LATINAS IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS:
INTERSECTIONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE BELL SYSTEM

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

In 1973, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) reached a consent decree with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T). The consent decree settled a lawsuit built on years of discrimination against white women and women and men of color, opening the largest private sector employer to underrepresented people. With this suit and settlement, Latinas began lifelong careers as information workers, operating information technologies on a daily basis. This study provides insight into the critical histories of Latina information workers in telecommunications in the Los Angeles region. This history is not simply a story of Latinas entering the information technology fields, but rather an analysis of the ways in which Latinas were engaged or neglected during the EEOC v. AT&T case and subsequent consent decree, and the analysis by Latinas of their experiences in telecommunications. I explore the discourses surrounding the lawsuit with particular attention to Latina inclusion and omission, and the personal narratives from Latina information workers employed after the consent decree. I engage archives from the EEOC v. AT&T case and qualitative interviews to investigate the subjective entrance of Latinas into telecommunications. I conclude that intersectional identities function as crucial context for beneficiaries of the consent decree, and that Latinas applied a critical framework to their everyday socio-techno labor practices.

This research contributes to the literature in several significant ways: It is the first in-depth history of Latina information workers in telecommunications; it adds to the cross-disciplinary research of the social construction of technology, often found in Science and Technology Studies (STS), critical digital media studies, and critical informatics; it contributes to the current debates advocating for Latinas in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields; and it has implications for encouraging a Critical Latina
Technology Studies, a technique already applied in telecommunications by Latina information workers.

Information was gathered through oral history interviews with Latinas in Los Angeles who worked under the Bell system during the period 1973-1984, and from archival materials related to the EEOC v. AT&T case. This evidence was used to construct the histories of Latinas in telecommunications and determine a Critical Latina Technology Studies approach.
Keywords

American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T), California, invisible information labor, oral history, Latinas, Latina information history, neoliberalism, telecommunications
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“Caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar” - Gloria E. Anzaldúa

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List of Abbreviations

AFL American Federation of Labor
AT&T American Telephone and Telegraph Company
CRLA California Rural Legal Assistance
EEOC Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
FEPC Fair Employment Practices Committee
FCC Federal Communications Commission
IBEW International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
ICT Information Communication Technology
IT Information Technology
MALDEF Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
NFTW National Federation of Telephone Workers
NOW National Organization of Women
PT&T Pacific Telephone and Telegraph
SCOT Social Construction of Technology
SMSA Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas
STEM Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
STS Science and Technology Studies
WTUL Women’s Telephone Union Local
Chapter 1: Introduction

When I was young, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) was a household name, discussed regularly in our day-to-day lives and at the dinner table. For my family, AT&T was not just the landline provider on our 1980s touch-tone phones; Pacific Bell, the California subsidiary of AT&T, was our livelihood. My parents met working in a mailroom at Pacific Bell. When changes in telecommunications were in the news, we watched with an awareness that seemingly everyday shifts in political economy would deeply impact our everyday lives. An interwoven story between my family and AT&T predated my own life. Part of me always knew that the most infamous telecommunications monopoly in the world was foundational to our lives. But a chapter of the story went unspoken in my family--something not discussed when we worried about labor strikes or closing offices, or saw landlines become wireless. A question waited for me in the future. How did most of my aunts and uncles, a first generation Mexican family who did not go to college, end up in various jobs in telecommunications?

It was common to hear stories about the work in AT&T. Little anecdotes about my mom receiving ‘crank calls’ while working the operator’s cord board. Or when my uncle, a lineman, had fallen off of a telephone pole and broken his arm. I knew that AT&T and the Villa-Nicholas families were intricately connected in an uneasy marriage. But I did not know the why and how. Why did AT&T hire my family? Why did my family stay in or leave this uneasy romance? Why were all of the Latinas I knew at one time in their lives connected to the phone company? In mainstream media and politics, Latina/os were discussed in conjunction with immigration, education, ‘crime,’ poverty, sweatshop factories, and migrant farm labor. However Latinas within telecommunications was not an issue discussed among incumbents, unions, or community
organizing groups. So how did Latinas come to be established in telecommunications, working different parts of a corporate machine that kept telephones ringing and would one day lead us here, to individual internet access through smart phones? This dissertation is a response to an unspoken question that took years to formulate.

The time period of this critical inquiry into Latina narratives of telecommunications begins in the early 1970s, when the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), via the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), rejected a request by AT&T to raise their rates (Green, 2001). Latinas entered lower levels of information technology sectors with the resulting AT&T-EEOC affirmative action consent decree. Latina information workers were ‘included’ into the economic systems of labor at a distance, their difference used by private sectors for expanding capitalism. While such fields as Communications and the history of computing have explored in depth AT&T’s history, Latinas’ accounts from within telecommunications have yet to be explored. This research purposefully focuses on Latinas employed in telecommunications for most of their lives, starting in the early 1970s and 1980s, their lives resoundingly impacted by the Civil Rights Movements and subsequent Affirmative Action laws. The entry of Latinas into telecommunications in the 1970s marked a new path of telecommunications’ history, one that takes into account race, gender, sexuality, and culture, all identifiers at play as Latinas have gone to work ‘on the line.’

This thesis constructs and reflects on the history of Latinas in the Bell System, with a particular emphasis on California. Although Latinas have often gone ‘unseen’ in technology-based fields, they continue to work in the invisible information labor sectors that fuel the services housed under ‘telecommunications.’ Today, these women are approaching the end of their careers, having worked for decades in data-entry, customer service, telephone operators,
electrical engineers, and other blue and white-collar services. There is a dearth of research on Latinas in telecommunications, despite their lifetimes’ worth of information technology skills in telecommunications’ services. This thesis brings to attention the histories of Latinas in telecommunications, demonstrating how these histories can contribute to the larger canons on Latina labor, communications, race, gender, and social constructions of technology. By partnering a mixed-methods approach of archives and ethnography, the histories of telecommunications will become strengthened through heterogeneity.

With telecommunications’ archives and Latina oral histories, I propose a Latina Technology Studies, a method of analysis that acknowledges that Latinas’ experiences provide critical insights into the social histories of communications and technologies. Moving towards a Latina Technology Studies requires not only that we demand a higher employment rate of Latinas/os in information technology fields, but also that we recognize where Latinas are working in the tech industry. Often this means looking away from the visible Information Technology (IT) jobs, and into the unseen sectors of the tech labor force. The invisibility of Latina information labor promulgates the myth of technological determinism, the ideology that technology is neutral and uninfluenced by the relations of powers that dictate everyday life. Telling this history moves Latinas out from behind the cord board and acknowledges that major technology conglomerates are not established by ‘self made’ CEOs, but rather powered by many men and women working at different levels of information labor.

**Background and Context**

Recently, much attention has been paid to the dearth of Latinas in Science, Technology, Engineering, and MATH (STEM) fields. With the release of diversity statistics by major technology corporations of Silicon Valley, such as Google, where Latinas and Latinos make up
just 3% of employees (Google Diversity, 2015), diversity advocacy groups are now calling for more visibility of Latinas in STEM fields. Scientific American’s writer Mónica I. Fellú-Mójer asserts that, “The underrepresentation of Latinas in STEM is detrimental to the advancement of science and innovation, and to society” (Feliú-Mójer, 2014), arguing for advocacy from within places of privilege to change the field. Some have pointed to the need for a shift in education for Latinas, who comprise a total of 7% of the STEM workforce (Caballero, 2014). The absence of Latinas in Silicon Valley, STEM, and IT fields has reached national awareness in popular media (Bohorquez, 2014). While these statistics do warrant immediate attention, it is crucial to acknowledge that many Latinas have worked in information technology sectors for most of their lives. Though rarely reaching white-collar positions within telecommunications, Latinas have indeed worked in the blue-collar sector that propels technology to the center of global society and economy today (Villa-Nicholas, 2014).

This dissertation is concerned with the history of Latina information workers in the United States, during and after the 1973 EEOC v. AT&T case. This time period is not only significant for this case alone, but because it sits at a crux of a number of shifts in U.S. society, politics, and economy. The 1970s were impacted by the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movements of the 1950s and 1960s, resulting in increasing legislation on affirmative action in the workplace (Padilla, 1997). Although people of color and white women were integrated further into various blue- and white-collar employment, the economic structure of the U.S. began to change, with the previous manufacturing industries broken down or sent overseas, the defunding of the public sector and increased government support of the private sector, and the flourishing of new economic industries such as information technologies (Harvey, 2005). For Latinas and Latinos specifically, the 1970s were preceded by a wave of Chicana/o Rights
movements with different goals to improve the quality of life for Latina/os in the United States (Martinez, 2010). But Latinas often found themselves at an uneasy intersection of movements between Chicano Rights, often male dominated, and the feminist movement, associated with white women’s rights. These movements, though creating social change, often relegated Latinas to the periphery of identity politics.

While AT&T’s history and the case between the EEOC v. AT&T occurs mostly on the East Coast, California has played an important role for Latina history, citizenship, and labor rights, as well as an epicenter for hearings and legislation against Pacific Telephone and Telegraph (PT&T), the California Bell company owned by AT&T. The Chicana/o Rights movement inspired the formation of such California rights groups as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), both involved in the EEOC v. AT&T case. With large communities of Latina/o populations and a history with Latina/o foundations, Los Angeles was a source of major political forces and inspiration for Latina rights in the United States.

One of the products of the Civil Rights Movements and affirmative action legislation in the Bell System was the hiring of Latinas into blue- and white-collar positions at the phone company. Latina information workers joined the telecommunication sectors from multiple historical moments colliding, becoming a part of the information labor economy that was simultaneously shifting (Schement, 1990). The histories of Latina information workers reveal how Latinas were neglected throughout the EEOC v. AT&T hearing process; and, conversely, how Latinas worked lifelong jobs with information technologies in telecommunications, shaping critical discourses around the political economy and against technological determinism.
Identity politics within the Civil Rights Movements neglected intersectional needs of women of color entering the information labor force. Nevertheless Latinas did enter telecommunications, into the lower levels of STEM fields as invisible information laborers--as telephone operators, mail delivery, data entry, splicers, technicians, customer service, and more. Latina information workers were some of the first in their community trained on personal computers. They saw the rise and fall of labor unions, the political device of the ‘family’ within the Bell system, and the rapid change in information technologies. This project seeks to foreground the early history of Latina information workers, some of the first Latinas to work in information technology fields.

**Terminology Defined**

This section defines a few key concepts, such as Latina, subjectivity, identity, and power, so that the usage and meanings of words used throughout this dissertation are clear.

**Latina, Hispanic, Chicana**

Many terms have been used to describe Latinas, each with their own reasoning and political positioning. I am interested in exploring the historical uses of the terms applied to Latina communities and explaining how they evolved. This research chooses the term ‘Latina’ as an imperfect term that homogenizes a diverse group of women. By choosing Latina, I have also made a choice not to use ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Chicana’ to label my interview participants and the women engaged during the EEOC v. AT&T case.

The term ‘Hispanic’ has often been contested because of its connection to colonialism and imperial politics. ‘Hispanic’ in the United States was first used by “wealthy descendants of Spaniards from New Mexico and other Mexican territories, recently acquired in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century” (Cruz-Janzen, 2002, p. 159). Marta Cruz-Janzen argues that ‘Hispanic’
was a term used to align Spaniards with American whites, rather than to Indians and Mexicans, referring directly to Spanish origins (Cruz-Janzen, 2002, p. 159). ‘Hispanic’ has also been typically associated with U.S. census terminology, which homogenized a population of people from Spanish-speaking countries, despite their diverse backgrounds in nationality, linguistics, culture, politics, race, religion and gender (Oboler, 2002, p. 77).

Denise A. Segura and Beatriz M. Pesquera define Chicanas as women of Mexican heritage in the United States. Chicana feminists were early organizers, artists, teachers, scholars, and writers who sought egalitarian treatment of race, class, and gender (1998, p. 193). Chicanas frequently experienced discrimination through race, ethnicity, and gender in education, jobs, and politics (Segura and Pesquera, 1998, p. 193). ‘Chicana’ was an identifier that signified not just ethnicity and race, but political movements for intersectional rights. I use the term ‘Chicana’ in the following chapters only when it relates directly to Chicana/o rights movements, or the subject being discussed identifies as such. Although my interview collaborators did not identify as Chicana, I acknowledge the term as significant to Latinas in present day.

Much of the field of Latina/o Studies has troubled the all-encompassing term ‘Latina/o’ as too homogenizing to describe a wide array of people from different ethnicities, cultural traditions, language, and nationalities. However Marysol Asencio, in Latina/o Sexualities: Probing Powers, Passions, Practices and Policies describes the preference for the term Latina/o:

As such, some prefer the term Latino since they believe the unifying thread is more about the social and political relationship within the U.S. context than cultural similarities deriving from Spanish colonization…the term Latino is used to refer to Caribbean and Latin American heritages while sometimes excluding Spain, a European country, and including Brazil as a Latin American country (2010, p. 3).
This study uses the term Latina to identify a group whose cultural, social and political experiences have often been similar in the United States, however it resists a narrative that all Latinas might respond the same to their experience as information workers or navigators of information technologies. I agree with Maria Josefina Saldana-Portillo that within Latina/o Studies there must be a critical scholarship and a “critical consciousness of empire…that is ‘tirelessly reckoning with America’s past,’ but also with its present, through an examination of how displaced cultures of racialized immigrants trouble national narratives of democracy and equality” (2007, p. 508). The use of the term Latina/o is not a neutral or simply descriptive term, but includes a politically engaged debate about the status of Latina/os as citizens or immigrants in the United States.

This study focuses on how telecommunication corporations have positioned Latinas to technologies and how Latinas have negotiated technologies as information workers. The complexity of such a topic is evident in simply trying to establish the reasoning and argument for using the term Latina over other terminology. The word ‘Latina’ will further break down when I examine the qualitative narratives of Latinas in telecommunications that do not identify themselves as ‘Latina.’ ‘Latina’ is a word I choose for scholarly purposes, however I want to resist it as an end-all term for this study, which embraces slippage of racial signifiers according to how my interview subjects construct their own narratives.

**Subjectivity and Identity**

Subjectivity and identity are not easily separated, often existing within the same discursive spaces. Subjectivity is an important term for this research because it acknowledges the preexisting conditions that situate Latinas in telecommunications (Rodríguez, 2003, p. 5). But using subjectivity can often neglect Latinas’ own way of being, situating Latinas
in a world that only organizes them, and does not allow them to shape their own ways of knowing (Rodríguez, 2003, p. 5). Identity practices are important because they allow for agency. Juana María Rodríguez advocates that:

The challenge becomes how to conceptualize subjectivity through both semiotic structures (discursive spaces) and agency (identity practices) by investigating the ways these fields work to constitute, inform, and transform one another. Discursive spaces exist at the site of knowledge production. (Rodríguez, 2003, p 5)

Among my research subjects in the archive and collaborators of oral history, identities vary by many factors, such as region, nationality, culture, language, and experiences. Identities are not fixed, but in a constant state of production and reflection (Oboler, 2002, p. 85). Identity is the Latina-self, placed into telecommunications and all the spaces that came before, with “preexisting narratives” (Rodriguez, 2003, p. 5). When thinking about the co-construction of Latina subjectivity, telecommunications, and technology, those preexisting narratives of each factor organize Latina identity. Telecommunications and Latinas become through these socially constructed identities (gender, class, age, race, place), engaging with information technologies and the larger political economy, “which in turn reproduce and restructure these identities” (Wallis, 2013, p. 4).

**Power**

This research recognizes systems of hegemony in multiple contexts. Intersectional identities, telecommunications, information technologies, and the larger political economy engage with visible and invisible systems of power. Michel Foucault discussed the ‘biopower’ to give and take away life-chances through services of the state (1990, p. 136). These ‘life-chances’ include race, gender, class, and sexuality in determining access to such everyday needs as health,
income, and other services that may give or take life. This term bio-power has significant implications during the 1960s and 1970s, as white women and people of color were integrated into public and private institutions, such as education and labor. Stuart Hall theorizes that identity differences, in these spaces of power, are enclosed into hegemony (1990, p. 68). Power is enforced, negotiated, and acted upon on macro levels, such as the state and institutions, and from below, between subjects of the state, for whom biopower benefits or works against.

Latina difference is not only positioned at odds with the larger ‘norms’ of telecommunications, but also used to recirculate and make possible the hegemony of the larger institutions. This concept was often the case for AT&T; though the state mandated the inclusion of underrepresented peoples, the Bell System used these political moments for the company’s profit, and to the detriment of minority information workers (Green, 2001, p 199). Power, in this research project, is not easily separated or identified, but always ‘at play’ within larger structures of the state (public), AT&T (private), Latina identity, subjectivity, and the formation of information technologies.

**Research Positioning**

A dual path of education and personal experience led me to this area of research. Through my coursework and academic research, I became increasingly interested in such fields and concepts as Science and Technology Studies (STS), the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), gender, sexuality, race, and class (intersectional) approaches to technology studies and New Media Studies, and cyber-feminism. These fields also speak to the histories and intersectional social constructions of technologies. Likewise, my academic background in Latina/o Studies paralleled and informed my investigations into these histories. But these were not solely questions pertaining to professional research. I had grown up in a mixed-race family,
white and Mexican. An older family member had often taught me to ask the question ‘where are the Mexicans?’ when watching films and television. These were my first critical engagements into media literacy. Although they were said in passing, they taught me to search for Latina/o representation, and to question when we were conspicuously absent. These two paths, one personal and the other professional led me to this research, where I ask ‘Where are Latinas?’ in the history of telecommunications and information technologies.

I come to this research with a great interest in the history of telecommunication and information technologies. My personal background informs this investigation. Both of my parents and numerous aunts and uncles worked in telecommunications, having found jobs in the fields during the 1970s, after the monumental consent decree took place. Therefore, this research is deeply personal, and resists narratives of ‘objectivity.’ Just as my theoretical framework acknowledges the social constructions of everyday life, I recognize my own epistemological background impacts my approach to research; how I collect, interact with, and analyze data. I am a Latina woman, first generation college student, who benefits from light skin privilege. My family’s successes and failures in telecommunications are organized around race, class, and gender. This work seeks to not only write Latinas into the history of telecommunications and information technologies, but also to critically engage these intersectional power structures that organize their everyday work. Part of my goal is to promote more Latinas in higher-ranking positions in STEM-related fields, which is directly related to promoting social justice in the form of labor, gender, and race equality. Therefore, this study of Latinas, historically marginalized within STEM academic fields and labor, uses a critical framework to balance the history of information technologies, and resists neutral approaches to research.

**Purposes, Objectives, Significance**
Technology-centered sectors such as telecommunications have historically marginalized groups such as white women, women and men of color, sexual minorities, and non-gender binary people. Recent scholarship has encouraged documenting the historical existence of these marginalized people into the histories of technologies and information (Sinclair, 2004; Schiller, 2007). But New Media and cyber-feminist scholars challenge that the goal is not solely to ‘write’ underrepresented people into the history of technology, but to also interrogate the racial and gendered formations of power that organize information technology work (Wajcman, 2009; Fouché, 2012). Information technologies do not have a value-free context, but politically influence and construct their timelines (Winner, 1986).

The study of Latina information workers lags greatly within STS, New Media studies, the information sciences, Latina/o Studies, and women’s history. However, as Latinas become an increasingly visible part of the population in the United States (Bogado, 2015) and STEM fields further diversify their workforce (Bohorquez, 2014), Latinas’ histories in IT fields become more urgent. This research extends the understanding of histories of technologies and telecommunications more generally and deepens the knowledge of Latina socio-techno (Wallis, 2013) histories. I recognize that Latina information workers are already applying critical engagements to their quotidian labor.

This study’s primary purpose is to understand the histories of Latina information workers in telecommunications in Southern California, and their critical engagements with information technologies. Practically, the purpose is to stimulate further research into Latina information technology practices and discourses of co-subjectivity with Latinas and information technologies. This study of Latinas in the American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) system is
geographically and temporally limited, focusing on Latinas in Southern California who began working in the Bell System after the consent decree of 1973.

To fulfill the dual aim of documenting Latina histories in telecommunications as well as critical interrogations of Latina information workers’ experience, this thesis uses two research questions to guide my work:

1. What is the history of Latinas in the field of telecommunications?
2. How have Latinas navigated information technologies in telecommunications, with regards to power and agency?

The contributions of my research to the proposed research fields are:

1. There has been very little research on the history and significance of Latina information workers in the United States. This study adds to the fields of STS, technology studies, and New Media studies, by increasing Latina visibility as workers who have been employed in the blue-collar work of STEM fields.

2. There has been no research on the impact of EEOC v. AT&T and the consent decree on Latinas in the United States. This study adds to this dimension of the scholarship that has been written.

3. There have been few studies critically interrogating Latina socio-techno practices in the United States.

4. There has been little research on the oral history testimonies of Latina information workers and their critical interrogations of technologies and the larger political economy.

**Thesis Outline**
The body of this dissertation consists of an additional six chapters. This research is contextualized in Chapter 2, which covers the history of AT&T in the United States in the late 19th to mid-20th centuries, with some emphasis on developments in California. Within the discussion of AT&T is a focus on labor, gender, and race, which frames the 1970s setting in telecommunications. The focus on AT&T ends with the social unrest of the 1960s, which preceded the affirmative action legislation of the 1970s. Chapter 2 ends with a special focus on Latinas in the 20th century, with an emphasis on labor, the Chicana/o Rights Movements, and Latinas in California. Chapter 3 continues to contextualize this research by placing this dissertation within the current research literature. Because of Latinas’ intersectional identities and subjectivity, this thesis project leans on multi-disciplinary intersectional literatures and aligns Latinas with race, gender and sexuality, neoliberalism, information technologies, and telecommunications.

Chapter 4 reviews the research design of this study. It begins by reviewing the epistemological positioning of this study, which recognizes the social constructions of identity signifiers such as race, gender, sexuality, and the social construction of technology. This chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks that allow for analysis of these results, as well as the methodology necessary for engaging both archives and oral histories. This chapter concludes with a discussion around the study’s participants, instruments, analysis, ethics, and limitations.

Chapters 5 and 6 detail the histories of Latinas in telecommunications studied in this dissertation. Chapter 5 covers the archival research of the EEOC v. AT&T case, investigating how Latinas were considered or neglected throughout this process. Chapter 6 describes the history of the Latina experience in telecommunications through qualitative interview data.
Chapter 7 presents the discussion, contributions, and implications of this study, summarizing the dissertation findings and conclusions. Finally, I provide suggestions for future research directions of this study.
Chapter 2: Overlapping Histories

From the inception of the Bell System, people of color and white women were discriminated against, laying the foundations for an unequal incorporation of Latinas into telecommunications. Multiple historians have debated the structural influences within the Bell System. For Richard John, the state-oriented political economy came into conflict with that of the municipally oriented political economy, heavily shaping the Bell System (John, 2010, p.8). According to John, the history of the Bell System is an oscillating debate between private enterprise and public utilities (John, 2010, p. 8). N.R. Danielian’s approach to Bell’s history looks at the telephone company as an empire, not accountable to congressional committees or regulatory commissions. Danielian deems the early hierarchy as a ‘system of dictatorship,’ run by financial backers (1939, p. 31). However neither of these historians includes an analysis of the exclusions of people of color and white women, instead focusing on the political economy’s influence on the Bell System and vice versa. Stephen Norwood has analyzed the gendered organization of work at Bell, as well as the activist response by white women operators (Norwood, 1990). For an intersectional history of AT&T, Venus Green retells Bell’s history as organized by race and gender; exclusions of people of color were done through the strained inclusion of white women as operators (Green, 2001). The following is a summary of those histories from the late 19th century to the 1960s, when the civil rights and affirmative action initiatives forced changes into AT&T. While I agree with John that the telephone is a technology of politics and culture, I find it essential to include Green’s assertion that the telephone is also an invention co-constructed by race, class, and gender. Four interrelated themes arise within this history: the decisions of the stockholders, administration, and managers to monopolize Bell; the general public, state and federal attempts at custody of the telephone
company; technological influences on labor, specifically the telephone operator; and the race,
gendered, and class formations within AT&T. To contextualize this thesis, I parallel AT&T’s
history with that of Latinas in the United States, with a focus on labor, gender, and the Chicana/o
rights movements.

19th century

The story of the Bell System begins with the invention of the telephone. Richard John
asserts that the telephone evolved in the United States through three different stages:
Commercialization, when the network was established (1870s); popularization, when the
network was developed into mass service (1900s); and naturalization, when the network was
depoliticized (during World War I) (John, 2010, p. 7). Bell was first controlled by the owners of
the majority of the stock during the early years of development; then by management with
minority stock interest; and finally, into the early 1900s, by investment bankers (Danielian, 1939,
p. 39).

In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell obtained a basic patent for the ‘talking machine,’ and a
second patent for the structural aspects of the telephone (Danielian, 1939, p. 7). Soon after, the
Bell Patent Association was formed out of a group of investors funding Bell’s work (Danielian,
1939, p. 7), leading to the inception of the Bell System. The zeal for science and invention of the
19th century complemented the patents for the telephone, obtained early on by Bell. This allowed
for the monopoly on telephone research and therefore propelled further invention (Danielian,
1939, p. 98).\(^1\) Bell justified this monopoly with a narrative of ‘public good’ through invention, a
prelude that would contribute to the technological determinism in the U.S. today (Danielian,
1939, p. 119).

\(^1\) Between 1879 and 1894, the Bell legal team defended and won 600 patent infringement suits
Advocates claimed that the telephone, telegraph, and postal system created ‘global villages,’ coining the phrase “Making a neighborhood of a Nation” around new systems of international communications (John, 2010, p.10). However, like many technologies, the telephone was not created for the masses at its inception. The first users of the telephone were businessmen, professionals, merchants, and doctors; these users viewed the telephone as a tool that sped up the rate of production for those who could afford it (Johns, 2010, p. 219). It was not until the late 19th century that the general public used telephones in commercial spaces such as markets (John, 2010, p. 219). Because of boycotts and politicking spurred by high rates and a consequential demand for rate caps, this trend of public access to telephones ensued (John, 2010, p. 239). Through the 1900s public sentiment expressed that the telephone companies had a social obligation to provide social services (John, 2010, p. 268), as well as to resist Bell’s monopoly on the telephone (Green, 2001, p. 14). To assuage public fears, Bell president Theodore Vail used a new technique of business policy called ‘public relations’ (Danielian, 1939, p. 271).2 In 1885 AT&T was established in New York in the name of ‘interconnection,’ an attempt at merging the telegraph and telephone service under one network as both a holding company and network provider (John, 2010, p. 209). Giving the American public access to long distance services and standardizing equipment presented the move towards ‘interconnection’ as a public good (John, 2010, p. 209-210).3 Also significant to this time period was the inception of the Pacific Bell Telephone Company in San Francisco in 1880, formed from the consolidation of the American Speaking Telephone Company and the National Bell Company (Masters et al., 1927, p. 45). The

2 According to Danielian, public relations included “devices ranging all the way from ‘instruction of employees,’ and ‘public education,’ to interference with teaching in schools, editing of school books, buttonholing legislators, patting ‘big shots’ on the back, and kicking little fellows in softer spots” (Danielian, 1939, p. 271).

3 AT&T would retain its dual identity as a holding company and a network provider until 1984, when a federal judge forced it to sell all of its operating companies.
expansion through the Western states continued as Pacific Bell Telephone Company offered long
distance services in the late 19th century, and incorporated smaller independent companies
(Masters et al., 1927, p. 55). From its early beginnings, the telephone was surrounded by
controversy, debated between a private good and a public utility that should be regulated by law

Since the early 20th century, the telephone operator has been a gendered job. Telephone
operators started as young boys, however their reputation for fighting with one another and
rudeness toward the customers led to an intentional incorporation of white women.\textsuperscript{4} The first
woman telephone operator was hired in 1878, and was viewed with the ‘white collar’ status of
school teaching and clerking (Norwood, 1990, p. 28).\textsuperscript{5} The first operators worked with different
technological skills and challenges to connect callers (Green, 2001, p. 16), a short-lived process
through the 1880s. With the implementation of Taylorism, Bell established a regimented and
monotonous workplace for operators (Norwood, 1990, p.33). The late 19th century image of the
operator shifted from a local worker who exchanged gossip with callers, to a more controlled
“rationalized and scientifically managed workplace” (Green, 2001, p. 51). The shift in operators’
duties was inspired by multiple factors, including managerial methods of control, more complex
tasks such as more switchboard lines to monitor, and modifications to the switchboard
technology in the name of efficiency, reliability, economy, and further control over the operator

\textsuperscript{4} AT&T was formed of three different departments: The Commercial Department, responsible
for billing, customer services, advertising, and accounting; The Traffic Department, responsible
for telephone service, operator discipline, and training; and the Plant Department, in charge of
the construction, installation, and maintenance of line and switchboard equipment (Green, 2001,
p. 15); of these, operators were located in The Traffic Department.

\textsuperscript{5} The first female telephone operator was Emma M. Nutt, a white woman hired in the New
England Bell Company in 1878 (Brooks, 1976, p. 66).
Venus Green discusses this process of modifying technologies in order to further control or decrease labor all together through ‘technological displacement’ (Green, 2001).

Race, gender, and class are deeply embedded within Bell’s formations of labor and technological changes. During the early years of the switchboard, a gendered ‘emotional labor’ was intertwined with technological skills for the operator (Green, 2001, p. 19), as operators were trained to soothe. Green notes that when equipment failure occurred, the operators were told to use their social skills to placate callers (2001, p. 19). In the 19th century, the utilization of the telephone in America was deeply gendered as well; from rural ‘farm wives’ to urban wives; the telephone was used as a remedy for the isolation of gender roles (Brooks, 1975, p. 94). But gender was not the only element in shaping the role of the telephone operator and use of the telephone in society. Race and class played a key component to the status of the white woman telephone operator. The position of the operator was elite because it was exclusive to white women (Green, 2001, p.3), maintaining white status through the paternalistic ideologies of the Bell workplace (Green, 2001, p.3). Green contends that the model of the passive ‘white woman’ operator image maintained by the Bell System was also expected in poor working conditions, wages, and other benefits (2001, p. 4). However the early 20th century would bring labor resistance by white women telephone operators, while simultaneously maintaining racial and class segregation within the workplace.

**Early 20th Century**

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6 From the 1880s on, the Multiple switchboard was constantly being upgraded and monitored with new approaches that would increase the operators workload or decrease the need for operators all together (John, 2010, p. 237). For a detailed account of switchboard changes, see Venus Green’s *Race on the Line*, 2001, p. 30-46.

7 For an analysis of how the telephone is a gendered instrument, as well as an instrument of gender, see Lisa Rakow’s *Gender on the Line*. (1992).
By the early 20th century, the telephone had become popularized throughout the United States (John, 2010, p. 270). Despite their attempts, Bell was not the only operating company offering services. Because the Bell patent monopolies expired in the late 19th century, ‘Independent’ non-bell Companies built up their patent portfolios, operating 2.4 million telephones in 1902, compared to Bell’s 3.1 million (John, 2010, p. 273). While Bell offered a larger network and a larger variety of calling plans, the independents offered lower rates for local services (John, 2010, p. 274). But by 1907 the independent companies began to collapse, unable to compete with their Bell rival (John, 2010, p. 306-307).

Although Bell continued to grow, public and lawmaker opinion still challenged the monopoly; the idea of government ownership over the phone company was a popular bipartisan idea in 1913 (John, 2010, p. 369). On the west coast, the Bell Company expanded their ownership by acquiring smaller already established telephone companies. The Pacific Bell Telephone Company name changed to the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph (PT&T) Company in 1890, and then to the Pacific States Telephone and Telegraph Company in 1900 (Masters et al., 1927, p. 67). The Pacific States Telephone and Telegraph Company’s name changed again to Pacific Telephone and Telegraph (PT&T), acquiring the Sunset Telephone Company in 1906, which had recently merged with the Los Angeles Telephone Company (“Los Angeles Telephone History”).

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8 John asserts that the popularization of the telephone was due to the network expansion of the political economy. State and municipal governments were given authority to regulate the phone company (John, 2010, p. 270-271). Congress put the telephone and telegraphs under the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) in 1910. In 1913, Bell and the Justice Department agreed on three provisions in the Kingsbury Commitment: the divestiture between Bell and Western Union, a mandate that Bell could not purchase independent operating companies, and to give independent companies access to Bell’s long-distance network (John, 2010, p. 360).
In the early 20th century, the use of telephone operators was not always popular among customers and phone companies. Independent companies had begun using the dial-system, cutting out operators completely, but Bell defended the need for operators with a gendered campaign that advocated the ‘skill and faithfulness’ of operators unavailable through machines (John, 2010, p. 384-385). At this time the role of the operator continued to shift as well. The telephone-using public viewed the rural operator as an indispensable messaging center, presented as ‘heroic’ for circulating news of emergencies around the country (Brooks, 1976, p. 117). Among Bell employees, operators began attending training schools, coached on how to talk and dress ‘simple’ (Norwood, 1990, p. 44). This persona maintained the white collar distinction as a ‘lady,’ that separated the operators from factory assembly line workers (Norwood, 1990, p. 63), including the lower class, ethnic, racial and language minorities.

Among the rank and file, working conditions were dissatisfying for telephone operators (Norwood, 1990, p. 62). Training manuals and technological changes to the switchboard limited the operator’s skills, further standardizing working conditions (Green, 2001, p. 74). By the early 20th century, labor unions increased all around, including the formation of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) (Norwood, 1990, p.73). Operators attempted to organize unions early on, however male telephone union workers frequently foiled their efforts, unwilling to support women telephone workers in sympathy strikes (Norwood, 1990, p. 84-87). In response to the exclusion of major unions such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL),

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9 Part of this public relations campaign included placing Bell as the socially responsible corporation performing a public service by educating telephone users on the superiority of a telephone monopoly to that of independents and government ownership, see John, 2010, p. 386.
10 In Montana and San Francisco, organizing efforts failed specifically because male union employees as well as feminist groups would not support female telephone operators (Norwood, 1990, p. 84-87).
local telephone operators formed non-affiliated unions with international organizations (Norwood, 1990, p. 73).

Labor organizing and working conditions were executed not only by gender but also racial exclusions. Although they held ‘white collar’ jobs with a higher status symbol, white women telephone operators did so in poor working conditions, expected not to challenge with strikes and organizing (Green, 2001, p. 90 & p. 94). The telephone operators hired by Bell were done so based on their proficiency for speaking English, and being native-born British or Irish ancestry (Norwood, 1990, p. 47-48). Operator jobs were particularly discriminatory against minority groups deemed ‘foreigners, illiterate and untidy’ (Norwood, 1990, p. 42), and Jews and blacks were not allowed promotion beyond janitorial duties until 1940 (Norwood, 1990, p. 42).

The formation of the early telephone operator was used to appease the disgruntled male telephone customer. The racial exclusion of minorities was the foundation of Bell’s employment and technological structure of control (Green, 2001, p. 55). White women telephone operators gained a small social esteem through their work because it excluded racial minorities and was superior to factory conditions; however the feminization of their occupation limited their real wage benefits (Green, 2001, p. 86).  

1910-1930 

1918 was the only year that the Bell System was officially under government control, when President Woodrow Wilson issued an executive order transferring control of the telephone and telegraph to the Post Office Department under Postmaster General Burleson (John, 2010, p. 11).

Bell’s own President Vail was known for his condescension and ‘chivalry’ towards women, believing that they should not operate machinery beyond the telephone (Brooks, 1976, p. 147). In lieu of real benefits, Bell would offer ‘amenities’ such as comfortable break rooms, free lunches, tea, and coffee, and company awards. These spaces were also tools of control to keep the operator under the managers’ gaze and within the company walls during break (Green, 2001, p. 86).
The Bell System was officially a part of the U.S. Army communications, creating a Women’s Telephone Operating Unit for those operators fluent in French and who could interconnect lines with France (Brooks, 1976, p. 157). Although Bell was officially under the Post Office, they would remain autonomous, assisting in using the telephone, telegraph, and cable into ‘one great medium’ for the war (John, 2010, p. 397). This time period worked out in Bell’s benefit, giving them more leeway to explore wireless telegraphy, their strength in logistical support, and creating a network to allies (John, 2010, p. 382). The unions also knew Postmaster General Burleson as an adversary, honoring fewer benefits than Bell, and, consequentially, leading to more strikes by telephone employees (John, 2010, p. 422).

Meanwhile on the west coast, PT&T was experimenting with ‘telephotograph’ equipment to transmit pictures as beams of light across the country (Masters et al., 1927, p. 107). Also significant to the Pacific Coast’s technological developments was direct radiotelephone communication with England, Scotland, and Wales (Masters et al., 1927, p. 107). After the war, Bell entered the 1920s era with less regulation because of the failed attempt of government operations (Brooks, 1976, p. 157).

Unions and labor rights expanded from 1910-1930, providing more activist opportunity to the telephone operator. Telephone operators were taking on a new image of the self-confident woman, prepared to defend workers’ rights (Norwood, 1990, p. 223). The newly formed Telephone Operator’s Department within the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

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13 223 American women telephone operators worked overseas for the Signal Corps, assisting in establishing a new telephone network in France (Brooks, 1976, p. 156).
15 It should also be noted that this time period saw further technological change, with Alexander Graham Bell making the first coast-to-coast telephone call in 1913, with the invention of a high-vacuum tube used to amplify telephone conversations (Brooks, 1976, p. 139).
(IBEW) sent operators to worker union schools and organized conferences to bring unions together (Norwood, 1990, p. 228). In 1912 in Boston, operators formed one of the largest locals in the nation, the Women’s Telephone Union Local (WTUL) leading to victories in their demands of management and government in 1912 and 1919 (Norwood, 1990, p. 91).\footnote{In 1915 Julia O’Connor became the first WTUL president (Norwood, 1990, p. 121). Labor organizing expanded to the South, West, and Canada (Norwood, 1990, p. 151); though they still did not receive support from the IBEW, they did confront IBEW leadership (Norwood, 1990, p. 152).} Despite the telephone operators’ labor organizing of this time, which led to the formation of unions and successful strikes, Bell and male unions resisted. Despite union wins, the successful telephone workers’ strikes were accomplished with mens’ terms in mind, neglecting female telephone operators (Green, 2001, p. 108).\footnote{One exception was the Colorado Telephone Company Benefit Association in Denver, formed in 1906, which created workers rights specifically based on the needs of women (Green, 2001, p. 108).}

But the technological changes of the 1920s, such as the increasing use of the dial system in Bell,\footnote{The dial era lasted from 1920 to 1960. Dial telephones were unpopular to the general public because they were difficult to operate and took away jobs (Green, 2001, p. 160).} threatened unemployment for operators. The automated switching exchanges improved upon after WWI enabled Bell to treat operators as dispensable.\footnote{In 1923, a strike of picketing and unrest ended with the New England Telephone Company dismissing all strikers and replacing them with inexperienced operators (Norwood, 1990, p. 292).} Manual operating boards were used for small cities and rural areas, while automation was recommended for all but the largest cities (Green, 2001, p. 123). Dial and automation technologies led to a new role for operators, that of the ‘service specialist,’ operators known more as personal assistants in information (Green, 2001, p. 134). Technological shifts would also lead to more regimented working conditions. Although operators were overworked and underpaid, their labor in an exclusively
white woman’s occupation maintained their elite status as their jobs became closer to that of secretaries (Green, 2001, p. 135).  

One result of the labor organizing from the 1920s was the development of the ‘family,’ an idea that would last through the 1970s and strongly resonate among employees of Bell/AT&T. Bell President Vail advanced the ‘family’ concept as a way to curb involvement in unions via ‘employee associations,’ a concept used to displace trade unionism with non-union benefits (Green, 2001, p. 137). About the ‘family’, also known as the ‘Employees’ Benefit Fund,’ Vail said, “we have felt more than ever that we are just one big family with every employee having a seat at the family table” (Green, 2001, p. 137). The employee associations were discussed by Bell management at conferences, planned to reinforce gender expectations of white women operators via ‘sympathy,’ attempting to place white women in the familial role of passive and quiet, without a need for higher wages (Green, 2001, p. 146-147). Within the employee associations, representatives were elected to discuss wages and working conditions, however without the power to actually change anything (Norwood, 1990, p. 258). The associations also placed operators on a ‘merit’ based wage schedule, avoiding contractual union mandated raises (Green, 2001, p. 148). But being a member of the Bell Family still held a prestige for operators because of its racial homogeneity. Telephone operators’ membership in this ‘family’ reinstated racial hierarchies, and accomplished Bell’s larger goals of higher profits via public relations (Green, 2001, p. 144).

1930-1950s

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20 Green finds that in such publications as the Union Telephone Operator newspaper, black stereotypes and blackface were used to reinforce white women’s superiority in their work (Green, 2001, p. 135).
The Depression and World War II changed labor and technology in the Bell System once again. Between 1929 and 1935, Bell cut their labor force by 40%; but these losses in employment were done so to maintain the $9.00-per-share dividend (Danielian, 1939, p. 200). By 1930, Bell was providing more service to a record number of telephone customers and stockholders (Brooks, 1976, p. 187). However in 1931, Bell experienced the first decline in telephone service, and by 1932 services were down by 10% (Brooks, 1976, p. 187).

Although the economy recovered after the Depression, Bell did not replace operators’ jobs, implementing the use of the dial instead (Green, 2001, p. 161). For those continuing operator work, workloads increased and working conditions declined. Green identifies this process of ‘technological displacement’ as especially prevalent. ‘Technological displacement’ indicated Bell’s intentional move to replace labor with automated systems (2001, p. 161). Despite the major cuts on Bell’s part, by 1930, about two-thirds of the labor force was women (Danielian, 1939, p. 17). Bell chose to squeeze more work out of telephone operators at an accelerated pace to make up for the losses, increasing the operators’ average hourly load (Danielian, 1939, p. 210). Labor activism arose in response to the poor working conditions and low wages. In 1937, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Wagner Act, protecting independent labor organizing (Green, 2001, p. 171), leading to the establishment of the National Federation of Telephone Workers (NFTW) (Green, 2001, p. 173). Although women operators were still relegated to low representations among their male counterparts, they now engaged further in debates, bargaining demands, and work-related issues (Green, 2001, p. 173).

The 1940s were rife with labor union wins for telephone workers, although not without setbacks. During the war, telephones became a crucial part of national communications. In 1942, long-distance calls increased by 400% immediately after Pearl Harbor (Brooks, 1976, p. 208).
Although World War II created a need for more telephone operators, it was used as an excuse for Bell managers to create new technologies as a method of ‘progress’ to excuse the jobless rates (Green, 2001, p. 168). According to Green, this was a key time for unnoticed technological displacement, “Low-paying operators’ jobs could be sacrificed at the altar of ‘progress’” (2001, p. 169). But despite technological displacement, the labor movement gained momentum in the mid-1940s, with the first massive telephone worker walkouts, organized by the NFTW (Brooks, 1976, p. 218). The union won their demands in 1946 for a ten-dollar-a-week increase and a minimum hourly wage of sixty-five cents (Brooks, 1976, p. 219). In 1947, the NFTW created a new benefits package demand, however when a deal could not be reached with AT&T, more than three hundred thousand telephone workers walked out, beginning the first nationwide strike in telephone history (Brooks, 1976, p. 221).

A significant shift ensued in gender and race roles for the operators of the 1940s. White women telephone operators could not move into other equivalent clerical jobs in the Bell System (Green, 2001, p. 190). These new jobs were not promotions, but a horizontal transfer without wage increases or training in skilled labor (Green, 2001, p. 190-191). African-American employment also shifted in the post WWII jobs sector; under the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), blacks could now be hired into operator roles (Green, 2001, p. 195). But this transition did not happen without resistance from white operators, who degraded black women through minstrel shows in black face (Green, 2001, p. 206). Bell used their own various discrimination tactics to ignore executive orders to integrate. White operators argued that black women would threaten their social status and work environments, and Bell used these complaints

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21 Other sectors included the Plant, Accounting, and Commercial Departments, and not just Traffic.
22 Pacific Telephone and Telegraph specifically ignored Executive Order 8802 and 9346 (Green, 2001, p. 200).
to justify their employment discrimination practices (Green, 2001, p. 206). As the workplace was racially integrated, the image of the ‘white lady’ telephone operator declined (Green, 2001, p. 196). Bell restructured the workforce to diminish the ‘elite’ operator status (Green, 2001, p. 196). As a result, telephone subscribers and white telephone operators regularly harassed newly hired black operators (Green, 2001, p. 196).

1960s

The Bell system continued their lip service towards recruiting previously excluded minorities throughout the 1960s, however without greatly diversifying the workplace. AT&T developed the ‘Plan for Progress,’ a voluntary set of affirmative action agreements that were not mandatory (Green, 2001, p. 229). Although women and men of color employees increased during these years, the computerization and occupational segregation also decreased the number of jobs in these sectors (Green, 2001, p. 227). Bell also developed the Expanded Direct Distance Dialing; allowing subscribers to dial their calls long distance with minimum operator assistance (Green, 2001, p. 217), further diminishing their need for operators.

For the telephone operator, the decline of the ‘white lady’ image and integration of black women were used as methods of control in the workplace, manipulating white workers through threatening their jobs by hiring racial minorities (Green, 2001, p. 226). Bell management also decreased the privileges previously afforded to white operators, such as free coffee, tea, and comfortable lunchrooms (Green, 2001, p. 220). Telephone workers of color lacked union representation, as union officials saw themselves only acting on behalf of white workers’ interests, viewing new minority hiring as a threat to white union members’ jobs (Green, 2001, p.

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23 At the 1943 National Assembly of the NFTW, members openly discussed how to evade Executive Order 8802, which required integration in the workplace (Green, 2001, p. 207).
The 1960s were a time when racial tensions and resistance to workplace integration mounted, leading to the pivotal turning point of the EEOC v. AT&T case of the 1970s.

Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s drew negative attention to the Bell system. Reports of discrimination and low numbers of the recruitment of people of color and white women placed Bell in the spotlight of workplace integration (Brooks, 1976, p. 288). In 1975, the U.S. government conducted their second antitrust investigation into AT&T, which would lead to the break up of the Bell System in 1984 (Brooks, 1976, p. 317). Civil unrest, the Bell monopoly, the Civil Rights Movements, and the feminist movements built up to 1970, when the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) denied AT&T’s request for raising interest rates, inciting the official investigation into discriminatory employment hiring practices.

**Latinas**

**Labor**

Latinas entered telecommunications at a specific moment of social change in the political, economic, racial, and gendered norms in the United States. Latinas and Latinos had deep and contentious roots in the U.S. long before the Civil Rights Movements. During the Great Depression from 1920 to WWII, over 500,000 people of Mexican descent were either deported or repatriated (Blackwell, 2011, p. 44). Although Mexicans comprised less than 1% of the U.S. population, they were targeted for 46% of all people deported (Blackwell, 2011, p. 44). Due to a labor shortage during WWII, migrant workers were brought back into the U.S. to work on agricultural production. After the postwar boom, the U.S. program “Operation Wetback” targeted Mexicans through massive deportation (Blackwell, 2011, p. 45). Under the “Bracero Program” from 1942-1964, Latina/os were excluded from labor unions and paid low wages for seasonal work, viewed as disposable by agricultural employers (Blackwell, 2011). In fact,
Latina/os were segregated from labor unions and often subject to hostility by the AFL when they received membership, separated into lower pay rates and seniority lines (Blackwell, 2011).\textsuperscript{24} With increased suppression came increased activism among Latina/os in California, who organized labor strikes in Oxnard, California in 1903 and a massive movement among Cannery workers in the 1940s (Blackwell, 2011).

The social unrest of the 1960s led to increased affirmative action legislation to integrate the workplace. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Latina/os were largely excluded from blue-collar jobs and union membership. By the 1970s, Latina/os were more widely incorporated into the workplace, however in conjunction with the recession from 1974-1975, the economy was becoming deindustrialized, two trends leading to fewer jobs for newly incorporated minorities (Segura & Zavella, 2007). These new market trends were the beginnings of the political economy we now know as ‘neoliberalism,’ with trends in corporate restructuring to diminish union rights, and the backing of government to defund public services (Segura & Zavella, 2007).

The brief window that Latinas would benefit from affirmative action integration had closed quickly after the 1970s, with the implementation of the Reagan era, a time when many cities would lose industrial employment (Segura & Zavella, 2007).

Despite the affirmative action implementation, the standard of living for Latina/os dropped from 1973 to 1987 (Vélez-Ibáñez & Sampaio, 2002). Poverty rates rose three times higher for Latina/os than their Anglo counterparts. Latina workers in the U.S. occupied the lowest ranks of the wage labor force by the mid-1970s, despite the 70% rise of Latinas into the workforce (Vélez-Ibáñez & Sampaio, 2002). In 1970, 18% of Latina hourly workers earned

\textsuperscript{24} Unions had a history of excluding Latina/o organizers and members. One such example is the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union, who refused to support the work of Latina/o organizers after WWII (Vélez-Ibáñez & Sampaio, 2002).
poverty-level wages, and those Latinas in blue-collar jobs often saw their job sent overseas to workers exploited for even lower wages (Vélez-Ibáñez & Sampaio, 2002). For Latina/os who retained their jobs, they continued to experience decreased wages and benefits. Between 1975 and 1989, average earnings growth among Latina/os slowed to the point of stagnation as income inequality grew (Vélez-Ibáñez & Sampaio, 2002, p. 54).

**Latinas and Chicana/o Rights Movement**

Chicano history begins with the conquest of the U.S. over the Southwest in 1848 and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Since that time, Latina/os were subject to segregation, lynching, state violence, and labor exploitation (González & Fernández, 1998, p. 93). ‘Chicano’ and ‘Chicana’ became a term that marked a new political identity of Latina/os in the U.S. The Chicano Rights Movement was the outcome of identifying around these histories and cultural nationalisms. Throughout the 1960s, Chicano Rights movements on the West Coast were motivated through the cultural idea of ‘Aztlán,’ a geographic place of origin of the Aztecs believed to be in the Southwest of the United States. Aztlán acted as a rallying point of cultural nationalism by Chicano activists responding to racial exploitation (Klor de Alva, 1998, p. 71). But within the ranks of the Chicano Rights Movement, Latinas, identifying themselves as Chicana, were often pigeonholed into stereotyped gendered roles and excluded from leadership (Blackwell, 2011, p. 31).25

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25 Latinas have a long history of raced, gendered, and sexual subject formations in the United States. Under the gender roles of Spanish colonizing formation, women in Mexico were held to a binary role of virgin/whore, only allowed to occupy one or the other (Rodríguez, 2003, p. 18). Latinas in Southern California in particular inhabited spaces impacted by colonization, in which land was once part of Mexico, and indigenous territory before that, resulting in a settler colonial state in which Latinas are often portrayed as foreigners, undocumented, hyper-sexualized, or hyper-reproductive by the mainstream media (Rodriguez, 2003, p. 18).
Within the Chicano Rights Movement, women were often placed in gendered roles as mothers or caretakers. When Chicanas raised issues about patriarchy in the Chicano Rights Movement, they were often labeled as traitors, la malinche, or as white (Segura & Pesquera, 1998, p. 196). Not only was the idea of the ‘family’ prevalent to Bell’s history, but Chicanos also used it as a method of activism. Chicanas who challenged the ideologies within Chicano Rights were accused of breaking up the ‘family’ with their feminist critique (Segura & Pesquera, 1998, p. 196). But Chicanas during the 1960s and 1970s could not find a place within the Feminist movement either, due to its tendency to overlook race, ethnicity, class, and cultural divisions between women (Segura & Pesquera, 1998, p. 196). This time period left many Chicanas on the outskirts of both movements, though still active on their own terms. Many women of color organized their own ‘feminisms’ movements. Maylei Blackwell insists that women of color were leaders in these movements where multiple strands of feminisms intervened in U.S. politics (2011, p. 22). Latina/Chicana feminists organized around their intersectional needs through political action, community organizing, academic scholarship, and creative artistic expression (Ruiz & Sánchez Korrol, 2005). Latinas entering into the Bell system during the 1970s had a long history in the United States, as gendered and sexualized subjects, activists, and underrepresented laborers.

**Conclusion: Latina Histories in Telecommunications**

The creation of a Latina information worker history requires braiding multiple strands of history together, which were previously documented as separate. Latinas were on the margins of the Chicano rights movement and the Feminist movement during the 1960s and 1970s, however they were active during these monumental moments of affirmative action. To locate Latinas within the history of telecommunications, it is necessary to overlap these separate histories.
Latinas have been present in the Western part of the United States from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to present day, leaving imprints in oral histories, the arts, and activism. In the 1960s and 1970s, Latinas organized around Chicana feminist movements that took into account the intersectional needs often overlooked through various identity politics. I draw on Gloria Anzaldúa’s reflections on borderlands and the *mestiza* consciousness to think about the multiple overlapping spaces that Latinas inhabit in telecommunication. Anzaldúa discussed the *mestiza* consciousness as one that must negotiate many perspectives, cultures, and ‘borderlands,’

*La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western Mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 101)

This project embraces the unique experiences expressed in my oral history interviews. Latinas bring to telecommunications a perspective in their cultural, gender, racial, ethnic, regional, and linguistic difference. Latina histories in telecommunications will not only broaden relevant fields of study, but will offer important insights into previously overlooked AT&T histories. These histories will be explored further in subsequent chapters. The following chapter provides further context by reviewing the research on Latina intersectional identities, their experience of neoliberalism, information technologies, and the literature on women of color in telecommunications.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

Latinas have frequently been left out of the developing fields of the history and social construction of technologies. This thesis is framed by literature written in Latina/o Studies, Critical Technology Studies, Science and Technology Studies, Cyber-Feminisms, and political economy. Although the literature does not specifically cover Latina histories of technologies and telecommunications, when brought together these perspectives create a portrait of the context for this dissertation.

The first body of literature concerns the debates surrounding Latina identities, with a focus specifically on Latinas and formations of race and sexuality in the United States. This literature shows the historical subject positioning of Latinas, and how these formations impact their work in telecommunications. Because this time period researched, 1973-1984, represents the beginnings of the neoliberal political economy, a brief analysis of Latina positioning within neoliberalism is also discussed.

The second body of literature considers research conducted on Latinas and information technologies. Though sparse, researchers in Latina/o Studies found that Latinas engage cultural values into their work, bring a critical analysis to working with all levels of technologies, exercise agency within limited possibilities of work with technologies, and are interpellated by power structures that shape their engagements with information technologies (Peña, 1997, Cantú, 2008). Information technologies play an important role in forming spaces of power where Latinas exercise critical analysis of micro and macro constructions of subjectivity.

Finally, I look at the literature written on the history of the EEOC v. AT&T case and subsequent impact of the consent decree. Although few sources take Latinas into consideration, and many of the researchers are divided on whether to prioritize race, gender, or class as a
guiding identity when exploring the case’s impact, when brought together these research sources agree that Latinas were undeniably invisible before the consent decree. In later chapters I explore how the EEOC v. AT&T made Latinas further invisible throughout the case.

**Intersectional Identities**

**Latinas and Race**

United States media, popular culture, and historical discourse have traditionally represented Latinas as both racialized and sexualized subjects. Latina racial formations “derive simultaneously from domestic racial projects- where ‘domestic’ refers to both the homeland and the host land- and the racialized geopolitics of US-Latin America relations” (Candelario, 2007, p. 337). In Latin America, colonization ranked race on a racial continuum from indigenous to pure Spanish blood, however in the United States, the institutionalized racial order organized as a white and black binary, “created a hard boundary around White populations that became defined as pure through exclusions and powerful because racial exclusivity allowed for cross-class symbolic, social, and political investments in Whiteness” (Candelario, 2007, p. 339). Latinas’ racial experience is re-categorized in the United States, creating a “‘transcontinental experiential dissonance’ that is significant insofar as it makes salient the structurally disadvantageous position non-Whites find themselves in because of shifting ontological contexts” (2007, p. 342). This complicated racial position is significant in telecommunications as Latinas are often neglected or positioned as a binary to black women within telecommunications as competitors, buffers, or allies in hostile work environments.

Latinas were historically and discursively represented as non-citizens, or suspected as foreign outsiders. Leo Chávez identifies the politically charged rhetoric surrounding Latina/os and immigration, the law and cultural xenophobia of the past as “The Latino Threat Narrative,”
in which Latinos “are different from past immigrants and other ethnic groups in America today. Latinos have been in what is now the United States since the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, actually predating the English colonies” (Chávez, 2008, p. 3). Latina/os are viewed as a threat by resisting integration and acculturation into the national community, positioned as invaders across the southern border with the intention of destroying American culture (Chávez, 2008, p. 2). Telecommunications organizes Latinas by the same racial tropes that function within the larger everyday context of the United States.

**Latina Sexuality**

Two major themes regarding Latina sexuality have been explored in Latina/o Studies - the binary of the Malinche/traitor whore and the Virgin/submissive woman, as well as the discourse around over-sexualization and fertility of Latina women in pop culture. In the media, representations of Latinas as over-sexualized are proliferated, “Latinas have been racialized and exoticized in pop culture… as sexually wild and uncivilized beings” (Asencio, 2010, p. 1). Recently, Latina fertility and reproduction has been the “center stage in the often vitriolic public debate over the causes and meanings of demographic change” (Chávez, 2008, p. 71). Chávez observes that the U.S. societies’ discourse around Latinas’ fertility has been ongoing for over forty years (2008, p. 73). Jose Quiroga and Melanie Lopez Frank’s research notes that, “the starting point for the cultural production of knowledge on Latina/os and their sexualities arises from activist work in the 1960s and 1970s” (2010, p. 139). The time period of Latina sexual discourse and cultural production occurs in congruence with the beginning of my research on Latinas as information workers.

**Neoliberalism and Latinas**
The time period of this critical historical inquiry into Latinas and ICTs takes place in the era of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism marks a period of divestment in public services and the move to give private corporations more access to wealth. Neoliberalism is not just an economic system, but also impacts race, sexuality, and gender. Political ideologies embed information technologies and promote a western culture of ‘progress’ and ‘freedom’ through technological determinism.

According to Harvey, the neoliberal project dis-embeds capital from the constraints of state-led planning and state ownership (Harvey, 2005, p. 11), therefore increasing international capitalism as a “utopia project” (Harvey, 2005, p. 11) and re-establishing capitalism as a political project “to restore the power of economic elites” (Harvey, 2005, p. 19). Lisa Duggan examines the values of the neoliberal project as promoting the narrative of privatization and personal responsibility. Neoliberalism touts privatization as a critical point of freedom for citizens under capitalism, reaching far beyond the United States, prioritizing the protection of class power and ‘freedom’ to accumulate wealth (2003, p. 12). Within neoliberalism, corporate profits are intimately intersecting with the hegemony of people of color and women, as Duggan explains,

Welfare reform and the law and order politics of the past two decades clearly illustrate the dense interrelations among neoliberalism’s economic vision and its cultural projects.  

The goal of raising corporate profits has never been pursued separately from the rearticulation of hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality in the United States and around the globe. (2003, p. 15)

Duggan argues that race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ethnicity and nationality cannot be compartmentalized as ‘outside of’ economy, “The economy cannot be transparently abstracted from the state or the family, from practices of racial apartheid, gender segmentation, or sexual regulation” (Duggan, 2003, p. xiv). More specifically, Duggan names five phases around
neoliberal discourses: attacks on the New Deal coalition and unionism that came from the 1950s and 1960s, attacks on downwardly redistributive social movements such as civil rights, feminism, and LGBT movements in the 1960s and 1970s, pro-business activism on behalf of U.S. based corporations, culture wars that attacked and defunded public spaces and institutions, and ‘multicultural,’ ‘equality’ politics, which used the language of equality to continue the redistribution of wealth to corporations (Duggan, 2003). Although economy is discursively separated from race, gender, and sexuality, these elements of subjectivity are intimately intertwined with political economy (Duggan, 2003).

‘Freedom’ and ‘mobility’ are two concepts deeply embedded into justifications around neoliberalism and information technologies. The ‘freedom’ component of neoliberalism is significant because it is often used to describe access to ICTs, but as my research will show, often inhibits the so-called freedom of Latina information workers. Doran looks at how popular media represents mobile devices and produces tools of neoliberal citizenship, finding that neoliberal citizenship is characterized by both ‘freedom’ and regulations:

…Continued pursuit of individual freedom as well as by systems of domination which are becoming increasingly material, invisible, and infrastructural. The neoliberal citizen is thus a paradoxical figure, at once ‘free’ –that is, governmental power that regulates and manages conduct through the strategic deployment of such freedom. (Doran, 2011, p. 134)

While the neoliberal era divested access to welfare and state-funded resources, it accelerated the narrative of freedom through information technologies such as mobile devices. Freedom is presented as “the ability to manage the self remotely, unconstrained by geography. In this way, mobility becomes a powerful signifier of freedom of the neoliberal citizen” (Doran, p. 138).
According to Cameron McCarthy, the mobility in the neoliberal era organizes the post-welfare state subjection, “as socially and economically mobile” (2011, p. 10). This mobility wrapped in freedom is contingent upon the geographic manipulation and immobility of Latina information workers in telecommunications.

The neoliberal economy and state power affects Latinas as well, both domestically and abroad. Through neoliberalism governments turned to foreign markets for economic recovery (Mirabal & Laó-Montes, 2007, p. 240), greatly increasing immigration from Latin America to the United States (Mirabal & Laó-Montes, 2007). Integrating the neoliberal economy with digital capitalism and the ‘network society’ (Castells, 1997), we have a less regulated marketplace with defunded public services organized by new forms of space and time- “timeless time” and “the space of flows” (1997, 145), “It is a society that is structured in its dominant functions and processes around networks. In its current manifestation it is a capitalist society” (1997, p.148).

The 1970s mark a time period when technology became more flexible and mobile. Mirabal & Laó-Montes explain,

The reconfigurations of technology in the form of nature, as flexible, was also central to the re-spatializing of capital in the 1970s, when a U.S. recession and new developments in technology enabled corporations to move to off-shore sites as the new frontier for higher return on capital investments, flexible shop-floor strategies, and an abundant flow of cheap labor. (Mirabal & Laó-Montes, 2007, p. 244)

The exploration of the Latina information worker’s experience is critical to the discussion around neoliberalism, which often leaves Latinas out of scholarship surrounding globalization or solely focuses on the maquiladoras developed out of free trade (Mirabal & Laó-Montes, 2007, p. 251).

Chicana/o Studies
This research enters Chicana/o Studies discussions around information technology and neoliberal labor practices. The neoliberal model, including globalized free trade policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), impacted Latinas in the Southern hemisphere and the United States (Mirabal & Laó-Montes 2007, p. 251).

Curtis Marez writes on the merchandising industry of Homies, the popular Latina/o figurines. Marez finds that the Homies industry is an example of both collusion and resistance to the information age (Mirabal & Laó-Montes, 2007, p. 251). The information age, established on the foundations of defunded public spaces and reinvestments into technology-focused private sectors, promised new opportunities for the technological elite; instead, it revealed old inequalities reformulated in the latest information technology industry (Marez, 2006, p. 139). According to Marez, the Homies merchandising industry’s production and reception “foregrounds many of the contradictions between workers and corporations in the new economy” (Marez, 2006, p. 140); like Marez, I found my interview collaborators both opposing and reinforcing the larger systems of information capitalism (Marez, 2006, p. 140). Latina information workers engage the complex and contradictory interactions of everyday work in the private sector. Whereas Homies circulate in production, consumption, and resistance of the information age, Latina information workers embody those circulations of culture (Marez, 2006, p. 146).

The neoliberal era marked the deregulation of the state and the inflation of hypercapitalism in the form of the free market. While women in Latin America have been researched on the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the physical labor in creating ICTs, Latinas in telecommunications have yet to be explored. This entrance into the
neoliberal era exposes how Latinas were affected by government deregulation, the divestment of welfare and state-funded programs, and the onslaught of digital capitalism.

**Latinas and Information Technology**

Research into Latinas and technology, though scarce, has often been concerned with the digital divide. Richard Chabrán and colleagues define ‘Digital Inclusion’ as, “that everyone-regardless of who they are or where they live-can participate in and take advantage of the economic, educational, health, and civic opportunities afforded by broadband and related information technology” (Chabrán *et al*., 2008, p. xiii). Latinas use technologies for some purposes, as well as for outlets of agency and sabotage. Mirabal and Laó-Montes found that women in post-NAFTA Mexico and Colombia used technologies such as the Internet for geographic mobility in the form of Internet marriages with foreign husbands. While some may victimize these women through their use of desire as currency, Mirabal and Laó-Montes argue that women from Latin America use neoliberal systems of economy to repurpose technology, arguing, “bodies disrupt the gears of technologies that promise flexibility and mobility” (2007, p. 251).

Previous research by scholars on Latinas/os and technology contributes to the history of formulating a critical Latina Technology Studies. Jorge Reina Schement’s (2001) work reveals the historical impact of telecommunications policy on Latinas/os in the twenty-first century, demonstrating how Latinas/os must be engaged and considered in this policy. Schement proposes a telecommunications policy agenda that will most directly relate to Latinas/os, noting that those who benefit from the information age do so through the production and distribution of information: “Latinas/os must engage in the public policy discourses that drive telecommunications” (2007, p. 251). Telecommunications policy does not occur in a vacuum;
issues that have been important to Latina/o communities for years, such as immigration, education, housing, Latina/o owned businesses, and healthcare, are all relevant to access during the information age.

Richard Chabrán and Romelia Salinas (2004) ask how the new digital economy has altered our conceptions of space and place, recognizing that socioeconomic forces that develop technologies organize the physical experiences of technologies and telecommunications. Telecommunications companies once recruited Latinas, though underrepresented in high-end Silicon Valley tech jobs, after the Civil Rights Movements, the Women’s Rights Movement, the Chicana/o Rights Movement, and the 1973 Consent Decree between AT&T and the EEOC.

While policy regarding access to ICTs is important, there is also a critical race theory approach to the digital divide. The approach to the digital divide is not without its own racial politics, often mimicking the larger structures of power. Rayvon Fouché analyzes the racial significance around the program One Laptop Per Child and contends, “technological change references and reflects the fluid meanings of race and the nature of race relations in the United States” (2012, p. 66). Language around the digital divide is articulated as a have/have not binary, positing access to the Internet and distribution of laptops without a critical framework as a resolution. This narrative is displayed in the recent 2012 Pew Research Center Report that praises, “The digital divide between Latinos and whites is smaller than what it had been just a few years ago. Between 2009 and 2012, the share of Latino adults who say they go online at least occasionally increased 14 percentage points, rising from 64% to 78%” (Lopez et al., 2013, p. 5). The gap that the Pew Research Center lauds as bridged through mobile phone Internet access is discussed by Latina/o Studies scholars as more complicated than simply Internet access.
Few sources account for the lack of Latinas in technological fields, though some authors promote Latina narratives of STEM and IT experiences to supplant the thin history. Despite the increasing access to technologies, Latinas seldom graduate from STEM fields or work in high profile technology jobs. Norma Cantú engaged the oral history of successful Latinas in STEM to learn from their experiences. Cantú’s research tells women’s stories on their own terms,

What the stories uncover is a web of caring and support that propelled these Chicanas--predominately working class, first generation in college, of Color, and women--into spheres previously uninhabited by people like them. Noting their embeddedness in social relations, rather than simply focusing on their achievements as individuals, reveals a much more complex and textured explanation for their success. (Cantú, 2008, p. xv) Burnett et al. interviewed high-ranking Latinas in IT to demonstrate their experiences. Though the authors neglect the racial structural discriminations in the IT workforce, they find four trends in Latina narratives: Interviewees were cognizant of negative gender social typing in IT participation. All women chose to pursue technical degrees in college. Prior to entering the field, four women were minimally exposed to computers, the Internet, and IT. All five women described positive support from peers, family, or other members of their social network as critical to their success (Burnett et al., 2009). According to these studies, Latinas working with information technologies engage cultural, gendered, and racial identities with their careers.

In his exploration of Mexican women assembly line work in maquiladoras, Devon Peña uses Latina narratives as examples of agency and struggle against the domination of such tedious technological work. Peña traces a genealogy of truth claims to reveal a social construction of knowledge as power and the politics of knowledge (1997, p. 180),
In the workplace, differences in power are often articulated as hidden dimensions of everyday labor experience. For example, the deployment of technology can obscure the human bases and dimensions of domination on the shop floor—the engineer is always one step removed from labor's experience with the mechanical despotism of the flow line. But the contradictory and ambiguous narratives of differently empowered subjects can also make domination more transparent, and thus have a more direct impact on material conditions and power relations in the workplace, as well as on people's perceptions of these phenomena. (Peña, 1997, p. 181)

Though Latinas are often not included in the history of United States, their own articulations of working in telecommunications describe “identity narratives,” what Peña describes as discursive practices, “that workers and managers invoke when they are involved in struggles over the ‘crafting of selves in the workplace’” (Peña, 1997, p. 181). Latina information worker knowledge, situated and specific to the subjects’ gender, class, ethnicity and geographic location, will help shape a discourse around how information technologies shaped contemporary capitalism, how people of color have been given or denied access to ICTs, and how power circulates with regards to technology within digital capitalism. These explorations are reflected on every day by Latina women in telecommunications, and though their voices are often neglected in the history of telecommunications, their own stories of the workplace describe deep-rooted discriminations that are inter-related to the development and distribution of ICTs. “This knowledge- a dynamic byproduct of workers’ shifting subjectivity- is social, cultural, and technical in nature” (Peña, 1997, p. 188). Agency and skilled knowledge work hand in hand in Peña’s research on Mexican maquila workers. The women working in maquilas acquired knowledge in production that includes both mundane and highly skilled engineering techniques,
using these skills to stall or stop work all together. These nuanced accounts are incredibly crucial to building a history of Latinas and information technologies, “Workers, like managers, engineers, or social theorists, are perfectly capable of creating and articulating their own discourses on moral rights and deconstructions of the will to power on the shop floor” (Peña, 1997, p. 184).

**Latinas Enter Telecommunications**

Although a dearth of scholarship explores Latinas’ work with, analysis of, and resistance to information technologies, recent research has engaged Latinas’ work in information technology related fields, such as STEM and IT. But often these narratives, important to a body of work emphasizing Latina presence in a tech-centric industry, neglect accounts of crucial legislative and corporate history that led to openings into technology-heavy fields for underrepresented people. Within the scholarship on the AT&T v. EEOC, the subject on Latinas is unwritten.

Although a solid foundation of scholarship exists around the history of the AT&T v. EEOC consent decree, a deficit of analysis around Latina presence weakens the body of literature on telecommunications. Venus Green conducted the most thorough investigations into the ways in which the EEOC, influenced by NOW in particular, separated gender and race, resulting in the benefit of white women. Green named this ‘gender first’ approach as a large cause as to why black working-class women’s complaints were neglected in the post-consent decree years at AT&T (Green, 2012). Green contends that NOW minimized the differences among women’s testimonies, therefore erasing blackness from complaints filed by African American women against AT&T, instead taking the approach of universalizing women (Green, 2012, p. 50). Marjorie Stockford’s historical account argues that the EEOC focused solely on
race, neglecting gender all together. Despite the EEOC leading the suit against AT&T, tensions were high between NOW and the EEOC. Women from NOW as well as women staff at the EEOC found the EEOC dismissive of issues around gender; Stockford recalls, “For the EEOC’s part, NOW, a feminist organization only three years old, was hardly in its lawyers’ consciousness. Theoretically the two groups were working toward the same goal, but they had little respect for each other” (Stockford, 2004, p. 23). Stockford recollects white feminist influence on EEOC attorneys as a necessary step in awareness, however according to Green, feminist organizations such as NOW would turn a blind eye to race from lobbying EEOC (Stockford, 2004, p. 23; Green, 2012, p. 45). But Stockford universalized ‘women’, presented as receiving the same discriminations when convenient for the argument.\textsuperscript{26} Lois Kathryn Herr (2003) gives a similar gender-centric retelling of the history leading up to the consent decree, with particular emphasis on NOW’s role in pressuring AT&T through protests and organizing female employees.

The class divides within the affirmative action movements also work against women of color, whose working class needs were different than middle-class feminists. Emily Zuckerman’s research focuses on the employment discrimination case of the EEOC v. Sears, Roebuck, & Co., a 1973 investigation that went to trial in 1985. Zuckerman’s work displays how different class ideologies within feminism might benefit middle-class feminists and neglect lower-class feminists (Zuckerman, 2008, p. 6-7). MIT Professor and former EEOC researcher Phyllis Wallace examined the results of the case in an edited book from various disciplines including

\textsuperscript{26} Stockford’s (2004) account of AT&T v. EEOC paints a clear picture between the racial and gendered dichotomies that EEOC oscillated around, but could not intersect. EEOC Attorney David Copus was presented as gender-blind, unconvinced that middle class women suffered discriminations; while Stockford’s protagonist Susan Ross represented and advocated the contemporary white feminist approach in interpreting AT&T discriminations.
Psychology, Economics, Sociology, Business, and Management. Due to the limited information available, research on Latinas was thin in Wallace’s collected essays.

Latinas now lag drastically in representation in STEM fields, IT workplaces, and Telecommunications (Jachik, 2014). This history struggles with race not only as an epistemology, but also as a fluid scale, which Latinas are positioned upon depending on the historical, social, gendered, and political moment. The AT&T v. EEOC case, framed by a racial black and white binary and re-organized with ‘gender-first’ arguments that neglected race (Green, 2012), demonstrates the undertones of impossibility for Latinas entering into technological spaces. Within the AT&T v. EEOC case Latinas were identified as one or two-dimensional subjects - by national origin or as Spanish-speaking minorities and had no entrance into the AT&T v. EEOC moment.

The history of Latinas in telecommunications is unfortunately scant, and the evidence has yet to be engaged, especially on race and gender. Little attention has been paid to Latinas in telecommunications during these critical shifts in affirmative action and the onset of the neoliberal era. My study seeks Latinas during the AT&T v. EEOC case, pinpointing how Latinas have been made preliminarily invisible and often illegible in a major information technology workplace.

While some research has been conducted on Latinas in the STEM field and IT workforce, my own research will integrate Latina testimonies of information technologies and telecommunications’ archives to explore both the untold oral histories of Latinas and

27 Larger structures of race that Carolyn De La Peña names as “at play in all technological production and consumption” (2010, p. 923). De La Peña (2010) names whiteness as a racial epistemology which acts invisibly and goes unnamed in histories of technology.  
technologies as well as the structural systems of power that occur with ICTs.

**Conclusions: Finding Latinas in Telecommunications**

The scholarship in Latina intersectional identity, the neoliberal era, engagements with information technologies, and lack of representation in the history of telecommunications and STS more broadly contribute to the foundations of this project. The debates over whether the EEOC favored a gender or race focused consent decree is an important point for the entrance of Latinas into telecommunications. Latinas’ presence in technology-heavy sectors challenges multiple systems of power, which have traditionally kept Latinas from entering STEM fields. All of these fields of literature come together at the site of Latina information work, where they embody daily race, gender, and class socio-techno practices, while deeply embedded in and affected by the political economy.

This chapter discussed the literature pertaining to identity formations of Latinas in the United States. The intersectional components of Latina identity and subjectivity contextualize their presence in the EEOC v. AT&T case and AT&T workplace. The next section covered the literature on Latina engagements with information technologies, as tools of agency, resistance, or as agents of power. The chapter ended with a study of research written specifically on the EEOC v. AT&T case and consent decree with considerations of white women, women and men of color, and class structures. As the literature shows, there is still an active debate among scholars over the ramifications of how the EEOC v. AT&T case neglected intersectional identities. Therefore, any study must clarify its position in these matters to avoid obscuring how positioning affects the research. In positioning, this study aligns itself with Venus Green (2001), who contends that women of color benefited the least because of the emphasis on gender, and the general neglect of race and class. In this researcher’s view, the context of Latinas in the United
States will further reveal how Latinas’ needs were neglected in terms of the stipulations of the consent decree.

While there is a growing realization of intersectional approaches to place, economy, information technology histories, and telecommunications’ histories, a significant gap is present in the study of Latinas and information technologies and their implications for relevant fields. While studies on Latinas and ICTs have enabled researchers to reveal agency and displacement, they have not had far-reaching influence within the interdisciplinary scholarship examined here.

The importance of Latina histories with information technologies and in STEM-related fields such as telecommunications has yet to translate into a sustained focus on the part of Latina/o Studies, STS, information studies, or cyber-feminism. This study responds to this gap by analyzing Latinas’ intersectional identities, co-constructions of Latina subjectivity and information technologies, Latina socio-techno practices, and fundamental analysis by Latinas of ICTs. It continues the discussion of the need for feminisms and critical technology studies. This research adds to the history of Latinas in telecommunications by contributing to the narratives of the oral history of Latina/os and information technologies in California. This study both contributes to the expansion of knowledge in these areas and the use of multiple methods in the construction of these histories. This is the first study to focus on Latinas in telecommunications from both an oral history and archival perspective, with the aim at developing a critical Latina Technology Studies to demonstrate implications and possible analysis of STEM fields and the social construction of technology, long un-observed by historians of technology. In the next chapter I will discuss my research design, including the theoretical framework, methodology, participants, instruments for analysis, and ethics of this project.
Chapter 4: Research Design

This study incorporates cross-disciplinary methods of archival research and qualitative oral history interviews to construct the history of Latinas in telecommunications. The implementation of multiple methods allows for two strains of history: the archival research speaks to the incorporation of Latinas into AT&T through legislation, political organizing, and state and private structures; Latina oral histories give a personal account from below, allowing for insights not possible through archival documents. This chapter explains the study’s theoretical framework, data collection methods, and mode of analysis. It opens with a discussion on the study’s epistemological positioning of technological social constructionism and the theoretical framework of a Latina Technology Studies. The chapter then outlines the methodologies used to gather the data, which include traditional archival research and oral history interviewing. Then I describe the participant community for the study and the reasons for choosing the research group. An outline of the study’s interview guide follows, including interview questions. The next section describes the analysis of data, followed by an explanation of the study’s ethics and limitations and the chapter’s conclusions.

Epistemological Positioning

The social construction of technology, gender, and race frames this study, suggesting that telecommunications is created, understood, and made sense of through social structures. Telling the story of Latinas in telecommunications is not solely to ‘write’ Latinas into the history. Latinas are both interpellated by and interpellate the technologies with which they work. Latinas are subjected to the organization of race and gender that determines when they have access to ICTs, where they are located with those ICTs, and what ICTs they will work with. But Latinas in telecommunications also determine how they will incorporate ICTs into their professional and
personal lives. Feminist constructivist technology studies encourages the analysis of the co-construction of gender and technology, looking at how “technology is shaped by gender and gender is shaped by technology” (Landström, 2007, p. 8). Landström argues that the heteronormative formations that normalize gender in technological systems should be considered in these information technology constructions (Landström, 2007, p. 21). Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) is a critical approach that (Winner, 1986) allows for, as Fouché advocated, resisting simply entering people of color into the history of technology, but rather considers, “how technological changes influence our perceptions of racial and cultural relations” (2012, p. 66). Fouché’s resistance to simply tell a history of people of color creating or using technology is critical to my own approach, emphasizing the discursive engagements of power that occur as Latinas are included into a technological field.

Gender must be analyzed as discursive formations of power structures, without losing the materiality of the body’s experience, recognizing the body is “a social, cultural, and historical production: ‘production’ here means both product and process” (Balsamo, 1996, p. 3). Although technologies are a part of the cultural production of the body, the gendered body might also resist these technologies.

Telecommunications is a field built on social structures of hierarchy and power. Race, gender, sexuality, and class are subject formations that come into play with the historical formations of information technologies. An intersectional approach to the social construction of technology is critical in recognizing all of the identity groups that Latinas navigate while working for AT&T. Because this study deals with Latinas in the Bell system, a private corporation liable to state orders and reform, an intersectional social construction of technology

29 Emphasis mine
approach allows for the many modes of power negotiated by Latinas in telecommunications. The epistemological positioning of this study through a social constructionist lens leads to its theoretical framework.

**Theoretical Framework**

My theoretical approach is an incorporation of multi-disciplinary theories that allow me to proceed in interpreting the results of my research. Using these different fields in dialogue with one another assists me in what I hope to be the beginning of the discussions around a critical Latina Technology Studies, a theoretical approach that captures the discourses and social relations in understanding the mutual constitution of technology, power, and subjectivity that Latinas engage with every day (Wallis, 2013). While information technologies are largely imagined as value-free ‘neutral’ artifacts, Latina Technology Studies, supported by many genres of literature, digresses from this mainstream outlook and contributes to the Social Construction of Technologies (SCOT) literature (Winner, 1986). Literature on the social properties of information technologies from such authors as Winner (1986) and Bijker (1995) recognizes that these constructions of technology are not without raced (Fouché, 2012, Nakamura & Chow-White, 2012) and gendered (Haraway, 1991, Balsamo, 1996) functions and settings. The aim is to bring these theories together to further understand how Latinas were a part of these systems (Peña, 1997, Burnett et al., 2009), while resisting the underlying technological determinism in recent reports on the need for Latinas in STEM that neglect to acknowledge the politics of these fields and information technologies (Feliú-Mójer, 2014, Bohorquez, 2014). The goal is not merely to recruit more Latinas into higher levels of STEM fields, however that objective is supported by the author’s scholarship, but to encourage a critical approach to the technological
and political systems that shape these fields. I view the preceding theories as paths that guide my own critical inquiries into the social constructions of technology.

**Technological Intersections**

Because of the racial and gendered politics of the United States, Latinas’ work with technologies must always be approached as intersectional. Two interrelated points come to mind as important to identify: first, that Latinas are extremely diverse, and though they may be represented by dominant society as one ‘type,’ are in fact multiethnic and multiracial (Vélez-Ibáñez & Sampaio, 2002, Oboler, 2002). Secondly, Latinas have been organized by a colonizing racial scale, rather than binary (Cruz-Janzen, 2002). While the racial order in the U.S. was built on a white/black binary, with blackness marking a race excluded from the privilege of an American citizen, Latina subject identity descends from colonized Latin America and the Caribbean, where racial continuums established the Casta system, creating a hierarchical society, Arlene Dávila (2004) notes that “…issues of race and ethnicity are consistently subsumed to a black-and-white paradigm that veils multiethnic/multiracial dilemmas of contemporary cities.” Ginetta E.B. Candelario, in her research on Latina racial identities and life chances, labels the experience of this racial continuum by Latinas as a ‘transcontinental experiential dissonance’, “Latina/o racial formations, in other words, derive simultaneously from domestic racial projects- where ‘domestic’ refers to both the homeland and the hostland – and the racialized geopolitics of US-Latin American relations.” Multiple points of construction and shifting points of identity are happening when we talk about Latinas and information technologies- including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, regionalism, class, and language.

An intersectional approach deconstructs the tendency towards technological determinism often found in the American narrative of progress. Technological determinism would describe
information technologies as value-free artifacts, rather than objects that are both a result and consequence of gender and race. The mainstream narrative of technology as value-free parallels the essentialist assumptions often implied with race and gender, leading to pathologies which necessarily need deconstructing. Intersectional and SCOT analyses put into words what Latina telecommunications workers embody every day in their labor and domestic spheres.

**Gender and Technology**

The body, gender, and sexuality are all intertwined in systems of meaning within the technological society. Donna Haraway (1991) incorporated feminism and technologies by proposing that we are already at the state of the cyborg, where everyday life is dependent on technologies. From the beginning of the notion of the cyborg, Haraway recognized that an analysis of cyborg was already happening among feminists of color, such as Chela Sandoval’s (2000) theory of oppositional consciousness. Anne Balsamo suggests “the cyborg challenges feminism to search for ways to study the body, as it is at once both a cultural construction and a material fact of human life,” (Balsamo, 1996, p. 33). While Balsamo acknowledges the social construction of gender and the gender performativity that Judith Butler first identified, she argues, “‘technologies of the gendered body’ described the interactions between bodies and technologies. Gender, in this schema, is both a determining cultural condition and a social consequence of technological deployment” (1996, p. 9).

Although technology articulates power relations, the body does not dissolve into a dematerialized state. For the Latina experience in telecommunications and engagements with ICTs, gender must be analyzed as discursive formations of power structures, without losing the materiality of the body’s experience. The body is “a social, cultural, and historical production: ‘production’ here means both product and process” (Balsamo, 1996, p. 3). We can think of
technologies as both a part of the cultural production of the body, and also the ways that the
gendered body might resist these technologies.

Race and Technology

Critical Media theorists advocate that the history of technology should not simply add in people of color, but recognize that technologies must be critically examined for their hegemonic formations. Fouché argues that the late twentieth century zeal for technology has mirrored a missionary-like salvation for brown and black people. The dialogue around owning a computer mimics the racial implications that those without technological proficiency are a product of the individual’s lack of motivation or laziness (2012, p. 63). Fouché considers, “how technological changes influence our perceptions of racial and cultural relations” (2012, p. 66). Fouché’s resistance to simply telling a history of people of color as creating or using technology is critical to my own approach, emphasizing the discursive engagements of power that occur as Latinas are included into a technological field.

Carolyn de la Peña (2010) argues that historians of technology neglect the subject of race. De la Peña notes that the history of gender and technology was taken up quickly when challenged to do so in the 1970s, however race is long overdue. Without the analysis on race, Latinas are still rendered invisible to a recognized personhood. Whiteness is often protected as invisible, therefore De la Peña suggests that we acknowledge technology as a part of the social structures that make, sustain and protect whiteness. Joel Dinerstein (2006) finds the concept of technology in America functions as a ‘white mythology,’ prospering whiteness as property. Technology, race, and gender must be acknowledged as co-constructed identifying practices, rather than value-free and neutral. The narrative of technology is so inextricably intertwined into

30 Emphasis mine

56
these Western ideologies that ‘technological progress’ has become an inseparable phrase, labeled a myth by Dinerstein, but one so powerful that it continues to reaffirm whiteness. We move through a Latina Technology Studies recognizing that technological epistemologies are established in racial power relations.

**The Biopolitics of Inclusion**

In the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the Bell System’s corporate maneuver used the structure of the ‘family’ to order their employees and encourage resistance to employee coordinated labor unions, encouraging instead internal ‘committees’ that further helped micromanage the family structure (Green, 2001). Such was the heteronormative tenor that Latinas entered in the workplace after the 1973 AT&T vs. EEOC case. African Americans, Latinas/os, Asian Americans, and Native Americans were hired into telecommunications through the enforcement of Affirmative Action as a result of the Civil Rights and Feminist movements of the 1960s, which means they entered into a hegemonically complex power structure where the state and private institutions were forming citizenship around the biopolitics of inclusion rather than exclusion. The political economy enclosed Latina information workers’ difference for economic benefit. The state and private institutions formed citizenship around the biopolitics of the inclusion of difference, rather than exclusion.

The biopolitics of inclusion sets the stage for Latinas entering into the telecommunications sector as phone operators, electricians, low-level engineers, and other lower management information worker positions. Michel Foucault originally defined biopower as the switch from the sovereign’s right to incorporate subjects through death to “the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it…one might say that the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (1990, p. 136). Roderick
Ferguson details how power is executed in affirmative action settings, finding this new mode of biopower advances public and private institutions with minority difference (Ferguson, 2012). In the political economy’s formation of subjects, Latina information workers in telecommunications are not excluded or exploited laborers, but made part of the larger project of neoliberalism. Pheng Cheah asserts that transnational female laborers are ‘recognized’ through “productive incorporation rather than by prohibition, and repression through force or ideology” (2013, p. 107). For Cheah, global labor practices’ recognition and inclusion of previously excluded subjects recirculates the political economy (2013). Stuart Hall challenged that state projects use difference to expand; hence Latina information workers’ racial and gendered difference are both constructed into the larger neoliberal project and as identifiers of exclusion (1991, p. 58). These locations of difference, then, are fraught with tension, “hegemony, in this sense, is never completed. It is always trying to enclose more differences within itself…it wants the projects of its individual and smaller identities to be only possible if the larger one becomes possible” (Hall 2011, p. 68). Latina information workers’ quotidian labor practices are the sites where recognition and fallouts with telecommunications take place.

**Theoretical Framework: New Histories**


Cara Wallis’ approach to how migrant Chinese women use mobile phones allows her research subjects agency through their navigation of mobile phones, however also recognizes the
power of social constructions and geographic/regional discriminations, recognizing that these engagements both reproduce and restructure Chinese women’s identities. It is the mutual constitutive nature of technology, culture, race, and gender that brings us back to the important notion of intersectionality. These technologies that Latina information workers have worked with in telecommunications can be used to further their marginalization and hinder any upward mobility, or they can be manipulated and resisted. Information work, engaging technologies such as the telephone, enters into gendered and raced sites (Rakow, 1992). This is especially relevant in the history of the Bell System. These spaces of information labor that Latinas engage with are embedded with politics (Rakow, 1992, p. 154).

Venus Green’s text *Race on the Line* (2001) is a seminal work that influenced my own research. Green focuses on the inherent whiteness that was built into the position of the telephone operator in the early 20th century, and the systematically racist spaces that black women entered when employed as operators. Green’s deployment of the term *technological displacement* resists ‘technological determinism’ by looking at how the Bell System historically built technologies with race and class in mind. Green’s text is critical in recognizing also how the EEOC consent decree changed the focus of the case from race to sex, further harming the ability for African American and Latina women to enter into the sector after the Consent Decree. As a historian of race, gender, and technology, Green lays a framework that brings technological development out from under the cloak of whiteness.

Finally, Devon Gerardo Peña (1997) looks at Latina assembly line workers in a maquiladora on the Mexico border. Peña’s work specifically focuses on affect and resistance in the workplace, recognizing maquila workers’ often highly skilled and mundane technological labor. I find Peña to be incredibly important in his emphasis on the ways that Mexican women
resist, through sabotage in the workplace, and disrespect for authority. This research recognizes Latinas’ work in the larger project of the state and global economy in conjunction with information technologies and telecommunications.

This project emphasizes Latina socio-techno practices (Wallis, 2013) and how they are incorporated into their social and cultural lives, as well as their resistance to these systems, which are deeply connected to the contemporary global and political economy. At the heart of this research is a desire to contribute to a critical history of Latinas and information technology, which engages an active analysis of resistance and incorporation into digital capitalism. I ask how Latinas have found themselves to be deeply ingrained in the state of digital capitalism today, but beginning with their starting point in the early 1970s and the AT&T-EEOC consent decree. Critical Latina Technology Studies draws from strong traditions in cyber feminisms, Chicana feminisms, intersectional theorists, and Science and Technology Studies to highlight Latina engagements with information technologies and information labor histories as complex sites of gendered and racial power. This framework deepens our understandings of information technologies as socially constructed sites of power, not untouched by the race and gendered politics in which they are developed.

**Methodology**

The methodology applied to this study combines archival research and oral history interviews to collect data, which was analyzed using grounded theory analysis. Archival research is the traditional methodology used in historical research. Qualitative in-depth interviews are a method to fill in the history of underrepresented groups that have not been well-documented in the historical record. These methods follow from the epistemological positioning of intersectional social construction of technology and the theoretical framework. De la Peña
challenges that these histories may not come from the archive or traditional methods of historical research, and my own work follows suit in relying heavily on oral histories from Latinas in Southern California to draw conclusions, hoping to contribute to the “alternative technological narratives” (2010, p. 921).

This study’s purpose is to explore Latina narratives of digital capitalism, histories in telecommunications, and their analysis of shifting neoliberalism. Using a snowball sampling, I interviewed a total of four Latinas working around the greater Los Angeles region in telecommunications. The interview collaborators have worked between one to four decades in telecommunications companies, experiencing frequent changes in information technologies, corporate consolidations and divestiture, geographic relocations, technological displacement, and race and gendered discrimination in the workplace.

Through feminist ethnography methods, I recognize that my own subjective past experiences will inevitably be a part of this study as I interacted with my research informants. It is also important to recognize and attempt to resist the potential to ‘other’ these research subjects, preserving the nuances of their oral histories (Wallis, 2013, p. 24). Through their lived experience, Latinas in telecommunications are experts on the subject of information labor and subject formations. I am relying on the experience of these interviews as:

31 In her history of the raced construction of the telephone operator’s job, Venus Green uses the term ‘technological displacement’ to describe the dial telephone conversion, resulting in the loss of jobs for operators. This term generally resists technology constructed as neutral or positive. Green points to how technology was developed to displace laborers. See Green’s Race on the Line.

32 I am a first generation college student and second generation Mexican-American who benefits from my own light skin privilege in moving (un)comfortably into higher education and workplaces, through the same raced and gendered structures that have shaped telecommunications. I elaborate more at the end of this chapter, under ‘Subjective Positioning.’
‘Uncontestable evidence,’ particularly to illuminate the lives of marginalized groups…experience cannot simply be taken at face value; instead, an investigation of a group’s experience must always include an analysis of how difference is socially constructed and constituted by discourse, and how discourse functions to produce experience in specific, historical conjunctures (Wallis, 2013, p. 24).

One of my central goals is to analyze how power produces Latina information workers as subjects. I stay mindful of feminist ethnographic methods while asking the larger questions:

1. What is the history of Latinas in the field of telecommunications?
2. How have Latinas navigated information technologies in telecommunications, with regards to power and agency?

In my research process I have taken careful steps to keep my research interviewees anonymous as well as respect their wishes to omit any previously discussed topics.³³

Archival Research

Archival research is a traditional approach to gathering data for historical studies. The archive has been treated as sets of factual information that can be accumulated and rearranged into a story (Appleby, Hunt & Jacob, 1994). My own approach to the archive has begun with communications with archivists at Stanford and the National Archives. Both of these repositories hold critical documents from the EEOC v. AT&T case. After confirming the presence of relevant archives to my research, I have searched the catalogs, narrowing by the time period relevant to this research (1973-1984) and with relevant key words. After finding the boxes and folders with relevant materials, I confirmed with the archivists my intended visit and scheduled appointments to visit the archives.

³³ The Institutional Review Board has approved this research as exempt.
For this study, archival research was conducted to gather primary sources relating to the EEOC v. AT&T case and its subsequent legislation. Three main collections that were identified to hold relevant documents relating to Latinas in this case were the MALDEF and the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) archives at Stanford University. Multiple types of archival records were sought and consulted during this process: Hearing and court documents, internal memos, surveys, witness records, handwritten notes, letters, and training materials. The MALDEF and CRLA archives, located at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, are a crucial part of my research, which looks in depth at the positioning of Latinas with regards to Affirmative Action and the Bell System. MALDEF and CRLA assisted the EEOC in gathering testimonials from Latina customers and employees of the Bell System and their experience with AT&T services and technologies. The third collection of archives included materials available online in digital form from the Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse.

These archival documents detail how discrimination and inclusion took place within AT&T during these formative years, when Latinas were first included into technological employment sectors in the U.S. But as Gayatri Spivak (1988) has shown, the archives demonstrate their own bias, and those who do not hegemonically benefit from privilege may not have a voice within the archives at all. Oral histories from Latinas will supplement and complement the historical record, which fails to include all subgroups involved in the EEOC v. AT&T case.

The National Archives may hold records from the EEOC and specifically contain witness testimonies from Latinas who were discriminated against in employment and as customers by AT&T. Communications with the National Archives in College Park, Maryland were inconclusive as to whether more Latina testimonies were available. Due to time and budget constraints, this research does not include testimonies from the EEOC that may be in the National Archives, however future work from the author will investigate these possible resources (see Appendix A).
Narratives

I posit Latina narratives as a source of credible knowledge that should be included within scholarship. As I explore how Latinas were positioned to technologies, their own stories and experiences may contradict the dominant narrative of telecommunications. Such narratives will be used as a ‘competing reading’ or ‘competing universality,’ one that challenges a monopoly. Helena Maria Viramontes argues that the way to deconstruct a universal representation is with alternative texts,

The master-narrative-produced notions of universality have never acknowledged the sheer colonizing force of euro centrism behind it. Thus, master narratives privilege those who have the power to define it and neatly eliminates the countless other ‘universals’ of the colonized worlds. (2007, p. 11).

Latinas from within telecommunications, then, are important in countering the larger ‘universal’ stories of technology and the history of telecommunications. They can disrupt Latina stereotypes. In his exploration of Mexican women assembly line work in maquiladoras, Peña uses Latina narratives as examples of agency and struggle against the domination of such tedious work. Peña (1997) traces a genealogy of truth claims to reveal a social construction of knowledge as power and the politics of knowledge:

In the workplace, differences in power are often articulated as hidden dimensions of everyday labor experience. For example, the deployment of technology can obscure the human bases and dimensions of domination on the shop floor—the engineer is always one step removed from labor's experience with the mechanical despotism of the flow line. But the contradictory and ambiguous narratives of differently empowered subjects can also make domination more transparent, and thus have a more direct impact on material conditions and
power relations in the workplace, as well as on people's perceptions of these phenomena.

(1997, p. 181)

Though Latinas are often omitted in the history of the United States, their own articulations of working in telecommunications serve as “identity narratives,” what Peña describes as discursive practices, “that workers and managers invoke when they are involved in struggles over the ‘crafting of selves in the workplace’” (Peña, 1997, p. 181). Latina information worker knowledge, situated and specific to the subjects’ gender, class, ethnicity and geographic location, will help shape a discourse around how information technologies shaped contemporary capitalism, how people of color were given or denied access to ICTs, and how power circulates with regards to technology within digital capitalism. These explorations are lived and reflected on every day by Latina women in telecommunications since the 1970s, and though their voices were not prioritized in exploring the history of telecommunications or ICTs, their own stories of the workplace describe deep-rooted discriminations that are inter-related to the development and distribution of ICTs, “This knowledge-a dynamic byproduct of workers’ shifting subjectivity- is social, cultural, and technical in nature” (Peña, 1997, p. 188). Drawing on these narratives is crucial to disrupting a master narrative of technological determinism that drives digital capitalism and presents itself as non-discriminatory of race and gender. Technological determinism, as described by Raymond Williams, is a perception and widely held attitude of the nature of technology in society. Technological determinism dictates that new technologies are discovered by an essentially internal process of research and development, which then sets the conditions for social change and progress (Williams, 1992, p. 5). Such vast and uninterrupted notions of technology hold little reflection in questioning the fast paced development of ICTs.
In her work highlighting autobiographies from Chicanas in the STEM field, Norma Cantú notes that stories from the fields of mathematics and the sciences trouble the master narrative of individual success. She argues that the problem with master narratives are that “they subsume many differences and contradictions and restrict and contain people, by supporting a power structure in which gender, class, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and ability all define who matters and how” (Cantú, 2008, p. xvi). This research presents Latina information worker stories with equal value as statistics or archival material and argues that such narratives are crucial to interrupting a master narrative of ICTs and contemporary digital capitalism.

**Interviews**

While this methodology relies on both archival texts and oral history testimonies of personal experience, there will inevitably be an underlying colonial nature of qualitative research and ‘discovery’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.1). A qualitative research approach that prioritizes Latina testimonies and narratives attempts to foreground minority experience previously unheard or invisible. However it is also crucial to acknowledge that, “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.1). Just as this research seeks the politics of information technology, I also acknowledge that the method itself is political, that it is not value-free or neutral. Recognizing the bias and subjectivity of the author resists a narrative of positivism and determinism, aligning with the ultimate goal of this research in contributing to Science and Technology Studies (STS) by analyzing the social construction of technology. As Denzin and Lincoln note, “The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that he or she then examines in specific ways (methodology, analysis)” (2008, p. 28). Thus my own experiences as a mixed race Latina first-generation college student,
with light-skin privilege from a middle-income family, are all relevant factors in the collection of this data.

This methodology, while drawing on mainstream methodologies such as qualitative oral histories, also attempts to contribute to that of Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed*, which engages intersectional identities and acknowledges that minority women have used ‘technologies’ or techniques in both psychic and social praxis. These states of *oppositional consciousness* act as a method employed by women of color in the U.S. as well as the foundations of theory. The oppositional consciousness is one that is already engaged with Latinas’ everyday work as telephone operators and information workers; it has already influenced the development of information technologies. My investigation into Latina work at AT&T prioritizes *oppositional consciousness* in the formation of a critical Latina Technology Studies. I am learning from an analysis already applied by my research subjects on critically evaluating information technologies and the history of technology.

Oral history interviewing is a critical methodological approach for underrepresented groups traditionally left out of the historical record. Oral histories both complement and supplement the archive by highlighting existing evidence and bringing to the forefront those experiences that may not have been documented; it is a method that has historically been used to give voice in the academic sphere to underrepresented people without traditional means of representations (Perks & Thomson, 2006, p.26). Because my work seeks to explore Latina experience, dissonance, and agency with information technologies, the personal testimonies of the women working at the telephone companies are crucial to describing these historical developments that lead us to the contemporary information communication technologies we rely upon today.
Participants

While there are many groups that have been marginalized throughout the labor history of the United States, Latinas were chosen as the focus of this study for three reasons. First, my larger research questions that guide my academic path: I am interested in exploring the history of Latinas and information technologies throughout my academic career, and the EEOC v. AT&T case is an appropriate jumping off point, because it has yet to be explored. This work has a solid foundation and starting point because a solid and dedicated field has foregrounded Latina labor history, gender, and sexuality research.

Searching for Latinas in the EEOC v. AT&T case archives is also a unique approach because it has yet to be researched. There are multiple archival resources that help tell this story. Studying multiple archives such as the documents from the case, EEOC, MALDEF, and CRLA records allows for the comparison of different participating groups and how they considered Latinas throughout the case. Unfortunately, the AT&T archives beyond the past 15 years have been closed to the public. The AT&T archives would have been a critical part of this puzzle, which many researchers have used in the past to explore this case (Green, 2001; Norwood, 1990; John, 2010). In this dissertation’s case, an exploration of the AT&T archives is outside of the scope of this project. However with the supporting documents and pre-existing literature, a more complex and complete understanding of Latinas in telecommunications can be constructed.

Latinas were not only incorporated in telecommunications since the consent decree, but many have spent their entire careers at the phone company. Now approaching retirement, these women have decades of experience with shifting technologies, political economies, and workplace culture. Although this research is limited to the EEOC v. AT&T case and the decade thereafter, the larger project that extends past this research values these women’s knowledge in
full, from the start of their employment to their retirement. Therefore, this thesis is the beginning of a larger project that will bring the history of Latinas in telecommunications to the present day.

The three archives studied were chosen based on initial database research, bibliographies from existing literature, and conversation with archivists around the country, revealing that the slightest consideration of AT&T Latina employees and customers would be located among EEOC, MALDEF, and CRLA files. The MALDEF and CRLA files are located at the Stanford Special Collections in Stanford, California; and case documents from the EEOC are available digitally from the Papers of Marjorie Stockford.

Volunteers were solicited from previous acquaintances at the phone company, and a snowball method led to further interview collaborators. Four interviews were conducted in order to have multiple points of view and a richer understanding of the Latina experience during the 1970s and 1980s. These interview collaborators were specifically sought after because of their work in the Bell system after the 1973 consent decree, and the extensive period of time they spent as laborers at AT&T. This allowed for the gathering of information to construct the histories of Latinas in telecommunications, as well as obtain further potential interviews.
## Table 1: Participant demographics and background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>High School completion (region)</th>
<th>Highest ed. Attained</th>
<th>Years employed</th>
<th>Company Titles</th>
<th>Position Titles</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>60-65</td>
<td>Southern California</td>
<td>Some college (2 years)</td>
<td>1970-1982</td>
<td>Pacific Bell</td>
<td>Operator</td>
<td>Mail room Data Employee –records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>55-60</td>
<td>Southern California</td>
<td>Some college (1 semester)</td>
<td>1978-present</td>
<td>GTE Atlantic Bell Verizon</td>
<td>Operator Customer-Service Offline-support-representative Assignment Switch</td>
<td>Service, Delivery, and Insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>San Jose, Costa Rica</td>
<td>Some college (2 years)</td>
<td>1972-1987</td>
<td>AT&amp;T Pac Bell</td>
<td>- Clerk - Inventory - Personal records - Transportation</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>60-65</td>
<td>Southern California</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1973-present</td>
<td>Pacific Bell AT&amp;T</td>
<td>- Operator - Messenger services - Facility Technician</td>
<td>Facility Technician</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instruments and Data Gathering

The recruitment aim for this project was to locate experienced Latinas who worked in telecommunications in Southern California during the 1970s and 1980s. Interview participants were selected based on their ages and experience in telecommunications in California during the 1970s and 1980s. Seven interview participants were recruited based on their work and the time period that they were involved with ICTs at such workplaces as Pacific Bell, AT&T, and smaller independent telephone companies that would become a part of a larger corporate structure. The interviewees were narrowed down to four Latinas who had specifically worked at Bell in the immediate aftermath of the consent decree, in the greater Los Angeles area. I used the recruitment method of ‘snowballing’ wherein I spoke to people with whom I had established a relationship in order to meet more interviewees. I approached potential interview subjects recommended from my first set of interviews by emailing or phoning them. Since the goal of this study is to write the history of Latinas in telecommunications, the voice of any Latina and these experiences is a useful story that has not yet been told. I received exempt status from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to interview women who worked in the Bell System and related independent telephone companies as telephone operators and information workers engaging with information technologies (See Appendix B).

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews occurred on the telephone and in person. Initial interviews were approximately one hour; with 30 minute follow up interviews with Monica and Gloria, due to their retaining telecommunications’ artifacts. Because the interviews were based on the findings that emerge from interacting with participants, it was not possible to know in advance exactly what questions would be asked, but they addressed such topics as the specific work that interview subjects conducted; how they self-identified in terms of race (i.e.- Hispanic,
Mexican-American, Chicana/o, Latina/o, etc); how they got their jobs at these companies; if they experienced discriminations based on their race and gender. I audio recorded participants during our interviews in person and over the phone. Consent for recording was obtained prior to turning the recording device on, giving the participant an opt-in, rather than opt-out option.

A Grounded Theory method guided me through the process of collecting data and coding. I used such tactics as extensive coding throughout data collection, selective coding, and sorting the memos to find Theoretical Code (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). Grounded Theory allows the researcher to systematically discover theory from the data collected during the research process (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). To answer my leading questions I take a grounded theoretical approach in conjunction with Chela Sandoval’s concept of “oppositional consciousness.” I suggest that already embedded in the everyday working lives of those Latinas employed in technology fields is a critique of precisely those fields, particularly in relation to the body.

Sample questions:

1. Where did you grow up during childhood? When did you move to California?
2. Did you go to college? Where?
3. How do you identify your ethnicity and race?
4. When did you start working in telecommunications? Where did you work?
5. How long did you work at _____?
6. What was your job title?
7. What actions did you perform in your job?
8. What kinds of technologies did you work with?
9. How were you trained for these technologies?
10. Did you experience any discrimination as a Latina in these fields?
11. Did you enjoy your work at this job?

12. How did this job lead to other opportunities?

13. Was this workspace a pleasant experience? If yes, why? If no, why?

14. Did you work with other Latina/os? Was the field diverse? What was the demographics?

**Strengths and Limitations**

A number of methods could be used for recording the historical narrative of Latinas and Information Communication Technologies. Surveys, census, and quantitative data could demonstrate the patterns, similarities, and differences between Latinas and Latinos in telecommunications. This project relies on archival research and oral history interviews to get a sense of the lived experiences that Latinas negotiate and the meaning making that happens while working with, creating or changing information technologies. Other limitations include time restrictions and restrictions on geographic location where the interviews were conducted, in the greater Los Angeles and surrounding Southern California regions.

Accessing the MALDEF and CRLA archives at Stanford enabled me to confirm and expand the experiences of Latinas beyond my interviews. The archives most poignantly point to how Latinas were discriminated against in greater detail. Reports and complaints were filed with MALDEF and CRLA as evidence to how Latina customers, applicants, and employees of AT&T were ignored, demoted, or immobile in their employment positions.

Personally, I was able to access these documents freely with little trouble. However due to the geographic location of the archives, in the Stanford archives in Silicon Valley, these documents are not easily accessible to everyone, especially current and former employees of the Bell system. I made two trips to the archives that required funding for travel, accommodations,
and had limited time. Such hindrances did not deter my research, which is funded through a privileged position within higher education. An information worker on a more limited budget could not as easily access these archives.

A second weakness to the archives method was my inability to access record group 403 at the National Archives. According to Venus Green’s documentation, the EEOC records contain further evidence on Latina testimony during the AT&T v. EEOC proceedings (Green, 2001). However after communication with multiple archivists at the National Archives, I determined that it was outside of my budget and time constraints to pursue this potential evidence (See Appendix A). Due to these time and budget constraints, the archival records consulted are limited to those housed at Stanford University in California or available online in digitized form.

The interviews in this dissertation fill gaps where the archives fail; they provide a personalized and experiential description of how Latinas experienced AT&T after the consent decree. Whereas the archives do not document how it feels to work in telecommunications, Latina information workers could give detailed description of their labor, the shifts in technology, and the liberalizing information economy.

The interview informants were very accommodating in sharing their knowledge and stories with me, an outsider. However one of my greatest weaknesses in this project is as an outsider. Because of my educational privilege, this thesis is limited to restrained conversations. Whereas my privilege gave me access to the archives, it caused tension among the interviewees. The women I interviewed often did not value their information labor knowledge and dismissed their experiences as irrelevant. The conversations around their work might have been different if they were conducted with an insider who also had firsthand experience with information labor in telecommunications.
Analysis

The next two chapters will explicate my analysis of the data collected. First, textual analysis was used in approaching the archival information collected. Textual analysis acts as a historical methodology. Textual analysis is useful in approaching the archive in that it allows for seeing the text among “different discourses, genres and styles they draw upon and articulate together” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 3). Fairclough encourages this method as a way to identify discourses represented within the timeline of events being analyzed, and that the researcher identifies the perspectives that are represented (2003, p. 129). In the EEOC v. AT&T case, Latinas are placed in certain social structures and organizing elements that result in the various players of the case making Latinas invisible. If the archive is approached with textual analysis as a tool, how Latinas are neglected, ignored, or made invisible in these archives can be analyzed based on the larger structures of power organizing the world (Fairclough, 2003, p. 133).

Incorporating the three archival sources- MALDEF, CRLA, and EEOC- allow for a more nuanced comparison of three players significant to this case who were responsible for including Latinas’ witness testimonies and needs into the hearings and resulting consent decree.

Evaluation of the Data

Archival and interview evidence was used to explore how Latinas have navigated information technologies in the telecommunications sector, during and since the consent decree, as well as analyzing how Latinas were included and/or excluded from telecommunications. Data was evaluated on how Latinas are made subjects of ‘inclusion’ with information technologies; looking at the ways that Latina race and gender is co-constructed with information technologies at this point of ‘inclusion’ via affirmative action helps identify which sectors Latinas succeeded in and which they were not promoted into through the STEM-heavy telecommunications field.
Although Latinas and Latinos are often identified as under-represented in STEM fields, they are in fact working in technology heavy sectors; however these positions are often overlooked because they tend to be in lower and middle-ranked job sectors. Looking at Latinas ‘becoming’ in relation to ICTs during and after the consent decree has theoretical and practical implications, explaining how Latina subject-hood has been constructed alongside the mass field of telecommunications, as well as exploring further the ways that Latinas have not been promoted into higher positions of engineering within the sectors that they work.

Archival data from the EEOC v. AT&T case assisted in exploring how Latinas were engaged by AT&T, the EEOC, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Justice, as well as by advocacy groups. Interviews with Latinas who worked in telecommunications after the consent decree are crucial for exploring their own perspective as to their work, skills with ICTs, perspectives of engagement and exclusion in their places of work, as well as affective relationships to the field of telecommunications as a larger source of engagement as neoliberal subjects.

**Interview Data Gathering and Coding Process**

At the beginning of this research, I had entered with preliminary assumptions of the themes and analysis that would emerge over the course of oral history interviews. In my guiding hypothesis, I hoped to find methods of resistance and a devotion to union organizing, and a direct identification of experiences of racism and sexism. However after my first few interviews, I found that my assumptions were misleading my study, and decided I needed to revisit Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2012). Instead of my own assumptions guiding my research, I had to allow the interview collaborators’ testimonies to speak for themselves. This process was difficult at first, but resulted in a more nuanced and complex relationship between Latinas and
telecommunications than I had originally assumed. Instead of Latinas describing a polarizing or peripheral experience of telecommunications, they had nuanced and sometimes contradictory narratives about the Bell System. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 6, Latina relationships to their history of telecommunications are intimately entwined, at times isolating and at times feeling a part of the Bell ‘family’ that they were once excluded from completely. Therefore, this research process of analysis greatly benefitted from Grounded Theory’s method of induction.

As I conducted interviews gathering the participants’ stories, I recognized themes that began to emerge. As I began to notice themes through the interview, transcribing, and re-reading process, I developed codes. I coded each interview and used ‘constant comparative analysis’ (Glaser & Strauss, 2012) when comparing the interviews to each other. The constant comparative analysis allows for joint coding and analysis, in order to “generate theory more systematically than allowed by the second approach, by using explicit coding and analytic procedures” (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). After finding emerging themes among interviews, the constant comparative method allows for “plausibly suggesting (but not provisionally testing) many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems” (Glaser & Strauss, 2012).

I began this research by interviewing participants who had worked at the phone company in the early 1970s. As I interviewed the participants, I constantly compared their stories to each other. I noticed early on that my interviews were not solely restricted to the discussion of AT&T, but became a type of participant observation as the women I interviewed shared pictures, technological and AT&T artifacts with me. These objects and documents became a part of their memories, and demonstrated another theme that emerged within my research, that of the conflation of telecommunications in the public and domestic space of information workers.
These interviews were conducted around Southern California, specifically in Los Angeles and Riverside in-person and over the phone from the summer of 2013 to 2014. I initially contacted interviewees who were referred to by friends and family who had worked in telecommunications. These interviewees referred me to more contacts. Initially, this research began with interviews from 5 Latina women and 2 Latino men in telecommunications companies beyond Bell. After initial interviews, I decided to narrow the subjects down to 4 informants, all women. After initial interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews with some respondents by phone and in person, further guided by questions and knowledge of the themes that had emerged from previous interview responses.

I began the coding process by writing down emerging themes in my notes during the interviews, transcriptions, and re-reading the interview transcriptions. Although hiring a transcription service would have been efficient and timesaving, I find the process of transcribing, tedious as it may be, crucial to my in-depth exploration of themes. I continued this process with each interview and added more ideas and themes. After reading through all of the interviews and cross-coding them, I had identified a large number of themes that were further consolidated through headings and subheadings. Six key themes emerged that are organized in Chapter 6 of this thesis. I read the interviews several times in search of commonalities. In the transcripts of my interviews, I assigned a color to each of the themes and reread the transcripts again, color-coding each of the interviews as the themes emerged. As a result of the data analysis of the interview texts, I identified the following six themes: (a) internal migrations, (b) The Welfare State versus the Merit System, (c) information technology skills, (d) surveillance, (e) race and gender critical analysis, (f) the affective sphere of telecommunications. In order to write about the data, I printed out the transcribed, color-coded texts and organized the quotes by theme.
Previous to the interviews, I read the IRB consent form out loud to the participants. Throughout and after the interviews, I would follow up on details or further explanations about the technologies that the interviewees have worked with. I reviewed many of the details and asked the interview participants if any details needed to be omitted from the record. Upon the completion of this thesis, a copy of the manuscript will be sent to all of the interview participants.

**Subjectivity and Privilege- An intersectional reflection**

I am a mixed race first generation college student, and second generation Mexican-American. Because of my background, I benefit from the same privileges and disadvantages that frame the history of telecommunications and the women’s lives that I have interviewed. I see three themes in particular within my own life that impact my research, and I would be remiss to not name them and make them visible in this dissertation. First in this reflection, how my personal life has been affected by race, gender, and telecommunications. Secondly, how my archival research determines the formation of the story that follows. And finally, how my oral history interviews are impacted by my personal subjectivity.

I was born in Torrance, California to a Mexican-American mother and Anglo father. My father met my mother at their work in the mailroom of Pacific Bell in Los Angeles. Whereas my mother moved ‘horizontally’ through the company (a theme I will explore further in the data portion of this dissertation), my father moved vertically, into middle management positions. Neither of my parents received college degrees, but even before I was born, the system of white privilege that determines information workers’ upward mobility had impacted my life. All of my aunts and uncles that worked in telecommunications began as blue-collar information workers in phone companies. My family moved from the lower class to the working, blue-collar middle
class with these positions, offered to them very visibly as a result of the affirmative action mandate that launches this research. However, as my research will show, qualified and highly skilled people of color were consistently denied transfers into management in the Bell system. So it is with responsibility that I recognize the white privilege that benefited my father, and myself through his income and status and my own light skin, which moved us into a more comfortable middle class.

Secondly, and rather glaringly, are the privileges that grant me smooth access into the archives. This research is partially based on two trips to the Stanford Special Collections in Palo Alto, California. To use the archives requires, first and foremost, an ID and a home address. Although my research is about Latinas who are citizens in the United States, discourse and politics around Latina/o identity is often framed by the question of citizenship, and the many benefits that come with documentation in the United States. My access into the archives is a privilege that would not have been easily afforded to my grandparents, who did not have citizenship status until the 1980s. Although easily taken for granted, my grandparents travelled miles and across countries to bring me to my own citizenship and education status, to the moment when I could easily show my California Driver’s License and walk into the Stanford Special Collections.

Because of time and budget constraints, my parents travelled with me to the archives and helped me document the many pages of MALDEF testimonies about AT&T. On the first day, we were pressed for time, with only a few hours left in the day to view and copy MALDEF records. My mom had forgotten her ID back at the hotel, so she could not come past the front doors of the library, let alone into the archive. My dad and I were given two hours to document 5 boxes. We were given all of the boxes to sort through at once, handed the archivist the images we wanted to
scan, and given those images back with approval within ten minutes. The next day, when my mom came with us, the rules had changed. We could only look at one box at a time, and it took two hours to gain approval to photo these documents. A process that had taken us two hours the day before for five boxes was doubled in time for the same amount of boxes. The rules of the archive, a space that is the physical incubator for knowledge and power, are applied differently depending on the race, gender, and sexuality of a patron.

Finally, the qualitative oral history interviews that I conducted with Latina information workers were also mediated by intersectional structures and identity. Family and friends who worked in the phone company most of their lives referred the women that I interviewed. In many ways, Latina information workers in the blue-collar middle class are my community. I believe that my interviews greatly benefitted from an already established relationship of trust. Although I have not worked in the phone company, I am intimately familiar with the culture and history from stories and oral knowledge that my family has related to me my whole life. But as I interviewed my research collaborators, I noticed a pattern among my conversations that I could not deny. I often found myself assuring the interviewees that their knowledge, experience, and skills are important and useful. Many of the women were quick to dismiss their work as unimportant or simple. While I believe that some of this mindset comes from the monotony and repetition of the work of such jobs as the telephone operator, I think there is also a class and education divide between myself and the interviewees that led to the frequent dismissiveness or downplaying of their skills. Attempting to flip roles, so that I was the student/learner and my research collaborators were my teachers, proved to be a difficult and uneasy task.

These three reflections demonstrate that power and privilege of the researcher are never removed from their work. I am often one of very few Latinas in the information sciences,
especially as a doctoral student. Latina/os continue to remain underrepresented in the LIS and STEM fields, and I often experience the discomfort and discrimination of an underrepresented person in higher education. However through my personal life, archival research, and oral history interviews, we see that research, just like technology, is never value-free and unbiased. My intersectional identity as a light-skinned first-generation college student, second generation Mexican-American Latina are all factors that I bring into this dissertation.
Chapter 5: Seeking Latinas in Telecommunications’ Archives

Recent research has focused on the lack of Latinas in STEM, IT, and computing fields. As of 2013 only 3% of Latina women were represented in STEM fields (Jackson, 2013), and in 2011 Latina/os made up 7% of the STEM workforce (Landivar, 2013). However few look at the historical background for the underrepresentation of Latinas in tech-related fields, and those Latinas who do work with information technologies often remain unseen. Historically, Latinas have worked as invisible information laborers in telecommunications, providing the infrastructure that supports contemporary new media systems. In 1973, the consent decree between the EEOC and the AT&T Company led to the employment of Latina white and blue-collar information workers. But the EEOC v. AT&T case suggests a historical precedent of Latina exclusion in STEM, IT, Internet, and telecommunications-related fields.

The EEOC v. AT&T consent decree, an equal employment affirmative action mandate for underrepresented people, settled decades-long filings of employment discrimination towards white women and women and men of color. Latinas entered the lower levels of the telecommunications field with the consent decree settlement, beginning lifelong careers under the Bell System35 as telephone operators, customer service, data entry, electrical engineers, to name a few. Latinas have long been overlooked in telecommunications and IT fields more broadly, as demonstrated by the EEOC report *A Unique Competence*, the case proceedings, and the consent decree.

This study argues that as a result of the EEOC v. AT&T case, Latinas entered the lower levels of the Bell System as invisible information laborers. The EEOC v. AT&T case contributed to the underdevelopment of Latinas in management and highly skilled positions of

35 Comprised of AT&T and its associate companies.
STEM, IT, and telecommunications. A focus on the EEOC v. AT&T case with an eye towards Latinas (1) contextualizes the environment in which Latinas entered technological fields, (2) suggests the importance of intersectional race, gender, and class considerations of affirmative action movements, and (3) uncovers the invisible Latina labor in telecommunications and internet support. Because of the stagnation of Latinas as white and blue-collar low-wage workers in information technology fields, we do not see the effect of Latinidad on IT and Internet companies in visible ways.

This chapter explores the historical circumstances surrounding Latinas’ information labor employment during this monumental impact of affirmative action on telecommunications. I first consider the historical context of the Chicano rights movement,36 which was heavily labor-focused but often-neglected gender and race experiences of Latinas. Second, as emphasized by historian Venus Green, I look at how the women’s rights organization NOW and the EEOC erased race with the EEOC report A Unique Competence. Next, I question the effectiveness of the case proceedings for Latinas with regards to evidence, closely examining Latina customer and employee testimonies. Finally, I examine the consent decree and its results to gain an understanding of the discourse excluding Latina information workers.

Although a current recognition of the underrepresentation of Latinas in larger tech corporations has come to the public’s attention (Feliú-Mójer, 2014), the process of exclusion and inclusion (through affirmative action) of Latinas into related private sectors reaches back to civil rights era protests and legislation (Acuña & Compeán, 2008, p. 345). The 1970s saw a significant entrance for Latinas into telecommunications after such monumental legislation as the

36 I use the term ‘Chicano rights movement’ to describe the political movements involving Latina/os during this time period. See Oropeza, L. (2000).
Civil Rights Act of 1965, the Voting Rights Act, and the creation of the EEOC under Title VII, “Which prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and sex” (Green, 2012, p. 45). Once omitted from employment in jobs such as the telephone operator and clerk positions, Latinas were eligible for AT&T positions after the mandate of the consent decree. Considering the racial and gendered contexts of telecommunication policy acknowledges Latinas in technological spaces built on whiteness (De la Peña, 2010, p. 923) and supplanted by gender-only discourse. Including intersectional backgrounds of Latinas in the United States shifts the history of telecommunications and technology into multi-dimensional accounts.

Because of the historical racial constructions in America, Latinas’ entrance into the telecommunications sector has not fit easily into the racial binary framed by the EEOC v. AT&T consent decree. Due to the ‘gender first’ priorities of NOW and the EEOC’s legal approach, Latinas were especially neglected (Green, 2012, p. 45). Main players involved in the consent decree placed Latinas on the margins of the case. As a result, Latinas entered the lower levels of the Bell System as an invisible minority. The EEOC v. AT&T case contributed to the groundwork of a field presently underrepresented by Latinas working with sophisticated technological skills, and oversaturated with Latinas in blue-collar information worker positions. As Green maintains, the disregard for women of color’s intersectional needs set a precedent of inadequate ‘inclusions’ into technological spaces. This chapter searches for Latinas within the EEOC v. AT&T case, outlining how Latinas were made further invisible in telecommunications, and acknowledging the historical moment that Latinas became information laborers. My study
seeks Latinas during the EEOC v. AT&T case, pinpointing how Latinas have been made preliminarily invisible and often illegible\(^{37}\) in a major information technology workplace.

**Labor and the Chicano Rights Movement**

Multiple national events in the 1960s and early 1970s contextualize the opening of telecommunications to minorities, as well as the ongoing exclusion of Latinas in information technology spaces. The political, social, racial, gender, and labor history preceding the consent decree is significant to the EEOC v. AT&T case.

In post-World War II America, structural racisms were challenged to include previously marginalized groups, especially impacting Latinas in the United States. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the 1960s continued to be a tumultuous time of activism for Latinas in multiple sectors of U.S. society, confronted by the Chicano rights movement. In 1968, East Los Angeles student walkouts and community meetings indicated the discontent among the Mexican community regarding the treatment of Latina/os in schools. Latina/o culture developed political momentum with literature, poems, and film. Street theatre was performed to urban populations on the subject of rural labor conditions of migrant workers, led by charismatic leaders Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. On August 29, 1970, between twenty to thirty thousand Chicanos marched through East Los Angeles in the National Chicano Moratorium March Against the War In Vietnam (Oropeza, 2000).

A disregard for Latina leadership within the Chicano rights movement, in parallel with a neglect of intersectional identities in the feminist movement, became a source of political

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\(^{37}\) Lisa Cacho (2012) looks at African American and Latina/o subjects of the U.S. deemed as ‘illegible’ because they did not fit socially valuable categories.
isolation for Latinas. Chicanas\(^{38}\) identified reform as a change to all forms of social inequality, insisting upon an intersectional approach to social change. But Chicanas within the Chicano movement were designated to traditional gender roles. Resisting American nationalism, Chicanismo relied on a cultural nationalist ideology but kept Western gender roles in place. Chicanas were positioned as ‘caretaker’ roles in the larger movement, accused of breaking up the ‘family’ when challenging Chicanismo with feminist critiques (Segura & Pesquera, 1998, p. 106). Chicanas also resisted white feminism because of its tendency to overlook race-ethnic, class, and cultural divisions between women, claiming instead to unite as ‘sisters’ (Pesquera & Segura, 1998). White American feminists approached race and class inequality as issues from the previous decades Civil Rights Movements, leaving Chicanas excluded from both groups. Omitted by these social movements, Latinas were designated peripheral laborers and activists.

In the early days of the establishment of the Western United States, racial constructs around Latina identity were fluid and unstable. The question whether Mexicans considered themselves white was contested within and outside of the community. Although labeled white since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, Mexicans were often treated as second-class citizens by Anglo society, not fitting easily into the black-white racial binary that structures the United States (MacLean, 2006, p. 161). Despite some advantages Mexican Americans gained as white-identified, they lacked higher education institutions of any kind compared to historically black colleges and had no civil rights organizations comparable to the NAACP. Though historically important for minorities in the U.S., the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 did not

\(^{38}\) Chicana feminism emerged during the 1960s and 1970s social movements in an intersectional way that was neglected in mainstream second-wave feminism, usually represented as non-raced white women, and the Chicano movement, usually dominated by Latino men neglecting to consider gender. See Pesquera& Segura,(1998, p. 194). . I use the label ‘Chicana’ to indicate a political, race, and gender identity that some Latinas named themselves during these critical years through today.
directly impact Latina/os until 1975, when expanded to language minorities (Garcia, 1997, p. 75). Despite evidence that favored separating Spanish-surnamed people as a group, the historical records, such as a census, grouped Latina/os as ‘other minorities,’ with American Indians and Asians. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act provided Latinas/os the opportunity to identify as people of color, recognizing their differences from Anglos and ethnic white European immigrants.

Although Latina/o labor history focused on the larger labor struggles of agricultural and domestic work, Latinas found themselves shifting into various employment sectors throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Taken together, these events are important for reflecting on the percentage of Latinas in each field during transitioning periods: however in the 1960s Latina/os were not surveyed as a separate racial group, so the possibility to compare numbers is difficult. Besides working as migrant farmworkers, Latina/os were heavily involved in the Steelworkers sector, the automobile industry, smelter workers, steel mills, and the rubber industry (Acuña & Compeán, 2008, p.345). Despite winning more labor rights in the previous decade, the post-World War II era saw disinvestment of the unionized industries where Latina/os had just arrived, leading to the neo-liberal era. These changes resulted in shifting jobs away from manufacturing and into the service sector, increasing high technology industry jobs, and the beginning of jobs sent overseas (Gómez- Quiñones, 1994). In the 1960s Latinas worked overwhelmingly in

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39 Many scholars have written on this time period as a complete divestment in public services and the move to give private corporations more rights and access to wealth. David Harvey, in the most famous work around neoliberalism A Brief History of Neoliberalism, makes the point that the neoliberal project disembedded capital from the constraints of state-led planning and state ownership, therefore increasing international capitalism as a “utopia project” and re-establishing capitalism as a political project “to restore the power of economic elites,” See: Harvey, D. (2005, p. 11, 19). Lisa Duggan (2003, p. 12) examines the values of the neoliberal project as privatization and personal responsibility. Neoliberalism promotes privatization as a critical point of freedom for citizens under capitalism and reaches far beyond the United States, prioritizing the protection of class power and ‘freedom’ to accumulate wealth.
operatives, service work, food processing, and electronics (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, p. 58).

In 1960, 8.6% of Latinas worked in professional occupations, such as teaching, nursing, librarianship, and social work, however most Latinas worked in the “secondary” sector of the labor market, such as sales, clerical, operatives, nonfarm labor, household work, low-level (other) service work, and farm labor (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, p. 57). In 1970 Latinas made up 33.9% of the secondary sector occupations, compared to 43.4% white women, 21.4% African American women, and 30.2% Native American women (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, p. 54). For Latinas, the EEOC v. AT&T time period marked shifts in identity markers such as race, gender, labor, and political identities.

“A Unique Competence”

Latinas were grossly underrepresented within the clerical positions in the Bell System in the 1960s and 1970s leading up to the consent decree. In Felix M. Lopez’s Bell System report, Spanish-surnamed workers were significantly lower in numbers among telephone operators. In 1966 at Pacific Telephone, only 7% of Directory Assistance Operators were Spanish-surnamed. Out of 348 subjects in 1969, Southern Bell employed no Spanish-surnamed Toll operators, with 70% white women and 23% black women making up the ethnic grouping. From 1970-1971, 11% of Toll, Directory Assistance, and Traffic Service at 12 different locations were Spanish-surnamed, compared to 43% of white women and 46% black women. In clerical occupations from 1970 to 1971, at 12 different locations in the Bell System, 20% of Spanish-surnamed

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40 Unions were hesitant to get involved, and EEOC employees as well as Stockford (2004) attributed this to an anti-black and anti-women sentiment that had long resonated within unions such as the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBFW) (Wallace, 1976). The unions defended their hesitancy to get involved because a win for the EEOC would mean a possible loss of promotions and raises for their white male members. Unions, from decades old bias, stayed silent and on the sidelines building up to the case. The CWA announced support after A Unique Competence hit the media.
employees held positions, compared to 40% white and 40% blacks (Lopez, 1976, p. 232). In spite of the drastic evidence of exclusion, the EEOC report filed against AT&T *A Unique Competence* did not explore Latinas beyond linguistic and national-origin discriminations. Latinas were presented as one-dimensional victims, excluding the nuances of race and gender.

From the beginning, EEOC and corresponding ethnic organizations fell short in including Latinas into the EEOC v. AT&T preliminary proceedings. The case of EEOC v. AT&T began in 1970, when the FCC blocked AT&T’s attempt at raising long distance rates until the company agreed to stop employment discrimination practices. The EEOC conducted an investigation into the ways in which AT&T’s discrimination was practiced. They found that the systematic discrimination by race, sex, and national origin affected advertising, hiring, training, promotions, pay, benefits, career promotion, and vacation leave. The report also analyzed the gendered classifications at work, “Every single wage-earning job was classified as male or female…” The Bell monolith, the government study found, ‘is, without doubt, the largest oppressor of women workers in the United States’” (MacLean, 2006, p. 132). As a constituency, Latina/os accounted for nearly all of the complaints filed with the EEOC labeled as “national origin” (MacLean, 2006, p. 155). An especially significant method of discrimination, which AT&T defended as good business, was the “word-of-mouth” approach to recruiting. This tactic inevitably led to excluding minorities, especially Spanish-speaking people.

On December 1, 1971, the EEOC filed *A Unique Competence: A Study of Equal Employment Opportunity in the Bell System* document, a large manuscript detailing AT&T discrimination with footnotes, charts, tables, and testimonies (Herr, 2003, p. 63). According to
the report, ‘Spanish-surnamed Americans’ were excluded from employment in numerous ways. The EEOC named Spanish-surnamed Americans as the “Invisible Minority” in the Bell System (Herr, 2003, p. 67), finding that Spanish-surnamed Americans were specifically excluded from Bell employment. While the primary focus was sex discrimination, the EEOC acknowledged black women and Latinas as the most neglected or outright discriminated against (Wallace, 1976, p. 248). Out of the twelve Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA) where the Latina/o population was the largest, Bell’s employment rates were nowhere close to the industry average (Papers of Marjorie Stockford, 1971, p. 284), “In none of the twelve SMSA’s which had a substantial Hispanic population was their employment by the operating companies at rates near their representation in the work force” (Wallace, 1976, p. 259). The reason for underrepresentation of Latina/os was because of the preemployment criteria, including paper credentials and test scores, which “tended to screen out a disproportionate number of minorities” (Wallace, 1976, p. 259). The major complaints filed in *A Unique Competence* solely focus on Latina/os as language minorities of “Spanish ancestry,” engaging the Bell System discriminations against Latinas/os without racial or gendered components (Papers of Marjorie Stockford, 1972).

*A Unique Competence* addressed the employment discrimination toward Latina/o customers and employees in the final chapter of the report. Although concluding the report with “The Invisible Minority,” the EEOC disregarded the nuances of the ‘Spanish-surnamed’ group. The EEOC came to five conclusions about Spanish-surnamed Americans employed by Bell:

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The term ‘Spanish-surnamed Americans’ is used throughout *A Unique Competence* to denote Latina and Latino employees, customers, and potential customers. These numbers may be inadequate in recognizing the actual differentiation among Latina/o employees in the Bell System, considering not all Latina/os have Spanish-surnames and those with Spanish-surnames may not necessarily be Latina/o.
They were employed at a rate significantly lower than their proportion to the population; Spanish-surnamed Americans employed at Bell were working in the lowest paid classifications and excluded from all management; Spanish-surnamed American positions in Bell was equal to blacks in Southern companies in the previous decade; Bell’s recruitment and hiring policies, aimed at restricting/excluding black employment, had a greater impact on Spanish-surnamed Americans; and finally that Bell had made no efforts to improve the employment states of Spanish-surnamed Americans (Papers of Marjorie Stockford, 1971, p. 286). Spanish-surnamed Americans were estimated to have lost over $137 million annually due to their positions in the lowest-paying jobs or denial of employment all together (Papers of Marjorie Stockford, 1971, p. 288). Of the 12 SMSA’s identified in the report, Spanish-surnamed employees did not rise above 1% of employees at AT&T, and those few employed made 78% earnings of their white counterparts (Papers of Marjorie Stockford, 1972, p. 1266). A Unique Competence discussed the lack of services as particularly problematic. The investigation found that Bell had only one Spanish-surnamed interviewer and that the interview process itself held cultural biases allowing for many reasons to disqualify a Latina/o candidate from hiring (Papers of Marjorie Stockford, 1972, p. 1276). The Bell companies, except New Jersey Bell, hired installers with fluent English proficiency, who could pass the Wonderlic Test in English, and could meet the height standards

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42 One of the most controversial components of AT&T’s hiring practices were their use of psychological tests on selected potential employees. These tests served to systematically stop many underrepresented people from success in the job-hiring process, and gave AT&T management justifications toward discriminatory practices. The two tests widely distributed were the Wonderlic Personnel Test and the Bennett Test of Mechanical Comprehension. These tests were deemed by the Supreme Court as completely unrelated to job performance, however often engaged to specifically discriminate against black applicants. A number of aptitude tests and job performance prediction tests were also used adversely to work against black employment, See Ash (1976, p. 203, 208). Bell replaced the Wonderlic with the Bell System Qualification Test I (BSQT I); on the Wonderlic and BSQT 70% whites, 20 % black applicants met the recommended standards (Lopez,1976, p. 231).
for the average Anglo (“A Unique Competence,” Papers of Marjorie Stockford, p. 1276). A Unique Competence found all of these demands worked against the recruitment of Latina employees of the Bell System. Although A Unique Competence ends with AT&T’s explicit tactics of discrimination, the report grouped Latinas and Latinos into a monolithic contingent of the ‘Spanish-surnamed,’ neglecting to investigate intersectional bias of race and gender unique to Latinas.

The report, though detailed on the lack of Latina and Latino employees within AT&T, at no point defines the unique discriminations against Latinas and Latinos. A Unique Competence overlooked specific genders until the last page of the report, ending with the famous poem I Am Joaquin by Chicano activist Rodolfo Gonzales.

I am Joaquin/Lost in a world of confusion/Caught up in the whirl of an Anglo society,/Confused by the rules,/Scorned by attitudes,/Suppressed by manipulation,/And destroyed by modern society./My fathers have lost the economic battle,/And won the fight for cultural survival.

In a country that has wiped out all my history, stifled all my pride/In a country that has placed a different indignity upon my ancient burdens. Inferiority is the new load… (“A Unique Competence,” Papers of Marjorie Stockford, 1971, p. 289).

For Chicana feminists and scholars, I am Joaquin represented the empowered Chicano, an existential Latino male hero who faced Anglo-dominated spaces as a revolutionary figure. Chicana scholar Angie Chabram-Dernersesian analyzes the implications of I am Joaquin alongside similar cultural productions of the Chicano rights movement. Chabram-Dernersesian argues that the Chicano male literary subjects, written in the o/os linguistic qualifier, “subsume the Chicana into a universal ethnic subject that speaks with the masculine instead of the feminine
and embodies itself into a Chicano male” (Chabram-Dernersesian, 1992, p. 82). Without the consideration of Latinas’ needs as information workers and customers within the preliminary report, *A Unique Competence* dichotomized Latina identity into the ‘gender first’ ideology foregrounded by NOW (Green, 2012, p. 50), and the male-centric Chicano rights movement priorities that *I am Joaquin* performed. Though *A Unique Competence* identifies discriminations against Spanish-surnamed people, it continued the invisibility of Latinas by keeping them unnamed. With *I am Joaquin* concluding the report, Latino men were the default ‘invisible minority.’

The preliminary filings of *A Unique Competence* framed the oncoming proceedings of EEOC v. AT&T, opening up the largest company of private sector employees to underrepresented people at the onset of job loss in previously flourishing industries. Discourse around the inclusion of Latinos in the subsequent EEOC report *A Unique Competence* favored Latino men’s recruitment into the Bell System. The hegemonic disposition of Latinas within the Chicano rights movement set the precedents for oversight within ethnic legal rights organizations.

**Testimonies and Evidence**

Despite the weighty evidence, proceedings continued to treat Latinas as solely language and national-origin minorities, neglecting racial and gendered components. These complaints were filed through ethnic organizations born out of the Civil Rights Movements, working on the state and national level in various sectors of U.S. politics, education, and employment. Ethnic organizations and NOW brought political pressure on the EEOC during the 1960s through the 1970s to enforce Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, leading to major cases such as EEOC v. AT&T. Though the EEOC was created to enforce Title VII, it did not gain the
political momentum it needed until the early 1970s, targeting AT&T as the largest private sector employer and the largest overall employer of women. AT&T’s discriminations against Latina/os were racially motivated, however because the case was built on a framework with race discussed as ‘white and black’ and gender universalized to benefit white women, Latinas had little more ground than language and national origin complaints.

Previous to the EEOC v. AT&T case, Latina/os and Mexicans in particular had a tense relationship to the EEOC. In a regional EEOC conference in San Francisco in 1966, executive director Hermen Edelsberg told a Mexican American audience that the EEOC did nothing about Mexican American problems because, “Mexican Americans were ‘distrustful of agencies,’ so little could be done. He even told his listeners that Mexicans had ‘no such proverb as ‘the wheel that squeaks the loudest gets the grease’” (MacLean, 2006, p. 169). A few weeks later at an Albuquerque conference, fifty Mexican American leaders gathered to meet with the EEOC chairman Franklin Delano Roosevelt Jr., but Roosevelt sent Edelsberg instead. The leaders met until 3 a.m., walking out on the EEOC the next day as a united body (MacLean, 2006, p. 170). This walkout simultaneously demonstrated a rejection of the state of the EEOC as well as represented the unity of a Mexican-American constituency, developing the Mexican-American Ad Hoc Committee on Equal Employment.

Because the FCC’s primary responsibility was to regulate AT&T, they also oversaw the hearings that led to the consent decree, beginning in 1970 (Stockford, 2004). The FCC hearing’s evidence was further presented as solely linguistic, neglecting race and gender. During the FCC hearings, CRLA lawyer Albert Moreno proposed the FCC place a call in Spanish to Sonoma County. The caller claimed to have an emergency to see the results of service to Spanish speakers. Guido del Prado, a Spanish-speaking client of Moreno’s, called information in Sonoma
County. The transaction was passed to two different telephone operators, totaling six minutes and forty seconds of wait time before del Prado got the information he needed (Stockford, 2004, p. 119). This session ignored the real-life circumstances described above by Latinas, overlooking gendered and racially organized situations experienced by Latinas unable to use the telephone.

The Attitudinal Survey of Latina/o experiences of Pacific Telephone & Telegraph revealed great dissonance with the phone company, demonstrating racially motivated biases experienced by Latina/os. Prepared by Manual Alvarado, former Director of Community Education for South Alameda County, this survey detailed the results of a door-to-door survey conducted in Alameda County among Mexican-Americans “to determine their attitudes, impressions, and experiences in regard to Pacific Telephone & Telegraph service and employment” (Alvarado, MALDEF Records, 1972). 86 random respondents were surveyed on Bell services to Mexican-Americans and Spanish services. Respondents of the survey overwhelmingly required Spanish-speaking telephone operators, indicating that Anglos were more likely to receive better PT&T services and jobs. Respondents acknowledged that the telephone company discriminated against Mexican-Americans in service and jobs, finding it difficult to make telephone calls and pay telephone bills because of the English-only services. Despite the employment discrimination, 79 respondents would apply for installer, operator, and management jobs if the telephone company really advertised to hire Mexican-Americans. Finally, 81 out of 83 respondents favored a Mexican-American owned and operated company in Alameda County because it would offer Spanish-speaking services. Although the survey neglected gender, it reveals a racial consciousness in Latina/o respondents’ experience as potential employees and customers (Alvarado, 1972).
The resulting PT&T objectives, though lofty in promises of employment and improved services, continued to neglect the intersectional needs of Latinas. In a press release in March of 1972, PT&T announced major goals to include Spanish-speaking and/or Mexican-American employees and customers. PT&T’s promises included doubling the amount of ‘Spanish-Americans’ (MALDEF Records, 1972, Box 655) in its employment by 1975 and to triple the number of ‘Spanish-Americans’ by 1980. PT&T also guaranteed that 25% of all new hires would be ‘Spanish-American’ employees including 30% of all new college management hires. PT&T guaranteed to take responsibility for hiring 1,000 Spanish-speaking only persons. The “Press Summary of Bell Telephone Hearings on Spanish-Speaking Employment Problems” omitted Latina employment recruitment, services, or training at PT&T. Because the PT&T Attitudinal Survey did not focus on intersectional needs of customers and employees, Latina testimonies and experiences of AT&T are necessary to understand the nuanced and frustrating manner in which discriminations took place.

**Latina Customer and Employee Testimonies**

MALDEF and the CRLA were the organizing entities crucial to Latina/o engagement in this case. Founded in 1967 in Los Angeles, California (Vigil, 2000, p. 238), MALDEF used several strategies to gain rights for Latina/os, including litigation, advocacy, educational outreach, law school scholarships, immigration policy, and leadership development (Vigil, 2000, p. 239). CRLA was founded in 1966 to provide free legal services specific to housing, labor and employment, education, rural health, and leadership development (CRLA Fast Facts). But MALDEF and CRLA were unprepared to incorporate gender into their proceedings.\(^\text{43}\) MALDEF

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\(^{43}\) Ethnic organizations such as MALDEF that were involved in the case had deferred to NOW for gender discriminations, having no feminist component of their own. See: Green, 2012, p. 48.
and CRLA’s involvement in the EEOC case advocated for further recruitment of Latina/o employees in higher paying jobs at the Bell System, better services to Spanish-speaking customers, and challenged exploitation of current Latina/o employees. The nature of the witness testimonies on MALDEF and CRLA records neglected Latinas, primarily focusing on bilingual services, problems with employment services, the Bell’s participation in the Spanish-speaking community, regional attitudes of Mexican-Americans towards the Bell System, effects of media and communication on the Chicano image, community organizations’ experiences with Bell, customer experience within the Spanish-speaking community, education among the Spanish-speaking community, bilingual services and Bell employment (MALDEF Records, 1972, Box 652). Although the litigation did not focus specifically on Latina needs, employment experiences, and customer experiences, the testimonies themselves reveal the particularly unique intersectional experiences of Latinas in AT&T.

From April 17 to April 21, 1972 MALDEF and the CRLA held testimonies of witnesses in the case, concerned with the PT&T Company’s treatment of Latinas/os and Asian Americans (Wallace & Nelson, 1976, p. 249). Testimonies were also taken from representatives of Spanish-speaking communities from May 8 to 12 in New York. The testimonies came from Latina/o customers and employees of the Bell System. “All these potential speakers shared one goal: to document orally why the phone company should itself suffer in exchange for the suffering it had caused its own employees” (Stockford, 2004, p. 114).

Due to the lack of Latina AT&T employees, Latina customer testimonies were the dominant witnesses on record, however they do indicate markers of racial and gendered

44 Asian American experience as employees and customers, prior to and during this case has yet to be explored deeply within academic scholarship. This research echoes Venus Green’s appeal for the investigation into poor women, lesbians, differently abled women, transgender women, and others. See Green (2012, Footnote 17).
experiences. Dolores Martinez of Healdsburg, California testified that she was involved in an accident. Unable to reach help on the telephone, Martinez walked three miles for emergency help. Maria Torres, also from Healdsburg, had a child with heart problems whose doctor was located in San Francisco. On days when she expected calls from the doctor, Torres had to keep her children home due to the lack of bilingual phone services. Domitila Reyes of Windsor, California had a number of negative incidents with the phone company. Reyes received a series of erroneous bills from the phone company that had been previously paid. She was unable to call police during an auto accident, and unable to get her son out of jail in San Diego because of a lack of telephone services in Spanish (MALDEF Records, Witnesses, Box 653). Although sparse, the types of issues testified on AT&T services demonstrated the intersectional gender roles of Latinas as mothers and caretakers.

Latina employee testimonies against AT&T often pertained to the neglect of promotions, difficulties obtaining excused time off, and more severe punishment when they were absent. For Latina information workers at the phone company, a frequent reason for discrimination that arose in these reports are not their job performance or skill ability, but rather the supervisor finding a flaw in their personal characteristics. These personality flaws were marked as negative attributes in their overall reports, leading to the refusal of a promotion or transfer to higher pay and better work.

Latinas faced discriminations not only in their recruitment and retention, but also in their daily workplace. In her testimony against PT&T, telephone operator Anne Hay found it difficult to get excused time off, though she noted that White Anglo operators did not face this same challenge. Hay described the difficult working conditions, which she believed to be more

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flexible for white operators, “Minorities are never given non board assignments. White Anglo operators are” (CRLA Records, Anne Hay Case, Box 1251, Folder 3). Many women were led to believe that they might be promoted, but never were. Cecilia Coronel reported that although she was one of four candidates for a position, she was the only one of the candidates not interviewed. Two white men and one white woman were instead given interviews for the position (CRLA Records, 1971, Box 1251). Although Coronel was told by her supervisor that she was more qualified because of her background knowledge and experience, she was misled to believe she would receive an interview that was never offered (CRLA Archives, 1971, Box 1251).

For many of the incumbents in the case, they were ‘put off’ in timing for such issues as transfers, equipment repairs, and time off. Roseela Crooker worked at the Bell Company since 1965 and had transferred to the Bell Labs from 1969 to 1971, when they needed her as a Special Assistant. Although she followed proper procedure for a transfer, and felt that her bilingual ability made her a particular fit for her requested transfer, she had been delayed for weeks in a response for her request (CRLA Records, 1971, Box 1251). Barbara Davidoff requested a transfer into entry level management, however never received a follow up, finding it difficult to merely obtain the transfer request form needed to be considered for management (CRLA Records, 1971, Box 1251). She also had to wait five months for new safety glasses after her first pair broke. Waiting, with little to no resolution, is a common theme among Latina testimonies against the Bell Company.

Another common justification used against Latina promotion was the hindrance of their personalities on their labor quality. Supervisors frequently commented on Latinas’ personal and interpersonal skills as a hindrance to their work performance. Mary Martinez worked on different tasks between multiple Bell System companies, including PT&T, Nevada Bell, and
Atlantic Bell in the Medical Department. Her job required her to track monthly expenses, maintain accounts, billing, and perform special medical related research. Although Martinez was noted for her strong job performance, the appraisal summary from her supervisor stated that, “her emotions tend to be ‘near the surface’” (CRLA Records, Anne Hay, Box 1251, Folder 3) and this led to a denial in her promotion, transferring her horizontally instead. Operator Connie Sanchez was rated highly by her supervisor for her staff duties and skills, however she was told she needed improvement on her personal characteristics:

Although she can convey her thoughts clearly at times, she often tends to belabor her point or proceed with a subject without the basic data, assuming you know what has gone on before. She wanders about at times without getting to the point. She conveys thoughts adequately in writing. She does have a tendency to make premature judgments and have a one-sided communication as a result. (CRLA Records, Box 1251, Folder 5)

Ratings on ‘Personal Skills’ and ‘Interpersonal Characteristics' sections of these employee reports tended to be lower for Latinas, despite their high performance in managerial and administrative and overall job skills.

Overall, Latinas experienced different discriminations at the telephone company, as both customers and employees. Latina customers found themselves without bilingual services at desperate times in need of emergency services. The lack of Spanish-speaking telephone operators and customer service impacted their gendered role as mothers and left Latinas in desperate situations without help. Latina employees found it nearly impossible to achieve a raise or promotion, despite having received high marks on their skill set in reviews. They were often left waiting with little to no response from the phone company about promotions. Latina personalities were used as an excuse to deny them these promotions.
The Impact of the Consent Decree for Latinas

White women and women of color in particular were discriminated against in a number of ways at the Bell Companies, however Latinas were made invisible because of the dual neglect of intersectionality by federal laws and political organizing group politics (Green, 2001, p. 61). Notwithstanding numerical evidence, NOW and the EEOC’s arguments lost the nuanced experiences of women of color by becoming gender focused. NOW identified race discrimination as a problem within the Bell System, however did not use African American women’s testimony as charges of sex discrimination, labeling their statements as racially motivated discriminations (Green, 2001, p. 53). Thus, the consent decree fell short, dichotomizing Latinas’ identity as only significant for language services.

On January 18, 1973 the consent decree was handed down before the US District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania (Wallace & Nelson, 1976, p. 252). The consent decree put into place: collective bargaining rights, more promotion opportunities for ‘females and minorities,’ changed standardized testing so that scores could not discriminate against potential employees, instated a pay-promotion plan, insured that college graduate females were hired directly into management, and guaranteed pay adjustments and back pay for previous discrimination (“Consent Decree,” Papers of Marjorie Stockford, 1973). Reports, surveys, and testimonies from Latina/o communities went unacknowledged, lumping Latinas into the ‘women or minorities’ category essential to the consent decree. Latinas continued to be made invisible to the end of the AT&T v. EEOC case.

46 Green (2001) demonstrated how organizations such as NOW erased the women of color’s intersectional needs, particularly focusing on the erasure of black women’s grievances with AT&T.
The direct impact of the consent decree on Latinas is difficult to document due to the discrepancies in censuses. Although no longer categorized as ‘white’ on surveys, Latinas were still reported as ‘other’ with all minorities except African Americans. Herbert R. Northrup and John A. Larson’s *The Impact of the AT&T-EEOC Consent Decree* noted, “Minority group members achieved the greatest gains in regions where they represent a relatively significant proportion of the population” (1979, p. 98). According to Northrup and Larson, males and females of the same racial group tended to do well in the same job category, and different racial groups had success in different sectors of AT&T:

Although there was a shortage of technically trained blacks, their numbers far exceeded the available supply of Hispanics and other minorities, particularly American Indians. Hispanics suffer the additional handicaps of language and cultural differences, thereby compounding the problem of assimilating them into the AT&T labor force (1979, p. 98).

Northrup and Larson detail Latinas’ AT&T presence by regions where the numbers of Latina/o employees were significant; their results find a slow and steady increase in the percentage of Latina employees in the Mountain and Pacific regions. Table 2 demonstrates the small increase of Latina employees in the Mountain region, within a 1-2% range in both the white and blue-collar jobs. In the Pacific Region, the greatest increase in employment was for Latinas in blue-collar jobs. Over the six years surveyed, the increase of Latina information worker jobs was minor. Despite the circumstantial oversight of intersectional needs for Latina employees, Latinas did become information laborers in the Bell System. Many Latinas began employment as telephone operators, and as their work became automatic, they transferred into such jobs as data entry, customer service, clerks, and technicians (Villa-Nicholas, 2014).
Table 2\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Regional increase of Latina employees at AT&T after the consent decree}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/Region</th>
<th>% Latina employees at AT&amp;T</th>
<th>% Total Latina/o employees at AT&amp;T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973, Mountain Region</td>
<td>White Collar: 12.1%</td>
<td>White Collar: 9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blue Collar: 10.6%</td>
<td>Blue Collar: 10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979, Mountain Region</td>
<td>White Collar: 13.3%</td>
<td>White Collar: 11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blue Collar: 12.0%</td>
<td>Blue Collar: 10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973, Pacific Region</td>
<td>White Collar: 8.2%</td>
<td>White Collar: 7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blue Collar: 6.8%</td>
<td>Blue Collar: 8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979, Pacific Region</td>
<td>White Collar: 9.9%</td>
<td>White Collar: 9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blue Collar: 10.1%</td>
<td>Blue Collar: 9.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1980, a follow up review by CRLA found that PT&T on the west coast and AT&T nation-wide had neglected to increase services in Spanish and lagged in their recruitment and retention in the workplace (CRLA Records, 1980, Box 48). According to a 1980 letter from CRLA to Ben W. Dial, Vice President of Human Resources and Corporate Planning at PT&T, PT&T had not honored the 1973 consent decree. In 1972 President Hull had agreed to increase Latina/o new hires to 20-25%, and 33.3% of all college hires (CRLA Records, 1980, Box 48, Folder 3). But in California, of the 77,000 total hires, 12,800 were Latina/os (16.7%) (CRLA Records, 1980, Box 48, Folder 3). Furthermore, CRLA found that “Hispanics are the only group that failed to meet affirmative action goals, and the implementation of the commitment would have enabled Pacific Telephone to meet its goals…” (CRLA Records, 1980, Box 48, Folder 3). In 1979 Cecilia Coronel, Ester Cruz, Natalia Garcia, and Cleo Lambprea all documented that they had experienced discrimination in receiving transfers and promotions in PT&T, finding it impossible to move into management positions with little to no reasons from their supervisors (CRLA Records, 1979, Box 967, Folder 5). By 1980, PT&T had taken no measures to provide better bilingual customer services for directory assistance, phone center store service, public

\textsuperscript{47} All information from Northrup and Larson (1979,p. 172-185).
office service, and repair and installation service (CRLA Records, 1980, Box 48, Folder 3). MALDEF continued to file suit against PT&T on behalf of Latina employees. Some common reasons for these discrimination complaints included lack of promotions, unfairly discharged, and in one case in particular, pregnancy (CRLA Records, 1979, Box 967, Folder 5).

**Conclusions**

How do we account for the underrepresented Latina in information technology fields, especially when considering the lack of diversity in Internet startup companies that now dominate the political economy? While the 1973 AT&T-EEOC consent decree made historic changes to opening up the largest private jobs sector to underrepresented people, the historical record on how Latinas were made a part of this three-year long process is sparse. Because the case treated Latinas as mostly consumers, ‘language minorities,’ and by national origin, the history of Latina involvement in the EEOC-AT&T hearings requires recovery. Despite lengthy academic works published around the EEOC v. AT&T case, the Latina experience is widely neglected.

Embedded within the proceedings to include underrepresented people, racial and gendered politics intertwine into the timeline of telecommunications (De la Peña, 2010, p. 921). Further academic work must recognize where Latinas are employed in technological labor and their impact on the development of information technologies. Latinas’ history in telecommunications must be contextualized by the events that took place during the affirmative action legislations of the 1960s and 1970s. Additional research must be conducted on Latina information labor in telecommunications.

The next chapter details the oral history interviews of Latinas’ experiences in telecommunications after the implementation of the consent decree. These narratives are
necessary for supplementing the sparse archival record on Latinas in telecommunications. The
themes that arise from interviews contribute to the formation of a Latina Technology Studies,
providing unique insights of telecommunications and information technologies that we might not
have without such narratives.
Chapter 6: Latina Narratives of Information Labor

Following the civil rights and affirmative action movements of the previous decade, the 1970s United States private and public employment sector saw an influx of Latinas into telecommunications (Green, 2001). Now entering retirement age, Latina information workers have been employed in telecommunications for decades, seeing firsthand the divestment of U.S. industries and reinvestment into the private sector, the outsourcing of jobs overseas, and the rapid change of information technologies. Experiencing lifelong careers in corporations at the center of the neoliberal political economy, Latina information workers provide a significant case study in the construction and dissonance of telecommunication information workers in the private sector.

This data is especially timely given the increasing demand in the United States for the recruitment and retention of Latinas into technology-related fields. Recent revelations from large tech conglomerates reveal that Latinas are overwhelmingly underrepresented in STEM industries (Burnett et al., 2009). Although the demand for Latinas in STEM is particularly urgent, it is crucial to acknowledge those who have already been working in the lower level sectors of STEM industries- the telephone operators, data processors, electrical engineers, and invisible information workers who deploy critical skills for these industries to flourish. Latina employment and education in IT sectors and the STEM field more broadly has been underdeveloped by different complex barriers in the United States, including race, class, and gender stratifications. The IT fields have seen an overall decline of women in the U.S. In 2008, women made up 57% of the workforce, however only 24% of the professional workforce in IT and within computer scientists, only 1% were female and Hispanic (Burnett et al., 2009). These statistics encourage the need to recruit more Latinas into STEM fields and the IT workforce.
However while proceeding to advocate for more Latinas in STEM, this research advocates for a Critical Latina Technology Studies, a framework that does not only seek to increase some underrepresented people in technology workforces, but does so while questioning the overall structures of hegemony in the telecommunications sector and social construction of technology.

I conducted multiple interviews and participant observation with a small group of Latina women who had worked for the Bell System during the 1970s and 1980s. My journeys around Los Angeles, anywhere from one to four hours on freeways, reflected a small slice of what these women experienced daily in information labor.

By recounting Latina narratives of their lifetime experiences in telecommunications through intensive semi-structured interviews, this study seeks to understand how Latinas talk about and understand the IT sector, information, technology, and the socio-economic structures of these industries. Specifically, this chapter examines the critical approaches to information technologies that Latinas are already engaging with every day in their work. I present findings from four in-depth qualitative interviews with Latina information workers from Southern California, to explore their experience in telecommunications, specifically working in the Bell System. This chapter focuses on the common themes discovered through analysis of the data.

It is important to note that these critical insights are interpreted by myself, the researcher. Although Latinas approached technology, telecommunications, and the political economy with a critical eye, they did not consciously consider their approach to their labor a ‘critique.’ The resulting interpretation of these women’s comments as critical Latina technology studies is my own.

The participants’ accounts described unnamed contradictions, wrestling with the criticisms of the private sector’s implementation of neoliberalism. Latinas were included into
telecommunications and the neoliberal project because of their difference, inhibited through methods of surveillance and limited upward mobility in technology-heavy fields. Latina lower level employees describe working in hostile environments, highly surveilled, with larger workloads, and further restricted by the information technologies in their workplace. Latina information workers’ analysis reveals formation of information workers’ ‘belonging’ and sites of resistance in telecommunications.

**Biographies of Friction**

The tensions in these interviews are best described as ‘frictions,’ advanced by the internal migrations experienced in telecommunications. Friction, according to Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, arises from global connections of contemporary capitalism developed out of the increasing international trade of the past two decades (Tsing, 2005). Tsing further expands on frictions as similar to Hall’s (1991) work on difference, a necessary element to the larger projects at hand, “Speaking of friction is a reminder of the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form, and agency. Friction is not just about slowing things down. Friction is required to keep global power in motion” (2005, p. 6). One of the key sources of friction expressed by interviewees is the internal migration around the Greater Los Angeles area defining information workers’ lives in telecommunications. ‘Friction’ allows for the uneasy contradictions, the unsettled ideologies in my interviews with Latinas in telecommunications. The disturbed stasis of telecommunications companies becomes the underlying causation of mobility and immobility that organizes information workers’ bodies. Cheah asserts that these recognitions include subjects both mobilized and immobilized by globalization (2013, p. 86). For some, such as Maria and Monica, the movement is a daily part of their work. For others, such as Gloria, internal migration happens yearly, when her office is shut down or relocated to another part of Los
Ana Angeles. Latina information workers find themselves in a mobility that is simultaneously liberating and constraining.

Latina information workers’ accounts reflect constant change of job description, information technologies, and geographical location. They are consistent with Cameron McCarthy’s observations on the neoliberal subject’s mobility, “The post-welfare state subject is positioned as socially and economically mobile” (2011, p. 10). While Latina information workers’ histories enabled crucial analysis of technology and capitalism, their career timelines indicated the constant state/strain of change in telecommunications.

Three of the women I interviewed worked under the Bell System for various time spans and parts of their lives. My first research collaborator is Monica\(^48\), a second-generation Mexican\(^49\) woman born in Los Angeles in 1952 who has lived in California her whole life. Monica completed her high school diploma and attended a community college during her first years at the phone company. Monica worked at Pacific Bell from 1970-1982, first as a telephone operator, and then on to various information tasks such as data processing, mail delivery, and payroll records. While often performing complex tasks that included feeding data tape into super-computer’s processing systems, Monica’s work was marked as a lower level employee brought into the Bell System as a part of affirmative action regulations.

Sandra is a Costa Rican woman, born in Atenas, Costa Rica, who moved to California in 1964. Sandra worked for AT&T from 1972 to 1987. She started as a clerk, binding cables manually by adding ‘feet’ to attach the cables. After working as a clerk, she was transferred to the furniture department, taking inventory of materials. After the Furniture Department, Sandra worked in Personal Records, amending employee information cards and to add ‘race’ into the

\(^{48}\) All names have been changed to respect anonymity.
\(^{49}\) Ethnic and race identifiers are used based on how the interview collaborators self-identified.
records. From Personal Records, Sandra was then transferred into the Transportation Unit. At the Transportation Unit, she would manually enter billing codes into the computers. She used a dial phone to transfer data to San Francisco, using microfilms to find the codes.

Maria is a Mexican woman born and raised in San Pedro, California. She began work at Pacific Bell in 1973 and has worked there to the present day, where it is now known as AT&T. Maria began working at Pacific Bell immediately after receiving a high school diploma. She began as a Telephone Operator, where she answered calls and transferred customers using phone books. As a telephone operator, Maria was using the cord board, a headset, and plug. Maria transferred into Messenger Services after two years, where she worked for five years in Inglewood delivering loose mail, equipment, boxes, and cases throughout Pacific Bell. After Messenger Services, Maria transferred into Facility Technician in Huntington Park, where she has been to the present day. As a Facility Technician, Maria provides technical services to landlines around the Los Angeles region at four difference offices, including San Pedro, Wilmington, Torrance, and Lomita.

Gloria is a second generation Hispanic and American Indian who has lived in Los Angeles her whole life, having attended one semester of college. She was hired into the phone company in 1978 as a cord board operator at General Telephone & Electronics (GTE), an independent telephone company. Gloria’s job was subsumed under Traffic Service Position System (TSPS) as phone companies moved away from cord board operators to automatic systems. Gloria’s job went back to GTE in the 1980s and merged with Atlantic Bell in the 90s, becoming Verizon, where Gloria presently works general Customer Service.

These biographies of friction set the stage for the experience of internal migration through greater Los Angeles, conflicting opinions about the welfare state versus the merit
system, hyper-controlled bodies through information technologies’ surveillance, race and gender analysis of telecommunications, and telecommunications’ intimacy. What results is a complex analysis of belonging to, and set apart from, telecommunications.

**Internal Migration**

The internal migration theme common in the narrative of technological freedom is contingent upon the geographic manipulation and immobility of Latina information workers, subject to the will of the telecommunication companies. Maria described the locations that she might visit in a workday:

I take a lot of overtime and I work in these four offices local to me- San Pedro, Wilmington, Torrance and Lomita. They’re probably six miles away at time, but the service tech will put in a ticket and I’ll have to drive to the offices and it’s not occupied. If they call us we have to go (2014, p. 5).

The more a work location changes, the higher level of stress is expressed among the employees. For Glória, the internal migration phenomenon led to a resentful work environment, however Glória transferred the inter-office tensions to individual problems, in sync with the neoliberal narrative:

I mean there’s women there that don’t want to work. I go “there’s a ton of people that want to work, and you don’t want to work, you’re here, groaning about the work. Go home, retire and make room for somebody who needs the job. I’m at that point where you get sick of the grumbling. You have to be more grateful. Especially now days. If you’re not grateful for what the lord has given you, a job, a good paying job. We all have food on the table. *Granted, we all had to move again, it’s the move, it’s a constant moving, but if you look at my history, it’s a constant movement* (2013, p. 14).
Gloria was especially apt to intertwine the trajectory of her career with her personal and spiritual life, relating the parallels of growing up with GTE, a telephone company that started out local and became Verizon.

Telecommunications information work is intricately connected to the larger global economy, and the impacts are felt firsthand, with little room for agency. Gloria spoke of the internal migration as a phenomenon that endangered her work but was necessary for ‘survival.’

Gloria discussed internal office closures due to outsourcing:

But subsequently what I’ve learned now, this change, this is where I work now in Long Beach. Because I went to Pomona, from Downey they moved us from Pomona, from Pomona to Long Beach. *You don’t stay stagnant at the phone company. Every office I’ve worked at in has closed.*

Interviewer: Did it ever feel like there was a fear to lose the job?
Gloria: When Whittier was closing, if we didn’t find transfers we would have lost their jobs.

Interviewer: Did you know anyone who had lost their jobs?
Gloria: Most people found transfers because transfers were being pooled, but it’s dog eat dog now. I mean back then most people found jobs if you wanted one, there were a lot of openings back then and that was in the 90s, and that was when Whittier closed. Then we went to Downey and they were remodeling Downey and getting all these apartments in there, it was nice. Then they changed to Verizon, and you know Verizon is into consolidation, and that’s where you start… (2013, p. 10).

When the FCC broke up AT&T, Sandra found herself concerned for her own job’s security, although ultimately she chose her preferred company, “It was two months after I started working
For Latina information workers, the experience of internal migration around Los Angeles is both liberating and constraining. Working outdoors with manual and technological skills is associated with freedom. But the shifting ownership, titles, and geographic location of a company induced individual stress and inter-personal tension among employees. While Latina information workers adjust to these fluid conditions to keep their job security, the internal migrations scripted by telecommunications are parallel with the challenges and pleasure of skilled labor, therefore disrupting working conditions. Internal migrations augment the contradictory experience of neoliberalism, resulting in both liberating and confined aspects of information labor. Latina information workers indicate that the displeasure of internal migrations are a point of fracture in the workplace and disturbs ‘buying into’ the neoliberal model that expands telecommunications.

**Horizontal, vertical, and temporal mobility**

Interview participants described horizontal and vertical mobility experienced during their decades long careers with information technologies. I use ‘mobility’ as a neutral term, not always denoting an increase in wages or status, but to describe the frequent changes in technology and skills that comes with the job in major telecommunications companies.

Gloria described this mobility as geographic changes around the Greater Los Angeles region, as well as with merging corporations in constant flux:

Then we had to choose, once they were going to close that office, the cord board and make it computerized, we had to choose where we were going to go. And a friend of mine goes, let’s go to Mar Vista. I said “ok.” I didn’t know where Mar Vista was but…so
then I went to Mar Vista as a TSPS [Traffic Service Position System] operator, then when I transferred out of there as a customer service rep in Torrance, then I went to offline support in Whittier. Then they were closing the Whittier office so we had to look for transfers so that’s when I went to Downey, to assignment. And um…during this time, when I first started, the phone company was called general telephone. And between there and when I became a rep somewhere in the 80s, they changed to GTE. So they were GTE until uh…lets see I went to Downey in the 90s, maybe late 90s, umm…they merged with..umm…Atlantic Bell, and they became Verizon (2013, p. 11).

Monica remembers her mobility as vertical, and identified how the job and wages improved as she moved up in floors at Pacific Bell. She also notes the changes in technologies as more advanced as she moved upward:

So it was one of the main hubs of doing accounting. So I went from doing that into the mailroom. So what we did was take all the accounting…um…people’s accounting records. And they needed to go to different areas, different places. So we would separate them sometimes with a, I think it was called a deculator, because the paper needed to be pulled apart, because the paper came in reams and reams and rows and rows of paper that were almost attached, you know? And then you would separate them, and then send them off to next door, to where they were going to go. And it was seven stories so we had jobs that needed to be delivered to the other floors as well. Again I was there for a short time and it was weird to me that it was seven stories, but the higher you went up in the floor, the better the job got. So you started in the mailroom, and then I went to the fourth floor which was actually the computers there (2013, p. 8).
Maria also intertwined her experience of time and the change of technology, indicating a temporal mobility. Maria directly identified the change in technology as speeding up her experience of time:

   Just seeing the technology totally change, I’m looking here in this office and it’s half empty, they sent all of the equipment out, and it’s not even working, and I don’t know where time went. One day I’m like this and the next day I have 40 years. I see it all and it’s all happening and I’m kind of in denial too, you know it scares me. I never had any interest in learning anything more; I was always comfortable in what I’m doing now. It’s a big jolt for me to go into comtech, even though it’s more money, you’re more responsible for more important things too, you have equipment, one little box has 100 subscribers, you’ll put them out of service, critical little things like that that I’m worried I’ll be in charge of. They say ‘just contact tech support’ that’s what they say. They want us to backup and train, they know more than us; they’re supposed to train us while the problem arises, not before (2014, p. 8).

Participants’ lives were often formed around the greater socio-economic shifting and practices of Bell. Wrapped together into the enjoyment of work and the potential for upward mobility was a larger criticism of the neoliberal economy, which the interviewees indicated impacted their quality of life.

**Information Technology Skills and Surveillance**

   The ‘freedom’ component of neoliberalism is significant because it is often used to describe access to information technologies, but also inhibits the so-called freedom of Latina/o information workers. Steven Doran describes how mobile devices become a tool in the production of neoliberal citizenship:
Being free means being ruled. In this way neoliberal citizenship can be characterized by both the continued pursuit of individual freedom as well as by systems of domination which are becoming increasingly material, invisible, and infrastructural. The neoliberal citizen is thus a paradoxical figure, at once ‘free’—that is, governmental power that regulates and manages conduct through the strategic deployment of such freedom (Doran, 2011, p. 134).

While the neoliberal era divested access to welfare and state-funded resources, it has accelerated the narrative of freedom through information technologies. Freedom is presented as “the ability to manage the self remotely, unconstrained by geography. In this way, mobility becomes a powerful signifier of freedom of the neoliberal citizen” (Doran, 2011, p. 138). For Latinas in telecommunications, information technology possessed the potential to be liberating. All of the women enjoyed and sought after more skilled jobs. However information technologies are also discussed as suspect, leading to further surveillance in the workplace.

**Advanced training in technology**

Although many Latinas work in the lower level components of telecommunications, they have often been some of the first in their communities trained in advanced technologies, such as computers. Sandra recalled the process of training in the early 1980s, when she learned to assemble computers and used the original DOS program:

They sent us to special training, starting how to, how can I tell you, the computer was in the bags, we had to take it out and put it together completely and connect it and everything, then after they taught us the DOS program, how did they call that…it was like a running program, now its windows, it used to be DOS, and Excel, I don’t remember which other ones. We had special programs, they started more, the computer
programs started more...how can I say, more and more...we types something in the computer then they give us the Bill already there, and we put the name and everything and they sent it back to San Francisco. We didn’t have to do anything they just checked (2014, p. 1-2)

Sandra’s job in billing also led to her utilizing early data-transferring systems over the phone and with microfilm. She described the use of early data transferring Teletype machines that used step-by-step switches to connect distant offices:

Ok first, they used to send me umm, suppose we contracted, we called contractors for moving tables, and they sent us the bills. So the bills that came to us would send us codes. First we did it manually and sent it through the mail, then afterwards the computers started. Then we had to dial the phone to San Francisco, now thinking about the technology...we had to push a button and the click click click, you could hear that, and you were connected to San Francisco. And they gave us the codes for the labels. So we worked with microfilms, little ones, to find the codes to see if it was invalid or right. So we would send the bill, give it to the supervisor, he would check that and he would sign it and then we sent it (2013, p. 2).

Information labor became intentionally deskilled as technology shifted work from manual to automatic to digital (Green, 2001, p. 25). Although the interview participants worked with technology in their daily lives, they hesitated to trust it completely. Sandra described her work with cables as manual until it transitioned to a more sophisticated technology. Once the technology became more advanced, the job was moved to different geographic locations:

I think it was less than a year, after that it was transferred to Oakland, it was more sophisticated, they took that department up and it was no longer. I think that they started
more with the computers or something more…they started doing different things, not manually. For me, everything was manual; we put the maps and adding the feet. So I imagined that they changed or completely took out the department (2014, p. 2).

Maria expressed her dissonance with how technology had changed her field. She felt frustrated that she had to call overseas for computer support, a service local co-workers previously provided:

*Maria:* The technology, as far as everything is on the computer, our coverage’s, everything they want to cover us on, is on the computer. They used to physically come over here with us, but now, we go to the websites and do whatever we have to do on the computer. All of my work comes out of the computer, everything is assigned to us, times.

*Interviewer:* When did you start on the computer and when did you start getting timed?

*Maria:* Probably the last maybe, 12 or 13 years, we had to start putting in our own time. Learning the computer is probably like 13 years, it’s supposed to be paperless but it’s not. That’s probably when they had us doing all that. Right now, the centers that are here and the COs, we have all of equipment, but it all can be managed by operators back East. Like the service center, they’re all back East. And every time I have trouble with my computer or on my desktop, I get calls from India, from the Philippines (2014, p. 4).

Gloria adapted to the technology quickly to stay relevant to her work, however she distrusted technology:

But the one thing about the phone company is it’s constant movement. And not just in places, but internal. How things are working, how things are functioning. And that’s just how it is. The technology has taken over. And you either gotta go with it, you know. I
mean there’s certain things I don’t like to do, like pay my bills online, I’m still old

The deskilling of labor in relationship to technology was a common topic with Maria and
Gloria, employed their entire careers in phone companies. Maria noticed that skilled training was
related to the interconnection of community among laborers within the phone companies. Over
time the compartmentalized knowledge of a system of communication also led to the breakdown
of relationships among her co-workers:

Cross training, and riding with other people, and seeing how other departments work.
They exposed everybody to everything so that you pretty much knew what was going on.
Everybody was a little bit more considerate. That’s what it seemed like. Now the guys
don’t know what we do, and we don’t know who they are. They’re badgering us to get it
fixed, if we could fix it, but it’s out there, but it’s not like that…
…the people are really what made it too. All my good friends. You know, because it
doesn’t seem like it’s there anymore. Everybody would help each other. It’s not like that
anymore. Everybody is out for themselves. Because they depend on certain people to do
certain things. Some people, they are able not to do nothing where the management still
depends on certain people’s jobs. So I think it’s going to be like that everywhere. (2014,
p. 6).

Lacking support of new technologies, the acceleration of technology made Maria uncomfortable
with her skill level in her new job description. Although Maria enjoyed the skills she deployed in
her job, she has felt uneasy with the amount of responsibility the new job descriptions engaged
with little training. Her new workloads were deskilled and included a larger amount of
responsibility and higher stakes for failure.
All participants reported that they had advanced training gaining technological skills from on the job training, as well as experience at their work site. These skills allowed participants to move upwards within their respective companies. Most of the women’s jobs moved from manual labor to online during their careers, and they were some of the first in their communities to have computer training skills. These narratives allow for an insight on the day-to-day experience of Latina women who work intimately with information technologies for decades.

Latinas who have worked in telecommunications since the early 1970s experienced the transition of their work from manual to electronic and online as a shift not only in the greater economy, but also in their personal lives. Three of my participants began their work as manual telephone operators, plugging into a cord board. For these women, going ‘online’ meant plugging their headsets in and fielding incoming calls, as Maria indicates:

The calls automatically came in, and that was, then it was our timing was all essential.
We had to make so many calls in so many minutes of information; you know they would time us. And back in that day we used to use the big phone books, and turn the pages. You know the white pages and the yellow pages, in a phone book, it was, people that didn’t have it at hand… We had our stations and we would plug in, and the call would automatically come through. Often we would get monitored, and our AWT was how many calls we would take care of in a minute (2014, p. 2).

Gloria described her first experience with computer training, remembering that her work changed from the manual cord board to computers around 1978:

We always had training for different things. Customer service was always drilled into you. Constantly training customer service. Anything new coming up. But we did have
classes on how to use the computers. At first, during the time we’re in this office, the way it was set up was you went to different job functions as an online rep. So you were an online rep. Then you went to this thing called VAF, and what that was is you more interfaced with the reps, and we had at that time phonemarts, which, the customer would go in and place an order, which they would purchase a phone or lease a phone… Different things happen and we got the first computers for that system because it needed the address and stuff. So by staying there I got the first training on the first little computer they brought in to do that work, so it really helped me to do that other stuff, when it came time to do orders, I was a little more comfortable doing what I had to do (2013, p. 8).

All of the participants discussed a wide range of skills, from the mundane and repetitive motions of the telephone operator, to early applications of software training. However their experience with information technologies was not in a vacuum, but was tied to larger operations of their companies. Mobility and change is a phenomenon that arose during these interviews.

**Telephone operators and surveillance**

Among all of the interviewees, a critique was present of the shift in the value of labor, the change in technology and skills. This analysis of the larger socio-economic structure indicates the shifting global economy, the social construction of technology and the deskilling of labor. A clear parallel became evident throughout these discussions between the hyper-surveilled and monotonous work of the telephone operator, where three interviewees began their work, and the contemporary organization of technology labor within large telecommunications conglomerates.

Technology is said to have a speeding up effect on efficiency and time. Technological determinism is naturalized in the U.S. as having only positive effects on personal lives, workplaces, and economic growth. Latina information workers identified a distrust of technology
because they have seen firsthand their jobs deskilled, their work overloaded, and their co-worker communities fragmented. While all interviewees identified these negative associations with technology as more recent developments, one interesting phenomenon arose that harkened back to information work of the past, now made almost obsolete. The occupation of the telephone operator, a job where many Latinas began their employment in the phone companies, was described congruent with present day information work. The 1970s telephone operators came from a long history of highly surveilled and overworked labor. Operators were subject to decades of physically grueling and surveilled work, and often responded with union organizing and activism for better working conditions. Latina information workers found their work in these past few years to be similarly inhospitable. Although they regarded these working conditions as recent results of the neoliberal era, the similarities to telephone operators of the past may resist the ‘newness’ of this phenomenon. The parallel between the telephone operators of the past and today’s telecommunications information worker might indicate that new formations of neoliberalism are put into action through old models of technological displacement.

The telephone operator was an entry job for Monica, Gloria and Maria that led to more skilled opportunities that paid better. They described this work as highly surveilled, physically tedious, monotonous, and stressful:

Monica: When I first got a job there we wore these black headsets that you see, very very heavy, and you would put the earpiece over your mouth, you would get one of those, go to a little cubicle and you would plug in. and as soon as you plug in to a network calls would start coming in, the 411 calls, at the time they were the directory assistance. And you would answer 8 hours a day, phone listing, you were all to get phone numbers, phone
listings. Or if you couldn’t, you would get a supervisor. So there were like, two supervisors on staff all the time (2013, p. 6).

Gloria: It’s tedious work, and it started to affect, because at that time I was partying a lot. And when you’re an operator and you’re bored, you seem to party a little harder. So I just needed to do something else (2013, p. 2).

Maria: Yes, well, I know I wasn’t happy there in operator services. I was almost going to quit. I was just overwhelmed because it was a stressful job. Your hours are staggered, you have to turn on a light if you want to go to the bathroom, and only one person on the floor could go to the bathroom at once. It’s really strict and you’re constantly monitored” (2013, p. 7).

As technology became automated, the work became deskillied. Maria indicated that the level of surveillance on her work has greatly increased since technologies such as the GPS have developed, “I have a GPS and we have our cell phones too, and I heard we have GPS on our cell phone…they monitor our driving all the time and everything seems to be more stricter in the policy (2014, p. 5).

The deskilling of labor became a common topic among conversations with Maria and Gloria, who had had lifelong careers in phone companies, and had not moved into management positions. Gloria’s career has shifted a number of times geographically and by title. She made decisions on where to work based on attempting to keep her technological skill level up, exercising the small amount of agency she was given:

Well my job in Whittier moved to Florida, Florida took over that function. So jobs going out of state is bad. Now my job in, when we went to Downey on assignment, when we became Verizon…when we were still GTE we did everything as one function. When we
went to Verizon they kept Atlantic Bell, how they do things, and they separated job functions- switch and assignment, two different categories. So since I was already doing both, I decided to stay with switch, because it’s more challenging and I like it (2013, p. 4).

Because of the decades of insight that the interview participants have had in telecommunications, they identify a clear degradation of their work and skills with information technologies. Though they adapt to the new conditions with resolve, they often identify a general suspicion of technology and its overall effect on community, quality of life, and the well-being of the companies themselves.

**Race and gender critical analysis**

Race and gender was purposefully discussed during these interviews, however with varying results. Sandra, Maria, and Gloria did not believe they experienced discrimination as Latinas in the field, and primarily worked in offices with a majority of Latinos, Latinas, and African Americans. All of the women noted that with few exceptions supervisors are white men.

Gloria felt that her workplace had always been a diverse space, however not in supervisory roles:

Yeah it was very diverse, that’s one thing that GTE um…a very diverse company. They really…umm…it is, diversity is one of I think GTE’s better strengths. They’ve always been diverse….When I first started, it seemed like, they had a lot of African American supervisors. I didn’t really see any Hispanic higher ups, but in an operator smaller office, we didn’t see that. We went to TSPS [Traffic Service Position Systems], again I think most of the supervisors were white, the high managers were white (2013, p. 11).
Many negative experiences in the workplace were identified as individuals’ actions rather than linked to race and gender. Gloria and Maria both expressed an uncertainty about the nature of discriminations that they ultimately ascribed to individual attitudes rather than race and gender:

I’ve had a couple of supervisors that, you know, you didn’t want to come out and say, or they hid it well. But then they would do stuff to other people who weren’t Hispanic so I figured it’s just them… I always just give people the benefit of the doubt. Since I was a child, I never felt discriminated against for being Hispanic (2013, p. 12).

Maria also described discrimination as a conflicted experience. While she could not directly identify a race and gendered discrimination, Maria found that her age worked against further opportunities:

Interviewer: “Did you ever feel as a Latina in this field, like you experienced discrimination?”

Maria: I think I did…but I don’t know how to put it. Not really, I think it was more about personalities. I don’t really feel like I had any discrimination. I think if anything, because I was Latina, I was offered more opportunities. I could have probably advanced more than I felt comfortable to do. And as I’m getting older my opportunities are getting less and less. My mental and physical self. (2014, p. 6).

Monica recognized particular experiences in which she felt discriminated against as a Latina in a mostly white workplace. Monica recognized loneliness in the spaces that she worked where she was the only Latina:

And I went to, first to become a telephone operator, where our job was to look up phone numbers to the public, but we had to be trained for that, so for two weeks you learn about
area codes and counties, location, in color coded books, which were the directories. And it seemed like a simple job, and it was, but it was difficult because there were no other Latinos there at all so I just felt so out of place (2013, p. 4).

Monica described an instance in her workplace where she analyzes technologies (in the form of keys) as being used to create a hostile workplace:

People looked at what you looked like. That, I remember that, and I also felt discriminated once by this man who was very high up. Came to the mailroom when I was a mailperson, out of a white lady, an African American and me, he took me and he says, I need you to do this right now. And he had a set of a key, a little tiny key. And he threw a bunch of keys in front of me, sitting down, and he said, “I need you to find the key right now that this fits.

And the African American woman said to me, ‘Don’t do that, that’s wrong what he’s asking you to do.’ And I was scared. I went ahead and looked for a key there was nothing like that. And I really feel like to this day he did that on purpose. (2013, p. 13).

Monica also recognized that her level of access to more sophisticated information technologies was limited and that white employees had more access to certain technologies, such as a large data processing computer:

Right, I didn’t feel like I accomplished much. I didn’t know why I wasn’t allowed to go into the big computer center. Umm, we were not allowed to go in there, only certain ones. And I wanted to go in there.

Yeah they were working in there all the time. Changing the wheels, because the computer tapes were massive you know the data base was huge. And all we would do was get the
wheels ready for them. So I didn’t feel like… I didn’t accomplish much of anything in there. …

There were white technicians that would go in and out. There were the engineers, the technicians, they were always around. Like I said everybody wore a blue coat, and there were a few African American women allowed to put the reels in, but I don’t remember any Latino people going in (2013, p. 18).

One of the most interesting cases among the interviewees was with Sandra. Sandra, of all of the interviewees, has the most identifiable accent when speaking English, and had migrated to the United States after high school. She attained her job at Bell by answering an advertisement specifically looking for Spanish speakers after the consent decree was passed. One of Sandra’s jobs was to add race to employee data cards. Sandra noted that she never experienced discrimination at Bell. She was certain that she was not hired due to affirmative action, and that all employees were treated equally at Bell.

Race and gendered experiences in the Bell System are varied and acknowledged differently by Latina women. While Gloria and Maria had initially acknowledged racism at Bell, they could not specifically identify how, so quickly changed to a colorblind narrative. Of all the interviewees, Monica directly identified that race and gender had dictated the organization of her workplace and access to more skilled jobs at Bell.

**Telecommunications’ Intimacy**

**The Welfare State vs. the Merit System**

The neoliberal contradictions of freedom from government control and American self-determinism are key themes in these histories. Throughout the interview sessions, tension was expressed between the benefits of the pre-neoliberal welfare state, such as labor unions, and the
‘merit system,’ which neglects structural discriminations and promises success through individual hard work. Most of the interview collaborators agreed that the field of telecommunications would not have hired them without affirmative action and the Civil Rights Movements; but they were often torn between the need for workers’ rights and self-determination via the merit system. Monica knew that she was hired as an immediate consequence of affirmative action:

Well when I was in high school at the time, the affirmative action movement was going. And this man, out of nowhere, I just remember what he looked like, tall thin man came up to [redacted] and I, my sister and I, and our first job was working at the high school, and immediately after that, he said to me that there was a job opening at the phone company. And man we jumped on it. It so happened that I took two more of my Latino friends, but they didn’t get the job, and the way I see it is they met their quota with [redacted] and I. Because I could definitely tell that they were looking for minorities to work there. Because everyone there was white and they had to fill that gap, because you could totally see it (2013, p. 19).

The opinion of Latina information workers on affirmative action in telecommunications directly contradicts the neoliberal ideology that individual hard work and freedom of corporate enterprise will translate into success. However this is the site of tension that conflicts the interview subjects most frequently, rationalized via individual hard work. The interviewees often asserted that the individual is responsible for their own success despite the globalized economic conditions that drive working conditions.
Unions were discussed to different degrees, both positively and negatively. Gloria spoke about her own union as a necessary element for her own rights, but aggravated neoliberal framework of ‘hard work’ at all costs:

You know I work on a computer, and I really like my job now, it makes you think. You have so many different job functions. The way I see my job now is, you have to make yourself...what’s the word, almost needed. The more you learn you’re a valued employee. I work with a union, we’re a union. And, there’s good and bad in that. The good part is that if you’re up for a contract, you want to make sure it’s fair. I think the bad place in a union is that there are employees who really take for granted their job, they don’t work, you know they go to work and they’re not working (2013, p. 13).

Gloria realized that she must make herself indispensable to be recognized as employable at Verizon working in customer service, but also questions the union’s protection for employees. But Maria was concerned that incoming telecommunication information workers were more vulnerable and further deskilled with the loss of unions. As companies were broken up or merged, telecommunications offices increased work hours, stress levels, and reduced benefits. Maria named the shift in corporate culture, identity, and relocation as factors decreasing the quality of her work:

I think every time they changed our name, we were PacBell and then Singular, now we’re AT&T, every time we changed, we got all new procedures. What do you call that, when everything is different, the way you handle everything...using temps, it’s more non-union...they think it’s cost effective but actually, we’re going a little bit backwards, they see it working over there, it’s more productive and less money …
Latina information workers are embedded in an impossible paradox of inclusion, recognition, and rugged individualism. These workers recognize their unions (for those who have them) and affirmative action as necessary mediators into private domains, however they also consciously engage the corporate paradigm of hard work. The contradicting accounts between the welfare state and the merit system point to both an erosion of and adherence to the overarching utopic promises of neoliberalism and the ‘information age.’ Information technologies further deploy neoliberal standards through surveillance and control.

**The Soft Underbelly of Telecommunications**

A noticeable aspect as to how participants spoke about working with information technologies was the affect that engaged their work. Recognizing feelings as a mode of agency, these women expressed their work as deeply intertwined with their personal lives.

Many of the women described a fulfillment with certain types of work and skills, such as Sandra’s experience at Personal Records and Transportation, relating this as well to the community built into these spaces:

> Personal records, and the last one in transportation. It was the job, I guess we were more busy, the timing went so fast and the environment. I really liked it, I liked the job. The whole group we were like a family in both places (2014, p. 3).

Maria also attributed positive affect to her job, despite the physical toll:

> Being physical, I’m glad that I have to climb ladders and walking around. I’m glad I don’t have a desk job. It’s a wear on my body, I’ve had several injuries, I just got to be careful and take care of them. I don’t regret anything, or being in this same department for so long, 3 miles from home. I don’t mind working; I’ve always had a nice office (2014, p. 6).
Affect, expressions of joy, anger, displeasure and pleasure, reveal a window into Latina information workers’ relationship to telecommunications. Their work with information technologies and lifelong experience of shifting capitalism in the private sector is not contained to office spaces, but is messy and intertwined into their domestic lives. For as much as these women analyzed their work in telecommunications as intentionally deskill, outsourced, and shifting labor in a way that does not benefit the information worker, they retained artifacts from their employers. Ann Cvetkovich rethinks the distinction between the public and private spheres, “But as the private life of public culture, the home becomes the soft underbelly of capitalism, a place where the current state of things is experienced through a complex range of feelings” (2012, p. 156). For Latina information workers, these feelings were not only expressed in our interviews, but also in their personal collections.

Gloria gathered a number of mementos from GTE. Although Gloria’s work transitioned to a number of different titles, such as Atlantic Bell and Verizon, Gloria expressed the most sentimental attachment to GTE, a company she saw as paralleling her own life story. Gloria’s retention of such mementos is also interesting when considering that the days of awards and employment appreciation were discussed with nostalgia, no longer offered at Bell and Verizon. Monica retained her coffee mug from Pacific Bell and various pins that represented older logos of the Bell system (not pictured). These artifacts denoted another time in telecommunications, when the information worker was part of the ‘family’ that many of these women had lamented was long gone. If the home is the soft underbelly of capitalism, the retention of these mementos is a physical manifestation of nostalgia for information work long lost to neoliberal impacts on telecommunications.
Conclusions

Latina information workers are engaging in intricate and monotonous technological skills in a constantly changing environment. They identified pleasure in skilled work and chose complex tasks for more enjoyable jobs. However the trajectory of technological displacement leads Latina information workers into further mundane, automated and digitized skills, causing
them to feel like a ‘number,’ and less of an individual with skills (Green, 2001). While working with information technologies in telecommunications can be pleasurable, the state of controlled surveillance with information technologies creates a rupture with the overarching state of digital capitalism. The promise of freedom and individualism through information technologies for consumers is only accomplished through the confinement of information workers. If information workers are ‘made’ through recognition, Latina telecommunication workers are unraveled through information technologies’ control and surveillance.

As the last two chapters have demonstrated, the histories of Latinas in telecommunications are complex. At times treated as outsiders and denied opportunities for promotion and leadership, Latinas were included on the peripheries of the Bell System. However their relationship to their work, technologies, and telecommunications is nuanced and not solely based on ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ perspectives. The last chapter provides the analysis, implications, and conclusions of this data.
Chapter 7: Discussion

This study was conducted to answer the specific research questions:

1. What is the history of Latinas in the field of telecommunications?
2. How have Latinas navigated information technologies in telecommunications, with regards to power and agency?

The purpose of this study was to not only document a Latina history in the Bell System, but to also understand the particular power structures that Latinas engage with in their everyday lives as information workers. Particularly, my goal was to advance an intersectional analysis of telecommunications and information technologies. My project explored these histories through a mixed method approach of archives and ethnography. These histories of Latinas in telecommunications enhance our understanding of Latina/os in information technology related fields and the importance of telecommunications’ history in general.

My analysis investigated how the history of Latinas in telecommunications is nuanced in how the Bell System discriminated against Latinas, while also experiencing complex degrees of both dissonance and dedication to their workplace. The data was gathered from the MALDEF and CRLA archives from Stanford University as well as from Latinas who worked in the Bell System after the 1973 consent decree. From the archives I collected hundreds of documents related to the Bell System consent decree case files. From the interviews I collected multiple interviews with four Latinas, as well as images from their personal collections of telecommunications artifacts.

I discuss implications of this work for establishing a history of Latinas with information technologies. I present future directions for this work, emphasizing the significance of integrating a critical Latina Technology Studies into relevant fields such as information science,
communications, Latina/o Studies, and Gender and Women’s Studies, as an avenue that exposes new insights of the histories of telecommunications and information technologies.

**Towards a Latina Technology Studies**

In this project, I have advocated for a synthesis of Latina/o Studies, Gender and Women’s Studies, telecommunications’ history, and critical social constructions of technology, acknowledging the multi-faceted experiences and issues that arise when exploring the history of Latinas in the Bell System. This research builds on work such as that of Chela Sandoval, which acknowledges that Latinas are already applying critical technological analysis to their everyday lives and work. What arises from this investigation is a Latina Technology Studies, one that considers Latina histories and testimonies when researching systems of communications, the social constructions of technology, and Latinas as agents of change in information systems. Latina Technology Studies create new pathways and insights into established fields of thought, merging various disciplines to contribute to the destabilization of technological determinism.

The interview participants disclosed that they already engaged a critical analysis of technologies and the larger socio-economic structures. According to the interview discussions, a Latina Technology Studies would engage with Latinas who work at every level of IT, Telecommunications, and STEM. The themes that emerged from the narratives of Latinas in STEM: The biographies of friction around telecommunications; Latinas engage in a wide array of skills on information technologies from the mundane to the complex; a critical analysis of how race and gender is inscribed in technological spaces; and the use of affect in describing how information technologies become integrated into personal and intimate lives. Latina narratives of information work engage in disrupting technological determinism through critical analysis of the applications and engagements of technologies.
Though many of the women I interviewed spoke Spanish in their personal lives, they did not speak Spanish for work. Future research would benefit from speaking to Latinas who worked as Spanish-speaking telephone operators after the historic affirmative action cases of the 1960s-1970s, as well as those who engage Spanish more broadly as a part of their work with information technologies. Although more Latinas are entering into their field, interviewees expressed concern that the recent generation of Latina information workers have no unions, less benefits, and are treated as more dispensable. Because the women interviewed began their work in the early 1970s and 1980s, they are either approaching retirement or currently retired with sufficient packages to ensure their well-being after their careers have ended. More research is needed on the younger generation identified by these women.

Each woman articulated her experiences as negative when skills were mundane and monotonous work, and positive when challenged and engaging in complex tasks. These sets of skills were clearly identified as made more readily available earlier on in their careers, when they had more options to move into various roles in their respective companies. They identified access to developing their skills in multiple areas of their fields as beneficial, superseded by the rapid change in information technologies and frequent shifting of larger corporate mergers and breakups. This analysis, though not directly named, is in direct relationship to the shifting economies and globalized labor and manufacturing practices of the neoliberal period. The interview participants identified a lack of community, poor management practices, and unhealthy work environment as a direct result of these changes.

Latinas in IT, telecommunications, and STEM fields use affect as a mode of agency in describing their work. Affect, as well as Affect Theory, must be engaged as a point where technological skills and embodied experience meet. Cvetkovich (2012) identifies the affective
turn as one that depathologizes ‘negative feelings’ such as shame, failure, melancholy, and depression and identifies these feelings as entwined with positive feelings such as hope and happiness. Validating the feelings expressed in these technological spaces engages the critical analysis of technologies. All of the women that I interviewed had saved old telephones, operator headsets, company books, and other technologies from their workplace as artifacts of memory and affect. Allowing technological artifacts into their personal domestic spaces indicated the pride they took in their labor, integrating the personal and political (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 177).

All of the women interviewed noted that the supervisors were mostly white, while lower level employees were more diverse. Monica attributed intense discriminations in her workplace as due to her difference. This may be due to two reasons; Monica had begun working in telecommunications earlier than the other women interviewed. She clearly identified affirmative action and the Civil Rights Movement as playing a part in her integration into these workspaces, and found herself as one of the only Latinas as a telephone operator in the early 1970s. Intense instances of marginalization seemed to cause some Latinas to more openly recognize their experiences of discrimination, though not without some self-blaming. By the mid-1970s, due to affirmative action movement by the EEOC, many sectors of manufacturing and customer service had integrated more diverse employees into telecommunications. The interviewees described these diverse spaces as making the work more enjoyable overall. They often engaged the idea of ‘The Family,’ an early motto of the Bell System, as a time before neoliberal restructuring when these sectors provided better quality of life. Interpersonal tensions arose with the deskilling of labor and the decentralization of workspaces.

For Latina information workers in telecommunications, neoliberal subject formations meet and diverge in contradictory spaces. Latina information workers’ narratives challenge the
story of telecommunications by expressing a relationship of ‘friction’ to their work. Latina
information workers were hired into a limited sector within telecommunications through
affirmative action, finding themselves in these “sticky engagements” (Tsing, 2005, p. 6) that
keep global power in motion. Within Latina information workers’ oral histories are paradoxes
that work with and against the neoliberal formulations of capitalism, meritocracy, and
 technological determinism.

Intensified models of global capitalism and information technology surveillance have
disrupted Latina information workers’ sense of belonging in telecommunications. The decades of
experience of Latina information workers in telecommunications unveil two conclusions: (1)
Contemporary forms of neoliberalism erode its own sense of belonging to corporate spaces, and
(2) that telecommunications in the U.S. might be taking on new formulations of hyper-control
with fewer benefits of inclusion and recognition (Amar, 2013). This work suggests that new
configurations of capitalism are motivated by old techniques of technological displacement.
Latina information workers’ accounts of telecommunications, information technologies, and the
larger state of capitalism are crucial in identifying points of rupture in the political economy.
These interviews point to an opening in the breakdown of the belief in capitalism and the need
for new labor organizing in information technology sectors that speak to the vulnerabilities
identified by Latina information workers.

The terms of telecommunications are not passively accepted among Latina information
workers; they are a dialog between the employed subject and the larger implemented structures
of labor, production, and technological skills. Sites of friction are rationalizations and resistances
where Latina information workers negotiate the rapid change in telecommunications. Latina
information workers’ technological engagements might best be concluded by revisiting a
comment that Gloria made to me when I asked her about the constant flux in the telecommunications sector and technology,

I always…umm, the way I saw my life and where I worked is like we grew up together. You know…umm…General Telephone was probably one of the worst phone companies, it was general telephone and Pacific Bell, it was only those two, and people had to have you. So the quality…you know what I mean if people have to have you don’t raise the bar. But as things started changing in telecommunication, and General Telephone realizing ok we’re going to change to GTE. Customer Service goes up, everything goes up, you have to change; you have to get better if you want to survive.

The frictions in these interviews reveal one of the most important elements of Latina information worker experience: these intimate engagements are identified as the place in which Latinas challenge the larger ‘story’ of telecommunications and technological determinism; they are the place in which the ideology around contemporary capitalism rebuilds itself and fails. This research empirically contributes to historical analysis of Latina labor in telecommunications, but further research on Latina work with information technologies will expand theories of subject formation and resistance in telecommunications, STEM, and IT fields.

**Conclusion**

This study seeks to contribute to an ongoing history of Latinas in information technology related fields, specifically Latina histories in telecommunications. Although Latinas were relegated to lower level information labor, such as telephone operators and data entry, they still engage complex analysis of telecommunications, information technologies, and the larger political economy that impacts their everyday labor. The study confirmed that oral history and archival resources are useful tools in extrapolating a labor history yet to be explored. By
integrating different disciplines of communications, SCOT, Latina/o Studies, and Gender and Women’s Studies, this study demonstrated that histories of Latinas and information technologies could be relevant to multiple fields of thought.

**Implications**

This research reveals how Latina information workers have been engaged in telecommunications from the beginning of the AT&T v. EEOC consent decree from within the Bell System, and the critical reflections on information technology work from Latinas at Bell. Using the interviews as a platform for developing a critical Latina Technology Studies reveals new insights into the embodied experience of telecommunications and information technologies. Latina narratives from below, in information work limited to blue and lower-white collar positions, can offer perspectives into the inner functioning of telecommunications and the circulation of technologies that may not be available in preexisting canons. This study expands the history of the Bell System by focusing on Latinas on the West Coast, and contributes to the literature that explores how subjects are ‘made’ a part of contemporary digital capitalism. Latina information workers in telecommunications are not strictly dedicated to telecommunications, but have a personalized and sometimes-contradictory relationship to their work, that spills over into their private lives.

The archives indicate that Latinas were discriminated against through a number of avenues. By the 1973 consent decree, Latinas were generally underrepresented in telecommunications specifically because of nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and language. During the EEOC vs. AT&T proceedings, the intersectional needs of women of color were particularly overlooked in favor of solely focusing on gender. MALDEF and CRLA documented a number of discriminations experienced by Latina employees and customers. Latina customers
often had to wait long periods of time or did not receive bilingual telephone operator services, finding themselves in emergency situations without the resources to call for help. Latinas in the Bell system were met with a number of discriminations during their employment. Most prominent among the MALDEF and CRLA reports was a discrimination against Latinas’ promotion within AT&T based on their personalities and not their skillset. During their employment by the phone company, Latinas interviewed for this thesis applied a critical interpretation of both their technological experiences and the larger political economy that framed their work in telecommunications.

One goal of this study was to understand how Latina subjects are ‘made’ and engaged in telecommunications and information technologies. The women I interviewed had a deeper commitment to their work when they were using a higher level of skills and given more responsibilities. However their commitment to AT&T and telecommunications wavered based on the instability of the political economy, the use of outsourcing, deskilling of information labor, and the rapid flux in technology. Such results could contribute to a shift in labor organizing that is relevant to the globalized world. Focusing on the areas in which Latinas challenge the organization of telecommunications and the systems of information labor could strengthen contemporary labor rights movements. Acknowledging that Latina information workers are neither fully dedicated to nor avidly averse to their workplace gives Latinas in telecommunications a nuanced agency that recognizes their complex relations in information technology fields, and capitalism more broadly.

This dissertation demonstrates that Latinas were ‘included’ into AT&T as blue collar information workers during the 1970s, however denied opportunities of promotion, often based on such reasons as ‘personality,’ despite their skill level. But Latina information workers who
performed in their profession applied a critical perspective to their work, and the political economy that organizes, and is organized, by telecommunications. Thus, the fields of communications, gender and women’s studies, and Latina/o Studies can benefit from this work by acknowledging how Latinas are included in telecommunications and have impacted the field. The implications for such work are clear: intersectional experiences in telecommunications from Latinas offer critical insight into the histories of information technologies that we might not have otherwise. Prioritizing such methods as oral histories and ethnographic research into Latinas’ everyday engagements with information technologies discloses the quotidian functioning of how power is organized in digital capitalism.

Limitations

This study was limited in its access to archival materials, research collaborators, and time restrictions. Further interviews with Latinas during the AT&T v. EEOC proceedings may be available in the National Archives of College Park, Maryland, as well as Bell archives. However due to a limited budget and time, these archives were not further investigated, despite my inquiries into the archives and attempts to apply for funding. Instead, the data and analysis draws on materials and interviews within California, focusing on regional data relevant to my investigation. Though it would be more complete to have access to the Bell System archives and National Archives, this data set reflects a small piece of the larger story of Latinas in the Bell System. All of my interviews and archival documents enabled me to tell this particular part of the story.

Future Directions

I plan to expand this project by investigating more thoroughly archives and interviews that could not fit into the scope of this research. Future research could extend a similar study to
various geographic locations around the United States, and even a comparative model with Latina information workers in Mexico, to determine how Latina experiences might be different and similar according to their geopolitical context. A more thorough analysis of the AT&T archives, national archives, and further oral history testimonies could give a broader perspective of Latinas in the Bell System. On the East Coast, Puerto Ricans were more likely to be discriminated against as ‘foreigners’ among Jews, Irish, Italian, and anyone who did not speak English as their first language. Though some resources have suggested that Latinas/os on the East Coast (Brooks, 1976) were particularly targeted through harassing phone calls and discrimination, this thesis has been limited to focusing on Latinas on the West Coast. Comparing the histories of Latinas with a focus on their difference will strengthen the overall history of telecommunications, and assist in understanding overarching themes nationally and internationally. Therefore, I plan to further investigate such leads to build a broader history of Latinas in the Bell System.

This study focused on Latinas who entered the Bell System during the critical moment of the consent decree, and emphasizes their reflections on their careers since their start date. However future research should expand focus to contemporary Latina/o information workers entering into telecommunications. These workers, as identified by my research collaborators, enter into telecommunications with no union protection and little job security. Their position as information laborers is even more unsteady than their predecessors, yet they too experience the rapid change in technology and the impacts of the political economy on telecommunications. Such a study would lead to new and different insights of current functions and circulations of information technologies.
Research on race, gender, and sexuality in the Bell System history will also contribute to a discussion around the intersectional influences of power on the development of information technologies and the formation of telecommunications today. One example of such an account is the history of telephone harassment in the Bell System, particularly in the 1960s when obscene phone calls reached an all-time high and influenced lawmakers to change the Communications Act (Green, 2001; Brooks, 1976). The national dialogue around the race, gender, and sexuality of the victims and the callers is one that might expose such intersectional factors in the change in communications policy and technologies. There is a great need for more research on intersectional impacts on telecommunications and the shift in technologies. I am particularly interested in the ways that gender and race is normalized by technologies. As telecommunications continues to grow, and information technologies shift the political economy, it is imperative to destabilize the history of telecommunications through such approaches. I intend to produce a monograph of this research that explores in depth the history of Latinas in telecommunications with a focus on race, gender, and sexuality, using this project as a starting point.

The histories of Latinas in telecommunications are stories of resilience in a field where Latinas are highly underrepresented. Latinas are dedicated to applying complex technological skills to their work in spite of race and gender discrimination in the workplace. Latinas identify that the nature of telecommunications is one of change, and that their ‘belonging’ to these fields are based not only on skill but also affect. These histories should inform telecommunications, technological design and practices, and relevant theories. Latinas in information technology fields will continue to grow and impact technological design and culture. Their stories must be included in the canon and recognized as an important part of the development of new medias.
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California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) Records. Box 1251, Folder 5. Stanford University Libraries. Department of Special Collections and University Archives.


Papers of Marjorie Stockford. Consent decree. The Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse, EE-


Appendix A

From: Ken House [ken.house@nara.gov]
Sent: Friday, October 24, 2014 2:48 PM
To: Nicholas, Melissa J
Subject: Re: Concerning Record Group 403

Melissa,

Thanks for the additional information. I forgot to mention that the contact e-mail for sound recordings is: mopix@nara.gov and there is additional information here: http://www.archives.gov/research/order/sound-recordings.html#approv

I regret that Venus Green did not provide a more complete citation. Typically if the records were at a NARA field facility, that would be mentioned in the citation. For example, "National Archives, Seattle." The Volume part of the citation puzzles me. It would be more common to be referred to a series title and box numbers. I think she left out some critical data.

The majority of the RG 403 records are also at College Park. You could send an inquiry to archives2reference@nara.gov, the College Park textual research office and ask. Records come to our office, and other field locations, typically out of the local offices of federal agencies. We receive records from local National Forest offices, for example, in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska. If the case was heard in California, I might also check the National Archives at San Bruno and at Riverside. Headquarters level records typically go to Washington DC or College Park.

I hope you locate the records you need!

Ken House
Archivist
National Archives at Seattle
6125 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, Washington 98115
206-336-5119

On Fri, Oct 24, 2014 at 10:57 AM, Nicholas, Melissa J <mjnicho2@illinois.edu> wrote:

Dear Ken,

Thank you for your response. As I understand the history of it, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) took testimonies of Spanish speaking customers and employees of AT&T sometime between 1970-1974, the case was called AT&T v. EEOC. I've been to the MALDEF archives at Stanford but could not find these transcripts. Venus Green, a historian who spent a lot of time with these records as well, had a note in one of her articles that these testimonies were in RG 403, Volumes 32-42 in the National Archives, but I haven't been able to find anything further on this. I've attached Green's article, it is highlighted under footnote 37.
Thank you for your time. I will contact the National Archives at College Park, Maryland as well.

Best,
Mel

Melissa Villa-Nicholas
PhD Candidate
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
Website Manager at Gender and Women's Studies
http://melissavillanicholas.wordpress.com/

From: Ken House [ken.house@nara.gov]
Sent: Friday, October 24, 2014 12:33 PM
To: Nicholas, Melissa J

Subject: Re: Concerning Record Group 403

Melissa,

My name is Ken House and I am an archivist at the National Archives in Seattle. In Seattle we only have one case from RG 403 that has been transferred to the Archives section from the EEOC. The EEOC has sent other significant cases to the Federal Records Center located in the same building for off-site storage, but they have not been sent to the Archives yet. I attaching our Archives section finding aid or inventory for RG 403 for Seattle.

Can you tell me more about the case - where it was heard for example? and about the citation to Volume 32 - 42? I suspect it is not stored here, but need additional information to be certain. I checked the National Archives catalog and it appears that there is a related sound recording at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland. The College Park facility holds photo, sound, video and other non-paper formats within the National Archives system. Here is a link to the catalog entry I saw: http://research.archives.gov/description/111475 I hope this is the information you are seeking.

Please contact me with any questions and any additional information you have.

Thanks,

Ken House
Archivist
National Archives at Seattle
6125 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, Washington 98115
206-336-5119
Ms Villa-Nicholas: I will need a critical bit of information before we can fully assist you. Do you know when this record was retired? Is it recent or quite old? I ask these questions because I will need to determine if the records are held on the Federal Records Center side or if they have been accessioned into the holdings of the National Archives. If they are held in the FRC, then the records still belong to the EEOC and you will have to coordinate with the office that retired the records to get access to them. If the records have been accessioned into the Archives here in Seattle, then the ownership has changed and you will need to coordinate with one of the Archivists here to get access. I will cc the Archivist staff so that they are aware of your request.

regards

Roy Lower
Deputy Director
FRC Seattle
Appendix B

June 1, 2013

Linda Smith
Library & Information Science 112E LIS Bldg
501 E. Daniel St.
M/C 493


EXPIRATION DATE: May 31, 2016

Dear Dr. Smith:

Thank you for submitting the completed IRB application form for your project entitled The History of Latinas and Latinos in Telecommunications 1970-1990. Your project was assigned Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol Number 13827 and reviewed. It has been determined that the research activities described in this application meet the criteria for exemption at 45CFR46.101(b)(2).

This determination of exemption only applies to the research study as submitted. Please note that additional modifications to your project need to be submitted to the IRB for review and exemption determination or approval before the modifications are initiated.

We appreciate your conscientious adherence to the requirements of human subjects research. If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me or the IRB Office, or visit our website at http://www.irb.illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

Dustin L. Yocum, Human Subjects Research Exempt Specialist, Institutional Review Board c: Melissa Nicholas