, and immigration?

**Significance of the Study**

This study makes important contributions to the literature on undergraduate Latina/o students’ retention by examining how Latina/o students adapt to college by including their adjustments to home and community. My work builds on educational research that associates
Latina/o students’ academic success with Latina/o students’ ability to maintain strong ties with family and community (Delgado Bernal, 2001, 2002; González, Jovel, & Stoner, 2004; Hernandez, 2000, 2002; Sánchez, Reyez, & Singh; Zalaquett, 2005). This work also builds on Latina/o students’ agency and academic resiliency by demonstrating how they overcome oppressive educational practices. I have constructed a theoretical concept, gente estudiada, that serves to mitigate the ambiguities that many Latina/o college students experience, including making sense of their multiple and sometimes conflicting identities.

This study shows how gente estudiada can hold varied levels of resistance. For example, resistance is perceived in the ways in which undergraduate Latina/o students become conscious of drawing from home, community, and institutional knowledge to disrupt normative constructions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and legality. Or by using one’s status as gente estudiada to voice social inequalities and to work towards social change. Understanding this problem will shed light on student retention by examining the personal disconnect Latina/o students encounter when they leave their home for college and the ways they come to understand their experiences of belonging. As a result, I suggest that many Latina/o students are able to attain the language and tools to cope with the challenges, sacrifices, and negotiations they make in order to academically succeed and remain connected to their home and community. Lastly, this study will expand on Chicana/Latina feminist literature by raising potential difference in gender, class, sexuality, and immigration status by focusing on both Latinas and Latinos to learn more about their interactions with each other and if they perceive similar barriers and/or opportunities. The strength of this study, as well as the source of its inspiration, is that we get to learn from accomplished undergraduate Latina/o students from a teaching and research university of what it means to belong to a group of gente estudiada. I contend that institutions of
higher education can gain valuable insights to improve Latina/o graduation rates by examining the complex ways Latina/o students contest and navigate the contradictory spaces of home, community, and school. I hope to bring out hidden stories that we as a Latino community are afraid to share for fear of appearing ungrateful, mentally unstable, confrontational, or unscholarly.

The chart below illustrates an outline of what my study captures. There are three circles overlapping to show how knowledge from home, community, and from LLS and MAS courses intersect. The spaces of intersection show how students build on knowledge, experiences, and values from the different parts of their lives. I draw from Chicana/Latina feminist work to show how knowledge is formed and transferred from various sources and spaces. Home and community knowledge is transferred verbally through cultural practices such as *consejos* (advice) and *dichos* (popular proverbs and sayings). Although home and community knowledge intersect, they can also feel disjointed. For example, home knowledge can be disconnected from student’s community knowledge if they grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood. One can be exposed to home knowledge, within the home, including their native language, and through different cultural practices. Home and community knowledge is transferred in the following ways: (a) bodily through intuition, pain, desires, and pleasures; (b) socially through storytelling and/or by engaging in every day conversations with neighbors, church members, and/or workers in local businesses; (c) culturally by the representation of cultural and historical symbols such as streets or schools named after distinguished Latina/o leaders; (d) spiritually through religious and ancestral traditions; and (e) experientially through experiences, lessons learned, and gained insights from participating in student and community organizations, cultural events, and community marches.
All of this information leads to one of my research questions: How does home community knowledge support and hinder Latina/o students’ decision to pursue, persist, and graduate from college? However, students are also influenced by university knowledge and, more specifically, classroom knowledge. It is within classroom discussions, readings, and writing that students are able to reflect on home, community, and university knowledge. In addition to students’ participation in student and community organizations on and off campus. This process of reflecting and engaging from a personal and political place is enhanced by courses in LLS and MAS courses. As a result, Latina/o students are constantly moving between different places as gente estudiada.

**Organization of the Chapters**

Chapter 1 presents the rationale for this study by highlighting the increase in the number of Latinas/os enrolled in colleges and universities, but also the low college completion rates. An overview of the study is presented and the term gente estudiada is introduced as a concept that
serves to inform the interpersonal relations and contradictions that Latina/o students face as result of living between two worlds: the world of their family and home community and the world of school. I also share my story of my own process of becoming critically conscious as a result of learning about my racialized, gendered, classed, and immigrant identities.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the K-16 educational literature that draws from the following theoretical lenses: Chicana/Latina feminist theories, Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and Latina/o anthropology of education. One of the aims of this chapter is to capture the ways Latinos conceptualize schooling and educación and how families pave the road towards college for their children through the use of cultural values such as respeto (respect), dichos (popular proverbs and sayings), and consejos (advice). Second, the literature review highlights the obstacles that many first-generation Latina/o students encounter on their path to college. In reviewing the literature, I reconceptualize student retention by integrating pedagogies of the home, cultural wealth, and trenzas de identidades múltiples (braids of multiple identities). I conclude by emphasizing the importance of critical academic spaces and examples of professors in Ethnic Studies that have transformed these spaces.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework and methodology used to examine the experiences of first-generation Latina/o students at 4-year universities. I provide a theoretical discussion of Chicana/Latina feminist theories and how they informed my ethnographic methodology and methods. Both the theoretical framework and methodology allowed me to weave together, reflect, and exchange stories with other Latinas/o who have gone through similar educational experiences. I reflect about my role as both insider and outsider and my positionality in relation to my participants and research process. I also include a description of the research
design, including site, sample, the selection of the participants, data collection procedures, and
the data analysis.

Chapter 4 details the ways family stories, dichos, and consejos helped participants
overcome personal and academic challenges in their lives. In addition to reflecting on the
positive aspects of their home communities, they also shared stories about growing up in
disenfranchised neighborhoods. Chapter 5 captures participants’ stories of overcoming academic
obstacles on their pathway to college. Chapter 6 describes the ways Latina/o students became
transformed by MAS and LLS pedagogies and how those pedagogies connected them to
community and political issues. Chapter 7 examines current legal and policy debates, including
the DREAM Act, and how they continue to affect the educational attainment, social
incorporation, and political activism of undocumented Latina/o students. This section’s focus is
to understand how the story of Latina/o education disrupts immigration policies and how the
stories of undocumented students humanize the issue of immigration. This section provides a
media content analysis of blog posts and other social media networking sites to examine the civic
engagement of students in the undocumented student movement. I retell Andrea’s story of how
she experienced, navigated, and challenged the boundaries of academic, social, and political
spaces sin papeles. Specifically, I highlight her political activism, most notably her participation
in Atlanta, Georgia where she and six other students were arrested for protesting against the
Georgia Board of Regents for banning undocumented students from enrolling at the top five
public universities in the state. I conclude by summarizing the main findings, theoretical
implications, policy implications, and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2

Literature Review: Latinas/os Value Higher Education

The U.S. public education system has been inundated by discussions and debates on educational policies, reforms, and closing the achievement and opportunity gap for Latina/o students. Currently, one in four students in the nation’s public school system are Latina/o (Fry & Lopez, 2012). The Obama administration has made it a point to expand educational opportunities and improve the academic achievement of all students, including Latina/o students. In 2010, President Obama signed Executive Order 13555, renewing the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics (U.S. Department of Education). Part of the initiative has focused on expanding early childhood education, improving the achievement of English language learners, simplifying the process of filling out the FAFSA application, and making college more accountable and affordable for Latina/o students. So far the Obama administration has been successful in increasing college enrollment rates of Latina/o students.

While Latinas/os are entering colleges and universities at higher rates, they continue to fall behind white students when it comes to completing a bachelor’s degree (Fry & Taylor, 2013). On average Latina/o students tend to be less academically prepared for college as a result of attending lower-performing schools and/or being tracked into lower level classes (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Villalpando, 2010). Many Latina/o students are more likely to come from families with lower socioeconomic backgrounds, lower levels of formal education, and mixed-status households (Contreras, 2011; Lopez, 2009; Fix & Zimmermann, 2001). For many Latina/o students, transitioning from high school to college can be challenging and isolating. Often, nothing or little is done to welcome and to acclimate Latina/o students and their families to the

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10 President George H.W. Bush first established the initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic students in 1990 and it was renewed by President Clinton and President George W. Bush.
campus environment. While many educational scholars and student affairs practitioners recognize that Latinas/os are more likely to be first-generation college students and face additional challenges brought by their immigration status, there has been considerable divergence about specific factors that influence Latina/o college retention. We understand background characteristics of Latina/o students, but what we really need to know about are the ways they integrate both cultures in their everyday lives (i.e. having a strong sense of obligation to the family, at the same time having strong individualistic values), how they navigate and negotiate belonging within contradictory and often ambivalent spaces (campus, home, community), and how these spaces/relationships influence Latina/o student retention and degree completion.

**Understanding Latina/o Students’ Experiences of Having to Live in Two Worlds: The World of Their Family and Home Communities and the World of School/Academia**

As more first-generation Latina/o students enroll in 4-year colleges and universities, what do we really know about their college lives and relationships with their families and communities? How are they negotiating the contradictions that may arise between home, community, and institutions of higher education? The purpose of my research is to develop a better understanding on how first-generation Latina/o students view and negotiate relationships with their families, community, and their university. In addition to how these relationships influence Latina/o student persistence and how they draw from home and community knowledge (i.e. family stories) to navigate higher education, I examine how courses in Latina/o Studies (LLS) and Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses provide safe and critical spaces where they can grapple through these tensions and facilitate the development of students’ critical consciousness of how they come to perceive and connect their personal experiences to social,
cultural, historical, economical, and political structures. When students are able to make sense of their educational experiences, they are able to make connections between their college education to issues within their home, community, and institutions of higher education. The courses enable students to make sense of their past by learning about their history and connecting that history to the present. Developing a critical consciousness of who they are and to whom they are connected, increases the students’ sense of belonging and provides them with the tools to navigate different spaces.

In this literature review I will be interweaving literature from Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship, Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars, as well as from Latina/o anthropology of education. These sets of scholarship challenge the existing hierarchy of knowledge(s) about the education of Latinas/os along the educational pipeline. Chicana/Latina feminist perspectives are grounded on the activism of the Chicana/o Movement and Chicanas’ activism within the Women’s Movement with respect to their struggles for educational equity (Castillo, 1995; Flores, 2000; García, 1997). Most importantly, Chicana/Latina feminist perspectives have had the greatest impact on theorizing education and the experiences of Latina/o students as gendered, racialized, bilingual, and bicultural (Anzaldúa, 1987; Gonzalez, 2001; González, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 1998; The Latina feminist group, 2001). Their work has documented and highlighted Latina/o students cultural, linguistic, and community wealth and knowledge that has emerged from Latina/o homes and communities (Anzaldúa, 1991; Catellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gándara, 1995; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Chicana/Latina feminisms also provides a theory of resistance to and agency within oppressive educational practices (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Hurtado, 2003; Tijerina, 2004). Chicana/Latina feminist perspectives
in education challenge normative ways of thinking about educational research, policies, and practices in ways that center and build on Latina/o schooling experiences and draw from and critique home knowledge (Anzaldúa, 1991; Delgado Bernal, 2001, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Villenas & Moreno, 2001).

Both CRT and LatCrit in education place race and other socially constructed categories at the center of the analysis (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Valdez, 1998; Sólorzano & Villalpando, 1998; Yosso, 2005). CRT and LatCrit guide my work by privileging the experiential knowledge of Latina/o students, their families, and their communities (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Sólorzano, 1999). At the same time, CRT and LatCrit scholarship call for a reinterpretation of educational laws and policies in order to deconstruct and challenge social inequalities within the educational system (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Latina/o anthropology of education scholarship has challenged deficit notions about the education of Latina/o students and their families by (re)claiming subjugated knowledge(s) and moving home and community knowledge from the margins to the center of educational research (Cammarota, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Valdés, 1996).

This literature review aims to understand the experiences of first-generation Latina/o students. Existing research on Latina/o schools, highlight the different ways that Latina/o families pave the way for college for their children through cultural home knowledge (Carter, 2003; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Fernández, 2002; Rodriguez, 2010; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Valdés; 1996). Thus, I hope to capture the ways Latina/o students overcome and resist educational barriers by focusing on educational studies that examine the ways Latina/o students draw from home and community knowledge. In this literature review, I will also examine how courses in Ethnic Studies, including Chicana/o Studies and Mexican American Studies courses
provide critical spaces for Latina/o students to discuss and make sense of their race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, language, immigration status, and their educación and education (Córdova; 2005; Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Garavito, 2009; Holling, 2006; Pizarro, 2004). This literature review will also examine how Latina/o students use school success as a coping mechanism and form of resistance to discrimination and stereotypes regarding their academic abilities. Educational research has documented how resistance amongst Latina/o students influences their academic success and postsecondary educational aspirations and attainment (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Fernández, 2002; Gándara, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999).

Previous research on Latina/o college students’ academic success show that it is important for students to perceive safe spaces on campus in which they can seek out connections to academic and social support networks. According to Solórzano and Villalpando (1998) counterspaces can be formal or informal, thus, these spaces allow Latina/o students to share their concerns and frustrations with one another about their experiences transitioning and adapting to higher education. Counterspace can also serve to affirm students racial, ethnic, class, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status aspects of their identity (Tatum, 1997). This is especially important to this literature review because I will examine (a) how courses in Ethnic Studies provide Latina/o students with un sitio (a space) y una lengua (a language and/or discourse) to negotiate the different spaces between the university, home, and community (their community back home and the communities they have developed within the university); (b) when, where, and how students draw from and critique home and community knowledge(s); and (c) how the courses help Latina/o students to develop a critical consciousness (forms of agency and resistance; Freire, 1973; Pérez, 1998).
**Educación in the Home**

In this section, I will examine the term *educación* by analyzing how this Latina/o cultural value is defined and carried out within the home and how it impacts children’s education within a U.S. context. Although *educación* is a direct translation of the English word “education,” its meaning is much broader than just succeeding academically (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). In Guadalupe Valdés (1996) ethnographic study of Mexican families living in a semi-rural town near the U.S.-Mexican border, she found that *educación* was perceived as the groundwork for their children’s academic education. *Educación* is knowledge that is transferred from the families to the children (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Valdés, 1996). Furthermore, Latino families view moral values as the basis for their children’s academic success. For example, teaching their children *respeto* (respect) for parents, elders, and community members is considered to be an important element of *educación*. Parents also emphasize *respeto* for their children’s teachers by not questioning their authority, but at times it can serve as a disadvantage for the student if the teacher is not meeting the needs of the student. Parents and children’s *respeto* for the teachers can also become detrimental and misinterpreted by schools as a lack of caring or interest in their child’s education.

It is also through the use of metaphorical statements such as *dichos* (popular proverbs or sayings) that families instill *educación* to their children, such as *el buen camino* (the good moral path) or *valerse por sí mismo* (to be self-reliant; Villenas & Moreno, 2001). The impact of “traditional” family values such as *respeto* and obedience for elders is also critical for the survival of many poor and working class families (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valdés, 1996; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). In particular, immigrant families depend on their children to help out by taking care of their younger siblings, cooking, cleaning, and translating
for their parents, which can potentially lead to hyper-responsible children (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). According to Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (2001), migration creates changes within the structure of the family, which, as a result gives children more responsibilities, such as assuming roles as translators in medical, legal, social, and school settings. At the same time, conflicts may arise as the power shifts from the parents to the child in families where the child becomes the interpreter. As a result, many Latina/o children tend to adapt more easily than their parents to a new language and culture. At school, maintaining strong ties with both languages and cultures may cause stressors and negative experiences for the child as they adapt to a new environment and new ways of thinking.

Children of immigrants may be at a disadvantage in school because their families are confronted with many challenges including poverty, language barriers, lack of access to social services and knowledge about the U.S. education system (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). At the same time, Latino families possess cultural strengths that encourage and support their children to do well in school. Studies have shown that because poor and working-class Latina/o parents tend to have fewer resources and limited formal education, they are more likely to show their support for their children’s education through verbal support and encouragement (Delgado Bernal 2001; Gándara, 1995; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valdés, 1996; Yosso, 2006). Even though many Latino families have high aspirations for their children’s education, schools often devalue their cultural knowledge. The concepts educación and funds of knowledge point to the knowledge found in Latino households (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Theoretically, funds of knowledge is a framework used to explore the relationship between knowledge that emerges from the home economics and labor resources. Thus, funds of knowledge is an approach teachers and schools can apply to “[u]nlock
and capitalize on the knowledge students already possess” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. x).

In Patricia Gándara’s (1995) study of high achieving Chicanas/os from low-income Mexican American families, she found that parents encouraged sons and daughters similarly, however sons were advised to focus on a particular career goal, whereas the daughters were simply advised to do well, followed with, “[s]o you don’t have to depend on anyone” (p. 94). The parents tended to have more specific, and to a degree, higher goals for their sons. The Latina participants also shared how much more difficult it was for them to pursue a college education because they had to continue helping out at home. Although both sons and daughters were encouraged to pursue their educational goals, the women experienced tensions within their families. Oftentimes, Latinas are taught be self-reliant, but at the same time they are expected to maintain their family obligations, duties, and gender role expectations. The tensions and contradictions that arise for Latinas are a direct result of the male-centered and patriarchal family structure found within the Latino community. In the following example, we see the ways Latina mother’s in Gándara’s (1995) study push against patriarchal forces; when asked which parent had the greatest influence in their educational goals—both male and female participants felt the greatest support came from their mothers. Furthermore, the consejos, communicated by their mothers served as “[a] powerful weapon against patriarchal hegemony” for the daughters (p. 108). Mothers were the most encouraging and supportive of their children’s education, however it is noted that fathers had fewer opportunities to be involved and/or were absent from their children’s lives/upbringing.

Latino parents nurture their children’s educational aspirations through the use of consejos and family cultural narratives that draw from their lived experiences and struggles they
encountered in Mexico and/or within the United States (Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2008). In Concha Delgado-Gaitan’s (1994) ethnographic study of one Mexican immigrant family in Carpinteria, California, she demonstrates how the Estrada family’s use of Latino cultural practices, such as family cultural narratives (including consejos), served as motivational strategies for their children’s education. Delgado-Gaitan (1994) defines consejos as “[a] cultural dimension of communication sparked with emotional empathy and compassion, as well as familial expectation and inspiration” (p. 300). Consejos also served as a powerful tool to assist parents and their children overcome barriers in school and in their personal lives (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). For example, Latino parents are more likely to bring their children to work to teach them about the value of hard work and to reinforce education as a way to upward mobility. Working along with their families, children are also exposed to backbreaking labor, as well as racial, and gender discrimination. On the one hand, respect for the hard work parents do is crucial to any family and so having that experience to work along with them reinforces a strong work ethic. Thus, by giving their children first-hand experience of working in some of the most undesired jobs by U.S. Americans (i.e. agriculture, construction, landscaping, housekeeping), parents are exposing their children to hard labor and helping them understand that they have options—they can work hard in low-wage jobs and continually struggle, or they can work hard at school in order to develop their potential for a better future. One the one hand, a desire for mobility entails a desire not to be like one’s parents, hence Latino parents funds of knowledge is both for their children to instill the value of hard work and applying those values in the realm of education.

Furthermore, participants in Gándara’s (1995) study shared how their parents stressed hard work and how later in school those experiences would translate into “[p]ersistence in
schoolwork, as well as a means for instilling a sense of independence and taking care of oneself” (p. 31). The discrimination that parents experience is not always discussed with their children, but sometimes those moments of silence communicate more than words can convey. Those moments of silence can also serve as reminders that inspire students to move forward and to overcome personal as well as racial and gender discrimination in their everyday lives.

*Las Familias: Redefining Latino Parent/Family Involvement*

The family involvement literature clearly supports the importance of strong and positive relationships between the family and school. However, Latino parents do not always feel welcomed in their children’s school because of cultural and language barriers (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). In addition, Latina/o families and their children have often been defined as disadvantaged and culturally deprived; however more recent research has identified the resiliency of Latino parenting (Fine & Weis, 1998; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). It is also important to note that many Latino parents are already involved in their children’s education within the home, but they are not always aware or sure of how to be involved within their schools. Research has shown that when Latino families are involved at the school level, teachers become more aware about the challenges and strengths of Latina/o students and their families (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Many Latinos are disproportionately affected by poverty and other barriers associated with class. For instance time constraints are a primary obstacle for parents who work evenings or multiple jobs and little flexibility can adversely affect their ability to get involved in their children’s school (Aguilar, MacGillivray, & Walker, 2003; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Fry, 2002).
The literature on parental involvement has consistently shown how children benefit when parents are involved in their schooling; this has been linked to specific indicators of school success (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Research on parental involvement has also been highly concentrated at the K-12 level and has been conceptualized from the perspectives of parents. Later, in this chapter, I will discuss how Latina/o college students perceive their parents’ involvement in their education. So how do so many students succeed in school even when their parents are not directly involved with their schools? First, we should begin by problematizing the general use of the term parental involvement and how it limits who can be involved in students’ education and the ways involvement is defined. Narrow definitions of how parents should participate in their students’ education devalues the ways families of color participate in their children’s education due to cultural differences (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992, 1994). Educational research on parental involvement has shifted in order to provide a more inclusive definition of parental involvement.

In Richard Valencia and Mary Black’s (2002) case study of six Mexican American families in Austin, Texas, they found that parental involvement included the engagement of the extended family, particularly that of grandparents. They also found that it was difficult to capture the attitudes and practices of family involvement within schools; however, family involvement was best captured within the home. Findings showed that while some parents were not able to become externally involved within the school, the families were all deeply involved internally within the home. Some of the ways parents/families demonstrated external involvement included teacher contacts, school visits, and volunteering in the classroom. Many of the parents or extended members of the family were not able to be externally involved because of work obligations, transportation issues, and language barriers. However, they were externally involved
within the home. For example, many of the grandparents in these families told stories to their 
grandchildren about their own schooling experiences of racial discrimination and segregation 
during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Besides family stories, parents and grandparents shared 
consejos (advice) that served to reinforce the connection between academic success, college, and 
a better future.

Latino parental/family involvement has also been documented as positively impacting 
their daughters/sons decision to pursue higher education. Michelle Knight, Nadjwa Norton, 
Courtney Bentlye, and Iris Dixon’s (2004) ethnographic study of poor Black and Latina/o 
families in New York City, examined the ways families use counterstories to support and 
encourage their children to pursue a college education. The high school students in the study 
participated as co-researchers by conducting interviews with family members whom they felt 
encouraged them to pursue college. They found that youth retold counterstories of family 
involvement as a major influence in their educational goals. One of the participants, Raquel, a 
low-income Puerto Rican high school student, talked about going to work with her mother. As a 
child, Raquel was always sick and because her mother was not able to afford a sitter she would 
bring her to work. In one of her journal entries Raquel wrote, “[m]inorities are just as capable of 
being successful like these Whiteys do . . . the fact of the matter is, that’s just the current 
statistics . . . that can change drastically in the future. Hopefully” (p. 115). Studies such as these 
recognize non-traditional and informal Latino parent/family involvement practices, such as 
values and parents’ attitudes that have a positive influence on their child’s learning and 
aspirations to pursue postsecondary education.
Las Escuelas: Challenging Deficit Discourses

One of the problems that continue to persist in the schooling of Latina/o students is the miscommunication between families and schools. Teachers and school administrators will often perceive parents as not caring about their children’s education because of their lack of direct involvement within the school. The problem with the educational system and many of today’s educators is that they still believe that Latina/o students are not capable of academically succeeding by blaming their culture or their parents for their lack of caring and involvement in their child’s education. These beliefs and perceptions about Latina/o students’ lack of abilities to succeed academically are prevalent across schools and U.S. society. Lilia Fernández (2002) argues how Latina/o students internalize racialized discourses that have both immediate and long-term, cumulative effects. She explains.

Teachers’ assumptions about minority students and their families are shaped or reinforced by the portrayals of minorities in the evening news (as criminals), in legislative and political debates (as undeserving welfare recipients or unqualified affirmative action beneficiaries), in discussions about social service (as irresponsible young men and unwed pregnant teen girls), and in the political economy (as low-skilled, low-wage workers—janitors, housekeepers, fast food workers—or worse yet, as unemployed and unemployable). Thus, students are not expected, encouraged, or enabled to attend college. (p. 58)

It is important to understand that parents are doing their best to help their children succeed in school. Furthermore, schools need to recognize and value the social assets that Latina/o children bring to school, from respeto for their teachers to their strong desire to contribute to their family by getting ahead in school. Poor and working-class Latino families have a strong desire to see their children academically succeed and pursue a college education, although they may lack, in some instances, the social capital to succeed in school.

Scholars who have examined the concept of “caring” in an educational context contend that when students lack caring relationships with their teachers, it can potentially result in
students feeling academically disengaged (Lipsitz, 1995; Noddings, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, Vasquez, & Mehan, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999). In Angela Valenzuela’s (1999) ethnographic study of immigrant Mexican and Mexican American students at a Houston, Texas, high school found an absence of caring relationships between teachers and students. To form authentic caring relationships, Valenzuela (1999) argues how teachers need to respect students’ language and culture and students in turn reciprocate with a caring attitude by doing their best academically. Valenzuela explains.

What does it mean for faculty and school-based personnel to care about students? What does it mean, “to care”? The answer to this question is provided by the students themselves. Teachers and other school personnel are to depart from their penchant for aesthetic caring and embrace a more authentically caring ideology and practice. According to this reformulation, school functionaries are to embark on a search for connection where trusting relationships constitute the cornerstone for all learning. (p. 263)

It is important, therefore, to develop confianza (trust) with Latina/o students and their families in order to develop meaningful and caring relationships. To create an atmosphere that is inviting for Latino families and support Latino cultural values it is critical to demonstrate an authentic sense of caring and respeto for students and their families. Caring for Latina/o students requires an interest in learning about student’s backgrounds and respecting their home language and culture. In addition to respecting students’ cultural values and attitudes towards education and the hard work they do to maintain those goals, teachers who build respectful, trusting, and meaningful relationships with parents and students, in turn, can lead to student academic achievement.

Commonly held educational stereotypes about Latina/o students is that they lack the aspirations, academic skills, and cultural capital to succeed in school; however educational research suggest otherwise (Valencia, & Black, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2005). Villenas and Deyhle’s (1999) review of seven ethnographic studies of Latino education argues
that historically social scientists have located school failure of Latina/o students within the cultures of Mexicans and Latino families by using deficit theories. Deficit thinking has changed forms over time, but the primary function of deficit thinking has remained the same; blaming school failure on students and their families, rather than examining how structural inequities further marginalize Latina/o students and their families (Valencia & Black, 2002). Furthermore, deficit thinking is based upon the belief that students’ “culture” is to blame for their lack of academic success (Lewis, 1961). For example some teachers might blame Latina/o students’ failure in school because they are not able to read in English, but fail to recognize the fact that many schools do not offer bilingual education. This way of thinking also ignores the various forms of cultural capital that students possess. For example, the theoretical concept of Bourdieueuan cultural capital allowed Tara Yosso (2005) to challenge traditional interpretations of cultural capital through a critical race theory perspective. Yosso (2005) introduces an alternative concept known as community cultural wealth that acknowledges and recognizes the assets that students of color bring with them from their homes and communities into the school.

Yosso’s (2005) analysis and reconceptualization of cultural capital from a CRT lens led her to develop a more empowering concept, community cultural wealth through the following six forms of capital: (a) aspirational capital allows them to “maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (p. 77); (b) linguistic capital that includes the “intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (p. 78.); (c & d) familial and social capital that draws from cultural knowledge(s) and community resources; (e & f) navigational and resistant capital, allowing students to navigate through social institutions including schools and to develop oppositional behavior that challenges inequalities. In the remaining sections of this literature review, I will be
referring back to the different forms of community wealth capital to examine when and how students draw from this capital and how students challenge and transform the capital.

Some institutions, especially schools, often fail to recognize Latina/o students’ home and community knowledge. Historically, the curriculum for Latina/o children has increasingly become “linguistically and culturally subtractive” (San Miguel & Donato, 2010). In Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr. and Rubén Donato’s (2010) review of the education of Latinas/os over a 100-year period found that “the curriculum constantly devalued, demeaned, and distorted the children’s linguistic and cultural heritage and systemically sought to eradicate it from the content and instruction of public education” (p. 32). Thus, school knowledge is not made relevant to Latina/o student’s lives and experiences. For many Latina/o students it is not until they reach higher education that they are given a space and the opportunity to learn about the social, historical, and political contributions of Latinas/os in the U.S.

**Pushing the Boundaries of Educational Attainment**

The first major national report to focus on the educational achievement of Latina/o students was produced in 1984. The National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics (1984) found that 45% of Latinas/os were dropping out of high school. Also noted in the findings was how Latina/o students across the country were dropping out of high school because of overcrowded schools and a lack of understanding about graduation requirements. For the first time in decades, Latina/o students are surpassing white students in college enrollment rates as noted earlier. Recently released data by the Pew Hispanic Center found that 78% of Latinas/os are graduating from high school and a record high of seven in 10 or 69% of high school graduates in the class of 2012 went to college (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Still, Latina/o
students tend to have a different college experience compared to their white counterparts. Despite these gains, Latina/o students are less likely to attend a selective college, less likely to enroll full-time, and less likely to complete a bachelor’s degree (Fry & Taylor, 2013).

Educational research and reports continue to show that merely providing access to college for Latina/o students is not enough. Latina/o students are more likely to attend overcrowded, underfunded, understaffed, and racially segregated schools (Valencia, 2002). Research has shown that Latina/o students who attend segregated and underfunded schools are less likely to apply and get accepted to top-tier institutions (Burciaga, Perez Huber, & Solórzano, 2010). Latina/o students have also been overwhelmingly tracked into vocational or general education tracks (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Once tracked into lower tracks, students are restricted from accessing college-preparatory tracks, qualified teachers, and information about college (Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009;). For example, studies have shown how high school counselors disproportionally fail to identify high achieving Latina/o students into college-preparatory tracks, including Advanced Placement (AP) and honors classes (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002). Even among the Latina/o students who intend to go to college can go unaware of being tracked out of college-preparatory classes. Thus, many will not become aware of such information and those that become aware are also less likely to petition their way into a college-prep track. Another consistent finding with the literature is the correlation between students who enroll in AP and honors classes in high school are more likely to attend selective colleges/universities and complete their college degrees (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Research has shown that Latina/o students in advanced tracks have the opportunity to interact with other high achieving students and as a result they are able to exchange information
about college with their peers (Perna, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Being placed in a college-prep track also has an impact in shaping students’ aspirations; for example, a student who had plans to attend a local community college might now consider applying to a 4-year in state or out of state school, including the Ivy Leagues. The participants in Gándara’s (1995) study of high achieving Chicanas/os who attended desegregated schools and were placed in college-preparatory tracks gained confidence in knowing that they could academically compete with nonminority students. Latina/o students in the study did not develop a competing peer ideology, nor did they look down on their peers who were in vocational or general educational tracks, but rather, were supportive of each other.

Many Latina/o students attend overcrowded schools that are understaffed; thus, contributing to their lack of academic preparedness and eligibility to apply to selective 4-year colleges and universities (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Research has shown that high schools with a large attendance of minority students including Latina/o students tend to have more teachers who are not certified and inexperienced to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Fernández, 2002). Even among Latina/o students who graduate from high school with a moderate to high GPA and complete the courses required to apply to 4-year colleges, many are not accepted to 4-year colleges because they tend to have lower scores on the different national college entrance exams. As a result, Latina/o students and other underrepresented students that are been taught disproportionally by under-qualified teachers throughout their K-12 schooling and with less access to resources, are less likely to be academically prepared and eligible to enter college.

Latina/o students are also more likely to be subjected to lower expectation from teachers and high school counselors. For instance, Angela Valenzuela’s (1999) ethnographic study of an
inner city high school located in Houston, Texas, found how schools subtract resources from youth in the following two ways: (a) dismisses students’ definition and understanding of education, and (b) subtractive schooling involves subtractively assimilationist policies and practices that devalue students’ culture and home language. Placing low expectations on Latina/o students therefore underestimates their academic potential and limits their opportunities to pursue higher education. In a study of Latina/o students’ access to college resource allocation at a predominantly Latina/o high school, Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, and Allen (2009) found that as a result of attending an overcrowded and under resourced school, students felt they lacked individualized attention from teachers and counselors as well as access to college information. The findings of this study revealed that the limited resources at the high school were made available and distributed only to the highest achieving students. In addition, a major challenge faced by the students in this study was the counselor-student ratio of one counselor for every 725 students. It is critical to note the importance of counselors to ensure that Latina/o students and their families receive adequate information and resources to inform them about college.

Educational researchers have identified several factors to improve the academic preparation and college enrollment of first-generation students including providing early information to students and parents about the college-going process, pre-college programs, and creating a college-going culture in high schools (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005; Valverde & Associates; 2008). In Linda Castillo, Collie Conoley, Lisa Cepeda, Karen Ivy, and Debra Archuleta’s (2010) qualitative study of Mexican American ninth-grade students, they found that family influence, peer influence, school personnel, and student responsibility were important factors for creating a pro-college culture. In the study, students said they were most influenced
by parents. The students’ parents conveyed their support for their children’s education by talking to them about the importance of succeeding in school, punishing them for low grades, and by sharing their own experiences of facing barriers because of a lack of education. Students reported peer influence or friends as either detractors or supporters for pursuing a college education. The school personnel were viewed as extremely important to students’ access to information about college. Overall, students placed most responsibility on themselves to work hard to graduate from high school and attend college. In addition, Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, and Allen’s (2009) study suggests that Latina/o students from low socioeconomic backgrounds face barriers in accessing some of the most basic information about college because resources are often restricted or channeled to higher achieving students. Although parents are supportive of their children’s education, parents’ lack of exposure to and experience with higher education limits the information they could offer their children about college (Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009). By recognizing the early needs and challenges that Latina/o students experience, schools can advance the educational attainment of these students by implementing outreach programs to promote college-going and academic excellence for all students, but especially for Latinas/os, who are less likely to enroll in more selective 4-year colleges and universities. Despite the many challenges they face—from poor academic preparation, lower teacher expectations, and lack of college knowledge, research consistently shows that home aspirations and family motivation encourages many Latina/o students to apply and enroll in higher education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Gándara, 1995; Yosso, 2005).
Undocumented Students: The Educational Struggles of DREAMers

In addition to broad concerns about Latina/o educational attainment, more specific issues emerge when the questions of documentation and generation of immigration is examined. According to estimates by the Pew Hispanic Center, there are 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S.—58% (about 6.5 million) of them are from Mexico and 23% (about 2.6 million) from other nations in Latin America (Passel & Cohn, 2012). It estimated that 53% of the nation’s Latinos are second-generation (U.S. born with at least one foreign-born parent) and 11% are first-generation (foreign born; Pew Research Center, 2013). One of the top reasons Latinos immigrants give for coming to the U.S. is a strong desire to provide their children with better educational opportunities. But unlike the first and second generation Latinas/os, the one-and-half or 1.5-generation\textsuperscript{11} face additional challenges due to their undocumented status, thus, deterring them from postsecondary education. The 1. 5-generation are generally defined as those born abroad, but most or all of their schooling, social, and cultural development occurred in their host country (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orosco, 2011). For the 1.5-generation Latina/os coming of age can be psychologically, emotionally, and socially taxing because many of them grow up unaware of their undocumented status until they attempt to apply for a job or for college. Upon learning about their undocumented status, these students often struggle with the legal and social contradictions of being included and excluded from U.S. society. For example, undocumented students are legitimizied and protected for their academic achievements, but at the same time they and are excluded from institutions of higher education for lacking access to legal status. Many of these

\textsuperscript{11} Refers to those born outside the U.S. and brought to the U.S. as a child, as well as those partially foreign educated and U.S. educated.
students have not given up on their dream to pursue a college education, despite their precarious status and uncertain future.

Undocumented Latina/o students have a constitutional right to a primary and secondary school education by the 1982 U.S. Supreme Court decision Plyer v. Doe (Olivas, 2012). It is estimated that each year 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school with a dream of pursuing and achieving a college education (Fix & Passel, 2003). Many of these students have demonstrated a strong commitment to their education by excelling academically in high school and pursuing postsecondary education despite many of the challenges (Contreras, 2009; Olivas 2012; Perez Huber & Malagon, 2007). Research has found that undocumented Latina/o students first experience different obstacles related to their legal status around their sophomore/junior year in high school, when a social security number is required by the state to obtain a driver’s license, library card, and employment (Perez, 2009; Rincón, 2010). While many undocumented students and their families have high aspirations that they will attend college, they soon realize that they cannot qualify for in-state tuition or for receiving federally funded student financial aid. Since Plyer, states have confronted the questions of whether states should extend in-state tuition rates to undocumented immigrant residents.

Although federal law does not prohibit undocumented students from attending college, much of the debate about undocumented students has been on whether they should be allowed to pay in-state tuition and if they should receive federal financial aid. As a result of their undocumented status, only a small fraction—7,000 to 13,000 undocumented students—are enrolled in postsecondary education throughout the U.S. (National Immigration Law Center, 2012). However, they are not eligible to receive any federally funded financial aid, including

\[\text{12} \text{ Under Section 505 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Reconciliation Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) prohibits states from providing any higher education benefit on the basis of residency unless the same benefit is offered to a U.S. citizen (National Immigration Law Center, 2013).}\]
loans, grants, scholarships or work-study, thus making it extremely stressful and taxing for students to afford tuition (Perez, 2009; Rincón, 2010). Without financial aid, undocumented students that qualify for in-state tuition must pay an average of $15,000–$40,000 per year for full-time enrollment (U.S. Department of Education).

Currently, 13 states have passed laws that offer in-state tuition for undocumented students, including the following states: California, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, and Washington (National Immigration Law Center, 2012). In-state tuition bills have helped undocumented college students to reduce the costs of tuition; however, legally they cannot receive any federally funded financial aid including grants, loans, work-study programs, and some scholarships. However, some private colleges and universities have been willing to amend their policies and provide financial assistance to undocumented students.

For years, both federal and state legislators have passed and attempted to get passed legislation that will allow undocumented students to pay lower tuition rates and most importantly to provide a path to citizenship. Since 2001, there have been various versions of the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act or DREAM Act; if passed, the legislation provides a path to citizenship for undocumented students upon completion of two years of college (or certain vocational colleges or studies for at least 2 years toward a B.A. or higher degree) or serves in the U.S. Armed forces for at least 2 years (National Immigration Law Center, 2011). The experiences of undocumented students speak to their motivation and resilience to attain an education, despite, enduring many challenges that only seem to get progressively more taxing. Furthermore, in order for college educated undocumented students to be legally employed and enter professional professions, Congress needs to pass legislation that
will provide a pathway to U.S. citizenship. The future of the DREAM Act remains uncertain, yet challenges persist for undocumented Latina/o students as they seek access to higher education and a pathway to citizenship.

**Understanding the Factors Affecting the Retention of Undergraduate Latina/o Students**

In the nation’s 4-year colleges and universities, Latinas/os (18 to 24 years old) are now the largest minority group (Fry & Lopez, 2012). According to Hugo Lopez (2012), Associate Director of the Pew Hispanic Center, the recent increase in Latina/o student enrollment reflects, in part, the continued growth in the nations’ Hispanic population aged 18 to 24 years old from 1.3 million in 1972 to 6 million in 2011. This recent growth is also a reflection of the high value that Latino parents place on their children’s education, regardless of their educational backgrounds. Despite increases in the enrollment rates of Latina/o students in 4-year colleges and universities, they tend to complete bachelor’s degrees at lower rates than any other minority group (Burciaga, Perez Huber, & Solórzano, 2010; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Fry & Lopez, 2012).

Over the past three decades the literature on Latinas/os in higher education has consistently shown limited improvements on their university experiences (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Darder, 2012; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Murillo, Villenas, Galván, Muñoz, Martínez, Machado-Casas, 2010; Pizarro, 2005). There have been many factors that have been found to influence Latina/o student retention, including but not limited to the following: financial aid awards, academic and social support, mentors, increasing faculty-student interactions, integrating underrepresented students culture into the curriculum and throughout the campus (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Osegura, Locks, & Vega, 2009; Seidman, 2005). Although there is a large body of
research on Latina/o student retention, very few institutions of higher education have effectively incorporated the research and theories into policy practice.

Latina/o students tend to be first-generation college students, are non-traditional students, are enrolled part-time, are employed, and/or are caring for younger siblings or elderly relatives (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). They tend to be concentrated at Hispanic Serving institutions (HSI), less selective 4-year universities and colleges (Burciaga, Perez Hurber, & Solorzano, 2010; Villalpando, 2010). Once Latina/o students enter institutions of higher education, they are not thinking about failing or dropping out, rather they are excited to begin a new journey in their lives and have a strong desire to succeed. But the reality is that first-generation Latina/o students encounter many challenges along the pathway to college, including disparities in academic preparation and information about how to navigate college (Burciaga, Perez Huber, & Solórzano, 2010; Contreras, 2011; Fernandez, 2002). Latina/o college students are also more likely to experience cultural and social isolation, due to the lack of culturally sensitive services, spaces, and lack of Latina/o faculty representation on campus (González, 2002; González, Jovel, & Stoner; 2004). As a result, many Latina/o students feel disconnected and unsupported from the campus community.

Campus Climate: Creating a Home Away From Home

All students experience stress as they adjust to college; however Latina/o students attending predominantly white institutions experience higher levels of stress as a result of feeling unwelcomed or discriminated. Research has shown that campus climate is a significant factor that can support or deter the academic access, retention, and graduation of underrepresented students (Allen & Solórzano, 2001; González, 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). They are also
more likely than other underrepresented students to sense discrimination in the classroom and on campus (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). What constitutes a negative campus climate? According to Yosso (2006) a negative campus racial climate is a “social and academic environment that exhibits and cultivates racial and gender discrimination against people of color” in which people of color experience “racialized verbal and nonverbal insults” (p. 101). Research shows that a hostile campus climate can have a negative impact on student retention; at the same time, research has found that students in hostile climates tend to be more critical of their institutions and are more active to create positive changes (Hurtado, 1994). Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner’s (1994) research on campus climate demonstrates the association of minority student experiences to that of being a guest in someone’s home; one never achieves a sense of ownership or feeling like a full member of the academic community. In a positive campus climate, students of color are able to focus on their academics and less time is spent on protecting themselves from verbal and nonverbal insults. Making Latina/o students and other underrepresented groups feel welcomed and supported has positive effects on student retention, sense of belonging, and academic achievement (Allen & Solórzano, 2001; González, 2002; Sotello Viernes Turner, 1994).

Improving student retention has become and continues to be a vital issue in higher education. One major limitation in retention studies has been that educational researchers rely on traditional retention frameworks to explain the Latina/o experience. Traditional retention theories tend to focus on persistence and/or how the student is integrated into the campus (Astin, 1977, 1985; Tinto, 1975). Moreover, one of the most accepted theoretical models to explain why students leave college is Vincent Tinto’s model (1975, 1993) of student departure; his theoretical framework is based on the notion that students must become integrated into the college
environment. However, Tinto’s model relies on individualistic and meritocratic values, rather than, a more holistic approach to the issues and realities that first-generation Latina/o students experience in higher education. According to Tinto’s theory, college students must leave behind their family and community and fully integrate (assimilate) into the college environment in order to persist, academically succeed, and graduate.

Another limitation has been that retention studies have not examined how Latina/o college students navigate their relationships with their families. Research examining family responsibilities of Latina/o students has primarily focused on children and adolescents, and we know very little about how family responsibilities and expectations affect Latina/o college students. Institutions of higher education expect students to separate from family and to prioritize academics; however these demands are not consistent with Latina/o college student experiences. In order to increase Latina/o student retention it is critical to know the extent to which family fosters high educational aspirations for their children, but also how family expectations and obligations pull students’ attention away from their academics.

Although having strong family and community ties has shown positive outcomes on Latina/o students’ educational aspirations and achievements, it unintentionally places additional pressures on them to fulfill multiple responsibilities. While Latino parents do not directly pressure their children to fulfill multiple obligations, Latina/o students do it out of respect and gratitude for all their parents’ sacrifices. These demands are sometimes in conflict with their educational pursuits, making it difficult for students to transition into higher education.

Latina/o students are also more likely to come from low-income households and face greater responsibilities to contribute financially to their family (Becerro, 2010). While working may be necessary for many low-income students, in order to help offset the increasing costs of
attending higher education; it can also jeopardize their eligibility for state and federal grants. As a result, Latina/o students tend to receive less financial aid because they are more likely to enroll part-time and work more hours, thus affecting their eligibility for financial aid (Becerra, 2010; Hernandez, 2000, 2002; Miller & García, 2004; Siedman, 2005). Even when financial aid is available, it can be a difficult decision for Latina/o students to choose to enroll full-time, knowing that they will not be able to contribute financially to their families. Latina/o students are also more likely than their peers to live at home or close to home. The retention of Latina/o students will greatly depend on new retention frameworks that acknowledge the needs and challenges of the Latina/o student population. Latina/o students need academic and social support systems that will help them transition and navigate dual environments of home and college.

**Negotiating and Balancing Family Obligations and Responsibilities**

When Latina/o students perceive that their parents have high educational aspirations for them, they are more likely to feel motivated to achieve their educational goals (Sciarrì & Whitson, 2007). Daniel Sciarrà and Melissa Whitson’s (2007) longitudinal investigation of the significant factors that contribute to Latina/o students who continue their education beyond high school, found that parental support was one of the most significant factors for the attainment of an associate’s and bachelor’s or higher degree. However, parental support did not include financial support, therefore it was communication between parents and children in regards to academic matters that enhanced Latina/o student’s postsecondary educational attainment. Although being the first to pursue college is highly valued by Latino families and communities, many Latina/o students experience a greater degree of tensions and conflicts between their home
and college life due to Latina/o students’ strong cultural and family ties. For many Latina/o college students, maintaining close ties with family enhances their academic success; however family obligations and expectations can sometimes get in the way of students academic responsibilities (Boden, 2011; Hernandez, 2000 & 2002; Torres, 2004; Zalaquett, 2006).

More recent data also reveals that more Latinas enroll in college, as compared to Latinos (Valverde & Associates; 2008). This new trend demonstrates the manner in which Latinas are breaking cultural gender role expectations that otherwise would prevent them from pursuing higher education (González, Jovel, & Stoner, 2004; Cammarata, 2004; Hurtado, 2003). Latinas face additional cultural pressures and expectations. For example parents expect their daughters to live at home while they attend college or they expect them to serve as financial and medical support agents for the family (Ceja, 2006, Espinoza, 2010; González, Jovel, & Stoner, 2004). Latinas might decide to attend a college close to home and probably never fully discover themselves or take full advantage of the few opportunities they might encounter.

Sons are also expected to fulfill certain obligations, such as protecting the family and contributing financially. The cultural value of machismo creates an expectation that both sons and daughters are the ones who make sacrifices for the good of the family, even if it means dropping out of college to work full time and support their families (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Nonetheless, conflicting values between Latino cultural values and the values of higher education can create tensions and contradictions for Latina/o students (Rendón, 1992). For example, Latino families place much emphasis on close family ties and collectivity, whereas higher education places high value on competition and individualism, which can create tensions between Latina/o college students and their family. In fact, research has found that

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Studies examining the roles of Latinas/os within the home, consistently find that family related responsibilities are more likely to fall on women (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valdes, 1996).
Latina/o students are more likely to hide their cultural conflicts from their family and professors because they may sense a lack of understanding or perceived to be lacking of commitment to their education (Espinoza, 2010; Torres, 2006). Latina/o student retention and academic success depends in part on the degree of researchers and practitioners to better understand the factors that support and hinder their ability to negotiate competing demands of family, community, and academic obligations.

**Latina/o Student Retention: Bridging Latina/o Students Home Knowledge, Identities, and Experiences Using Chicana/Latina Feminist Theories**

What would retention look like if we were to examine retention from a Chicana/Latina feminist perspective? Retention from a Chicana/Latina feminist perspective would include the experiences of students within their homes and communities in order to begin to flesh out the features of a more holistic approach to Latina/o retention. Examining the extent of influences that external forces such as familial responsibilities, gender role expectations, and contradictory messages have on Latina/o students’ academic persistence is an important methodological contribution, because too often Latina/o students are suspected as to whether or not they are truly committed to their education if they chose to tend to family and community needs over their academic responsibilities. As more and more Latinas/os enroll in higher education, it would be wise for institutions of higher education to connect students’ university experience to their lived experiences at home and community by emphasizing and incorporating students everyday concerns.

Institutions of higher education need to develop academic and social engagement policies and practices that build on critical-race gendered epistemologies (Delgado Bernal, 2002) and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) in order to enhance the academic success and integration of
Latina/o students within and outside institutions of higher education. Second, universities would need to rethink, tap into, and incorporate funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) into the curriculum. Thirdly, shift to a comprehensive responsiveness to the identities of Latina/o students that acknowledge a *mestiza* consciousness or identity (Anzaldúa, 1999) and the *trenzas de identidades múltiples* (braids of multiple identities; González, 1998) in order to understand their various experiences and needs of students. It is part of the institutional role to ensure that all students achieve academic success by making retention a campus priority and creating a more inclusive campus climate.

Chicana/Latina feminist theories represent a shift from institutional values of competition and individualistic campus culture to cultural values of caring, *respeto*, and commitment to civic and social responsibility. In doing so, institutions of higher education can cultivate a culturally relevant learning environment for undergraduate Latina/o students. Chicana feminist scholar Delgado Bernal (2002) argues for a “critical raced-gendered epistemology” that allows educators, administrators, and policy makers to “consider creative admissions, curricular, and pedagogical policies that acknowledge, respect, and nurture the ways of knowing and understanding in communities of color” (p. 118). Critical raced-gendered epistemologies emerges from the experiences a person of color encounters such as racism, sexism, and other oppressions. Delgado Bernal provides different examples of how a critical raced-gendered epistemology can inform educational policies and practice. For example, she suggests for universities who have a language or diversity requirement to include the bilingualism and biculturalism of students into the curriculum. This practice would acknowledge students’ knowledge, rather than see them as limited in their English. It would also provide opportunities
for bilingual and bicultural students to participate on campus and off campus as tutors. This can help students develop a sense of belonging and integration into the institution.

**Family Knowledge: Pedagogies of the Home**

Although there are salient contradictions found within Latino families—it is also a way to link students to their communities, even if part of that link involves critically analyzing family values and home practices. Among Latina/o college students, maintaining strong family ties while attending college is an important factor that helps them adjust and navigate their transition into college life. Consistent with existing literature, Latina/o college students embrace the teachings of their families; at the same time, college provides a space to contest core institutions, values, ideals, and traditions. For many, this newfound knowledge and ways of thinking creates dissonance between their home and college worlds. The contradictions and tensions that many Latina/o college experience, thus, reflects the necessity for a pedagogy that can energetically and challengingly address the dissonance that is heightened by attending higher education. Delgado Bernal’s (2001) concept of “pedagogies of the home” is important here as her work documents the ways Latina/o college students draw from home knowledge and family as vital sources of support, encouragement, and motivation to navigate higher education. Pedagogies of the home situates the everyday teachings and contradictions that take place in the homes of Latina/o students. Her work is useful in understanding how Latina/o college students draw and apply pedagogies of the home and “[p]rovide strategies of resistance that challenge the educational norms of higher education and the dominant perceptions held about Chicana students” (p. 635). Her study is based on interviews and focus-group data with 32 female students who identified as Mexican, Mexican American, and/or Chicanas. Findings in the study revealed how students draw
from what they learned at home to help them navigate and confront their way around educational obstacles. The students identified bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to family and community, and spiritualities. Most of the participants felt that bilingualism had a positive impact on them academically and socially. For example, students felt they would benefit from better job opportunities because of their bilingualism. The participants also drew from their biculturalism and the impact on their academic experiences in college. Their biculturalism allowed them to understand things in different ways that students from the dominant culture might not understand. The participants also discussed their commitment to their families and communities as a source of inspiration and motivation to succeed in college. However, families also placed a heavy emotional burden and pressure on them to contribute financially and emotionally to the family. Lastly, students discussed how their religion and/or spiritual influences were perceived as a “[s]ource of inspiration and offered them ways to take care of themselves” (p. 635). Delgado Bernal’s work has important implications in educational policies and practices and places a strong connection of how cultural knowledge contributes to the academic success of Latina/o college students.

Community Knowledge: Cultural Capital

Looking at retention through a Chicana/Latina feminist lens allows for the experiential knowledge and cultural wealth of Latina/o students to serve as assets in relations to their academic achievements and social integration in the campus community. Building upon Yosso’s (2005) “community cultural wealth,” where familial and aspirational capital are just two of the many strengths that minority students bring to the university, I contend that familial and aspirational capital are key to first-generation Latina/o students access, retention, and graduation
in higher education. Yosso’s work demonstrates how community wealth consists of “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). She identifies the following six forms of cultural capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. These forms of cultural capital draw from home and community knowledge that students bring to school. This approach can be particularly beneficial to college admissions policies. For example, admissions counselors can encourage and guide students to write about cultural wealth in their admission’s essay, such as aspirational capital “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Also, when considering college admissions policies, rather than relying on standardized tests scores (ACT or SAT’s) or GPA, admission’s counselors should consider how the student’s cultural wealth will add to the academic experience of all students. As more Latina/o students apply to 4-year campuses and rather than viewing them and their families as problems, institutions of higher education can shift policies and practices that value student’s home knowledge and cultural wealth.

Building on what students bring to institutions of higher education has been shown to be an effective retention strategy (Delgado Bernal, 2001; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Yosso, 2005). This approach allows for students culture to feel respected, valued, and motivated to academically succeed without assimilating and having to leave behind their identity and family. Curriculum and pedagogy that integrates and draws from students home and community knowledge helps to cultivate a sense of belonging and a sense of community in the classroom. Although educational research centered on the funds of knowledge concept has mainly focused on the experiences of K-12 students and teachers, more studies are examining how funds of
knowledge or household and community knowledge helps Latina/o students navigate higher education (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). For example, Delgado Bernal (2001) argues that Chicana students draw from the lessons they learn at home to help them overcome educational obstacles and academically succeed. To increase the retention of Latina/o students the curriculum or learning objectives must reflect their home and community knowledge.

The Complexity of Latina/o Identity

Chicana/Latina scholars have made significant contributions to our understanding of Latina/o identity development. Identity aspects including racial, ethnic, class, gender, sexual orientation, linguistic, and legal status have been examined to understand how students draw from their multiple identities to combat negative effects (Anzaldúa, 1999; Darder 2012; González, 1998; Hurtado, 2003; Montoya, 1994). Chicana feminist scholar Francias E. González (1998) discusses the issues of multiple identities or the trenzas de identidades múltiples (braids of multiple identities) to examine and analyze how she and her participants create and make sense of their identities through cultural knowledge. A central feature of trenzas de identidades múltiples is the constant tensions, contradictions and negotiations between cultural knowledge and school knowledge. The young Mexicanas in González’s (1998) work were able to “sift through knowledge and experiences to braid transnational realities, identities, and relationships into womanhood” (p. 95). The research also suggests that a bicultural identity is generally associated with higher levels of overall well-being and ability to retain different aspects of their culture (i.e. cultural knowledge and practices). Bicultural students are also more likely to do well in school by viewing education as a way to counter negative stereotypes.
From an early age Latina/o students must learn how to cross physical, social, and cultural borders between home, community, and school. Borderlands is used by Anzaldúa (1999) to capture the ways Chicanas/os straddle, negotiate, and navigate the physical, psychological, sexual, and spiritual borderlands of the self. Anzaldúa (1999) speaks of a new third identity or *mestiza* consciousness born from the daily experiences of living between borders. Anzaldúa defines a *mestiza* consciousness as a level of awareness of the borderlands, tolerance for ambiguity and breaking down of paradigms. By (re)claiming a third-space, marginality and a differential consciousness are awakened and embraced. The new *mestiza* identity is depicted by a resiliency that allows Latina/o students to shift in and out from different spaces and places.

Delgado Bernal and Elenes (2010) define place as the “physical location where groups are located,” such as the classroom and space as the “position groups or individuals occupy in society as a result of their race, class, gender, and sexuality” in addition to their role in society (p. 75). By the time Latina/o students reach institutions of higher education, they will have mastered the skills to navigate the borders between different places and spaces, thus allowing them to cope and navigate through opposing forces within and outside institutions of higher education.

It is critical for institutions of higher education to understand how Latina/o students make meaning of their different identities because research has found that students who develop a positive identity are more likely to persist and graduate (Hurtado 2005; Pizarro, 2005; Rendón, 2009). However, Latina/o identity has been examined by using traditional identity theories or models that fail to examine students environmental influences outside the university or have been interpreted from a deficit view (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Phinney, 1993). Institutions of higher education need to understand the lives of Latina/o students within the campus and
outside within their home and community to have a more holistic understanding of the constant demands and negotiations they encounter.

**Redefining Campus Climate: Creating a Welcoming Space for Familias**

Educational research has shown that home and community knowledge provides Latina/o students with cultural, linguistic, and social assets, in addition to navigational strategies to overcome obstacles in higher education. In proposing to reframe retention from a Chicana/Latina feminist perspective, it is critical for institutions of higher education to recognize, value, and build on knowledge that students bring from home and their communities (Delgado Bernal, 2001; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Yosso, 2005) and develop a shared understanding of the complexity of Latina/o identities and school experiences (Anzaldúa, 1999; Darder 2012; González, 1998). Thus, oftentimes Latina/o students feel disconnected or torn between the university and their home and community. In fulfilling this disconnect, universities need to integrate students’ culture and promote Latina/o families and communities into the campus environment. For example, at the University of Illinois, at the beginning of the fall semester *La Casa* (a cultural house) organizes Latino Family Day visit where student’s families are invited to spend a day on campus. This event provides parents, siblings, and extended family members an opportunity to visit the campus and to learn more about their children’s college experience. Latino Family Day visit is held once a year, instead, universities should integrate Latina/o students’ family throughout the academic year. Another means by which to integrate Latina/o students family and community is for universities to value the work that students do outside the university, for example giving students course credit for organizing community events on campus and in their home communities. More importantly, by integrating Latina/o families into
the university, families can become more familiar with the bureaucracy, curriculum, and the demands of being a college student.

**Counter-Spaces: Ethnic Studies Classrooms**

Courses in Ethnic studies often serve as counter-spaces where Latina/o students feel welcome and their culture and school experiences are validated in the classroom. According to Solórzano and Villalpando (1998) counter-spaces can be formal/informal and academic/social and can serve several purposes. Counter-spaces allow Latina/o students and other marginalized students to develop a strong bicultural identity, a space where they can share similar life experiences with peers, and exposes them to social, cultural, historical, and political structures that have a direct impact on their lives. These courses develop students’ critical consciousness in regard to their own agency and participation in local and global constructs of equality an inequality. The professors that teach these classes are often professors of color or white allies who are invested and committed to the success of their students. By taking courses in departments like Ethnic Studies, students of color gain the confidence and the desire to academically succeed. More importantly, through course readings, writing assignments, and dialogue in the classroom, students learn different perspectives, language, and tools to transform their lives and communities. In the remainder of this section, I will demonstrate how Ethnic Studies including MAS courses and Chicana/Latino texts provide counter-spaces that are central to the development of Latina/o students’ critical consciousness.
Claiming Un Sitio y Una Lengua

Emma Pérez’s decolonial imaginary can help educators and educational researchers to (re)imagine students personal and academic desires. Pérez’s (1999) refers to the decolonial imaginary as a third space of (re)articulated desires and where multiple realities are negotiated. Thus, the classroom becomes a third space where the professor and students (re)define learning and knowledge. Students become the center of knowledge and together they (re)build a new shared vision of educación and education; thus learning becomes situated and reciprocal, leading to a collective third space. According to Pérez (1998) by claiming un sitio or a space in academia, Chicana/Latina feminist scholars create, develop, and nurture projects that recover the history, struggles, resistance, and the voices of marginalized communities.

Chicana/o, Mexican American, and Latina/o courses have carved out safe sitios for marginalized scholars and students to nourish an individual and collective critical consciousness in order to reconceive their struggles, persistence, and achievements. These sitios have been the labor of students, professors, and administrators of color’s activism to find a voice and presence within and outside institutions of higher education. Courses in Latina/o and Mexican American Studies provide Latina/o students with a lengua to voice their experiences, to talk back, and to (re)articulate issues that have a direct impact on students’ home and community. The courses facilitate the development of students’ critical consciousness by drawing on students’ testimonies; connecting them to larger social, economic, and political structures (Hidalgo & Duncan-Andrade, 2010). The classroom becomes a transformative space where professors and students disrupt and (re)imagine the experiences of Latinas/os within institutions of higher education and outside within their homes and communities.
Many of the professors in MAS and LLS courses are also known for utilizing stories in their teaching. They tell stories about their own personal and academic struggles in order to connect with students and to build a classroom community. The use of stories provides students with a more intimate learning experience by helping students connect their inner selves to course concepts. Many Latina/o students can relate to the practice of growing up listening to family and community members sharing stories about school inequalities, migration/deportations, labor, and the roles of the mujeres in la familia who kept the family and community together. Telling stories in the classroom is a useful pedagogical practice that celebrates and engages students to think critically about social issues.

Reflecting on Family History and Personal Narratives

In a recent interview conducted by Gilda L. Ochoa (2008) with Gilbert G. Gonzalez, professor of Chicana/Latino studies and social sciences at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) he discussed the importance of connecting to students’ lives through his pedagogical and research practices. Dr. Gonzalez has spent his academic career “reshaping our understanding of history and of Chicana/o and Latina/o studies by linking the history of Mexicans in the United States to patterns of U.S. capitalist development and imperialist relations” (p. 137). When asked to share his childhood and schooling experiences, he begins with an epiphanic moment in his life. Memories take him back to his mid to late twenties when he was working at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) teaching a summer course for the first Equal Opportunity Program (EOP). One of his peers had recommended Carey McWilliams’s (1949) North from Mexico to use for his class; this text is considered a classic of Southwestern history. He recalls
reading the text and feeling shocked by the material because he realizes that he was reading the history of his family. Dr. Gonzalez explains.

This was the history that I heard my parents talk about at home over the kitchen table with my uncles and aunts, like migrating or meeting in El Paso at the American Smelting Refining Corporation barrio there—we called it Esmelda, Smeltertown. . . . It was like my history that was buried somewhere, and finally I became conscious of this being not just mine but a history of an entire people. (p. 138)

It was a critical moment in Dr. Gonzalez’s personal and academic journey that sustained him in the academy and shaped his teaching by requiring students to utilize their experiences as part of his pedagogy. The text, *North from Mexico* provided a framework that enabled Dr. Gonzalez to connect his family’s history of migration and labor into the context of U.S. empire. Thus, courses in Chicana/o and Latina/o studies provide students with an opportunity to reflect on family history and personal narratives; thus exposing students to critical publications that connect the past to the present. Just like his education and his first lessons in Chicana/o history began at the kitchen table, Dr. Gonzalez’s pedagogy aims to create a space for students to draw from and connect their families’ histories, personal narratives to larger historical patterns. Although he is a strong advocate of Chicana/o and Latina studies, he believes many programs are not pushing students to look beyond issues of race and class. As such, his goal as a professor is to facilitate the development of student’s critical consciousness.

(Re)Claiming Academic Spaces

The greatest learning impact on Latina/o and other minority students takes place in the classroom when course material is culturally relevant and knowledge has an impact on their everyday lives. Many courses in Ethnic Studies have served as formal counterspaces where students have (re)claimed academic spaces. The work of Dolores Delgado Bernal, Enrique
Alemán, and Andrea Garavito (2009) documents the impact of Ethnic Studies course on students of color critical consciousness. Their work draws from Pérez’s (1998, 1999) decolonial imaginary and *sitio y lengua* to analyze how Latina/o university students narrate their experiences as first-year students enrolled in a year-long Ethnic Studies and service-learning course where they mentored Latina/o elementary students. This study is significant in that it demonstrates how undergraduate Latina/o students enact differential consciousness and agency through *sitio y lengua* to think critically about social inequalities including educational equity. Findings from this study, demonstrate that both the ethnic studies course and mentoring elementary Latina/o students supported and encouraged Latina/o university students’ connectedness to a predominantly white institution. The researchers argue that students’ who are actively involved inside and outside the classroom enhance students’ sense of belonging resulting in their academic success and persistence. As demonstrated in this study, the Ethnic Studies course and students community involvement had a positive impact in the development of students’ critical consciousness. Although research has shown that students of color, in particular Latina/o students, draw from family and community as a means of support to deal with issues of isolation, guilt, and sense of belonging within institutions of higher education, research demonstrates that Latina/o students new views and critiques of home and community are not always valued by their family and community (Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Garavito, 2009; Hurtado, 2005). For instance, some students shared their new discourses acquired in the Ethnic Studies course with family by challenging deficit discourses within their home. The Latina/o students in their study experienced “tensions and possibilities as they talked back to and interrupted dominant narratives found in their classrooms, in society, in their communities, and in their families” (p. 574). Students used *sitio y lengua* acquired from the Ethnic Studies course
to engage and challenge social and cultural constructions of gender, sexuality, and race with peers, professors, community, and family members.

The Ethnic Studies course served as a space for students to engage in cross-racial and cross-ethnic dialogues. The course also introduced students to theoretical concepts as tools “for reflection, a way to talk back to people, and the possibility of transforming self and society” (p. 578). At the same time, it can be a painful and exhausting experience for students to talk back to their professors, peers, friends, family, and community. As noted by the authors, “Talking back often shifted students into in-between spaces of empowerment and powerlessness, making allies and losing friends, and demonstrating both confidence and insecurity” (p. 574). Moreover, the toll of carrying this responsibility of talking back can be discouraging for many students to talk back or they can run the risk of being perceived as “a problem” by the institution, especially if they find themselves as always being the only ones to talk back. As educators, we have to make sure that students acquire the tools to talk back, but also learn how to be strategic of when they talk back.

Similar to the previous study, Michelle A. Holling’s (2006) work shows how undergraduate students enrolled in her course titled “Chicana/Latina Experiences” acquired the language and tools to analyze their experiences within an intersectional framework. She incorporates the narratives of eight Chicana and Latina students, based on the final writing assignment where students were asked to identify and analyze particular personal experiences and ideologies. Student’s final papers focused on three aspects of their identity—racial-ethnic and cultural identification, sexuality, and gender roles. The significance of this study is how courses incorporate students personal experiences and Chicana/Latina scholarship; for example students read texts addressing Chicana/Latina sexuality and were assigned to examine and
theorize about the ways they construct and negotiate their beliefs about sexuality. For Holling (2006) it is critical to engage student’s identity as pedagogy and storytelling as epistemology for it “[p]rovides students with a conceptual lens by which they develop and increase their sense of consciousness” (p. 90). The student’s work demonstrates their development and “increased sense of consciousness” and “ability to articulate ways of negotiating their identities” (p. 82). This study demonstrates the use of transformative pedagogical assignments that encouraged students to disrupt notions of knowledge and to see themselves as producers of knowledge.

As Latinas/os in higher education reflect on their educational experiences, they realize that an educational system failed them, thus reaching different levels of consciousness and resistance (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Thus, being exposed to new knowledge and truths can be exciting; at the same time, it can create tensions and increase Latina/o students sense of alienation from their families and communities. In Hurtado’s (2005) examination of the birth, development, and contributions made by Chicana/o Studies, she emphasizes the lack of efforts of many Chicana/o programs to include a “diversity of issues . . . integrating gender and sexuality issues (among others) into all aspects of the field” (Hurtado, p. 188). It is not a coincidence that issues such as gender and sexuality are absent from many Chicana/o programs, for they are also issues that are disregarded and silenced within Latina/o homes and communities. Thus, there are limited counter-spaces or sitios within institutions of higher education where Latina/o students are able to reflect, disrupt, and construct their gendered and sexualized experiences.

In Aida Hurtado’s (2005) study of educated Chicanas’ views on feminisms, found that their consciousness about their race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality was facilitated through their exposure of knowledge (i.e. feminist of color scholarship) and their political
activism within and outside institutions of higher education. Results from her study showed that from the 101 participants, 56% had taken at least one course in Chicana/o Studies. Enrolling in Chicana/o Studies courses (in addition to Ethnic Studies and Gender & Women’s Studies courses) and their exposure to feminists of color scholarship had a positive impact on their identities and political consciousness. Chicanas in her study shared how anxious they were to share with their families and communities their new acquired knowledge; however, they did not always agree with their new views and values on issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Although their families and communities did not always agree with their new views and critiques, results from this study confirmed participants’ deep commitment to working on behalf of the Latina/o community. Hurtado (2005) explains, “Most respondents felt that their political connection to Latino communities was a lifetime commitment, one that gave purpose to their lives and direction to their professional choices” (p. 247).

It is important to note here that college educated Latinas/os are admired by their families and communities, at the same time their views and hopes for their communities are not always received well. Yet, Latina/o students are able to embrace the contradictions. For example, Latino families are supportive of their education; however, daughters are pressured to fulfill traditional roles within the home and community. Although they encounter pressures within and outside institutions of higher education, they value the importance of giving back to their families and communities. This study is significant in that it shows that for most, their consciousness about their ethnic, racial, class, gender, and linguistic backgrounds becomes heightened in institutions of higher education. The courses and texts allowed the women to challenge and engage with the tensions and contradictions within institutions of higher education and outside within their homes and communities.
Conclusion

It is projected that Latinas/os will become the nation’s largest minority group by 2020, but also the most educationally disadvantaged (Burciaga, Perez Huber, & Solórzano, 2010; Gándara, & Contreras, 2009). The nation’s schools must recognize the cultural, linguistic, social, and academic needs of Latina/o students and find more effective ways of educating the largest and fastest growing minority group. Educational research has shown that Latino parents hold high educational aspirations for their children; however, having high aspirations for their children does not necessarily translate into obtaining a postsecondary degree. Latina/o students are more likely to attend over-crowded, under-funded, and racially segregated high schools that prevents many of them from accessing information and resources, and support to help them navigate the college application process (Chavez, 2008; Espinoza, 2010; Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen 2009; Valencia, 2002). They are also more likely to have limited access to adults with college-going experiences; thus, many Latina/o students must manage the college application process alone or they become dependent upon teachers, counselors, and other adults in their community to help them.

Despite many of the challenges that Latina/o students encounter throughout their K-12 education, high school graduation and college-going rates have increased (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Moreover, in spite of increases in college enrollment, Latina/o students are lagging behind significantly—they are more likely to attend less selective colleges, more likely to be enrolled part-time, more likely to be placed in remedial courses that do not count for college credit, and are more likely to drop out of college (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Fry & Taylor, 2013). Educational research has found numerous reasons behind this gap; however, less research has focused on the tensions and contradictions that Latina/o students experience and must navigate.
between home and school. Latina/o students are also more likely to experience an unsupportive campus environment, limited resources, and a *subtractive* educational experience. Hence, only a small percentage of Latina/o students will eventually attain a 4-year degree, despite having high aspirations to graduate.

The literature shows that Latino families value education highly, however many Latino parents are not informed about what to expect once their daughters or sons enroll in postsecondary education. The beginning can be extremely challenging for both parents and daughter/son, as the student finds ways to balance family expectations and obligations against the demands of college life. The literature shows that Latina/o students have high aspirations and strong desire to succeed academically, however variables such as cultural and social isolation can have a negative impact on Latina/o students decisions to persist and graduate from college. In order to increase the retention rates of Latina/o students, institutions of higher education need to create more pedagogical spaces that link students to their families and communities, but also address the tensions and contradictions that students experiences between home and school. Also increasing faculty and staff who are both bilingual and bicultural would provide mentors and role models for Latina/o students. Latina/o students have the *ganas* (will) to graduate from higher education, but are falling behind academically, dropping out, and not completing their degrees. They struggle academically, financially, and emotionally to navigate the different academic and social intricacies of higher education. Educational research has provided numerous recommendations to increase the postsecondary attainment of Latina/o students, yet they have focused too much on implementing changes and too little to sustain them.
Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework and Methodology: Grappling With the Tensions and Contradictions

My work builds on Chicana/Latina feminist ethnographic methods as I examine the contradictions that Latina/o students’ encounter between home, community, and schooling experiences. An important aspect of Chicana/Latina feminist research is having an understanding of the various positionalities, subjectivities, and assumptions that exist within the research process (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Flores, 2000; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Tellez, 2005; Villenas, 1996; Zavella, 1996). In this chapter I highlight my contradictory position as both insider and outsider conducting fieldwork with participants who come from similar communities and share the same ethnicity, class background, and educational experiences as myself, the researcher. My work is situated out of and within the ongoing complexities and tensions in the research process, including my own ambivalence in the field. I also draw from Delgado Bernal’s (1998) concept of cultural intuition in order to foster self-trust, tap into my own cultural intuition, and to claim my own ways of knowing and being. I share my own dilemmas of crossing physical and intellectual borders, and how I attempted to grapple with the contradictions that emerged from conducting research as an insider/outside. The ambivalence, tensions, and awkwardness that I experienced helped me to pay greater attention and to fully engage issues of positionality, researcher/participant relationship, power relations in the field, and reflexivity. Overall, being attentive to the politics of knowledge production and research dynamics allowed me to present a more complex reality of participants’ family, community, and schooling experiences. In this chapter, I will also discuss sampling strategies, overview of research sites and participants, research methods and data analysis.
Chicana/Latina Feminist Ethnographic Methodology

In choosing ethnography for this study, I followed Chicana feminist educational ethnographer Sofia Villenas’s (1996) methods of ethnographic research that recognize “[a] process where Latinas/os become the subjects and creators of knowledge” (p. 730). Her ethnographic methods rely on the following tenets:

1. Questioning the ethnographer’s identities and privileged positions;
2. Paying attention to how the ethnographer manipulates their own identities and how one’s identities are manipulated by others;
3. Disclosing the ways the ethnographer is situated in oppressive structures;
4. Problematizing the relationship between the native researcher and the majority culture; and
5. Producing knowledge that challenges structures of inequality and creates social change within the native’s community.

Throughout the research and writing process of my work, I followed Villenas’s methods, but like Villenas, I also struggled with the tensions that complicate Chicana feminist ethnography. Among such tensions is not being fully aware of the different power structures and inequalities in the community one is researching. Furthermore Villenas (1996) raises the question: despite educational ethnographers’ efforts to dismantle power inequalities in the research process, “What happens when members of low-status and marginalized groups become university-sanctioned ‘native’ ethnographers of their own communities?” (p. 712). Her work demonstrates the ways she (re)defined what it means to belong to an academic community and to identify on a personal and political level with a community outside the academy. I believe there is something unique about the ways in which many Chicanas/Latinas collect data and the relationship they develop with their participants. Perhaps it is because many women of color come from marginalized communities that they are able to perceive and understand different forms of oppression. In
addition, they desire the transformation of the lives of marginalized groups through research. By introducing and naming our own approaches and methodologies, we (re)imagine and transform the process of theorizing and producing new knowledge claims. A Chicana/Latina feminist ethnographic methodology acknowledges that multiple realities are constructed, perceived, and experienced by the participants. One of the greatest values of Chicana/Latina feminist writings is their emphasis on the experiential. Throughout my work, I included my experiences, while confronting difficult aspects about my family and my community. This research method offers rich descriptions of culture and language and the meanings given to the ways that participants articulate their own experiences within different social settings.

A Chicana/Latina feminist methodology emphasizes the importance of experiential knowledge\(^\text{14}\) that draws from one’s *insider/outsider* status (Collins, 2004; Villenas, 1996; Zavella, 1987) and *cultural intuition* (Delgado Bernal, 1998) by challenging claims to objectivity and links research to social change. In the following sections, I expand on the concepts of *insider/outsider* status, *cultural intuition*, and reflexivity as discussed in the work of Chicana/Latina and women of color feminist research. A researcher’s identity, background, and politics are tied to the choices and directions taken by their research. The methodology selected will influence the researcher’s ontological and epistemological position; therefore, when the methodology changes, everything else changes, including the production of knowledge and the role of specified values. Chicanas/Latinas have written about how one’s identity has an influence on the type of research one conducts, the research process, relationship between the researcher and participants, and how research is written and disseminated (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002;)

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\(^{14}\) The centrality of experiential knowledge is also a tenet in critical race theory and methodology in education. CRT and LatCrit scholars have made significant contributions to educational research, however my work will not center a CRT or LatCrit perspective. My project recognizes the experiential knowledge from a Chicana/Latina feminist perspective.

**Insider/Outsider Status: Grappling With the Tensions**

Chicana/Latina and Black researchers’ *insider status* has often helped them have access to their communities and navigate those places, to establish trust with their participants, and most importantly to pose research questions that challenge and (re)envision the body of knowledge on people of color (Collins, 2000, 2004; Merriam, Jonson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001; Sherif, 2001; Villenas, 1996). As an *insider* one may be able to communicate, relate, and connect in more meaningful ways than perhaps an *outsider* may ever experience. As an *insider* I had the advantage of sharing similar experiences with the participants and the ability to understand and connect with the same language, cultural practices and home knowledge. Clearly, being a cultural insider had many advantages when researching first-generation Latina/o students, particularly in terms of understanding and recognizing cultural references. At the same time, claiming an *insider* perspective also comes with a huge responsibility to one’s community, because any false representation could lead to feelings of betrayal on the part of the participants. As a result, *insiderness* is no longer considered a fixed position, but rather an ongoing process of negotiation. At the same time having an *outsider status* poses barriers and issues of *confianza* (trust) with the participants.

As a Latina graduate student and researcher, I was open about my roles as both *insider/outside* in the different research settings (Collins, 2004). Like for other researchers of color, my *insider* status allowed me to access the field more quickly and with more confidence. As an *insider*, having been socialized within a Latino family and community provided me with a
unique insight into my participants’ lives. I was perceived by my participants as an insider because I shared with them my story of being the first in my family to pursue college, but there were moments when participants in California perceived me as an outsider because I was no longer living in the same community. This was also true of the participants in Illinois. Although we lived in the same community, we encountered different challenges. Sharing my story with participants served as means of establishing confianza (trust) and a sense of connectedness. I presented myself to students in a way that made them feel that they could relate to my struggles, hopes, and dreams of utilizing our education to help our families and to create social change for our communities. Many of them were interested in knowing about my experiences in graduate school, including how I finance my education and what it was like to live far away from my family. I struggled with how much I was willing to share with them. Did I want them to know about the isolation and guilt that arise from balancing the demands of family and graduate school? Did I want them to know about how financially and emotionally draining graduate school is? I wanted to share with them all the positive aspects of graduate school, but also felt a great sense of responsibility to share the not-so-glamorous aspects of academia.

The insider/outside divide was far from straightforward; I realized that I while I was accepted within the group of Latina/o faculty, students, and community members, I was also perceived as an outsider and intruder by those who were observing me in the field. Indeed my insider/outside status shifted according to those with whom I interacted and the social context of the encounter. Doing research at “home” in the Bay Area and returning to my undergraduate alma mater afforded a degree of social proximity, but it also generated unforeseen tensions and many awkward moments. This was perhaps particularly true of the males through the indirect comments they would make about my presence in their space. On my first day in the field I was
scheduled to speak to an undergraduate course in Mexican American Studies about my research. However I was instructed to wait outside until the guest speaker finished his talk. I waited patiently outside, but the speaker kept talking until the end of the class. Students were swarming out as I tried to make my way inside the classroom. The professor greeted me with a warm welcome and asked if I wanted to join his guest speaker and students for lunch. I decided to join them. The professor introduced me to the guest speaker—an advocate for Latina/o youth. A former student was also visiting from Law School. We all walked a couple blocks to a small local Salvadorian restaurant. I was thrilled to see two other female students waiting for us at the restaurant. The professor introduced me as a graduate student from the University of Illinois conducting research and asked me to speak about my project. Meanwhile, the waiter approached our table to hand out the menus and to take our drink order.

The professor then asked the students to share their thoughts about the speaker or to address their questions to him. Students sat silent, but the speaker wasted no time in sharing his thoughts. He talked about the importance of pursuing advanced degrees and how he plans to return to graduate school and obtain a doctoral degree in social psychology because he is tired of having his work in the community devalued and challenged by academics. He shared a story about presenting his work with at-risk Latino youth at an academic conference. His enthusiasm and passion for teaching young Latinos how to be “real men” and how to be better fathers illuminated the room. He recalled how after his presentation, an academic approached him and asked for his literature and he proudly referred to a picture album of the youth he had worked with. He then continued our conversation by talking about the lack of people in academia not doing any real work and how they are only good at making up complex words. The professor responded to and seemed to agree with, these comments. I stayed quiet, but inside I wanted to
shout and let them know how their comments were hurtful or how not once did they ask what I thought about academics. I had traveled across the country and I found myself having lunch with males who clearly had strong sentiments about people in the academy. The words that kept haunting me were: “we are doing the real work.” It was harsh to listen to those words because here I thought I was doing something great for the community by writing about the experiences of Latina/o students but for them it was not enough. At the same time, why was I so caught up on these two males? I realized that perhaps subconsciously I was looking for that male approval that I had been conditioned and primed within my family and culture. After only 2 hours of being in the field, I felt the tensions between academic and community knowledges. Why does it have to be one or the other; why do we continue to create knowledge boundaries? Perhaps I should have said something, but I chose to stay silent because I did not want to be perceived as an angry Latina or come across as highly sensitive. Looking back, I realize that we need to pay greater attention to tensions of knowledge production within our communities and find new ways to engage in co-creating knowledge. We need to ask ourselves, what are our responsibilities as producers of knowledge and how can we confront issues of patriarchy and other systems of oppression within our culture and communities?

Researchers of color need to challenge their insider status by defining for the readers the different communities the researcher belongs to and how those different communities inform their research. Rethinking the complexities of the insider/outside status “[i]n terms of one’s positionality via race, class, gender, culture and other factors, offer[s] us better tools for understanding the dynamics of researching within and across one’s culture” (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 405). What does it mean to possess both insider and outsider status? What separates/unites the researcher from the people they interview and write about? Researchers of
color have noted that it is best to have both, but the boundaries between the two positions are not always clearly defined (Collins, 2000, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2006; Merriam et al., 2001; Villenas, 1996). I have realized that having an *insider status* generates its own particular barriers and just possessing an *insider status* does not produce better data or insights into the participants’ social position.

In particular, this method challenged my position as both *insider* and *outsider* by having to continuously move between the boundaries of who I was, who I am, and who I hoped to become. Bahira Sherif (2001) describes this process as the *partial insider* who is “[c]onstantly forced to move between worlds and identities” (p. 446). Villenas (1996) also reminds the ethnographer to be careful not to be manipulated and not to manipulate, but rather to unpack, rethink, and recreate knowledge together. For example, many of the participants said problematic statements, but rather than accepting their statements, I engaged with the participants and together we worked through those uncomfortable moments as we constructed new knowledge. Throughout my work, I attempted to capture and interrogate those moments where I claimed an *insider/outsider status*. Although I was reminded and/or challenged by my participants of my power as a researcher, others did not perceive me as such, but rather as a first-generation Latina who had made it out of the California State University system. I was also able to perceive my role as both *insider/outsider* and my decision to interview only Latina/o students as a representation of our resistance to the academy and to an educational system that continues to perceive Latina/o students and their families as uninterested in the future of our education. Although I perceived my participants as collaborators in my research, I was always conscious about the dissonance and limitations of conducting research within my community.
The Four Sources of Cultural Intuition

In order to conduct research with Latina/o students, I knew that I needed to be responsive to their ways of knowing. At the same time, I needed to find respectful ways to challenge participants’ views by posing questions that would help them reflect on their experiences and contradictions. I then turned to Delgado Bernal’s (1998) concept of cultural intuition in order to draw from various sources of knowledge and to better understand my participants’ lived experiences. According to Delgado Bernal, there are four sources of cultural intuition, which the researcher can draw upon, including: (a) personal experience of the researcher, (b) academic experience, or how one makes sense of existing literature, (c) professional experience, and (d) analytical research process that acknowledges that there are multiple ways our experiences inform how we conduct and analyze data.

The first source of cultural intuition is drawn from one’s personal experience, for it provides “insight and a cultural intuition from which to draw upon during research” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 564). During the collection and analysis of the data, I drew from the first source of cultural intuition including my personal experiences as a first-generation college student at both teaching and research institutions (Delgado Bernal, 1998). At the beginning of each interview, many of the students shared how they had never been interviewed by a researcher and as a result, this was their first opportunity to contextualize the fact that they are producers of knowledge. Thus, my research repositioned them as creators of knowledge. Drawing from my cultural intuition allowed me to develop a greater sense of confianza (trust) with my participants. Throughout the interviews, I relied on my personal experiences to help my participants feel comfortable and valued about sharing their most vulnerable selves. I asked participants to share challenges they faced in their K-12 schooling and how they were able to overcome them.
Andrea, a senior at UIUC, opened up about confronting her undocumented status in high school when she realized that she was different from her peers. After sharing such emotionally draining experiences of confronting her legal status, it was difficult to continue the interview. Instead of continuing, I drew from my *cultural intuition* and decided to open up about my own experience confronting my undocumented status. I talked about my experience crossing the Mexico-U.S. border with my mother, and although I was able to become a naturalized U.S. citizen, I too feared being separated from my family members.

In our follow-up interview, Andrea shared intimate details about her political activism within the undocumented student movement. In 2011, she and seven other undocumented students were arrested in Atlanta, Georgia in a major act of civil disobedience. Their stories became national news and on campus their actions and knowledge claims became critical in the ongoing efforts to address the issue of equal access to higher education for undocumented students. Students like Andrea discussed the complex negotiations between home and school knowledge. For instance, Andrea’s family was not always supportive of her activism and even discouraged her from participating in the movement because they thought it would call attention to the family. Her family had worked hard to stay invisible because there is safety in not being noticed when one is undocumented. In addition to making difficult realizations about being critical of home in an uncomfortable place like school, the students also realize that that home is not always a safe and comfortable place and sometimes school is not that uncomfortable. I believe our personal experiences are important for our research; however, they are not enough. Personal experiences cannot stand on their own without an interrogation of power, history, emotions, and subjugated knowledge (Collins, 2009; Córdova, 2005; Denzin, 1982, 2009; Mills, 1959). We also need to participate in the act of sharing our personal experiences because it is
when we share our stories with others that we are able to understand and connect our stories to larger structural conditions in society.

The second source of *cultural intuition* is drawn from our reading and one’s sensitivity to the existing literature. Delgado Bernal (1998) emphasizes the importance of developing “theoretical sensitivity” to the literature and data. I drew from the literature of Chicana/Latina feminist and critical scholars in education. This allowed me to pose interview questions that were culturally relevant, thus, allowing me to engage in respectful and transformative dialogue. This was a critical phase in my research because I did not want to romanticize the students’ stories. Rather, I sought to provide a space for participants to reflect, confront, and talk about social inequalities within the university and within their home and community. However, this was not always easy because some issues were more pressing in their lives. I found that my research questions generated discomfort and bodily shifts. For example, the male students were more affected by their race and talked extensively about their racial experiences, but when I brought up issues of gender, their tone of voice and body language would change. I felt as if the male students felt uncomfortable and nervous about the ways they discussed issues of gender. Based on their body language and tone of voice or what seemed like long moments of silence, I felt like they were being careful about the ways they crafted their answers to not upset me or to not come across as insensitive and uncritical of gender inequalities. It was always a challenge to come up with follow-up questions during the interviews that would challenge participants’ view without coming across as offensive or invalidating their experiences and knowledge. However, I realized that it was not that they did not want to discuss issues of gender, but rather, they have had limited opportunities to reflect on their male privileges or how gender roles and expectations have been deeply entrenched within the Latino culture and society at large.
By drawing on my *cultural intuition* of gender divisions within my own family and my sensitivity to the Chicana/Latina feminist literature on gender socialization, I was able to engage in meaningful dialogue about issues of gender with many of the male participants. One of the greatest differences between the male and female participants was that Latinos became conscious of the gender divisions much later than Latinas. Latinos were not always critical of how they benefited from women’s unpaid labor in their families or how patriarchal ideologies were deeply embedded and intertwined in cultural practices. One of the most challenging moments for me was listening to one of the male participants describe his mother’s role within the family. He was extremely respectful and talked extensively about his love and respect for his mother. When he talked about her, he mentioned how he would want to find a partner like his mother who could *aguantar* (to endure). He explained, “Growing up there were times when my mom and my dad would argue, but they never got super violent. My mom would start feeling sentimental, but she was taught that *hay que aguantar* (you have to endure).” When I asked Rigo what he meant by *aguantar*, he responded by saying how he was not a mean guy, but he expected to find a partner who would not just walk out on him because of a disagreement. At that point, I could feel my heart beating faster and images of domestic violence ran through my mind. I had a choice of ignoring his comments or of engaging them. I choose to engage with him and to help him think about his use of language. Also how he could rethink marriage and how Latinas love for their partner and family should not be measured by how much pain they are willing to endure or the sacrifices they make for the well-being of the family. At the end he realized how he had (re)defined the meaning of *aguantar*, which he explained as, “Staying strong, just whatever hits you, you still stay strong. You can’t be broken.” Trusting and following my cultural intuition, enabled both my participant and me to engage in transformative dialogue.
The third source of *cultural intuition* is achieved by drawing on one’s professional experience. I turned to my professional experiences as a graduate teaching assistant for Chicana/o Studies and my training in the areas of education and Latina/o Studies. Drawing from my *cultural intuition*, in particular my experiences applying to and navigating graduate school helped me to engage in reciprocity. Before speaking with students, a recruitment email was sent out through the Mexican American Studies and Latina/o Studies listserv, and the email was presented as an opportunity for students who were interested in graduate school to speak with a current graduate student. I entered the field knowing that I was not there just to conduct research, but I was there as a resource for students who were interested in pursuing graduate school. All of the participants asked me questions about graduate school or shared their own plans to pursue advanced degrees.

The fourth source of *cultural intuition* is gained during the analytical research process when “we are able to look more closely at the data and bring meaning to the research” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 566). For instance, few of the students emailed me to clarify some of their answers because they felt dissatisfied with their original answers or wanted to elaborate on them. Indeed, research can be overwhelming for the researcher and participants, especially when both are willing to share stories about their own personal struggles within the home, community, and institutions of higher education. As the researcher, I was reminded by the participants about my privilege to be able to take time off to listen to their stories of overcoming multiple obstacles and knowing intimate details about their personal lives. Even though there were days when I would spend an average of 12 hours a day in the field, I would forget how hungry or exhausted I felt as I listened to my participants’ stories of pain, success, and hope. Although I felt privileged to conduct research, at the same time I felt a great sense of responsibility and urgency to bring
greater attention to the academic, social, and psychological needs of first-generation Latina/o students. Furthermore, Delgado Bernal (1998) notes that cultural intuition is developed rather than inherent, hence a Chicana researcher’s “cultural intuition is achieved and can be nurtured” (p. 567). The four sources of cultural intuition played a critical role throughout the research process. Together we engaged in our own ways of knowing based on our personal, home, community, and schooling experiences.

**Reflexivity**

In reality, having an insider/outsider status and drawing from cultural intuition requires one to engage in reflexivity at all stages of the data collection, analysis, and representation. Reflexivity is critical in how the researcher develops their research project, how they access different communities, how they negotiate the relationship between researcher/participant, and how the research is presented to different academic audiences. Attention to reflexivity is a critical element in qualitative research, feminist research, and Chicana/Latina feminist research. Being reflexive in one’s research enhances the quality of the work by increasing the researcher’s sensitivity towards participants. While there are multiple forms of reflexivity, Pillow (2003) notes how reflexivity under feminism is “[n]ot only about investigating power embedded in one’s research but also about doing research differently” (p. 178).

Although some readers might find the insertion of my story resembling too much of the confessional tale, I believe it demonstrates the tensions and contradictions of the research process (Vann Maanen, 1988). Like many other feminists of color, I draw from my personal insights by including my story/autoethnography to illustrate the importance of language, culture, discrimination, and immigration within the lives of Latina/o students. This method also allowed
for a reciprocal relationship between my participants and myself as the researcher. One of my main goals as I entered the field was to let my participants know that I was there to share my experiences in graduate school and to guide them to resources for those who were interested in pursuing advanced degrees. For example, before students agreed to participate in my study, I told them that if they ever had questions about my research and/or needed advice related to their education they could contact me.

It is important that as a Latina feminist researcher, I continue to challenge my own assumptions about what I bring into the research process and my assumptions about Latina/o students’ identity and cultural practices. Most researchers tend to highlight the warm and friendly relations with participants, while awkward moments and difficult social encounters are often minimized. For example, when I discussed issues of gender with male participants, many would emphasize that they were “good guys” or when they recalled painful moments in their lives they would make comments like “I want to cry” yet they would hold back from crying or from letting themselves express their emotions. Perhaps with a male researcher, Latinos may have felt more comfortable discussing gender and may have been willing to talk more openly about their masculinity. Rather than ignoring those awkward moments, I allowed myself to engage with them and it also opened up an opportunity for male participants to reflect on the gender divisions within their home and community. For instance, when I asked Antonio to describe a family gathering, he shared how it is usually his aunts in the kitchen preparing the food, the men are in the backyard sipping on beers, and the children are in the living room area playing video games or watching television. He explained, “Once we hear ‘la comida esta lista’ (food is ready) that’s when the party gets started!” In the process of retelling the details of a typical family gathering,
Antonio realized how the women in his family are responsible for a disproportionate amount of the labor, while the men relax and the children have fun.

The work of Chicana/Latina feminists relies heavily on the practice of reflexivity; they start with the self by incorporating their narratives into their research. However, the ways Chicanas/Latinas incorporate self-reflexivity into their work goes beyond revealing personal information about themselves and their participants. Pillow (2003) characterizes reflexivity “[n]ot as clarity, honesty, or humility, but as practices of confounding disruptions—at times even failure of our language and practices” (p. 192). In my own research, participants pushed my methodological process toward Pillow’s “practice of cofounding disruptions” by taking risks and engaging with participants. Overall, interviews flowed, but there were moments where problematic or very personal issues came up. Part of me wanted to just move on to the next question because I did not always know how to engage my participants. I was also afraid that if I delved into these issues that participants would get angry and stop the interview. However, throughout the data collection process, it was critical to take those risks in order to develop confianza (trust) and an in-depth understanding of participants’ worlds. It also created a space for co-critical engagement and co-creation of knowledge.

In Villenas’s (2001) research with Latina mothers in North Carolina, she examines how her identity influenced the research, the research problem, the research setting (entering the setting as a woman of color from the university) and how she reported the findings back to the university. She writes about her journey of how her identity, values, and privileges were challenged by the Latino community and by the academy. She explains, “I am a walking contradiction with a foot in both worlds—in the dominant privileged institution and in the marginalized communities” (p. 714). I appreciate her honesty and her decision to include those
moments where she felt discouraged and angry, including how she works through those moments. Feminist scholars are raising important questions about confronting and challenging the theoretical and methodological tools in academia. It is important, then, to explore how the use of reflexivity acts as a tool to embrace inner conflicts and desires that are always in motion.

By the time I defend my dissertation, I will have presented my work at several conferences, but how much of those benefits will I share with my participants? I do not know how much I will be willing to share, but I do know that I will do my best to stay connected. Although my intentions were to develop close relationships with my participants, it was not always possible because it was not something that participants wanted. During several of the interviews, participants confessed how relieved they were that we would never see each other again because they had shared intimate thoughts and feelings about themselves and their families, communities, peers, professors, and administrators. If I could go back to the places and to the people I conducted research with, I would change many things, but I also firmly believe that as researchers we gain new knowledge about the process of conducting research every time we engage in a new project. As much as we try to academically and emotionally prepare ourselves, we will always encounter new challenges in the field because people and places are never fixed and are already always being influenced and moved by different forces.

Research Sites

Site 1: San José State University (SJSU). One of the sites for this study includes a teaching institution in California with an ethnically diverse student population. I have selected a public teaching university because they serve a high percentage of first-generation college
students (Valverde & Associates, 2008). It is also important to note the location of this site because California has the largest Latina/o population in the U.S. (The Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). San José State University is located in the Silicon Valley of Northern California. The university is primarily a commuter campus that had a total student enrollment of 29,076 students during the fall 2010-2011 academic year. The total undergraduate enrollment rate was 23,021. Latina/o students, the focus of this study, comprised 3,471 females and 2,549 males (Quick Facts, 2011).

**Mexican American Studies Department (MAS).** I selected SJSU because the MAS Department has been in existence for 45 years. It is also one the longest-standing Graduate Program in Chicana/o Studies in the country. The founders of the MAS Department were young academics and students who were deeply influenced by the Chicano Movement. It is also important to note the struggles of many Chicana/Latina scholars to integrate gender and sexuality into Mexican American and Chicana/o Studies programs (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Departments such as the one in SJSU have been rooted in the Mexican American experience centered in the Southwest. However, because of the changing demographics and increasing waves of first-generation immigrants, departments such as Latina/o Studies are emphasizing the connections of local and transnational experiences of Latinas/os and their impact on our understanding of new identities, meaning(s) of belonging, social movements, and immigration policies (Poblete, 2003).

**Recruitment of participants.** I first contacted the Department Head of the MAS Department at San José State through email to obtain permission to contact students. I have

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15 I am defining first-generation college student as neither parent graduated from a 4-year college/university.
16 Other political movements involved: African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Women’s and Gay Rights Movements.
known the Department Head since my undergraduate years at SJSU. The department head agreed to send out an email to the list serve of students who had or were currently enrolled in courses offered by the MAS Department. The email was also sent to all faculty in the department. The email was addressed as follows, “Important research on Latinas/os in higher education: Participants needed” and included a brief description of the study, participant criteria, anticipated time commitment that participants would be involved, sample interview questions, and my contact information. Four students responded to the initial e-mail; I immediately contacted them, letting them know that I would contact them again once I had enough interested students and had confirmed my travel arrangements. By the end of the month, since the first initial email was sent, I had five students who were interested in participating in the study. I contacted the students letting them know that I was going to be on campus and scheduled their interviews before heading out to California. Once the dates and times were confirmed with the students, I contacted the administrative support coordinator to reserve the conference room to conduct the interviews.

Site 2: University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). The second site for this study includes a public research institution in Illinois with a predominantly white student population. Currently the state of Illinois has a significant Latina/o population with a large concentration of Latinas/os in the city of Chicago (The Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). The University of Illinois is located in Urbana-Champaign, east-central Illinois in a micro-urban community. Although micro-urban is associated with a strong sense of community, yet many community members are excluded from participating in the different events such as the annual

I spent five years as an undergraduate student, out of which one year as a commuter student and 4-years living one block away from campus.

Micro-urban has been used by urban planners to describe small urban areas with patterns of high-energy usage and attributes associated with larger metropolitan areas (http://www.micro-urbanist.com/)
Roger Ebert’s Film Festival or from sending their children to University High School (Uni), one of the most elite public high schools.\textsuperscript{19} African Americans, poor whites, and the Latina/o community continue to be racially segregated and excluded from the resources and events organized by the university.

**Department of Latina/Latino Studies (LLS).** The University of Illinois was selected because it is home to the Department of Latina/Latino Studies. The department is recognized as one the nation’s most exemplary interdisciplinary programs.\textsuperscript{20} Like other innovative and politically progressive programs, the department was a result of the 1992 Latina/o student protests (Freeman, 1994).\textsuperscript{21} Some of the demands included hiring Latina/o faculty, staff and administrators, more funding for cultural programs, increasing support for recruitment and graduation of undergraduate and graduate Latina/o students. The department was built collectively from marginalized students, faculty, and the staff’s sacrifices that saw a need and took action to improve the educational experiences of the Latina/o population. This study would not have been possible without their labor, courage, and their determination to create true social change.

**Recruitment of participants.** At the time of the study I was enrolled and employed at the second site. First, I contacted one of the graduate students in my department who was currently a

\textsuperscript{19} Uni was established in 1921, where many of the professors from University of Illinois send their children. Students must go through a rigorous application process, including taking a placement exam, letters of recommendation, and transcripts.

\textsuperscript{20} The Department of Latina/Latino Studies has 9 faculty, and more than 20 affiliate appointments (Molina, 2010).

\textsuperscript{21} On May 5, 1992 Latina/o students and their supporters (i.e. African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and white allies) organized a sit-in at the Office of Minority Student Affairs and the Henry Administration building. At 5 p.m., when the building closed, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Administrative Affairs and the Director of Campus Security gave students three minutes to evacuate the building or else they would face arrest. Students refused to leave, and police officers were dispatched to the vicinity to remove the student protesters. On the University of Illinois’s timeline titled “Student Life at the University of Illinois: 1867-Present” the 1992 protests is included (from http://archives.library.illinois.edu/slc/researchguides/timeline/decades/1990.php). However they do not mention how three students were arrested and how officers used excessive force, including a stun gun against the student protesters. A film was produced for the Department of Anthropology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign documenting the 1992 student protests. For more information about the protests, please refer to the film titled “Latina/o Identity: 1992 Protests” (Freeman, 1994).
teaching assistant for one of the undergraduate courses in LLS at UIUC. I met with the teaching assistant to discuss my study and asked for permission to visit the class in order to recruit students. The teaching assistant agreed for me to come into two of her sections; I was usually given the first five or last five minutes of class. In each section, I started with a story about my experiences as an undergraduate student and the contradictions that I experienced between home, community, and the university. I also made the decision to leave a sign up sheet with the graduate teaching assistant because I wanted to give students time to think about the process. I also met with the director of student programs and academic advisor of academic minors in LLS. We discussed my study and I provided the director with a copy of the recruitment e-mail. The director agreed to send out a recruitment e-mail to students who had declared a major or minor in LLS. The recruitment email was titled, “Participants needed for an educational study about home, community, and institutional knowledge.” The e-mail also included background information about the study, sample questions, participation criteria, and my contact information. Several students responded to the initial e-mail sent by the director, and I immediately contacted them to arrange a date and time to conduct the interviews. The Director also gave me permission to use the conference room to conduct the interviews. Once I had the dates and times confirmed with students, I contacted the LLS office manager to reserve the conference room where the interviews were conducted.

Criteria for the Selection/Participation of Participants

A purposeful sampling procedure was used to select students who met the following criteria: self-identified as Latina/o, Chicana/o, Mexican-American, or Mexican; currently enrolled (at the time of the study) or had previously enrolled in courses offered by the
Department of Mexican American Studies (SJSU) and the Department of Latina/Latino Studies (UIUC); first-generation college student (neither parent graduated from a 4-year university); and immigration status comprising first-generation (born outside the U.S., immigration status can be one of the following: naturalized U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or undocumented immigrant, foreign educated); 1.5-generation (born outside the U.S. and brought to the U.S. as a child, partially foreign educated and U.S. educated); second-generation (U.S. citizen by birth and who had at least one parent who was foreign born).  

Institutional review board approval was obtained prior to recruiting participants.

Overview of Participants

Ten undergraduate Latina/o students were recruited to participate in the study. The participants in this study have been assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. All 10 interviews were conducted during the spring semester of 2011. A follow-up interview was conducted in the summer semester of 2011. Table 1 and Table 2 below outline participants’ background and educational demographic information.

Table 1

San José State University Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Major(s)</th>
<th>Minor(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cassandra</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>MAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>MAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cihuapilli</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>MAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Psychology &amp; Spanish</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. MAS offers a minor (undergraduates) and a Master’s in Mexican American Studies.

According to the Pew Hispanic Center by 2025 second-generation Latinas/os will outnumber the first-generation. Recruiting participants was based on academic and personal relationships at both institutions.
Table 2

University of Illinois Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Major(s)</th>
<th>Minor(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Biology &amp; LLS</td>
<td>GER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mexican &amp; Guatemalan</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Sociology &amp; LLS</td>
<td>AAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Araceli</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>LLS &amp; GWS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Communications &amp; LLS</td>
<td>BUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigo</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Secondary Education</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. LLS offers a minor and major in Latina Latino Studies (undergraduate). They also offer a graduate minor in LLS.

In this Chicana/Latina feminist ethnography, I have the honor and responsibility of understanding and writing about the lives of six female and four male college students. Each participant self-identified as Latina/o, Chicana/o, Mexican American, and/or Mexican.24 Participants’ age ranged from 19 to 36 years old. Five of the participants grew up and continue to reside in California, and the other participants reside in Illinois.25 Nine out of the 10 participants are fluent in Spanish and English. Many of the participants grew up speaking only Spanish at home, but use English and Spanish interchangeably with siblings and peers. All students were first-generation college students; Daniel’s mother and Cihuapilli’s father had taken some college courses in community college. Most are the daughters and sons of factory workers, janitors, gardeners, caregivers, and house-cleaners.

Cihuapilli was the only community college transfer student; she is also a single parent and lived near campus with her 19-year-old son. Cassandra and Sara lived at home because they

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24 A purposeful sampling procedure was used to select students who met the following criteria: self-identified as Latina/o, Chicana/o, Mexican-American, or Mexican; currently enrolled (at the time of the study) or had previously enrolled in MAS and LLS courses; working class background; and first-generation college student (neither parent graduated from a 4 year college).

25 The names of the places remain unchanged.
wanted to stay close to their families. Also, because many of the parents were not able to financially help them pay for their college education, parents felt that they could help their children save money by allowing them to stay at home without charging them for rent. Antonio and Daniel lived at “The Bricks” residence hall their first year, but after their first year they moved out and rented an apartment with friends near campus. All five students at UIUC were required to live in the residence halls their freshmen year, but soon after moved into an apartment with their college friends. All 10 students received some form of financial aid assistance from federal student aid, and/or student loans. Seven of the participants worked part-time and one of the participants worked full-time.

Methods

Interview procedures. Data for this study was collected using individual in-depth semi-structured interviews with undergraduate Latina/o students at both a teaching and research institution. One of the interviews was conducted via Skype because the participant was participating in the Study Abroad Program. Interviews were conducted using a topic guide to ensure that a core list of questions were addressed. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded using Garage Band and lasted an average of 90 to 120 minutes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by an advanced graduate student; however I verified each transcript against the digital audio-recordings to correct for errors. The advantage of conducting semi-structured interviews is

26 Latina participants from SJSU had 5 to 10 minute commutes depending on traffic. Although they had grown up near the campus, they were not aware of the campus until they were in high school.
27 Students at SJSU refer to the three residence halls, ‘The Bricks’ because there are only three residence halls that are made from red bricks.
28 The two Latino participants from SJSU wanted to attend colleges far away from their families, but close enough to be able to drive home. They lived about one to two hours away from home.
29 Skype is a software application that allows users to make video calls over the internet (the use of this application is free of charge).
30 Garage band is a software application for mac computers. This application allows the user to digitally audio-record voices.
that because questions are not fixed, they allow for a flow and share of views to occur in a more
natural approach (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2001).

I conducted all 10 interviews and one follow-up interview. I used an interview protocol to
ensure consistency. The first section of the interview protocol included questions that fell into
the following categories of background information: home environment, parental and family
influences, neighborhood and school characteristics, personal aspirations, and access to college
information. Participants were asked questions about their experiences growing-up at home and
knowledge acquired within their home and community. Many of the interview questions focused
on challenges they faced and how they were able to overcome them. Participants were also asked
questions about their experiences within their neighborhood and community. The second section
of the interview protocol focused on their college experience. Participants were asked questions
about their transition from high school to college and how they negotiated their home and
academic responsibilities. This section was designed to understand how students who enroll in
courses offered by the MAS and LLS departments helped them make sense of their race,
ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and legality. The third section of the interview protocol was
designed to elicit the participants’ perceptions in regards to the low educational attainment of
Latinas/os in the U.S. Participants were asked about the challenges Latinas/os experience in
terms of their educational attainment and how to improve it. The order of the questions posed
was critical to help students reflect on home and community knowledge and how the knowledge
acquired helped them pursue and navigate higher education. Concurrently, the questions allowed
students to reflect on the tensions that arose within their home and community environment and
how a college education, in particular enrolling in courses offered by the MAS and LLS
departments helped them to reflect on and also provided the knowledge and language to describe
the challenges and contradictions experienced with being the first in their family to pursue a college education.

**Interview locations.** Although participants were given the option of selecting the location for the interview, I quickly realized that it was an added burden to students. This seemed to be an issue in particular at SJSU because many of the students commuted, and they were not fully familiar with the campus. Only one of the students provided the option of meeting at a coffee shop; however, I declined her suggestion because of the level of sensitive topics and emotionally challenging questions. Therefore, I contacted the Department Head of MAS to inquire about the possibility of using their conference room. I was given permission to use the conference room; however, the room was already being used for meetings, office hours for lecturers, and student study groups, only leaving the afternoons and nights open. I also tried reserving private study rooms at the library, but because the library offers joint library services to residents of San José and SJSU students, requests for rooms must be done months in advance. I decided to contact one of the librarians to explain to her my situation, and she was able to reserve one of the rooms for a 3-hour block.  

Gaining access to privacy was quite a challenge at SJSU, where resources have been cut and spaces have been restructured and/or reduced. Selecting the location is important to ensure that participants feel safe and are familiar with the location. Four of the interviews at SJSU were conducted in a conference room and one interview was conducted at the King Library. The MAS Department is located in the Yoshihiro Uchida Hall (the old gym), where it is shared by the residents of San José and SJSU students, requests for rooms must be done months in advance. I decided to contact one of the librarians to explain to her my situation, and she was able to reserve one of the rooms for a 3-hour block.  

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31 In 2003, San José State University and the City of San José created a partnership. The old SJSU library was remodeled and new classrooms were built. A new library building was built and was named the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library.
Kinesiology Department and intercollegiate athletics. The MAS conference room is located on the first floor next to the faculty offices and main department office. The conference room had a long table with chairs around it; there were old sliding glass cabinets displaying students art work from previous classes, a small refrigerator on the corner, a metal cart holding a television and a video cassette player. The cabinets on the other side of the room were filled with old programs, posters, and journals from the National Association for Chicanas and Chicanos Studies (NACCS) organization. I arrived an hour early before each interview to make sure the conference room was unlocked, to set up my equipment, and to take fieldnotes. This provided me with the opportunity to meet other students. One of the days, there was a graduate student using the room to meet with undergraduate students. He realized that he had forgotten to reserve the room, but instead, I offered to buy him coffee and we stayed to talk about his experiences working with the undergraduate students in the department and about his research. I was fortunate if I could get through one interview without any disruptions from other students who had forgotten to reserve the room. Overall, the conference room was a welcoming and comfortable space for both participants and myself.

All interviews at the University of Illinois were conducted in the LLS conference room. I had access to the conference room most of the week, except for a 3-hour block during one day of the week. The conference room is located in an old Victorian house next to the Gender and Women’s Studies Department house. There are murals painted on the walls, a long oval wooden table with modern chairs, a wooden cabinet with doors to hide the television, and a sideboard table underneath the window out looking the street; there is a display of books and journals

32 During World War II, Uchida Hall was used to register Japanese Americans before sending them to Japanese American internment camps. In 1997, the building was renamed from Spartan Complex West to Yoshihiro Uchida Hall in honor of Yoshihiro Uchida; he was the head coach of the SJSU judo team (2003, Spartan Daily). The history of this building has been forgotten and concealed by the university by renaming the building, perhaps strategically to cover up the past.
published by the faculty in the department. The only issue with the room was the level of noise because thin walls separate the faculty offices from the conference room. Also, the door was difficult to close completely and I did not want to use the lock to avoid making the participants feel uncomfortable. Overall, it was a great location to conduct the interviews and participants were familiar with the space.

Field notes. Before and after conducting the individual interviews, I took field notes to capture the ways participants behaved, used space, dressed, and my interactions with participants. I also kept field notes on the physical environment such as describing the buildings, classrooms, and open areas, such as lawns, and how students used those spaces. Field notes included my thoughts and reflections about going into the field. The process of writing field notes allowed me to incorporate reflexivity about my role as a researcher and reflect on my own life experiences that perhaps could influence the ways in which I filter what I observed. I also took classroom observations at both campuses, in addition to attending different students events organized by undergraduate Latina/o student organizations. Field notes were useful to record non-verbal data from the interview. Taking notes of non-verbal cues provided texture and richness to the interviews. For example, when I interviewed female participants their bodies were more relaxed, but the males were more tensed or when they would get emotional they would not cry, but instead they would just say things like “Talking about this makes me a little emotional.” At the end of each interview I would shake hands with the male and female participants, but in several occasions I felt more comfortable hugging the female participants.

Data analysis. Data analysis did not occur until each interview was transcribed to prevent premature themes from emerging. To ensure accuracy on the interview transcripts, I compared the text of each transcript to each transcript’s respective digitally audio-recorded file.
The data was then systematically coded and analyzed using a qualitative constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data analysis proceeded as follows. First, I applied open-coding data analysis that allowed me to identify emerging themes from each site (a teaching and research institution). Second, I used the constant comparative method to compare the participants within each of the sites and to contrast the emergent themes from one transcript to the other. Third, results were compared with the current research to uncover similarities, differences, and gaps.

Positionality: A Seed of Sabiduría (Wisdom)

A seed of sabiduría was planted by my family and it was nurtured by my home community, teachers, and professors. In this section, I will go into detail of how I arrived at my research and my personal and political investment in this work. I will also discuss how this seed of sabiduría found a nurturing and caring space within an isolating and uncertain environment in higher education. I have always been committed to my education, but I have also felt torn between my responsibilities to my family and community. I have struggled to make sense of what it means to belong to a group of gente estudiada, a space filled with ambiguity and hope. Like my story, participants in my study are also struggling to find balance between their families, home communities, and university. They are learning how to navigate and make sense of the explicit and implicit expectations of home and higher education. At the same time, college has served as place of awakening and self-empowerment by recognizing our strengths, trusting our home knowledge, and abilities to create social change within our lives and those we love and respect. Like myself, participants in my study found their voice and have learned the language to

Gente estudiada is a Spanish term used in the Latina/o community to refer to people who are college educated. It often marks one as a person who is the exception, especially if she/he is the first in the family to attend college (see chapter 1).
talk about the consequences of social inequalities within their lives. They are learning the tools to confront issues of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, and xenophobia within institutions of higher education and within their homes communities.

Living away from my family and my exposure to graduate school was indeed changing the ways I related to my family and friends back home. I felt a great sense of guilt, isolation, and anxiety that I was not going to survive graduate school. Although deep inside I wanted to tell my family how much I missed them, I felt that I had made the right decision because I knew that I needed to move far away from my family to free myself from the responsibilities and pressures of being a good daughter. Being a good daughter meant visiting my parents every Sunday and helping with the household chores; it meant being present at every family celebration and emergency. Every time I chose my family first, it meant less time to do my reading and writing assignments for class. At the same time, because I was placed in remedial courses, I knew that I would have to work twice as harder to catch up with my peers. This frustration grew stronger for me when I left for graduate school at the University of Utah. My family and community were supportive of my decision to pursue graduate school, but I felt guilty for leaving them behind.

In my first year of graduate school, it became apparent to me that very few students from teaching institutions are encouraged to pursue graduate school. As an undergraduate student at San José State University my career goals were to become a probation officer, because as a student in the Department of Sociology my peers and I were encouraged to pursue careers in the criminal justice system because of our interest in helping youth of color. Class field trips in my sociology courses included tours of the local jails and guests speakers who worked in the criminal justice system. It was not until I was accepted to the Ronald E. McNair
Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program\textsuperscript{34} that I was exposed to graduate school and the endless possibilities of pursuing and producing knowledge in an academic setting. Perhaps because I attended an ethnically diverse, working class, and commuter teaching institution, the mission of the campus was not to expose or to prepare students for graduate school. While the literature suggests that students who attend teaching institutions are less likely to pursue advanced degrees, more research is needed to understand the experiences of first-generation college students at teaching universities who pursue advanced degrees at research universities (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Contreras, 2011; Corwin, & Tierney, 2007). Two years later, I completed the master’s program and moved further away from home to pursue my doctoral degree at the University of Illinois. At a research institution, I was once again reminded that even fewer students from teaching institutions\textsuperscript{35} make it to doctoral programs. Many of my peers had attended public research institutions in California and were a bit shocked that I had attended a teaching institution.

I decide to return to San José State to conduct my research with undergraduate Latina/o students who enroll in MAS courses because it was in those courses where I felt a great sense of belonging and connectedness to my professors, peers, and knowledge. It was important for me to return to SJSU to share with Latina/o students my experiences of pursuing graduate school in hopes that they could also think about the endless career possibilities beyond the criminal justice system. It was in my MAS courses where I felt safe, respected, and encouraged to stay in college

\textsuperscript{34} The McNair Program prepares eligible students from disadvantage backgrounds for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities; summer internships; seminars and other educational activities are designed to prepare students for doctoral study. In addition to tutoring, academic counseling, and activities designed to assist students participating in the project in securing admission to and financial assistance for enrollment in graduate programs (U.S. Department of Education).

\textsuperscript{35} Not all teaching institutions within the Cal Sate System encourage their students to pursue careers in the criminal justice system. However, a campus like San José State who have a large ethnically diverse and commuter student population are failing to attract students’ interest to field where they have been traditionally underrepresented. These students continue to be tracked into majors whose knowledge and professors who teach these students are not valued by institutions of higher education.
by my professors and peers. The professors in these courses took time to get to know the students, the readings addressed issues within our families and communities, and we were encouraged to talk about our personal experiences during classroom discussions and writing assignments. Professors in these courses inspired and motivated us to volunteer and connect in meaningful ways to Latina/o communities. My professors in MAS were also influential in my decision to pursue graduate school, by guiding and assisting me in the process of applying to graduate school.

For the past decade, I have been thinking about my research, one which has been cultivated by my own personal experiences in higher education, enrolling in courses in MAS and LLS, Chicana/Latina feminist literature, educational research from a CRT and LatCrit theoretical framework. Most importantly, I have received support throughout the years from faculty of color, white allies, and other mujeres in graduate school who have become my greatest support. Reflecting on my educational experiences of being a first-generation college student and attending both teaching and research institutions are important for my research because I want to capture the voices of Latina/o students at both teaching and research institutions who enroll in LLS and MAS courses in order to understand to what extent, if any knowledge acquired in these courses influence/challenge Latina/o students perceptions on issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and legality. In particular, I am interested in finding out how students utilize their home and community knowledge to create changes within their lives, homes, communities, and institutions of higher education. It is important to include students from both teaching and research institutions in my research to demonstrate their level of engagement to their own learning and development and achievement of a critical consciousness.
In this study, I will be addressing the challenges, tensions, and negotiations that undergraduate Latina/o students’ experience. I concur that not only is it important to validate students’ cultural strengths, but it is also critical for institutions of higher education to examine students’ sense of belonging within and outside the institution. Although being the first to pursue college is highly valued by Latino families and communities, many Latina/o students experience a greater degree of tensions and conflicts between their home and community life and college life due to Latina/o students’ strong cultural and family ties. As a result, they experience a magnitude of guilt, psychological pain, and isolation from having to assimilate into higher education and having to constantly keep the two worlds apart. My research is a reflection of 10 years of participating in higher education and my commitment to ensure that more underrepresented students pursue, persist, and graduate from college. In addition, because of the disconnect that Latina/o students experience, universities need to acknowledge and incorporate Latina/o students deep-rooted ties, commitment, and loyalty to their families and communities. We must continue to find ways to nurture the frail and thirsty seed of sabiduría within all of us, and we must never forget about those seeds that are waiting for us to add a sprinkle of our sabiduría.
Chapter 4

*Familias Fuertes: Learning Through Stories, Dichos, and Consejos*

This chapter highlights the ways participants used their families’ stories, *dichos* (popular proverbs or sayings), and *consejos* (advice) to share the ways they overcame challenges at home and in school. Stories, *dichos*, and *consejos* are fundamental aspects of funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth found in Latino families that are passed down from one generation to the next (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Yosso, 2005). They transmit intergenerational perspectives, attitudes, and values rooted in Latino culture. They foster a sense of hope, unity, and encouragement that allows family members to maintain a positive outlook on life, to resist marginalization, and to believe in one’s strength. Participants recalled how these everyday lessons took place over dinners, family gatherings, or when they felt discouraged at school. Parents, *abuelos*, and *tias/os* shared stories about overcoming difficult challenges in their lives, such as being forced to drop out of school to work and contribute to the family. Through these stories and household knowledge, parents and family members served as the inspiration for participants’ educational perseverance, but also to show them how much difficult life can be without an education. Participants’ memories of witnessing their parents’ perform backbreaking labor kept them focused and motivated to finish high school and pursue a college education. These stories reaffirmed that they come from *familias fuertes* (strong families) that have survived adversities and built the foundation for a better life for them.

Participants shared stories about the personal struggles they faced as children and youth, like growing up with an addict parent or dealing with *envidias* (envy) amongst extended family members. Since their parents had to work long, participants recalled learning to be more independent and responsible at a young age. Many of them talked about the pressures of having
to succeed in school while, at a young age, having to take on many responsibilities such as translating for the family, taking care of younger siblings, and helping parents make decisions about their younger siblings’ education. Andrea and Ana shared stories about growing up in mixed-status households (both documented and undocumented) and how they and many of the community members live in constant fear of family members being taken away by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. Many Latina participants shared stories about the *mujeres* in their family and reflected on the important lessons they learned from them.

Antonio, Cassandra, Daniel, Cihuapilli, and Sara grew up throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, California, and Andrea, Johnny, Rigo, Ana, and Araceli grew up in different neighborhoods within the Chicago area. Their parents settled into these communities because many had established family-networks that helped them find employment opportunities and affordable housing. Many of participants shared fond memories about their neighborhoods like playing outdoors or the beautiful murals that cover the walls of *La Misión* and Pilsen. They also shared stories about growing up in disenfranchised communities and being exposed to neighborhood violence and gang culture. Sara and Cihuapilli shared stories about growing up around gang influences, both in their neighborhood and families. The students who grew up in areas with a critical mass of Latinos felt a strong connection and pride in their heritage, cultural values, and traditions. Latinos shared stories about the lack of limited open spaces to play and seeing their neighborhoods being gentrified. Participants shared how many of their neighbors were forced to move out from the community because of rising rents, while others like Ana’s family decided to go into the suburbs in search of a better quality of life, affordable housing, and better schools. Many of the participants recounted learning important lessons at home that helped
them develop high aspirations for college, while others used the absence or the perceived lack of motivation from their parents to achieve their educational goals.

**Latino Family Stories and Consejos**

Latin American countries, including Mexico, are known for having a strong oral tradition where knowledge is passed down from one generation to the next through family stories, *dichos,* and *consejos.* Consequently, storytelling practices play an important role in the every-day lives of many Latina/o students and their families, one that serves as an entry point for parents and youth to share their educational experiences and aspirations (Carter, 2003; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Fernández, 2002; Rodriguez, 2010; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Stories can provide a space for Latino families and community members to pass on experiential knowledge and wisdom that will guide and prepare the next generation of Latinas/os about how to deal with difficult issues like racial and gender inequalities within the private and public sphere. Stories have the power of bringing generations together, allow for the storyteller to share issues that they might be struggling with, provides a space to reflect, and strengthens one’s sense of belonging to the community. Cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1993) writes about the epistemological significance of storytelling; he explains, “stories often shape, rather than simply reflect, human conduct” (p. 129). Rosaldo suggests that when Latinas/os tell stories they are also drawing from cultural knowledge such as *chistes* (jokes) or *dichos* that play a significant role in culture as a form of resistance and as a source of building a positive identity. Latina/o youth, therefore, learn important lessons from stories that are part of a broader emphasis on learning about the importance of *educación* and moral responsibility to self and others.
Families played a critical role in the participants’ identity development and educational aspirations. Many of the participants’ parents transmitted a strong Latino identity to their children by sharing stories about their upbringing in Mexico, speaking to their children in Spanish, and passing down cultural knowledge. Growing up, several of the participants recalled learning important lessons about hard work, persistence, and gratitude in the face of adversity. Many of the parents supported their children’s education in non-traditional ways by sharing family stories, *dichos, consejos*, and guiding them towards *el buen camino* (the good moral path). Parents and extended family members shared stories and memories about their own life experiences to teach their children how to make wise choices for themselves. For example, many of the parents advised their children to avoid *malas amistades* (negative peer influences), drugs, gangs, and early pregnancy. Throughout the interviews participants in this study expressed their love, *respeto* (respect), and admiration for their parents and families. From an early age, participants recalled learning from their parents that they would encounter many challenges throughout their education, but parents also engrained the idea that with hard work, dedication, discipline, and patience they would be able to overcome any challenge that came their way.

Participants described home as a place filled with great memories of spending time with *familia* and celebrating birthdays, *bautismos* (baptisms), and special holidays together. They recalled home as a nurturing place filled with love and pride for their Mexican heritage. Many of them grew up in homes where mothers did most of the cooking and household chores, and fathers were the breadwinners. Over time, several of the participants father’s role changed so that they were more involved with their children and took on more of the household work. Parents worked hard to provide a stable and loving home for their children, but sometimes they faced adverse circumstances of unemployment, addictions, and lack of legal status. Participants
expressed growing up in *familias fuertes* that emphasized the importance of education, but most importantly they learned that to achieve academic success one needs to work hard to attain it.

I remember the ways Rigo’s voice and gestures changed as the story about his father’s lack of school supplies unfolded. Rigo was born and raised in South Side Chicago and identifies as Mexican. He has two older brothers and a younger sister. His parents emigrated from a small farming village in Michoacán, Mexico. He shares a close relationship with his parents and throughout the interview expressed a deep appreciation and respect for his parents for providing him with *consejos* and for guiding him towards *el buen camino*. His parents shared stories about growing up Mexico and the lack of educational opportunities. Rigo recalled the following story:

He told me that when he was a kid they didn’t have a lot of money so he couldn’t really buy notebooks or pencils for school. He had to make sure not to use up the whole pencil because he would take off the eraser and sharpen both sides. And as far as paper he used to tell me that when he was done with an assignment and once his teacher handed back his paper, he would erase it so he could reuse the same paper. I was like wow! Uh it just got me right there.

Rigo was grateful that he was able to experience a different type of schooling. Family stories, like the one told by Rigo’s father, created a range of emotions, such as appreciation and a better understanding of the sacrifices his parents made so he could have a better education. Rigo realized that his parents’ struggles were far more pressing than his. Stories served to motivate their children to do well in school and to take advantage of different opportunities. Furthermore, stories provided a space for parents to communicate with their children and to strengthen relationships among family members. Thus, it was communication between parents and children in regards to academic matters that enhanced Latina/o student’s educational aspirations.

From a young age, Antonio’s parents placed a high value on education by setting high academic expectations for him and his siblings. Although the kind of support and involvement that Antonio received from his parents was not directly related to his schoolwork, he described
how his parents played a critical role in his educational aspirations. The ways his parents demonstrated their support for his education, included asking him questions about his day at school, homework, and sharing their own educational experiences to illustrate the ways education promises a better life. Antonio was born and raised in the Mission District of San Francisco, California, also known as La Misión to the Latino community. He identifies as Mexican and Chicano. Antonio is the oldest in his family and has a younger brother and sister. His parents emigrated from a small town in Guanajuato, Mexico. His father has been working for a major janitorial service company for the past 15 years, cleaning different buildings throughout the downtown San Francisco area. His mother is a stay at home mom and occasionally babysits for her relatives’ and friends’ children. Antonio recalled learning from his parents to value his education from a young age. He shared:

My mom always told me how she wasn’t able to continue her education. Both my mom and dad are from a small town in Guanajuato it’s called Tarimori. In their town they have primaria (elementary school) and one secundaria (middle school). But they didn’t really have a high school back then. There was one, but it was in the city, which was like a 15-minute drive and my grandparents didn’t allow my mom to continue because they thought she would go wild being on her own in a big city. So my mom told me how she was very saddened by that because she really wanted to continue her education and she had all these aspirations. The lesson was that you might not like it now, you might appreciate it more in the future about getting an education because my mom, that’s one thing she would tell me, that if she could go back she would have loved to continue her schooling. I learned not to take my education for granted!

Storytelling provides a space for families to come together and to relive defining moments in one’s life. Antonio’s parents shared stories about their childhoods and upbringing to illustrate how much better their children’s lives had improved as a result of their sacrifices. Antonio recalled that when he would complain about doing household chores, his parents would share stories about the chores they had to endure in Mexico. He took a deep breath as he recalled the story.
My dad always worked late so whenever she [mother] had house chores to do she would ask me to help her out with like sweeping, mopping, and with the dishes and things like that. And once in a while I would have to take care of my little sister cuz she had to go buy groceries so just little things like that. When I would complain about chores my parents would tell me little stories like when they were young and going to school they had to help out in the field cuz my grandpa would always plant cacahuates (peanuts) and he also had a lot of cows for milk in his ranch. They would tell me stories like that to show me how much harder they had it. So whenever we would complain about doing a chore they’d remind us that they had to do a lot more when they were our age.

The exchange of stories allowed Antonio to learn about his parents’ childhood in Mexico and his family’s connection to the land. The story helped Antonio learn about the importance of responsibility and how his work contributed to the well-being of his family.

Family stories were also passed down from older siblings to younger siblings. Growing up, Cihuapilli’s eldest sister shared stories about their father’s aspirations for his children’s education. She identifies as Chicana of Mexican and Filipino descent. Cihuapilli has a twin brother and three sisters. Her maternal grandparents emigrated from Mexico and worked in the agricultural fields throughout the Midwest. Her aunts and uncles on her mother’s side of the family were born in different states throughout the Midwest and South. She does not know her father’s side of the family, except that her grandfather emigrated from the Philippines and married her grandmother who had emigrated from Mexico. When Cihuapilli talked about her father it was emotionally painful because she was only 11 years old when her father passed away at the age of 34 from a drug overdose. Her father’s drug addiction and being in an out of jail did not stop her father from talking to his children about the importance of getting a college education. Although Cihuapilli was too young to remember her father, her eldest sister would share stories about the ways their father would convey high aspirations for their education. Cihuapilli paused for a moment, and then her face lit up with joy and sadness as she fondly remembered her father. She shared:

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36 Cihuapilli is a Nahualt term for noblewomen.
I can’t remember specifically, but like, I know that he would have wanted us, maybe I’m doing it subconsciously like, I know this is what he would have wanted for us, his girls, his children. And my sister always tells me. You’re your father’s daughter; you’re what he would have wanted. You’re doing everything that he would have wanted you to do. You know. I don’t know. It’s just kind of weird. I feel like I have a connection with my father. Even though I didn’t know him very well because I was really young when he passed. I feel like I have a really strong connection with him.

Cihuappilli’s connection to her father was strengthened through the stories that her sister shared. Their father was also able to set a good example for his children by enrolling in art courses at the local community college and later at SJSU. Growing up, Cihuapilli never felt encouraged nor discouraged with her education from her mother. She explained. “They [parents] didn’t have a lot of education. I think my mom went to some high school but she didn’t graduate. My mother really never focused on education for us, I’m not sure why, until this day I’m not sure why.” Cihuappilli did not have a lot of people encouraging her to do well in school, but it did not stop her from achieving her dreams, and now she has become a role model for her son, nieces, and nephews.

Many Latina/o parents shared stories about experiencing discrimination and dangerous work conditions to teach their children about the consequences of not obtaining a college education. Whenever Johnny felt like not doing his homework, he remembered how his father would share stories about how hard he worked. Johnny was born in Chicago and grew up in Pilsen. He identifies as Mexican American. Johnny has an older brother and sister. His parents emigrated from Michoacán, Mexico and both work in factories. Growing up his parents emphasized the importance of doing well in school by sharing stories about their experiences working in different factories. He shared:

My parents are hard workers. Very hard workers! My parents always emphasized education. Even just seeing them coming home from work, they would just tell me, “I don’t want you working in a factory. If you want to stop going to school then come with me and you can work with us at the factory.” They instilled fear in us. Like they would
tell us, Hey if you wanna smell like this, if you wanna be tired like this, then come with me, if not, study and get a good job.

Johnny’s parents shared their own testimonies about the challenges they encountered as a result of not having a formal education. They used their physical exhaustion to show their children what could happen to their bodies if they chose to drop out of school and do manual labor.

Several of the participants attributed their strong work ethic to the example set by their parents growing up. The majority of the students were conscious of how hard their parents worked and recalled money always being an issue at home. Although participants were not obligated to work, many felt it was their duty to help their parents by buying their own things because they knew that their parents were not financially stable. As soon as they were eligible to work, many of them found part-time jobs. Many of the participants were employed as young as 13 in order to pay for their personal expenses. Antonio recalled getting a job working at the San Francisco Zoo on the weekends. He shared:

Right off the bat I just wanted to be responsible. Ever since I started working I don’t ask my parents for money, sometimes they give me money here and there but I always try to make sure I’m not asking, that’s a big thing for me, making sure I can financially support myself.

Many of the students recalled learning and developing a hard work ethic from watching their parents work multiple jobs or seeing their mothers take on many of the household responsibilities. All of the participants recalled paying for expenses related to their education in high school such as college admission exams and application fees. Watching their parents work extraordinary hours under extreme work conditions motivated participants to seek ways of financing their own education without depending on their parents’ financial support.

37 Sara was thirteen when she started working at an ice cream shop and worked throughout high school to save money to pay for her college education.
Many of the participants reflected upon their summer vacations with their abuelos (grandparents) in Mexico and how spending time with them, they learned about their family history and cultural traditions. Daniel, for example, has made over six trips back to Mexico with his grandparents. Sharing a close relationship with his grandparents has provided Daniel with a strong sense of cultural heritage and family history. He explained:

Yeah he [grandfather] came through the Bracero program, so he would tell me all these stories about the migrant experience. And my grandma would tell me stories about how she grew up. She would tell me how she came from nothing. She lived through tough time and struggled a lot. She always tells me how she wishes she could have gone to school and so does my grandpa. And it makes me wanna work harder for them so that if I make it, it’s like they also made it!

These stories were a way for grandparents to convey high aspirations for their grandchildren. These stories also helped participants like Daniel to develop a strong sense of hopefulness and determination to persevere in the face of adversity.

Ana reflected on the frustrations she experienced as a result of being burdened by too many responsibilities and being forced to grow up too fast. She recounted how the only time she was able to enjoy her childhood was when she would spend her summer vacations in Mexico with her grandmother and aunts. She is the oldest in her family and has four younger siblings. Her parents emigrated from Guanajuato, Mexico. Growing up, both of her parents worked long hour in factories. Her mother works at Las Bolsas, bags, briefcases, purses, and luggage factory and her father works at Los Monos a toy factory.\(^38\) Because both parents worked long-hours, they had to rely on Ana to help take care of her siblings and take on many of the household responsibilities. She explained, “I had to take care of everyone, that was the mentality I had as a kid.” Her mother also relied on Ana to help her access information, such as translating bills and

\(^{38}\) Las Bolsas and Los Monos was the nickname Ana’s family came up for the factories where her parents worked. In English las bolsas means the bags and los monos means the toys.
notices and interpreting for the family. She also supervised her younger siblings activities related to school, such as helping them with their homework or assessing their progress in school.

One year, Ana and her parents decided to send her to Mexico with her grandmother. That year in Mexico was life changing for Ana on different levels. Ana felt liberated from the pressures at home. She explained, “I could breathe, I could feel . . . I didn’t have to deal with my dad’s alcoholism or drug addiction . . . I got to play . . . I learned about myself and about my culture.” Being able to be away from her family and spending time with her grandmother and aunts in Mexico, allowed Ana to be a child again. In Mexico, she spent time with her aunts who are college educated and are economically independent women with careers. Ana shares a close relationship with her grandmother who had a great influence in her education. She enjoyed spending time with her grandmother and listening to her stories. She wanted to stay in Mexico, but chose not to because she knew that her mother needed her. Instead, her parents promised her that if she got good grades, she could spend her summers in Mexico. Being able to spend extended periods of time with her grandmother and aunts in Mexico exposed Ana to her language, culture, social, historical, and political relationship between the U.S. and Mexico.

**Dichos: Teaching Life Lessons**

*Dichos* are bits of knowledge and words of wisdom that teach profound lessons about life. Some are whimsical, there is justice and injustice conveyed in some, and others transmit a sense of hope for better times. The use of *dichos* was present in participants’ everyday conversations with parents and extended family members. Gary Soto (1994) describes *dichos* as:

The soothing remedy to loss and the loss of hope . . . It is warning and conclusion. It is the unwritten literature and philosophy of the poor, particularly rural folk. . . . They are frequently regional yet universal in appeal. . . . They share the qualities of proverbs from other cultures: they are sharp and distilled truths. They can be relished, memorized,
quoted in Spanish and English, tested on friends, and finally evaluated in one’s life. (p. 6-9).

*Dichos* supported the teaching of moral and cultural values and critical lessons about life such as the importance of an individual’s share in collective responsibility.\(^\text{39}\) Parents shared *dichos* to make a point and as a form of advice about how to confront and overcome difficult situations in one’s life. Daniel smiled and chuckled as he recalled one of the *dichos* he grew up listening to. He explained:

> They would just tell me, that Spanish *dicho*, “*El camarón que se duerme se lo lleva la corriente.*”\(^\text{40}\) And that would just motivate me. When I was younger I’d just be like, “oh mom, you and your *dichos,*” but now that I’m older and I think about it, she’s right! I don’t want to be another statistic! There are too many people my age not doing positive things.

The shrimp in this *dicho* is used to illustrate the strength and power of the shrimp, but without its wise use of its own energy and vigilance it can be overwhelmed and destroyed by the large ocean forces. Daniel’s mom used this popular *dicho* to teach her son an important lesson about being proactive and perseverant. Sara also recalled growing up to the same *camaron dicho* and explains how she applied it to her own life.

> It has actually been very helpful throughout my life because thanks to that way of thinking I have tried my best not to procrastinate. I know I have to be on top of my things because you never know when life will hit you. If I were to procrastinate and if I had to deal with a real emergency situation, then I would be in a real big mess. But I try to have all my things in order so I know I’ll be fine.

The advice that Sara took was not to procrastinate or like in this *dicho* the shrimp is warned not to fall asleep or else the ocean’s current will wipe out the shrimp. When Sara’s mother was concerned about her friendships, she would be apt to repeat the following *dicho*, “*El que con

\(^\text{39}\) Although not all Spanish *dichos* translate into popular sayings in English, some that do include: *No dejes para mañana lo que puedes hacer hoy* (don’t put off for tomorrow what you can do today) or *Mientras hay vida hay esperanza* (where there is life there is hope).

\(^\text{40}\) Translation: The shrimp who falls asleep, gets caught up by the tide.
lobos anda a aullar se enseña.”41 This dicho advises one not to surround yourself with individuals with a bad reputation or negative influences or else you’ll end up picking up their bad habits. Sara reflects how she applied this dicho to her life, “in a certain way that led me to make better decisions about my friends.” Ana, recalled the following dicho, “No da paso sin huarache.”42 This dicho advises one not to make any decisions until you are completely sure of what you are doing or where you are heading. Araceli also recalled her mother’s dichos and how she was able to apply them to her own life.

My mom seems to have a dicho for everything! I've asked her before if she's heard them or if she just makes them up and she admits that she sometimes makes them up too. I don't remember all the dichos she's told me but one of the ones that I grew up hearing was: “Peor es nada y se caso con uno que tenia vacas.”43 In English it makes no sense but she means that things could be worse. A lot of the times when I told my mom bad news or my frustrations with things in college she would mention this dicho. I guess I have learned that in fact, my life has been pretty good. I've been able to achieve most of what I wanted.

Although Araceli’s mother is not college educated, she drew from her cultural knowledge including dichos to acknowledge her daughter’s educational struggles and to provide inspirational words of encouragement. Dichos connected participants to family and cultural experiences and communicated messages that extend far beyond their literal meanings. Parents shared dichos to teach their children critical lessons about life that translated into their academic success.

Las Mujeres in the Family

Latinas’ roles within the family in the U.S. have been changing as more women are employed and there are more woman-headed households (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 2006;  

41 He who walks with wolves learns to howl.
42 Translation: Nobody takes a single step while barefooted or without their sandal.
43 This literally means, worse is nothing and she married someone who had cows.
In Sofia Villenas and Melissa Moreno’s (1999) study of Mexican women in North Carolina, the *mujeres* talked about the central role their mothers played in their home education and how they continued those lessons with their own children. They found that Latina mothers and daughters learned how to live with contradictory gender teachings of knowing how to be “una mujer de hogar” (a woman of the home) while at the same time learning ways to resist subordination by “valerse por si mismas” (to be self-reliant). Andrea reflects on the contradictory messages that involved both a critique and respect for the women in her family. She explained:

> Even though I grew up around strong headed women that took the lead in a lot of things in terms of making family decisions . . . I feel like my aunts stressed the importance of gender roles that are placed in the household that are very much reflective of the outside. Like the women in my family were always inside the kitchen and the men never had to step into the kitchen because they were always in the living room watching sports.

She expressed a great sense of respect for the women in her family even as she critiqued their practices. Andrea’s experience illustrates the reality of gender oppression within the home and the possibilities of transcending gender roles. From an early age, Latina participants were highly critical of how the women in their family were confined by patriarchal traditions and practices. At the same time they admired the strength and courage, the *mujeres* had to counter traditional gender roles and expectations. Furthermore, the women shared how they did not want to become like the women in their family, while they did not want to become outsiders inside their community, either.

> From a young age, Latinas in this study developed a self-reliant mentality by seeing their mothers’ strong determination to keep their families together no matter how difficult life got. At the same time, Latinas were critical of how more often their mothers were the ones to assume the roles of breadwinners and providers for the family. Their mothers were also expected to
undertake greater degrees of household responsibilities and take on important roles that required them to serve as mediators or advocates for their family. In the following example, Sara talked about growing up in a single parent household and learning critical life lessons from her mother, including the importance of becoming self-reliant. She explained:

My mom struggled and I didn’t like to see her struggle and I was small so there was nothing I could do. But then when I started getting older, that’s when I started working and realizing that I didn’t want to take away un peso. \(^{44}\) I don’t have to depend so much on her so maybe she works less hours or maybe she has more money for something else. That’s what I always thought. I don’t want to be a burden for my mom. Even though we’re kids. We’re always a burden.

Becoming self-reliant for Sara meant assuming responsibility by earning her own money. From a young age Latinas learned to become self-reliant, including gaining economic independence in order to make their own choices. As Latina participants reflected on those lessons, they learned from their mothers that the only way to achieve economic independence and not end up working physically strenuous jobs was to get an education.

Araceli talked extensively about learning to be a strong woman from seeing her mother stand up for herself by divorcing her abusive husband and raising her children on her own. Araceli was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. She identifies as Mexican American. She is the oldest in her family and has two younger brothers. Her parents emigrated from Mexico, but while most of her father’s side of the family resides in Chicago, she shares a closer relationship with her maternal grandparents in Mexico. Her mother has worked in stamping and auto parts factories. After her parents’ divorce, Araceli recalled having to take on many of the household responsibilities, including rushing home after school to take care of her younger brother because her mother worked 12-hour shifts 5 days a week. She explained, “I had to make sure that he [her brother] did his homework, that I cleaned up after him, that he ate and that he went to bed

\(^{44}\) Un peso: take away a dime or a dollar.
because my mother at that time she worked from 4 p.m. to 4 a.m.” Araceli shares a close relationship with her mother, and despite her mother’s lack of formal education, she has always been supportive and encouraging of her daughter’s education. Watching her mother work 12-hour shifts without the support of her father or extended family, Araceli learned many important lessons. Her mother taught her the value of an education and the importance of being an independent woman so she’d never have to depend on a man or anyone else. She explained, “I learned from my mom that if I wanted to do something I was gonna have to figure it out on my own.” Her mother’s influence is evident in Araceli’s words and confidence in herself. At the same time participants expressed feeling high levels of stress, anxiety, and fear of disappointing their families. Learning to become self-reliant at a young age was critical for the survival of their families, especially in single parent households, where mothers’ depended on their older children’s support, such as taking care of younger siblings or cooking for the family. Being self-reliant also meant learning the value of money and becoming financially independent.

Latinas were conscious of the struggles and sufferings of their mothers and previous generations of women in their family. They grew up hearing stories about women’s double burden of contributing financially to the home, while assuming childcare and household responsibilities. Latinas were also aware that through education, they were part of a new generation of Latinas that are disrupting cultural and societal practices of patriarchy. This is evident in a statement made by Araceli:

I feel like a lot of the submissiveness that I’ve seen in my family, from the women to the men, I feel like that’s the way they were raised. They were told by their parents you have to learn how to cook and clean and my mom tried to tell me that but once I got an education I realized that I don’t have to be like that. I mean if a guy is gonna base whether or not he wants to be with me on whether I can cook and clean then that’s not the guy for me. So I feel like I try to negotiate it by just telling myself that it isn’t in my generation as much as it was in my mother’s generation and in her mother’s generation.
Araceli and many of the other Latina participants expressed valuing their mothers’ advice, even though at the same time they felt pressure to conform to traditional gender norms. One of the tensions that Latinas face once they decide to push against sexism and racism is no longer being able to relate to the people closest to them.

Many of the participants expressed how being exposed to Chicana/Latina feminist thought helped them understand how cultural practices and beliefs intersect with gender inequities. For instance, Latinas/os were encouraged by their family to achieve independence through their college education, but at the same time participants discussed feeling pressure from family to get married and have children. For example, Cassandra shared how during family gatherings one of her aunts would express traditional views on women. Her aunt would make comments like, “how old are you [Cassandra]? 21? You’re old you should be married by now.” Cassandra explained how these comments would have been more hurtful when she was younger and explained how being exposed to Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship has helped her to become more gender conscious. Latino males also expressed feeling pressure from family to start their own families and to find better paying jobs. Although Joe’s parents supported his decision to pursue graduate school, he shared how many of his Latina/o peers did not receive the same support from their parents and extended family and made indirect comments like “well what are you doing, you're 25 years old, why aren’t you married? And you should be getting a job.”

Not only did parents emphasize marriage, but they also reinforced heterosexual norms by assuming that their children are straight. Although none of the participants discussed their sexual orientation, many of them discussed having gay siblings or friends. However, it was mostly Latinas who had tried to discuss sexual orientation or gender roles within the home, but parents were resistant to discuss these issues. Ana explained:
My mom will sometimes make comments like, “hay son bien jotos” (they are so gay) but then I’ll tell her mom they have a right to be themselves and they are not any different than us and I go on my rant and she’s like “ay”! And even with my siblings when they say things like “that’s so gay” and I’m like don’t say that cuz then you’re implying that gay is being bad. I try to educated them. And they’re just like “ah!”

Their ways of thinking and educating their families on issues like homophobic language further confirm that Latino culture is fluid and changing through a new generation of college-educated Latinas/os who are becoming gente estudiada.

Mothers and other women in the family were highly engaged in communicating to their daughters the importance of pursuing their educational goals as a means to achieving economic independence. Although many of the women in their families played active roles outside the home, and some even earned higher incomes than the men or were responsible for making important decisions for the family, the males in their families were always privileged and glorified. Latina participants were critical of their mothers for showing preferential treatment towards los hombres in their families. Latinas expressed how women’s work and accomplishments in the home and outside seemed to receive less value or celebration. Many of the Latinas experienced gender socialization marked by traditional expectations, and received conflicting messages about gender role expectations in their families and home communities. For example, many of the Latinas’ mothers’ and other women in their families emphasized the importance of finding a partner who could be a good provider. At the same time, the same women also emphasized the importance of becoming self-reliant and achieving economic independence.

Latina participants also shared learning from the mujeres in their family the link between a college education and avoiding being stuck in unhealthy marriages and low-paying jobs. Many of the Latina participants recalled hearing stories about their mother’s struggles of feeling

45 The men.
trapped in their marriage. Araceli’s mother felt forced to marry her father at a young age. She shared:

She was never happy in her marriage. She told me that she didn’t want to marry my father. On the day of her wedding she told my grandpa that she didn’t want to marry him. And my grandpa told her, “well you can’t back out now, what will people say?” So he was using this idea of shame like, “you can’t shame our family.”

Araceli’s mother did not want to divorce her father because she thought it would bring shame to the family and felt pressure to be a good wife even if it meant being an abused relationship. There is also a cultural stigma in the Latino community that pressures many women to stay in abusive marriages. Although Latinos are more open to divorce, many continue to make remarks to women like “abandono su familia y hogar” (abandoned her family and home) and are judged and gossiped about more harshly than man. Eventually her mother divorced her father and now emphasizes college education in order to “valerse por si misma” (to be self-reliant) and gain financial independence. Araceli reflected, “If I don’t want a man, I know I don’t have to get one because I know I can provide for myself.” Araceli and the other Latina respondents reflected how their college education and exposure to feminist literature was increasing their ability to be more self-sufficient, confident, and gain freedom to choose how they want to live their lives.

Although many of the Latina participants viewed the women in their families as strong-willed and courageous, they also recognized the limitations that patriarchal structures imposed on them and expressed a strong desire no push gender boundaries. Latina participants also feared falling into traditional gender roles and being controlled by a domineering patriarch if they did not complete their college education and pursued careers.
Envidias Within Extended Family

Extended family within the Latino culture can provide a strong source of emotional and financial support; at the same time they can cause added stress, discomforts, and tensions. Participants in this study emphasized how important it was to receive emotional support and encouragement with regards to their education from immediate family; however, many did not always feel supported by extended family members. Thus, internalized racism and oppression within the Latino community often manifests as *envidias* (Padilla, 2001). For instance, many Latinas/os question the qualifications of other successful Latinos. According to Araceli, her family cared about her education, but she felt that they were not the most supportive or encouraging. She often found herself becoming defensive around her extended family. She explained:

I feel like they got envious of the fact that a woman who’s a single mother could have more success with her daughter than they could with their sons. . . . Especially the uncle that we lived with in Chicago, he always thought that his son was gonna be the best in the family and it turned out that it wasn’t the case. So they were not supportive but I feel like it’s really just pushed me to go above and beyond what they expected of me. I guess I was supposed to get pregnant and drop out of school. My uncle actually asked my mom why she was wasting her money sending me to a private high school.

Araceli’s uncle expressed *envidias* for her success by stereotyping her as just another Latina who gets pregnant and drops out of school. She was very proud of the fact that she proved her extended family wrong by being the first member in her family to attend a 4-year university. Rather than asking Araceli for advice about how he could help his son succeed in school, he disregarded her knowledge and insights about how to access higher education. Although Araceli’s mother has always been employed and has been the primary household wage earner, her extended family has never acknowledged her mother’s remarkable accomplishments. Instead, they have imposed their ideologies and values about what a family should look like and how it
should be maintained. Her aunts and uncles also made comments about the lack of a father figure in their family. It is disheartening when within our families and communities we neglect to provide support for each other, and even worse when we conspire against each other. The *envidias* phenomenon hurts our families and hinders Latino unity.

Community: Growing up in Latina/o Neighborhoods

Walking through the streets of major Latino communities in the Bay Area like East Side San José or *La Misión*, I draw comparisons with neighborhoods in Chicago like Pilsen and the South Side where many of the participants grew up. I cannot help but notice some of the striking similarities.46 Participants in this study emphasized both a strong connection to and disconnection from their home communities. They shared joyful stories about growing up in working class neighborhoods where people speak Spanish and Spanglish,47 sounds of Mexican music like *rancheras* and *reggaetón* are heard; colorful murals enrich the walls of schools, churches, and community centers, and the smell of warm *pan dulce* or hot crispy *chicharrones* are some of the many enticing sounds, sites, and aromas that flood the streets. Antonio, Cassandra, Cihuapilli, Daniel, and Sara grew up in the Bay Area, while Ana, Andrea, Araceli, Johnny and Rigo grew up in the Chicago area.

Cities like San José and Chicago have been home to thriving immigrant Latino communities. In the last decade there has also been a growth of Latino families moving into the suburbs, in particular, the Chicago area (MacDonald & Carillo, 2010). Homes are a lot smaller and narrower in Chicago and have a distinct classic look of limestone and brick that is unique to

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46 Only Ana and Daniel’s parents moved out into the suburbs.
47 Spanglish: the mixing of Spanish and English together. For example: ¿Dónde parkear el carro? (the Spanish word for parking is *estacionar*). Where to park the car? Many Spanish speakers in the U.S. use *parkear* instead of *estacionar* because *parkear* sounds closer to parking.
Chicago. *La Misión* is famously known for its tall and narrow Victorian style homes, whereas homes in East Side San José are mostly painted in bright colors and have beautifully landscaped fenced yards. These *barrios* are severely impacted by environmental racism, poverty, violence, police surveillance, street gangs, graffiti, low-performing schools, inadequate housing, high unemployment rates, limited open spaces, overabundance of liquor stores, and food deserts. The commonalities between these communities are no coincidence; for they share a history of institutional segregation of both subtle and not-so subtle strategies of dividing the cities racially. During the 1980s and early 1990s many of the participants’ parents settled in these cities to work in factories and the service-industry. Despite many of the social, economic, political, and environmental problems that these communities have faced throughout the years, they have retained a strong sense of a Latino culture and political identity by developing their own organizations, establishing and growing their businesses, and organizing cultural events that bring together the community. These communities also share a strong history of political activism; they have fought back against police brutality and immigration raids, and have demanded better schools for their children (Friedman, 2007).

Throughout the interviews many of the participants shared how their parents taught them critical life lessons including the importance of being selfless and giving back to the community. According to a survey conducted of Latinos in Chicago by the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame church membership was one of the most common forms of community involvement. Rigo talked about having a strong connection to the people in his community.

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48 East Side San José is located in the South Bay, it is considered one of the poorest areas in Santa Clara County, residents consist of Latinas/os, Filipinas/os, and Vietnamese.

49 Food deserts have been described as high-poverty communities/neighborhoods with low-access to healthy foods. According to the National Council of La Raza (2010) “Hispanic families are less likely than non-Hispanic White families to live in neighborhoods where healthy foods are available and sold at affordable prices.”


50 http://latinostudies.nd.edu/publications/pubs/LR@ND_V3N4web.pdf
neighborhood through church. His mother is greatly involved with the Catholic Church where she serves as a community organizer. She raises funds through the church, which she allocates to families facing financial emergencies. Growing up in a predominantly Mexican neighborhood, Rigo expressed feeling connected to his community and Mexican identity. He hopes to return to his community after graduating from college. He shared:

As soon as I get out I am going back and teach in my community because seeing that neighborhood, you hear all year round shootings or you’re around a lot of gang violence and I want to stop that. I don’t want nobody to talk bad about South Chicago because South Chicago is actually a good place to live in. Nobody should talk bad about it.

Returning to South Side Chicago to teach in his community is something Rigo looks forward to doing. He wants to increase the number of Latinas/os in his community to pursue a college education.

**Gang Culture and Youth Violence**

Many of the participants shared stories about themselves joining gangs, or their siblings’ involvement with street gangs. Araceli grew up in a predominantly Latino neighborhood in downtown Chicago. She discussed the challenges of growing up around gangs and youth violence and recalled many instances hearing neighbors fighting and drive-by shootings. She explained, “Where I come from I mean I was in a bad neighborhood. I remember how a guy got shot a few doors down and the blood print was right there for days.” Growing up in disadvantaged and high poverty neighborhoods was rough for many of the participants, but they also shared how their parents’ constant reminders to focus on school and to stay away from *malas amistades* helped them avoid getting involved with gangs. Research has shown that youth in poor neighborhoods are more likely to join gangs to find a sense of identity and a place to belong, while others join because of their family’s gang influence, or they see it as one of the only available ways of
making money (Miranda, 2003; Vigil, 2007). Gang culture becomes a way of life for many of these youth who grow up around it, while for others it becomes a means of survival or protection from other gangs.

Growing up in East Side San José was home for Sara where she witnessed *Norteño* and *Sureño* gang members fighting each other over neighborhood territory. She shared stories about her siblings involvement with gangs. She explained:

It was tough because my brothers and sisters fell into gangs. I was like, “oh that’s dumb,” it’s not for me. I would see them fighting and people in my neighborhood either ended up being killed or in jail. Why would anyone wanna go through that? There’s no positive outcome in that. Why would you want that for your life? But I was always like I don’t want that. I was the only one out of my three older siblings that didn’t join a gang.

When I asked Sara why she did not join a gang; she responded with a smile and enthusiastically said, “Because I like school! I would be the only one waking up in the morning to go to school. They’d be the lazy ones. I guess I liked school so that’s why I didn’t fall into gangs.” She also discussed how her mother was stricter on her and monitored her after-school activities. Sara avoided hanging out in her neighborhood and would spend most of her time at home doing homework.

Cihuapilli grew up in East Side San José and described her neighborhood as a “disenfranchised community” where she was exposed to drugs and gangs at a young age. She shared:

We were really poor, but I had a happy childhood. I remember being exposed to a lot of stuff but there was no abuse, no physical abuse, or verbal abuse, just a very negative environment. I was exposed to a lot of drugs, gangs, and violence you know all the bad stuff it comes with. I’ve sold drugs before, I’ve sold drugs with my mother. That’s sad. Back then I didn’t know any better. It was just a lifestyle, that’s how we made money, we were poor. You know, looking back now? That’s sad. And I have a lot of resentment towards my mother for that. I’m barely trying to work that out. So it’s like, I’ve become a better parent because of what I’ve been through.

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51 The rivalry between *Norteños* and *Sureños* has its origin in the 1960s based on divisions between U.S. born and immigrant Latinas/os.
She expressed having a lot of resentment towards her mother, but she has been able to change that by becoming a better mother for her son. Her mother never worked, but kept their family together and raised all six children on her own with the support of government assistance. She also recalled their mother not setting too many limits nor academic expectations on her and her siblings.

Cihuappilli recalled enjoying school and getting good grades, but was drawn into the negative influences of “gang life.” She dropped out of high school in the ninth grade and a year later gave birth to her son. When I asked Cihuapilli how her neighborhood environment impacted her life, she explained, “Growing up in a negative community makes you tough and street smart.” I followed up by asking her how learning to be “street smart” and “tough” has helped her throughout her life. She explained:

> You can use certain things as protection, you know, you can see if you’re going to be in a situation where it’s not going to be good, you can pull yourself away from it. Relationships, you see women being abused, you try to stray away from that.

It was not until her twin brother was put in prison that she realized that she needed to change her life for herself and her son. She shared:

> Seen everything going on around me and I was like, I can’t do this. So I just stopped everything I was doing, and I just tried to make a life for my son and I started by working. I didn’t have an education, I didn’t have any real social skills, I took what I could and so I started just working retail. I worked retail ::sigh:: retail is too much.

Cihuapilli left retail and found a job as a receptionist for a law office through a temporary service agency. After having worked for 3 years as a receptionist at the law firm, she experienced another major breakthrough moment in her life. She realized that she did not want to be a receptionist for the rest of her life and wanted to set a different example for her son. While working full-time at the law office, Cihuapilli enrolled in adult education classes and after just a few months she received her general education diploma (GED). Soon after she enrolled at the
local community college, she obtained her associate’s degree in psychology. She shared how having grown up in a poor community and experiencing the devastating effects of poverty, substance abuse, and gang activity in her own life has helped her to become a stronger, resilient woman. As a single parent raising her son and going back to school, she became great at multi-tasking and adapted rapidly to the demands of school and family responsibilities. During our interview, Cihuapilli experienced a breakthrough moment when she reflected on the immense pressure of having to physically, emotionally, and financially support her family. She shared, “I’m the one that does everything. I take on the responsibility for everything, I’m nurturing. I hate being like that [laughs]. It’s a heavy burden, a really heavy burden because my world is all crazy right now.” Prior to our interview, she had co-signed for her nephew’s bail because she is the only one in her family with good credit. She also had her 23-year-old niece living with her in the meantime while she found an affordable rehabilitation program for her addiction. Although Cihuapilli has moved out of East Side San José, many of her family members are still living in the area and being negatively impacted by neighborhood violence, unemployment, and lack of access to affordable housing. She takes great pride in staying connected to her family by supporting them in different capacities.

**Latinos: Lack of Open Spaces**

All of the Latino participants talked about growing up with fewer restrictions and shared that they were able to spend more time outdoors exploring their communities. As a result, they developed a stronger connection to their communities because they were able to spend time outdoors playing sports or going over friends’ homes. Daniel was the exception. He grew up in a predominantly White Irish community. At the same time, Latinos were also more likely to be
subjected to police surveillance and gang violence in their communities. When I asked Latino participants if they could see themselves moving back to their home communities after graduating college, all of them said yes, except for Daniel. Latinos shared fond memories of growing up and playing outdoors with the neighborhood boys. They also remembered the lack of parks and open spaces in their neighborhoods. Johnny recalled playing sports with the boys in his neighborhood and the lack of parks in Pilsen (located in lower West side Chicago). He shared:

Sports was always a big thing growing up. A lot of my friends from the neighborhood we’d always play sports whether it was softball, basketball, or even like tag. . . . We played in a parking lot cuz the park that was closest to my house was probably two blocks away and I guess that was too far cuz we didn’t wanna be too far away cuz we’ll get in trouble so we would play in a parking lot. We somehow even created a basketball hoop using our imaginations.

Although there was a neighborhood park, his parents felt it was dangerous because a lot of gang members would hang out at the park. Johnny also discussed how playing sports with other boys from his neighborhood helped him become more outgoing and confident. His experience also points to the limited spaces such as parks for children in urban areas to play and to stay active.

Antonio also describes the lack of open spaces in La Misión, a neighborhood in San Francisco, California. He explained:

When I was growing up, there was Dolores Park but that was a good 15-20 minute walk. And the other place would be school but when it wasn’t a school day you couldn’t get in so for the most part there wasn’t any parks. Which recently they just put a new one like two blocks away from my house. . . . So now when I go back home it’s pretty cool to see a nice little park. It’s not that big, it’s like basically the size of one block. It’s something and you always see parents taking their kids there so that’s pretty cool. It’s something we didn’t have back then but now that we do, it does seem to bring the community even closer.

Antonio also recalled playing outdoors in his front yard because he had one of the biggest yards in his neighborhood. Although Latinos were able to spend more time outdoors, it was difficult to
find open spaces where they could play or come together with the other children from the neighborhood.

**Latinas Restricted**

In general, growing up Latinas mostly stayed inside the house and were responsible for many of the household chores. Many of them expressed not knowing their home communities until after graduating from high school because their parents encourage them to remain more within the protective space of the family and home. Many of the parents tried to prevent their daughters from spending time outdoors and from being left unsupervised. Many of them grew up having very little time to themselves because they had to help out their mothers by taking care of their younger siblings and/or with household responsibilities like cooking for their families. Ana who grew up in Aurora, Illinois, explains the restrictions imposed by her parents. She explained, “My parents wouldn’t let me go anywhere. My dad was very overprotective. So my mom too so we really only hung out with our family, our cousins, and I had friends in school but that’s about it.” Gender dynamics within their family also placed restrictions on their bodies. They were expected to come home as soon as school ended. If they wanted to go out they had to ask for permission and they had to let their parents know with whom and where they were going to be. Many of them also talked about wanting to get involved in after-school activities, but many times they preferred not to ask because they did not want to disrespect their parents by challenging their decisions.

Latinas felt that their parents were stricter on them than their brothers because their parents imposed more rules and restrictions on them. As they got older, Latinas realized that their parents were only trying to protect them from the dangers and negative influences of living
in impoverished neighborhoods. Sara describes her experience growing up in East Side San José, California.

Everything was Latino! People would kick it? I usually didn’t do all the stuff that other people were doing like, “Let’s go beat up someone.” That’s the level of violence I grew up with. And I didn’t do that stuff cuz I was usually home watching TV or doing my homework.

Most of their time was spent doing household chores and doing homework. When I asked Latinas if they could see themselves moving back to their home communities after graduating from college, all of them responded, no, but were committed to giving back to their communities. Many of them wanted to live in quieter communities or in a suburb where they could raise their children away from the violence and poverty they were exposed to. Cihuapilli grew up in East Side San José and talked about her decision to move out into the suburbs. She explained:

I didn’t want to move to Gilroy, I didn’t, because I love my city, I love being in San José, I love the culture, I love the people. . . . The money and my son were the two main factors in my choice moving out to Gilroy because he was getting exposed to a lot of negativity. I just wanted him to get away from it. Which has been a really good move. I can see the difference in him.

She shared how she wanted to expose her son to a life outside their neighborhood. Since they moved out into Gilroy, she has seen positive changes in her son, for instance he enrolled at the local community college and is excelling academically.

**Gentrification and the New Latino Suburbs**

Over the years, these communities have transform into vibrant cultural hubs for Latino history, art, food, music, and nightlife. These barrios including *La Misión* in San Francisco and Pilsen in Chicago have undergone intense gentrification. Antonio from *La Misión* and Johnny

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52 All nine of the participants grew up in Latina/o enclaves. For the first five years of his life, Daniel lived in Oakland, California, but grew up in a predominately white neighborhood.
from Pilsen shared similar stories about their neighborhoods being gentrified and seeing their friends and families being pushed out of their communities. Antonio described his experiences growing up in La Misión:

I grew up on, like I said the Mission District around the area of 24th and Mission. So mainly when I was growing up it was mainly Latino families in the community. I grew up around Latino culture, a lot like how it is in Mexico. Spanish was my first language and I didn’t really get a good grasp on English until I believe it was third grade.

Johnny also describes seeing his neighborhood being gentrified and how it changed the dynamics of his community. He explained:

A lot of people in my neighborhood moved out to the suburbs of Chicago because growing up in the mid 90s, late 90s, it was bad. Crime was really, really, high. Drugs, gangs, and such and such. So little by little, people started moving to the suburbs. But I guess now the demographics are changing like you don’t see households with families. Now it’s more like single people, yeah just single people. . . . You don’t see a lot of people outside. . . . It’s a lot of working professionals that are moving in who are single. . . . So it’s changing. Not knowing your neighbors. No interaction. It changes. It doesn’t make you feel part of a community. So it’s changing you don’t feel that bond with your neighbors or with like people from church. It’s not there anymore. It’s always changing uh!

The Pilsen community has undergone gentrification because of market forces and public policies, as a consequence displacing many Latina/o immigrant families who have lived and worked in the area. Long time residents, like Johnny’s family, have experienced the impact of gentrification on their community, where neighbors become strangers and locally owned businesses like panaderías are being replaced with high fashion boutiques and tienditas into high-priced organic grocery stores. Despite all the changes, Johnny is determined to move back to his community and hopes to be a role model for the Latina/o youth by showing them that they, too, can pursue a college education.

As a result of gentrification, many Latino families will eventually no longer be able to live in these communities. For example, Cihuapilli grew up in East Side San José and wanted to
purchase a home in the San José area, but as a single-mother she was not able to afford a home in her community. Her only option was to purchase a home in Gilroy and commute to work and SJSU. She explained the reasons why she moved out from her community.

It’s cheaper [laughs]. I didn’t want to move to Gilroy, I didn’t, because I love my city, I love being in San José, I love the culture, I love the people. I know that there’s bad, and there’s also good. But when I was looking for my house. I have just one income so my loan wasn’t for that much and I couldn’t afford a house here for the amount of the loan I was offered. I could’ve found a house—a really run down, one that needed a lot of work so, my next best choice was Gilroy and I found a nice little house out there.

Gentrification has been felt more severely in historic neighborhoods of color—where the elderly, female headed households and children are affected the most (Hanlon, Rennie, & Vicino, 2010). With gentrification comes a huge loss of social diversity and noticeable changes in the neighborhood’s character. San José is a great example of how gentrification and immigration has affected communities of color in the area. At the turn of the 20th century, the San José area—Silicon Valley was once a farm area known for its fruit orchards, locally known as “The Valley of Heart’s Delights.” The 1960s was also a critical time for scientists and engineers in the Bay Area of Northern California creating a fertile ground for the computer industry. Thus, one of the most important events of 1965 for Silicon Valley had nothing to do with the computer industry, but rather, with the Immigration Act of 1965, allowing immigration based on both the possession of scarce skills and on family ties to citizens or permanent residents. The economic growth of Silicon Valley, in particular in the downtown area of San José, has created gentrification displacing many Latinos, African Americans, Filipinos, and poor whites out from the area.

Many Latino families are increasingly moving out of the city into the suburbs because they are unable to afford the rapid and substantial increasing rents. Daniel and Ana’s family moved out of the barrio into the suburbs. Ana was born in Los Angeles, California, she was a small child when her parents moved to downtown Chicago to be with family. A few years later,
her family moved again, this time heading to the suburbs in search of better housing and schools. Ana describes her experience growing up in Aurora, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago), “When we first moved in, there weren’t that many Latinos, or Mexicans there. But then as time progressed, it became very, mostly Latinos.” Aurora is now the second-largest city in Illinois and has succeeded Chicago as the cultural hub for the Latino community. Although growing up, Ana spent most of her time indoors at home or at school, she always felt connected to her community. She explained, “There [Aurora] I really didn’t feel like a minority. There was La Chiquita, Supermercados El Güero, we had panaderias La Chicanita and ice cream places La Michoacana.” In the last 20 years there has been an increase of Latinos like Ana’s family who are moving into the suburbs because they have been displaced by gentrification or in search of better jobs and housing opportunities (Hanlon, Rennie, & Vicino, 2010). A major problem in these developing suburbs has been not being able to provide or improve services for the growing population. For example, many of the schools are failing to provide Bilingual Education or enough teachers who can relate to Latina/o students.

Conclusion: Familias Fuertes

Family and community stories provided critical lessons about making sacrifices, strategies of resistance, fortitude to overcome obstacles, and determination to seek better opportunities. From an early age participants recalled that their parents held high aspirations for their school success. Although parents were not directly involved with their children’s school or academics, participants were sensitive to their sacrifices to provide them with better educational opportunities. Many of the parents emphasized the importance of providing their children with

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53 According to U.S. census data (2010) the trend of immigrants moving into the suburbs instead of starting in a major city has increased across the country.
una educación at home as the foundation for all learning by sharing stories, consejos, and dichos to help them overcome personal and academic challenges. The teaching and learning that many of the participants experienced at home also helped them avoid hanging out with malas amistades, joining gangs, and using drugs. Participants expressed a deep sense of appreciation and admiration for their parents and for knowing that they come from familias fuertes (strong families). Participants recalled watching their parents work long days and nights in hopes that one day achieving the “American dream” of attaining a college education. Despite growing up in disadvantaged circumstances, participants were grateful for their families’ sacrifices, for encouraging them to pursue their dreams, and for guiding them towards el buen camino (the good moral path).

Many of the participants grew up in working class immigrant neighborhoods where they were exposed to neighborhood violence and street gangs. Participants were able to thrive academically despite growing up in high-crime neighborhoods and learned important life lessons about survival and the ability to learn intuitively. Growing up in predominantly Latino communities, participants experienced a great sense of pride in their heritage, family history, cultural traditions, and community. Throughout the interviews participants talked about the importance of embracing and staying connected to their families, community, and culture by being fluent or familiar with Spanish, partaking in storytelling during family events, making trips to their parents and grandparents homeland, and engaging in a host of social activities and

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54 Family stories are incorporating the use of digital recordings, for example Antonio shared how at every family party, one of his family members will bring recorded footage of their hometown in Mexico. He explains, “By the end of the night we always end up watching tapes from old parties, weddings, or bautismos. And they always have a video either from the last time someone in the family went to Mexico so that way the ones that didn’t get to go (especially for family members who are undocumented) they can see how people are doing or how our town looks. So that’s one cool thing about how we end the night.”
family celebrations (e.g. quinceañeras, baptisms, religious holidays). Most importantly they shared a strong commitment to give back to their families and communities.
Chapter 5

School Stories: Latina/o Students (Re)claiming Their Education

The stories I have gathered speak to the educational inequalities Latina/o students have experienced in an educational system that has failed them on many levels. Each of their stories illustrates the complicated feelings and negotiations that students experience living in two worlds: the world of their family and home community and that of school. From a young age, participants took initiative and control of their education. These students shared stories about overcoming challenges in their schooling such as attending over-crowded, under-funded, and racially segregated schools. Students talked about the contradictory ways in which schools would simultaneously encourage and marginalize them. Some shared that their teachers did not care about them and that their expectations of them were low. At the same time, participants shared stories about how their teachers and guidance counselors helped them transfer into better schools outside of their district and got them on track with college planning. They were all the first ones in their family to attend college (although some had older siblings who were in college). Despite their parent’s unfamiliarity and lack of information to help their children navigate their way into college, they always emphasized to their children the importance of pursuing a college education. It was within the family context that these students developed and retain high educational aspirations, despite facing numerous obstacles.

Many of them recounted how having older siblings, high school teachers, and mentors in pre-college programs55 inspired and helped them to achieve their dreams of going to college. Several of them benefited tremendously from participating in pre-college programs, acquiring the tools and strategies necessary to better navigate the college application process. They also

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55 I use pre-college programs to describe programs that support the transition and success to 4-year colleges and universities.
relied on the Internet to gain access to information about the college application process. Although their families lacked knowledge about how to guide and assist them with college, parents were encouraging and supportive throughout the process.

These stories provide firsthand accounts of the remarkable resiliency, optimism, and initiative that first-generation Latina/o students possess. Participants talked extensively about the added pressures and stress they experienced as a result of having to figure out how to get into college. They discussed the realities of living in two worlds: the world of their family and home community and that of school, thus, making the Latina/o college experience different from that of mainstream college experiences. On one hand, Latina/o students’ family role in their education served as a strong source of support. On the other hand, families, at times, can trap students with excessive obligations, expectations, and contradictory messages. Many of the participants in this study grew up with limited financial resources at home and grew up in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty and crime. Facing severe economic hardships or living in mixed status households created a stressful home environment. As a result, students were forced to negotiate their expectations as both students and daughters/sons while still trying to survive the stressful conditions and demands of two environments.

K-12 Educational Experiences

Despite federal pressures to desegregate the nation’s school system, most low-income minority students continue to attend under-funded schools, are taught by less qualified teachers, have limited and unequal access to high-level classes and challenging curriculum, and face tougher disciplinary consequences (Gándara & Contrears, 2009; Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009; Valencia, 2011; Valverde & Associates; 2008). Nine of the participants
attended segregated elementary schools, where the majority of the students came from low-income and mixed-status Latino households. Participants described their schools as being overcrowded, under-resourced, classes were not challenging, and teachers had low expectations of them. They recalled using low-expectations from teachers, counselors, and/or extended family as motivation to academically succeed. The following students started out at predominantly Latina/o schools: Araceli, Cassandra, and Antonio, but later found ways to attend either private or highly selective public high schools outside their district of residence. All of the participants mentioned the importance of staying optimistic, taking initiative, having a strong work ethic, as qualities they felt allowed them to get into college. Participants also mentioned the importance of having access to individuals (i.e., teachers) who posses information about college and taking advantage of different learning opportunities throughout their education.

**Applying to Highly Selective Schools Outside Their Neighborhood**

The competition to get into college has never been tougher, especially for Latinas/os who attend low-performing high schools that are failing to prepare them for college level work and provide them with post-secondary information on college admission requirements (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Many of the participants in this study recounted how they or their parents managed to get into schools that would provide them with better learning opportunities and safer schools free of gang activity and drugs. Teachers were critical in helping students transfer to more academically competitive high schools by guiding them through the application process and by writing them letters of recommendation. Araceli, for example, always knew that she wanted to go to college, but felt that if she attended the public high school in her neighborhood, she was not going to receive the same level of academic preparation for college. By the end of
eighth grade year, Araceli decided that she was not going to attend the high school in her neighborhood. She explained:

I didn’t feel like I was learning much just because of the area I was in and I knew that if I stayed in the public school system I was gonna go to a high school where a lot of the people didn’t graduate.  

Araceli turned to her sixth grade teacher for advice and guidance about how to apply to a private high school. With her teacher’s assistance, Araceli got into one of Chicago’s most prestigious private high schools. Her mother was supportive of her decision to attend a private high school; however, many of her extended family members expressed their lack of support by criticizing her mother for spending money for a private school education.

Antonio also shared a similar experience where he felt that the schools in his neighborhood were not preparing him for college. He attended a predominantly Latina/o elementary and middle school in The Missions District in San Francisco. He remembered school being boring and not challenging. He explained:

I had teachers where they would show up, but they were more focused on discipline than actually teaching, like making sure kids weren’t acting fools. Honestly, the class was a joke. A couple of us who stayed calm and showed up to class and turned in our papers here and there, we got passing grades.

For high school, Antonio and his parents decided to apply to a high school outside his district, a school whose reputation he knew was better. Antonio recounted how his eighth-grade teacher’s influence and support helped him get accepted into one of the most prestigious preparatory high schools in San Francisco. He explained, “The high school was on the other side of the city and it’s mostly where white kids and Asian kids go, and it’s like one of the better public schools in all of California supposedly.” He described the application process being rigorous and highly

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56 In seven out of 10 Chicago public schools, minorities make up more than 90% of all students. Chicago’s public schools also have very high concentrations of low-income students (Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame).
competitive. He recalled completing the application, taking an entrance exam, and an interview as part of the admission process. Although the process of applying to the high school was demanding, Antonio recounted how he enjoyed the challenge of applying and attending one of the most competitive college preparatory public high schools in the San Francisco area. He explained:

   It was like a challenge to myself cuz honestly throughout elementary and middle school I didn’t have to study. I mean I did the homework, but it was pretty easy to me. I wanted push myself to see how far I could go by applying to the school. I would hear all the good things about the school like how 80% of their students go on to college and they were getting into all these really good colleges. Back then I didn’t know what I wanted to do but I always knew that I wanted to go to college since my parents kept pushing me and I would hear all these good things about college. So by going to this high school I thought that basically as long as I did what I was supposed to do I would get into college.

His first 2 years at the college preparatory high school were academically challenging and socially isolating. The learning environment at the high school was highly competitive and he did not feel academically prepared. He recalled receiving support from one of his middle school teachers, who had transferred to his current high school during his eighth-grade year. She saw that he was struggling and reached out to him. He explained,

   She just kept pushing me and telling me that I could do it and to not give up. Without her, I probably could have not done it. I think I would have still done it but, she just added an extra push that helped get through it.

By the end of his sophomore year in high school, he was able to adjust academically and was also able to make friends. He described how he had to work harder and knew that if he stayed focused on his schoolwork, it would increase his chances of attending more selective 4-year colleges and universities.

   Many of the participants lived in poor and working class neighborhoods with schools known for having higher rates of dropouts and gang activity. Participants discussed how they and their parents searched for better schools outside their neighborhoods. Although parents were not
always informed about the quality of schools, they would ask relatives, friends, and co-workers about their experiences with the schools. Often parents would hear that certain schools had a reputation for having gang problems and not graduating their students. Cassandra, for example, recounted how she attended elementary school a few blocks away from her home, but for middle school and high school her parents decided to enroll her at a performing arts high school. She explained, “Both of the ones I was supposed to go to were known as not too good. The high school I was suppose to attend has a lot of gangs and it was famous and popular for that.” Cassandra’s parents were aware of the fact that there were better schools outside their neighborhood with better reputations that would eventually prepare her for college.

**Pushing the Boundaries of High School Tracking**

Many of the participants recalled not being aware of the implications of being tracked into low-level classes or knowing how to talk with their high school counselor about moving up into higher-level courses. Valenzuela (1999) found that schools in Texas tracked many Latina/o students based on “cultural tracking” as way to divide students who posses dominant culture skills from those who lack them. As a result, since schools often devalue Latina/o students’ culture, home knowledge, language, histories, and experiences, they are more likely to be placed in lower-level tracks. Educational research has shown that Latina/o and African American students have far less access to Advance Placement (AP) and honors classes because courses do not exist at their school, are less likely to be referred by teachers, or may be reluctant to be the only minority student in the classroom (Solorzano & Armida, 2004). Out of all 10 participants, Ana was the only student that fought to be placed in honors and AP classes. Ana attended a
previously attended a predominantly Latino high school in Aurora, a suburb of Chicago; she recounted how she had to fight her way into honors classes. She explained:

My friends and I were planning on taking the same classes, but I was like, “I wanna go into honors” and at first my counselor was like “are you sure you wanna do this? It might be too hard.” And I was like, “no, I wanna do this.” I thought maybe I should listen to him. Maybe I shouldn’t be in honors. But I went into honors and I didn’t know anyone. All my friends were taking regular classes so I didn’t know anyone anymore, I was by myself. . . . In high school it was the same thing. I was the only person in my AP classes, I was very shy and I didn’t talk to anyone.

Ana also talked about the lack of support from her AP teachers and the anxiety and pressure she constantly felt to perform well. She was afraid to ask for help from her teachers because she did not want them to think that she was not capable of academically succeeding. Being the only Latina in AP classes added an additional layer of pressure because she felt like she had to represent Latinas/os in a positive light. To ensure the academic success of Latina/o and other minority students in more rigorous classes, schools need to provide additional support to avoid and reduce racial, gender, and minority isolation. Ana also recalled how once she got into AP classes, she noticed how her counselor treated her differently from her friends who were in lower-tracks. She explained:

In my high school we were respected cuz we were the honors kids so I didn’t get written up cuz I was like number three in my high school. The counselors loved me cuz like I never did anything bad. But I feel like for example the bilingual kids always got mistreated. I felt like they didn’t count. Like my cousin she was in bilingual and then in regular class and I feel like they didn’t do much to help her. And I’ve also talked to one of his brother’s friends and he actually got into U of I and we were talking about our experiences dealing with our high school counselors. He shared a story about how his counselor told him that he probably shouldn’t apply to U of I because he probably won’t get in and how he should be more realistic and apply to community colleges. We went to the same high school and we had the same counselors and everything so I’m like he’s an asshole!

The subtext of Ana’s story is that many of her Latina/o peers were not getting the same encouragement from teachers and counselors and access to basic educational resources. Ana was
one of the few Latinas in AP classes and accepted the challenge, but she was also highly critical about the ways the school placed her cousin and Latina/o friends and peers into lower academic tracks. She referred to them as “the bilingual kids” because many of them were an ESL or had been in bilingual classrooms throughout elementary school. Furthermore, “the bilingual kids” were perceived as slower, less intelligent, and more Mexican because they were excluded from mainstream classrooms. Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) refer to this phenomenon as a “school within a school” where they found that even when Latina/o and African American students attend multiracial high schools, they remain underrepresented in AP classes. The “school within a school” phenomenon demonstrates how school tracking places students at a disadvantage for college because they are not afforded the extra GPA points from AP classes, decreasing their chances of attending more selective colleges and universities. Furthermore, a more rigorous curriculum prepares students for a smoother transition to college-level course work.

One of the biggest challenges participants faced in high school was being the only or one of the few Latina/o students in AP courses within multiracial or predominantly white schools. Daniel described his experience attending a predominantly white high school in Dublin, California. He shared:

I kinda felt at times alienated, isolated. I was the only Chicano trying to pursue a higher education. My friends all got kicked out. They went to a continuation high school, or they moved away. I’m the only one. The only Mexican American that made it to a 4-year college and everybody else is working or having kids, or going in and out of jail.

When Daniel was 4 years old his parents decided to move from Oakland, California, to Dublin, California because they wanted their children to grow up in a safer neighborhood and attend better schools.

Participants described feeling unfairly treated, overlooked, and excluded by some of their teachers, staff, and principals. However, it was mostly Latino participants who were constantly
confronted with negative stereotypes about their abilities to succeed in school. For example, although Daniel was placed in a college track he described feeling negatively perceived by many of his teachers because many of his close friends were other Latinas/os who were labeled by the school as the “troubled” students. Daniel expressed feeling unfairly treated, misunderstood, and disconnected from school. Research shows that students who are more susceptible to stereotype threat are those who care the most about their education (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Steele & Aronson, 1995). As a result of being the only Latino to be college tracked in high school, Daniel and other participants talked about the importance of staying connected with their friends in regular tracks. Daniel described how his friends in regular tracks supported his educational goals and helped him cope with the pressures and discrimination he experienced in advanced courses. Maintaining friendships with Latino peers, and staying connected their community becomes critical to help students deal with the effects of negative stereotypes.

Participants who attended predominantly Latina/o high schools noted the overrepresentation of Latina/o students in low-level classes (i.e., special education, bilingual and/or ESL classes), vocational training (i.e. Reserve Officer Training Corps program) and the presence of military recruiters. Throughout high school Ana was an AP student and ranked number three in her graduating class. Ana described the overrepresentation of Latina/o students in lower-tracks and the lack of college culture57 at a predominantly Latina/o high school in a Chicago suburb. She explained:

I’ve always wondered, why is it that all the high schools and the majority of minorities why do they always suck? Why are they always the ones with reputations like gangsters and shootings and everyone getting pregnant or that kind of thing? Why is it always our high schools? Why is there always a giant ROTC program in our high schools? How

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57 According to Corwin and Tierney (2007) college culture in high school “cultivates aspirations and behaviors conductive to preparing for, applying to and enrolling in college” (p. 3). A college culture should also “be inclusive and accessible to all students.”
come the military is recruiting at lunch tables but there aren’t any college recruiters at our lunch table?

Ana’s comments speak to the historically and culturally deficit notions that depict Latina/o students as disinterested in school and incapable of achieving academic success (Valencia, 2011; Valencia & Black, 2002; Villenas, & Deyhle, 1999). Her high school failed to provide a school environment of high academic expectations; instead students were being pushed to join the military or to pursue vocational training programs. Ana was aware of the racial inequalities at her high school and realized that information about college was only made available to students in college-tracked classes. Johnny echoed similar sentiments; however, he was an ROTC student throughout his 4 years in high school and talked about the support he received from his ROTC teachers. He explained:

It was a great experience and I wanted to join the military at first, I thought “yeah military’s cool and their disciplined.” But my instructors who are retired Marines, they told me, “No don’t join the military.” They said, “go to college.” They told me, “if you wanna go to the military join after you get a bachelors degree.”

At first, Johnny was perplexed by his instructors’ advice because he had been encouraged to join the military as an option to pay for his college education. This example demonstrates the fact that there are many educators who are highly aware of the disproportionate military recruitment in minority schools and who genuinely care about their students by encouraging them to pursue postsecondary education.

Sara also attended segregated low-income public schools in a predominantly Latino neighborhood. She was always at the top of her class and shared how her teachers encouraged her to work hard and provided her with the support she needed to succeed. She explained, “I was always trying hard so that’s why they would motivate me and they [teachers] would say to me ‘keep trying, don’t give up.’” Sara talked about always having a strong commitment to her
education and recounted how she would get up at 5 a.m. without an alarm because she did not want to be late for school, although school started at 8 a.m. and she lived walking distance from school. She shared:

I had to walk to school and I felt like I couldn’t be late. I was always so exaggerated with my school stuff. I would always do my homework. I couldn’t miss one day of school because I felt that if I missed one day, I would feel like I missed a whole week. . . . That’s how I still feel till this day. I’ve always been like that. I don’t miss a day of school even if I am sick.

Sara continues to have the same level of commitment for her college education. She works hard to get good grades and always puts forth her best efforts in school. After her parents’ separation, Sara went off to live with her father in Mexico, once in the third-grade and a second time in sixth-grade. Her father enrolled her at la primaria (elementary school) in Sonora, Mexico. Thus, many Mexican immigrant families make return trips to their homeland or they send their children away for a year or two to get to know their families better, to expose them to their culture, and to improve their Spanish (Sánchez, 2009). However, when students return back to the U.S., schools do not always see the value in students return trips back to their parents’ homeland.

When Sara returned to the U.S., she was placed in English Language Development (ELD) level classes, based on her records that she had attended school in Mexico, without having been assessed on her English language proficiency. She explained,

My teachers actually changed my classes. I didn’t know that I could change them. I had teachers from ELD classes who were like, “you don’t belong here” and they moved me up. If it weren’t for them, I wouldn’t have known and I would’ve stayed in those classes.

Although she found her ELD classes boring, she was not aware that she could petition to move out. It was not until one of her ELD teacher’s noticed that she was fluent in English and helped her transfer out of the program. Educational research has shown that Latina/o students who speak

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58 The state of California implemented the ELD program to assist limited and non-English students learn grade-level content in the core curriculum (http://pubs.cde.ca.gov/tcsii/ch2/eld.aspx).
Spanish are disproportionately placed into basic ESL classes; once they get classified as English Language Learners (ELLs) it takes schools a long period to reclassify them as fluent English speakers (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003).

Many of these students want to attend college, but are often surprised to find out that lower-level track courses do not count towards college admission requirements. For example, throughout high school Sara maintained a high GPA, however her junior year, she realized that she had not been taking the correct classes to get into college. She explained, “There were classes I could have changed but I didn’t know I could. So I took basic science and math. That’s why I graduated with all basic classes.” Sara had taken enough classes to apply to the California State University (CSU) campuses; however, she was not able to apply to the University of California (UC) system. Sara and the other participants described always having to fight their way out of remedial classes or low-performing and high poverty schools.

**Applying to College: I Have to Fill Out Another Form!**

When I asked students about what they knew about college, many of them recalled not fully understanding what college was or how to get there, but they knew it was a place that their parents aspired for them to reach and it was a place that would help them and their families pave the way out from poverty. Latina/o students in this study faced numerous challenges trying to figure out how to get into college (i.e., enrolling in advances courses needed for college, choosing a college, filling out college applications, financial aid, and housing) with little help from their families and high school counselors. The college application process was stressful and extremely complicated for many of the participants, but they were determined to figure it out. When I asked participants to identify individuals who helped them with the college application
process, all of the participants mentioned one or both parents and/or an older sibling. For instance, although parents were not able to directly help them with their college applications, they held high expectation for their daughters and sons educational goals, stressed values such as hard work, and shared consejos and dichos about the ability to persist in difficult situations. Thus, educational research has shown that Latina/o students, who continue their education beyond high school, found that parental support was one of the most significant factors for the attainment of an associate’s and bachelor’s or higher degree (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Hernandez, 2000, Hernandez, 2002; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Zalaquett, 2006). Overall, it is communication between parents and participants in regards to their education that enhances Latina/o students’ enrollment in college.

Many of the participants rarely came into contact with anyone who had gone or had aspirations to go to college, so it was difficult to get a feel for what it took to get admitted. However, participants saw the value of developing positive relationships with teachers and administrators that would not only encourage them, but that were able to assist them to access and navigate the college application process. Existing research shows that teachers and counselors play an important role in Latina/o students college decisions by helping them access critical information, thus, they are also the gatekeepers who can restrict students from accessing different educational opportunities, including pre-college programs (Ceja, 2001; Contreras, 2005; Kimura-Walsh et. al., 2009). All ten students spoke of a teacher or counselor who helped them access information about the college application process, but there were also instances when they were not helpful. For instance, Cassandra recalled having a few teachers who helped find information about scholarships. She explained:

I wasn’t really close to many [teachers] cuz I was really shy in school so unless they actually took the time to talk to me, I would just blend in with everyone. But some of my
teachers, well two of them nominated me for a scholarship and they told me they saw potential in me, which was encouraging.

Cassandra and the other participants realized that while it was difficult to apply to college, they recognized the importance of having access to individuals who are knowledgeable about the college admission process.

A crucial factor in participants’ path towards the pursuit of post-secondary education was the advice they received from high school counselors. Many of the participants described high school counselors as not always being helpful and felt a lack of individual attention from them. Sara described the lack of attention and support that she felt from her high school counselor:

I would meet him whenever I needed something. It’s like “I need a transcript for this, I need a transcript for that.” He really didn’t provide any advice. That’s what they were there for, but if you don’t know that’s what their there for then they’re no use to you. I didn’t know.

Sara did not understand her counselor’s role, nor did her counselor or school provide her with the necessary information about how to navigate and access different resources. Other participants discussed feeling encouraged and supported by their counselors. For example, Cihuapilli was considered a non-traditional student because she returned to school as an adult and started out at the community college before transferring to SJSU. She shared a positive review of her community college counselor:

My first counselor he was a Chicano, Dr. Frank Espinoza. He was one of those real motivational people you know? I kind of attached myself to him not like in a physical way or anything like that but more mentally. He’s gonna guide me so I need to stick to him and follow what he was doing. I looked up to him, almost like a father figure because I lacked that in my life. Yeah, I kind of looked to him as a father figure because he was educated, and I thought to myself, “ok if my dad was here” I thought, this is what he’d probably be like, you know? He was real motivational!

Cihuapilli would meet with her academic counselor to discuss the necessary steps and requirements to transfer to a 4-year college. Latina participants also cited friends as an important
source of emotional support and information regarding college. They would exchange college information with their friends or they would remind each other about different deadlines.

Eight of the 10 participants indicated that their high schools provided limited access to the most basic college information. Johnny, for example, described the lack of college culture at his high school. He explained:

There was always the military, or there was always vocational school or different programs, but I was like “nah I don’t wanna do that!” I wanted to do something better than that. It made me very upset that counselors would encourage students to start at the community college or to join the military. And that pissed me off and it made me very upset cuz I think the standards were set lower for a lot students. So instead of it making me feel sad, it motivated me, it pushed me! I have this thing where I love to succeed and defeat. So it upset me and I was like “nope I don’t wanna be a mechanic. No I don’t wanna join the military. No I don’t want to get my associate’s degree. I am going to get my bachelors!”

Participants described the process of applying to college as confusing and difficult to navigate all the different application forms. Not knowing the correct pathway to take brought much confusion to participants such as Sara, she explained. “I didn’t know where to go so it was confusing more than anything. No one was telling me, ‘go here or go there.’” Among the students interviewed, filling out applications for financial aid was one of the most confusing and challenging forms to complete. Cassandra, explained her experience filling out her college application and financial aid forms:

I had no idea what I was doing. I had no idea what came next or what form to fill out or anything. If I didn’t have the help of those counselors then I don’t know how I would have done it on my own cuz there were a lot of forms and they were confusing, and I had to put family information and I only had one chance to make it because we could only afford one of the applications which was 50 dollars which isn’t a lot, but back then it was a lot of money for my family.

Here, Cassandra described how she had to include her parent’s information on the financial aid application. Ana also described having similar experiences with filling out the FAFSA application. Although she is confident in her translating abilities, she did not always know how
to translate certain concepts and terms. She described how she was able to overcome this obstacle:

It was hard cuz my mom didn’t understand what I was going through until I took her, I had to remind her two weeks in a row, “ok you’re going to the FAFSA workshop right?” Mr. Alvarez was putting it on. And it was in Spanish so I was like, yes! I don’t have to translate cuz I don’t know how to translate most of the terms... And so she finally went and when she came out she’s like “so that’s why it’s so hard for you because I didn’t know the system was so different here in the U.S. I thought it was like in Mexico.” And I’m like no it’s nothing like in Mexico. Basically, I would describe it as hell cuz I hated every minute of it.

Even when students attended schools with more resources, many of the counselors failed to understand the needs of first-generation students. For instance, Araceli attended a predominantly white private high school in Chicago and was confident that she would receive the support and guidance from her counselor to apply for college. However, when she asked her high school counselor for help filling out the FAFSA application, her counselor’s response was “oh we don’t do that here.” All of the participants described similar experiences when filling out financial aid applications. This brings into questions how many students with similar experiences do not apply for financial aid because they are not aware and/or because filling out the forms is too complicated.

Teachers were also instrumental in referring students to pre-college intervention programs. Johnny participated in the Chicago Bulls Scholars59 in middle school and Daniel participated in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)60 program in high school. Students who participated in a pre-college program felt the most supported and prepared to apply for college. Students who received general information about college (i.e. college

59 Chicago Bulls Scholars program provides the opportunity for seventh and eighth graders to earn high school credit in either algebra or English during after-school hours in the Chicago public Schools system. The program is funded by the Chicago Bulls organization. Go Bulls!

60 AVID is a college readiness system that prepares students for college. AVID provides students with academic support, training in college level reading and writing, organizational and time management strategies and study skills. In addition to helping students map their educational goals, explore careers, and provide them with information and guidance about the college application process.
representatives, presentation by counselors, and/or having a career center) stated that it was not enough information to fully understand the college requirements and application process.

Participants who participated in pre-college programs were able to better understand the application process and helped them adjust to college. Frances Contreras’ (2011) review of more than 40 intervention programs found that programs promoted student success in the following ways: an infrastructure within the school, access to adult human resources, community networks and peer networks. The positive influence of participating in different enrichment programs manifested in participants academic aspirations. Johnny explained how participating in the Chicago Bulls Scholars program helped get ahead by increasing his GPA and interacting with other motivated students. He explained:

So I loved that I was a freshman taking courses with juniors and seniors. So it felt great being ahead, I was like “ah cool” you know “this is awesome.” I was just a freshman and I was taking courses with juniors and seniors so it was a challenge but it was a great experience to interact with older peers. I loved the idea of getting ahead and then the idea of college came into mind. They were all talking about going to college, so being exposed to that was like, “I wanna be there I wanna be in their shoes” so interacting with older students it made me start thinking about college and even just seeing stuff in school. To me it was never enough I never wanted to settle for less.

In middle school, Johnny was able to enroll in additional English and algebra classes, after-school through the Chicago Bulls Scholars program. By the time he reached high school, he had earned high schools credits and was also able to take advanced classes. Being able to get ahead provided Johnny with a sense of confidence, that allowed him to do better in his classes and to apply to 4-year colleges.

Throughout high school, Daniel considered himself an average student and explained how participating in AVID gave him confidence to apply to college. He explained:

They selected students that needed just a little push and needed a little bit more motivation to go to college and I got selected. They taught me how to take notes, how to be organized, we had guest speakers from different colleges come in, and that really
enlightened me. Enlightened me on the different majors and different programs. We looked up scholarships. My teacher shared her insight on her college experience. It provided workshops. We applied to college in that class and just a lot of really good information.

Daniel also talked about how AVID had prepared him academically for college level work.

Overall participants who were enrolled in academically competitive high schools or who participated in a pre-college intervention program felt more academically and emotionally prepared for college. Participants were also able to experience smoother transitions from high school to college.

**Older Siblings**

Consistent with previous educational research, older siblings with college experience are an important source of support for many first-generation Latina/o students (Ceja, 2006; Gándara, 1995; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). Participants consistently recognized that having older siblings with college experience had an important influence on their decision to pursue higher education and helped them garner information about the application process. Andrea, Johnny, and Rigo all had older siblings in college. Older siblings were instrumental in encouraging and fostering participants educational goals. They were also able to provide them with specific information about college and guide them through the application process that their parents were not able to help with. Older siblings would remind them about different deadlines (i.e., SATs and other exams, college applications, financial aid, and other programs geared towards first-generation students). They also provided feedback on their personal statement for college admission. Older siblings also acted as role models and mentors to their younger siblings.
Rigo described how he could rely on his older siblings for academic advice and was able to have a better understanding of the different college admission requirements. He explained the different support he received from his two older brothers in college.

My second oldest brother he’s always been right there helping me out. He’s always putting emphasis on education and my parents as well. My older brother, he’s more like “get your stuff together, do your work, or study for this,” but my second oldest brother, he’s like, “did you fill out the application for U of I? Are you studying for your ACT? Are you getting recommendation letters?” And it would be like that throughout the whole senior year.

Once he got accepted, his older siblings continued to give him advice on selecting classes and organizing his schedule. Similarly to Rigo, Andrea explained how having an older brother at UIUC helped her access information about the college admission process. She explained:

I think, mainly, the support that I got was from my brother, he would give me a lot of advice because he was already in college, and so I feel like he had to go through it more on his own than I did because I was able to look up to him and I was able to call him if I had any questions or anything like that.

Having an older sibling in college had a positive influence on participants’ college decisions and helped them envision their own college success. They also emphasized the importance of attending class, making time to study, and taking advantage of professors’ office hours. Older siblings were more able than parents to provide them with specific information about college, helped them with their class assignment, and served as positive role models. Most importantly, older siblings advised them about the importance of finding a balance between school, work, and their social life, including getting involved on campus.

Navigating Online College Information and Resources

As for the participants who did not participate in a pre-college intervention program or who did not have an older sibling with college experience, they relied heavily on online
resources to help them navigate the college application process (i.e., state and deferral education websites, university websites, social networking sites such as Facebook, blogs, message boards, and forums). In the past, first-generation students’ access to information about colleges depended greatly on the availability of college pamphlets at their career center or high school counselors. Online college resources have become a powerful tool for many first-generation students, one that has greatly changed the ways they navigate and access information about the college application process. Many of the participants were introduced to the Internet at a relatively early age and grew up at the same time when electronic mail and listening and downloading music online became popular. Furthermore, in order for high school students to successfully pursue postsecondary education they need to be connected online in order to complete in any number of college application task including, but limited to the following: signing up for Advanced Placement exams, college applications, federal and state financial aid application.

Several of participants provided specific examples of how they used the Internet to access information about colleges and universities and as a source of community support. For instance, Araceli shared how she relied heavily on online college resources. She explained:

I had to look up everything online . . . like the Internet became my best friend! I would look up everything online like advice and tips and places where I could apply for financial aid and grants and scholarships. So yeah I literally had to look up everything online.

Although Araceli attended a private high school, there were no resources for poor and working class students. She recalled how many of her peers at her high school had parents who were college educated and were the ones advising and guiding them through the college application process. Despite these limitations, Araceli was able to successfully complete the different applications to get into college. Johnny also shared how he relied on the Internet to access information about college, he explained, “I went online, started searching and looking up
programs and so that’s what I did my summer before my senior year.” Although many of the participants were able to find information online, they struggled to navigate the websites or sometimes information was incomplete.

Other students, like Andrea, described using the Internet to find a sense of community and to connect with other undocumented students. She explained:

Well I read a lot of websites and some blogs about first generation Latinos, but then I found other ones of undocumented students who were the first to go to college. . . . So I started reading a lot of that and I started outreaching to that and just finding chat rooms and forums, that really helped too and just trying to vent because there were other people that were going through it too and so I didn’t feel so alone.

It was important for Andrea to connect with other undocumented students and find a place where she was able to share her story. She also created a network for sharing resources with other undocumented students. She explained:

That’s when I started finding stuff on the Dream Act. And realized I was undocumented. And that’s when I started sharing my story online too because there was really nobody that I could talk to. My parents, I think they weren’t willing to talk to me about it or go much into depth about our case, maybe out of shame, I don’t know. Maybe out of embarrassment I don’t know.

The Internet has being an effective tool for many first-generation and undocumented students across the country to access information about the college application process. Research shows that over the past decade, there have been significant increases in Latinas/os accessing the Internet; however, they are less likely to have access to reasonably high-speed Internet and newer and personal computers at home (Mellander, 2002; Cooper, 2011). However, given the lack of access to fast Internet at home and unreliable or inaccurate information on online can discourage many students from attending certain institutions. To ensure that first-generation Latina/o students are receiving the most accurate college information, schools should expose them to a variety of resources.
Mental Health: The Contradictions and Ambivalence of Living in Two Worlds

I can still remember the way her body sunk into the chair, the way her voice cracked, and her glossy eyes as tears ran down her face. This was my first interview with a Latina student. It became evident to me the ways participants reflected through memory and relived through their bodies significant and painful moments in their upbringing. They shared their experiences and feelings of living in two different worlds of their family and home community and school. The constant demands of having to negotiate and balance their time and relationships with both worlds proved to be draining and exhausting for participants. Throughout the interviews participants shared very painful experiences, but it was not until I read through all of the transcripts that words such as depression, thoughts of suicide, anxiety, anger, sadness, loneliness, hopelessness, and hurt came up over and over again. What I found most alarming was that these were feelings that participants experienced as children and intensified, as they got older. By no means do I want to diagnose participant’s mental well being, but I want to bring special attention to Latinas/os mental health, in particular the alarming rise of suicide among Latina adolescents.

Latina/o students in this study faced a multitude of challenges at home and in school that affected their psychological well-being. Participants recalled helping their parents adapt and understand “American” culture, including the educational system. They also recalled taking on critical household responsibilities from an early age. In fact many children of immigrant parents tend to become hyper-responsible children, and thus, can cause children to become depressed (C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, 2001). For example, Araceli, as the daughter of immigrant parents, had to rush home everyday after school so she could take care of her younger brother because her mother worked from 4 p.m. to 4 a.m. She remembered sometimes missing school because she had to stay home to take care of her brother and younger cousins. Her parents
got a divorce when she was 13, but when her parents were together, she remembered her father’s verbal and emotional abuse. She shared, “When I would get home from grade school, I would try to avoid him [father] because he would yell at me for any little thing.”

Research shows that Latina/o youth are at a higher risk of suffering from depression, anxiety, suicidal behavior, hopelessness, and drug and alcohol abuse due to the constant demands of living in poverty, facing racial/ethnic discrimination in school, and having to negotiate the cultural norms of their family with those of dominant culture (Chesin, & Jeglic, 2012; Gloria, Castellanos, Kanagui-Muñoz, & Rico, 2012; Zayas, 2011). First-generation Latina/o youth are more likely to experience more stressful and traumatic events in their lives including, migrating to the U.S., the fear of being separated from their families and friends because of their legal status, and perceived discrimination (C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Latina/o students who are undocumented or who have family members who are undocumented experience greater levels of anxiety and face added financial barriers at home. Research has shown that Latina/o youth living in mixed-status families experience higher levels of anxiety and depression because they live in constant fear of being deported back to their home country and the possibility of being separated from their families (C. Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, M. Suárez-Orozco, 2011).

**Rising Numbers of Latinas Attempting Suicide**

Over the past two decades, research has also found that Latinas have higher rates of suicide attempts than females of other racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). They are at a higher risk for depression and anxiety as a result of their families imposing stricter gender roles and expectations on them (Zayas, 2011). Young
Latinas had to cope with dual stereotypes about their gender and culture as caretakers, underachievers, and unlikely to attend college in favor of starting a family. Although these stereotypes may have not always being intentional, they had damaging effects on their self-esteem or caused them to doubt their academic abilities. Latinas in this study received conflicting messages from home, school, and society, but they were also determined to prove them wrong.

At home, Latinas grew up with strict and overprotective parents who imposed traditional gender role expectations on them. At the same time, parents and extended family members emphasized the importance of obtaining a college education in order to seek economic independence and to valerse por si mismas (to be self-reliant; Villenas & Moreno, 2010). Although home can be a safe and supportive place for Latinas, it can also be a place filled with contradictions.

Latinas in this study were expected to take on many of the household responsibilities, including raising their younger siblings. They were also expected to get good grades in school and to get into college. However, parents did not always have the time, resources, or knowledge about how to prepare and guide their children for college. This left many participants with the enormous pressure of having to figure their way into college. For example, Araceli was raised by a single mother that was not able to guide her because she had a sixth grade education and had to work 12-hours shifts to support their family. Araceli explained, “I learned from my mom that if I wanted to do something I was gonna have to figure it out on my own.” While Araceli was able to figure out her way into college, she and the other participants expressed feeling over-burdened and frustrated about how to get into college.

All of the participants experienced greater levels of anxiety and stress associated with their parents economic and/or immigration status, as well as pressure from their families to contribute to the family. Many of the Latino participants recalled coping with depression
throughout different stages in their lives. Two of the Latina participants shared struggling with suicidal thoughts or had attempted suicide as young as eleven years old. Latinas experienced greater pressures from their families to fulfill specific family obligations and they were also expected to succeed in school. Although families supported their daughter’s pursuit of a college education, they were expected to fulfill multiple roles causing higher levels of psychological distress. Andrea exemplified the psychological distress she experienced when she understood what it meant to be undocumented. She shared:

I was just really, really confused because I felt like everything that I had known before was sort of a lie. All this time I thought that I was like everybody else. That everybody had to go through the same process that I was going through. . . . My parents would always tell me, “you just have to wait” . . . I would come home from school and I would just lock myself in my room. . . . I wouldn’t really talk to anybody. So it was definitely really lonely. There were times when I contemplated even harming myself, but it never got to that point where I was seriously thinking about committing suicide or anything like that. But it was really lonely. I would say it was one of the worst years of my life.

There were three critical moments in Andrea’s life causing high levels of psychological distress, including when she was a child and immigrated to the U.S. with her mother and brother. The second was her junior year in high school when she found out that she was not eligible for employment, a driver’s license, and financial aid. Before finding out that she was undocumented, her parents had kept the truth away from her by telling her that she needed to wait. Her family has waited over 10 years for her father’s case to be evaluated by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Lastly, when she was accepted to some of the top Ethnic Studies graduate programs in the country, but did not accept because they were not able to offer financial assistance because of her legal status. Thousands of children like Andrea are brought to this country as children by their parents with very little understanding of the consequences of their legal status; thus, many do not become aware of their legal status until their

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61 USCIS is the government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States.
sophomore/junior year in high school when they find out that they are not eligible to apply for a driver’s license or they are not able to be legally employed.

Araceli shared how she had attempted suicide in sixth grade. She recounted how years later, her mother shared her father’s response to her suicide attempt. She explained:

She’s [mother] always told me as much as she thinks that I can handle. So she didn’t tell me until this year when we were driving over here because back then I probably couldn’t have been able to handle it. She told me that when I attempted suicide in sixth grade my father said, “well it would have been one less mouth to feed.” I wouldn’t have been able to handle it in high school, but she knew that I could handle it now because I’ve been through a lot in my life and I have also succeeded in my life.

When she shared her experience with attempting suicide, it was fairly brief and kept talking about it without shocking up or shedding a tear. Meanwhile, I felt like I had gotten punched in the stomach. I was speechless, but I also did not feel comfortable probing Araceli about such a painful experience. This led me to wanting to know more about suicide attempts among Latinas/os and came across several studies, newspaper articles, blogs, and non-profit organizations addressing the rise of suicide rates among Latina adolescents. However, schools have yet to address this issue. Schools need to make sure that the issue of Latina suicide is addressed and resources need to be made available for students. Although Latina/o students are more likely to attend under-resourced schools, the minimum they can do is to establish relationships with crisis providers and other community organizations, as an effective strategy to reach out to students and their families.

According to the 2012 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) one out of every seven Latina teens attempts suicide. Considering that Latinas/os are the largest minority group in the nation’s public schools, there have been few Latina-focused suicide prevention research and knowledge. Another limitation in the research is that most of these studies tend to rely on questionnaires and/or surveys, which might not be the most effective method to get
participants to open up about a very personal and painful issue.\textsuperscript{62} For the last 30 years, Luis H. Zayas (2011) has been studying mental health issues in the Latino community; in his book *Latinas Attempting Suicide*, he examines the psychological, social, and cultural phenomena of suicide attempts by Latinas. Findings from his study show that Latinas experience greater pressure to remain loyal and tied to the family. Latinas are also more prone to attempting suicide than African American, Asian American, and Native American girls, as a result, of generational and acculturation differences between the girls and their parents. However, it is the lack of communication between family members and what often results in misunderstandings, insensitiveness, mistrusts, defiance, tensions, and conflicts as some of the leading causes of Latina suicide attempts (Zayas, 2011). Furthermore, neighborhood conditions can also cause parents to be overprotective of their daughters; as a result, Latinas are confined to their home and are not able to have as much social or physical freedom. Findings also showed that Latinas who lack caring and dependable mentors in their lives are more prone to attempting suicide. In addition, De Luca, Wyman, and Warren’s (2012) study on Latina adolescent suicide suggests that Latinas level of perceived caring from their teachers, connectedness with teachers, and greater school engagement are associated with reduced risk of suicide attempts.

**Growing Up in Mixed-Status Households**

Participants recounted stories about seeing their parents struggle through economic uncertainty and the increasingly anti-Latino and anti-immigrant laws like Arizona’s SB 1070 or Alabama’s HB 56. Participants with undocumented parents were constantly worried about the possibility of their parents losing their jobs and being deported. They were emotionally devastated and anxious about the potential separation of their families. The constant political

\textsuperscript{62} These studies also tend to focus on Latinas/os use of counseling centers.
backlash on immigration or as Leo R. Chavez (2008) has coined the *Latino threat narrative*, is a narrative of Latinos whom:

are seldom represented as agents of positive change, because their unwillingness to integrate denies them the opportunity to influence the larger society in any particular way, except in the negative-as a threat to existing institutions (e.g., education, social services, medical). (p. 41)

Even if participants parents or they themselves had established U.S. residency or citizenship, they were not always protected from the discrimination or marginalization experienced by many immigrants of color in this country. A recent national survey by the Pew Hispanic Center, found that 6 in 10 Latinas/os rated discrimination as major problem in their lives that prevented them from achieving success (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). In the survey participants were asked to rate the cause of discrimination based on following factors: immigration status, language skills, skin color, income and educational levels. Results showed that 36% ranked immigration status as the single most recurrent cause of discrimination among the four factors tested in the survey.

Participants’ parents perceived education as a protector from discrimination.

Participants in this study found themselves at the crossroads between their home culture and school culture, between childhood and adulthood, and between their parents’ aspirations and their own aspirations. Family played a significant role in their educational success, but they were also expected to take on many of the household, translating, and social responsibilities for their families. Participants had to also deal with additional pressures of surviving in challenging home and school environments. Many of the participants felt that their parents tried their best to be supportive, but for the most they were expected to figure things out on their own. As participants advanced in school they experience substantial higher levels of psychological distress at home and school.
Conclusion: Protecting Your Dreams

At so many levels participants in this study were not meant to make it, but it was seeing their parents work long hours or seeing their sibling and friends fall into gangs that kept them focused on one goal. That goal was to succeed in school and to obtain a place in higher education. They had an internal desire to push themselves beyond what most teachers and society expects from Latinos, they were also motivated by the idea of making their families proud and of one day giving back to their communities. Despite having to experience discrimination and being discouraged by many of their teachers, participants utilized these barriers as motivation to prove them wrong. They also understood that they had to work twice as hard than most of their peers to get into college. Among the most expressed challenge to achieve academic success is finding balance between their commitment to their families and communities and their desire and commitment to excel academically.

Participants in this study had to develop an open mind and heart in order to embrace the contradictions and ambiguity of living between two worlds. Many of them described feeling caught in between two worlds: home family and their school. As they advanced in their education, many of the participants realized that if they wanted to academically succeed they had to find a balance between both worlds. Participants reflected on the tensions and contradictions experienced at home, hence, challenging family ideologies and/or values, such as gender inequalities within the home. Many of them also recalled drawing from their home knowledge and family support in order to protect their educational dreams even when they felt defeated.

Navigating the path to college was academically challenging and emotionally painful for many of the participants. Their educational experiences were filled with obstacles, limited opportunities, and negative messages about their academic abilities to attend college. They also
recalled having supportive teachers and administrators that helped them along the way. Many of the participants shared how their families were their greatest supporters in helping them reach their life long dream of pursuing a college education. Although parents were not always able to directly guide them, they were always there to lift their spirits, to remind them of the value of their education and to the endless possibilities that a college education will create in their lives. At the same time, family’s role in their education was complicated and contradictory. *La familia* and home matters are often perceived as being private and sacred. At times, participants were uncomfortable discussing those contradictory family moments in their lives, but there was a also a sense of relief when participants shared those intimate and painful contradictions. They shared how oftentimes it was painful and challenging to navigate and manage the complexities of belonging to an educated U.S. Latino population, while maintaining close relationships with their families and home communities. Despite the growing tensions between parents and participants, there was a mutual sense of respect and admiration for each other’s accomplishments. As educators, it is critical that we create safe spaces and different opportunities for Latina/o students to address and undo the tensions and contradictions that exist between students home, community, and school.
Chapter 6

Latina/o Students Carving out *Un Sitio* (a Space) and Claiming *Una Lengua* (a Language and/or Discourse) in Mexican American and Latina/o Studies Courses

My Story: Connecting to My Research

Like my participants, I am also a product of a subtractive schooling process that devalued our pedagogies of the home, community cultural wealth, bilingualism, and bicultural identities (Darder, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2001, Valenzuela, 1999, Yosso, 2005). As a necessity to reclaim our presence within institutions of higher education, to foreground our voices, and experiential knowledge, Emma Pérez (1998) points to the need for marginalized groups to have separate spaces to “inaugurate their own discourses, *nuestra lengua en nuestro sitio*” (p. 92). In this section, I reflect on how enrolling in Ethnic Studies courses provided *un sitio* (a space) where I engaged in my own process of becoming critically conscious as a result of learning about my racialized, gendered, classed, and immigrant identities. I also acquired *una lengua* (a language and/or discourse) to talk back to the deficit discourses about my family and community.

Throughout my K-12 experience, I felt like there were pieces missing from my education. As someone who grew up within the Bay Area public school system, I had limited opportunities to learn about my history and culture. I longed to recognize my experiences in the texts we read in school. I developed a strong racial and ethnic identity by seeking separate spaces outside of school. For example, I joined a Mexican folkloric dance group where we performed traditional dances from various Mexican states. Being part of the dance group, I learned about the complexity and richness of Mexican history and cultural traditions. I experienced a new great sense of belonging, connectedness, and memory across generations.

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63 Our language in our space.
It was not until I enrolled in both Asian American Studies (AAS) and Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses as an undergraduate student at San José State University where I felt connected to an academic space. Both AAS and MAS courses became critical sitios where I unlearned and learned about the experiences and stories of Latina/os and other marginalized groups in the U.S. In these courses we excavated the buried and forgotten stories about the struggles, survival, and perseverance of marginalized communities. It was in these courses where my professors created a safe sitio where we shared our educational experiences, where our family knowledge was valued, and where we worked through the contradictions of navigating two worlds. I became exposed to the history of immigration in the U.S. While learning this history, I understood why my mother could not find work in Mexico and why her only choice of giving her children a better life was to immigrate to this country. I always saw my mother as a strong woman, but after reading the work of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars, I saw my mother through different lenses. Although my mother does not use the term Chicana or feminist to describe herself, throughout her life she has had to challenge traditional gender roles within the home and work place. Enrolling in these courses, I became less afraid to speak up, and little by little, with the support of professors, friends, and peers that I met in these courses, I became more critically conscious and civically engaged. Both AAS and MAS courses helped me to see both the disjunctures and connections between myself, my family, and my community. By learning about terms like Chicana feminism, and critically evaluating whether or not one has to embrace them consciously to practice aspects of them, I thought more about what naming means, how infused some of these practices were, and also how challenging they were to key experiences of myself, my mother, family and community.
As a Latina researcher conducting research with first-generation Latina/o students, I chose to share my story with participants as a means to establish *confianza* (mutual trust) and to create a safe *sitio* where participants affirmed their experiences and knowledge. I propose a conceptual framework that incorporates both Chicana/Latina feminist theories and Paulo Freire’s (1973) concept *conscientização* (critical consciousness) as a potential framework for studying how home and school pedagogies intersect. This study uses a Chicana/Latina feminist ethnographic methodology, coupled with qualitative research methods (Villenas, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I examine how issues in public education policy, including Arizona’s House Bill 2281 devalue epistemologies and pedagogies that seek to critique and dismantle race, class, gender, immigration, and power inequalities in the U.S. As a response to HB 2281, the elimination of the MAS program in Tucson’s high schools, and the banning of texts, both local and national organizations organized teach-ins and read-ins to demonstrate their support for Ethnic Studies. This chapter will seek to critically explore how first-generation Latina/o students make sense of their participation in higher education. In addition to how participants reflected on the pain and growing contradictions between their families and schooling experiences, students made sense of opposing ideas and knowledges in LLS and MAS courses through inquiry, reflection, and dialogue. Findings show how *sitio y lengua* provides a critical space where intersecting pedagogies of home and school emerge, where community boundaries get redefined, and where students reclaim academic space.

**Conceptual Framework: Critical Education Through a Chicana/Latina Feminist Approach**

As stated earlier, my study builds on theoretical analysis of how home, community, and education are linked, especially for Latina/o students. For instance, Chicana/Latina feminist
frameworks have expanded conceptions of knowledge by confronting epistemological colonialism within the field of education and reasserted the importance of viewing education within broader contexts of learning outside of traditional educational institutions (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006). Chicana/Latina feminists have challenged the production of knowledge and have offered new theories and methods to “uncover and reclaim their own subjugated knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 574). Previous educational research from a Chicana/Latina feminist epistemological approach has documented the ways Latina/o students rely on their familias (family’s) consejos (advice), dichos (sayings of wisdom using life lessons), and sabiduria (wisdom) to navigate higher education (Burciaga, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Montoya, 1994; Rendón, 1992; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

My work also expands on Paulo Freire’s (1973) concept conscientização (critical consciousness) by drawing on Chicana/Latina feminist theoretical concepts. Specifically, I draw on Emma Pérez’s (1998) theoretical concept to examine how MAS and LLS courses create un sitio (a space) or a safe space y una lengua (language and/or discourse) for students to critically negotiate the variety of forces and influences that inform their personal and academic lives. In the field of education, Freire’s concept of critical consciousness has been used to understand how marginalized students come to perceive social, political, and economic oppression and their ability to make critical choices that transform their reality (1970, 1973). According to Freire (1973), critical consciousness serves as the motor of cultural emancipation. Freire proposed that education is political and should help students achieve a critical understanding of their own reality and the social structures that shape those conditions through inquiry and dialogue. However, Freire’s work does not account for the process of learning and unlearning that
marginalized students experience in higher education. It is necessary, therefore, to examine Latina/o experiences in learning spaces that complicate their learning process.

Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies have offered new ways to recognize, analyze, and rethink traditional notions of education and spaces in which teaching and learning come alive. These ideals have resulted in the establishment of both informal and formal learning spaces where we can begin to acknowledge, disrupt, and rethink the reality of tensions and contradictions that arise from different privileges, oppression, and power as they are lived within the intersecting spaces of home, community, and school. Both Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies and critical pedagogy are concerned with issues of voice, consciousness raising, and the desire for personal and collective transformation (Elenes, González, Delgado Bernal, & Villenas, 2006; García, 1997; Freire, 1970).

Based on participants’ descriptions of LLS and MAS courses, professors followed a Freirean pedagogical approach, where questions and not answers are the core of the curriculum and where dialogue and reflection are valued over lecture, repetition, and memorization. Professors emphasized the everyday concerns of students, such as issues of immigration status and worked to incorporate these concerns into the curriculum. All 10 participants commented on how in their LLS and MAS courses they were able to discuss issues that they could relate to, since these courses utilized students’ experiences as the basis of instruction and used students culture, language, home and community knowledge. Through inquiry, reflection, and dialogue students developed a critical consciousness by disrupting and connecting their personal experiences to larger social, cultural, historical, economical, and political structures.

After substantive and careful analysis of the work of Chicana/o and Latina/o educational scholars and participants experiences in LLS and MAS courses, I identified the following eight
characteristics that I believe are grounded in, and recur in many of these courses: (a) the history of Chicana/o and Latina/o oppression and resistance; (b) oral traditions (i.e. corridos, cuentos, and dichos); (c) consciousness raising; (d) notions of familia, love, and respeto; (e) interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives; (f) visual and performance arts (i.e. teatro campesino); (g) collectively creating social change and empowering the self, family, and community; and lastly, (h) healing from colonialism (Anzaldúa, 1999; Burciaga, 2007; Córdova, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2001; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Hurtado, 2005; Pizarro, 1998, 2004; Valenzuela 1999; Yosso, 2005; 2006).

Methodology

Chicana/Latina feminist theories served as guide for the development and analysis of this ethnographic study. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of first-generation 64 undergraduate Latina/o students enrolled in Latina/o Studies (LLS) and Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses at two different 4-year universities. By using a Chicana/Latina feminist framework, I centered the voices and home epistemologies of first-generation Latina/o students. The analysis of findings was focused on the role of knowledge acquired from participants’ home, community, and courses in MAS and LLS, and the impact of that knowledge on participants’ personal and academic lives (see Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of courses taken by participants). 65 This ethnography traces the process of how the courses facilitate the development of students’ critical consciousness; in particular how they come to perceive and connect their personal experiences to larger social, cultural, historical, economical, and political structures (Delgado Bernal, Alemán Jr., & Garavito, 2009; Freire, 1973). My research also

64 I am defining first-generation college student as neither parent having graduated from a 4-year institution of higher education.
65 Research participants had taken an average of 1 to 14 courses in LLS or MAS.
examines how negotiating different spaces and relationships enables students to persist and graduate from institutions of higher education. My dissertation draws on interviews with 10 Latina/o college students attending school in California and Illinois. Their narratives show how they experienced and interpreted their educational experiences, bringing together their voices, memories, feelings, and analysis for understanding, belonging, and their need for change.

I wanted my research to accurately reflect these students’ experiences and so, in keeping with a key tenet of Chicana/Latina feminist methodology, ensured that my research subjects were able to check and analyze data collected from them (Delgado Bernal, 1998; González, 1998; Tellez, 2005). This practice enhanced the trustworthiness of the data and gave research subjects a fuller sense of the relationality of our work together though it took 4 months to get responses from all the participants. Some of the participants’ remarks included how little I had talked and how much more they had talked. Others found it refreshing and interesting to be able to look over their responses from 6 months earlier. Overall, the students were satisfied with their responses and made minor corrections to their interview transcripts. Some of them also gave me an update on what they were doing with their lives since graduating from college, including attaining jobs working with Latina/o students, starting graduate school, and attending conferences. In short, by focusing on how we had developed relationships through the research, the process itself helped create a sense of connection, respeto, and urgency for such stories to be told, heard, and recirculated.

Outline of Findings

These same complex relationships were described by my interviewees who recounted how they, as Latina/o students became transformed by MAS and LLS pedagogies and how those

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66 The details of the interview process were discussed in Chapter 3: Theoretical framework & methodology.
pedagogies connected them to community and political issues. During the data collection and writing stages of this work, Arizona passed House Bill 2281\textsuperscript{67} which banned Mexican American Studies from Tucson’s K-12 public school system. This highly public battle over teaching Ethnic Studies courses became yet another example of how bills such as HB 2281 not only limit academic freedom, but also limit the rights of marginalized communities to have control over their children’s education. Undeniably, HB 2281 stems from a legacy of school segregation that continues to silence Latinas/os from telling their stories, from speaking their truths, and from being transformed by their education. Thus, one of the main objectives of Ethnic Studies courses remains to decolonize knowledge and power by bringing in non-western epistemologies and practices (Córdova, 2005; Hidalgo, & Duncan-Andrade, 2010; Hurtado, 2005, Pizarro, 2004). After all, Ethnic Studies emerged from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, where students, educators, and community activists expressed the need for specialized courses that privilege the knowledge, memories, and stories of marginalized communities.

In the second section, I highlight the findings from interviews with 10 undergraduate Latina/o students and fieldnotes\textsuperscript{68} collected to illuminate complex issues facing first-generation students in pursuit of a college education and to demonstrate the transformative process they undergo when they enroll in MAS and LLS courses. I found that these courses impacted students in the following ways: (a) developed a critical consciousness; (b) strengthened their sense of civic and social responsibility; and (c) increased their academic self-confidence. MAS and LLS courses provided \textit{un sitio} (a space) or a safe space for students to critically negotiate the variety of forces and influences that inform their personal and academic lives. Students also acquired

\textsuperscript{67} HB 2281 cuts off funding to Tucson school district’s K-12 public schools that offer Ethnic Studies as part of the curriculum.

\textsuperscript{68} I took extensive field notes at both campuses (e.g. location of each department within the campus, classroom observations, and attended student events). I also took field notes before and after each interview.
una lengua (a language and/or discourse) to discuss the different ways that they worked through these tensions, and resisted oppression and dichotomist thinking by redefining relationships.

I believe that students shared valuable stories to be learned from during a period of profound economic, social, and political uncertainty. These students are trying to make sense of what it means to be first-generation college students when their families are losing their homes, when their parents can not find stable employment, when their family members or friends from back home are being deported, when tuition fees keep rising, when access and retention programs are being cut or eliminated, or when they themselves don’t know how they will pay for tuition because they are undocumented.

**HB 2281: Arizona Bans Ethnic Studies and Books From Public K-12 Schools**

The banning of Ethnic Studies and Mexican American Studies programs in Arizona can be traced back to 2006, when Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farm Workers and civil rights activist, was invited to speak about the importance of civic participation in honor of Cesar E. Chavez week at Tucson High Magnet School. During her speech, Huerta made public remarks critical of legislation passed by Arizona Republicans. Huerta received a standing ovation by many of the students, teachers, and administrators; however, several Republican students took major offense to her speech. As a result of her presumed liberal bias, Huerta received severe criticism from media, political, and school district leaders for her infamous statement “Republicans hate Latinos.” As a response to Huerta’s statement, state Attorney

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69 Tucson High Magnet School offers specialized courses focused on the visual and performing arts, math, science, and technology, information retrieved from http://edweb.tusd.k12.az.us/thms/
General Tom Horne, who was the state superintendent at the time of the incident, sent Deputy Superintendent Margaret Garcia-Dugan, a Latina Republican, to address students at Tucson High Magnet School and to counter Huerta’s statement. About 10 minutes into her speech, about 70 students stood silently in the auditorium turning their backs to Garcia-Dugan. Student protestors took off a layer of their clothing to reveal their white t-shirts with different hand-written messages such as “You can silence my voice but not my spirit." They also taped their mouths with blue tape, symbolizing their voices being silenced by legislation targeted exclusively at the Latino community, as they silently walked out from the school’s auditorium.

Tom Horne took this incident as confirmation of his beliefs that Ethnic Studies was not being taught in an objective way, thus, promoting undesirable behavior, racial chauvinism, resentment, and divisions among students. In his opinion, the students that turned their backs on Garcia-Dugan and walked-out of the auditorium, further confirmed his claims that the classes were encouraging students to engage in disrespectful and disruptive behavior. Horne who helped craft HB 2281, believes that the Raza Studies program in Tucson was teaching students that they were being oppressed and that teachers were teaching a “race obsessive philosophy, a downer philosophy, teaching students that they are oppressed and making them angry and making it so that they don’t have hope for their future.” He concluded by stating “this is not the way to teach kids!” Horne’s comments are contradictory; for instance, he states that Ethnic Studies is making students feel oppressed; however, making it illegal for Latina/o students to learn about

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70 Tom Horne served as the elected Arizona State Superintendent of Public Instruction from 2003 to 2011. In 2011 he was elected Arizona Attorney General. John Huppenthal was elected to the office of State Superintended of public in November 2010.
73 On May 13, 2010, Tom Horne and Dr. Michael Eric Dyson (professor of sociology at Georgetown University) were invited to debate on the ban of Ethnic Studies on CNN’s show Anderson Cooper 360.
their history is a form of oppression. He also states that Ethnic Studies courses are making students angry, but fails to recognize that students are exercising their agency through civic engagement, a core value of democracy. Throughout Horne’s 6-year campaign to dismantle Arizona’s Ethnic Studies, he made appearances on mainstream and conservative national television programs, and used HB 2281 as a platform to pursue his political agenda and gain the support of conservative leaders and voters, as well as to help him win his current position as Arizona’s Attorney General.

Lisa Marie Cacho’s (2010) work points out how Horne’s argument in support of HB 2281 relied on feelings of hate, resentment, and fear, which she refers to as “neoliberal antiracism.” She writes:

The fears and resentment associated with Ethnic Studies gain affective currency and value the more they circulate throughout multiple discourses. . . . Hence, whether or not feelings function as evidence for the illegitimacy of knowledge depends upon which feelings are evoked and who feels them. Having feelings evoked when learning only seems to render that knowledge illegitimate if people of color feel empowered by it and others feel resentment, guilt, or shame whereas the opposite response—knowledge that simultaneously elicits white empowerment and non-white resentment is normalized. (pp. 30-31)

Because neoliberal ideologies have misappropriated anti-racist, anti-immigrant, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic language it becomes increasingly difficult to convince others to perceive policies that systemically limit and exclude certain groups of people. For example, in an interview, Horne went as far as to recount his participation in the 1963 March on Washington. By discussing his experience and citing Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream speech,” one of the most memorable speeches of a Black leader, Horne positions himself as an anti-racist leader who is dedicated to eliminating discrimination and promoting equality for all groups of people including the Latino community. Yet, Horne fails to acknowledge that Ethnic Studies evolved as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. What conservatives and anti-racist neoliberals
fear the most is the possibility that this kind of teaching and learning may persuade young people to become informed citizens who might exercise their rights to demand equal access to equal opportunities. As Sandra K. Soto and Miranda Joseph (2010) contend, “neoliberal evocation has the insidious effect of promoting and preserving . . . social inequality and oppression along racial lines” (p. 53). Furthermore, the banning of Ethnic Studies in Arizona is but one example of how educators at the K-12 and higher education levels are being highly policed and punished for teaching students to become critical and self-empowered.

Soon after the incident, Horne began to investigate the Ethnic Studies program and commissioned Cambium Learning Group Inc. (a leading provider of K-12 curriculum products) to conduct a study of the program. On May 11, 2010 Arizona’s Governor Jan Brewer signed House Bill 2281 under the reference title, schools; prohibited courses; discipline; this bill explicitly prohibits schools from offering courses that cater to students of a particular group, promote resentment or advocate ethnic solidarity, or promote the overthrow of the U.S. government. Although findings from the study did not support the alleged violations by Tucson’s Ethnic Studies program, in January of 2011, Arizona’s Superintendent John Huppenthal released a statement affirming Tucson’s Ethnic Studies program to be in violation of HB 2281, giving the district 60 days to comply with the law. Failure to comply with the time period, the district was facing a loss of up to 10% of its budget. It is now against the law to teach Ethnic Studies classes, including Mexican American Studies, in public school grades K-12 in the state. Both Horne and Huppenthal criticized MAS curriculum as being influenced by the left, thus, encouraging students to be resentful and distrustful of authorities. Their comments reflect Arizona’s ongoing

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educational policies and practices to segregate Latina/o students by prohibiting culturally relevant pedagogy in schools.

**A Response to the Banning of Books: Teach-ins and Read-ins**

The banning of Ethnic Studies courses was followed by the banning of over 80 books, including Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1999) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, one of the most influential texts in the field of Ethnic Studies and whose works speaks to the experiences of many Chicana/o and Latina/o students. Arizona’s HB 2281 was a direct attack against the education of Latina/o students, critical educators, and scholars whose work has focused on issues of educational desegregation and democracy in public schools. The removal of Ethnic Studies courses from the school’s curriculum raises significant questions about what “knowledge” should be taught and learned. School policies such as this one, erases the histories and culture of students of color. The policies hurt these students’ academic achievement and psychological well being by devaluing their knowledge and silencing their voices. Students of color will not have an accurate understanding of history without learning about both the social injustices faced by their ancestors as well as their contributions.

The elimination of Arizona’s MAS programs and the list of books banned have generated the interest and support of local and national organizations. On February 5, 2012 the council of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), one of the nation’s leading organizations in the field of education, passed two resolutions condemning both HB 2281 and the suspension of Mexican American Studies classes. AERA sent a powerful message against Arizona’s discriminatory practices. Across the country, different organizations have demonstrated their solidarity by organizing teach-ins in support of Ethnic Studies programs.
Many student groups in public schools and college campuses have also held read-ins and posted videos of students, faculty, and staff reading excerpts from the list of banned books in Arizona. In February 2011, students and faculty members joined the virtual community to protest book banning in Arizona by organizing multiple “read-ins” and posting them on YouTube.  

Ethnic Studies programs at the public school level are not the only ones that have been under attack. Many Ethnic Studies programs in colleges and universities have been restructured or eliminated due to budgetary cuts. Since the creation of Ethnic Studies, knowledge produced from this field has been deemed as marginal and lacking scholarly rigor. Although research shows that Ethnic Studies scholarship and curriculum help to improved undergraduate Latina/o students’ sense of belonging and connectedness their campus, and both retention and graduation rates, these courses continue to be devalued (Córdova, 2005; Delgado Bernal, Alemán Jr., & Garavito, 2009; Hurtado, 2005; Pizarro, 2004). Chicana/o and Latina/o scholars such as Marcos Pizarro (2004) have been warning us about these attacks. Pizarro explains, “in short, our future is in serious doubt because, as the politics of race stack up against Chicana/o studies, these programs and their caretakers have not prepared a counter-offensive” (p. 150). The recent attacks on Ethnic Studies programs and curriculum across the nation, are having a profound impact on students by keeping them from experiencing a comprehensive education and from accessing books that discuss issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, culture, oppression, and resistance. The banning explicitly and pointedly also devalues and penalizes progressive educators.

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76 The videos of the ‘read ins’ at UIUC can be found on YouTube using the following links: http://www.youtube.com/user/tandracki & http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_FNhjmyHMA&feature=related
Findings

Intersecting spaces of home and school pedagogies. LLS and MAS courses provide a creative and critical sitio that invites Latina/o students to reflect on the teaching and learning they experience in the home space. Latina/o participants in this study reflected on the pedagogies of stories, consejos (advice), and dichos (proverbs) in their everyday life. For example, participants recalled listening to parents share stories about being discriminated against and working under unsafe conditions. Through these stories, parents emphasized education as a key to better opportunities for employment and good health. Latina participants recalled that their mothers were their first teachers who taught them critical life lessons about self-determination, courage, and life aspirations. Latina mothers also embodied and taught their daughters important lessons about challenging and navigating patriarchal traditions and constraints (Villenas & Moreno, 2001). In the process of remembering and retelling these stories in the classroom, there was a shift in sitio y lengua that highlighted the complexity of opposing and contradictory ideologies between the home and academic spaces. Sitio created a space where intersecting pedagogies of home and school emerged. Lengua gave students the analytical tools and language to disrupt, critique, and rethink traditional and dominant discourses while also working through the tensions that emerged among them.

All the participants reflected on and shared their increased critical consciousness since enrolling in MAS and LLS courses. As a result of their increased sense of critical consciousness, they were able to recognize hegemonic discourses, resist oppression, and redefine relationships. Moreover, when their sense of consciousness increased, they developed a deeply fulfilling appreciation for learning. Sara, a freshman at SJSU described her experiences taking MAS courses:
It’s my second semester taking MAS and it opened up my mind to a lot of things that I didn’t know. I used to think, you know what? Maybe it’s recent *Mexicanos* coming over here but they’ve been here for a while and it changes the way you see history. Because I’m used to the American version you know the one you learn in history books. So in my Mexican American studies classes you see both worlds coming together. And it has really opened my mind a lot and to a lot of things that I didn’t know.

Sara’s comments stress the ways that MAS epistemologies and pedagogy support and develop students to think critically about their history and to resist meta-narratives.\(^7\) Moreover, the course allowed Sara to demystify her own understanding and ideologies of how Latinas/os fit into the U.S. Participants expressed being more open-minded to different viewpoints and aware of their own biases than prior to taking MAS and LLS courses. All of the participants felt like for the first time in their education they were able to learn about their history and other topics that had been dismissed throughout their K-12 education.

Participants also described how LLS and MAS courses increased their knowledge and understanding of structures of inequality based on class, racial, linguistic, and heteronormative privileges in society. They also emphasized how different pedagogical practices helped them connect their personal lives and family histories to existing social structures and institutions. For example, many of the Latina participants expressed how the courses helped them confront patriarchy and how they embraced a new outlook on the roles and expectations of women in their families and in their home communities. Araceli, a senior at UIUC, described an example of how she shared a story in class about challenging gender roles at home and how the class helped her understand gender inequalities and their effects on women. She explained:

We were talking about the double shift, of how women are always expected to hustle home from work and take on another shift. I remember sharing a story in class. I had just started going out with my boyfriend and I was in the car with my mom and for some

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\(^7\) One of critical race theory’s core concepts is to give voice to those on the margins and to name inequality and injustice by opposing metanarratives “the images, preconceptions, and myths-that have been propagated by the dominant culture of hegemonic Whiteness as a way of maintaining racial inequality” (Treviño, Harris, & Wallace, 2008, p. 8).
reason she felt the need to tell me that I needed to learn how to cook. And she said “you’re never gonna be able to keep a man if you don’t know how to cook.” I was so angry ‘cause I had also taken a gender and women studies course and I just kind of blew up. And I was like, so you think I’m going to college so that I can continue to feed into these gender stereotypes. What if I don’t have enough time to cook, what if I make more money than him, what if I’m busier than he is. Why is it still my responsibility to cook I don’t think that’s fair. These gender stereotypes are what is keeping us down! And she just kinda got quiet.

Many of the Latinas struggled to reconcile the contradicting messages they received from their mother. Although Araceli’s mother has always headed the household and paid for her daughter to attend a private high school so she could have a better opportunity to get into college, she continues to convey messages of domesticity. Moreover, the knowledge acquired from reading Chicana/Latina feminist literature in MAS and LLS courses helped Latina/o students reflect and understand the ways they had been socialized about gender roles. Both Latina and Latino participants reflected on the ways traditional gender roles were being enacted at home and in their communities. Latinas were more conscious of gender ideologies and divisions from a younger age, whereas Latino participants became more conscious of these divisions when they moved away to go to college. When Latinas moved away from home, many expressed feeling freed from many of the home expectations and obligations. Latinas also felt strongly about never returning back to their home communities, while Latinos expressed missing home more often and a strong desire to return back to their home communities.

One of the greatest challenges participants experienced was learning how to negotiate the contradictions and expectations from their families and the university. Many of the participants expressed how stressful and painful it was trying to balance two very different worlds: the one that exists with their family and friends who have no experience of college and the one at the university. It was quite common for many of the participants to feel a great sense of guilt for leaving home to pursue their education or for not always being able to financially contribute to
their family. At times it became too painful to deal with the guilt and some considered dropping out or holding off on graduate school. However, many of the participants commented on how enrolling in MAS and LLS courses helped them meet and make friends with other Latina/o students who were experiencing similar issues. MAS and LLS provided un sitio to relate to the challenges of their peers and to share their struggles with someone else. Participants benefited from having peers who they could trust with sharing their personal struggles without feeling judged or challenged for their commitment to their education. Johnny, a senior at UIUC, reflected on the impact of having peers who he could relate to, but who could also understand the challenges and contradictions that many Latinas/os experience with their families. He explained:

Latinas have it worse. A lot of my friends here on campus, we talk. This one time I was studying with my friend and I asked her, “hey how’s your family, how’s everything going?” and she started telling me “hey so I was at this quinceñera and my tía told me, mijita why aren’t you married, where’s your man, where’s your kids” and I’m like wow that’s messed up you know. My friend wants to get a Ph.D., and she’s like “I am going to be in school forever, and I’m not gonna get married till I’m 30 something.” I’ve had the same conversation with my other friend she’s trying to go to med school. It hurts us students ‘cause we’re hearing these stories and it scares us like, Uh no! No one’s gonna marry us, uh no one’s gonna love us ‘cause were gonna be old. I think our friends and family are a huge influence and I guess once you go away from that norm it’s like “oh this is not normal what are you doing why are you still in school?” I mean like I said pursuing a higher education for Latinos is something new and it’s shocking to them. So I mean it’s very important for people to talk.

All of the participants stated that their parents were supportive of them being in college, yet their parents expected them to come home on the weekends and/or to call home at least once a week. Many parents also expected their children to return back home after graduating from college. Much of the tensions and disconnect that participants felt was due to their parents lack of understanding about what their daughters and sons were doing in college. Parents were also concerned about how college was distancing these students from the family because they were spending less time at home or because they did not know what they were experiencing.
However, many of the participants shared how the longer they were away at college, the less talking they would do at home because they felt like they disagreed on too many issues with their family. Participants’ feelings of home/phobia intensified as a result of crossing borders between the culture of their families and communities and the culture of higher education, which they often described as living between contradictory realities. Relationships with relatives and friends who did not go to college became difficult to remain connected because their lives were so different. Participants felt more comfortable listening to their families and friends back home. They also felt that the issues that their family and friends back home experienced were a lot more real and pressing, especially because many of their family members and friends were dealing with unemployment, deportations, or the prospect of losing their homes. Participants felt like their issues of dealing with a difficult class or racist guiding counselor was nothing compared to the everyday struggles that their families and friends back home were facing.

All 10 participants emphasized that MAS and LLS courses provided un sitio (a space) or a safe space for students to critically negotiate the variety of forces and influences that inform their personal and academic lives. Antonio, a junior at SJSU, explained how taking courses in MAS helped him interrogate his identities. He explained,

Taking MAS classes I feel more strongly connected to a Chicano identity so that’s the word I use a lot more now when I identify myself. Through reading about Chicano literature, Chicano films, I just identify a lot with it so I would definitely say Chicano.

Similarly, Johnny recalled an LLS class discussion addressing identities:

I sincerely think I’m American because I was born here and I’m a U.S. citizen. I don’t care if people don’t accept me as American. . . . Well I also embrace my Mexican roots. I’m culturally aware of my Mexican culture and language. . . . People identify as Hispanic, and that’s their thing you know. Are they wrong? I don’t know. That’s on them. It’s complicated because we only get one box so it’s like I’m not white, I’m not Native American what am I ugh, I’m also African, I have African ancestry like what do I do? So that was an interesting conversation you know we went from Chicano, Mexicano, to Latino to Hispanic, to race and it was really interesting and people were so confused.
Issues of ethnic and racial identity are topics that were regularly discussed in LLS and MAS courses. As such, rather than attempting to police his identities, Johnny sees the possibilities of remaking his own subject positions. Moreover, participants’ increased sense of consciousness is critical to their ability to question, construct, and negotiate their identities as they navigate the complex path towards higher education.

Participants also described how MAS and LLS courses helped them discuss their racial/ethnic identities with their families back home. Ana, a sophomore at UIUC, explained how taking courses in LLS encouraged her to discuss a transnational racial/ethnic identity with her mother:

Like the issues of mestizaje even before I went to college it was a contradiction that I always found. “Ok we’re mestizos we’re indigenous most likely European, most likely Spanish, we’re mixed.” Why do we treat the indigenous people in Mexico like crap? Why do we have the expression, “te ves muy indio” and that’s an insult. I don’t understand that. So I’ve always had the discussion with my mom. And she’s like “Ana I’m not gonna hear about this” and she closes off. It’s hard to have a conversation with my mom ‘cause I know she’s really tired and she’s really busy.

Although Ana has tried to engage with her mother on issues of mestizaje, it is difficult for her mother to find the time to sit with her and discuss these issues. Whenever Ana goes back home, she makes it a point to share and engage with her family on the books or articles she has read for class or on politically and socially conscious documentaries. Ana, like many of the other participants, made strong efforts to have discussions with their families about their college experiences and to introduce them to new knowledge. Ana describes how she is perceived by her family, “My family calls me grillera because grillos make a lot of noise.” Ana was so passionate to learn more about the historical and current issues of Latinas/os that she decided to

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78 Mexico has historically avoided addressing issues of racial and social class discrimination. Thus, many Mexicans continue to suffer from feelings of inferiority. Although Mexico is a country that has tried to break away from a colonial mentality, yet discrimination is still widespread and pervasive (Lugo, 2008). Phrases like “te ves muy indio” translates to “you are very indigenous looking” maintaining stratification associated with skin color.
79 Translation of grillo is cricket.
double major in Latina/o Studies and Biology. For most of the participants, being exposed to Chicana/o and Latina/o texts and class discussions had a significant effect on their identities as well as on their political awareness.

(Re)defining the boundaries of community space. By redefining community spaces, students explored and learned new ways to develop and sustain their connections to multiple communities. Participants shared how staying involved with different communities helped them to bridge the disconnect between their home community and academic communities. Enrolling in LLS and MAS courses exposed and helped students develop a greater sense of social and civic responsibility to bring about social change within their own lives, family, and communities. All of the participants emphasized the importance of giving back to their communities by working collectively to create social change. Students like Antonio, who lived away from their home communities, expressed feeling disconnected as a result of being in college. However, Antonio discussed how he is actively involved with different Latina/o student organizations on campus, but when he graduates he hopes to work with his community in La Mission. He explains, “It’s always nice to know you’re giving back, but if you're giving back to where you grew up and that always feels the best.” Being exposed to the historical, social, and political struggles of Latinas/os in the U.S. in their courses had a positive impact on the participants’ motivation to create change for their families and communities. All students made comments expressing their commitment to serving their communities throughout their college experiences and beyond.

Enrolling in LLS and MAS courses inspired many of the participants to partake in activism by joining student organizations centered on issues of education, immigration, and the criminal justice system. Eight of the students I interviewed were actively involved on campus and in their home communities. Students joined student organizations on campus because they
wanted to learn more about the different Latina/o issues such as immigration policies. Participants felt empowered to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills to bring about social changes within their campus and the larger Latina/o community. Other students, who were not directly involved with a student organization, sought out different opportunities to become involved within their communities. For example, Daniel, a junior at SJSU is a tutor for the Reading for Life Program teaching basic literacy skills to jail inmates.\textsuperscript{80} Participants’ activism ranged from organizing national and local protests, starting their own student organizations on campus, tutoring elementary children and jail inmates, presenting workshops on financial aid at their high schools, to organizing different campus events to inform and celebrate Latino culture. Those who were not active or involved with their communities recognized the importance of giving back and had a strong desire to find jobs where they could serve underprivileged communities. Many of the participants also discussed their engagement on community research projects that provided them hand-on experiences with many of the social disparities in their home communities.

Many of the LLS and MAS courses provided students with community volunteering opportunities to work with local organizations serving the Latina/o community. Courses also prepared students to conduct community-based research projects. These different learning opportunities allowed students to explore the social, cultural, political, and economic realities that shape the Latina/o experience in the U.S. Throughout the semester, students shared their experiences and insights with the class. Cihuapalli and Antonio, both undergraduate students at

\textsuperscript{80} The Alameda County Library provides library services to inmates in the county jails. Volunteers teach basic library skills to inmates in Alameda County Jails in Dublin and Oakland, California.
SJSU, talked about their experience enrolling in a MAS special topic course. They discussed how much they appreciated their professor’s use of different pedagogical practices, such as community-based teaching and research. In particular they appreciated the layout of the classroom and the opportunity to explore and express their spirituality. Cihuapilli explained.

So we had a circulo. It was part of the class. . . . So we brought in a lot of indigenous culture into the class. Where we did our offerings just like the Aztecs would do. It was spiritual where we all gave a piece of ourselves; our own personal experiences and we were all exposed within the circle of classmates. It was just different. It wasn’t like your typical class. It’s almost like this class bonded us and we still continue to work together. It’s a relationship that we’ve built with each other. That class has really, really changed me.

In the symbolic system of Aztec beliefs the circulo embodies a spiritual energy representing inclusivity, change, and connectedness (Anzaldúa, 2009; Fuentes, 1992). The set-up of the classroom and the professor’s position within the circulo recognizes their indigenous knowledge and encourages students to get in touch with the levels of their knowing that are not always acknowledged within academic spaces. This set-up also facilitated dialogue; students were able to look at each other and take turns speaking without having to raise their hands. As a result of organizing the classroom into a circulo, they felt more connected to un sitio (space) and with their professor and peers. Antonio echoed how the professor provided a safe sitio (space) where their experiences and ideas were respected and valued. The classroom space also fostered a strong sense of community by creating different opportunities for students to collaborate with peers outside of the classroom. Antonio explained:

Everyday, somebody had to share a personal story. That was my favorite part of class ‘cause we became really close even today we were still sending emails and we try to get

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81 The course provided students with an understanding of the forces that produce disenfranchisement of marginalized communities with an emphasis on teaching students the skills to conduct and work within those communities.

82 A circle.

83 Symbols were an important aspect of Aztec culture, for example the Aztec calendar (a large circular calendar stone) is one of the most recognized symbols of ancient American civilizations.
together at least once a month. So that part of that class, just by hearing a personal story from someone, you felt a connection with them so that’s one thing I really still remember and probably always will. Sometimes we would get really emotional ‘cause some people would share deep stories. That was one thing that will stick with me for a long time.

The classroom provided *un sitio* where students shared and reflected on their common lived experiences, and participants expressed learning through feeling different emotions. Renato Rosaldo (1993) examines the importance of encouraging students to articulate their feelings. He explains, “classrooms then produce a range of feelings, from intimate to distant, and feelings have to be addressed. . . . In my experience such classrooms, even at their most uncomfortable, have produced student work of exceptional quality” (p. xv). In the process of critical consciousness, self-understanding becomes significant for the intellectual and personal growth of students. Student-centered dialogue, listening, and reflection are also essential means in facilitating the development of critical consciousness in students. When caring, creativity, and compassion are valued in the classroom, learning moves away from being lecture-centered to learning collaboratively and growing together.

Professors in these courses provided students different learning opportunities aimed at bridging students’ experiences with the readings and writing assignments. Many of these courses asked students to conduct community-based research projects within the Latino community. For example, Cihuapalli, a senior at SJSU, chose to work with women who were recovering from drug addictions. She discussed how the class helped her rethink research in disenfranchised communities and the importance of developing meaningful relationships with community members. She explained:

I learned about the importance of creating relationships and really working with the community. Not just for a project, but like an ongoing thing. Coming from a background where I’ve abused drugs and almost every female in my family has abused drugs I decided to interview women who were on probation to learn about how they came to use drugs and how they came to stop. I still call them and talk to them just to see how they’re
doing. That class was awesome! I felt like that class changed me a lot and I’m applying my teachings that I’ve learned in that class within my life.

The course enabled Cihuapalli to make meaningful contributions to her community and the larger society by emphasizing both social and academic responsibility. The course had tremendous personal benefit for all of the participants, where knowledge was actively transformed by applying it within their own lives and communities.

LLS and MAS courses provided *un sitio* (a space) for Latina/o students to gain a sense of belonging to the university and to build positive connections with the university community. Participants discussed how meaningful it was to have faculty who genuinely cared about their personal and academic concerns. They also indicated that developing interpersonal connections with faculty in LLS and MAS courses was pivotal to their persistence and learning how to access different resources on campus. Participants expressed how the courses helped them build support networks with peers and faculty. As a result of forming these connections, participants felt accepted, supported, and determined to academically succeed. Andrea, a senior at UIUC, describes how joining a student organization and enrolling in LLS courses helped her feel connected to the university. It also helped her find her voice and supportive *sitios* where her voice was heard. She explained:

I felt kind of lonely at times and weird. I felt like I didn’t belong here at times, but other times I just knew that I had to do what I had to do to keep going. But once I finally became involved in an organization, I started feeling more, like I was part of this community, I was part of this school and I, you know I started feeling a little bit more, less anxious and more like I really did belong here. . . . The more and more I learned\(^8\) I stopped seeing myself as like a helpless victim as opposed to something or somebody that could actually change the course of my own future and my family, so it was definitely very empowering and yeah, that’s the word, very empowering!

Andrea shared how she became more involved on campus and felt more comfortable speaking up in classes. Enrolling in LLS courses increased Andrea’s, and many of the other participants’,

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\(^8\) Andrea was refereeing to the knowledge she learned in her LLS courses.
academic self-confidence resulting in feeling more academically and socially integrated into the campus (Delgado Beernal, Alemán, & Garavito, 2009; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993; Villalpando, 2003). LLS and MAS courses also provided different opportunities to participate in student organizations and events, such as workshops, performances, and lectures on campus. All of the participants shared how joining a student organization or attending these different events increased their sense of belonging to their campus. Although many of the participants thought it was important to take advantage of the different learning opportunities outside the classroom, many felt that joining student organizations or by attending events on campus would distract them from their academic pursuits, especially for commuter students.

Participants’ sense of belonging to the university emerged from their connection to their professors in MAS and LLS courses, curricula, and peers. Many of them shared how they felt they could trust their professors and felt comfortable sharing their personal struggles. Johnny described his relationship with his LLS professors as follows:

There’s a lot of professors that I also see as friends and role models and that’s what keeps me going. Having someone that actually cares about you, someone that actually reaches out and wants to help you. Like they’ll say like, “Hey if you need anything give me a call, you need anything send me an email or hey you need a letter of recommendation I’m here for you,” stuff like that. I’m very thankful especially for my professors in the LLS department. Having someone telling me “you’re doing good, keep going, things are falling to its place” that’s amazing! I’m really privileged and blessed to be where I’m at.

Johnny felt that LLS professors and graduate teaching assistants were also more approachable outside the classroom. Many of the participants developed close relationships with their MAS and LLS professors and/or teaching assistants. It was simple actions such as feeling comfortable to greet their professor outside the classroom that helped them feel less socially isolated. Sense of belonging also had important implications on participants’ psychological well-being. As a result of feeling more connected to the university, they experienced lower levels of anxiety and
emotional stress. Although it is critical for Latina/o students to feel supported by their professors, it was always professors in MAS and LLS who were taking the time to reach out and mentor Latina/o students. Too many professors in these departments have to spend more time advising Latina/o students (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). Instead, these professors should take the opportunity to encourage and to direct students to work with other professors, including white allies who are committed to advising and mentoring students of color.

(Re)claiming academic space. Through class readings, writing assignments, and class discussions undergraduate Latina/ students who enrolled in MAS and LLS courses acquired una lengua (a language and/or discourse) and the tools to explore how categories of race, class, gender, language, and immigration have an affect on their lives, families, and communities. The classroom became a transformative sitio (space) where the professor and students (re)claimed and (re)imagined themselves as producers of knowledge. For the first time in their education, many participants felt that their professors and graduate teaching assistants cared about their learning. They also felt that their instructors conveyed high academic expectations for everyone in the class and provided them with the support necessary to achieve those expectations. Furthermore, participants discussed how learning about the legal history of unequal education for Chicana/o and Latina/o in MAS and LLS courses helped them make sense of their K-12 educational experiences. Being able to relate to the readings, to write about their experiences, and to contribute to class discussions provided them with a strong academic foundation and the confidence to set high academic standards for themselves. Andrea reflected on her experiences enrolling in LLS, Women of Color/ Native Feminisms:

This was my favorite course because through this class I became more and more aware of various theory and pedagogy that I could turn to and learn from in order to articulate my own experiences and those of my fellow undocumented youth and friends. It was the first time where I felt challenged to discuss and write about my own experience and
contextualize it, while also pushing myself to break the silence that I was told to perpetuate in all other aspects of my life. Also, it was the first time that I got to work closely with a professor, in trying to find my voice and to be able to express it in not only my personal writing, but also in my academic writing.

For students like Andrea, LLS pedagogy created _un sitio_ where she felt engaged and her ideas were valued. She also acquired _una lengua_ to express herself through self-authorship. Andrea described how the course taught her how to insert personal experiences into her writing assignments:

I always try to use personal narratives and use the personal to politicize and put it in this context that I didn’t know I could do. So it’s mainly about using what I do know and using my own experiences to complicate things and for others to learn from it instead of me just memorizing facts and figures and then just regurgitating it. I think it’s one of the main ways that LLS courses have helped.

This process of developing her voice through self-authorship is especially important to first-generation students. Many of the participants shared that before enrolling in MAS or LLS courses they experienced high levels of anxiety that negatively impacted their academic performance. By the end of the semester, participants were able to capitalize on their strengths and to trust their ability to make knowledge claims. For Cassandra, MAS courses have helped her develop a greater sense of academic confidence. She explains, “I’m more confident because of all the classes and research articles I have read. They have helped me be a better individual and I am able to contribute to an intellectual conversation.” Overall MAS and LLS courses increased participants’ confidence in their academic abilities, and they also created a solid sense of confidence in their decisions about their future.

All of the participants commented on the significance LLS and MAS courses had on their personal and career choices. They all strongly believed in pursuing advanced degrees and choosing to get married later in life. For instance, Araceli addressed how a new generation of educated Latinas would change social and cultural gender ideologies:
So I feel like with the new generation of educated Latinas, it’s gonna start another cycle, and I feel like it’s gonna start a cycle of empowerment rather than these conflicting messages where it’s good to bring pride to our family by going to college but you are also reminded to please your husband by cooking and cleaning at home. So it all has to do with just educating one generation so that they can then educate the other and so on.

Araceli also discussed how she would change the ways she would raise her children by setting the same chores, curfews, and expectations regardless of gender.

Enrolling in MAS and LLS courses had a great impact on participants’ personal lives by shaping the ways they view relationships with their partners and family members. For example, Latinos discussed how their mothers encouraged them to find a partner who valued traditional gender roles; however, most of the males did not find that to be an important quality when choosing a partner. Latina participants commented on how being exposed to feminist literature in MAS and LLS courses changed their previous, more traditional views on marriage. Although their mothers emphasized independence, the students also received conflicting messages such as expecting the daughters to fulfill traditional gender roles (i.e., cooking and cleaning for the men). However, when it came to finding a partner, Latinas valued a partner who would support them in their careers and share responsibilities for raising children and maintaining the household.

Many of the participants addressed how professors and graduate teaching assistants in MAS or LLS courses encouraged and supported them to pursue graduate and/or professional degrees. All 10 participants had plans to do so. Many of them wanted to work for a year after graduating to help out their families and to save money before starting graduate school. At the same time, many of the participants felt torn between returning back home after graduating and continuing their education. During my interview with Andrea, she had been accepted to several highly selective out-of-state graduate programs, but she had not been able to talk to her family about the possibility of moving away for graduate school. She was hesitant to tell her family
because she had been feeling pressured by her aunts and uncles to start contributing financially to the family. She explained:

I think they feel like I’m being selfish oftentimes and I definitely hear them saying that a lot. When I went home over winter break my aunts and uncles were asking me what I was going to do after college and I would just say, “oh I don’t know, I really want to continue my education” and they would say, “oh don’t be so selfish your mom is working four jobs, so why don’t you start helping her out.” So that definitely makes me feel guilty.

Although her parents have always been supportive of her education, she felt torn between wanting to pursue graduate school and returning back home. In the end, she was not able to pursue graduate school because of her undocumented status, which meant that universities were not able to offer any financial support. After graduation, she returned back home, but hopes to reapply to private universities. She hopes to obtain a doctoral degree in Ethnic Studies and teach at a university.

Daniel talked about his experience with his professors in the MAS Department and how they were instrumental in his decision to pursue an advanced degree. He recalls wanting to pursue a doctoral degree since his freshman year in college, but he did not start looking into the process until his junior year when he was accepted into the Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program\textsuperscript{85} at SJSU. He described his motivation as follows:

I’ve surrounded myself with positive ambitious individuals that wanna do the same. So we really wanna make an impact within our society. We think the best way to do that is to obtain a Ph.D. Also, numerous faculty have instilled and motivated me to wanna pursue higher education. I see positive Latinas/os that are educated and you know what I thought “that could be me.” If they could do it I could do it!

Daniel also discussed the importance of believing in himself and working hard to accomplish his goals. Furthermore, student-faculty contact within and outside the classroom is a critical element

\textsuperscript{85} The McNair Program prepares eligible students from disadvantage backgrounds for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities; summer internships; seminars and other educational activities are designed to prepare students for doctoral study. U.S. Department of Education/Federal TRIO Programs: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triomcnair/index.html
for the retention, graduation, and enrollment of Latina/o students in graduate school. The process of applying for graduate admission can be an intimidating, stressful, and isolating process for many first-generation college students. According to Yosso (2006), the flow of Latina/o students from the undergraduate pipeline to the graduate pipeline depends on that they can garner: (a) undergraduate faculty support through research opportunities and recommendation letters; (b) graduate faculty support through common research interests; and (c) financial support (p. 132). When faculty take personal and professional interest in Latina/o students, it can make a difference by keeping students in college and by facilitating the steps to graduate school.

The majority of the participants experienced struggles related to understanding the different career paths they could pursue with their majors. Many of them dealt with counselors who were not responsive or supportive to their needs. However, many of the participants talked about MAS or LLS faculty and graduate teaching assistants who were extremely helpful in advising them about their career paths. Araceli described her experience with her guidance counselor and TA in her LLS course:

She [LLS TA] was pretty much the reason of how I figured out that I wanted to go into education because as a sociology major I went to the career center and she [guidance counselor] just gave me a list of things that I could do which ranged from teacher to police officer and I was like thanks but I already know all this. I wanted to know something specific and I tried to tell her I’m interested in education, but she didn’t really listen. It was really useless. So I talked to her [LLS TA] and I told her I just want to do something with education where I can help kids who are like me that want to go to college and there’s no one to help them. She said “you could be a liaison” where I could work at the college level. So I feel like I owe her a lot.

After graduating, Araceli was accepted to a highly competitive college access program to work as a college advisor with underprivileged high school students in the Chicago area. Throughout her undergraduate years, Araceli sought out different opportunities to give back to the campus community. During our interview she also talked about using her education to give back to the
Latino community and now she is actively working with Latina/o youth by encouraging and
guiding them through the college application process.

**Reflections and Concluding Remarks**

Latina/o Studies and Mexican American Studies courses offer different learning
opportunities that further develop students’ critical consciousness and civic engagement outside
the university space. These courses are important in Latina/o student retention because they
increase the students’ sense of belonging to the university and, as a result, increase their
academic confidence to change their *destino* (destiny). In addition, these courses provide
students *un sitio* (a space) to interrogate and redefine their identities. Through student-centered
dialogue, listening, and reflection students are able to talk about their own experiences of
exclusion and misrepresentation. Teaching for critical consciousness enables Latina/o students
to experience personal and collective forms of empowerment through the process of sharing,
observing, reflecting, and analyzing stories of exclusion and survival in the classroom. Students
acquire *una lengua* (a discourse) to discuss their social realities critically and to examine how
inequalities function and persist.

My work contributes to challenging the current legislation that fails to recognize the
value of departments and programs developed out of the Civil Rights Movement, including
Ethnic Studies and other courses focused on issues of exclusion, oppression, and collective
struggles and resistance of marginalized communities. By supporting academic programs such as
Mexican American Studies Departments, students are afforded with opportunities to experience a
culturally empowering curriculum that bridges students’ personal experiences with social,
cultural, historical, and political issues that have a direct impact on their lives. Furthermore, my
work is consistent with previous research that reaffirms the need and value of these courses to help students gain a greater understanding of the complexities and uncertainties associated with how society is shaping their lived experiences.

This work is important to many of us because these courses created un sitio to share our stories, to see ourselves as producers of knowledge, and to reimagine our futures. These courses provide us with the tools y lengua to talk back to deficit discourses about our family’s culture, language, accent, immigration status, and ways of living. Many of us spend 12 years in school believing that Latinas/os just got here, when in fact there exists a rich history of the contributions of Latinas/os to this country. Many of us grow up misinformed about the long history of the political, civic, and social activism in the Latino community, including the legal victories that secured educational equality, such as in the Méndez et. al v. Westminster School District (1947), that was a precursor for the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) that ended racial segregation in public schools (Valencia, 2011). But we are not the only ones that fall into these beliefs: our teachers, our non-Latina/o friends, and sometimes even our own families, in addition to politicians and the media, continue to accept these so-called truths about the Latino community. The educational system is one means used to segregate and dominate the Latino community. At the same time, schools have served as places of empowerment and have allowed many of us to see the ways our education has divided, silenced, and denied us access to the truths. But when we have access to safe learning sitios like LLS or MAS courses, every student has the opportunity to learn and unlearn twelve years of dominant narratives. We have been able to understand where we come from, who we are, and find what we want out of life. Many of us have been able to find our voice and to acquire una lengua to talk back to the world.
Chapter 7

The Undocumented Student Movement: Andrea’s Story

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the undocumented student movement, educational policies, and immigration laws that have both expanded and restricted undocumented students from accessing higher education. Thus, access to higher education for undocumented students is one of most complex and divisive issues in institutions of higher education and society at large. It is estimated that 7,000 to 13,000 undocumented students enroll in postsecondary education throughout the U.S. (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012). Although undocumented students come from different countries, Latinas/os, specifically Mexicans represent the largest group (see appendix B for breakdown of immigrants to the U.S. by country of origin). Furthermore, I examine how state anti-immigrant laws inspired by Arizona’s SB 1070 allow for the dehumanization and criminalization of both documented and undocumented Latina/o students, their families, and communities.

The purpose of this chapter is to understand how the stories of undocumented students challenge racist and anti-immigrant policies, as well as to humanize the issue of immigration. I examine the ambiguities that constitute undocumented students’ experiences and the ways they navigate higher education sin papeles. Specifically, I highlight the story of one participant’s activism, most notably her participation in Atlanta, Georgia where she and six other students were arrested for protesting the Georgia Board of Regents for banning undocumented students

86 I am using the term ‘undocumented’ to refer to immigrants living in the U.S. without legal permanent residency status or citizenship. There have been conscious efforts to get people and the media from not using the word ‘illegal aliens’ and any other form of ‘illegal’ because it dehumanizes and criminalizes people. More politically appropriate terms include: undocumented, unauthorized, and just simply lacking legal status.
88 Being undocumented is not crime, but rather a violation of civil law (National Immigration Law Center). States like Arizona, Georgia, and Alabama have been trying to criminalize the presence of undocumented immigrants.
89 Translation: without papers or without legal documentation.
from enrolling at the top five public universities in the state. Andrea was one of the first students that I interviewed at the University of Illinois. I did not know much about her except that she responded to my study recruitment email and was interested in sharing her experiences as a first-generation college student. Although my initial research was not about undocumented students, I was interested in learning about the challenges that first-generation Latina/o students encounter. It was the culmination of Andrea sharing her story about negotiating the complexities of her undocumented status and the increasingly restrictive anti-immigration bills that fueled me to write about the impact of immigration policies on the lives of undocumented students.

My data is supplemented with participant observations and both formal and informal interviews with Andrea. I attended several campus events addressing issues of immigration, including a lecture by Jose Antonio Vargas, author of one of the most renowned “coming out stories,” published in 2011 in the New York Times and founder of the Define American campaign. I closely followed the ongoing political and social immigration debates by reading blogs, watching the coverage in both English and Spanish-language television networks, and having informal conversations with colleagues, family and friends about immigration policies. My work examines the political, social, and emotional contexts which undocumented students like Andrea must overcome to persist in higher education. By retelling her story, I complicate the dominant narratives of “coming out stories” that tend to highlight students academic achievements, community involvement, and the limitations imposed on their education because of their undocumented status. Historically, young people like Andrea become politically engaged through their involvement in community and campus organizations. I explore how Andrea became politicized by tracing critical moments where she was confronted by her

90 http://www.defineamerican.com/
undocumented status and how she used educational spaces to reaffirm her rights. First, I begin her story by focusing on how she became aware and made sense of her undocumented status. Next, I concentrate on how Andrea was able to make a successful transition to college. Despite experiencing higher levels of financial and emotional distress because of her undocumented status, Andrea was able to cope through her activism on campus with *La Colectiva*, and she became actively involved with the Immigration Youth Justice League (IYJL). Andrea’s participation and leadership within the undocumented student movement provides insights on how she developed as a leader and the how she negotiated the interplay of her education, family, community, and activism. For example, Andrea’s parents and brother were not always supportive of her activism because they were worried about her safety and fearful of their family’s legal status being discovered. Andrea’s story serves as a strong declaration that without comprehensive immigration reform, undocumented students and their families are excluded from fully participating in this nation.

**Undocumented Student Movement: 1847?**

Some might agree that the undocumented student movement can be traced as far back as the mid-19th century, when the Mexican government surrendered to the U.S. and entered into negotiations. One of those negotiations was the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; thus, the treaty among other purposes, simply ensured that the new citizens (formerly-Mexican citizens, or their descendants, living in U.S. territory) would have the same rights as other citizens of the U.S. (Chávez, 1984). Under this treaty, the U.S. committed itself to securing full civil rights for Mexicans, including the right to an equal education. However, for the past 167 years, Latinos, including Mexican Americans, have fought against receiving a second-class education. The
Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo is one of many entry points of tracing the undocumented student movement.\textsuperscript{92}

The movement has an extensive history; however, it has become stronger in the last three decades, where parents in Texas and organizations, including the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) defended the educational rights of undocumented children in the \textit{Plyer v. Doe} case. More recently Latina/o youth, including undocumented students, have brought visibility to the urgent need for comprehensive immigration reform. They have risked arrest, deportation, and rejection from family, friends, peers, and educators by “coming out” to announce their undocumented status and, for some, also their queer identity. Much of the organizing of the movement began with youth sharing their stories of having to confront contradictory and ambiguous laws that both include and exclude them from U.S. society, a place that many call home. In this section, I trace the undocumented student movement and examine how it has been transformed in response to the changing political climate, including state level legislation that denies undocumented students access to some of the states public institutions of higher education.

\textit{Plyer v. Doe: Undocumented Children Gain the Legal Right to a K-12 Education}

The question of citizenship and the right to an education resurfaced at the state and federal level in 1975 when the Texas state legislature passed a law that allowed its public school districts to charge tuition to its undocumented students at the K-12 level. Under this law, not all Texas school districts chose to charge tuition. However, in Houston, undocumented students were allowed to enroll, but were required to pay $1,000 annually whereas schools along the U.S.

\textsuperscript{92} The undocumented student movement is also referred to as the undocumented youth movement. I am privileging student to highlight and emphasize their position and commitment to their education.
Mexican border denied enrollment of undocumented students completely (Olivas, 2012). It was the first state law to raise one of the most debated questions today. Who can access public education on the basis of legal status? The law was questioned for its constitutionality before state and federal courts and eventually made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In a five to four decision, in *Plyer v. Doe* (1982) the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that undocumented children are entitled to a state funded K-12 education. This was a groundbreaking case in which, for the first time, the Supreme Court found that although undocumented immigrants and their children may not be U.S. citizens, they are still entitled to the Fourteenth Amendment’s protection (Olivas, 2012; Valencia, 2008). The court also held that undocumented children should not be punished for their parents’ actions. *Plyer* has helped to ensure the integration of 1.5-generation students in a time of pervasive anti-immigration and anti-Latino sentiments and policies. However, the decision did not extend to postsecondary education.

**Neoliberal Economic Policies Pushing Women and Children North**

Mexico’s close proximity to the U.S. and the implementation of neoliberal policies between both countries has increased immigration, in particular migration of women and children. For instance, when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented in 1994, the Mexican government assured its citizens that increase in trade and exports would raise salaries and standard of living. However, only those in power benefited from NAFTA, whereas the poor, including many women and children, were most negatively affected (Stephen, 2007). Thus, a common theme in Chicana feminist literature is immigration and the feminization of labor, which led to the rise of Latinas immigrating and working in the U.S. service sector (i.e. domestic workers; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Segura & Zavella, 2007;
Schmidt Camacho, 2008). During this time, many poor Mexican women were put in a difficult position of leaving their children behind in the care of extended family or bringing their children along the dangerous journey across the border to the U.S. According the Urban Institute, the nation’s immigrant population grew exponentially in the 1990s, more than in any decade in the nation’s history with Mexicans representing the largest group. According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2012), there was also a shift in migration patterns in the 1990s with more women and children immigrating to the U.S. than ever before. In the decade of the 1990s, the U.S. entered a period of economic boom and low unemployment rates, thus creating a demand for immigrant labor (Chavez, 2008). As a result, more than 13 million documented and undocumented immigrants came to the U.S. from 1990 to 2001, due to the U.S. ’s economic boom or to reunite with their families (Capps, Fix, & Passel, 2002). Many women risked their lives and that of their children in search of better wages and hopes of providing a better education for their children.

By 2001, we begin to see a decline in the number of immigrants because of tighter border enforcement and the rise of state and federal exclusionary policies specially targeting documented and undocumented Latinas/os in the U.S.

Mixed-Status Households

In the mid-1990s many of Latino children were brought to the U.S. because their parents believed in giving their children better educational opportunities. However, changes in immigration laws and the lack of available pathways to lawful permanent residency forced many immigrant families to raise their U.S. citizen and undocumented children in even more

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93 Under the 14th Amendment the children of immigrants are granted birthright citizenship, Amendment XIV, Section 1 (1968). All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of...
precarious legal situations. Currently there are roughly 12 million undocumented immigrants residing in the U.S. and at least 4.5 million U.S. citizen children live in mixed status households, where one or both parents and, in some cases, siblings are undocumented (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012). These families are confronted with difficult and stressful situations where a sibling or a parent may have access to resources and opportunities but another does not because of their undocumented status. The struggles for daily living are profound for these families. Even more stressful is the everyday fear of apprehension and deportation that these families must confront. The possibility of being separated from their loved ones is ever-present and taxing on their lives. For a mixed-status family, daily activities like going to work, paying rent, driving their children to school, or grocery shopping can stir many emotions and create anxieties that come from confronting their employers, landlords, their children’s teachers, and local law enforcement. Many mixed-status families work hard to stay invisible and often avoid situations that will call attention to their families because of the fear of being apprehended and deported. Furthermore, these families are stripped of many of their rights and are at higher risk of being exploited by their employers, discriminated against and harassed by local authorities, and taken advantage of by their landlords.

Although undocumented children are legally protected and have access to a K-12 public school education, knowing that a parent or an older sibling can be taken away from them can have detrimental effects on their education and their futures. Also many parents might not always perceive schools as safe places for their children. For instance in 1994 when California passed Proposition 187, and more recently in 2011 when Alabama’s HB 56 law went into effect, many parents pulled their children out of school or moved to a different state because both laws

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life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. To access the Bill of Rights: http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html
required schools to check students’ immigration status. Furthermore, both laws posit that undocumented immigrants are welcome into the states as temporary workers, as long as they do not bring their families or have access to public services, including schools. Immigrant parents without legal status are struggling to keep their families together and raise their documented and undocumented children in the midst of anti-Latino sentiments. Despite many of the challenges that mixed-status Latino families face, parents are optimistic about their children’s education and often that is one of the major factors why they immigrate to the U.S. and tolerate discrimination for the well-being of their families (Chavez, 2008; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Valdés, 1996). Parents want to make sure that their children get a good education and have access to a college education.

**Accessing Higher Education *Sin Papeles***

By early and mid-2000s, many of the children that immigrated with their parents in the mid-90s were beginning to graduate from high school and apply to colleges and universities. Many of these students felt they had to navigate their education without much help from their parents due to their lack of time and exposure to and experience with postsecondary education. Many of these students have also expressed a strong sense of gratitude and obligation to make up for their parents’ sacrifices by doing well in school and pursuing higher education. However, many of these students do not become aware of their undocumented status until they apply to college and are suddenly confronted with the limitations of their status. The majority end up working low-wage jobs to help their families and few make it into higher education. Even then, many are not prepared for how physically, emotionally, and financially draining it is just to get into college.
Undocumented students encounter additional challenges that prevented them from applying for state and federal financial aid, employment opportunities, and limited access to health care and social services. By this time, we witness that some institutions of higher education began to enforce their own rules to prevent or to allow undocumented students from establishing residency for tuition purposes. We have also witnessed the federal government’s failure to address the ambiguous status of college-going undocumented students. Although federal law does not prohibit undocumented students from attending college, much of the debate about undocumented students has been on whether they should be allowed to pay in-state tuition and if they should receive federal financial aid. Currently 16 states have provisions similar to California’s Assembly Bill (AB) 540\textsuperscript{94} permitting certain undocumented students to pay in-state tuition. Three states, including Arizona, Georgia, and Indiana, have passed laws that prohibit in-state tuition rates for undocumented students (National Immigration Law Center, 2013). According to the National Immigration Law Center, in order for undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition, in general they must meet the following requirements:

1. Attended a school in the state for a certain number of years;
2. Graduated from high school in the state; and
3. Signed an affidavit stating that they have either applied to legalize their status or will do so as soon as eligible.

Although in-state tuition bills are meant to relieve some of the hurdles that undocumented students encounter, only a few students have benefited from such policies because many students and counselors are not aware that such policies exist or they choose not to apply because of fear of revealing their immigration status (Gildersleeve, Rumann, & Mondragón, 2010; Perez Huber

\textsuperscript{94} In 2001, California’s governor Gray Davis signed into law AB 540. The following states have passed in-state tuition: California, Texas, Illinois, New York, Utah, Washington, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Kansas (Rincón, 2008).
& Malagon, 2007). In addition, most public colleges and universities lack clear information and training on how to serve the needs of undocumented students. Still, Latina/o high school and college students throughout the country have played a critical role in the passage of in-state tuition bills. Without in-state tuition rates, many undocumented students cannot afford higher out-of-state tuition rates. (National Immigration Law Center, 2012).\footnote{The laws vary by state, however generally each state requires that in order for undocumented students to be eligible for in-state tuition, they need to provide evidence that they reside in or attended a high school within the state for a specific number of years.}

For undocumented students, pursuing higher education is, in many ways, a political battle to claim their right to attend public postsecondary institutions and to challenge the boundaries of citizenship. Undocumented students’ activism has helped to prevent numerous policy proposals that would limit educational opportunities for undocumented students. The success of the passage of in-state tuition bills, in turn has helped to strengthen the undocumented student movement. High school students, college students, and allies across the country have worked tirelessly over the past decade to provide safe places for undocumented students to overcome social isolation and to develop politically. They have become known as DREAMers whose political activism and strong coalition of diverse supporters have created local and national student organizations and networks, such as The National Immigration Youth Alliance and Dream Activists: Undocumented Students Action & Resource Network. During this time, youth-led organizations were also heading local and national campaigns to stop deportation proceedings for undocumented youth and their families. They were also working relentlessly to help pass the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act, also known as the DREAM Act.
The DREAM Act: A Broken Promise

The DREAM Act has been circulating in Congress for over a decade and has undergone different adaptations. Representative Luis V. Gutiérrez (D-IL) introduced the first version in 2001 under the title of Immigrant Children’s Educational Advancement and Dropout Prevention Act (H.R.1582)\(^96\) to help prevent the deportation of undocumented students and lower their high school dropout rates.\(^97\) However, this bill was rejected in favor of Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Richard Durbin’s (D-IL) DREAM Act (S.1291); if passed, the legislation would provide a pathway to U.S. citizenship for undocumented students. Although the passage of the DREAM Act would have significant benefits for undocumented youth, we also need to be cognizant of its broader implications. For instance, only the most exceptional, academically successful, high-achieving, hard working, and law-abiding students will qualify. We should ask, what about their undocumented parents or siblings that are not as accomplished? Once approved, DREAM Act beneficiaries would be able to petition for entry of their parents or siblings only after fulfilling a lengthy and rigorous process, and even then it would take several years to sponsor them.

Soon after the DREAM Act was first introduced in August of 2001, the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. were attacked by a foreign group of extremists on September 11, 2001. Following the attacks of 9/11, President George Bush enacted several immigration related laws aimed at strengthening U.S. national security and its borders (Fernandes, 2007). In the post-9/11 period, there has been a drastic increase in the number of

deportations and people placed in immigration detention centers (Detention Watch Network).\footnote{Detention Watch Network (DWN) is a non-profit organization and one of the nation’s largest fiscal sponsor that work to educate the public and policy makers about U.S. immigration detention and deportation system and advocate for human reform. http://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/whoweare} There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of anti-immigration laws that were passed by state legislatures, such as Arizona’s S.B. 1070 and Alabama’s HB 56\footnote{HB 56, under the bill title, Beason-Hammon Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act, Retrieved from the 2011 Regular Session from http://www.ago.state.al.us/File-Immigration-AL-Law-2011-535} targeting both documented and undocumented Latinas/os. Since 9/11, the U.S. federal government has passed discriminatory and inhuman laws against immigrants and their children. These new laws have heightened racial profiling and the criminalization of undocumented immigrants and people of color (Chavez, 2008; Puar, 2005). As a result of these events, any legislation towards comprehensive immigration reform has been halted.

Despite the heightened racial profiling and criminalization of documented and undocumented people of color, DREAMers continue to fight for their right to a college education. They have gained the support of educational, civil rights, labor, and political organizations, including, but not limited to the following: The National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS), the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). In 2010, for the first time the DREAM Act (S.3992) passed the House of Representatives and received a bipartisan majority vote in the Senate, but did not have enough votes to pass. The most recent version of the DREAM Act (S.952) was reintroduced on the floor of the Senate on May 11, 2011, but once again, the bill failed to pass. Nevertheless, every time the DREAM Act was reintroduced it inspired political participation and activism of large numbers of both documented and undocumented students.
Social Media’s Role in the Movement

The Undocumented Student Movement has been led mostly by a diverse group of high school and college graduates. Much of the movement’s success has risen from their use of social media networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Social media has provided new possibilities for activists to connect, organize, and enact change in an inexpensive and fast capacity to disseminate information to large groups. Online communities have served as safe spaces for undocumented youth to participate in the movement as bloggers, social media activists, artists, and documentarians (i.e., posting videos of protests from their cell phones on YouTube). Thus, these spaces are more open to alternative views and opinions that are not present within more traditional media outlets. So now we are able to instantly view both sides of a developing story from different perspectives. For example, when Andrea, one of the participants, was arrested for an act of civil disobedience, several headlines appeared online, such as: “8 Illegal Immigrants Detained at Georgia Protest” (U-T San Diego Newspaper) or “7 Immigrant Youth Arrested in Atlanta for Demanding Higher Ed Access” (Colorlines News for Action). The headlines read differently, thus, portraying the event as a group of “illegals” protesting or as an act of civil disobedience by a group of American students. Media has become a powerful tool for outsiders to imagine what it would be like to live in this country without a legal status.

DREAM activists have organized highly visible and successful campaigns influencing public opinion. One of their first most notable national campaigns was the DREAM Act postcard campaign where students across the country mailed postcards and e-postcards urging state and federal government leaders to support and pass the DREAM Act. The postcards featured the artwork and stories of the DREAMers and information about the bill. The DREAM Act postcard
campaign has been ongoing every time the DREAM Act is reintroduced in Congress. In 2009, leaders from grassroots organizations and campus-based student groups, including but not limited to DREAM Activists, the National Immigrant Youth Alliance, and the Immigration Youth Justice League (IYJL) released a 60-page guide for undocumented youth in removal proceedings, under the title “Education not Deportation.” These carefully organized actions included the widely publicized 2009 campaign titled, National DREAM Graduation\(^{100}\) where over 500 DREAM activists from 17 different states gathered at the Lutheran Church of the Reformation near the Capitol and the U.S. Supreme Court to attend a mock graduation ceremony. Students dressed in their graduation caps and gowns and recognized each other’s academic accomplishments and activism. The DREAM graduation has been part of an annual event held around the country to recognize the 65,000 undocumented high school graduates that may not have the opportunity to pursue higher education or participate in a college graduation. As momentum built, organizers carefully studied the tactics of the different leaders of the Civil Rights movement, including the appropriation of the ritual of “coming out” from Gay Rights activism.

Using the power of storytelling, student activists across the nation have organized “coming out of the shadows” events where undocumented students have come out publicly about their undocumented status in front of their family, friends, neighbors, teachers, professors, and media. The idea of “coming out” as a political strategy was inspired by gay rights political leader Harvey Milk, who urged the gay community of San Francisco to fight back by publicly announcing their sexual orientation. Milk was dedicated to fighting prejudice against the gay community and all others who were excluded and discriminated against. DREAM activist

\(^{100}\) The National Dream Act ceremony was organized by DreamActivist.org, one of the largest online undocumented youth advocacy network: http://www.dreamactivist.org/nationalgraduation/
reasoned that “coming out” as undocumented would put a human face on the movement and anti-immigrant sentiments. Many of the undocumented student activists at the forefront have also come out as queer calling themselves “undocuqueer” (undocumented and queer). Undocuqueer youth undergo a double “coming out” experience and risk not only being rejected at home, but also being deported to countries that persecute the LGBTQ community. Through their stories and actions, undocuqueer youth have bridged the gaps between the immigrant and LGBTQ movements.

American DREAMers

DREAMers began to engage in a type of storytelling that revealed the adversities they faced as children, their abilities to overcome obstacles, and their optimistic beliefs in the American Dream. One of the most renowned “coming out” stories was written by Jose Antonio Vargas titled, “My life as an undocumented immigrant” published in 2011 in The New York Times Magazine. He tells his story of emigrating from the Philippines at the age of 12, his experience growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, and the challenges he faced as a successful journalist because of his undocumented status. Vargas also revealed his queer identity. He graduated from San Francisco State University with a major in political science and a minor in black studies. Vargas is a former reporter for the Washington Post and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007. A year later, after publishing his “coming out” story and publicly confessing to lying about his legal status, Vargas appeared on

the cover of *TIME Magazine* titled, “We are all Americans* Just not legally”\(^{102}\) where he wrote an article titled, “Not Legal, Not Leaving” where he addresses the question of why he had not been deported after publicly announcing his undocumented status. He also wrote about the lives struggles and achievement of 35 other undocumented immigrants from 15 different countries. On October 25, 2012, Vargas paid a visit to the University of Illinois. He gave a lecture titled, “My life as an undocumented immigrant” at the University YMCA, during which he discussed his experiences as an undocumented immigrant, his views on the role of immigration policies in the 2012 presidential election, and his work as the founder of the “Define America”\(^{103}\) campaign.\(^{104}\) The room was jammed from wall to wall with students, faculty, staff, and local community members. It was one of the most inspiring, witty, and heart-felt lectures that I have ever attended. Mr. Vargas shared the painful price he paid for trying to reach the American dream. He also showed photos of his personal legal documents, including his driver’s license from Washington State, which was annulled by the state soon after his story came out. He is no longer eligible for a U.S. government-issued identification because he falsely claimed citizenship on job applications and submitted false information in order to obtain a Washington State Driver’s license. His only form of legal identification is a passport issued by the Philippines. He spoke with passion about his work as an activist for immigration reform and discussed his documentary titled, “Is this Alabama?” where he documents the impact of Alabama’s HB 56 on the

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\(^{102}\) Vargas, J. A. (2012, June). *We are all Americans* *Just not legally*. Available at http://ideas.time.com/2012/06/14/inside-the-world-of-the-illegal-immigrant/#ixzz1xmM85PrY

\(^{103}\) The Define America campaign, includes a website to provide a space for people to share their thoughts on what it means to be American.

\(^{104}\) The event was part of the University YMCA’s fall 12 series, Beyond Rhetoric: Key Issues in the 2012 Election. It was sponsored by the University YMCA, La Colectiva, Graduate Employees Organization, Philippine Student Association, Champaign School District, Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations, Political Science, American Association of University Women, Champaign-Urbana Jewish Federation, Channing-Murray Foundation, Chapel of St. John the Divine/Episcopal Church and Foundation, First Mennonite Church, McKinley Presbyterian Church and Foundation, and Wesley Church and Foundation. The event was paid by the Student Organization Resource Fee (SORF); they are responsible for allocating monetary resources, generated by the Student Organization Resource Fees to Registered Student Organization’s in support of their programs and activities.
undocumented community. Mr. Vargas continues to travel around the country and is becoming more active in addressing immigrant rights and immigration reform.

Another remarkable story was the presence of Benita Veliz at the 2012 Democratic National Convention. She graduated from high school at the age of 16 as the valedictorian of her class and went on to receive a double-major in biology and sociology from St. Mary’s University with a full academic scholarship. Benita Veliz is the first undocumented student to address a national political convention and to “come out” about her status in front of millions of viewers. Prior to Veliz’s address, a group of undocumented and documented activists protested against immigration and deportation policies outside the Democratic Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina. Ten of the activists were arrested after blocking off traffic. The activists were part of a group of undocumented people from all over the country, including students, day laborers, domestic workers, and mothers who rode together in what they called an “undocubus” from Phoenix, Arizona to North Carolina, as part of their campaign No papers, No fear. During their tour they stopped at different public gatherings where they shared their stories of the people who are affected by anti-immigration laws. These once invisible stories have the potential of changing the ways the public looks at the struggles of undocumented people. Such stories have been a powerful vehicle of bringing people together, inspiring others to take action, and most important, creating healing and empowerment for both the storyteller and listener. The Undocumented Student Movement has gained national attention through protests, like organizing “coming out” events, conferences, and non-violent civil disobedience tactics like sit-ins to promote awareness and support for undocumented students, their families, and communities.

They have made significant progress by stopping the deportation of many undocumented students throughout the country and have put pressure on Congress and the Obama administration to provide a pathway to legal status for undocumented students and their families.

**Arizona SB 1070 and the Rise of Copycat Laws: Show Me Your Papeles**

In a span of 2 years between 2010 and 2012 several states considered passing legislation similar to Arizona’s SB 1070 targeting undocumented and documented Latinas/os across the nation. According to the National Council of La Raza, in the 2011 legislative session, at least 24 states introduced SB 1070 copycat laws. Although SB 1070 does not address higher education specifically, many Latina/o college students will be subject to police action. While Latino parents want better educational opportunities for their children, many Latino families face limited educational, economic, social, and political opportunities. It is also important to note that while many Latinas/os are native born, there is a rise of Latinas/os living in mixed-status households (Fix & Zimmerman, 2001). Mixed-status families are more likely to live in poverty, face language-barriers, and experience higher levels of stress because of the lack of legal status (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). Thus, many mixed-status families are at a greater risk of being separated. Consequently, their children live in constant fear that they or their parents will face deportation.

On April 23, 2010, Arizona’s Governor Jan Brewer signed Senate Bill titled, *Support our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act*; which made it a crime to be in Arizona without

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documentation proving your lawful status in the U.S.\textsuperscript{108} SB 1070, as well as similar immigration laws have led to increased racial profiling, discrimination, and criminalization of Latinas/os because these types of laws are difficult to enforce without relying on discriminatory stereotypes based on phenotypic characteristics (Lacayo, 2011). The Latino community in the state of Arizona overwhelmingly opposed SB 1070 and took it upon themselves and supporters to protect their communities from racial profiling by organizing rallies and educating communities about their rights. Many of these organizers are part of the Undocumented Student Movement who have been advocating for comprehensive immigration reform (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2010; Rincón, 2010). Issues of immigration are important not just for undocumented Latinas/os, but also for those who are U.S. citizens because their status is not going to protect them or their families from being discriminated against or from being a victim of a hate crime.

More than 30 years after \textit{Plyer v. Doe} (1982), several states have subsequently proposed legislation and passed laws that violate the U.S. Supreme Court ruling. Once again we see an increase in legislation that tries to punish and increase the surveillance of children of immigrants and undocumented students. According to the National Immigration Law Center, in 2011, legislators in at least nine states introduced measures targeting Latino children in K-12 public schools. In 2012, the Alabama state legislature passed HB 56, which would require schools to check and report the immigration status of their students and would deny undocumented students access to postsecondary education (Santa Ana & González de Bustamente, 2012). As a response to the increase in these laws, the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of

\textsuperscript{108} The battle continued in Arizona and on June 25, 2012 the U.S. Supreme Court settled SB 1070, by invalidating four of the clauses as unconstitutional, however one was not. That clause which was unanimously held by the U.S. Supreme Court, now gives law enforcement officials the power to ask for your \textit{papeles} (legal documents) to anyone whom they believe to be undocumented.
Education issued a “Dear colleague letter” to remind and inform schools of the Federal obligation to “provide all children with equal access to public education at the elementary and secondary level” regardless of their citizenship or immigration status. The letter concludes by restating the significance in the landmark decision of *Plyer v. Doe*.

As Plyer makes clear, the undocumented or non-citizen status of a student (or his or her parent or guardian) is irrelevant to that student’s entitlement to an elementary and secondary public education. To comply with these Federal civil rights laws, as well as the mandates of the Supreme Court, you must ensure that you do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin.\(^{109}\)

The increasing numbers of anti-immigration and anti-Latino laws, including the ones mentioned in this chapter, have heightened the levels of discrimination against Latinas/os within public institutions, including schools. As a result, these attacks are having devastating effects on undocumented Latina/o students by denying them their educational dreams and a pathway to U.S. citizenship.

**Temporary Relief for DREAMers: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**

On June 15, 2012, Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano and President Obama announced a new policy titled *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals* (DACA)\(^{110}\) as a temporary solution until DREAM Act is passed. Secretary Napolitano’s memorandum formalized a deferred action policy for undocumented youth, many of who would have benefited from the DREAM Act. DACA provides temporary protection for undocumented youth who were brought to the U.S. as children (before the age of 16), and who were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012. DACA applicants must meet very specific eligibility criteria, including an

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\(^{110}\) http://www.dhs.gov/news/2012/06/15/secretary-napolitano-announces-deferred-action-process-young-people-who-are-low. Students who qualify under this program will need to pay a $465 application fee and demonstrate their eligibility by submitting numerous official state records (i.e. school transcripts).
education requirement and/or a military service. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that 1.7 million undocumented immigrants could potentially become eligible for deferred action status. Since the inception of DACA, more than 500,000 undocumented youth have applied for deferred action status (U.S. Department of Homeland Security). However, thousands of undocumented adults like Jose Antonio Vargas did not qualify for DACA, because he had just turned 31 years old when the program was announced. DACA provides temporary protection for a segment of the undocumented population to remain in the U.S. without the fear of deportation, allows them to apply for work permits and a social security number. For undocumented college students, DACA provides the opportunities to apply to scholarships or internships that require a social security number. However, they cannot apply for federal financial aid, loans, or work-study because their status is temporary. The reality of obtaining deferred action status for many applicants remains uncertain leaving the recipients anxious of what will happen to them after 2 years.

President Obama’s address upon the announcement of the deferred action plan reflected his decision to address the needs of only undocumented youth. This sends a strong message that the country will only accept immigrants who are young, healthy, educated, and law-abiding. In his speech he presents several compelling reasons for “Americans” to support his plan:

It’s the right thing to do for the American people, and here’s why . . . because young people are going to make extraordinary contributions and are already making contributions to our society. I’ve got a young person who is serving in our military, protecting us and our freedom. . . . If there’s a young person here who has grown up here and wants to contribute to this society, wants to create jobs for other folks who are looking for work, that’s the right thing to do.111

President Obama frames his arguments to influence conservative Americans to support immigration reform for educated Latinas/os. Indeed, Latina/o students should be compensated

for their academic achievements and should have the right to utilize their college degrees and enter the formal labor market. However, one of the greatest drawbacks of DACA is that it does not provide permanent legal status or a path towards citizenship, thus leaving its recipients with an ambiguous legal status. Instead it provides temporary relief only for the educated and law-abiding immigrants under the age of 31.\textsuperscript{112} Parents and siblings of these youth are left behind without any protection or hope of staying together legally as a family. While DACA only partially protects a segment of the undocumented youth and thus it counters the mission of the undocumented student movement who are not only fighting for themselves or for only the “best” of the group.

Undocumented student activists across the country expressed mixed feelings about Obama’s new immigration policy because it was not the DREAM Act, which would have paved a pathway towards citizenship. Many reacted positively to the news, perceiving it as a small step towards immigration reform, while others saw it as political tactic from President Obama to gain the Latino vote. President Obama already had majority support from the Latino community, and the announcement of DACA, helped to improve Obama’s approval rating among Latina/o voters, which led to his reelection. Furthermore, the announcement came during a time when DREAM activists and immigrant rights leaders felt that Obama was not doing enough to push for immigration reform. Immigration activists were frustrated by the Congress’s inability to pass the DREAM Act, the lack of progress towards comprehensive immigration reform, and the historically high numbers of deportations since President Obama’s election. Nearly two million undocumented immigrants have been deported under the Obama presidency (Pew Hispanic

\textsuperscript{112} According to Secretary Janet Napolitano of the United States Department of Homeland security, only youth who “have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety” are eligible for deferred action (U.S. Department of Homeland Security).
Center, 2013). Although President Obama has publicly announced his support for immigration reform, he has chosen to only provide temporary protection to young adults while deporting over two million immigrants. Latino families continue to live in ambiguity about their futures and in fear of being deported and separated from their loved ones.

**Andrea’s Story: Learning to Navigate Life Sin Papeles**

Andrea was born in Mexico and was brought to the U.S. when she was 5 years old. She is the daughter of Guatemalan and Mexican parents and has an older brother. She identifies as Latina. Her father emigrated first, and a year later, Andrea, her mother, and older brother emigrated to the U.S.

They came through the Arizona border and took a flight to Chicago where they united with her father’s side of the family. When they first arrived in Chicago, she remembers living in a one-bedroom apartment with 12 other relatives whom she had never met before. At first she found it difficult to adjust to her new family because they were all Guatemalan and she identified more with her Mexican side of the family. A year later, her family moved into a relative’s basement apartment. Andrea recalls growing up close to her family. She explained:

> Usually every night we would have dinner together and we would wait till everyone would get home if it wasn’t too late and so every night before dinner we would pray and stuff like that or just say a few things that we were thankful for. And we would always have to tie it back to the sacrifices that our parents made.

Before coming to the U.S. her mother and father had worked at a hospital in Mexico. After high school, her mother was expected to stay at home and help with the household chores, but instead she would sneak out at night to attend classes to become a nurse. Her father completed his associate’s degree in accounting and worked as an accountant at the same hospital where he met Andrea’s mother. Now they both struggle to find stable employment in the U.S. Her father has
been unemployed, but has worked in the past at a factory making car parts, placing adhesives on envelopes, and more recently as a day laborer. Her mother cleans homes and she also works as a caregiver for an elderly woman.

Andrea grew up on the North side of Chicago in a racially segregated neighborhood comprised of poor and working class Latinas/os and recently arrived immigrants. After school she went to a day-care center from kindergarten through eighth grade. At the day-care, she interacted with children from different racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds. It was there that her Latina/o friends who did not speak Spanish taught her English and she taught them Spanish. In high school she would take an hour and a half bus ride to get to school.

During her junior year in high school, Andrea recalled experiencing a difficult and jolting shift in her life. Coming of age, Andrea was not aware about her undocumented status until she attempted to apply for her driver’s license and internship. She recounted her experience applying to an internship at the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago:

I was accepted, but then they told me that I needed a social security number and so the next day I went with my mom. But it turns out that I didn’t really have a social security number. She [her mother] just took the letter with the ITIN¹¹³ number, so when we got there we showed it to her. I didn’t really know what was going on. . . . I didn’t know what I was handing her or what she needed from me. So that was how I became aware of my status and the lady just told me, “you can’t be showing this to anybody as if you were presenting a real social security number. You need to be aware that you can’t do this.” I didn’t really know before that incident. My parents would always just tell me that I had to wait and I had to wait.

This incident proved to be life-changing for Andrea as realized that she was being excluded from society. She realized that she could not apply for a part-time job or a driver’s license, or receive federal financial aid to pay for college. She struggled to make sense of what had happened, stirring reactions of confusion, frustration, and anger towards her parents because she felt as

¹¹³ Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). The IRS issues ITINs to individuals who are required to have a U.S. taxpayer identification number but who do not have, and are not eligible to obtain a Social Security Number. The ITIN is used to help individuals comply with U.S. tax laws.
though they had lied to her. For the past 12 years, her parents have continued to wait for their father’s petition to be reviewed by the immigration services; if his case is approved, the family could be sponsored through her father and gain lawful permanent residence. It was not until she was denied employment because of the lack of a Social Security number that the implications of her undocumented status became real to Andrea for the first time. She remembered that it started one of the most painful and lonely years of her life. She explained:

Coming back from the Shedd Aquarium when I went with my mom to present that paper, it was just a really weird experience. We didn’t talk to each other on the way back home and for a few days after that we wouldn’t talk to each other at all. I would come home from school and I would just lock myself in my room and just go online and do more research. I wouldn’t really talk to anybody . . . or my aunts or my cousins. Anybody. So it was definitely really lonely. There were times when I contemplated even harming myself, but it never got to that point where I was seriously thinking about committing suicide or anything like that. But it was really lonely. I would say it was one of the worst years of my life.

As she came to grips with her reality and the meaning of her undocumented status, she began to search on the internet for other youth who were experiencing similar issues. She found many of her answers by joining a virtual community of undocumented youth and advocates. Andrea became highly engaged online, joining the other undocumented students and allies in cyberspace. Andrea explained how she found comfort and hope by joining the online community:

The only way that I knew I wasn’t that alone was through the stories online and by me sharing my story online. People would write to me and tell me their stories, tell me their issues and then I would post their stories online and post whatever they shared with me. And so in that sense I felt like I had an increasing sense of responsibility not only to myself, and to my family but also to so many undocumented students that were just running into roadblocks and not knowing what to do and things like that.

She found comfort in sharing her story online and reading about other youth like herself. For 2 years, Andrea was a blogger for one of the most prominent websites in the undocumented movement.
When it came time to apply to college, Andrea—like many undocumented students—felt fearful of revealing her legal status. At the same time, many such students are willing to take that risk of sharing their status with school officials and gatekeepers in order to gain access to different information, resources, and opportunities. Andrea’s high school counselor played a supportive role in guiding her through the college application process. The counselor helped her by informing her about in-state tuition and connecting her to staff at the university who are knowledgeable about the needs and concerns of undocumented students and their families.

Andrea described her experience of applying to college:

I still had difficulty filling out the application, not really knowing what to put on or what not to put on my application. My senior year, after hearing back from here [UIUC] they sent me a letter saying that they needed my international student visa. And so my counselor put me in touch with somebody who worked here in the Office of Minority Student Affairs (OMSA) who was able to help me change my application to say that I’m a resident of Illinois but I just didn’t have a Social Security number. So that person actually got back to me and several other students who had gotten the same letter.

Her high school counselor’s relationship with OMSA counselors was vital to her college admission and ability to pay for her college education. Andrea and several other undocumented students were contacted by OMSA counselors inviting them to be part of a panel for school counselors working with undocumented high school and college students. The students shared their experiences of navigating the college application process. After sharing their stories, one of the high school students on the panel was offered a full scholarship to Dominican University. Thus, with the academic advice from her high school counselor, support from the online undocumented youth community, and her relentless determination, Andrea was able to fulfill her dream of attending college. Although she and other undocumented students have had to overcome multiple obstacles to enter college, once enrolled they continue to face tougher
obstacles, like being charged the full out-of-state tuition or feeling isolated on campus as a result of anti-immigrant sentiments.

**College Student Organizations: La Colectiva**

While many students have difficulty making the transition from high school to college, research shows that Latina/o students like Andrea who are first-generation, low-income, and undocumented at historically white universities have a much more difficult time adjusting academically and socially to college (Perez Huber & Malagon, 2007; Rincón, 2010). By the time Andrea started college, her brother was also a student, yet she struggled to adjust. She explained, “I felt kind of lonely at times and weird . . . I felt like I didn’t belong here at times, but other times I just knew that I had to do what I had to do to keep going.” It was not until she joined *La Colectiva*, a student organization at UIUC focused on the challenges faced by the immigrant community, that she developed a greater sense of belonging. She explains. “I started feeling more, like I was part of this community, I was part of this school . . . I started feeling less anxious and more like I really did belong here.” Joining *La Colectiva* had a positive impact on Andrea’s social and political involvement. She explained, “It really helped me grow as a person, I became more outspoken because of the things I had to say at the beginning because of how my life was unfolding.” *La Colectiva* provided a safe and supportive space for Andrea to talk about her experiences as an undocumented student. As a member of *La Colectiva*, Andrea gained valuable leadership skills that helped her collaborate with different student organizations and community members to increase awareness of the challenges faced by undocumented students and about the resources that are available to them.
Community Youth Organizations: Immigration Youth Justice League (IYJL)

Andrea’s activism and involvement with student organizations expanded into her home community on Chicago’s South Side. In 2009, Andrea received news from her friends back home about Rigo Padilla, an undocumented student at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), who was facing deportation proceedings after a drinking-and-driving misdemeanor. Rigo’s story inspired students and youth in the Chicago area to organize a grassroots campaign to stop his deportation.\footnote{Under the Obama administration, Rigo’s deportation was deferred for one year.} While organizing the campaign for Rigo, students and youth recognized the need for an organization led by undocumented youth, and the Immigration Youth Justice League (IYJL) was created in October 2009.\footnote{IYJL were the first ones to support Rigo’s case because other groups were not willing to step up because he had been charged with a DUI.} Having played a critical role in forming the organization, Andrea explained the process of how IYJL came together:

> We gave it a name, we made a mission, we made points of unity and we drafted the steps that we needed to take to stop his [Rigo] deportation. So just being in that room was very, very powerful! It was just amazing what was happening in that room because it was something we wanted.

The organization needed a leader and students looked to Tania Unzueta to lead. Andrea explained:

> She [Tania] was the leader. Before the Dream Act happened, there was this Care Act, that was similar to the Dream Act and she was actually the poster child for the Care Act from Chicago. She had more experience with organizing. She had done this work already and she had a lot of connections. Her parents are long time activists in Chicago who own their own organizations and who started their own organizations who are also undocumented, who have really big successful organizations and are involved in unions.

Tania is one of the co-founders of IYJL, and she graduated from UIC with a bachelor’s degree in Sociology (minor in Gender and Women’s Studies) and a Master’s degree in Latino Studies. She has been key in bringing together immigration and LGBTQ rights. The first IYJL meetings were held at Radio Arte, a Latino-owned youth-driven public radio station located in the Pilsen
community. There are currently over 75 members, 25 of whom are more active. It is important to note that IYJL members come from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds. They meet weekly in different locations in order to make meeting more accessible to its members that live in the different neighborhoods in Chicago. Andrea has been a crucial member of IYJL by organizing and bringing immigration issues to UIUC.

IYJL members have organized several events to advocate for their rights and to raise awareness about the challenges that undocumented students and their families face. They organized the first “National Coming Out of the Shadows Day” where undocumented youth participate by “coming out” and disclosing their undocumented status and, for some, their queer identity. This event was inspired and conceptualized by the Immigration Rights Marches of 2006\textsuperscript{116} and the Gay Liberation Movement. Many of the first student activists were also part of the LGBTQ community and as members of both communities they pushed for the creation of safe spaces for youth to talk about the intersectionality of their undocumented status, class, race, and sexuality. Andrea explained how the concept of “coming out” came about.

I remember the concept of “coming out” came out from the meeting because a lot of the students who were involved in the meetings are queer so they identified with that aspect of “coming out” to their families as queer. So that’s where the idea of coming out as undocumented happened because it’s not something we talk about publicly.

Many of these students’ identities are intricately tied to the metaphor of living in the closet about their immigration status and sexuality. Undocumented queer activists have succeeded in bridging these two movements together. Later the notion of coming out as “undocuqueer” (undocumented and queer) was developed to emphasize the participation and rights of undocumented queer youth. Since the first “National Coming Out Day,” undocumented youth across the country have organized their own “coming out day” as a strategy to raise awareness by disclosing their

\textsuperscript{116} Millions of immigrants and supporters across the U.S. participated in protests across the U.S. in response to H.R. 4437.
undocumented status. Many of these students risked deportation for themselves and their families by publicly reading or posting their stories online and coming out as undocumented. The leaders and members of IYJL have taken greater risks by organizing and participating in sit-ins and acts of civil disobedience to pressure politicians to pass the DREAM Act and to stop the deportations of undocumented students. IYJL is just one of the many youth-led immigration rights organizations across the country that have created safe spaces for students to find their voice and to feel empowered to create change for their families and communities.

**Storytelling: Andrea Reads Rigo’s Story**

Andrea traveled back home to Chicago on the weekends to help organize a campaign to stop Rigo Padilla’s deportation. She was able to connect her community activism work in Chicago on campus by informing its members of La Colectiva about Rigo’s campaign. In 2009, members of La Colectiva decided to organize its first major rally on campus to raise awareness about the DREAM Act and to create dialogue on campus about immigrant rights. That day, Andrea read the story of Rigo, the 21-year-old undocumented UIC student who had been placed in deportation proceedings for a drinking-and-driving misdemeanor. Rigo’s story is the story of thousands of undocumented youth who are criminalized and face deportation over misdemeanor offenses. Andrea recounted the day she read Rigo’s story in front of 200 students, faculty, staff, and community members:

I read Rigo’s story and statement on the quad and it was really successful. Although a lot of people after that thought that I was the one that had been put into deportation because I was reading his statement in first person. So they thought it was me. But after that we brought attention to the issue here on campus in a way that was more public and in a way that was different from what had been done since the marches in 2006. This was already in 2009 and nothing was really happening so yeah it helped to bring the issue back here on campus once again.
The rally at the quad motivated different student organizations, faculty, staff, and community members to mobilize around immigration reform and access to higher education. Students like Andrea have dedicated their time to the undocumented student movement by organizing different events to educate the community about the experiences and needs of undocumented students. As a result of Andrea’s and La Colectiva’s effort, the voices and issues of undocumented students became more visible on campus, although at times the dialogue was innately xenophobic and racist against undocumented students.

Her participation and involvement back home and on campus not only strengthened her leadership skills, and she also developed a greater awareness about the issues immigrants face in her community. Although UIUC is about a 3-hour drive from her home, Andrea would take the bus or train to go back home. As the undocumented student movement grew and the Senate failed to pass the DREAM Act, Andrea realized that there was a great deal of misinformation about the requirements for the process of applying to college for undocumented students. For example, many undocumented students in Illinois are not aware of in-state tuition. Students like Andrea have been critical in dispensing information to various sectors of the community about accessing resources to help these students access higher education.

**National Coming Out of the Shadows Day: Andrea’s Coming Out Story**

The first ever “National Coming Out of the Shadows” event was organized by the Immigration Youth Justice League (IYJL) on March 10, 2010 in Chicago. Although Andrea was not able to attend the event, she shared with her colleagues in La Colectiva the idea of potentially organizing their own “coming out” event to raise awareness on campus. La Colectiva decides to host their own “coming out” event on campus by having undocumented students read their
stories. However, many students were afraid of the consequences of publicly reading their story on campus. At the time, Andrea felt she was ready and took on the responsibility of reading her own story to the Urbana-Champaign community. On February 23, 2010 La Colectiva organized a community forum titled, “We are all Americans: Why we need comprehensive immigration reform” which was part of the “Know your university” talk series where its members discussed the impact of current immigration policies on higher education, including the DREAM Act. The forum took place at the YMCA at UIUC. Andrea recalled feeling a mixed of emotions from sharing her “coming out” story to her professors, peers, friends, and community members about her legal status. She explained:

I remember feeling really exhausted at the end of the day because that was the first time I shared my story publicly to people that I really didn’t know that well. I remember feeling exhausted because I was really nervous to share my story publicly. I actually read my story twice on the same day, at a noon event at the YMCA and in the evening at the Channing-Murray\textsuperscript{117}. And so to have to share my story twice was just really emotionally exhausting. I would cry there while I was talking so it was just really draining. I just felt exhausted by the end of the day, but it was definitely really rewarding because I think that it was the first time that people from the community came out, these people who seem disconnected from the issues. I remember how they would come up to me and tell me like, “let me know what in any way how I can help” and so it definitely felt like it brought two different people together for this one cause. Even though it was not a big event or anything, I definitely felt the support, and I definitely felt the backup. And a lot of the members of La Colectiva were really helpful too. Trey tried to do whatever they could to ensure that I was safe.

Andrea shared her story about emigrating to the U.S. with her family and growing up considering herself a part of this country only to find out that she was being excluded because of her legal status. She shared what it was like to find out and understand what it meant to be undocumented. Andrea opened up about the emotional and financial challenges she experienced as an undocumented college student. She shared stories about seeing family members, friends,

\textsuperscript{117} The Channing-Murray Foundation is a Unitarian Church, located on UIUC campus, available at http://www.channingmurray.org/
and neighbors being taken away by ICE\textsuperscript{118} agents. Her story is one of perseverance, hope, and struggle against inhuman practices.

**Seven Latina/o Student Activists Arrested in an Act of Civil Disobedience**

On April 5, 2011, seven student activists\textsuperscript{119} joined forces in an act of nonviolent civil disobedience, declaring themselves “undocumented, unapologetic and unafraid.” The protest began at Hurt Park\textsuperscript{120} in Atlanta, Georgia, where students shared their stories about the challenges they faced in their everyday lives and the obstacles they faced in pursuing a college education. After their stories, Reverend Timothy McDonald, III member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and civil rights activist, addressed the students. State Senator Vincent Fort also spoke in support of the students. Following these addresses the student activists and protesters marched together to deliver a letter to the Georgia State University President asking him not to comply with the Georgia Board of Regent banning of undocumented students from attending the top five public universities. Over 100 college students, civil rights activists, and community members joined them by marching around Georgia State University campus and chanting “refuse the ban” and “education not deportation.” Their protest continued with the seven student activists blocking a downtown street by sitting together around a white banner with red wording, “We will no longer remain in the shadows” followed by “Will you take a stand?” Images of the protest rapidly appeared on the internet, showing the activists sitting

\textsuperscript{118} In 2002, under the Homeland Security Act (HSA) the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was established. In 2003 the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) was dismantled and its duties were transferred to DHS. The following three bureaus are now administered by DHS: Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), available at http://www.dhs.gov/history

\textsuperscript{119} The seven student activists had traveled from different states including Illinois, North Carolina, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.

\textsuperscript{120} Hurt Park is a small park located in downtown Atlanta.
together at an Atlanta intersection wearing graduation caps and yellow, blue, and grey t-shirts with the wording, “The DREAM is coming.”

The student activists had spent several months planning and developing material for the protest, including a statement of protest explaining their reasons for protesting and demands. They stated:

The purpose of this action is to give an opportunity to those who stand against us to see what we stand for, to see that we are undocumented and unafraid and will no longer tolerate your infringing on our rights. . . . As undocumented youth we realize the sacrifice our families made when they came to this country, we are now taking a stand to show that we are ready to make a sacrifice for our families and fight for our rights. . . . We are asking that legislators realize that we are the face that goes along with their anti-immigrant legislation. They try to scare us and think that because we are undocumented we will not speak out. We are here to show them that we can and will fight back.

Their actions made headline news across the country when the seven student activists were arrested for blocking off traffic. They were taken away in plastic handcuffs and sent immediately to the Atlanta City Detention Center. Their story received coverage from local and national newscasts, including Cable News Network (CNN)121, and daily newspapers (i.e. Los Angeles Times)122. Thousands of students across the country united in cyberspace by creating alliances and circulating their message. This was only one example of the countless protests, marches, and sit-ins organized by youth across the country. It also serves as a reminder of how much people value education and how much they are willing to sacrifice for it.

La Colectiva Calls an Emergency Meeting

On the same day, around five in the afternoon, I received an email from La Colectiva calling for an emergency meeting after receiving news that one of its members, Andrea, and six

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other students had been arrested. At the time of her arrest, Andrea was only 22 years old and one-month away from graduating. Members of La Colectiva hosted the meeting at La Casa Cultural Latina. I remember how every chair in the room was taken up by a range of racially and ethnically diverse undergraduate and graduate students. By the time we met, Andrea and the other students were sitting in their cell waiting to hear back from ICE. We were informed that the students were safe and the purpose of the meeting was to discuss different fundraisers for Andrea’s bail. We also discussed ways of how we could individually help, which included donating money for Andrea’s bail which was set at $1,800, forwarding Andrea’s message to friends and family, and signing an online petition against Georgia’s ban on undocumented students. Below I include one of the flyers that was circulated through different social media networks (i.e. Facebook) and emails.

Figure 2. Free Andrea poster.

Everyone at the meeting was excited to help, but we all had a lot questions. Members of La Colectiva tried to calm us down, while one of the members worked frantically on a laptop. After what felt like hours of waiting, they opened a file: it was a video of Andrea, which she had

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123 A ChipIn account had been open to collect the money for her bail. The app allows anyone to collect money for a personal cause, group purchase, or fundraiser using their own custom ChipIn page.
recorded the night before the protest. In the video she shared her frustrations with immigration laws, her privilege of being able to attend UIUC, and realizing that many undocumented students in the state of Georgia had been banned from attending the top five public universities. Her video was posted on different websites (i.e. IYJL and YouTube) and circulated around different listserves and social media sites. After watching the video, we brainstormed different ideas for fundraising. Although we did not know how long Andrea would be detained, we predicted that it may be up to 3 weeks, which would give us time to raise the funds for her bail. As a group we decided on a date for the fundraiser, potential locations, and speakers for the event. The meeting was adjourned with a unity clap.

Andrea’s Side of the Story

May 2011, I conducted a follow-up interview with Andrea to talk about her activism and participation in the protest in April. When I asked Andrea about raising the stakes of her activism; she talked about how she was feeling frustrated by the lack of progress on DREAM Act legislation, becoming tired of watching her family members being deported, and growing angry at watching her friends in the movement being harassed and threatened. In 2010, Andrea’s friend Mohammad, immigrant rights activism, whose family is from Iran, was arrested by ICE agents. Mohammad has been involved in the undocumented student movement and is one of the co-founders of one of the largest student-based organizations supporting the movement. Weeks after Mohammad had participated in a protest in Arizona, ICE agents showed up at his home in the middle of the night, arresting him and his family. Members of the undocumented student movement were outraged, but there was nothing they could do because under the U.S. Patriot Act, the government has the power to search private property without any notice to the owner.
Under this law, the government is no longer required to provide evidence, much less show stipulations for probable cause.¹²⁴ These are the stories of which many of us are not aware, yet they are important to show instances of state surveillance and censorship occur in the everyday lives of undocumented students who are critical of the state.

Andrea continued to be involved in the movement, but she also began to experience physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. She recounted how she felt:

There was just a lot of pent up anger and just all these different emotions and frustrations. I was severely restless. I couldn’t sleep very much and I would stay up till 6 a.m. and maybe sleep two hours and then go to class. I felt this my entire first semester of my senior year. I just couldn’t function. I would break down and cry like random moments. Sometimes I would skip class because I couldn’t stop crying uncontrollably. I didn’t really know how to deal with it.

Andrea’s only outlet for her feelings and emotions was journaling. She found comfort in writing about feeling trapped and restricted by her undocumented status. On January of 2011, Mohammad contacted Andrea to see if she was willing to take action. When she received that call, she remembers feeling revived and inspired. She explained:

Without any explanation as to where or who was participating or what we were going to do. I was just like, yes, I’ll do it! So I did and I think that from that time in January to that day of the action, again I was keeping in mind everything that had happened. Everything that I had gone through, everything that my friends had gone through, and everything that we had experienced. Like how much stronger we were not only here in Chicago or in Illinois, but nationally. I knew what I was going into and I knew that it was something that I had to do. So that’s why I decided to do the action.

¹²⁴ U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights, Amendment IV (1791): The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effect, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized, available at http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html
A year earlier, Andrea had prepared to participate in a sit-in in U.S. Senator Harry Reid’s office in Washington, D.C. However, after confiding to her mother about the possibility of being arrested and deported, she decided to participate behind the lines of protest. She explained:

She [mother] tried to convince me against it and I felt a heavy weight on my conscience. I just felt like, what if something happens to my mom? What if they go after her and I am not there to do anything about it. So I stepped out at the very last minute. But then I was standing there watching my friends be arrested.

Andrea decided not to participate in the sit-in in Senator Reid’s office because her mother worried about her safety and she was afraid of the consequences to the family. When Andrea was asked by her friend Mohammad to participate in the Atlanta protest, she decided not to tell her mother. This time, Andrea was more careful about who she was going to tell that she was participating. Days before departing to Atlanta, Andrea told one of her cousins, few of her close friends, and one of her professors in the Department of Latina/Latino Studies at UIUC about her participation in the protest. Her LLS professor asked for a copy of the action plan to review it and offered her support. Andrea decided to tell only a few close people because she did not want anyone to change her mind. On the day of the protest, her cousin showed the video to her family and members of the La Colectiva screened it at La Casa.

Andrea poignantly continued to share how the events of the protest unraveled. After sitting for more than an hour at a busy intersection in Atlanta, Georgia, Andrea and her comrades were arrested and taken away in plastic handcuffs to the Atlanta City Detention Center. When I asked Andrea, to talk about her experience of the day of the protests and to share her feelings and/or thoughts about what was going through her mind. She explained:

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125 U.S. Senator Harry Reid is a co-sponsor and strong supporter of the DREAM Act.
126 Although the Department of Homeland Security owns and operates its own detention centers, they also purchase beds spaces from jails and prisons nationwide. The Atlanta City Detention Center website make reference to the students protests, however there are several errors, for example they state that there were two students, when in fact there were seven students.
I was really surprised by the fact that I remained composed throughout the entire time. I was the one who was comforting them as opposed to the other way around. I wasn’t worried thinking about how my mother reacted. I wasn’t worried about anything. I knew that everything was going to be fine in the end.

By the time they arrived at the Atlanta City Detention Center, the protest was being aired on the local news channel. Many of the detention center employees welcomed them with a loud cheer and others made comments about how their actions brought back memories about the Civil Rights Movement. Meanwhile, many of her fellow protestors broke down emotionally and became extremely anxious as they waited for the ICE agents to arrive. They were each placed in a small cell and were given a cold sandwich for dinner. In the 24 hours that they waited in their cells, they got to hear the stories of the other detainees. Andrea described how she felt hearing the stories of the other detainees:

I cannot get any of the people we met there out of my head. I still remember each of their faces and each of their stories. I still remember the undocumented mother because she was the only woman there with all these males. She was arrested for driving without a driver’s license and was being processed for deportation. Her children were back home and they were only 14 and 8. They were young kids that she was forced to leave behind. I think that was the hardest moment. But I think it was also one of the most rewarding moments, just hearing her stories.

Andrea and her fellow protestors also shared their story with the other detainees, many of whom expressed that the stories reminded them of their own children. They also conveyed their respect for the protestor’s courage and resiliency. The student activists, men, and women at the center created a space where they shared stories and listen with their hearts. Andrea recalled how hearing each other’s stories created an atmosphere of humility and compassion, as they each shared the challenges and uncertainties of living in the U.S. without any rights. She was also reminded of the fact that they made a choice to risk deportation by participating in the protest, but the other detainees did not have that privilege.
Telling Your Story: “The More Public You Are the More Safe You Are”

Andrea and her fellow protestors were certain they would be placed under deportation proceedings, but they were quite surprised by the authorities’ response. Within 2 hours after their arrest, the group was interrogated by two ICE agents. Andrea explained:

The minute he looked at us and saw that we were young and saw that some of us were students, he said, “No, I’m not going to deport you guys. I’m not going to process you guys. You guys are just here to protest and I get that.” That was his response. And I think it just shows the hypocrisy and these contradictions and how there’s this system that is so difficult to change because of all its contradiction and all this hypocrisy that is happening within the system. I think it definitely also had to do with the fact that our action was very public and we got a lot of attention.

Andrea recalled how polite and understanding the ICE agents were to them. Informed that the students were undocumented, the ICE agents proceeded by instructing the students to fill out different forms which included their personal information. The students refused to sign the documents and asked to call their lawyers. The agents decided not to place the students into deportation proceedings: instead, they were charged with obstruction of traffic and unlawful assembly. The judge ordered them to complete 10 hours of community service.

The next morning, they were released from the center, which was definitely not what they had expected. They had prepared to face deportation and to fight their deportation in court, including consulting an immigration lawyer and writing their story, drafting different petitions, and securing media coverage. Andrea discussed the contradictory impact of publicly disclosing her undocumented status. She explained, “We realized that the more public you are about your case, the more safe you are because more people will know about you and the more

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127 A deportation proceeding is also known as “removal proceeding.” A removal proceeding is a hearing presented before an Immigration Judge to determine whether the person detained should be deported from the U.S.
128 According to the City Atlanta, obstruction of traffic is defined as unlawful assembly.
129 Key points made in their story: their name, age, city and state of residence, their educational experiences, if they are in college they discussed the limitations imposed on their education because of their status, their involvement in their community, how they found out that they were undocumented, and their plans for their future.
inclined they are going to feel to step in and to do something about it.” Andrea and thousands of undocumented students are growing increasingly frustrated with the lack of immigration reform and have taken up new tactics, including nonviolent acts of civil disobedience. Thus, one important factor contributing to justify Andrea’s and the students act of civil disobedience was they were not only willing to go to jail, but they were also willing to accept the fact the ICE agents would immediately place them under deportation proceedings. Andrea and thousands of undocumented students have defied their invisibility and silence by making themselves visible and heard by disclosing their undocumented status. After “coming out,” many have expressed feeling empowered and protected. They have stood up against fear by declaring themselves to be “undocumented and unafraid” in the pursuit of accessing higher education.

*Whose Side Are You On: A Fundraiser Event*

On April 13, 2012, *La Colectiva* hosted a fundraiser event titled, “Whose side are you on?” to raise funds and awareness about the struggles that undocumented students face on campus. Initially the event had been organized to raise funds for Andrea’s bail, but she no longer needed the funds because she was released without having to post bail. Instead the fundraiser collected funds for *La Colectiva’s We Dream, We Act Scholarship*, due to the limited number of scholarships available to undocumented students at UIUC. Below I include the flyer of the event (circulated through different social media networks).
Several students and community members spoke at the event, including Professor Lisa Cacho from the Department of Latina/Latino Studies. Dr. Cacho spoke about Andrea’s commitment to her activism and her work as an academic. Dr. Cacho stated, “After all, the right to an education is not only about the right to be educated, but it’s also about your right to produce knowledge.” She continued by discussing Andrea’s senior thesis that examines the arbitrariness of immigration law and the need to “adopt an impossible politics. We need to demand the impossible” as quoted in Andrea’s senior thesis. The event ended with Andrea sharing her story about her decisions to participate in the Atlanta protest, the organization behind the protest, and her experience of being arrested and detained. Andrea concluded her speech by encouraging the attendees to take action by supporting the undocumented student movement. We were all there to witness the risks that undocumented students like Andrea are willing to take for their education. Dr. Cacho also reminded everyone in the audience about the importance of allies to “speak with undocumented students and never for them.” The event ended with a silent auction of art, jewelry, and clothing to raise funds for the scholarship.
Andrea perceived the university community as a safe space where she could speak about her experiences while also educating the public on the issue faced by undocumented students and their families. At the same time, she realized that her radical actions were not being supported at home. Many of her family members, including her only brother, refused to speak to her because they felt that she was putting the family in danger. Such family tensions add to the complexities and inconsistencies that Latina/o students experience as they move across different spaces. A college education exposes Latina/o students to a variety of frameworks that help them reflect on their personal, academic, and political journeys. What becomes critical is the complex negotiations Latina/o students encounter between home and school knowledge. It is a process when students begin to see choices, concepts, ideas, and truths unfold. Students begin to ask questions such as: Who am I? What is happening to me? Am I my family’s vision of myself? As they see their realities changing they become aware of the choices to change their realities.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter is dedicated to the 65,000\textsuperscript{130} undocumented students who graduate from high school each year and to their families for supporting and encouraging these students to pursue their educational dreams, something not easily attained. I also want to dedicate it to the thousands of undocumented youth activists who have fought to claim a space in higher education and mobilized to pass the DREAM Act. Many have chosen to do so, while others have been forced to live their day-to-day lives \textit{sin papeles}.\textsuperscript{131} Others have continued to take risks by applying for deferred action status, even though it only provides temporary protection. The internet is filled with stories of undocumented youth who are excelling academically, attending

\textsuperscript{130} Statistic obtained from the Pew Hispanic Center.

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Sin papeles}, is a Spanish expression used in reference to one’s undocumented status.
some of the most prestigious universities, and are leading undocumented youth advocacy organizations. There are also forgotten stories about undocumented youth and their families being detained in immigration detention centers and families separated from deportations.

Regardless of distance, social, or cultural backgrounds, undocumented youth like Andrea and allies across the country have been working together both face-to-face and virtually to educate and advocate for the rights of undocumented immigrant communities. Despite their numerous challenges, many undocumented students like Andrea have claimed a space in higher education. They have put their lives and their families at risk by “coming out” and publicly announcing their undocumented status, and for some also their queer identity. Their message has been loud and clear: they are not going to hide anymore and they are not going to wait any longer.

The Undocumented Student Movement has been successful in large part because of their inclusivity and use of different social media platforms and practices. Although the undocumented student movement has been growing stronger and more students are stepping up and stepping out before their friends, peers, politicians, reporters, university and college administrators about their undocumented status, we have seen very little change. Although DACA provided many DREAMers with a glimpse of hope, the reality is that DACA is a temporary solution and ignores the recipients’ mixed-status families. DREAMers have worked for over a decade by organizing protests, posting their stories online, and participating in numerous acts of civil disobedience to convince the public that our immigration system is unjust and irrational, and this nation has responded by increasing the surveillance of Latino communities which has led to a dramatic increase in immigration raids and deportations.
Conclusion

We Are Gente Estudiada!

My research aimed at exploring how home and community knowledge fostered the educational aspirations of documented and undocumented Latina/o students. I also examined how knowledge acquired in Mexican American (MAS) and Latina/o Studies (LLS) courses gave students the tools to navigate the tensions and contradictions between their home, community, and their university. While there is a growing literature on the experiences of documented and undocumented Latina/o students, less research has examined the tensions and contradictions that students face throughout their education from multiple perspectives. Latina/o students in this study demonstrated a deep understanding of the complicated and often contradictory nature of their schooling experiences and their desire to transcend cultural, social, political, and educational boundaries. My work drew from the resources found in Latino communities, but like Anzaldúa’s call for ambiguity, I also critically analyzed the very communities that provide support for Latina/o college goers. This work builds on Latina/o students’ agency and academic resiliency by demonstrating the ways they confront and overcome oppressive educational practices (Fernández, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). In this concluding chapter, I provide a summary of the main findings, the limitations of this study, and what students themselves recommend to increase the retention rates of Latinas/os.

Many Latino families immigrate to the U.S. with high hopes for a better life and a good education for their children. All of the participants commented on how their parents felt a great sense of fulfillment seeing them go to college, as an integral part of achieving the “American dream.” Findings in my study show that Latino parents hold high educational aspirations for their children and believe that a college education will lead to a better life. Participants’ parents
stressed the importance of a college degree as a necessity to becoming “bien preparados” (well prepared), as a strong source of opportunity, and as protection from discrimination. In fact, Latinas/os are entering colleges and universities at higher rates than white students. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, seven in 10 Latina/o high school graduates enrolled in college in 2012 (Fry & Lopez, 2013). Majority of the students transferred to highly selective high schools because they were worried that if they attended their local high schools, they were not going to be academically prepared and competitive for college. Not only did the students have to go through a rigorous application process, but once they were accepted to more competitive high schools they had to continue to contend deficit notions about their academic abilities to apply to 4-year colleges and universities. Although college enrollment of Latinas/os has steadily increased, college-completion rates remain low and when compared to white students, Latina/o students experience intensified contradictory expectations and obligations between home, community, and their university.

My work highlights the significant, positive impact of family and community relationships on the education of first-generation Latina/o students. Although being the first to pursue college is highly valued by Latino families and communities, it can also be very stressful for the student to find a balance between their academic and family obligations due to their strong family ties. Participants shared fond memories of growing up in a community of family, friends, and neighbors. Once in college, they continued to make communal decisions. However, staying connected with family and working together with the home community became more time consuming and emotionally draining during college. This caused the students to feel torn between the two worlds; their families’ strong emphasis on collectivity clashed with the expectations in higher education, which places high value on individuality. In fact, research has
found that Latina/o students are more likely to hide their family conflicts from their professors because they may sense a lack of understanding or perceived lack of commitment to their education (Espinoza, 2010; Torres, 2006).

Participants that moved away from home to attend college experienced a greater sense of guilt for not being able to go home as often as their families wanted them to or being able to financially contribute to their families. At times dealing with the guilt became too painful and some considered dropping out or holding off on graduate school. Much of the contradictions and disconnect that participants felt was due to their parents lack of understanding about what their daughters or sons were doing in college. Parents were also concerned about how college was distancing their children from the family because they were spending less time at home or because they were considering staying in college longer to pursue advanced degrees. Many of the parents did not always understand the value of obtaining an advanced degree. Again we see that because many Latino parents lack knowledge about college it can create distance and tensions as they try to make sense of their children’s decisions.

Participants demonstrated multiple forms of academic resiliency, which allowed them to navigate and succeed in higher education. They drew from various forms of capital from their culture, families, and communities in order overcome academic and personal challenges. Findings highlight the ways participants used their families’ stories, dichos (popular proverbs or sayings), and consejos (advice) to share the ways they overcame challenges at home and in school. For example, dichos were used to teach their children important lessons about being proactive and how to confront and overcome difficult situations in one’s life. Participants shared stories about overcoming challenges in their schooling such as attending over-crowded schools or dealing with teachers that had low expectations of them. They also shared stories about some
of the challenges they faced at home such as growing up with an addict parent, growing up in a mixed-status household, *envidias* (envy) amongst extended family members, and strict traditional gender role expectations. Although many of the students’ experienced harsh realities growing up in impoverished neighborhoods and attending under-funded schools, they stayed focused on their educational goals and envision better lives for themselves. Furthermore, throughout college, many of the participants recalled how important it was for them to have their parents support, even if it was only through phone calls. Although many of the participants’ parents were not knowledgeable about the higher education, participants recounted how whenever they felt defeated by the academic demands of college, their parents were always there to lift their confidence up and encourage them to do their best and not give up.

My work also examined the ambiguities that constitute undocumented students experiences and the ways they navigate higher education *sin papeles*.\(^{132}\) I highlighted Andrea’s activism, most notably her participation in Atlanta, Georgia, where she and six other students were arrested for protesting against the Georgia Board of Regents for banning undocumented students from enrolling at the top five public universities in the state. Andrea graduated from college and had plans to pursue graduate school. Although she was accepted to some of the top doctoral programs in Ethnic Studies, she was not able to pursue her dreams because the programs were not able to offer her financial support. A year after she graduated from college, DACA was passed giving Andrea deferred action status. Her new status provides her with a work permit, a social security number, and other forms of identification; however, it only gives her a temporary protected status and fails to secure lawful immigration status (i.e., permanent residency status) or a path to citizenship. Andrea has been working as a receptionist at a law firm working with prominent civil rights lawyers. She plans to reapply to graduate school and hopes that her

\(^{132}\) Translation: without papers or without legal documentation.
deferred action status will work in her favor, although she still would not qualify for federal or state financial aid.\textsuperscript{133}

My work drew from Anzaldúa’s (1999) insights of the borderlands—as a space where two or more cultures, values, ways of being, and knowledge collide and merge, as well as, where contradiction and ambiguity is embraced. Although having strong connections to family and community helped many of the participants focus on their academics, home life (i.e., values and cultural practices) was at times contradictory to the culture of higher education, placing students in an ambiguous space. As participants reflected on the pain and growing contradictions between their families and schooling experiences, they sought out spaces like LLS and MAS courses where through inquiry, reflection, and dialogue, students made sense of opposing ideas and knowledge. The classroom environment in these courses facilitated the formation of counterspaces in which Latina/o students’ pedagogies of the home were valued and where students embraced the potentially contradictory and difficult position of \textit{gente estudiada} (Cacho, 2010; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado Bernal, Alemán Jr., & Garavito, 2009; Holling, 2006; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). The classroom space also created a critical \textit{sitio} (a space) to affirm their culture and ways of knowing. They also acquired the tools \textit{y lengua} (a language and/or discourse) to critique inequalities within their home, community, and their university. Not only did these academic spaces increase Latina/o students’ sense of belonging and academic self-confidence, but they also provided a space for students to reflect and reconcile these tensions and contradictions.

\textsuperscript{133} According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security—from August 15, 2012 to January 17, 2013, 407,899 people applied for DACA, and a total of 154,404 cases were approved and 13,366 cases were rejected.
Limitations of Study

Students were recruited from LLS and MAS listservs and from existing courses where they indicated an interest in participating in this study. Students who did not choose to participate may have had different experiences from those who decided to participate. Perhaps those who participated had more positive experiences in LLS and MAS courses. In fact, participants mentioned how they had developed close relationships with their professor or graduate teaching assistant (TA) in LLS and MAS courses. They also tended to describe their professor or TA in these courses as more approachable than other faculty and TA’s in other courses. Findings suggest that LLS and MAS courses provide critical spaces for students to reflect on and share their experiences navigating home and their university. Only including students who took MAS and LLS courses may have created sampling bias. Perhaps Latina/o students who enrolled in other Ethnic Studies such as Gender and Women’s Studies or Asian American Studies had different experiences. Another limitation is that most of the participants in this study self-identified as Latina/o or Chicana/o of Mexican descent. Only one of the participant’s self-identified as Latina of Guatemalan and Mexican descent. Latina/o students from other backgrounds, such as South American or Caribbean, are not represented in this study and therefore may have different experiences and perspectives.

Students Perspective on the Education of Latinas/os and Recommendations

The growing Latina/o student population in institutions of higher education is likely to continue in the next decade. However systemic barriers have remained in place, thus increasing the chances of them dropping out and not reaching their full potential. As this study illustrates, Latina/o students have high educational aspirations, are determined, and are optimistic about
obtaining their bachelor’s degree and pursuing advanced degrees despite all the hardships and barriers they face at home and in institutions of higher education. Rather than formulating what I perceived as important recommendations, I asked participants about their thoughts and perspectives on the educational attainment of Latinas/os and strategies to help improve college graduation rates. Below I have included just a few of the recommendations they provide:

Money is a huge issue. Another thing is family. Like this thing with Latino families and loyalty and contributing to the household. As soon as you get a college education and you don’t go back home, you’re seen as a traitor to your family. Yeah and they start saying things to your face like “te cres muy chignon” (you think you’re a bad ass) just because I’m college educated. But I think its just because being a college educated Latino is not a common thing in my community and they’re just in shock. (Johnny, senior, UIUC)

There’re a lot of obstacles but there’s no reason why Latino kids can’t succeed like others. More of us are here [higher education] to show that we’re slowly getting there, but there’s a lot of work to be done. Like with my aunts and uncles, I’m always telling them to push my cousins to go to a 4-year and not a two-year college because they think they can save money by having them go to community college first. So I try to educate them on financial aid because most of them honestly could probably qualify for financial aid, but they just don’t know how it works. But my parents and I really try to get it into their heads that in the end, it’s gonna pay off so why not go for it. (Antonio, junior, SJSU)

More resources like alternative ways of funding, especially for undocumented students who don’t qualify for federal financial aid. But not only lack of resources but lack of mentors. I think for me, as an activist, I always try to push for very real structural changes. As somebody in the field of LL, I try to just imagine the possibilities outside of that and creating greater accessibility. (Andrea, senior, UIUC)

I’ve met a lot of students their freshman year and then I don’t see them again. So I think, there needs to be more resources for freshmen. Maybe they need to advertise more resources for Latina/o freshmen students’ cuz a lot of them feel overwhelmed with the work and they’re scared to ask professors for help or they just don’t know how to adjust to this kind of environment. (Daniel, junior, SJSU)

I feel like gender roles especially for Latinas is a huge challenge when you’re in college. Like I remember how in class we talked about how if you’re a Latina in college and you become too outspoken they think you’re a lesbian or you’re a bitch. You are never seen as strong. You are just seen as a bitch or a lesbian. I remember this one passage from this book we were reading in class where this girl got mixed messages from her dad. He wanted her to graduate and have a good career but would remind her that she needed to take care of her husband. I also had those conflicting messages and I feel like it’s really
confusing when you’re trying to figure out what you’re doing in college and then your parents are telling you things like, “Yeah good job but don’t forget to learn how to cook.” (Araceli, senior, UIUC)

Honestly, I think it just boils down to resources and expectations. Well I don’t know if I can say the majority, but at least the Latinos that I know that grew up in disenfranchised communities; they’re falling through the cracks you know. Teachers should have higher expectations for all kids. (Cihuapilli, graduated, SJSU)

These are just few of the numerous recommendations made by the students. While many of the recommendations are not new, they serve to remind colleges and universities that Latina/o students and their families continue to experience many of the same barriers. For instance, making college accessible and affordable is especially critical for Latina/o students because they are more likely to be the first in their family to attend college. They are also more likely to come from higher rates of poverty and thus lack financial literacy skills, making it difficult to fill out the FAFSA application and to understand financial aid forms and processes. In addition, it is important to recognize that Latina/o students are not a homogenous group and come from diverse backgrounds. There are growing numbers of Latina/o students who come from mixed status households, meaning that they or some family members are citizens and others are not. Thus, students and their parents legal status can create financial barriers. Although many undocumented families file tax returns using individual taxpayer identification numbers (ITINS), many do not file their taxes out of fear of being deported. Many of the participants are U.S. citizens, but some have undocumented parents who do not file taxes; as a result, they had a difficult time completing the FAFSA application because they did not have the information about their parents income. Some students were guided to individual who were able to assist them, while others gave up although they are U.S. citizens. The lack of financial aid and in-state tuition for undocumented Latina/o students can make it extremely difficult for students to afford higher education.
Lastly, as illustrated by many of the participants who experienced mixed messages from family, it was more common among Latinas for parents to praise them for pursuing a college education, but continued to idealize traditional hierarchical gender roles. Although many of the Latinas had moved out to go to college and had been financially supporting themselves, they continued to receive traditional gender role messages. Many of the participants also commented on how higher education was changing the ways they thought about themselves, their family, and community. For many, their family was distraught by the changes in them and did not know what to think of them. Sometimes their new adopted perspectives were misinterpreted by their parents, family, and friends back home as being creidas/os (stuck up or arrogant).

My study provides insights about how LLS and MAS courses provide a safe and critical sitio where students worked through the junctures between their home and their university cultures. Educational policies, such as Arizona’s HB 2281, presume that Mexican American Studies make students feel angry, oppressed, and resentful towards a race or class of people. However, these critics have failed to look at the experiences and views of students themselves. Student narratives in my study suggest that Latinas/os in these courses acquired una lengua and gained the tools to reflect on their experiences. Participants developed a strong sense of connectedness to their university and academic resiliency by trusting their ability to make knowledge claims and pursue advanced degrees. Students identified with the texts and felt comfortable sharing their families’ stories by interweaving home knowledge (i.e., pedagogies of the home) with academic knowledge. More importantly, is the opportunity students had to establish authentic caring relationships with their professors and peers that helped students engage in honest and transformative dialogue.
Both Latina/o and Mexican American courses provided a critical sitio (space) for students to work through the complexities and contradictions of belonging to a group of gente estudiada. The curriculum and pedagogy in these courses provide a sitio for both students and the professor to insert their experiences and voice into the classroom. Students learned to be self-reflexive of their own ideologies and acquired una lengua to describe the things that affect their families and community, such as cultural imperialism. Becoming gente estudiada requires for a kind of personal transformation that begins with students awareness and understanding of their multiple identities and realities. They become interested in excavating through their families struggles and histories. At the same time, they begin to see their family and home communities through different layered meanings of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, language, and immigration status. They found ways to retain their dual identities and to succeed in the mainstream world, while staying connected to their cultural traditions and values at home. Together participants in this study reclaimed their identities as gente estudiada committed to the transformation of their families, communities, and institutions of higher education.

Institutions of higher education need to integrate Chicana/Latina feminist theories and other minority perspectives to inform the development of more effective theories of retention. The findings of this study also offer insights for student affairs professionals to be sensitive to the contradictions and ambiguity that Latina/o students endure. Furthermore, in order to more effectively address the needs to Latina/o students, student affairs professionals can take an active role by reaching out to students’ families and communities. They can also encourage students to enroll in MAS or other related courses their first semester in college. The academic success and graduation rate of Latina/o students will depend not only on colleges and universities becoming aware of these contradictions, but also providing formal and informal academic spaces to help
students make sense of these contradictions and the tools to help them navigate dual environments of home and college.

Based on my findings and the literature (see chapter 3), I provide the following recommendations to close the college completion gap for Latina/o students:

1. Outreach to Latino parents. Many Latino parents tend to feel unqualified to help their children make decisions about college because they tend to have lower levels of formal education and encounter language barriers. The information gap is significantly greater for immigrant and undocumented Latino families. Institutions of higher education need to provide bilingual outreach programs that are meaningful and culturally appropriate to help narrow the information gap and to help parents become active supporters throughout their children’s college years. For example, workshops can include information about what a day in college looks like, the level of assignments, and the time it takes to complete the assignments. This new acquired information can help parents better understand what their children experience so that they can relieve their children from family responsibilities and expectations.

2. Increase information about the cost of college and financial aid for Latino parents and students. Most of the students in this study learned about specific types of financial aid their junior or senior year in high school. Many parents who felt they could not help their children pay for college, encouraged their children to attend a college close to home in order to save money and stay connected with family. They were also less inclined to take out student loans, in part because of parents’ distrust of the U.S. government which tends to be rooted in their negative experiences with government officials (i.e. immigration enforcement). In addition, many Latino parents and students’ cultural aversion to student loans is considered a sign of having a strong work ethic and independence from government assistance. Administrators should provide cultural competence training for financial aid staff. For example, one of the biggest challenges when it comes to filling out FAFSA is when Latina/o students who are U.S. citizens have to fill out information about their parents who are undocumented. They often feel discouraged from submitting the application because they are uneasy about revealing their parents’ undocumented status.

3. Gender and sexual identities need to be more fluid in Latina/o and Mexican American Studies courses. Often issues of gender and sexual identities are left out from the curriculum or are minimally covered. Many of the participants who were more critical and conscious of issues of gender and sexual identities took courses that were cross-listed with Gender and Women’s Studies. For instance, professors can use pedagogies of the home to facilitate reflective dialogue with students about the challenges that marginalized women face. This is especially critical for Latinos because many of the male participants did not become conscious of these issues until college.

134 For a more in-depth discussion on the lack of gender and sexuality in Mexican American, Chicana/o, and Latina/o Studies refer to Chapter 2 (p.73).
4. Academic Affairs need to demonstrate their commitment to Ethnic Studies Programs (i.e. Latina/o and Mexican American Studies) by supporting the faculty and staff in these programs. They need to understand and value the impact that these programs\textsuperscript{135} have on Latina/o student retention. It should be mandatory for first-generation Latina/o students to take a course in Mexican American, Chicana/o, or Latina/o Studies their first semester to help them navigate and negotiate the borderlands of home and higher education. My research demonstrates that Mexican American and Latina/o studies courses contributed to Latina/o students’ persistence and graduation. These courses also helped students increase their sense of belonging to the university by developing positive relationships with their faculty and peers.

5. Student affairs practitioners need to be well informed about the different campus resources for Latina/o students, such as academic counselors who are cognizant and culturally competent to work with Latina/o students and their families. Student affairs educators can take a more active role in creating different sitios (spaces) and opportunities throughout campus for Latina/o and other underrepresented students to tell and hear each other’s stories. Creating safe sitios (spaces) outside the classroom not only validates their struggles, but also provides an opportunity for students to make sense of the contradictions and tensions between their family and university experiences in a community of confianza (trust) and respeto (respect).

\textsuperscript{135} LLS and MAS courses are just two examples; however, there are other programs including, Gender and Women’s Studies and Ethnic Studies courses that provide all students the opportunity to study critically and systemically from an interdisciplinary perspective the histories and experiences of marginalized communities.
References


Appendix A

Number of LLS and MAS Courses Taken by Participants

The table below shows the total number of courses taken by participants in the MAS and/or LLS.

Table A1

Total Number of Courses taken by MAS and LLS Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>cName</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Total number of MAS &amp; LLS Courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>UIUC</td>
<td>7 LLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>UIUC</td>
<td>14 LLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>SJSU</td>
<td>6 MAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Araceli</td>
<td>UIUC</td>
<td>6 LLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassandra</td>
<td>SJSU</td>
<td>7 MAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cihuapilli</td>
<td>SJSU</td>
<td>3 MAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>SJSU</td>
<td>7 MAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny</td>
<td>UIUC</td>
<td>11 LLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigo</td>
<td>UIUC</td>
<td>1 LLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>SJSU</td>
<td>2 MAS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Many of the courses in the LLS Department are cross-listed with African American Studies, American Indian Studies, Anthropology, Asian American Studies, Education, Gender & Women’s Studies, History, Media Studies, Sociology, and Spanish.
Appendix B

Estimates of Undocumented Immigrants

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Pew Hispanic Center
Country of Birth of Unauthorized Immigrant Population: January 2011