

The Southwest Borderlands as the Silenced Center and the Voices of Single-mothers

by

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Abstract

Colonia's are defined as “unincorporated population settlements on the U.S.-Mexico border” (Núñez-Mchiri, 2009, p. 68). Literature published surrounding the *Colonia* phenomena; lack the voice of the families that make up those communities. Critical issues surrounding border communities focus on human impact and quality of life (Anderson, 2010), identity and sexual orientation (Baumle, 2010), ease of accessing illegal drugs amongst high school students (B. Brown & Benedict, 2007b), alcohol and drug abuse (Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, Wallisch, McGrath, & Spence, 2008), and health disparities (Anders et al., 2008; Leach, 2010; Mier et al., 2008). While significant and noteworthy, these topics are covered using quantitative measures and such quantification reduces these marginalized populations to sheer numbers associated with sadness and despair, thus perpetuating their silence. To address the lived experiences of *Colonia* residents, I have sought to capture the experiences of single-mothers living in a *Colonia* along the U.S. borderlands. The guiding research question was: what does it mean to be a single-mother living in a *Colonia*? Five women participated in this research effort. They were recruited via in-field recruiting efforts through a snowball sample. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in a three-part series using the Seidman (2006) method featured in *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*; covering the women’s life histories, their present lived experiences, and the meaning and re-presentations of who they are as individuals. Analysis of the research participants/collaborators’ narratives took place via an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach as a strategy to extract themes through an idiographic process (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As a result, three super

ordinate themes emerged (a) dynamic lived experiences that shaped their identities (b) affect provoked through the participant's experiences (c) fulfillment as a consequence of impactful lived experiences. The presentation of findings is showcased through the use of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The findings highlight the complexities, disguised as nuances, and collectively answer the research question. They also augment the deficit of women's stories in research on *Colonias*, studies of single-mothers, and other representations of everyday life on the U.S.-Mexico border that some Chicana scholars write about (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2009; Castañeda, 1992; González, 2004).


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This dissertation was submitted by Diana Riviera under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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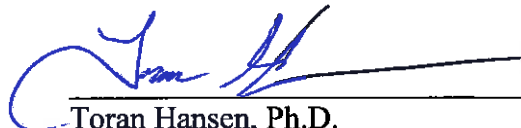
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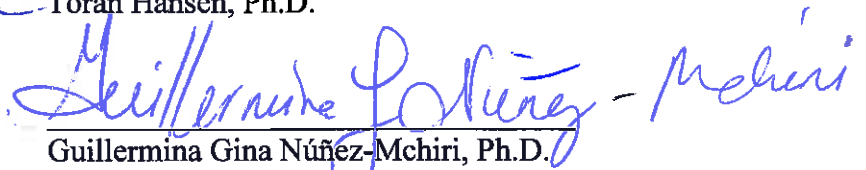
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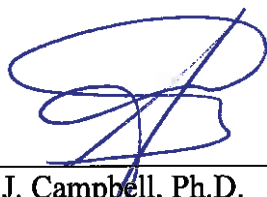


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Dedication

A todas las madres solteras

To all single-mothers

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Preface

My earliest memories of growing up in a single-parent household began while living along the Arizona borderlands, approximately 130 miles north of the U.S./Mexico border. I attended Elementary School there; back then, kindergarten was divided into morning and afternoon sessions; I was enrolled in the afternoon session. I found it strange that my sister and all her friends were going to school in the morning and coming home in the afternoon, yet here I was arriving at school mid-day. In some way, I felt guilty because I slept in and took my time to prepare for my school day and because I spent many mornings playing with my sister's Barbie dolls after being specifically instructed not to do so by her.

I had other uncertainties about the afternoon session; I was always curious if I was getting the same quality of instruction as the morning students. This was not because of something that I experienced nor did I have any real reason for my suspicion, my mind would sometimes wonder and I would think about the teacher's stamina. I would tell myself, "They aren't as fresh in the afternoon as they are in the morning" and "Are we getting the same quality of instruction as those morning kids?" I never answered that, but I knew that I was learning. I was quickly learning some of life's lessons.

During first grade, I was in a classroom with some of my peers from kindergarten and I was there long enough to feel comfortable that it was my class. The first day of school jitters were long gone. Unfortunately, I became uneasy about another matter and it was there where I experienced my first encounter with, what I would consider today to be discrimination. An administrator walked into the class said a few words to my teacher then asked me what my last name was, when I replied she said, "come with me". I was

placed in another classroom without explanation. I later found out that I was in an ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom and that this decision stemmed from an assumption based on my ethnic surname.

I went home and told my mom what took place that day and the next day my mom was at the school having a talk with the principal. I remember the tone of that talk. I recall my mom asking the principal why they suddenly felt the need to remove me from my class and place me in another class. My mom had heard my version and she wanted to hear what the principal had to say, but she could hardly contain herself and this moment started to seem more like an inquisition than a dialogue. This was a one-way conversation. Her questions were rhetorical almost as if to let her know that she knew for a fact that I was moved based on discriminatory motives. She shifted from questions to statements, “if you think that you have the right to move my daughter because of her last name, you shouldn’t be here. What kind of education teaches you that this is okay, awards you a degree to work at a place and do this to children?” The principal sat in a stoic pose the entire time. There was a note of amazement in her posture and expression; I was not sure if she was caught off guard possibly because, according to her, the decision to move me was not discriminatory or racially charged or if she was stupefied that this particular mother was able to forcefully communicate her distaste and desires, to her. It was at this moment when I turned around in my chair, I didn’t want to see or listen anymore. After my mother’s passionate act of assertion, she asked the principal when I would be moved back. I never heard an apology from the principal or an attempt to take a constructive opportunity to communicate to my mother the reason why I was moved. Needless to say, I was back in my class and enjoyed the next couple of years.

It was now the late eighties, I was eight years old and in the third grade. I was a child by definition, but I always felt much more mature than my age. I learned responsibilities very young and learned to adapt to whatever the circumstances dictated. I embraced humor as a means of creating balance within an ever-changing lifestyle.

As a child, I had a favorite outfit that I loved to wear. It was a teal t-shirt and a pair of cotton/linen blend pants, not just any pants though. They were white with large teal polka dots all over. My sister was my biggest and frankly only critic when I wore them; I however, felt great in them. It was as if somehow these pants transcended happiness. Yes, they looked like they belonged to a clown; I was that clown. Not a silly or obnoxious clown, but one that could make others and me laugh with innocent humor.

One school day, during that same year, I wore my favorite outfit. That day ended differently. I was at recess and got called into the principal's office. The principal asked me "did you hear that fire alarm" we lived in a small town so when the fire department's alarm rang the whole town heard it, I replied "yes". I had heard it a little muted because I was having fun outside, besides we were so used to it that it became a common sound. She went on to say that the alarm rang and firefighters were responding to a fire at my residence. I didn't know what to say or how to feel, I don't even remember what happened in those few moments. I walked home in my polka dotted pants with my head hung low and that was the only time when I did not feel happy wearing those pants. I felt as if the pants let me down, how could this happen and why would this happen on a day when I'm wearing my "funny" pants? My thoughts shifted and I thought that I looked pretty ridiculous walking home to no house and now I'm stuck with this outfit because it was the only thing I now had left to wear.

The next couple of days we stayed at a neighbor's house, she happened to be the mother of a boy who was in band with my sister. This was just enough time for my mom to figure out what would be the next step in moving us to a more permanent place to live. We continued to attend school while my mother spent her days whisking off to this place and that place. My mother stored her cash in her mattress so when we lost our home to the fire, essentially her money had vaporized, but being the mother that she was and is, she would not accept that assumption. She had asked the fire chief if she could access the apartment in order to retrieve any items that were still salvageable. I'm not sure how she knew or if she was just taking a chance, but she was allowed to enter and found her stash of cash tucked away under her mattress. She recalls holding the mostly burnt and crumbled roll of her hard earned money. She later learned that she could take her damaged currency, to the bank and have it exchanged; she managed to successfully make that exchange.

Soon thereafter, my mom told us that she had found an apartment. We moved to another small desert town located slightly northwest of our town. The American Red Cross had provided our family with the essentials; we received vouchers for food and clothing and new beds. As a child, I remember that when difficult situations arose they would somehow be resolved and things would fall back into place. I only hoped that as an adult, I could retain this knowledge and resiliency, translating these gifts much like my mother put these into practice when she took over and overcame the life challenges that came our way.

When I became a mother everything changed for me. Describing first-time parenthood seemly translated into a novelty experience rather than an experience that had

a fundamental impact on who I had become. Oftentimes, I heard new parents state that their newly arrived child had “changed their life”. This life-changing phenomenon is shortened with a mere statement that lacks depth and description. At least this is what I was thinking as I was going through my sleep deprived months after the birth of my little miracle, one of the most constant thoughts that I would entertain during those waking moments was, “what does it really mean to be a parent?”

In the early summer of 2009, I gave birth to my daughter, she was perfect. I remember not being able to hear her cry after the doctor delivered her. For one brief second I panicked, and then I realized I was tied down to a table due to delivering via caesarian. My husband quickly reassured me that she was crying; we joked that she was crying because she did not want to make her *début*. That joke got old quick especially since it seemed as if she never stopped crying.

Three days later, my husband and I brought our little girl home and could hardly believe that we were parents. I remember one of us saying, “That’s it, we are on our own” and with that, I promised myself that I would do the best possible to provide our daughter with the best upbringing that I could offer. I committed myself to nursing her as her primary source of nutrition. I am sure that my husband made his own promises.

My husband was on an active tour of duty with the Florida Army National Guard prior to, during my pregnancy, and after. He was able to spend about two weeks at home, but was expected to return to his active duty responsibilities. We knew that this time we had together was going to come and go quickly. As I was trying to adjust to having a newborn, coming to grips with the physical and emotional changes that my body was

going through, and pondering how I would manage when he left, placed me in a state of anxiety.

Soon after we arrived from the hospital my milk started to come in and I was excited, it was the best feeling as a new mother, knowing that I was literally nourishing my child. She was excellent at latching on; the pitfall to nursing for me came when I noticed that my baby was no longer patient. It seemed that I was not producing enough milk to satisfy her and despite my attempts to build up my supply, it was not enough. Admittedly, I felt as if I failed at something, my first attempt of really being a mother was not successful. This was important to me and the fact that I could not make my body give my child what I wanted it to give was a bit devastating.

Weeks passed, my husband left, and the only other change was that I was medically cleared to drive. There had not been a routine or schedule that I could rely on to this point. My daughter was not sleeping; therefore, that meant that I was not sleeping. Being able to drive did not bring me any relief; I wanted to sleep. Besides, I did not have the energy to drive anywhere when I was trying to put a newborn on a schedule mostly by begging her to sleep. In retrospect, I can say that this was my first experience of my daughter expressing her direct rebelliousness against my desires.

This continued for months and I had many emotions running through every part of my body. There were times that I felt as if I were being punished by not being allowed to sleep and other times I felt angry and resentful towards my husband. During those times, I would send him texts about how our baby was crying and how she just would not sleep. Thoughts of unfairness would visit me and I would think about how my husband would be sleeping somewhere. It didn't matter that he was away on military duty or what

the conditions were wherever he was sleeping, he was enjoying the privilege of sleeping and that is all I could think about. I would quickly bring myself back when my mind would occupy those thoughts; I knew that he would much rather be home than in any other place at that moment. I also knew that if he were given the choice, he would choose home. In fact, there were a handful of times when he did have the choice and he would get in his car and drive for hours, through the night, to be home. We would alternate our sleep cycles; I would sleep for a few hours, he would sleep for a few hours then get back on the road. I keep those memories very much alive in my heart; they remind me of how my husband would do anything for our daughter and I....anything.

While making these new memories, memories of my childhood re-entered my life just as I had become a mother and was enduring this life changing experience. It was not so much the sleep deprivation, but the actual meaning of being a mother and parenting. I had a lot of time to reflect in between trying to get my baby to sleep and taking in little moments to close my eyes. I went back to being raised by my single-mother. I often thought of how my mother raised three children on her own.

My mom and dad separated when I was about five years old, they attempted to reconcile their relationship in between the time of their separation and divorce. Unfortunately, it didn't work out, but my younger brother was born out of that attempt. I am the middle child of three. I have a sister who is four years older than I and a brother whom is six years younger than I. We are all close and get along well, as far as siblings go. We have never argued with one another and have never stopped talking to each other. We don't always agree with each other, but we respect that we now have our own separate lives.

When my brother was born, we couldn't wait for him to come home. My sister and I would typically walk home from school together, but those days, when we expected him to be home, we would race home to meet our new little brother. My mother would greet us with news that he was not home due to some complications during his birth, but reassured us that he would be home soon. We raced home every day until that day that he was actually home. He was dressed in a yellow outfit and sleeping peacefully on my mother's bed. During my mother's pregnancy, close friends of hers would ask me if I felt or would feel replaced since I wouldn't be the baby anymore. I didn't even know what that meant; how could anyone ask a child something like that? There were times when I thought that they meant that I was literally going to be replaced. Where was my mom going to send me? Had she done this before? Had she had a dozen kids prior to my sister and I that she 'replaced'? These were questions to scenarios that I would imagine in my own mind, but never took seriously. Meeting my little brother for the first time gave me the answer; I was not being replaced, my mother had added a soul mate to our family.

Now, my mother had three children, my sister ten, I was six, and a newborn. Back then and as I was growing up, I certainly didn't think about my mother as a single-mother, being a phenomenon. I took her status for granted and thus did not recognize it as a phenomenon that warranted exploration. It was when my identity as a mother came to fruition and I struggled to find my comfort zone with motherhood that I reflected on some of the experiences that I remembered of my mother as we were growing up.

My mother was a very strong-willed individual; whenever she set her mind to something, she made it happen for herself and for us. My mother came to the United States from *Chihuahua, Chihuahua*, Mexico as a little girl. She crossed the deadly *Rio*

Grande or *Rio Bravo* as some call it. She had nothing to lose, but her life and as she sees it, she would have lost her life if she had stayed in Mexico. The structural violence of the poverty that she experienced, along with the physical, emotional, and mental abuse was enough to make any child a victim of unimaginable series of events leading to a fatal outcome.

My mother's arrival to the U.S. was bitter sweet, while she was freed from the confines of her restrictive environment; this also meant that she was alone. She started out primarily cleaning houses in El Paso, Texas. Then as a young adult, she moved on to work as a migrant farm worker wherever the harvest was abundant. She traveled from Texas to New Mexico and to Arizona and California. Regardless of where she was, she always reminded herself that this was the only way to pull herself up. She recalls living in an apartment above a store front property in *El Segundo Barrio*, one of the most historical neighborhoods in El Paso, Texas. She would wake up at midnight to make her way to a location where other workers would meet and wait to be transported to the place of employment.

During my recent trip to El Paso, Texas, I visited Bowie Bakery, the original bakery on Park Street in *El Segundo Barrio*. My daughter, my niece, and I indulged in some of the best Mexican pastries. This was quite a nostalgic moment for me. When I shared this experience with my mom, it reminded her of her experiences at that very same bakery. Many times she would collect what she could for food or save up to buy just the essentials. Back then, twenty-five cents would get her a few pieces of the day old bread and sometimes, depending on who was working, she would get a few of the freshly baked pieces of bread for the same price or at no cost.

While with my father, my mother took on the role of a housewife, but after their divorce, my mother returned to work in agriculture. My sister was a little older and could get herself dressed for school. She would stay with a neighbor, early in the morning, and leave for school when it came time. My mom would drop me off at a friend's house and tell me "*quédate aquí, okay? Yo regreso en la tarde*" meaning "Stay here, okay? I will return in the afternoon" I would literally stay where she left me, I mean I would get up to eat or use the restroom and at the caretaker's plea, I would try to enjoy playing with something. I would do it only to please her so that she would not worry that I was sad or that she was not doing a good job. I preferred to sit there until my mom came for me. Once she did, I knew that she was safe.

Out of my siblings, I was and am the closest to my mother. I love her very much and I always felt that my mom had a difficult life. I really believed that she deserved to be loved, not by a partner or by her children, although that wouldn't hurt, but loved by someone who truly knew how to love. I thought that I had to do that for my mother and loving her meant taking away some of the stress that she was going through. I knew that she did not wish to work fourteen hour days just to bring home a menial salary, but this is what she had to do. So my way of loving her was to be patient at the sitter's house and to be right there when she came back so that she knew that I was okay. She tells me to this day that I was such a patient child and I like to think that is my best quality. It is my solace, my peace, and truly the only thing that can make me upset is when someone tries to negate me of it.

Living in small rural communities such as the ones I lived in along the Arizonan border, as a child, reminded me as an adult that there is something about living on the

margins that cultivated my mother's strength. It provided her the courage to move beyond the small town and onto greener pastures so that we, her children, could be afforded with opportunities that she knew she could not provide us directly. Opportunities such as an education with the resources to acquire life-long knowledge and the possibilities of gaining skills that would provide us options in the workforce rather than be limited and repeat my mother's experiences in unforgiving labor.

When my sister was a teenager she acquired a desire to work, as my mom had in farm labor. After a longtime of begging and pleading, my mother gave in and allowed my sister to go and absorb this experience. At the end of the day, my sister came home and confessed about how difficult it was to keep up. She expressed that her difficulty was physical and emotional. That day the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement conducted a raid, many undocumented workers fled as officers conducted their sweep. My mom reminded her that she had the privilege of getting an education and as a young teenager; there wasn't a real need for her to work. She never went back.

These were memories that I recalled as I began to prepare for the field research of this study. I thought about how important it is to reflect where my life began and how no matter what happened in my life, I came around full circle. I thought many times that this project was not what I should be committing myself to. I faced many challenges from the onset of this study and it was enough to make me want to change topics altogether, but there was something that kept catapulting me back to my memories, to my mother's lived experiences, and to my unforgettable moments as a first-time mother. They deserved to be explored as a small tribute to my mother, but mostly as acknowledgment and respect for those women who continue to live and raise their families on the margins.

So with my memories, my quasi single-mother experience, my niece and daughter, and my research plan in tow, I set out to meet Mexican single-mothers who currently live in the *Colonia* of *El Portaje*. I consider this an important population to study and work with because I consider my mother important. Not only because she is my mother, but because she worked tirelessly to knead in the significance of education while raising her three children. She made certain that we grew into the best reflection of her definition of the American Dream with the access to the possibilities that originally brought her here, and more. My personal experiences as my mother's child have been brought forward as my education has blossomed. I have consistently been frequented by thoughts related to the meanings of my and my mother's experiences. Other narratives representing similar life histories have ignited my search for the meaning of the lived experiences of other Mexican single-mothers. Through a phenomenological approach, the stories of these particular Mexican single-mother's, are captured and presented as portraits, within their specific *Colonia* context. They reveal intimate encounters of migrating to the United States, dealing with domestic violence, personal emotional struggles, and the creation of the creative mother at the behest of poverty, to name a few.

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**Part I: Studying Mexican Single-Mothers living on the Borderlands: Context,
Theoretical Frameworks and Methodology**

Chapter 1: Introduction

This qualitative research study explores and describes, in detail, how single-mothers, living in the *Colonia* along the U.S. Mexico border, make sense of their lives in this context. As experts of their stories, the focus was on the perceptions of the participants making sense and meaning of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Centered on their lives in their *Colonia*, the participant's stories were captured through a series of three semi-structured interviews covering varying periods of times. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, they are re-presented with pseudonyms. Due to the geographical size of the *Colonia*, where the study took place, that name has also been altered and is referred to as *El Portaje*. *El Portaje* is a *Colonia* located along the southwest region of the U.S./Mexico border.

For the purpose of this study all single-mothers were defined as a woman who has or has had one or more children residing with her; she does not have a husband or significant other cohabitating with her nor contributing to the household expenses and is of Mexican heritage. *Colonias* are defined as “unincorporated population settlements on the U.S.-Mexico border” (Núñez-Mchiri, 2009, p. 68) Typically, *Colonias* are rural areas of land that often lack infrastructure to support an ordinary neighborhood (Ward, 1999). Likewise, the term *Colonia* is well recognized among many, as communities closely associated with poverty (Donelson & Esparza, 2010). On the whole, a *Colonia* is a neighborhood located on the northern side of the U.S.-Mexico border that is populated with families who unequivocally live in severe impoverished conditions and lack basic needs such as proper sewage and water systems.

Background

The United States has an established history of border conflicts. Over three hundred years ago the most notorious case of border conflict belonged to Maryland and Pennsylvania. After a thirty-year protest by Maryland, the conflict was resolved with the Mason-Dixon Line (Stein, 2008). Today, the U.S./Mexico border is central to many conflicts, surrounding immigration, drugs, and death to name a few. The fluidity of the U.S./Mexico border presents a blurred division between the two countries. U.S. *Colonia* landscapes mirror that of those located on the Mexico border. As such, media and scholarly sources, echo the third-world backdrop within *Colonia* communities (Donelson & Esparza, 2010; Hill, 2003; Stutz, 1989; Ybarra, 2010).

To further demonstrate the point, Texas settlements can be traced back to the late 17th century when France and Spain held interests in the area for expansion. About a hundred years later, Spain conquered stake in that territory which stemmed from the U.S. purchase of the Louisiana Territory (Stein, 2008). In the 1950's, conflicts surrounding land began to emerge. Due to the shortage of affordable housing, many poor Texans were settling in one of over two thousand *Colonias*. (Donelson & Esparza, 2010). Greedy, unrestricted land developers took advantage of these circumstances and made attractive offers to those looking for affordable housing. For minimal monthly payments residents paid for a section of land where they could build their home; at the completion of the payment schedule, the land developers would hand over the deed and move on without fulfilling their promises for paved roads and proper water and sewage infrastructures. More astonishing than that, was the fact that one late/missed payment required

relinquishment of the land by the land owners thus reselling the property to other potential buyers (Donelson & Esparza, 2010; Ward, de Souza, & Giusti, 2004).

In short, the border conflicts of the past that resulted in the United States conquering the land now located north of the *Rio Grande*, served to demonstrate the need for affordable housing. Despite the living conditions or the imposed 'Third World condition' labels and the victimization by greedy land developers, families were determined to thrive. Living in conditions without basic needs such as adequate sewage systems and falling below the national poverty level, presents a resounding need for examining this social issue. Correspondingly, imbedded is the social issue of single-mothers living in these conditions working and raising their children.

Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study

Literature published related to the phenomena surrounding *Colonia*'s, lack the voice of the families that make up those communities. Critical issues surrounding border communities focusing on human impact and quality of life (Anderson, 2010), identity and sexual orientation (Baumle, 2010), ease of accessing illegal drugs amongst high school students (B. Brown & Benedict, 2007b), alcohol and drug abuse (Caetano et al., 2008), and health disparities (Anders et al., 2008; Leach, 2010; Mier et al., 2008) are represented in quantitative studies. While significant and noteworthy, such quantification reduces populations to a number, thus perpetuating the silence.

U.S. Census data illustrates the context surrounding households within the *Colonia of El Portaje*. Data retrieved from the 2010 U.S. Census Data, Demographic Profile for *El Portaje*, place the total population just over nine thousand (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2010d). Thirty five percent of that population is foreign born and perhaps from Mexico, since the Mexican population totals ninety two percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c). Various breakouts will assist in contextualizing these data. These breakouts also reveal numerical relationships related to some of the themes found in the review of literature, such as employment, transportation, and poverty status.

Basic demographics provided through the 2010 Census, reveal a young population living in *El Portaje*. Forty percent of the total population is newborn to twenty-four years of age. The female population is slightly higher than the male population, fifty three percent to forty seven percent respectively. Single-mothers are nestled among the total population, at seventeen percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c). The 2007-2011 American Community Survey provides further insight on the employment status of this population. For the six thousand and twenty six individuals who were considered legally employable, fifty one percent were employed. More than half of that group was female and of those, forty three percent were employed (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a).

It is important to move past the statistics and begin to take on the challenge of negotiating and navigating the marginalized terrain that make up *Colonias*. As a result of the gap in the literature, this study had two main goals. The first goal was to gain an insider's perspective of the personal world of single-mothers living in this *Colonia*. And the second goal was to find out how single-mothers perceive their lives in the *Colonia* in which they live. Towards that end, my research question was: What does it mean to be a single-mother living in a *Colonia*?

Theoretical Framework

A subaltern canon was used to “inform the development of the research questions, the methodological [approach], as well as the development of this research study as a whole” (Merrill, 2010, p. 7). The focus in this study is on the participant’s stories, thus allowing their narratives to “shine as the stars of the study” (Ronald J. Chenail, 2011, p. 1715); therefore, theory was not imposed on this study rather consulted once the findings were generated. The use of subaltern theory highlights a significant need for the voice of women in marginalized spaces.

I will briefly introduce subaltern theory here; the discussion section of this dissertation features its application in detail. I aim to address any links to oppression that may be revealed through the data analysis. More specifically, it will focus on the invisible voiceless women of Mexican single-mothers living in their *Colonia*. Furthermore, subaltern theory as Spivak (1988) has introduced it will be explored in an attempt to illustrate the deep oppression placed on women living in their *Colonia* who do not have access to the dominant discourse and face the social and environmental competing forces throughout their daily lives. Spivak (1988) specifically refers to the deeply oppressed woman as the subaltern woman. The woman as the subject is not the subject in the traditional sense who encapsulates a harmonious set of desires and interests. The subject, according to Spivak (1988), is divided and dislocated making a ripe situation for hegemonic powers to control conditions where subaltern populations exist. This lack of command of oneself gets to the very core of the subaltern rhetoric.

According to Spivak (1988), subaltern women cannot speak; they are socially, politically, and geographically separated from hegemonic power. Additionally, they are

stratified in specific ways further removing them from the male dominated discourse (Spivak, 1988). Political leaders have described and labeled *Colonias* as “The Third World within our borders” (Richardson, 1999, p. 43). Geographically, *Colonias* are situated in close proximity to Mexico where much of the rhetoric consists of the dangerous and violent cases related to drug trafficking and immigration.

Subaltern theory is linked to the chosen methodological approach. Voice is a common theme amongst Subalternity, and IPA. The participant’s narratives are critically analyzed for the “objects of concern” as well as “experiential claims” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p. 111). This analysis then leads to possible connections to subaltern theory. Subaltern theory advocates for the voices of marginalized women to be heard (Spivak, 1988), the juxtaposition of this theory and the methodological approach create a strong relationship that makes an influential contribution to this population. It adds the stories of women who have raised children and continue to raise children on the borderlands, to the gap in literature. More importantly, it answers the call made by scholars to include women’s stories that have historically been omitted (González, 2004; Guha & Spivak, 1988; Ling, 2007; Mohanty, 1988).

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Although there are many issues that cause poverty, there are areas that significantly affect single mothers such as: unemployment, the breakdown of families, the number of children a woman has, and caring for an elderly relative. Poverty is a national concern, and its impact is evident in impoverished communities along the U.S./Mexico border. This literature review focused on the causes of poverty and the long term effects on single-mothers living in urban poverty and Mexican single-mothers, living in *Colonias*.

Poverty in the United States

Poverty is a complex issue that affects diverse groups of people equally and differently. Unemployment, the breakdown of families, the number of children that a woman has, and taking care of elderly family members are all causes of poverty; however, the afflictions of poverty run deep. Poverty related conditions are prevalent in areas with high crime rates, having barriers that restrict access to social and community resources, high rates of poor physical and mental health, limited education and employment opportunities, and family conflicts which lead to the deterioration of successful social integration (Mullin & Arce, 2008; Sanders, Lim, & Sohn, 2008).

Nearly 43 million people living in the United States were identified as living below poverty in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). There may be many causes of poverty; however, for women the roots of poverty are linked to domestic violence and sexual abuse; moreover, their plight becomes more challenging as lack of education, affordable housing, and childcare compromise their efforts to gain social stability (T. N. Richards, Garland, Bumphus, & Thompson, 2010). As the poverty rates continue to

grow, the rates of women being affected by poverty will also grow. For over thirty years women have abundantly been victims of poverty thus “feminizing poverty” (Pearce, 1978) as cited in (T. N. Richards et al., 2010, p. 98). According to Richards, et al. (2010), although women have gained significant momentum in areas of equal rights, they continue to be deprived in areas of employment. Due to this deprivation along with family responsibility being dealt to women, the feminization of poverty coined by Diana Pearce, frames poverty as a female issue (Brady & Wallace, 2001; T. N. Richards et al., 2010).

Central to the current economic status is the issue of unemployment. As the unemployment rate increases, affected families and their financial and household compositions are fractured, thus resulting in poverty. During the twenty-nine years spanning 1964-1993, many families living in poverty in Lake County, Indiana was the direct cause of poverty (Brady & Wallace, 2001). As a result of the declining job market, specifically those jobs centered on manufacturing, there was an increase in families receiving government assistance. Furthermore, the downward spiral of deindustrialization deepened the hole to poverty and created the dissolution of African American families in Lake County (Brady & Wallace, 2001). As men left in search of jobs and created a lack of marriageable males, family responsibilities were transferred to women.

The results of Lichter and Crowley’s (2002) study mirrored those of Brady and Wallace (2001) asserting that the breakdown of families is an indirect cause of poverty for many women after the men leave the family unit. Since women are usually the ones left with the responsibility of raising children, gaining employment or searching for more

suitable opportunities may not be a conceivable reality for women left in situations which often results in poverty (T. N. Richards et al., 2010). In turn, women must make household decisions that they never had to make prior to the dissolution of their relationships. Many times those decisions lead them and their children into substandard housing and a lack of other basic needs (Lichter & Crowley, 2002). Women and children exposed to these undesirable conditions experience perpetual weaknesses in their family structures.

Brady (2003) revealed that the number of children a woman has is another cause of poverty or can potentially lead to poverty. Unstable job markets place all Americans in a vulnerable position; however, single-mothers trying to be gainfully employed face considerable consequences. Accordingly, Crowley, Lichter, and Qian (2006) reported that the single-mothers in their study, with three or more children live in significant poverty. Noteworthy, is an interesting finding that suggested marriage reduced poverty amongst the sampled population (Crowley et al., 2006). This is consistent with the study by Brady and Wallace (2001) which stated that broken marriages added to the causes of poverty.

A less obvious cause of poverty is that of care-taking. Women who became care-takers of elderly family members were at high risk of living in poverty (Wakabayashi & Donato, 2006). There are several reasons that can explain this phenomenon. Receiving government assistance, Medicaid, having a low level of education, not married, poor health, and racial/ethnic status are some of the causes that have been outlined. These factors are indicators of poverty related to care-taking of elderly relatives. It is not known

which ethnicities add to the composition of poverty; nevertheless, one may contribute the decision to take care of a family member as a cultural one. For example, Dominguez and Lubitow (2008) comment that Latin American women not only hold on to their ethnic identities, but also consider their familial ties important. Despite living in poverty, the women in their study dedicated their work ethic towards generating enough income to travel back to their country of origin. It was important for them to have their children assimilate to both cultures.

A more poignant and consistent cause of poverty is domestic violence and varying types of assault. Moreover, poverty amongst white non-Hispanic women tends to be an outcome of family conflict (T. N. Richards et al., 2010). Poverty arising from family conflict, in the form of domestic violence, in white (non-Hispanic) households, is the most extreme cause of poverty that women have experienced. Having stated the direct and indirect causes of poverty for single-mothers, the long term effects must be considered.

Impacts of Poverty on Single-mothers

Living in poverty impacts the lives of single-mothers in the following areas: (a) health (b) welfare (c) housing (d) parenting (e) transportation. Within each area, there are complexities that single-mothers face as they negotiate their space in society.

Health. Health and poverty are interconnected and it is only one of the significant effects of poverty. Socioeconomic status within poverty also influences a woman's health condition. Women receiving public assistance tend to report higher levels of illness (Wakabayashi & Donato, 2006). Salient issues that contribute to the barriers of

poverty are the access to healthcare, trust in the healthcare system, and work-family conflict.

According to Lichter and Crowley (2002) unhealthy single-mothers typically tend to have unhealthy children, and the likelihood of their children suffering physical ailments is high thus impacting their children's education. There is a cyclical pattern to mother-child illness. These illnesses are not a few sporadic colds; many single-mothers living in poverty report that they experience persistent illnesses that are often caught by their children (Hildebrandt & Ford, 2009). In addition, environmental and emotional conditions of living in poverty can have weakening effects. For single-mothers, the mental pressure of providing for their children can cause a "depressive symptomology" to emerge (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002, p. 1316). The impact of depression lingers on to influence many other areas of life, and upward mobility becomes incredibly difficult to achieve. For instance, women who are able to obtain employment realize that it is much more difficult to manage responsibilities when presented with the arduous task of addressing and resolving conflicts surrounding family, health, and employment (Ciabattari, 2007). These single-mothers may be the best logistical specialists, as they learn to navigate through society and think under pressure as well as find suitable and safe housing, feed and clothe children, and meet society's demands.

Welfare and Employment. It is becoming more common for children in the United States to be raised by a single mother. The number of households headed by poor single-mothers is surpassing the number of poor families headed by married couples (Lichter & Crowley, 2002). In addition, single-mothers who live in rural poverty areas are, on average, younger than those who live in urban areas, a result possibly related to

the rise of teen pregnancy (J. B. Brown & Lichter, 2004). Young single-mothers with children are more likely to have less experience obtaining and maintaining full-time employment. In fact, employed single-mothers living in poverty tend to work part-time and are typically older (Ciabattari, 2007). For some single-mothers, finding employment is not a problem; it is keeping a job that proves to be challenging. Ciabattari (2007) highlights the challenges of consistent employment for single-mothers as being related to the influence that household dynamics has on employment longevity. These household dynamics can include, but are not limited to, an ill child, issues with transportation, and/or allocating resources to fix a problem in the home, such as plumbing.

In cases where women cannot secure gainful employment or family/work conflicts do not allow for stability in the workforce, receiving government assistance becomes a next resort. Moreover, Brady and Wallace (2001) proclaim that rises in government assistance reciprocity occurred when “deindustrialization” (p. 350) took place, adding to the dependency on government aid. In an effort to reduce dependency and motivate women to retain employment, the government implemented a new U.S. welfare policy called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for those women who were receiving government assistance, but capable of working. A five-year lifetime limit was initiated in order to wean women off of welfare and integrate them into the workforce (Hildebrandt & Ford, 2009). This plan was intended to motivate single-mothers to gain independence and confidence through self-sufficiency.

This welfare to work program can be translated as a program aimed at restoring independence and raising self-esteem by acquiring job skills that result in securing employment. However, there are additional hurdles that many women face as they make

this transition. At a stroke, women were determined to be ready for the permanent transition of employment. At the end of the five-year term welfare benefits were terminated for women who could not demonstrate gainful employment. Dissimilar, minority women experienced additional hardships and continuous challenges with adjusting to this change. Women who were of minority race as well as those women who lacked essential resources such as transportation were described as reasons for failing to accomplish the goals of this program (Gemelli, 2008; Hildebrandt & Ford, 2009). Thus, remaining in poverty and reducing any possible optimism for change.

Housing. With limited resources, one option for women to financially support their families is through government assistance. Additionally, those women living in rural areas tend to receive less financial assistance than those single-mothers living in urban poverty (Lichter & Crowley, 2002). Oftentimes, this assistance alone is not enough to provide all of the household needs, and other arrangements are made in conjunction with receiving aid. Some women decide that combined housing is more reasonable. In this case women share housing with another family or other people and divide the household responsibilities by using their government assistance and/or barter, such as exchanging childcare services (Clampet-Lundquist, 2003). There is a bit of a distinction amongst poor single-mothers. Poor single-mothers who share housing are more likely to have a higher poverty rate than poor single-mothers who do not share housing (J. B. Brown & Lichter, 2004). The reason for this disparity is not quite clear; however, Clampet-Lundquist (2003) concluded that some single-mothers move into dilapidated houses or “abandoned houses in order to eventually take over ownership” (p. 134). Their determination motivates them to make considerable strides towards home ownership.

This may not make them less poor, but can certainly provide a stable place to live in terms of not having to face logistical housing issues that may be related to rent.

Parenting

Adding to the stressors of fixed incomes and housing arrangements is that of mothering. Single-mothers face a tremendous challenge when it comes to parenting. Difficulties in keeping a stable home may result in parenting strategies falling short. Low-income mothers who are employed find additional obstacles in balancing employment, childrearing, and maintaining a home. As a result, these women experience conflict from various factors (Ciabattari, 2007). First, many single-mothers are raising multiple children while living in poverty. Second, they are responsible for providing food and shelter for their family. Third, they have to maintain jobs and meet the requirements set by their employers. Lastly, these mothers have to model parenting skills that will ultimately influence the way that their children will react and respond to social pressures. All of these elements can result in high stress level for single-mothers and as a result impact parenting strategies.

One way that some single-mothers have dealt with parenting dilemmas is through “co-habitation” (J. B. Brown & Lichter, 2004, p. 292). Not only is co-habitation beneficial in relieving financial burdens, but it also helps with parenting. Having another person share household demands whether in the form of financial contribution, caretaking, or both, alleviates some of the stress related to managing these needs. Intimate relationships and/or family relatives are often the sources of parenting support (J. B. Brown & Lichter, 2004; D. J. Jones, Forehand, Dorsey, Foster, & Brody, 2005).

This is not to say that household conflict is non-existent; however, it does help in reducing the amount of interpersonal conflict these families often face.

Mental Health Setbacks. Other areas that affect single-mothers living in poverty are their mental health status and their approaches towards parenting while dealing with mental health issues. Ceballo and McLoyd (2002), report that depression is significantly related to single-mothers living in poverty. As a result, mothers who display depressive symptoms are less likely to be engaged with their children and are more likely to implement harsh punishment as a means to correct undesirable behavior (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002; D. J. Jones et al., 2005). Depression changes the way a woman functions and it may also have an effect on the way that she handles stressful situations coupled with parenting.

Parenting Style. Socioeconomic status does not determine the parenting approaches for single-mothers. Single-mothers living in poverty and single-mothers who were not living in poverty were equally consistent in assuming an assertive parenting role (Bulanda, 2008). Changes in parenting styles occur with mothers who have less family support and/or experience changes in their environmental surroundings. When a downward shift in family support and environmental surroundings develop, the parenting style tends to be negligent and/or penal in nature (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002).

The quality of these mother-child relationships may have a consequential impact on children and their misconduct. The more children a woman has, the less available she will be during each child's development. Furthermore, the repercussions caused by the lack of maternal presence leads to juvenile delinquency (Bulanda, 2008). This characteristic is not conclusive of all poor single-mothers. The majority of poor single-

mothers tend to create boundaries in their child rearing approach, more so than single-mothers not considered to be poor (Bulanda, 2008). Setting boundaries and priorities becomes necessary for single-mothers living in poverty.

Transportation. There are many practical life issues upon which single-mothers living in poverty rely. Reliable and necessary access to childcare services, jobs, and social services requires public transportation for many lower socio-economic populations. For many poor families living outside of public transportation routes, the challenges are compounding.

The public transit system limits its routes thus limiting its service to populations that could benefit from it. One of the “practical life issues” concluded by Campbell-Grossman, Hudson, Keating-Lefler, Yank, and Obafunwa (2009) was that of transportation (p. 41). This issue is a common daily struggle for many poor individuals and families, but a constant struggle for poor single-mothers living in rural areas. Public transportation is typically the method used by individuals without vehicles and has been a reliable source for many who rely on it in order to get from one place to another. However, for those living in rural areas who cannot afford other means of transportation, the public transportation system fails them. Single-mothers are faced with many limitations, including transportation. Boundaries in public transportation routes further restrict single-mothers from “access to reliable, quality child care services and transportation to jobs” (Hildebrandt & Ford, 2009, p. 298). Without public transportation in rural areas, other life issues can arise for single-mothers who depend on this method of transport.

The lack of dependable transportation in rural areas poses an increased level of considerable limits for single-mothers living throughout these areas. Generally, these limits are not apparent to the majority of society; however, to single-mothers they are more than obvious. Seemingly, there is no real chance of emerging from their circumstances particularly when their welfare life time limit expires and they are expected to be self-dependent through full-time employment. Women who received welfare benefits in rural areas reportedly received fewer benefits than women who received welfare assistance and lived in urban areas (Lichter & Crowley, 2002). This could contribute to the marginalization of single-mothers wanting to access resources that could potentially provide ameliorative results for their families.

Literature on *Colonias*

Single-mothers living in poverty begin at a disadvantage, as women, they typically gain full custody of their children and attempt to meet of their responsibilities single handedly. Through their life's process, they face significant challenges. This cycle is perpetuated by taking low paying employment, receiving public assistance benefits without the resources for upward mobility, taking positions within the family that are not compensated, such as a caretaker. The research presented on women living in poverty suggested that women will continue to be poor throughout their elder years. However, there was a lack of research on how other poor populations in the United States are affected.

Colonias in Context. With all the poignancy that is attributed to *Colonias*, they are rarely considered as a unique and interesting occurrence of poverty. *Colonias* have a history of existing as rural areas with poor housing infrastructure, lack of suitable water

and sewage systems and paved roads, they have also been referred to as “rural slums” (Betts, Slottje, & Vargas-Garcia, 1994; Richardson, 1999, p. 49). *Colonias* span the nearly 2,000 mile border shared between Mexico and the United States. By state, Texas has the largest stretch of borderland within that, 868 miles makes up the El Paso border (Ward et al., 2004). This border phenomenon is exclusive compared to other areas of poverty in United States. According to Richardson (1999) there is no poverty stricken area in the nation that compares to poverty in *Colonias*. This is possibly due to access to both countries and the transnational lives lived by *Colonia* residents.

The *Colonias* that comprise the Texas/Mexico border are mostly made up of residents with Hispanic Origin and predominantly Mexican. In fact, the Mexican born population in El Paso County make up 24 percent of that total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). Residents of *Colonias* face unique challenges than those living in urban poverty. Like many other rural areas of poverty, *Colonias* are geographically separated from metropolitan cities, thus limiting the access to social services and out of the public transportation route. *Colonias* are located in the most rural regions of states that adjoin the U.S./Mexico border. Areas of extreme poverty are more commonly remote and occupied by minority populations (Lichter & Crowley, 2002). This remoteness acts as a double-edged sword in the case of *Colonias*.

Available homeownership is a major factor in relocating to a *Colonia*. The lack of affordable housing in metropolitan cities of Texas allow poor families the opportunity of homeownership; however, they are also vulnerable to shameless corruption caused by greedy land developers (Ward et al., 2004). The proximity of *Colonias* is convenient for those families who want a better life, yet cultural and family connections also remain

important to maintain Mexican culture and values. Some women reported that they want the best for their children, and access to a U.S. education is the reason for moving to a *Colonia*, perhaps due to the absence of government corruption and crime in the U.S. compared to that in Mexico (Gorordo, 2008; Richardson, 1999). This determination is outweighed by the risk of apprehension for non-U.S. Citizens. Other families believe that children can be misguided and negatively influenced by living in metropolitan cities; therefore, this can be avoided by moving to a *Colonia* (Zollinger, 2008). Despite the ubiquitous poverty in *Colonias*, there are people who choose to live in *Colonias* and accept the challenges of living in substandard conditions.

Living in a *Colonia* presents many struggles for its residents. For example environmental toxins found in wastewater in *Colonias* affect the general health and wellbeing of any human being who comes in contact with it; however, this has been an issue in *Colonias* for many years (Johnson & Niemeyer, 2008; Richardson, 1999). Environmental forces that depreciate health and possibly reduce the life span of *Colonia* residents, may pose as inconvenient in the scope of homeownership. The chances of wastewater entering a *Colonia* dwelling are alarmingly high due to the poor infrastructures in place. When canals overflow with rain water, it enters the homes of many residents that live in an already compromised dwelling. Due the lack of proper sanitation services, the waste water is often disseminated and absorbed by the soil, further compromising the livelihood and health of *Colonia* residents (Olmstead, 2004). Despite these conditions, the benefits of being connected to their family, owning a home, and accessing better education for their children outweigh the physical, environmental, and health risks for those

Housing. Homes in many *Colonia* neighborhoods are built with ordinary, unwanted materials, such as cardboard, scrap wood, and scrap metal, that have been collected and used to build a dwelling to be occupied as a primary shelter (Donelson & Esparza, 2010). Others have been able to purchase new materials over time and gradually build a new home for their families. By building a home, in a *Colonia*, overtime, *Colonia* families end up paying substantially less than families who live in metropolitan cities and pay a mortgage to a bank. A little more than half of the households located in El Paso, Texas *Colonias* have a mortgage. Moreover, these families pay substantially less monthly than those families who pay traditional mortgages (Machado, 2006). Mortgages in *Colonias* usually consist of monthly payments to land developers for the land itself. Thirty-one years ago, land was sold for one hundred dollars down and eighty dollars a month (Richardson, 1999). In the early nineties developers were known to sell their lots with the down payment being half of the total selling price; moreover, selling land through contract for deed eliminated the middle man and allowed the developers to profit up to the tune of one million dollars (Donelson & Esparza, 2010). At this rate, *Colonias* certainly provide affordable housing to those families and individuals determined to make ends meet and partake in the American Dream.

Since many *Colonias* are located in undesignated areas, companies that provide utility services in metropolitan, urban, and other rural areas, do not provide these services to *Colonias*. Machado (2006) provides insight into the conditions of *Colonias* from an infrastructure perspective and the decisions that are made by *Colonia* residents to meet their basic needs. *Colonia* residents must contract with private companies that have the capacity to provide these services to *Colonia* households. Along with this service come

higher costs; however, depending on the *Colonia*, a municipal water supply is not available.

Although private companies may provide water to *Colonia* families, health concerns surrounding innocuous consumption arise. Raw sewage from *Colonias* located in Mexico is dumped into the *Rio Grande*, in turn water trucks are filled with this water that is then sourced to *Colonia* communities in Texas (Johnson & Niemeyer, 2008; Machado, 2006; Stutz, 1989). Despite this, *Colonia* residents choose this option based on the need. There is a significant strain on the need for these services and regardless of heedful consumption, eventually water supply runs low requiring long waits for a replenishment delivery (Machado, 2006). This is the consequence of living in a region that has many restrictions, including the inability to easily access basic needs. However, as per capita income increases the likelihood of a consistent source of water supply also increases (Olmstead, 2004).

Transportation. Transportation is a fundamental need in *Colonia* neighborhoods. Public transportation is not an option; furthermore, emergency services are limited making vehicle ownership almost a requirement. Additionally, shopping for household necessities and socializing require permanent means of commuting (G. Núñez, 2006). Households without vehicles are challenged; however, those who have personal vehicles allocate a large portion of their earnings on fuel, further impacting monetary resources (Machado, 2006).

Impacts of Colonia Poverty on Single-mothers

While negotiating everyday life in *Colonias*, single-mothers face financial challenges. Employment is critical to the functioning of a household and at times a child

deemed able to go out into the workforce may be required to leave school in order to help support the household. The obstacles related to healthcare trace back to their home country and for various reasons single-mothers do not access U.S. healthcare unless it is absolutely necessary. This means that many illnesses are left untreated especially those that are more common for single-mothers, such as depression and other mental health illnesses. Needless to say, prescription drug coverage is non-existent; therefore, creating further obstacles for those who may decide to seek professional medical care. Other barriers related to single-mothers living in *Colonias* include parenting and struggles related to spending quality time with their children, deterring their children from the temptations of the ubiquitous presence of drugs, and maintaining healthy social relationships outside of work and home.

Financial Challenges. *Colonia* single-mothers prioritize their needs and those of their children. In her study, Martinez (2005) presents the coping strategies of Mexican immigrant women living in a California border town. Martinez reports that one of the reasons that her study participants came to the United States was due to financial challenges experienced in their home country, Mexico. They included employment and education. Martinez goes on to mention that these participants accessed employment and education in the United States and their coping strategies were underpinned by their cultural belief of hard work, sacrifice, and independence. Self-reliance is a self-imposed expectation for many of these women. They tend to be employed in areas where there are vacancies, many times these range from domestic jobs, to farm labor, and even occupations in the informal market; sometimes a combination of all of these. When challenges arise in generating income, the last resort is to apply for government aid if

they qualify based on their citizenship status. For Mexican single-mothers in *Colonias*, welfare is only an option when times are difficult and there is an absolute uncertainty of being able to provide for their children. Moreover, the result of accepting government aid is seen as a form of humiliation (Martinez, 2005). By opting out of receiving government aid, *Colonia* Mexican single-mothers marginally reduce the stigma imposed by outsiders and debunk the myth that all Mexicans are lazy and take advantage of government assistance.

Employment. Employment for *Colonia* residents not only represents independence, it also represents security. It is not security having an income that enables paying for credit cards, going shopping, and participating in extracurricular activities. For *Colonia* residents, Security represents life. Without a means of employment, life is compromised so much so that prospects of education are not a consideration (Jauregui & Slate, 2009). While education in the United States is emphasized as critical for our youth, many *Colonia* residents are not able to prioritize education. *Colonia* families often make disheartening decisions that require children to leave school and enter the workforce to help support the family (G. Núñez, 2006). The potential that education can offer all individuals take time and investment; something that *Colonia* families do not possess. They are focused on the present to decisions surrounding what is best for the family unit. The employment available to these residents does not offer financial investment opportunities such as 401(k), healthcare coverage, or workmen's compensation. (Jauregui & Slate, 2009). Jobs are offered with the unspoken acknowledgement that there will be a simple exchange - labor for pay.

Healthcare. A reason why receiving public assistance may not be important to Mexican, single-mothers living in *Colonias*, could be because they have long lived without government aid on other levels in their home country. Health insurance coverage is non-existent for many Mexicans resulting in a lack of consistent care from a primary doctor (H. S. Brown, Pagán, & Bastida, 2009). Making ends meet to support a household is of primary focus for many *Colonia* residents; oftentimes resulting in poor health. This is especially true for those residents living in *Colonias* that continue to lack environmental infrastructures such as adequate water and sewage systems.

Lack of acculturation significantly influences the decision not to access healthcare. Not knowing where to go for healthcare or how to pay for healthcare diminishes any possibility that *Colonia* residents will get the healthcare that they need (Martinez, 2005). Asking for help from the “dominant culture in the United States”, is not necessarily an option, the perception of Americans is “distant and cold” (Martinez, 2005, p. 33). This misconception adversely affects any possibility of integrating into the larger culture. When circumstances call for medical attention or require medicinal applications, non-traditional methods such as remedies that have been passed down from ancestors, are used rather than seeking out Western healthcare (Martinez, 2005). This thought of acculturation would seem to suggest that once a Mexican immigrant has acclimated to his/her new environment, accessing Western healthcare would then become less intimidating. This is not the case for those who reside along the U.S./Mexican border in *Colonias*. The closer that a Mexican immigrant living in the United States lives to the Mexican border, the higher the rate of poverty and the less acclimated he/she will be to the United States as a whole (Crowley et al., 2006).

Access to healthcare or lack thereof, will be the same for someone who has lived in the region for two years compared to someone who has lived there for twelve years. Conjoint issues of “trust and deportation” have been expressed by many Hispanic women who fear being turned over to the authorities (Campbell-Grossman et al., 2009, p. 40). The perceived position of medical professionals further removes these women from receiving medical care and in a sense, creates self-imposed barriers to healthcare.

Not only is healthcare a problem, but prescription coverage is also an issue. Those who must access healthcare in the United States face the dilemma of not being able to afford expensive drug costs. Mexican immigrants without health insurance, by default, do not have prescription coverage, and therefore, are required to pay out of pocket at retail prices. A way around this is by traveling across the border and acquiring the needed medication in Mexico (Anders et al., 2008). This can seem as an inconvenience and a reason not to seek out medical attention in the United States, if it can be avoided. The likelihood that a follow-up visit will take place is very slim, perhaps due to the physical and legal (depending on immigration status) difficulty of crossing the border. Anders et al. (2008) also mention that an outstanding account balance deters this population from continuing their medical care with the treating physician. A visit to the doctor’s office has to be completely necessary and worthy of incurring a debt, once symptom free, follow-up visits are not exercised primarily due to cost.

Traditionally, regular doctor visits, prescription drug coverage, and emergency care are what are generally thought of when considering access to healthcare. Rarely is access to mental healthcare described as an obstacle in the rhetoric of healthcare. From a gender perspective, females are more likely to experience mental health issues, and as a

result of the lack to access to conventional healthcare, females are more likely to experience a decline in their overall mental wellbeing (Mier et al., 2008). This poses a considerable challenge for Mexican single-mothers in *Colonias*.

Not only does one not become acclimated the longer that he/she lives in this region (Crowley et al., 2006), mental and physical capacities deteriorate the more that one resides in these borderlands (Mier et al., 2008). Mier and colleagues (2008) report that, as time goes on, the daily stress of providing for a family under the conditions of their *Colonia*, places these single-mothers at a disadvantage from a health perspective. Illnesses that arise as a result of environmental conditions, such as inadequate sewage and water systems, are obvious. However, the compounded difficulties of *Colonia* life take on a harsher role within the realm of single-mothers and their mental welfare. When trying to gain access to a better education for their children, frequently, healthcare becomes secondary.

Physical and mental symptoms have a joined relationship and typically they are equally left untreated by *Colonia* residents and tends to impact their quality of life in the long run (Mier et al., 2008). This is common amongst many individuals regardless of socioeconomic status; however, those living in metropolitan areas are less likely to go unnoticed of essential medical care or they may know how to reach the resources intended for such needs. Recent studies report that there is a link between individuals, who live in *Colonias* and are in poor physical and/or mental health, and a lack of education on the importance of healthcare maintenance as a conduit for a higher quality of life (Machado, 2006; Mier et al., 2008).

Parenting. Women work with men in industries and take on schedules that limit the quality time they can spend with their children (G. Núñez, 2006). It is not uncommon for Mexican single-mothers to work multiple jobs and long hours in order to meet the obligations of supporting a household with children. However, along with those sacrifices come the repercussions of children who began to show signs of rebellion. A mother who takes time off to address her child(ren)'s behavioral issues risks losing wages for time missed or risks losing the prearrangement of a preferred schedule (G. Núñez, 2006). Balancing work and family conflict in *Colonias* seem to consist of greater challenges.

Due to this geographic location and the presence of drug trafficking, Mexican single-mothers have a critical role in their children's activities both at home and school. Brown and Benedict (2007a) profess there is an effortless exchange of various street drugs amongst high school students. At a time where young adults are making decisions about their futures such as employment or going to college, there are other crucial alternatives that are negatively influential. Not only are gateway drugs such as alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana, available to many high school students in this region, but there is also an abundance of powerful drugs such as ecstasy and heroin that are made available to anyone for personal use and/or distribution for profit (B. Brown & Benedict, 2007a). This places Mexican single-mothers in a position of vigilance at all times in order to ensure that their children take on a positive path towards independence.

With such responsibility and demands, the research indicates that *Colonia* single-mothers persevere through poignant circumstances of *Colonia* life. However, they still lack a basic personal network of support. Interpersonal struggles get in the way of the human ability to cope. Support systems that are built on trust and fondness enable these

women to express their frustrations and allow them to generate personal strength (Martinez, 2005). The strength of the single-mother is encouraged through the support of other women who have equally experienced *Colonia* life. These are only some of the challenges that women face while living in poverty. There are heightened obstacles for those single-mothers who live in rural regions of poverty such as *Colonias* (J. B. Brown & Lichter, 2004), have multiple children (Crowley et al., 2006), are of minority race/ethnicity (Gemelli, 2008), and receive government assistance through the welfare to work program (Hildebrandt & Ford, 2009). Mexican single-mothers who live in *Colonias* have more to consider. The challenges of living in the *Colonia* context coupled with the impacts of being a Mexican single-mother offer a resounding point of interest for research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative research. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand how single-mothers, living in the *Colonia of El Portaje*, make sense of their lives. The methodology for this investigation is qualitative, implementing a phenomenological approach through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Qualitative research is a holistic process that requires the researcher to consider multiple factors in identifying complex relationships (Creswell, 2007). This process is driven by the context of the study. Researchers collect data in the field as the primary data collection instrument. The natural setting allows for rapport to be established with the participants. Qualitative research is an inductive process rather than a deductive one. The participants are the fundamental focus of the study at all times. Their meanings are central to the emergent design of the research study. Therefore by taking a qualitative approach, I achieved the goals of this study by exploring, describing, analyzing meanings and coupling them with theory to embody an interpretive approach which informs the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). As my analytic strategy of choice, I was able to achieve the purpose of this study through an idiographic course (Smith et al., 2009). Through the use of this method, I was required to focus on the particular phenomenon taking place in the specific context. In this study, the phenomenon of the Mexican single-mother is examined in the context of the *Colonia of El Portaje*.

The fundamental components of IPA are comprised of three elements. The first element, phenomenology, is concerned with the 'life world' or lived experience according

to Edmund Husserl (1970). Husserl contented that it was impossible to understand the world and expressed that empirical science would be best achieved through the examination of individuals' lived experiences (1970). Furthermore, transcendental phenomenology requires that the researcher suspend her preconceived thoughts about the phenomenon in order to accurately provide a representation of the participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology is not connected with IPA, but is worth mentioning due the purpose of this study. The aim is to introduce this underrepresented phenomenon to the scholarship that has, by in large, left them out as well as present the stories of women who have never been asked to speak about their lives. These stories are relevant to many more people outside of academic circles. Their experiences are interconnected to experiences that are common with other women, daughters, and mothers alike. I myself am an example of this representation. There was not a way to suspend or disconnect myself or my preconceived thoughts about this topic when it was my very own experience that brought me to research this phenomenon. It is important to point out that I did not go into the field and interview participants with my experiences at the forefront. I did scale back on my preconceived thoughts that evolved with me while growing up and this allowed me to be open to their experiences and resulted in my own personal reflection.

The second component is hermeneutics, most notably developed by Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1976) which speaks to being in the world and having an influence on the way we understand our experiences. According to Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1976) our existence contributes to the knowledge that we bring to a phenomenon; therefore, arguing against Husserl's position of removing oneself from the experience.

Moreover, Silverman and Marvasti (2008) purport that there are four key reasons why topics for research are chosen. (1) social obligations, (2) curiosity, (3) being assigned to a project, and (4) personal experiences; whichever the reason is for choosing a topic, the common feature is that the researcher develops or comes in with a connection to the topic (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Being that IPA takes the hermeneutic approach of Phenomenology “reflexivity is viewed as an optional tool, enabling the researcher to formally acknowledge his or her interpretative role, rather than as an essential technique for removing bias.” (Fade, 2004, p. 648). Thus, enforcing Richards’ (2009) position on the use of bias through a “careful design” (p. 23).

Again, this was an important aspect of my overall experience. My bias was carefully checked so much so that when a participant shared her views or thoughts on a matter, I rediscovered something about myself. For example, after one of the interviews, which was probably close to two hours in length, this particular participant asked me what transpired in my parent’s marriage resulting in their divorce. I proceeded to tell her that, in my mother’s opinion, my father did not take the role as a leader as a man who should have been the head of household. This transformed into a looming disinterest for my mother causing the dissolution of their marriage. She responded by saying *“I know exactly how your mom felt because I am a very independent person and I appreciate those around me who are independent as well. I don’t want to be taking care of a man”*. My first thought was one of thankfulness because I felt as if my mother’s decision was being supported and that there was nothing wrong with her decision. Later as I reflected on that interview, I thought to myself and said “wait a minute, my mother and father divorced because my mother was not happy about the relationship dynamics that were

taking place?” “It was that decision that initiated the rest of my life without my father”. This revelation prompted me to ask myself in what capacity was I trying to execute this study. This introspective consultation informed my position as my mother’s daughter. As the little girl who grew up without her father, who was raised by a Mexican single-mother, and as the woman whose unseasoned experiences as a mother ignited this wonder that turned out to be this study.

The third component of IPA is idiographic. As previously stated, the focus is on the specific. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) posit that the key features of the IPA approach is that it “focuses on personal meaning and sense-making in a particular context, for people who share a particular experience” (p. 45). In this study the context is the *Colonia* of *El Portaje* and the people who share this experience are single-mothers. Therefore, the phenomenon is the lived experiences of single-mothers in the *Colonia* context. The idiographic approach is also evident with the sample strategy.

Participants

Sample size. There are no set numerical limits on how many participants are adequate to conduct a study. Sample selection guidelines are unconstrained in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). There are pros and cons to this as the researcher has the freedom of picking however small or large a sample size, which will ultimately result in breadth and depth of the study. This freedom, however, is not absolute. Patton (2002) asserts that researchers must have a clear vision of the study and keep in mind that the study has to present useful credible information with the time and resources allotted.

Moreover, the sample population depends on the type of study that is being conducted and the expected anticipated results. Although three to six, participants can

provide genuine depth through a narrow scope, while a larger sample size will produce a wider scope of knowledge (Patton, 2002; Smith et al., 2009; Yin, 2009). I anticipated a total sample size of six in order to present depth from the participant's experiences, as well as to keep in line with the "do-ability" and "feasibility" of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 5). While I recruited five single-mothers, one participant dropped out after the first interview. The researchers' purpose is to make meaning of how the participants make meaning of their experiences rather than make generalizations from this study. Therefore, this study reflects researchers' limited resources while, at the same time providing an in-depth understanding through a narrow scope.

Additionally, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) point out three important considerations that were well-thought-out when prior to deciding on my sample size. First, I took into account the dedication that IPA requires in the analysis phase. Line by line analysis with more than six participants can be overwhelming resulting in a poor report or a complete loss of interest. This leads into the second point that a larger sample can affect the content of the report. The researcher risks losing valuable rich data that can only be generated by the case-by-case analysis process. The researcher should also consider another important factor regarding sample size. Researchers come with different sets of circumstances surrounding their research goals. For me as a full-time employee, mother, wife, and student, my circumstances dictated how much I could realistically take on and successfully complete this requirement.

As a very general guide and taking individual circumstances into account, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) suggest that students stay within a sample size of three to six participants. This will prevent the potentially dangerous pitfalls of large samples and

compliment the researcher's constraints. As an aside, the quality of the study should always be the emphasis. If done effectively, a small sample can get to the core of complex issues surrounding the phenomenon under study as well as make "important and powerful contributions" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 38). As previously mentioned, my goal was to recruit five women, while I did recruit five women for this study, one participant dropped out after the first interview.

Sample selection. IPA's sampling procedure highlights the idiographic approach through its use of "small, purposively-selected and carefully-situated samples" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). Moreover, the homogeneity adds to the specificity through the significance that the research question may have for the defined group (Smith et al., 2009). Through purposive sampling, the criterion for the homogenous sample was: Mexican women 18 years of age and older who were single-mothers of biological children, and migrated from Mexico at any point prior to settling in *El Portaje*.

The participants were recruited and selected through a variety of means. The *Centro* that hosted my stay also hosts an assortment of personal enrichment classes. A Zumba fitness class is an example and a class that I participated in. At the conclusion of a Zumba class I made an announcement surrounding my research study and asked that anyone interested see me or contact me via the recruitment flyer. From that effort, two women decided to participate. The third participant was referred to me by *Estrella* from the *Centro*, the fourth participant was referred to me by the third participant and the fifth participant was referred to me by an employee at the Catholic Church located across the street from the Community Center. Ultimately taking on a snowball sampling approach.

Procedure

Exploratory trip. During the fall of 2011, I took an exploratory trip to the southwest region. My external dissertation committee member facilitated a tour of the borderland area. She introduced me to many individuals, one who later became instrumental in gaining access to the field. This guidance was substantial towards achieving the anticipated recruitment goals and potential participants who meet the outlined criteria, particularly in a marginalized context. From that visit I was able to narrow my research space. I communicated with *Estrella* from *El Centro* and she offered to host my stay whenever I was ready to execute my field research. Official permission from *El Centro*'s director was secured, ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Nova Southeastern University, and a certificate of confidentiality was granted by the National Institute of Health/ National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, prior to entering the field.

Entering the field. In the summer of 2012 I returned to the southwest region, and continued on to *El Portaje* where I met with *Estrella*. I had originally anticipated arriving sooner so that I had the opportunity to observe, participate, and recruit potential participants in the personal enrichment classes offered. Logistical setbacks caused entering the field to be delayed. By the time I had arrived, the last semester of the year had ended and all classes ceased for the summer. I modified my recruitment strategy as outlined in the sample selection section.

Upon meeting each potential participant, I provided a recruitment flyer and explained the research study. They were all provided with a letter inviting them to participate. By happenstance all participants showed interest in participating at the time

that the recruiting took place and the first interview took place immediately after the parameters of the informed consent were discussed and signatures were acquired. They were informed that their participation in this study was completely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. They were also assured that their anonymity would be protected through the use of pseudonyms and that a certificate of confidentiality was obtained in order to protect their information from being disclosed via a court order, should there be a reason. Moreover, they were also assured that they had the right to decline sharing any information that they were not comfortable disclosing. I also reassured them that the audio recordings and all pertinent data would be kept securely and confidentially.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection instrument used. Interviews are typical in many qualitative research traditions as they prompt a conversation to take place, with a purpose (Smith et al., 2009). In order to compliment the sample size and produce a robust analysis, I felt that conducting a three-interview series would be most beneficial. This approach allows for contextualization of the participants lives (Seidman, 2006). Seeking three interviews from each participant allowed me to gain insight into the lived experiences; this contributed to meaningful results and established a rapport that would have otherwise been doubtful considering the circumstances - time constraints and a marginalized population. The interview series was made up of life history - interview one, present lived experiences - interview two, and meaning and re-presentation of who they are as a person - interview three. Each interview

lasted anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes and subsequent interviews were scheduled at the conclusion of interview one and two.

Interviews. The life history interview sought to explore the participant's historical experiences. Determining how far back the participant wanted to reminisce was left up to her. Generally, the participants shared stories of their life histories as children in Mexico and experiences migrating to the United States, as well as living transnational lives. Not only was the first interview aimed at capturing and contextualizing their past, but it was also used to build rapport. The first interview created an ice breaker effect by asking the participant to tell me about her past, her childhood, lessons learned, and family.

The second interview focused on the present lived experiences of the women as single-parents. The questions were central to how they became single-parents, their experiences living in *El Portaje*, their daily routines, and associated challenges. With this interview, the purpose was to allow the participants to "concentrate on their present lived experience and to reconstruct" (Seidman, 2006, p. 18) experiences prompted by a guiding question. For example, when I asked a participant to share a time when she reflected on being a single-mother, she told me that she thinks about it all the time. At the time of the interview she lived alone and was struggling with feelings of loneliness. She proclaimed that she would reflect on memories of her sons growing up in the home that she now occupies alone. While these were memories of her past, remembering was a present lived experience that occurred almost daily with that participant.

The third interview was perhaps the most difficult for a couple of the women. Answering the first question of who they are as an individual proved to be challenging because they worked hard to make their "own worlds" with their children. At one point or

another, the participants managed to provide insight into this interview. It is clear that they explored a balance of past and present experiences to describe the meaning and represent their identities (Seidman, 2006).

The integrity of this interview series was maintained through the use of the adequate timing, the structure, and the spacing between interviews. The minimum time between each interview was 24 hours with the maximum time being one week. A separate day was scheduled for check-in and wrap-up. All interviews took place during the month of August, 2012 and they were all completed over a three week period.

Transcriptions. I transcribed all interviews personally and in my home office; this was not only cost-free, but it protected the anonymity of the participants. I transcribed all interviews using the built-in speech recognition feature found in Windows 7. This feature allowed me to control the computer through voice commands. Initiating the speech recognition element was an uncomplicated endeavor and was effortlessly established through the short steps found here <http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows7/Dictate-text-using-Speech-Recognition>.

Once this was setup, I was able to compliment and streamline this process through the use of Audacity <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>. Audacity is free downloadable software and is compatible with windows and Mac. Audacity was downloaded on my MacBook; my MP3 audio files were uploaded into audacity. I used audacity to control the speed of the audio file so that I could listen and speak at the same time. There were also times when I could not make out what the interviewee was saying and using audacity to speed up or slow down the audio file, allowed me to accurately capture what was said.

I used two computers to accomplish this task, my home PC and my MacBook. I took my MacBook to the field and my audio files were saved there. I did not want to risk losing those files by moving them around from my MacBook to my PC and vice versa. I used a Microsoft headset with a microphone to listen to the audio and parrot the recording. My particular headset had an audio input and a headset input. The headset input was plugged into the Macbook and the audio input was plugged into the PC. I ran the audio file, through Audacity, from my Macbook. I slowed down the speed so that I could listen and parrot the interview into the microphone where it then appeared on the word document on my PC. In anticipation of my analysis, I set up my word document to include line numbers, rather than going back and completing this step later. This is also a word function that can be easily accessed through the page layout tab in word 2010. Click on the page layout tab, in the page setup quadrant you will see a “line numbers” drop-down box. Click on that drop down menu and select continuous. This lined the numbers throughout my transcription and I repeated these steps for each new transcription.

Data Analysis

I followed the six-step Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) model provided by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) to conduct the data analysis of the interviews. While there are a variety ways of conducting this particular analysis in IPA fashion, the method outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) is best suited for me as a new user of IPA.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Step One: Reading and Re-reading. I prepared myself for the analysis phase of the research project by reading and re-reading the recorded transcript. Smith, Flowers,

and Larkin (2009) suggest that listening to the audio recording of the transcript while reading along can place the researcher in the moment of the original interview. I did this as I was not only new to IPA, but also new to executing a research study on my own. I wanted to be as careful as possible and tried not to tread onto a path that could potentially set me back.

Reading and re-reading of the transcript along with listening to the audio recordings became a necessity. There was a lot of adjusting that took place through the use of the parrotting feature, during the transcription process. There were times when the recording was inaudible and this required that I play back the recording several times. Also, the speech recognition was not entirely reliable which resulted in having to go back and correct the words that were misunderstood by the software. This process prompted me to become more familiar with the transcripts and audio recordings. All in all, I consider myself as having commanded this particular process due to the repetitious nature of this task.

In this step, the participant is the central focus of the analysis and the researcher can then begin to bring together the initial analysis looking for chronological accounts while paying attention to the general descriptions that lead into more specific details related to thoughts and feelings (Smith et al., 2009). It is only through the careful and diligent preparedness required in this step that I was able to begin absorbing the material that would ultimately allow themes to emerge.

Step Two: Initial Noting. After spending plenty of time with the transcript via step one, it was important for me to remember that this process is the crux of the project. Step two required me to continue to pace myself in order to fully “engage with the

transcript” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). Failing to absorb the details of the transcript could have resulted in failing to understand the participant and how she thinks about, talks about, and describes, certain issues. In order to capture these essential nuances, I utilized the margins of the transcript for noting, thus generating an extensive and abundant compilation of data.

I had to approach this step the best way that worked for me that meant that I was not sitting in front of a computer screen or no longer listening to the audio files. I took each transcript and read it again while marking important passages and making notes on the margins of the transcript. This hands-on approach proved to be the most efficient way for me to best capture the data that would eventually become emergent themes. This method was also practical as I was able to work with the transcripts while in a situation that required stretched periods of waiting such as in doctor’s offices, auto repair shops, my daughter’s swimming lessons. I also took advantage of informal areas to mark-up my transcripts, such as the couch and bed. This was a more pleasant way to work without it feeling demanding and intrusive of my time and it allowed for the development of my analysis.

Step Three: Developing Emergent Themes. As the initial noting took shape, it made room for emergent themes. In this step, I took the transcript and the notes and faced the challenge of delicately re-organizing the data in a successful attempt to “map out the interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 91). This was a demanding feat considering that there was an abundance of rich material acquired through the transcripts. The authors propose a traditional approach for arranging the transcript excerpts and developing emergent themes. Smith, Flowers, and

Larkin (2009), suggest that one way to proceed with this effort, is to cut out excerpts from the transcript and spread them out on a large table or on the floor. This direct encounter is stated to initiate the subsumptive process in preparation for the generation of the subthemes.

This conventional approach did not work for me. I found it to be too free flowing and difficult to capture prominent connections between the excerpts that could potentially create a subtheme. For this step, I chose to create an excel matrix for each participant. I added eight columns with the following headings; line number, excerpt, emergent theme, affirming questions, descriptors, logical functions, memo, and interview. I also placed my primary research question as the header in order to keep my research inquiry plumb (Ronald J Chenail, 1997). The transcript excerpts presented are in keeping with the orthography of the interview.

Step Four: Searching for Connections across Emergent Themes. In accomplishing this step, I searched for these themes, first, chronologically. The chronological order was the simplest way to begin classifying the themes based on the order in which they came up in the transcript (Smith et al., 2009). The matrix in figure 2 shows the first column representing the transcript line number. The last column reflects the interview number. Based on this chronology and the need to connect the emergent themes, I consulted Stephanie's Fade's (2004) article and found her insight towards writing the narrative helpful for this particular process. The columns labeled affirming questions, descriptors, and logical functions were built into the matrix. The affirming questions ask how, when, why, where, and what, in connection with the transcript excerpt and emergent theme. The affirming questions serve exactly that purpose, to affirm that

the precise excerpt and emergent theme chosen continue to carry the integrity of the participant's story.

The descriptors column simply restates the descriptor that was used in the affirming questions column depending on the descriptor a number will be displayed in the logical function column. A logical function was created for this process; a number was assigned to each descriptor. When that descriptor was typed into the respective column the corresponding number appeared in the logical function column. I found this type of coding more manageable and functional as it allowed for mapping the themes based on their fit, as well as a more organized structure that permitted for the auditing of themes.

The first six columns from the matrix were copied and only the values were pasted onto a separate excel spreadsheet. A column (A) was added to this spreadsheet and labeled as participant; this became helpful for step six later in the analysis. The transcript line number was sorted in ascending order so that the data appears in chronological order.

Based on this sorting, the next step was to begin looking for subthemes. A column for sub themes was added as well as a column for the sub theme description. To come up with the sub theme, I went through each line and created corresponding clusters them per participant. A number was assigned to each sub theme. As I went through each case the number of sub themes grew. I also used some other methods of spotting themes, such as, “abstraction (general idea), subsumption (incorporation), polarization (division or opposing) , contextualization , numeration, and function” (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 96-98).

Step Five: Moving to the Next Case. Moving to the next case requires that the researcher suspend herself from one transcript prior to taking on another. Smith, Flowers,

and Larkin (2009) assert that the researcher must disconnect her ideas from the previous transcript before moving on to the next case. That is to say, that the previous case should not guide the analysis of subsequent cases and, generating sub themes for the next case may or may not be similar to the previous case(s).

I chose to use those sub themes that were convergent with those in previous cases. For example, the sub theme of relationships was prevalent amongst all participants; therefore, when it emerged in a subsequent case, I labeled it the same. This was very advantageous when I began looking for patterns across cases. Steps one through five were completed for all cases prior to moving on to step six.

Step six: Looking for patterns across cases. Looking for patterns in this step calls upon a practical application. After completing the matrices for each participant, I developed a master table of themes by taking the nine columns from each of the participant's sub theme clusters (as shown in figure 4). I then went through each line as I did in step four and conducted a cross evaluation of the themes which clearly showcased the super ordinate themes nestled within the broader themes (Smith et al., 2009). As a caveat, participant five provided her interviews in the Spanish language. A translation was not conducted in the matrices per se, but rather mentally so to present the emergent theme and subsequent steps in English. Any direct quotes, used in the narrative, are presented in Spanish followed by an English translation. Figure 4 presents the five superordinate themes that contain the twenty two subthemes.

Presentation of Findings

The findings are presented through the use of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). By using portraiture, the narratives extend further than simply findings.

Portraiture calls for joining social science and art; this is the integration of “empirical description with aesthetic expression” (p. 3). This style compliments the double hermeneutic of IPA. The portraits are assembled based on the researcher’s interpretation of the participant’s interpretation of their life stories. One goal of portraiture is to “capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (p. 3). Another significant aspect of portraiture is to document and present the “goodness” and the “expression [of the participants] strengths” within their lived experiences (p. 3;141). To accomplish this, the researcher is asked to take an optimist position (p. 9). This should not be conflated with the production of a romanticized account; however, an effective portrait will contain a harmonious story which contains the countless characteristics that make up that righteousness.

In Chapter five, I present the portraits of the study participants as they relate to identity. Casilda’s portrait captures what I believe to be a representation of the equity that the authors call for in portraiture. In the portrait titled *An Independent Type of woman*, Casilda shares the rejection she experienced through her “chaotic lifestyle” growing up. She embraced that upbringing so that it became her primary source of survival. Without focusing on failure specifically, I aimed to bring these complexities to the forefront. By doing so I represent how her vulnerability, being molested by a family member as a child, also shaped the woman she would become. Ultimately, this portrait reveals Casilda’s strengths despite her hardships. And therein lies the goodness. Part II of this dissertation contains chapters four through seven. Those chapters are comprised of the compilation of findings which are re-presented through the use of portraiture.

A chapter analysis is provided as the conclusion of each chapter as a means to answer the "so what" question. The analysis is presented with three sections in order to contribute a thorough understanding, to the reader, as to what meaning the portraits have and how this social science research fits within the larger scope of the published literature surrounding their meanings. R.J. Chenail asserts that qualitative research does not have to be difficult at all, in fact, as qualitative researchers, our goal should be to keep things as simple as possible. Furthermore, Chenail suggests a streamlined approach to writing up an analysis; specifically, using the following categories: identify, describe, and analyze (personal communication, April 23, 2014).

Since not all the participant's narratives contributed to every chapter, the identification section sets up the analysis by introducing who said what in the chapter. The description expands on what the participants said that contributes to the overall analysis and ultimately answering the "so what" question. The description includes quotes from the participant's narratives and aids in contextualizing the forthcoming analysis. The analysis displays the qualities of the participants talk and its characteristics. It features a table to assist in how I came to my analysis. For example table 1, found in chapter 5, displays how I came up with my analysis for the chapter on identity. I primarily focused on language (Smith et al., 2009), for this particular section, and found that the participants sought out a peaceful resolution to specific experiences discussed in their narratives. I looked at the stimuli that triggered their response and found that there was a common quality connecting the participant's responses.

Quality Control of this Study

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) argue that the evaluation of qualitative research should be executed using methods tailored to qualitative research rather than the current and more traditional approach originating from quantitative research methods. The authors further advise against the use of "easy-to-use checklists" in order to avoid reducing our research into categories rather than focus on describing the details of our own course (Smith et al., 2009, p. 179). The authors advocate for guidelines to conduct this assessment and cite Yardley's (2000) criteria as a beneficial resource for doing so. These general guidelines served as a comprehensive resource that allowed me to critically reflect on my research experiences. I present these principles below and insert my particular undertakings to demonstrate the validity and quality of my study.

Sensitivity to context. Establishing sensitivity to context can be achieved by many means. Some examples of illustrating such sensitivity can include, but are not limited to: choice of methodology, accessing in-field facilitators, data collection plan(s), execution of data analysis, and connections between my study and scholarly material published on the research topic (Smith et al., 2009). There are subtle and overt occurrences that took place throughout my research process. It is important for me to preserve those moments and proffer them as significant contributions to, not only this study, but to qualitative research as a whole.

Sensitivity to context is evident through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). With IPA, the focus is on individual cases or events in a very specific way. This particularity calls for the researcher to precisely select a research space and explicitly select a sample of participants, thus the homogenous

sample. Executing IPA successfully, requires a serious level of commitment (Smith et al., 2009). For this study, the exploratory trip and the field research experience represents this sensitivity to context. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) also pitch the purposive sampling procedure as sensitivity to context. Because homogeneous purposive sampling coupled with marginalized and stigmatized populations can be difficult to access, gaining entry into the field and securing support from a respected and well established community center leader is "central to the viability" of this project (Smith et al., 2009, p. 180). The exploratory trip and thorough review by the institutional review board as well as the certificate of confidentiality is exemplary towards accomplishing this quality control measure.

This principle can be demonstrated in the study through the thorough review of literature. This includes literature surveyed on theories, content, and methodological approach (Yardley, 2000). I justify my sensitivity to the context by presenting a substantial literature review. To go further, I also establish sensitivity to context by substantiating the research of other scholars as it relates to this particular study. This is often the case in the discussion section of the dissertation. My personal story is presented as the preface as another way to demonstrate my sensitivity to the context.

Commitment and rigor. Commitment and rigor are parallel to demonstrating the “prolonged engagement” to the study (Yardley, 2000, p. 221). By becoming completely immersed in the topic, the researcher’s commitment is more likely to genuinely continue through to the end. This commitment is also showcased through the skillful use of the data collection instrument(s), the analysis, and the corroboration of existing literature on the topic (Yardley, 2000). By choosing to take on the larger end of the sample scale,

according to IPA sampling, rich data was gathered to support a comprehensive analysis. Commitment and rigor are also present through the careful execution of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Themes begin to emerge while paying special attention to the descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments. Handling the data was rigorous and time consuming, which also lends to the commitment allocated to this study. The expansive matrix is an example of the commitment poured into each participant's interview.

Transparency and coherence. For this particular principle, the transparency and coherence lies with the researcher. As Yardley (2000) puts it, “detailing every aspect of the data collection process and the rules used to code data” (p. 222). Furthermore, transparency and coherence in this study would be providing a detailed account of the IPA methods I used to conduct my study as well as reveal the data collection strategies, sampling, interview schedule, and analysis (Smith et al., 2009). The procedure, data collection, and transcription sections all outline all of the important details that exemplify the transparency and coherence of this study. Although reflexivity is optional in interpretative phenomenology, I chose to include my stance on this research in order to enhance the transparency of this study. My personal story as the preface, is used to tell readers why and how I came to conduct this study. Sharing my story was proved useful as a rapport building exercise with the participants as they often asked questions about my life.

Part II: In the *Colonia* of the Mexican single-mother: Lived experiences and making meaning

Chapter 4: Introduction to the Results

"Las mujeres son las grandes olvidadas de la historia. Los libros son la mejor forma de rendirles homenaje"

"Women are largely forgotten from history. Books are the best way to pay them tribute"

-Elena Poniatowska

Social Context

One can pass by *El Portaje* without even knowing it. The black tar interstate is the main artery running through the Southwest States. *El Portaje* sinks into the tall sun-kissed grass that acts like a shield around its exterior. The juxtaposition between Americana and *Mexicana* is enveloped with the tall grass reminding me of ‘amber waves of grain’ and streets named after American presidents. There are small Mexican restaurants decorating the landscape, the predominately Mexican, Spanish-speaking, population always greeting wherever I went, and the expansive presence of the *Rio Grande*.

It has a small town feel with only one exit and entrance into town from the interstate and an alternative route via Main Street. Along this stretch of road, which runs parallel to the *Rio Grande*, you continue to see the negotiated American/Mexican space a Sonic Burger, Wells Fargo Bank, Mc Donald’s, *La Feria* Supermarket, Roosters, and, to add, a low security prison nestled between two states. The Spanish Colonial architecture, the abundance of land surrounding it, and the beautiful mountains as the backdrop, disguises this particular landmark. You would have to know that it is a prison or drive slowly enough to see the simple road sign that reads “Federal Correctional Institution”.

I finally made my arrival into *El Portaje* during the summer of 2012. It was an evening in late July; I arrived at *El Centro* and met with *Estrella*, the Director there. She greeted me with a big smile; I later found that she wore it permanently. She welcomed me, my niece, and my three-year old daughter and showed us where we would be staying. The living quarters, was a house that became the original *Centro*. When the new *Centro* was built, the original dwelling was used as extra space to host a variety of educational visits and other events. It was spacious; it had a bedroom with two twin beds, a seating area with a futon and television. There was an enclosed office area, a full restroom with stand-up shower, a large kitchen with enough space for a dining set and casual seating. There was another room that was set-up conference style. Multiple tables create a rectangular shape with fold out chairs lining its exterior. The whiteboard exposes the attention that others before me have given it with the evidence left behind by the dry erase marker's refusal to part ways.

During that meeting, *Estrella* mentioned that the *Centro* was in its last week, of the semester, for the personal enrichment classes and that they would not resume until the fall. This was important because those classes were essentially the foundation of my recruitment strategy. Like any good field researcher, adapting and overcoming is a necessary trait. *Estrella* mentioned that I was welcomed to sit in on the last couple of days of classes and I accepted thinking that, at the very least, I would gain some insight.

The following morning my niece and daughter came along and we joined the ladies at the *Centro*. I enjoyed conversations with the women they ranged from their personal experiences in these classes to commenting on how they enjoy my daughter's gregarious qualities. We soon became absorbed in conversations surrounding my visit

and they asked similar questions that I later received from the participants of the study. They wanted to know about me and my interests in *El Portaje*. I explained that I was conducting a study where I was seeking to talk to single-mothers. I then assured them that my purpose is to shed light on the stories that seem to get overshadowed by other incidents of poignancy and pity. This was responded to, by those women, as something positive and needed, as something that “no one talks about”.

After building rapport with this group of women, they began sharing stories of women they knew to be single-mothers; daughters and friends. One woman shared that her daughter was a single-mother. Her daughter had suffered the unfortunate circumstance of a cheating husband and was left to care for her three children alone. She seemed to admire my work because, according to her, the dominant story, albeit within these communities, was that single-mothers took on that status due to their participation in amorous relationships with married men. While none of these particular women were single-mothers themselves, nor did I gain participants from these efforts, this experience lent great perspective for the possibility of having the privilege of interviewing a woman with this background. My recruitment strategies took on a more active approach, to say the least.

Every morning we awoke to the sound of vibrant music and, like clockwork, every evening we were welcomed with the same sound. When I inquired about it, *Estrella* told me that it was the Zumba classes that were offered there during the week. She also suggested that this may be a great recruiting alternative to my previous plan, I agreed. My niece was eager to participate in this activity and my daughter was more than willing to explore the music’s origins. Taking part in the Zumba classes became our short

term routine. Not only were they satisfying in a health sense, but they also yielded two ambitious participants, the first, Maria and second, Laria.

We continued the Zumba classes and I began the interviews with these women. I also quickly realized that I was not getting interested participants from the subsequent Zumba classes. I decided that I would take a walk and explore the community a bit. There was a Catholic church very close to the *Centro* it had a grand presence; with the likes of a historic landmark. While calmly taking in the architecture and exterior décor, I was approached by one of the priests. He asked if I needed help and I responded by telling him that I was curiously admiring the parish design and sacred adornments. He proceeded to give me a very humble tour of the layout and asked about what brought me there. I told him about my academic endeavors and he continued to describe the church's spiritual spaces. Once inside, he introduced me to the office staff and provided them with an overview of what brought me to *El Portaje*. He asked if they happened to know any single-mothers and they kindly replied "no father".

We moved to the kitchen where the aromatics of a delicious meal were being prepared. The priest introduced me to the woman who stood near the stove cooking up the feast. She was outfitted with a floral apron and a gentle smile. The priest once again explained my purpose. He asked her if she knew of any single-mothers and she replied *no padre*, "*las mujeres que yo conozco están casadas, gracias a Dios*" meaning "no father, the women that I know are married, thank God. He offered me something to eat and before I could reply he asked the friendly woman to serve-up some *arroz con leche* – a traditional Mexican rice pudding. We sat across from one another in the dining room; the center of the table was decorated with a large platter filled with fresh fruit. I enjoyed my

arroz con leche as we shared stories from our childhood. Our conversation ended with a recommendation from the hospitable priest. He advised me to meet another individual on staff, who worked in a separate building. I humbly excused myself and made the short walk across the road.

It was a small office with two large desks occupying most of the space. The woman there received me in the same manner everyone had in *El Portaje*, with open arms and an eagerness to be of help. I discussed, with her, what my plans were during the time that I was there. She too found that this study was of importance, relevant, and acknowledged its uncommonness. She asked me to give her a couple of days because she had a few women in mind, but due to the nature of their circumstances, she would need to delicately facilitate the introduction. After checking in with her she informed me that she had one woman with whom I could count on. She asked me to meet her at the church so that I could follow her to meet *Esperanza*, the third participant.

I was excited to see that my calendar was filling up with times to interview these women; however, I grappled with the anxiety of not having the exact number of participants that I had set out to recruit. It is possible that these feelings stemmed from being a novice researcher and as an unseasoned academic I relied on what I had read which did not prepare me for how I would feel. As my own self-preserving mechanism and perhaps paradoxically, many times I reminded myself that if I only moved forward with the two women that would be okay. In between the interviews, I would write out my notes, entertain my niece and daughter, and check-in with *Estrella*. During one of those visits, *Estrella* mentioned that she knew of one woman that may be a match for my study. She asked me to talk to one of the volunteers at the *Centro* and he could make contact

with her. He called her right away and she replied positively with this request. We scheduled the first interview almost immediately and that is when I met Casilda, she joined the study as the fourth participant.

After our first interview, Casilda told me that she had a friend in mind who may be willing to participate. She told me that she would contact her, explain the study, and if she's interested, she would bring her to the next interview. After the second interview with Casilda, She sent her friend a text message asking her to come and meet me. Rosita became the fifth woman to participate in the study, she was also the youngest. In the end, it all worked out and I was grateful for the diversity in the women's experiences and age.

In capturing the answer to a relatively simple research question, there were five major themes that surfaced. Within each theme there were several sub-themes that represent each major theme in various ways. The sub-themes and major themes have been collectively presented as portraits; they highlight the dynamic complexities that bring meaning to the participant's lived experiences. The themes are expanded upon in a narrative fashion and occupy the larger space of *El Portaje*; it funnels down to the space of *El Centro* and further down to the lives of the women who graciously allowed me into their lives.

Meet the participants

Maria. Maria had fair skin which was complimented by her amber brown hair. Her face was pleasant; she had a delicate nose with thin lips and while her eyes were proportionate with her face, they were big with expression and emotion. They watered when an emotional cord was struck, they moved with the animations of her face, and at times they would slowly close as she took in a moment of silence. These features

matched the way she gingerly talked about her lived experiences. Her voice had an engaging monotone quality. She spoke with an assertive reconciliation; I was convinced that she was at peace with everything that she had experienced in her life.

Maria became a single-mother after finding out that her husband was having an amorous relationship with another woman; this was while she was nine months pregnant with her third son. Her knowledge of his infidelity sparked a remarkable assertiveness. At times Maria would surprise me with her emotions when retelling the story of how and when she confronted her husband and his mistress. She restates this experience with assertion and confidence, but the pain of becoming a single-mother lies in having to see her children grow without “the balance of two parents”. Throughout her narrative Maria takes me on an emotion-filled journey. Although Maria has adopted a motto of “what’s next”, she has been mindful to savor those important moments and therefore, everything that she shared was sincerely expressed as coming from a place of genuine significance.

Laria. Laria met her husband in Mexico during frequent trips that she made to enjoy the nightlife scene. She fell in love and married young. After eight years of marriage, Laria became a single-mother to her two sons. Her husband died as a result of an automobile accident. He was impaired due to his preference in alcohol consumption. From that day on Laria expressed feelings of “anger” and “loneliness”. Physically Laria was not alone, she had live in help. There was a young girl who came to live with Laria and her family to help with the boys. This was an arrangement that Laria had negotiated with her husband who had been reluctant about Laria working outside of the home. Laria affectionately calls this young girl “the blessing girl.”

Laria took care of her appearance. Not only did she find physical activities to be part of her health conscious effort, but she also felt that looking good was important. Working with children did not afford Laria the opportunity to always look her best, but she managed to make the most of these sporadic glamorous moments. Every Sunday Laria attended mass and on those days she likes “to go very pretty to church because I have a lot of pretty clothes and like I don't go out anymore so I just wear my high heels”. On the day of our last scheduled interview, Laria invited me to her parents’ house; this was part of her post mass ritual on Sundays. I met her in the church parking lot after that morning’s mass. She saw me before I saw her and she called my name, I heard “Diana” and when I turned she stood there waving.

Laria was wearing a sage colored ankle length pencil skirt that complimented her physique. Her beautiful high heels matched the neutral colors of her floral blouse. Her flawless make-up accentuated her most prominent features. The rouge seemed to be applied with the purpose of highlighting her already eye-catching cheek bones. Her dark eyes were emphasized with just the right amount of beauty enhancing cosmetics. Laria had thick black hair that remained tamed in a clip. On this particular day she wore it down, her hair laid just past her shoulders; the wide waves in her hair were on display and so was her poise.

Casilda. I was introduced to Casilda through the *Centro*. Casilda maintained a relationship with Estrella and when she could, Casilda would spend her time volunteering. All of our meetings took place in a conference room at the *Centro* and Casilda was one of two participants with whom, for no apparent reason, I did not have the opportunity to spend time with outside of our interview schedules. Casilda was not

interested in choosing a pseudonym; I advised her that I would choose one, at some point, to protect her anonymity. After reading and re-reading her transcript, I concluded that Casilda had a distinct fighting spirit. While she did not directly describe herself as such, I was able to interpret this from her narrative that seemed to be represented in several instances throughout her story.

During our first meeting I presented Casilda with the letter to participate in the study; and when Casilda expressed interest in participating I completed all IRB formalities. Casilda was ready to begin the first interview. According to her there was no need to schedule another time for the first interview, she went on to say “I’m gonna tell you everything that you need to know”. Casilda never deviated from her straightforward approach.

Casilda had big brown eyes and a friendly round face. Her most notable feature was her hands, which captured my attention every time she tapped them on the table. She had long thin fingers that seemed to be extended by her fingernails. They were always well manicured and by the sound of the tapping, they matched her strong spirit. She was about six months pregnant at the time of our interviews and carried the girth of a health pregnancy.

Casilda’s narrative is fascinating; mostly because of her steady account of her lived experiences. She tells about her challenges as a child, the deceit by those who she trusted and loved, and the difficult decisions that are marked by unforgettable and significant milestones. Her unwavering spirit is commanded by her intentional and unapologetic presence.

Rosita. Rosita was the youngest of all the participants; in her early twenties, Rosita embodies her youth. She had a slender build and flawless appearance. Her lived experiences dictated her maturity, which surpassed her age. Rosita was soft spoken, but carried her narrative with conviction. She shared stories of her childhood in Mexico and her feelings surrounding her desires for the transnational life she once lived.

Although Rosita only participated in the first interview, she opened up about many personal encounters. She valued and honored the relationship with her mother; she discussed her father's role in her life, and the admiration that she held for her grandfather who she considered to be a father figure to her. Rosita became a mother at the age of eighteen. For Rosita, being a mother means that she provides her daughter with a harmonious life consisting of her joyous childhood experiences and those considered to be ripe for her daughter's age.

Esperanza. Esperanza's physical appearance deceived her age; she was in her mid-forties. She wore her life's struggles like war wounds. Her skin was dark brown and leathery in texture; it reflected the time that she had shared with the sun. Esperanza walked with a limp due to her near fatal epileptic seizure and when her balance was unreliable, she used a cane. Her hair was dark brown, thick, and at shoulder length. It showed no sign of delicateness and it was her most profound feature. Her eyes represented the uniformity of her other features, they were dark brown in color, but they reflected her inner optimism.

Esperanza's interviews took place at her home. The first day that I met her, she eagerly agreed to begin the first interview. She told me about how they go without food and water sometimes and that particular evening she had been without water. As she

talked about her thirst she stoked her throat. I thought to myself “I cannot leave here without offering water, it is a human need”. I asked her to give me her five-gallon jugs and she handed me two. I put them in the car and told her that I would return with them filled. I placed my daughter in the back seat and my niece sat in the front. I took a deep breath; none of us really knew what to say. I turned the radio on only to have the tears that I had been holding back, welcomed to the sound of Carrie Underwood’s distinguished voice singing, “Jesus take the wheel”.

We sat outside for most of the interviews. The dry summer heat made it hotter indoors than outdoors. In the evenings the sun went down and allowed the fresh air to sweep across our sweat-beaded skin. Esperanza lived in an architecturally eclectic neighborhood. There were homes that were in poor shape with various odd materials imposing on the façade, there were homes that looked like they came out of a middle to upper class neighborhood complete with the details of an opulent décor, and there were many homes like Esperanza’s – trailer homes. Her home was like the many others that sat on a desert lot. Her home was old and had not seen the care of a carpenter’s hands in many years. It had three steep steps and the integrity of the structure was questionable.

Inside her home, Esperanza showed me the work that was needed in the interior. Much of the insulation was missing around the door frame; she had not had the luxury of gas in many years, she negotiated cold and heat with space heaters and fans. Her kitchen space was simple. A wooden frame held up her kitchen sink and her stove acted as counter space for the electric griddle that she used to cook all her meals. She had a television and two couches in her living room. The couches were overlaid with blankets, perhaps as a way to preserve their wholeness. One had a pink floral décor and the other

was white with little red race cars covering it. One wall was accessorized with two frames that displayed religious adornments.

Esperanza was the only participant who was a Spanish only speaker; therefore her interviews were conducted in Spanish and were not translated. It is my intent to honor the lives of the women who participated; therefore, the orthography of their stories has been preserved.

Chapter 5: Identity Matters

As individuals, we are natural cultivators of identities. From the time that we are born, we become sons and daughters to parents and in some cases, siblings. When we die our headstones are summarized with the most important identities that we held for our loved ones. However, as we live our lives, in between and within each identity there are ever-changing experiences that shape the way we carry out our perceived responsibilities. In this chapter, the focus is on matters (in significant and situational form) surrounding the identities of the participants in this study. There are overt and covert instances, experienced by single mothers living in *Colonias* that they ascribe meaning to. Overall, I aim to present the dynamic lived experiences that shape their identities.

These dynamic lived experiences are presented through three subthemes that come under the superordinate theme of identity. First I will present the portraits of Maria, Laria, and Casilda as they relate to the subtheme of identity. I focus on the narratives that showcase the lived experiences that prompt a transition from one identity to another, highlighting the details that elevate an otherwise nuanced circumstance to a level of complexity. Second, I present the subtheme of preservation – preservation of identity. Laria and Casilda’s narratives display experiences of preservation; whether it is a holiday tradition, as in Laria’s case, or the preservation of self that is evident in Casilda’s narrative. Lastly, the success subtheme is offered for Laria, Casilda, and Esperanza. The concept of success is applied in distinct manners for each of the collaborators. An analysis section concludes the chapter, as a means to compliment the findings.

Identity

Under the subtheme of identity, I present the various ways in which the identities of Maria, Laria, and Casilda unfold. As well as, the lived experiences that propels their identities from being married with children, to single parents. The parenting challenges are instrumental to their perseverance as single parents. They are featured as a phenomena due to the nature in which the collaborators chose to approach there resolve. The way in which the women in this study consider themselves is also of interest. They define themselves in very certain ways that pairs well with their positive frames of mind.

Maria. Maria's portrait begins with the challenges she experienced during her childhood. Those challenges were influential in the way that she took on the role of becoming a mother, then a single-mother. The transitions of Maria's identity were captured through her lived experiences; it was my goal to present the interconnectedness of her experiences as her identity morphed.

As a child, Maria had a winning spirit that came naturally especially when she did what she loved the most, played sports. While in Mexico, Maria played a variety of sports and admits to favoring a no holds barred approach, which was seemingly imbedded in her DNA, "I don't know it was just in our blood to win". Part of her adjustment, upon arriving to the United States, was confronting the sportsmanship rules that, in part, were "don't touch, don't hit". On the field she was competitive, driven, and enthusiastic, but off the field it was difficult to keep up. The longing to be reunited with her father became a melancholic experience.

Everything was different for Maria, from her life as a student at a new school, to her family life at home. Her enthusiasm depleted as she began to realize that "It was kind

of hard for [her] to adapt to having a dad”. Although she looked forward to this reunion, the dichotomy of her life, at this moment, became difficult to balance. She found it necessary to commit to finding a survival strategy on the school front rather than focus on rebuilding a relationship with her father. Those challenges were imprinted within her as she continued to grow into a young adult and ultimately it meant that her younger-self always followed.

Maria’s childhood experiences influenced the person she would become. The uncertainty of transferring from a Mexican school system to an American one built up a host of uncertainty which was transported with her as an adult, “I’m still somehow you know that way um I am very conscious about my accent”. The thread of insecurity became part of who she would become as a married woman. In that role, Maria was "very insecure and dependent of [her] ex-husband". This played a large role when she contemplated divorce. Maria carefully and strategically planned for her next move.

Maria remembers the exact moment when she faced the triumphant challenge of raising her sons on her own. She notes “when my ex-husband left me for another woman, I was eight months pregnant”. While her ex-husband was working on abandoning his family, Maria was negotiating with her assigned identity. The physical and emotional rejection was not the obvious tell-tell sign, but rather his actions and inactions that created their homeless experience helped her conclude that he “would [not] care for my kids”. This became evident when he liquidated their shared bank account and stopped paying the mortgage. Shortly after, he unscrupulously arranged the short sale of their property. Maria was approached with one thousand dollars which represented her share of the sale. Upset and insulted, she struggled to find a way out of this immediate

situation, but as she had always done, she generated strength from her childhood experiences and embraced the support from her family.

Aside from the physical separation, Maria had to put in the work to move forward with an official departure as a married woman. Maria's firm Catholic beliefs dictated the path that would result in her identity as a single-mother. These beliefs meant that she had an obligation to seek permission for her request to divorce. She searched for the confidence to move forward through the consultation of biblical scriptures. Maria worked tirelessly to get confirmation from the Bible and once she did, she peacefully accepted her newfound identity. She invested her energy, focus, and purpose into her children. During those child-rearing years, the insecurity that was born out of her childhood experiences faded into the background and was replaced by confidence.

Maria commands a tenacity that she applies to her upbringing in Mexico. Being Mexican "means that you know what that's what makes me strong because you go through different kind of struggles in Mexico you know but you learn to survive". Maria's meaning making comes across as sink or swim; there is a rougher and tougher landscape that dictates the circumstances in form of an obstacle course and one must take agency in getting through each and every hurdle. Maria leaned on those early experiences to build the resilience that she needed to prosper as a single-parent.

As a single-parent Maria shared a few of the challenges that greeted her as she was getting adjusted to her new role. As a single parent, she felt conflicted because she didn't have the skills needed to go out into the workforce and against her cultural beliefs; she "would get a little money from the government". This assistance allowed her to go to school to gain those necessary skills, over a period of five years, while also being

available to her children. She continued to build her confidence, as a mother, during these critical five years, Maria began working and she experienced the demands of the working parent. “That’s when my routine changed because I depended on my mom and on babysitters”, this dependence created a cycle that demanded a careful balance between the time that she put into work and the time that she devoted to her children. There was also another side that Maria was trying to balance and that was her personal needs. Maria surrendered her responsibilities, temporarily, by enjoying nightlife entertainment. Releasing the week’s stressors meant that she left her children in the capable care of her parents; however, that did not come without a price. Sleeping in after a night of fun was not an option because she had three little boys that demanded her attention. Maria shared, “I learned from my dad you know you wanted to have fun night you pay the price”. Her responsibilities as a single parent were clear and those late nights and early mornings added needless hardship to her already challenged situation. She continued to dedicate herself entirely to her children.

She threw herself eagerly into her declared obligation of parenting. Maria applied a sincere meaning of that duty. After putting in long days at work, some days required that she make a stop for groceries or other household needs. Her sons had spent the day in the care of their maternal grandparents, not wanting to spread their patience thin, Maria would pick them up and travel to the store. She strategically used a double stroller and a child harness. Her second son, the middle child, had a character that was very energetic coupled with inquisitiveness; his rambunctious nature was the reason for his limited approval to walk through the store, albeit in the harness. His older and younger brother complacently rode in the stroller. Knowing that she would undoubtedly be challenged by

at least one of her son's, Maria embraced these occurrences as learning and teaching opportunities. Tantrums were responded to, assertively "we're gonna have a talk and you're not gonna like it" replied Maria to her son who was inconsolable, during one of these shopping trips, "he got quiet he was like "uh oh mom means business". An alternative and perhaps and swift remedy may have been more straightforward especially if there were strangers judging her inability to adequately diffuse the tantrum and perhaps others wishing they could step in and give her a hand. She would not give in to the pressure of the audience nor did she resort to the hasty discipline of spanking "It was tempting just to spank him and I go no there's gotta be another way" instead she reached deep inside for a more permanent solution. Her plans to countermeasure these episodes were open communication and age appropriate options. "I had to teach him you know, you can tell me what you want but I might not say yes all the time but I can give you choices". Maria implemented a win-win plan; she divided her grocery list between herself and her sons. She told them exactly what she needed and they would bring it back to her. After the scavenger hunt they were rewarded with their opportunity to pick "certain cereals or a certain snack that they liked" she took advantage of these trips and the fact that she captivated their interest, to teach them finance and time management at their young age. When they made visits to a department store, they were allotted time and money to pick something of their liking. She made sure to set these rules right away "I give you 10 minutes to pick a toy I give you \$5.00 and then you pick nothing else but was ever is \$5.00". Maria recognized that "it was challenging but it's good to say that when the day was over it was like yes I did it!" She turned her situation around; she taught

herself to apply a positive discipline style that would teach them responsibility and cooperation.

Maria's sons responded to well to her strategic parenting and Maria knew that this was a path worth continuing. It was part of what she believed in "I try to communicate and that's how I tell my kids to do I don't agree with violence". Her strategy of creating a peaceful space meant that she had a weekly family meeting and that was their "time to talk at least once a week". This open communication was reinforced with reminders of affection "we make sure to say I love you" and a concrete distribution of responsibilities was discussed in case of an emergency, her thinking was to "just have a plan". Her sons learned how to be alert for anything unusual around the house. A bump in the night would prompt her oldest to get out of bed and patrol the interior of the house, with a bat. He took on the role of protecting his family through Maria's continued expression of the importance of family.

The significance of caring for the family as a reciprocal responsibility became a tenet in Maria's home. Maria's forth son joined the family twelve years ago. Her experience as a single parent and her older son's imbedded sense of responsibility brought on an inclusive and unique approach towards raising him "with my little one it's all of us.....we're teaching him". With her youngest son, Maria found the support that she had planted in her son's when it came to rearing her youngest "if my boys are home, they take care of him".

Her "own little world" had worked out well for Maria despite her early challenges she found the strength and reliance on the family values that she built and enforced, they were not without sacrifice however, "I've gone through a lot you know and mistakes that

I've done that has cost me heart aches but like I told you.....you know, I just face life head on just what's next". Looking back Maria can appreciate those efforts "at first it's hard but now it's more gratifying I feel that there's a lot of rewards that I can say it's only mine sometimes when it's two parents it's hard to know what part you did right and what part you didn't do right".

There is no going back and pondering what could have been done Maria is strong and certain about how she raised her sons. These lived experiences contributed to the continued evolution of her better self. The identity of a single-parent was a hidden treasure for Maria "if I had not been a single parent I would still probably be a housewife and not push myself to go to school....I wanted to prove to my kids that I could be a role model". She embraced the future as a divorcée and with certainty she enthusiastically declared "it's been good". In her presence, a quiet pride is witnessed through her jovial spirit and in the calm tone in her voice "you have your husband sometimes you don't push yourself that extra to become a better person". The conflicted status of deciding how to approach divorce produced a constructive outcome. The patience and thoroughness transcended into her parenting commitment. She pushed herself to become the better person that she wanted to represent to her children.

Maria's children were the reason for her transformation into the role model that she sought out to be for them and the person that she wanted to be for herself. Her parenting strategies resulted in her success and the purpose for the meaning that she ascribes to it "It means the world to me it means I guess everything it means the thing that I've ever done that's why you know when I see it coming to an end I get sad.....I wish I could go back in time when they're little again". Being a parent was effortless to

express, but explaining the meaning of being a single-parent was a feat. Maria admits that she never paid much attention to that identity, while she was living it; it was only at the time of this interview that she was willing to reflect on her experiences. "I don't know it's just I guess I never thought about it because I never thought what meaning is there being a single parent I just focused on what's next everyday it was just a challenge especially when you're limited like at the beginning when I first got divorced". There wasn't room for Maria to stop and reflect on the meaning of being a single-parent, much less to drown in self-pity. This was the time to be proactive, embracing, and strong. Any fears that she may have been confronted with had to be concealed. She knew that in order to raise strong children she had to exude the same. "I learned to put a strong face for my boys so they can get respected because I knew that my boys would probably go through what I went through so I had to teach them that I was going to be both dad and mom". Being "both dad and mom" de-gendered her role as a parent.

Time passed, making Maria uneasy about the prospects of her children no longer needing her. Her role as a mother was ending as she saw it and coming to grips with that prompted her to evaluate her course; "Having this time off feels good now that I've accepted it". Embracing the inevitable was the only way that Maria knew she could begin to make herself a priority. She welcomed the opportunity to engage in and develop a friendship with a male who ultimately became a relevant companion, in her life, as she searched and defined her individual jubilation. "I started experiencing what happiness is apart from my boys, of course a different kind of happiness cause you know I felt like my boys are my happiness but this was my different my I don't know how to say it my individuality making it my own happiness without having to share it". She rediscovered

the natural beauty of the outdoors. Taking long walks meant she would stop to steep in the organic environment and become reacquainted with nature's colors and textures. "I started noticing wow, look how beautiful the trees are the different smells and the flowers and the sun the sunrise the sunsets, the smiles of people". This was an awakening that fueled her personally and filled a gap that complements her embodied felicity.

Despite this breakthrough, Maria continues to be haunted by the need to consult the little girl within. "I have to go back to being a child... that teenager... that woman... a single woman. I have to go back again as a child and remind myself who I am as a person and I'm still the same little girl inside of me I see myself still insecure. That's something that I really haven't dealt with and you know fixed it but I still it comes to me when I'm making decisions making balance in my life I go back to that where do I fit in".

This evaluation of self is consistent throughout Maria's story. Once again Maria would be visited by the uneasiness of a seamless transition. She had mixed emotions as she awaited the birth of her first grandchild. While she was mostly excited, the uncertainty about how she would fit in brought on a calm sense of worry. "I don't know what my role is gonna be in it you know how....what am I gonna be allowed and not to do and I don't like that feeling". She understood and respected that her son now had his own family and that it would be up to him and his wife to determine how much she would be involved. "I'm either all in or nothing at all I'm very extremist when it comes to that I don't like half ways I guess it's the control thing", says Maria assertively.

There's a more significant and perhaps hidden identity that was buried underneath all that came with becoming a mother, and then a single-mother. Being a woman also meant being an individual, but Maria inherently consults another part of her. Often times

“I have to go back again as a child and remind myself who I am as a person and I’m still the same girl inside of me I see myself still insecure”. This tug-of-war of sorts is something that Maria still struggles with and continues to work on.

Maria’s perspective on being a single parent is one of advice and revelation. Her lived experiences bring about a self-appreciation for her methods in raising her family. Her most important virtue for having successfully raised three boys was “just being vigilant make sure that they were not hanging out with the wrong crowd” because “you’re giving them a good source all this information is from a good source”. Staying informed is also important, Maria mentions “if you just stay ignorant you cannot fulfill the parenting you’re gonna be a parent no matter what but the more you educate yourself the more you can help your kids”. Being armed with education is used as reinforcement for being able to intervene when needed “we have to be making sure that we’re the first force they come to or they can get information from”. This was something that Maria added to her repertoire of advice after using her personal experience with bullying and her educated knowledge to come to her son’s rescue.

Her steady vigilance revealed that her son was going through his own challenge with bullying. She noticed that there were other youths attempting to influence her son into joining a gang. After her efforts of talking to him about this failed, she decided that she would join him for lunch, at school one day. She had an unassuming conversation with him, but she was very well on alert. Her hypersensitivity to her surroundings allowed her to decipher who the individuals were and what they wanted. She then went to the principal’s office and explained, very directly, about what her concerns were and how no action meant that the school would be held accountable. She left and later realized that

she was successful in her efforts. These were the type of strategies that Maria describes as sometimes being cumbersome.

Her initial perception of parenting was “I was looking at it more like a burden and you know because at first it was too much responsibility for me”. Reflecting on her parenting now, Maria describes it as an investment considering that her boys are grown up. “It’s hard to accept your kid’s decisions especially when you put too much into it too much effort too much detail”. Her hopes now are that her tactics with parenting are permanently implanted within her children. “I have to trust that whatever they learned at home they be able to use it now”. The return on her investment would be to see her children succeed with the tools she taught them.

Maria is realistic about the prospects of her children making their own choices and going against her current. She’s clearly aware because it has happened “when they start making decisions you’re like what that’s not what I had planned for you.” This realization turned into a preservation of her identity as a mother. Maria wants to preserve her position with her standard of ideals. She wants to see them exude independence and exercise their individuality. While sharing a short scenario with me, Maria explained that her eldest son lives with his wife, at her mother’s house. She knows that he understands it’s not the best living arrangement, but it will do for now. Her experiences of struggle forced her to make quick decisions for the betterment of her family and her expectations for him are similar. “I’m just anxious you know like come on when are you gonna do it, but I have to be patient and let it happen whenever he thinks it’s perfect”. Her overall feelings about the reality of letting go are seemingly natural for those who can relate, “I don’t want them to [grow] I just kinda want to put ’em in a little box and keep them all in

there”. The preservation of her identity as a mother is an extension of the preservation that she has applied to the identity of herself.

When Maria found out of her husband’s extra marital affair, she was not only determined to get biblical approval to divorce her unfaithful husband, but she was also purposeful in her actions in confronting the mistress. She wanted to make sure that the ‘other woman’ knew that she was getting involved with a married man. At eight months pregnant with her third son, Maria approached the woman’s doorstep; Maria was greeted by the woman’s mother and she welcomed her in, almost facilitating this meeting; she allowed Maria to wait inside. Shortly after, Maria’s husband and the mistress arrived; Maria took this as the ripe moment to expose her husband’s deception. As her husband became unraveled by this unwanted surprise, the mistress asked Maria to take a ride with her. While riding together in one car, Maria’s husband was following in another in a fit of rage he resorted to attempting to run them off the road and firing rounds from his gun. Maria’s goal of protecting her own identity meant that she faced the threats resulting from this confrontation. In all, Maria’s purpose was completed and her conclusion of him was one of selfishness “he just didn’t want me to tell the girl you know about me and about what he was doing that he was still married”. She was not entirely satisfied with what had happened it was as though she felt as a bit of a failure “this is not what I wanted for my kids I just wanted a balanced life with two parents so once in a while when I see them I just think it’s unfair sometimes”. Throughout her life demands, such as this one, Maria figured out ways to evaluate her situation and potentially avoid heartache.

Throughout her storytelling, Maria provides multiple methods for taking a pulse check on her situation. Early on, Maria realized that there was a pro versus con approach

to the way that she preferred to view a particular situation. Relying on her theological ideology, “I go back to see if it’s a blessing or a burden” says Maria. Her check-in practices also evolved as her parenting strategies demanded. She takes accountability of her role “I pay attention to messages that I get it’s like just to keep an ear open”. As the matriarch in her family she made sure that she did not miss anything relevant to her children’s lives or the daily operations of her home; “if I miss something if I didn’t do something that can happen so I was always on guard making sure that I was fulfilling my role”. She promotes an inclusive technique in executing overall collectivity in her home “even with my boys if I notice that they’re just you know they appreciate what I do for them they give me feedback I always got them used to that that they need to let me know when I need to do something”. These are the creeds of her prosperous home.

Maria also identifies herself as successful. She attributes this success mostly to her childhood and her own upbringing. Being raised by a single-mother and harassed by children for not having a father, then suddenly being whisked off to another country, she craved balance. She wanted her children to have a stable and loving home where their voices mattered, so in taking ownership of her family, she deliberately defined what family was to her. “See immediate family to me my kids you know I make my own world in my house”. In this ‘world’ she decided how she wanted to construct a foundation for initiating, creating, and embracing achievements; “in my life there is um I guess my personal success and there is a success to see my kids succeed”. Maria prides herself in being successful with her parenting her subtle interference with her son’s bullying plight, was just one example of how she ascribes herself as successful. This was particularly important for her because “there is a lot of gang members and a lot of self-destructive

kids you know and to see that they kinda listened you know and they wanted my guidance so I succeeded on that”. Her children rewarded her by responding to her approach. Her desire to have a home that was unlike hers as a child, meant that she succeeded. Her thriving household leaves her reflecting and responding with “in a way I’m glad that I did it by myself”.

Laria. Laria did not have an ordinary childhood. Along with her entire family, Laria migrated to the United States from Mexico. Laria does not describe this as a troublesome journey; her father had been working in the United States under the Bracero program. While here, he managed to make all the necessary arrangements to bring his family from Mexico. This was an unforgettable move as this would be the last time that Laria would make Mexico her home, but there was also another memorable reason. It was November 22, 1963 when Laria and her family crossed the border in their family vehicle, soon after their entry into the United States; all border access was shut down. The news that president John F. Kennedy was shot had instantly paralyzed the nation.

Laria was grateful that her family was united and looked forward to what this country had to offer. Her father continued working and her mother stayed home. Her relationship with her parents was somewhat neutral, but Laria does confess that she “wasn’t a good daughter”, “I would fight with my mom” continues Laria. This was perhaps due to typical adolescent behavior or possibly due to how she perceived her mother, as unwilling to stand up to an abusive husband. As a young person Laria described herself as “just an ordinary person that did not value life the way I value it now”. Her youth consisted of frequent trips to *Juarez* where the nightlife was abundant,

friends were plenty, and fun was there to be had. Her identity as a young person was on the carefree side.

On one of those trips to *Juarez*, Laria encountered a Mexican man, about her age, who later became her husband. In traditional fashion, they fell in love, got married, and Laria became pregnant with their first son. It was then that Laria reflected on her relationship with her mother. “The minute that I had my first son you know I understood my mom I understood all the love that my mom had for us I understood all the love that my mom had for us and this is why she stayed with my dad”. This epiphany led Laria to take on a particular identity as a mother “when I became a parent, I didn't see my life anymore as myself but the responsibility of my children”. Laria exchanged her personal identity for that of being a mother. There was less Laria and more mother, just as she had wanted.

Laria's married lifestyle was satisfying for the most part. She encountered the hardships that many relationships do. She managed to find ways to resolve them albeit difficult at times. Laria was a bit more challenged in that she describes her husband as inheriting the “Mexican machismo” trait. Her husband did not want her to work especially after having their second son. She had even had a live-in friend, a young lady, who helped her with her children and household chores. Suddenly, Laria's life circumstances would change. Her husband's allegiance to alcohol betrayed him on the day that he decided to get behind the wheel of his vehicle. An alcohol-induced car accident left Laria a widow, at twenty-eight years old, and a single-parent to two young boys.

Laria was willed to be and exemplify the best parenting that she could. She still had help from the young girl who had been living with her, whom Laria calls a “blessing”, but she could not help feel distraught and lost with this sudden hand that she had been dealt. The only way that Laria found solace was through her faith in God. She believed that her sons were a gift from God and that she could do “something good” as a parent to them. She identifies with this as being “very hard but you have to be a fighter there's always solutions out there there's always ways to better yourself you can't just give up on your child”. She found ways to make the days not feel as long and gave herself time to grieve the loss of her husband.

She was in full swing with her identity as a single-parent. She figured out how to make things work for her and her family. After some time went by she became accustomed to being alone with her kids. “I was happy being alone when I had my son's because they were my life”. Her life was consumed with what her sons were doing and with what her responsibilities were as their mother; however, as her son's naturally preceded in age, she realized that she's “seeing them grow growing into men and leaving” and this has her feeling “a little bit selfish” “don't you think so?” she asks.

She too invested a lot of time and love into her children and the change from children to adult men places a void on her identity as a mother. She explains that this change is difficult to accept because the challenges were vast. Unfortunately, alcohol was a mundane part of life for Laria, from her father to her husband; it became a painful vice to rid, especially when her sons became interested in its recreational use. “I was very strict with my oldest son and never permitted him to have any alcohol in the house” Maria explains. She thought that this would deter this curiosity and end the cycle that she

had been regrettably familiar with. Mostly, she tried to avoid the fear of something terrible happening them. When her youngest son decided that he not only wanted to have a relationship with alcohol, but also wanted to flirt with drug use she had to resort to making some real tough decisions. Laria firmly claims that it “was easy being a single-parent” in those cases. “I made the decisions it was me and as my kids were growing older, if I decided to leave my son out in the street, which I did my youngest son, and call the police on him I call the cops or not you know that it was my decision”. Her tough love technique was balanced with forgiveness “that was one of my advantages” as a single-parent, “that if I said c'mon in the doors open to you that was me making decisions”. She did not have to compete, be challenged, or negotiate, with a co-parent surrounding her firm outcomes. Other scenarios became more difficult to take on “the hardest thing was having to talk to my kids about drugs, that was hard because I was never taught. My parents never talked to me about that”. Laria never experimented with drugs nor did her parents openly talk to her about topics that may have been seen as taboo. The model for executing a successful and deliberate course of action had to be created by her.

Aside from the existential part of being a single-parent it is the cognitive part that can potentially derail the spirit of the strong Hispanic mother. “I wasn't ready to be a single-parent” said Laria, “it's awful; it's just awful you really don't know..... there's no way nobody teaches you how to be a parent that's just hard”. If she sat around thinking about it, she would not have been able to exercise the parenting demands that had been solely handed to her. “I just felt that it wasn't fair that I had to raise my boys by myself”. After getting over these initial reactions, she managed to raise two independent hard

working men and learned to be gratified by her experience “what I like about being a single-mother was, I told my boys no it was no I told them yes it was yes there wasn't a contradiction of somebody else like a partner”.

Her rumination has her looking into herself again and recapturing the personal identity that she stored away when she became a mother. She very proudly describes who Laria is “I am very friendly I can make like really quick conversation with somebody. I mean, I can be friendly right away I don't have a problem with that”. I witnessed this quality of Laria’s with her swift willingness to share her story with me. Her physical and mental health is a priority; we met after taking part in a zumba class. She has committed herself to reinvest in Laria – the woman. She sustains herself with weekly doses of the spiritual word and she does so in style. “I like to go very pretty to church because I have a lot of pretty clothes and like I don't go out anymore so I just wear my high heels 'cause to work I don't wear high heels”. After church, on Sunday’s, she continues with her ritual of spending time with her family at her parents’ house. Lunch is provided by her father who stops at a local woman’s house to purchase freshly made *menudo*. She ends her evening with dinner, customarily prepared by her mother.

Laria feels that her deeply rooted Mexican culture has influenced the person that she has become. Being Mexican is part of her identity and as an adult it has provided her with the ability to appreciate who she is as an adult daughter; it has also shaped the relationship that she now has with her parents. “I just feel that you know you help them 'cause it's my culture I've always had my parents they've always help me”. Her parents have played an important role in the unfolding of her identities. She has referred to them

as her “pillars” of strength and concedes that “I wouldn't change anything because this is where I was born, from a Hispanic family”.

Casilda. At the time of this interview, Casilda was in her late twenties. She was a straight forward individual who became interested in sharing her story with me. Casilda was born in the United States, not too far from *El Portaje*. Her parents were from Mexico and came to the United State together. Her childhood seemed riddled with tragedy, but one could not tell by her presence alone.

Casilda emanated a strong spirit one that refused defeat. Trying to get a sense of where she acquired this capacity, I asked about her family and what that meant to her. Her response was remarkable, Casilda had always had a “chaotic lifestyle” and therefore, never really considered herself as having a family. As a child she began living an autonomous life, “I think I've been by myself since I was 13....12....13. I've always been more of the independent female type of woman”. As a child, Casilda had her identity all figured out and she was independent.

This designation was partially forced upon her. Casilda disclosed that, between the ages of seven through nine, she had been repeatedly molested by her paternal grandfather. She never told anyone in her family, until much later. Her relationship with her mother was practically nonexistent. Casilda did not understand why she was out casted by her mother, but there were clearly favorites. Her older brother was preferred over all of her siblings and her sisters were chosen over her. Her frequent requests to her mother, asking to be taught how to cook, were rejected; however, her sisters were taught. And in her resilient style Casilda responded, “fine don't teach me I don't care I'm gonna find a way”. That has been her fundamental motto.

Her relationship with her mother was further strained when Casilda became pregnant at the age fourteen. Her mother was not pleased and this created the distance between the two greater. However, with the help of her father, the father of her child, and along with Casilda's perseverance, Casilda completed her high school requirements and graduated early. Unfortunately, the relationship with the father of her son did not withstand and they separated. Later her mother passed away causing Casilda physical and emotional symptoms of pain. Casilda would never have a relationship with her mother, her passing meant that it was final and opportunity for reconciliation was gone. "[I] can't say I have forgiven her for getting mad at me because I got pregnant".

This news was difficult for Casilda to take and her description of her lifestyle as "chaotic" was proving to be too much for her to handle. Only six months after the passing of her mother, Casilda's father had moved on romantically. He married a woman and subsequently had a daughter out of that relationship. At the onset of this relationship, Casilda felt that it was too much for her to handle and fall back into a dark place. As a means to cope with overwhelming feelings stemming from molestation, Casilda would cut herself in order to feel relief. She had not resorted to cutting as an adult, but when she found herself at a crossroads with her relationships, she began cutting once again. This moment of weakness was translated as an opportunity to take advantage of Casilda. The father of her oldest son challenged her ability to be a fit parent, in court, and he was granted full custody of their son. As a result Casilda says, "we didn't grow together we didn't have that time to bond".

Later, Casilda had met and married a man with whom she had developed a great relationship. At the age of twenty-two Casilda gave birth to her second son. After being

there for him and supporting him with his educational goals, Casilda felt the thorn of betrayal when her husband began an amorous relationship with her friend and neighbor. After two unsuccessful relationships, Casilda is a single-parent.

In an effort to mitigate her situation, she decided that a roommate would be helpful to share the expenses with. She took in a male roommate and one unmemorable night, due to drinking, they had a sexual encounter. “This is really sad, but yeah I got drunk with my roommate and there was no feelings there”. That one nightstand resulted in her pregnancy with her third child. A child that he had no intention of claiming, his response after being notified was, “I’m not gonna be a father again”. Shortly after, Casilda decided that the roommate agreement had to cease and they would go their separate ways.

Throughout this ordeal with her roommate, visitations with her oldest son became painful, physically and emotionally. Her son had developed an abusive streak against her and she had to face yet another unsettling event. She came to the conclusion that she could no longer take his abuse, especially since she was pregnant and had to care for her youngest son. If there was a day when a mother had to show her human strength, mother’s day was it. On mother’s day of 2012, Casilda not only evicted her roommate - the father of her unborn child, but she also had to cut her ties with her oldest son. “My choice was like you know what this is gonna end. I’m sorry son, I love you and all but you know what you can’t get your act together”.

It seems undeniable that this independent identity is what defines who Casilda is and how she navigates her situations. Betrayed by family and lovers, Casilda was left to rely on herself. She hangs on to her seven-year-old son; he is the most steady and reliable

person in her life. “He knows what he has to do I don't have to be asking him over and over there is that bond between us where we're close together I'm not that close with my dad or anybody in the family”. As a single parent, he is what keeps her heading in the right direction “[if his dad were to take him away] to me it's like taking part of my life. It's like taking a part of me for my motivation part of my....to me it's enthusiasm part.....of my moving on”. Through her son, she has a reason to be happy and move on with a positive regard for life.

Casilda has found this confidence in moving forward, with her son, she considers her independent identity as something crucial . “To me being independent is, you work hard for what you want. You work hard for what you wanna get your kids and you move forward whether somebody likes it or not whether somebody supports you or not”. There are no obstacles placed on Casilda by anyone else. Any unmet goals are still attainable, “I honestly think I would've had my master's degree. I've always been interested in aerospace technology so I'm pretty sure that it would've been some kind of engineering degree technology degree”. This is stated in a tone that translates into - in her own time she will manage to realize her ambitions.

The current reality of being a single-parent means that Casilda has to create the best environment for her child as well as for her unborn child. Her role as a parent is split between her and her son's father. She strives to provide the best for her son. She's not particularly in a strong financial position, but she always make sure that she has the essentials. “To me it's important that he knows that hey you know whatever I do there's always gonna be something else I can do. It's always gonna be something else that my mom can offer to me and to me it's more about that security because I want him to have

that security and him to have that trust and confidence that hey my mom does have money”.

If Casilda considers herself as not having a family, aside from the one that she has created, then it is understandable, that on a cultural level, Casilda is not too connected with her Mexican heritage. She does not label herself as Mexican because according to her “to me, my dad and my mom used to be Mexicans. To me, Mexicans are people who crossed the border and try to survive however they can”. Casilda was born in the United States; therefore, she would be considered American, but she doesn’t necessarily allow it to define who she is “I don't know why, no sometimes I'm Mexican, but sometimes I'm too high tech and then sometimes I'm like too white and sometimes they're like are you blond and I'm like no I'm just a mixture of everywhere and everything I've gone through”.

Preservation

Laria. Laria attempts to preserve parts of her identities. She continues to live in the home that was built by her late husband and subsequently remodeled by her youngest son. Laria claims that she would give up that house and that she is not holding on to it for any material value; however, she feels that her sons are entitled to it since it was the home that they grew up in. What she cherishes the most are the trees that were planted by her husband. “I have four *Nogales* in the back that my husband planted and those *Nogales* are very valuable to me they make pecans every year and my granddaughters help me pick them up and we take them and we go sell them and the money that they make it's for them”. This became a holiday tradition with her granddaughters and monies generated from the pecan sales are her contribution to their Christmas.

Apart from wanting to hold on to a sentimental part of who she was a married woman, Laria also struggles to find a little peace in the ever-changing burrow of life. At the time of this interview, her youngest son had recently moved out. He started a family with his longtime girlfriend. The stillness in the house became burdensome to her emotional state. However, Laria carefully assures me that her vulnerable emotions are temporary and situational and not compared to being in a state of depression. “I don't think I'm depressed because I feel depression is something.....I know depression as the sickness and I know people that have been depressed that go through medication. I'm not depressed because I function good I do my work it's just that it's too recently that my son left me that's what it is”. While sharing her plight in letting go brings on a natural flood of emotions, Laria continues to be her easy going self who loves to dress-up for church and exhilarate her body with a zumba workout.

Casilda. There are also threads of preservation, from Casilda's story. With everything that she encounters in life, she is determined to preserve her autonomous right. After going through the terrible separation from her oldest son, Casilda sought counseling as an option. She had been seeking help from a therapist and felt that things were not working out well. That therapist agreed to transition her into the guidance of another therapist. It was clearly stated to the incoming therapist that one of Casilda's biggest problems was trust.

Throughout Casilda's story, there are bursts of unmistakable preservation. She brings forth her strong character in defense of herself. While trying to work out the sorrow of breaking the relationship off with her oldest son, she attempted to return to something familiar. The relationship with the therapist she had been seeing, was not

working and Casilda saw an opportunity to begin a relationship with a therapist at a more convenient location. Casilda wanted to make sure that the transition went as smoothly as possible, her previous therapist assisted with the changeover. It was specifically important for Casilda, that the in-taking therapist understands her trust issues and the difficult life experiences that cause her apprehension. Despite her attempts to minimize the risk of disappointment, Casilda found herself in a familiar position of betrayal.

After canceling a session with her therapist, Casilda was reassured, by her therapist, that she would follow-up with her to reschedule. When that did not happen Casilda resorted to her personally well-known defense mechanism. “I said fuck it I don't need services like this when you tell me one thing that you gonna be here for me this and that I expect that from you because you're somebody that I'm confiding in somebody that I'm supposed to be trusting”. Compelled to refuse others to take advantage of her; she has reclaimed her autonomy. “You know you have to set limits you have to set ground because when you don't that's when people try to take advantage of you try to do more you know to try to take advantage of you”.

This is an approach that has helped Casilda cope with her difficult life experiences. She has moved forward with eliminating anything and anyone from her life that who not have a positive effect on her life. This was contrary to what Casilda had done in the past to block unwanted memories. Conversations with a friend brought to her attention that she had purposely restricted more from her memory than she had intended. “I don't know I don't remember that I pretty much block that area off my head”. She regretted not remembering some of the better moments of her childhood. “I had recently a friend asks me hey do you remember when we used to go to *Juarez* and we used to

drink the coke's out of the bag? cause they used to sell them like that in a bag with a straw and I was like no and then I realized I'm blocking too much out of my childhood”.

Another way, in which Casilda exercises self-preservation, is by not becoming attached emotionally. Casilda was surprised when she became pregnant with her third child. After several attempts to become pregnant during her last relationship, she was advised by a doctor to see a specialist. Casilda was not interested in going that far to have another baby; she accepted the fact that it is just not something that was meant to be. With this unplanned pregnancy she almost instantly thought that it would not be viable. Accepting the fact that she was pregnant came only after an examination. “I guess until I saw the ultrasound at the hospital and they were like well you haven't lost it yet and I was like really and they were like no you're still pregnant”. Still not completely able to embrace this possibility, Casilda remained emotionally separated from the idea. “So I was like it's not that 12 weeks span and I was like well I'll probably lose it. I'm not gonna get my hopes up”. This was well prior to this interview and during that time Casilda's pregnancy was healthfully thriving.

Casilda also manages to avoid running into to her ex-husband and his wife in public places. Aside from the few run-ins at her son's school, Casilda knows how to avoid any unwanted interaction. While she does not shy away from a situation, she prefers that these encounters be minimal because she knows that they are not completely avoidable in this small town. She strategically chose where to buy groceries. “I go the grocery store right here because I know they won't go there. His aunt was killed there by the structure building, it had a big bell and the structure fell over her head and killed her”.

Success

Laria. Laria's identification of successful is attributed to what she has accomplished in her personal life, in child rearing, and with what her sons have reaffirmed to her. "I come from Mexico I started getting educated at an older age. I'm a single-parent of two children at home you can do it and there's nothing out there that you can't do you just set up your mind and say you can do it and you'll do it" that's Laria's advice after cogitating on her personal story. As an older student, she is inspired by her son, who is also getting a higher education in the health professions. He has generously taken time to ease Laria's nerves surrounding schoolwork. Laria's feelings on that experience were, "oh my God that was like him being the father him being the oldest of my sons and him helping me was something very very powerful that meant a lot to me that taught me to continue doing good". She attributes this successful existence with verbal reminders made by her sons "they're always telling me you were the father you were the mother for us and I feel proud of myself". In turn, Laria's legacy will continue on through the positive contributions that her sons will directly impact in their lifetime, for now she can "see [her] boys do something good for this society something that [she] can tip [her] hat to.

Casilda. Casilda identifies herself as being successful. While not in the best financial position, she knew when it was most advantageous to take the plunge into homeownership. When she found out about a government program aimed at providing a homeownership opportunity for low-income individuals, Casilda applied and she was selected. She knew that a permanent home would provide her and her son stability. A kind of stability that she wanted in her life; in contrast to the "chaotic lifestyle" she was

familiar with. Casilda proudly states “between all this time, I got a house with the United States Department of Agriculture”. It has served as a symbol of positive constancy.

Esperanza. The dissolution of Esperanza’s marriage began when her husband left their home in Durango, Mexico to work closer to the U.S./Mexico border. Esperanza stayed home with her family; Esperanza received financial support from her husband. In small town fashion, rumors reached Esperanza surrounding her husband’s alleged drug use. Esperanza travelled to the border region to confront her husband and attempt to save their union. While she never really found out whether he was using drugs or not, during that time, Esperanza became pregnant with her first child. Esperanza’s economic status was not ideal and she was not exactly ready to become a mom at that moment; however, she accepted what fate had gifted her.

Esperanza’s daughter was born with a mild mental delay that Esperanza attributes to her dependence of anti-seizure medication, lack of prenatal care, and subsequently, finding out that her husband was a serious recreational drug user. From that point on, Esperanza tried to be very careful not to become pregnant again. She was sure that her husband was a drug user and she could not care for a child who was similarly or more severely handicapped than her daughter. Without fail, destiny intervened once more and gifted another addition to her family. She prayed throughout her entire pregnancy, “*ay señor de mi alma, que no vaya...pos que mi hija... pos salga mal*” meaning “oh lord of my soul, that she not...well that my daughter...come out unhealthy”. Her faithful prayers were heard and answered; Esperanza’s second daughter was born healthy and without complications. Immediately after giving birth, Esperanza opted for a permanent birth control solution.

Esperanza's husband was deeply entrenched in a lifestyle addicted to drugs and out of touch with his marriage and children. After having several unenthusiastic encounters, Esperanza realized that this was not a healthy relationship for her. Esperanza decided that it would be in her and daughter's best interest to end the relationship with her husband. Esperanza came to the United States with her daughters and her mother. Her mother divides her time between Mexico and *El Portjæ*. For the most part Esperanza was the head of household. She made a living cleaning houses, wherever she could find employment.

At the time of her interviews, Esperanza did not have a job nor a steady income coming into her household, at least not from her initiatives. A few years prior to our meeting, Esperanza suffered a serious epileptic seizure. Since her job history consisted of cleaning houses, the crippling effects of her medical condition affected her ability to be economically productive. Irrespective of her situation, her fighting spirit was not hindered. She continuously and consistently makes the effort to find ways to generate an income.

She points in various directions and extends her arms wide as she describes her daily routine, after she sends her daughters off to school, she says, "*si no voy aquí, voy allá, o voy allá*" meaning "If I don't go here, I go there, or I go over there", hopeful that she will find an employment opportunity or an opportunity to collect food.

Esperanza is explicit about her identity as a single-mother. She does not think about her status often, in terms of being single; she believes that thinking about it would be more of a hindrance to her and does not help in achieving her families daily needs. According to Esperanza, being a single-mother "*se vive en diferentes formas*" meaning

"is experienced in different ways". She simply describes herself as a *"luchista"* meaning "fighter" who subscribes to lifestyle where the goal is to attain employment that will allow her to provide for her family, if only for that day. Esperanza has accepted her reality, as single-mother, as another facet of life, *"nunca lo he pensado en esa situación de mama soltera. Simplemente trato de salir adelante. nunca lo ha pensado porque se imagina..... si lo pensaría cada rato.....mama soltera.....pues me volvería loca"* meaning "I've never thought about it as a single-mother situation. I simply try to move ahead. I've never thought about it because, can you imagine.....if I thought about it every moment.....single-mother.....well I would go crazy."

Esperanza clearly defines who she is and she does not allow her status to define how she approaches life every day. She admits that, *"es mucho más fuerte ser mama soltera porque no tienes el respaldo de tu pareja"* meaning "it is very difficult being a single-mother because you don't have your partner's support" she points towards her daughters and continues *"o del papa, el papa de ellas"* meaning "or the father, their father".

Despite the fact that Esperanza is charged with the demands of being a single-mother, although she does not reflect on it, there are solitary moments when Esperanza experiences moments of reflection. Looking back, Esperanza compassionately describes her situation as *"muy triste, desde chiquitas a ver sacado a mis hijas adelante pues es una satisfacción muy bonita a pesar de que estuve muy grave. Mire diosito me dejó un ratito más."* meaning "very sad, as little girls having raised my daughters despite being very ill. Look God left me here a little while longer". Esperanza extends her arms out wide, almost as if she was surrendering herself to her faith in God and in her calm

monotone voice she declares, “*yo de mi mente pos no estoy sola y esta diosito que me ayuda.*” meaning “in my mind, well I’m not alone, God, who helps me, is here.”

Perhaps the most important and constant thought that preoccupies Esperanza's mind is the sole responsibility that she has to feed her daughters. For Esperanza, being a single-mother means that she lacks the support of a partner, in the case that something may happen to her. With her health challenges and her unemployed status, worry and sadness begin to emerge. Almost whispering and slightly tilting her head, Esperanza confesses, “*pues es muy triste*” meaning “well it's very sad.” Despite her dependence on a cane and her ongoing efforts to heal from her severe seizure, Esperanza's priority is to forge ahead “*por mis hijas y por mi*” meaning “for my daughters and for me.”

Esperanza's physical capacity may be a little broken, but not completely destroyed. Her spirit may a little shaken, but not defeated. The dry desert sun tries to beat her down with every cane-assisted step, but “*cada dia mi meta es salir adelante*” meaning “every day my goal is to move ahead.” With each step her daily goals are carried out by bartering her cleaning services in exchange for food, at the local church, or negotiating the payment of a nominal household bill, requesting assistance at local food pantries and sometimes accepting help from acquaintances, neighbors, and relatives. Esperanza ends her day successfully through her hustle, “*me encuentro muy contenta con mis hijas en que tengan por lo menos comida*” meaning “I find myself very happy along with my daughters, that at least they have food.”

As her daughter have grown, Esperanza has been grateful that it has not been too difficult raising her daughters. As adolescents, they are “*unas muchachas muy tranquilas no tienen amigas, pues que digan malas, pues que diga yo, no tomen no fumen*” meaning

"calm girls, they don't have friends, well that I would call bad, that I would have to say don't drink don't smoke."

Esperanza painfully tells me about the constant reminder of not having enough to provide for her daughters. The teenagers in *El Portaje* are like teenagers anywhere else when it comes to technology and the latest fashion. Friends of Esperanza's daughters are no exception. Esperanza realizes *"si tienen que tener amigas, yo lo sé pero unas de las niñas que le dije pues son de aquí tienen de todo traen teléfonos de acá que mis hijas lo ven y lo quieren les digo, "espérense déjenme componerme y yo les compraré pero no porque miren a sus amigas pos ustedes quieran saben cómo estamos"* meaning "yes they have to have friends, I know, but one of my daughter's friends, that I told you about, well she is from here, she has everything. She has a telephone, my daughter's see it and they want one. I tell them "wait, let me get better and I will buy you things, but don't want things just because you see your friends with things, you know our situation."" Esperanza is bound by her financial circumstances and has no choice, but not to buy luxuries.

Esperanza's teenage daughters have declared, and at times exercised their freedom. Esperanza's physical disability, along with her single status means that she has lost a degree of influential ability. Any attempt to enforce the rules is not successful, because Esperanza cannot really carry out disciplinary action, *"ahorita de todos modos se me van porque estoy sola"* meaning "right now they leave anyway because I'm alone," says Esperanza. However, she assures me that it is temporary because *"estando mi mama si les dicen no se van a ir y a ella si les hacen caso."* meaning "once my mom is here, she does tell them that they are not going anywhere and they do listen to her". Esperanza's

dependence on her mother is essential to ensure that the welfare of her children is safeguarded.

Esperanza displays a simplicity in describing who she is a woman. This simplicity is paralleled with humility in her description. *“yo soy [Esperanza] yo me describo como una muchacha sincera amable.....yo me describo como una muchacha seria agarrar las cosas pues de un plan de haberlo pensado bien.”* meaning "I am [Esperanza] I describe myself as an honest friendly girl I describe myself as a serious girl who obtains things from a well thought out plan." She assures me that despite how poor she may be and how much she is in need, she never takes shortcuts in life. She proceeded to share with me about a time when an older man *“pidió que saliera con él.”* meaning "asked to go out with him." Esperanza interpreted his offer as a symbol of his genuine interest in her it that could have potentially led to a serious friendship. She was stunned by his assumption, possibly due to her health status and financial position, that should willingly exchange her body for money, when he offered to take her to a "hotel".

Esperanza has a difficult time putting herself first, even in a cognitive sense. When thinking about who she is as a person and exclaims, she is Esperanza; however, Esperanza holds a reservation towards because *“lo primordial como le digo, para mí, son mis hijas luego ya después yo”* meaning "what is paramount, like I've said, for me, are my daughters then me."

Chapter Analysis

Three of the five participants talked about experiences that led to the emergence of the identity subtheme. While their experiences were all different, they all contained

clear markers of identity transition with a particular characteristic. The women in this study, whose narratives contribute to the subtheme of identity, all exercised a peaceful approach during particularly challenging moments.

Laria and Casilda's talk turned up markers of preservation. In Laria's case, her home was a major indicator of preservation. Additionally, she aimed to preserve the pecan trees planted by her late husband. Laria also implies self-preservation, when discussing her emotions and how she deals with it. Casilda demonstrates the preservation characteristics through the use of assertion. In this way, she preserves her autonomy and voice. Casilda also exhibits self-preservation with the lack of personal attachment that can be observed through her narrative.

Maria's transition from a married mother to a single mother required her to tend to all confrontations made by her sons. This included those tantrums that would unfold in the middle of a store check-out line. Maria describes one moment as "tempting just to spank him and I go no there's gotta be another way". She preferred a constructive approach and peacefully diffused the situation with her son.

Laria's outlook on life was also impacted by her identity as a single mother. She often found herself overwhelmed by the choices that her sons would make. Her identity as a single-parent afforded her the autonomy of exercising her own style of discipline. Sometimes it was tough love "if I decided to leave my son out in the street, which I did my youngest son, and call the police on him... I call the cops or not you know that it was my decision." Her tough love technique was balanced with forgiveness "that was one of my advantages" as a single-parent, "that if I said c'mon in the door's open to you... that was me making decisions".

Casilda describes her lifestyle as “chaotic” and while this was how she interprets her life, Casilda remained a very straightforward and methodical woman. A snapshot of Casilda’s chaos can be examined during the period of time where she was a single-mother of two children, then becoming pregnant by her roommate, then cutting ties with her roommate, and ultimately having to end the relationship with her oldest son due to his abusive treatment towards her. In the end, Casilda remained a single-mother to her youngest son and expecting her third child.

Laria shared the significance of her home. She talked about the house being built by her late husband and subsequently remodeled by her youngest son, who works in the construction industry. Laria also discusses the importance of the pecan trees in her back yard. Not only were they planted by her late husband, but they symbolize a holiday tradition. Around the Christmas holidays, Laria picks pecans, from the tree, with her granddaughters. Laria and her granddaughters package the pecans and sell them. The proceeds go to Laria’s granddaughter as her Christmas gift to them.

Casilda’s preservation is observed through her agency. When she does not like something, she makes certain to address it. Again, in the case of her therapist, Casilda had been looking forward to making progress, when her therapist did not follow through, as Casilda had been promised, Casilda felt that it was a setback. Her trust issue with females was reinforced through this experience.

In examining the identities of these three participants it is critical to understand what their identity transformations consisted of. For Maria, her identity as a single-mother meant that she had three young boys to parent. This transformation elicited her creativity and prompted a positive parenting style. Laria became a single-mother of two

sons when she was widowed at the young age of twenty-eight. Not only did Laria have to cope with the loss of her husband, but she had figure out how to navigate the single parent terrain from one day to the next. For Laria, executing tough love when her sons were older and experimenting with drugs and alcohol, was the best way for her to assert her position as a single parent. Casilda had a history of experiencing abuse and neglect from family members. Casilda developed a tough exterior to compliment the actions that she determined she had to make for her health, safety, and overall best interest. The way in which they chose to address their personal provocations are worthy of examining here.

Within the three portraits there are relevant stimuli that generate a response and it is their precise response that is of interest. Table 1 illustrates these stimuli and responses:

Table 1: Stimuli/Response - Identity Chapter

Participant	Stimuli	Response
Maria	Son's tantrum in the store	"there's gotta be a better way" Followed up with communication
Laria	Son's alcohol and drug use	Tough love followed by forgiveness
Casilda	Roommate's response to her pregnancy and Son's abusive behavior.	Letting go of roommate and letting go of son

The participant's responses represent qualities of resilience and perseverance. However, considering their histories and overall life challenges they exhibit a mental toughness that transcend confidence, control, determination, and focus (G. Jones, 2002). Jones (2002) enlightens us with the characteristics of mental toughness being associated with athletes and their determination to succeed through the practice of evoking positive energy coupled with positive thinking. This consistency is found in the participant's

narratives as they present their obstacles and how they decided to resolve those dilemmas in a manner that produced the most positive result for them. It is through their own volition that their outcomes were resulted in what they preferred.

Additionally, Maria, Laria, and Casilda carry qualities of grit typically attributed to individuals in military and education settings (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Grit is defined “as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. [It] entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress” (Duckworth et al., 2007, pp. 1087-1088). There is also a steady link between the participant’s lived experiences surrounding their identities and grit. Maria and Laria had older children; therefore, their narratives illustrated stories that exemplified this perseverance and passion in raising their sons. Casilda demonstrates these qualities in the way in which she makes straight forward decisions. Situations that may come across as adverse are responded to with swift replies. Such as cutting people out of her life and asserting her position when individuals fail her, as in the case of her therapist. Casilda maintains her effort and interest in sustaining a quality of life that is acceptable to her and her children.

In examining what preservation means in this context, it is necessary to explore what is actually taking place within these narratives. For Laria, memories in her home and of the pecan trees, helps her remember her husband and cherish her son. Laria also creates new joyful memories with her granddaughters. In Casilda’s case, it is her memory that triggers her use of preservation. Memories related to the lack of attention from her mother and having her voice muted through victimization prompts Casilda, as an adult, to preserve her identity of who she is as an “independent woman”.

The notion of holding on is relevant in here. Scholars who have studied the notion of holding on, as it relates to language (Oh, Jun, Knightly, & Au, 2003) and cultural identity (Lieber, Chin, Nihira, & Mink, 2001), indicate that there is a functional aspect to holding on or preserving. For early speakers of a language other than English, preserving a native language means maintaining a relationship with speakers of that same language (Oh et al., 2003). Asian immigrants were found to negotiate between “holding on and letting go of aspects of their Asian identity” in exchange for ease of acculturation. Laria and Casilda hold on to important aspects of their identity in order to function as the individuals they choose to be.

Chapter 6: Experiencing Life through Emotion

The emotional experience is central to the research question, what does it mean to be a single-mother living in a *Colonia*? The sentiments of these participants are critical to who they are and how they act. The dynamics of parenting are highlighted throughout their narratives, thus making the range of emotions a focal point of their lived experiences. The participants expressed various emotions related to their lived experiences as single-parents. These emotions are captured as vulnerability. In this chapter I explore the affect that was provoked through the participant's experiences and provide a chapter analysis which highlights how it is that expressing vulnerability through emotions, aids in answering the research question.

Emotions

Maria. "How can you just leave me behind" Maria sobbed into her pillow during "those nights where I would cry". Maria's relationship with her older son could not have been more perfect. They held a "bond" that began when Maria naturally opted to nurse her first born. With each act of latching on and suckling, there was a deeply rooted connection being created, only to be made stronger through each gulp of his mother's milk. As her son got older the trust and confidence grew as well "he wants my opinion for everything..... to any decision he's gonna make". This was something that Maria grew to enjoy, "I was so used to just being in his life"; however, when he became a married man she realized that his "wife doesn't appreciate that" and she soon began to notice that the once cemented bond would begin "breaking".

Maria learned that her son was courting, his now wife, and having an active sexual relationship, when they both came to her advising her that they would be moving

in together. “They were having intercourse before they got married” Maria states strongly “I guess [her] mom found out and she kind of pushed the issue that they needed to live together”. According to Maria, the girls’ mother did not believe that living together was sufficient; they had to get married in order to appropriately enjoy one another. “My son of course being a man, he said yes, okay”. In a short moment of desperation “I was trying to put sense in them and say you know you guys are making a mistake”. She took her focus from being a mother to the son that was standing before her and redirected her emotion to his girlfriend “I talked to her I said, we as women.....we have dreams you know. We wanna do things before getting married or getting married the right way. First it’s a ring you know kind of like.....a Cinderella kind of story. Don’t you.....you wanna just go through that?” Her plea fell short, and “they were more influenced on the idea that they had to live together”.

Her appeal was rejected and in the back of her mind, Maria knew that “he was gonna do whatever he thought was right for him.....he was already twenty [years old]”. In the spirit of a youthful generation, half-truths applied, but would not go unnoticed. Shortly after her son moved in with his girlfriend, Maria found out that he was not only living with his girlfriend and her parents, but with her siblings and their families, as well “they all live together even if they’re married”. This was a shot to the heart for Maria, “I felt a little betrayed because that’s not what I taught him, he went and listened to somebody else” as a result “it’s been difficult having to deal with my son’s decisions based on the influence that he has now”.

Maria confides that she has been “terribly” affected by his decisions, but also understands that this is something that she “can’t fix”. Her emotions have extended into

her sleep and she is haunted by the prospects of her son's future. She finds solace in her personal conversations with God, and tries hard to "put things on god's hands so he can give me that peace". She holds on to this ritual with a white knuckle grasp, as her emotions are tested once again. Maria is going to be a grandmother.

"They were afraid that I was gonna be upset the first time they told me they were pregnant". Maria was not upset at all, she reacted as a mother who has longed for a grandchild. Although Maria had not been in want, she was now part of a trend "because at work everybody was becoming a grandma". Maria celebrated the news with excitement "there was gonna be a baby at the house!" It would not be long until those warm feelings would be replaced with a lukewarm quality.

"I was excited up until the point she started rejecting me". Maria's image of embracing a new baby was soon sprinkled with bitterness. Maria was wrestling with the transition of raising her son to having an adult relationship with him. He was married and about to become a father. Throughout this time, she had not had a solid bond with her daughter-in-law. With closed fists, Maria gestures that her and her daughter-in-law were butting heads. She still craved the mother-son relationship that she had nurtured single-handedly and his wife also wanted the "attention". "My son calls it...like we're fighting over him".

And, it is with these "mixed emotions" that Maria prepares for the arrival of her first grandchild. Although Maria's not particularly certain as to what her "role is gonna be", she's certain that she will have to deal with the emotional pain precipitated by her personal ambitions. "You're just making up these really nice stories for your kids and

then when they start making decisions you're like...what...that's just not what I had planned for you!", but "I have to understand that's his life".

Laria. The emotional cord for Laria was struck after her youngest son moved out of the family home. Laria has lived her entire life in the company of her family. Even after the death of her husband, Laria remained surrounded by her sons and the "blessing girl" who had been living with her and helping out with childcare. "I have never lived alone in my life" says Maria. Her voice cracks when the conversation leads to her loneliness. "Right now it's been very difficult adjusting to living alone. That has been very difficult".

Her solitary strife is complicated by sleeplessness and a mind that wanders and gathers thoughts of sadness. In an abandoned tone, Laria reassures me that "I just don't like my life being alone." In an instant she is overflowing with emotion; she releases her cry in admittance "I have to ask God for forgiveness. I see my sons doing good you know...I'm happy don't get me wrong...I'm living in a stage of my life which I'm like single again." The agony of loneliness brings Laria to a questionable decision.

In search for comfort she turned to her church and joined "a group of *Caballeros de Colon* – The Knights of Columbus", where the focus is, for married couples, to retain their spiritual connection to one another and for single individuals to possibly connect with a man/woman of faith. Although this seemed like an ideal situation for Laria, it was difficult to get pass the fact that she remained alone and that each day she returned to "an empty house". She witnessed the happiness that other couples shared and this created a little discomfort for her. I presented her with a question "what would be different for you if you had a partner?" Laria thinks quietly and responds, "I would have to come home

and cook; that would probably retain me from finishing school. Actually, I should be taking advantage that I'm by myself." The confliction is relentless; it lingers and frequents Laria with repentance.

After the loss of her husband, Laria was in a sound financial position. "I was making \$9.00 an hour; I was getting survival benefits and back then I was getting \$2,500". The sudden influx of monies was something that Laria was not accustomed to. She lived life in the moment. "We traveled a lot; I bought a lot of expensive clothes. I would by the most expensive stuff [for my kids]." The wiser people in her life tried to guide her. Laria remembers her parents inquisitive curiosity asking her "why did you buy a bat that's just thrown right there?" Despite their attempts to deter her spending habits, Laria continued to enjoy the luxuries that were once uncommon strangers to her.

"I bang my head against the wall" she says of her major financial regret. The death benefits had been exhausted and that marked the end of Laria's financial comfort. She now faced the residual effects of her decisions. "See... why didn't I finish paying my house?" Laria's self-examination reveals the emotional beating that she relives as a result of the financial decisions that she made in the past. Having experienced this, Laria has "learned" and her current financial situation means that she buys clothing at second hand because "money is tight". Aside from battling her feelings of loneliness, Laria also continues to struggle with other qualms.

When it came to her children, Laria was forthcoming with her 'tough love' parenting that was prompted when she began to notice her younger son enter the vicious cycle of drugs and alcohol. Her older son reminded her that she had been very strict with him "I never permitted him to have any alcohol in the house." His suggestion to her,

when her younger son was at the pinnacle of his experimenting phase “you need to be more flexible with [him]. You need to let his friends come to the house and drink if they want.” She thought that perhaps her son was right and being a little more liberal may not hurt.

It would be another remorseful decision. She vividly remembers the “disaster” that resulted from her willingness to be less “strict”. Permitting her son to enjoy a little alcohol with his friends in the safety of their home meant that Laria would be struck with a “bad pain” that she loathed. Things got out of control and she had to “stop it completely” when she received a call from a police officer asking her to come to the station. She arrived to see her son apprehended, the officer looked at him and said, “Tell your mom under what influence you’re under.” “Cocaine” he replied. I could almost feel Laria’s heart break once again, as she retold this story. She held herself together by her own interjection to tell me that her younger brother was in prison serving time for a serious drug charge. Her concerns for her son evermore heightened.

Unfortunately this was not the rock bottom moment for her son. Laria would have to face more pain and heartache as a result of his choices. Her son had established a pattern that consisted of long nights of partying with long days of sleeping. “I was just so tired of him coming home in the morning or not at all” and on one particular night she told her son “I’m going to go, be careful”. This was a night where Laria planned to wake early, at “4:00am” and make the drive with her family to visit her younger brother in prison. Perhaps a phone call at “3:00am” was not unusual, being that she had plans early that morning. She did not expect it to be her son saying, “Mom, I’m hurt”. “Well fine your hurt”, her uncompassionate reply was fueled by the anger built up from his

rebelliousness. This time it was serious “I need to go to the hospital”, he continued.

“Fine, have your friends take you” was her last reply as she “hung up.”

It did not take long for Laria to be plagued with her own contradiction. “I have always told my sons, if you’re in danger, call me no matter what.” Laria tried “calling him, but he would not answer.” She ran out of the house in fear “I was outside screaming to God. God please guide me, where’s my son.” She called him out by name, in the middle of the street, but he did not answer. She continued to appeal to God, “he’s in danger and probably needs me.” She let out her last yell.....“soooooooooonnnnnn.” For a brief moment everything was silent. Then, suddenly she heard noise coming from “the next street, they were calling his name.” Her public plea had been heard. “I got in the car and I went riding to the next street.” She was not sure what to expect.

She pulled up to a crowd of people surrounding her son. She found him “covered in blood.” He had been assaulted by a group of individuals and did not know exactly what had happened. Laria took her son home, he cleaned up and at her request they went to the hospital. He had shattered bones in the upper part of his face, the area around his eye. Laria was relieved to find out that the injuries would not leave a permanent disability. She recalls during her moment of distress calling out to God and “said okay, I already went through the death of a husband. I don’t think I could survive the death of a son.” As stressful and fearful as this was, Laria hoped that this would be the moment that her son would turn his life around.

Laria continued to be supportive of her son as he continued to struggle with his vices. There was another time when her son was violently attacked. “He didn’t go to the hospital that time.” Laria was less emotional throughout her recount of this incident. She

simply summarized what her son had told her, “He was driving his truck. They just stopped him and beat him up, right there on top of the truck.” Her only emotion was to “thank God that this happened, this is going to make him change.” It was a slow change that took place a year after this confrontation and Laria’s reflection of these events was “you always worry for your son’s and your daughters, but also a lot of the time, the bad things that happen in your life.....that’s what makes you stronger.”

Casilda. The emotions that ran through Casilda’s life may be less common depending on the individual. Casilda’s affliction began early on, as a child Casilda became a victim of sexual abuse. Since the perpetrator was a family member, she was exposed to a routine of molestation. The experience left a void within Casilda “since that incident happened with my grandfather, I’ve always had trust issues.” As a result, Casilda also learned to lean on cutting to relieve the overburden of emotion and create disconnect with family “it’s not like I need my family.” There was a time when Casilda did want to be part of her family, however, her mother’s constant refusal to bond with her left her feeling alienated “she would obviously prefer my two older sisters over me. So I learned that at an early age, I’m gonna stay away from you.” Remarkably, Casilda “took it hard” when her mother passed away. There was a lot left unsaid and not having closure impacted Casilda, she did not have the opportunity to “forgive her.”

Casilda was visited by her “history of cutting” when she learned that her father had moved on with his life after her mother’s passing. Within a “six-month span, he got married to somebody else” and subsequently fathered a child with this woman. An argument ensued between Casilda and her father, regarding his progress in the spouse department. This altercation left her “in shock, I ended up cutting myself.” The sequelae

from here on unfolded as anyone's nightmare. Her self-injury yielded just the right ammunition for her ex-husband to petition a court of law for the removal of their son from her care "he used it against me". Her son, only two years old at the time, was taken away from Casilda and as a result "we didn't grow together we didn't have that time to bond."

Now twelve years old, Casilda described her son as "very abusive." Casilda's only visible show of emotion was when she "completely gave up on him". On Mother's Day of 2012 "I was like you know I don't need you." Her tears ran down her face faster than she expected "ah tears, tears, tears" she comments as she tries to remain stoic. She dries what she managed to soak up at her eyelids. The other tears dried and imprinted on her face. The tracks of her tears contravene her flat affect-like persona, but only for a moment. She continues as balanced as she had originally started "I ended up in the hospital because of him" and "I don't need this, I don't need the stress."

She got rid of stress when the downfall of her second relationship attempted to completely break her spirit. Casilda had managed to secure housing through the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Development program. The prospective owners had to commit to assist in the building process "I was helping other people build their house and they were helping me build my house". Through this course, Casilda became friendly with a woman who was also looking forward to owning her own home "I was helping her build her house" and "During that year [my boyfriend] was a student at [the State University] he was attending classes for a master's degree in mechanical engineering." At the end of the building project all of those who qualified and aided in the building, received the keys to their homes. Casilda moved into one unit and her new

friend moved in across the street. Casilda continued to support her significant other as he strived to complete his studies “I switched my schedule from 3:00pm to 11:00pm so I could watch my son in the morning and he would be home by 2:30pm.”

The loyalty to the relationship was one sided, on her part. Casilda began to hear from another neighbor that her boyfriend had been visiting her friend across the street, “he's been over there”, her neighbor warned, but she did not believe it. She was convinced that “he's committed” because they lived as a “married couple.” She came to find out that he went to this woman’s house, across the street to “put up a mirror”, Casilda was now less convinced about his commitment and more concerned about his motives. “What the hell are you doing over there” she asked opposingly. Partly confused and mostly in denial, he replied “what are you talking about?” The day that her son presented his version to his mother, Casilda knew that there was trouble. Her son had told her, that he “had seen him kiss her”; he went on, “he kissed her, he was dancing with her.” Candidly and rhetorically she responded with “are you fucking kidding me?” She confronted her boyfriend over the phone, but the urge was too inescapable, she left work and headed straight home a “fight” ensued and this marked her boyfriend’s exit from the house. “Two weeks later he was already in with her, living right across the street.”

Casilda’s emotions took a downward spiral. First her son began “going through the depression” then Casilda experienced her own constraints due to depression. “That was very horrible. I knew I was depressed; I didn’t want to deal with the depression.” Her emotions were powerful enough to transform her mental state and that transmuted her physical health. “I would not sleep. I would not eat. I was losing weight and got really sick with an ovarian cyst.” Of all her life’s struggles this was what “kinda [brought her

to] hit rock bottom.” She managed not to lose control completely because she “was still working.” Her responsibility as a mother meant that she had to work to support her younger son and that is what kept her moving forward.

Isolation

Maria. Maria speaks specifically about her isolation during one particular, life-changing experience. Her second serious relationship, with Sebastian, did not start out that way “it was more like a game.” Maria was at a point in her life where she realized that she continued to be afflicted by her reality “it was hard for me to cope with struggles.” This relationship was not initiated through their deliberate intentions. The convenience of their acquaintance as neighbors allowed them to acknowledge one another “he started just coming around.” Being that she was nine years his senior, Maria asserts, “in no way, in my head, did I want to start a relationship.” Perhaps it was something that her spirit needed. At that time Maria’s state of isolation placed her in a vulnerable position. “I was lonely. I was confused. I call it suicidal mode.” Entertaining his company became a “get away.”

Needless to say, they managed to turn nothing into something. Five years into their on- again off-again relationship, Maria became pregnant with her fourth son, his first child. Although Maria knew that Sebastian wanted to be a father; she was adamant that “three is enough” and that “I’m just not ready to have another baby.” Ultimately, Maria became pregnant as a result of his deceit; his intention was to “get me pregnant” so “he kind of planned it.” Maria remembers being “mad at him” when she found out and “even slapped him.”

Sebastian had a sketchy lifestyle that made Maria uncomfortable. She understood from the beginning that he would be conflicted by his choice of “alcohol and drugs.” That was not something that she desired to be connected to. With the news that she would be bearing their son, she now embraced the fact that their interactions became a relationship and, at this point, their relationship “required commitment.” That commitment wavered and after fourteen years, they both decided to call it quits.

Laria. Laria’s isolation is not only due to her status as an empty nester. She also carries an emotional loneliness that keeps her from moving away from her isolation. Overtime her loneliness has grown and taken on different forms. The loss of her husband left a void that only a widow could know. Her sons grew up and left the house. Her attempt at another amorous relationship left her reliving a partner’s abandonment, “he left me because I started school”, Laria recounts. A certain day of the week marked Laria’s real struggle with isolation.

Laria’s most difficult moments with loneliness come every Sunday. Laria describes Sunday as “a more heavy day for me.” Although she has a routine of attending church and spending time with her parents, Laria’s frequently reminded of her loneliness. “I miss my more my children, probably a partner.” These thoughts are mixed with confusion as Laria tries to understand why Sundays weigh heavily for her. “I don’t know, could you explain to me why on Sundays?” Limited television programming on Sundays could be why Laria finds it challenging to cope on this day. “There’s nothing nice on TV. Like in the week I watch something, like a show or a program, but on Sundays there’s nothing.” Laria “go[es] through all the channels” before giving up and “turning it off.” Now left to her own devices, Laria’s loneliness appears like an unwelcomed guest.

There's nothing left but to reflect on what those thoughts mean and how they fit in her life. Even so, Laria has not found that remedy to why she is persistently haunted by these lived experiences. She understands that perhaps she may never be relieved of these thoughts, but she has developed her own view to lean on:

I feel even if you have your husband you're gonna be depressed, you're gonna be sad and I feel that even if you're alone, you're gonna be sad and you're gonna be happy cause that's just part of life. It's just you, when you're sad, turning it around; when you're happy making the best of it because that's just part of life. You gotta learn to live; it's like learning to live with the good and the evil. Also learning to live by yourself or with company and because you came to this world by yourself I believe you're gonna go by yourself someday.

Memories

Maria. For Maria, being a child in Mexico “was a lot of fun” and for her, there was an abundance of “freedom.” Most of the time, her sisters were her companions; they played carelessly and without limitation. “You can be out late,” Maria says excitedly. Afternoons marked the start of her school day that meant that “we would stay up late all the kids in the neighborhood; we were playing a making a lot of noise and having fun.” Maria embraces these memories, but also vividly remembers longing for her dad. Amidst all the fun, “I would miss my dad.” There were other relatives who Maria enjoyed seeing.

Maria's relationship with her paternal grandmother was special and uniquely cultivated. Maria's mother did not particularly like her mother-in-law “it was some kind of jealousy” and in Maria's personal opinion her mother “dislike[ed]” Maria “because she would tell me that I looked like [my grandmother].” “Because of that, I felt like she had

to like me more” Maria’s grandmother was a United States citizen; she owned property in Mexico and in the United States. She often made transnational trips “to visit” and that is when Maria would see her. During those trips home, Maria’s grandmother always greeted her with gifts. Her grandmother stopped at a local artisan stand “she would always bring me some earrings, a bracelet, or something.” Due to her mother’s unwelcoming relationship with her paternal grandmother, Maria acknowledged that she had to “hide it from my mom.”

Laria. Laria recalls a humble childhood living in a modest two-bedroom house. With limited living space, Laria shared a room with her “grandma, sister, and brother.” As children living in a home where alcohol abuse was persistent and domestic violence was expected, there were celebratory moments. Laria reminisces about her trips to and from Mexico to visit family.

With a total of nine aunts and uncles on her mother’s side, Laria had an abundance of cousins and always looked forward to spending time with them. “We would seem to get together on the weekends.” This became a mutually beneficial arrangement, Laria and her siblings would get dropped off at her maternal grandparents house and “my dad would go drinking at the local bar.” They made their trip back across the border on Sundays, but Laria tells of times when it was questionable whether they would survive the drive home. “Sometimes my dad was so drunk, he would go in the car like that - gesturing in a swerving motion.” They always managed to make it home safe.

Summertime was also memorable for Laria. During this time off from school, her and her family would go back to Mexico and “spend two or three weeks” visiting her paternal grandparents. Her father spent recreational “time with his friends, drinking”,

however, there were many “very good memories” for Laria. She is able to revive skills that she learned. “My father also spent time with us over there and I have very good memories because he teach me how to swim and how to ride horses.” In the face of suffering “we were happy.”

As a mother Laria’s suffering called on very different emotions and more so as an adult after her son’s moved out of the house. As she toils with her loneliness, Laria also recollects on specific part of her past, “I go back and remember when they were little, when they would run through the house.” Reliving this side of her past makes an empathic case for her current fray of loneliness. Laria shared what every parent is familiar with, coming home and finding that her son’s would leave things out of place. “There was a shoe sometimes here, there was something on that table,” she says of those days past. Now “everything is where I leave it, in its place.” From the moment that she walks into her home, the undisturbed space is a constant reminder of her loneliness.

Casilda. Casilda presents dismal memories from her childhood that consisted of her mother’s preferences. “My mom always tried to dress the three girls alike and then she would dress the boys different.” The boys dressed different because according to Casilda her “oldest brother is the spoiled one.” Casilda went on to express her parent’s favor over all of her siblings. For her mother not only was the eldest son spoiled, but Casilda’s “oldest sister was always a spoiled one.” And “[for] my dad, [the] spoiled one was my youngest brother.”

Irrespective of her parent’s choice in siblings, no one sibling had more than the others. When it came to their entertainment, Casilda remembers that they “didn’t have the greatest toys, I remember playing with the laundry basket and a little ball, like the little

ping pong ball and twirling it around.” She was at peace with her family’s circumstances “it wasn’t the best, [but] it was okay.” Their underprivileged lifestyle required simplicity for everyone. “It wasn’t like you’re gonna get Nikes or Jordans. It wasn’t like you’re gonna get clothes from the Gap or anything like that. It wasn’t always brand stuff, sometimes it was hand-me-downs.”

Casilda shared other memories from her youth and she admits that these particular memories were repressed along with her experiences as a victim of child molestation. One day, Casilda and her friend were enjoying a conversation that took them back to their youth and travels to *Juarez*, she took out a picture and asked Casilda, “hey do you remember when we used to go to *Juarez* and we used to drink the Coke’s out of the bag?” As she was gaping at the photograph she found it difficult “to remember” that part of her history. All Casilda could think was “I’m blocking too much out of my childhood.” She “kept looking at the picture” determined to regain control of *her* memories and suddenly there was a momentous discovery. “I was like hey you know what I used to drink those it was like the *Changuitos*. *Changuitos* used to be a cucumber peeled, they used to cut it in four’s they would put *chile* and lime and salt on it and you would eat it out of a bag and I was like yeah I used to drink those”, she laughed. This moment was revelatory, to the release of her deep personal sorrow. Her attempt to flashback and recall the coke-in-a-bag prompted another indulgent part of her past, the mouthwatering *Changuitos*.

Rosita. Rosita romanticizes the time she spent with her grandfather in Mexico. She spent as much time as possible with her grandfather, so much so, she considered him “more as a dad than my dad because he would spend more time with me than my dad.” “Just sitting outside” was enough to want to be with her grandfather. There is simplicity

about her life as a child in Mexico that Rosita so sentimentally shares. “He would always give me a quarter and he thought that I could buy all this stuff with a quarter.” She laughs compassionately as she dispenses these genuine memories of her grandfather.

Another staple of her memory was her grandfather as teacher. Rosita fondly recalls a particular skill that her grandfather taught her. “I remember him teaching me how to write”, she says proudly. This was important to her since her mother “didn't do that kind of stuff”; her dad did not have an influence on her learning and her “grandma didn't know how to write.” A lesson began with preparing the pencil “he would buy a pencil and break in half and give half to my sister and half to me.....and he would sharpen the pencil with the blade not a pencil sharpener.” Although writing is a fundamental skill, it is not the act of writing that reminds her of her grandfather; it is the ritual of sharpening the pencil that she summons to mind “when I see somebody sharpening a pencil with the blade, I remember him.”

His unyielding commitment to her grew strong. For Rosita, there seemed to be an unbreakable physical connection. She had anchored her heart to her grandfather and when she learned of his death, the shock countered the strength of that anchor. “He was the first person that passed away in my life that I was close to, that it was very traumatic.” The grieving and mourning process was too real for Rosita. She resorted to resisting that part of her life “I would always wake up and block that. I felt like in *50 first dates* with Adam Sandler.” She managed to release that block and now she celebrates her memory of him, “I still take flowers to him every year.”

Esperanza. Esperanza shares her childhood memories. She recalls remembering, a particular time as a child, when “*mi mama dejo a mi papa*” meaning “my mom left my

dad”. *“Lo dejo porque mi papa era muy borracho tomaba mucho.....y la maltrataba.....y la golpeaba.”* meaning “she left him because my dad was a drunk, he drank too much.....and mistreated her.....and he would hit her”. Esperanza talks about these experiences as any other common topic. The look on her face does not reflect a sentiment towards the situation, nor was there a sympathetic tone to extract, perhaps because this was a common occurrence with the given context.

Time passed and without knowing exactly why, Esperanza and her brother were sent to live with their grandmother. *“No sé cómo estuvo allí la historia, parece que estuvo mi mama en Dallas.....en Dallas Tejas, por allá.”* meaning “I don’t know how the story went, it seems that my mom was in Dallas.....in Dallas, Texas, over there.” Esperanza and her brother spent their childhood living with their maternal grandmother mostly because *“mi mama no nos recogía”* meaning “my mom did not pick us up” and it was not until Esperanza’s grandmother passed away that her mother *“nos recogió”* meaning “picked us up.” Esperanza began a relationship with her mother as an older adolescent.

Strength

Maria. Maria’s initial presentation of strength is physical. Throughout her narrative, Maria has provided us with her life’s dynamics. Her children are the cornerstones of every significant experience; they have cultivated her strength. It started with their births “I had my boys and by the way, four cesareans.” She laughs with pride, but I was not sure if there was more to the physical pain of having four cesareans. Perhaps the pain was temporary and physical pain prepared her for what was to follow, becoming a single parent and that demanded emotional strength.

“I had to fight for my kids”, exclaims Maria. Her strength intensified when she knew “what [her ex-husband] was capable of doing.” From taking all the money to selling the house from under her, “I wanted, just to.....to protect my kids.” When it seemed that everything depended on Maria and that it was up to her to move forward with her children, she conferred to her past. “What gave me courage is like if my mom did it in *Juarez* with no help, it was not going to be as difficult for me.” The resources that were available in the United States, at that time, were not and currently are not, available in Mexico.

Maria admittedly discusses her need of a financial crutch while she assessed her plan as a single mother and decided on what would help her eventually reach her own financial strength. “There’s a lot of help here, so that’s good, you know. I did take advantage of that for a little while, until I got strong.” With this strength came responsibility and Maria knew not to literally “take advantage.” “There’s help here in the United States for single parents, you know. But um we have to understand that it’s only a little push you know. It’s like not forever it’s up to us to try to make it work.” Her perspective on responsibility came from her experience in Mexico. “It’s our responsibility, you know.....that’s what I learned in Mexico. There’s not that kind of help over there.” By “responsibility” Maria means that one must understand that taking this help should be done with the intent to make positive changes in one’s own life.

She went on a quest in search for her individual strength; this required positive thinking, “You go through setbacks and you think you’re not going to make it this time and you know you have to convince yourself every time. It’s like nope I can do this and with God’s help, you know it’s been.....that’s what I tell my kids. You cannot do

anything without God in your life, that's what makes.....makes us strong.....trusting in God."

Aside from trusting in God, Maria had to trust in herself and believe that she was capable of raising her family on her own. Her 'can do' attitude is based on her self-applied philosophy that "you were the one who was either going to succeed or stop and settle with what you have." Not willing to settle, Maria strived to be "a stronger person. I wanted to be strong for my boys." Being strong meant that Maria had to set aside her fears and to let go of any uncertainty. In doing so, Maria explains that she had to be "vulnerable sometimes, even just being at home by yourself at night" required that strength, testing vulnerability.

Her vulnerability translated into being a role model for her children. She wanted to show them that she was strong so that they would also be strong. This was a necessary strategy "so that the fear wouldn't consume you." Maria surrendered all the fear and insecurity to God. She had a practical method for handling this matter. "We would have family nights we would discuss things.....if anything, if any emergency how we're gonna do this.....so just have a plan." Her no-fail system was to teach her sons to believe in the power of prayer "if you fear, just pray and leave it in god's hands.....so they learn to relax."

Laria. Laria's greatest strength begins and ends with her sons. The experience of losing her husband left her with an unpalatable bitterness. "I was mad at life, I would question God a lot. Her questioning seemed to be answered with the continuous presence of her sons, "I would look into their faces and that's what made me strong." It was not always that way, Maria confesses that during her most difficult time she allowed herself

to surrender to depression. She realized that she was ignoring her responsibility as a mother to her sons, and regretfully she “had to ask God for forgiveness. I was too busy being asleep, but they were my motive for living. I just wanted to live for them.”

Her commitment to living provided her with the gift of recognition. Laria acknowledged that she deserved to move forward and that required restoring her healthier self. Purging that particular pain was “Healing. You heal, the kids heal, from your soul to your heart, and I think it’s good.” Worrying for her children is inevitable and Laria appreciates what life brings; “a lot of the time the bad things that happen in your life.....that’s what makes you stronger.” Opening her spiritual-self invited a different way of thinking that allowed Laria to embrace situations that she may have otherwise found to be imposing.

Reflectively, “God was preparing me all the way.” The “blessing girl” that came to help her with her boys, was all part of Gods plan; “I wasn’t even alone at that time. She was with me and stayed with me for five years. She helped me with my kids.” A moment during a short pause seems to capture Laria’s endeavors to find the resolve in the how and why of her life’s plan. She goes there in her mind, she searches giving the impression that this is a familiar exercise. Her pursuit only yields a conclusion, “I feel that, since I was 18 God was preparing me. I still don’t know and I still don’t understand, but I know that made me stronger for when my husband died.”

While Laria is void of this reason that she seeks, she gains momentum in thinking about the strength that she has had and that inspires her embrace on that part of her past as well as her current employment status. “Being a single-parent and dedicating myself to my children and working with children made me strong.” The emersion that comes with

working with children gives Laria joy. “Children are always giving us smiles. Children is.....how can I say it.....they’re so innocent they’re always happy laughing so this brings up my spirit all the time. I’m always looking forward to go to my job and to play with my children I sing and I dance, I get messy.” Today Laria leans on the strength she has generated through her parenting and working with children. Her response to anything contrary to her focus is “shake it off and get up.”

Casilda. Casilda was a young teen when she became pregnant with her first child. Although it is probably no parent’s expectation to have their children have children so young, Casilda’s mother made sure to let Casilda know it and the birth of her son did not change things. Casilda remembers her mother as non-“supportive” and “even when I had my son, my mom would give me a hard time about watching him.” In some way Casilda accepted that this was the way her relationship with her mother would be; however, as her own rite of passage, Casilda requested more thing of her mother, “you need to teach me how to cook” appealed Casilda. Her mother’s reply was “no”, Casilda knew that she was an outcaste to her mother because “she would teach my other sister’s.” By way of rejection, Casilda replied to her mother “fine, don’t teach me. I don’t care, I’m gonna find a way.” Her strength also lies in her determination to survive. Casilda befriended a neighbor whom she trusts. They exchange favors to include cooking lessons.

Casilda witnessed strength from another woman who she admired. Her aunt was “born and raised in *Juárez*” Mexico. She came to the United States “she signed up for the Army and she got her U.S. citizenship”; she has been active for thirteen years. While her aunt was fulfilling the requirements of back-to-back deployments, she also made time to inspire Casilda with strength. Casilda informed her of her first pregnancy and “she was

fine with it and she gave me advice you know. "*Échale ganas no estés por vencida*" meaning "Give it your all, do not accept defeat." This was extraordinarily meaningful coming from a woman who left her native country and has pledged to give her life in defense of her host country. This was an instant boost of strength for Casilda, "I was like fuck it, I gotta do it. She's always going from war to the United States from war to the United States. She's gotta have something that she knows." Casilda has gone through life cultivating her courage and collecting meaningful life gems as she makes her way through it.

When the relationship with the father of her second son came to end, Casilda remembered the advice given to her by her aunt "*no estés por vencida*. Do not accept defeat." There were plenty of times when Casilda felt that her ex-boyfriend was trying to intentionally defeat her, yet she refused those attempts by "putting up a brick wall." "He wanted to drag me down" states Casilda. Her response to his antics was "I'm not gonna let you drag me down because you're the one trying so hard it makes me a better person." Casilda held an allegiance to her audacity. When her ex-boyfriend moved out of her house and into the house of the 'other woman', Casilda took that as a dare since they were now living directly across the street from her. One day she walked over there and knocked on the door, he opened the door and she calmly asked "hey, wasn't it your turn to watch your son? Isn't that what the court order states?" The other woman "was walking like nothing in that big house", but Casilda had already went through with her intention and she sent a message with her posture "yeah, I'm here girl." "He got pretty pissed off at that" because "I think they figured that I was gonna let them step all over me." Like the little girl who refuses to bow down to the wolf, Casilda also declines any

attempts they may make to weaken her spirit. “They wanted to see me so in the dirt. They wanted to see me lose my house, my car, my confidence, and my strength.....to this day I still don’t let them.” By not allowing them to drag her down, Casilda understands that she has complete ownership of herself.

Chapter Analysis

All five participants talked about lived experiences that consisted of emotional qualities. In this chapter, I addressed the various ways in which those emotions were displayed. The first subtheme covers emotions in general. Including Laria's emotions related to sadness, forgiveness, and regret and Casilda's subjective emotions. The second subtheme is that of isolation, something that emerged in Maria's and Laria's talk. The third subtheme is memories. All participants shared stories that made a connection between their memories and emotions. Maria, Laria, and Casilda all shared stories that correlated to emotions of strength.

In describing the participant's emotions I have used Table 2 as a representation of the various emotions that apply to this chapter. In this section, the stimuli represent the vulnerability projected by the participants. The response category addresses the coping strategies exercised by the participants.

Table 2: Stimuli/Response - Emotions Chapter

Participant	Stimuli Vulnerability	Response Coping Strategy
Maria	"I felt a little betrayed because that's not what I taught him, he went and listened to somebody else	Maria turns to a spiritual source. She "puts things on God's hands so he can give me that peace"
Laria	"I just don't like my life being alone"..... "I see my sons	"I have to ask God for forgiveness"

Participant	Stimuli Vulnerability	Response Coping Strategy
	doing good you know.....I'm happy don't get me wrong"	
Casilda	Childhood molestation - "since that incident with my grandfather, I've always had trust issues"	Resorted to cutting
Maria	"It was hard for me to cope with struggles"	Entered into a relationship as a "get away"
Laria	Sunday loneliness	Rationalization with other possible scenarios
Maria	Maria's mother - "she would tell me that I looked like [my grandmother]" - paternal grandmother	When Maria's paternal grandmother would greet her with gifts, Maria had to "hide it"
Casilda	Experience with molestation as a child	"I'm blocking out too much of my childhood"
Rosita	Memories of her grandfather - "He was the first person that passed away in my life that I was close to, that it was very traumatic"	"I would always wake up and block that. I felt like in <i>50 First Dates</i> with Adam Sandler"

The participants shared a wide scope of emotions that exhibit their personal moments of vulnerability. Within their narratives, the participants also shared the different ways in which they coped with their emotions. Regardless, of which subtheme we focus on, we can survey all the vulnerable stimuli and analyze the responses/coping strategies. A common quality amongst all the participants is that they all took on an inward approach towards dealing with their emotions.

In analyzing the responses to the participant's vulnerability, it is clear that the participants chose similar coping styles to address their emotions. In all of the examples above, the participants have adverse responses associated to their emotions. The major quality to notice is that they take on an inward approach towards dealing with their emotional obstacles. It is not uncommon for women, who live in *Colonias* and are exposed to situations that cause stress and vulnerability, to attempt to resolve their challenges rather than seek out external assistance (Leyva, 2003). This quality further represents the emotional independence that the participants demonstrate in their talk. Literature surrounding emotional independence is dated and focuses on children (Heathers, 1955a, 1955b; Landis, Gullette, & Jacobsen, 1925). However, the qualities of the coping strategies listed seem to indicate that there is an imposed emotional independence or a refusal to allow others into their intimate emotional lives (Hatchett, Garcia, & Williams, 2002). During the interview process, all of the participants mentioned, in one way or another, that they had not taken an opportunity to talk about, much less reflect upon their life stories.

Chapter 7: Fulfilling the Role

This chapter responds to the research question through various subthemes that emerged. The portraits presented in this chapter give reverence to how these women fulfilled their perceived responsibilities via effectual lived experiences such as the status of their personal economy, the geographical space and that of their own construction, their perspectives on learning, and the meaning of relationships that they had or have in their lives. As a whole, this chapter aims to demonstrate how these women fulfilled their lives as a consequence of impactful lived experiences.

This chapter begins with the subtheme of the economy as it relates to Casilda's and Esperanza's lived experiences. I then present the subtheme of space, this correlates to the geographical space that is the *Colonia* as well as the space that is created by Maria and Laria. The chapter continues with the subthemes of learning and relationships and concludes with a chapter analysis which highlights the issue of food insecurity and the funds of knowledge generated through the participants lived experiences.

Economy

Casilda. The economy of a single-mother is subjective to many factors. Casilda was surrounded by an environment where she understood that public assistance was available. She had to pick and choose which resources would best benefit her and her children. When it came to her home, there was no question that having a permanent roof over her head and her children, would be worth reaching out for. There was a time when Casilda felt that she needed a little more help and when she attempted to apply for food aid she learned that “I didn't qualify because I had a house, the house was my asset.” This disqualification reinforced what she was already convinced of, “I don't wanna be living

off of the welfare and the income taxes and child support, the food stamps and all that, that's not the kind of life I want because I wasn't raised that way.”

Unfortunately Casilda’s strong beliefs did not fill her belly and that of her son. She still had to figure out how to make ends meet on a very limited budget. When the dollar was stretched to its maximum capacity, Casilda turned to her authenticity, “being who I am, of course I started asking family here and there if they…… you know…… if they had any extra food can we have it, they’re like of course. I asked my neighbor you know we don't have any food.” While this is the case, other luxuries, commonly taken for granted by others, are purposefully absent from Casilda’s household “I don't have cable, I can't afford cable. I recently disconnected my internet it's a luxury I can't afford any longer.” Casilda appreciates her son’s acceptance of the household status “my son is very mature, usually he just watches the same stuff on my computer. I have downloaded movies that he watches.”

Casilda confirms the difficulty of being a single-parent “it's hard being single; it is hard raising a child by yourself.” It’s not the limitations on the luxuries that Casilda worries about, she focuses on what her son might be connecting “I kinda start noticing maybe he notices that I'm struggling being a single-mother and he notices but he just won’t say anything. I'm pretty sure that's what going on.” She navigates her economic status delicately; with precise subtly, “when I'm with my son I usually take him to like a museum when they have free admission or to a park. I'll take him out to eat at someplace, sometimes it will be like Peterpiper, and sometimes it will be like a local Mexican restaurant, so that he doesn't think like “oh she doesn't have money she can’t take me out.””

Decisions surrounding which household goods to invest in are equally as important for Casilda. Casilda's aunt came to live with her temporarily prior to one of her deployments, during that time Casilda noticed that her usual dish detergent had been replaced with the more "freaking expensive" Dawn. Casilda "used to buy the cheap Palmolive", but realized that her aunt was spending "\$4.00 a bottle." This triggered her curiosity and it became "obvious" that, although she was using Dawn every day, it had "been lasting longer." Casilda had long believed in "value vs. quality" and now she trusts that she can have both, "I want something that I'm gonna be able to use longer." She gave up on the disappointment of short lived Palmolive suds and began "buying the big bottle" of Dawn. Her value and quality philosophy is also true of her cooking oil. Casilda replaced her "cheap vegetable oil" for olive oil, on the basis of spending a "couple of dollars more" in exchange for a "healthier" lifestyle for her and her family.

Esperanza. In talking about her economic status, Esperanza expresses which of her basic human needs are the most important, "*para poder comer*" y "*que no me falte mi medicina*" meaning "to be able to eat" and "that I do not lack my medicine". Although she suffers from epilepsy, Esperanza always found a way to work cleaning houses or offices. She recalls the times when she used to clean the local Catholic church, prior to her recent epileptic seizure. "*yo entraba a esa iglesia y me ponía a limpiar las bancas, a trapear... y limpiar allá y limpiar acá.*" meaning "I would enter that Church and I would clean the pews, I would mop...and clean over there and clean over here." She cleaned "*las horas que me daban*" meaning "the hours they gave me" and she would accumulate her hours. Once she had enough hours, she would approach the father, and compassionately ask "*¿si me ayuda padre para el mandado? ... ¿si me ayuda para un*

vil?" meaning "will you help me father, for groceries? ...Will you help me with a bill? The household utility bill was the most essential bill for Esperanza. Esperanza would negotiate the payment of this bill with the father. *"Una vez al mes le preguntaba...cómo si me salía el vil de cincuenta dólares, el me pagaba la mitad y yo y mi mama ya poníamos la otra mitad."* meaning Once a month I would ask him...if the bill totaled fifty dollars, he would pay half and my mother and I would pay the other half" Unlike traditional employment, but that was her arrangement for the work that was completed.

Three years prior to this interview, Esperanza suffered a major epileptic seizure. She was bedridden and paralyzed, little by little she began to recover some her faculties; however not completely, to this day she walks with the assistance of a cane. Esperanza does not know exactly what happen and how severe it was, *"mama no me platicó tanto, pero la gente que me conocen y al verme me dicen "como te has compuesto y como has salido adelante."* meaning "mom didn't talk to me about it much, but the people who know me and see me say "you have made progress and you have moved forward." Since experiencing that seizure, Esperanza has not been able to work. She does not have the physical agility to move from place to place cleaning.

As a result of her state of health, Esperanza's personal economy took a hit. Esperanza analyzes her economic status within the national context, *"horita básicamente no hay tanto trabajo como en aquel tiempo cuando estaba el presidente Bill Clinton... con este presidente no hay tanto trabajo."* meaning "basically, right now there aren't a lot of jobs like in those times when president Bill Clinton was in office...with this president, there are many jobs." Esperanza recognizes the effects of the decisions that are made by those with hegemonic power. With president George W. Bush, *"estaba también muy bien*

el país porque te ibas a una casa a trabajar y te venias y te triabas tu dinero y ahora ya no.” meaning “the country was great because you could go and work at a house and come home and bring your money and now you can’t.” Esperanza has had to accept the help of the people around her who love and admire her, *“la gente nos ha ayudado... como por ejemplo, no tuve para mis hijas... para comprarles...le regalaron las mochilas.”* meaning “the people have helped us...like for example, I didn’t have for my daughters...to buy them...they were gifted their backpacks.” Esperanza’s sister contributes by paying for the landline telephone, this was a luxury that Esperanza never thought of having; however, since her seizure, it became a necessity. In the case of *“una emergencia, que yo pueda tener ya aquí esta porque no es fácil por ejemplo, de que yo me enferme y salir corriendo para con los vecinos... mire cómo andan los perros.”* meaning “In an emergency, I will be able to have it here because it’s not easy for example, if I were to get sick and have to run out to the neighbors...look at how the dogs run unrestrained” Esperanza points over to two dogs roaming loose in the neighborhood.

During our conversation surrounding the basic needs that she lacks in her home, Esperanza invited me into her home and directly to her kitchen. There I found a modest space; the kitchen sink was supported by a simple wooden frame. Esperanza had not had gas services in several years; she cooked on an electric griddle. She opened the refrigerator to show me what she had to eat. She picked up a gallon of milk, nearly empty, to show me. There were a few ears of corn and a few other items. There was a carton of *molé* that was half full; it had been given to her by a neighbor. Suddenly her there was a cheerful emotion on her face, thinking about how *“el mole es el plato favorito de mis hijas. Les estoy descongelando el pollo para que tengan su comida lista*

cuando lleguen de la escuela.” meaning “*molé* is my daughters favorite dish. I am defrosting the chicken so their food will be ready for them when they come home from school.” Esperanza also showed be the two five gallon containers of water that I had taken with me during our first meeting, and filled up with water for her. She told me very thankfully, “*las tres estábamos tomando agua y hay que sed teníamos porque ya ve que tan caliente la tráiler... me recuerdo como estábamos con sed.*” meaning “the three of us were drinking water and what thirst we had because you can see how hot it is in this trailer...I remember how thirsty we were.”

Esperanza also mentions the lack basic needs that contribute the human dignity, “*necesito como champú, papel, [y] toallas sanitarias que no tenían tampoco.*” meaning “I need shampoo, paper, [and] sanitary napkins, they also don’t have.” When Esperanza does not have the means to provide for her daughters, she responds with “*espérenme*” meaning “wait for me”, but when the situation requires her immediate attention, Esperanza has to act. For example, when she is out of sanitary napkins, Esperanza thinks like a “*luchista*” meaning “fighter” with creativity, “*tomo un trozo de tela y me lo corto en pedazos*” meaning “I take a piece of fabric and cut it into pieces.” Esperanza does this not only to protect her daughters from sanitary perspective, but also to preserve their respect as young ladies in high school.

Despite Esperanza’s difficulties, she speaks with a convincing positivity. “*No le digo que anhelo...no le digo que quiero...nada más que estemos bien físicamente con eso está todo bien.*” meaning “I wouldn’t say that I’m longing ...I wouldn’t say that I’m in want ... only that we are well physically, with that, everything is all right.” Esperanza makes sure not to lack a home because “*a pesar de todo eso que hemos sufrido*

económicamente, les hemos pagado [la] renta por mes.” meaning “despite all that we have suffered economically, we have paid them [the] monthly rent.” In addition, Esperanza knows she is always in good company, “*esta diosito que me ayuda.*” meaning “I have God who helps me.”

Space

Maria. Despite Maria’s early challenges living in *El Portaje*, with time, she managed to “feel rooted here.” She has gotten “used to the people in town” and realistically has not considered moving to any other place; however, “If I ever move from here it’s because of my kids, if not I’ll stay here.” Maria did not have any genuine complaints about living in *El Portaje*. For the most part, Maria says “I made my own little world in my house.” She controlled her environment to include everything that she wanted to give and receive in her space. External factors out of her control were dealt with accordingly and Maria shares a dislike that she personally encountered, “The only thing I don’t like is the gangs they really bothers me a lot because when my oldest son started middle school he experience bullying.” The bullying was actually an attempt to initiate her son into a gang; however, Maria successfully derailed those efforts.

Laria. Laria also applies a “little world” outlook. *El Portaje* is a source of strength for Laria mostly because “my parents are here and in some way you know I tell them that they've been my... I don't know how you say in English like a big *pilar* it's something very sturdy that... do you know what a *pilar* is?” For Laria, her parents are her pillars of strength and this space means that she has the support of her family.

Despite the reliability and comfort of family, Laria’s socio-economic status provokes an urge, “I always wanted to move”, says Laria. Her neighborhood is not the

most desirable and although she has an established history there, she would prefer a place with a view. “I know that living in a middle class area... that there's still drugs but it's like more hidden... people manage to hid it versus a more low income family.” Her quandary is buttressed by her established history. Her loved one’s use of drugs and alcohol was an ongoing battle as it inflicted every man in her life, from her father to her son. This space is significant to this cause and it transcended as part of Laria’s perspective after her husband’s death, “it just seemed like the alcohol was in my life. I'm against it and still don't like it. I knew that it was because living here and not being educated.”

Learning

Maria. Maria admits that getting a higher education was not a personal goal for her. However, she quickly learned that obtaining a degree higher than a high school diploma would place her in a better position in the workforce. She acknowledges that she “learned a lot going to college” and she appreciated the help that she received from those who preceded her “my two older sisters would take charge and they would just pass on whatever they learned, to me.” Eventually, Maria would like to “continue going to school and continue learning.”

As a single-mother to young children, “[I] learned to be with my three boys I had to learn that I couldn’t depend on anyone.” Self-sufficiency was continuous and evolving for Maria. Maria recalls suggestions made by the staff at her son’s school (middle son); her son had an extraordinary excitable personality and she had been asked to consider putting him on “medication to calm him down.” Maria had been able to bestow positive discipline and knew that her son did not require medication. Being “very hyper” did not

qualify a school to write-off her son, Maria expected that they work with him as much as she had or at least attempt to understand what may help him be more productive in class. In her conversation with his teacher Maria asked, “is he doing his work?” “Oh he’s the top...he’s the one that finishes first” replied the teacher, “then what is the problem? ... Give him more work”, insisted Maria. She did not depend on anyone to tell her what is ‘wrong’ with her children and she commanded assertiveness in the process.

Financial challenges did not dictate her motivation nor did it restrict the amount of her interaction with her children. “Even if I didn’t have money we always planned something so they got used to that they got used to planning things.” Maria learned to make the most of her time with her kids, she established her own traditions in her “own little world.” Maria picked a couple of days out of the week and assigned them as “family time”, “Friday is game night and Saturday we try to make a movie night.”

This custom worked great when they were children, everyone enjoyed participating. As they got older, understandably there were modifications to these plans. Maria appreciates the time that she has with her sons now that they have grown into young men. There are times when she arrives home from work and her sons will be there together “playing video games” they come over “just to say hi.” However, there are life situations that have become difficult to learn for Maria. While her sons appreciate her, they also welcome their own individuality and fortitude. When her second eldest son started college, Maria wanted to contribute. She purchased “clothes and books” for him. She remembers his response to her gesture, “mom I hate to do this to you, but let me tell you, I’ve grown. I need to do my own thing.” For Maria that comment “was like he just

threw a bucket of cold water on me. I can't believe that he just said that and I felt like he was just being ungrateful."

Life's lessons were difficult to embrace at times; Maria admits that it took her "awhile to understand that" her son craved his autonomy and clearly expressed his desires "I need to start making my own decisions." She made it through the heartaches, she got passed "feeling sorry for myself", as Maria puts it, and she understands that they are "moving on." This challenge presented a revelation, "now I have a little bit more...my own time", Maria says happily. With this newfound time, Maria developed a close friendship with a gentleman who had been a mentor to her sons as "their ROTC instructor." He helped her achieve extraordinary awareness through an experience of profound personal learning. "He made me believe in happiness ... I had forgotten what flowers smell like, the trees ... the color of the trees in the fall. I didn't know how to do that anymore." Maria regained her alertness and reconciled with her future ambitions, "I just wanna be the best grandma now, but I wanna continue growing as a person ... I want to just have my own kind of lifestyle."

Laria. Laria shares two sides to learning, an institutional education and life knowledge. As a young adult, Laria dropped out of high school. "I dropped out because my father has always...we were always low income so I had to work...so I dropped out to work." Laria's dedication to provide for her family's needs overrode any desire she may have had to finish school. Eventually Laria completed her high school education and received "just a plain GED, in '92". For Laria a GED meant that she "didn't get any education except taking some classes here and there" to fulfill the requirements. The GED also marked the start of her higher education trajectory. It was only later in life that

Laria found higher education accessible. She had raised her sons then focused on herself; “in 2006” she began her Higher Education path. “I got my associates in 2008. I got my bachelor's in 2010, and now I'm working on my master's”, says Laria proudly. Reaching those education milestones “means everything.” It means upward mobility, “Before I got my associates degree I was getting paid like eight to nine dollars an hour, then when I got my associates degree I got paid twelve dollars an hour and now that I got my bachelor's degree I get paid fourteen.” There is however, a caveat to the apparently increasing value of higher education, “I don't have a bachelor's in early childhood education” and this currently stunts Laria's advancement in her field.

Laria also professes lessons learned along the way. As a witness to her mother's private pain stemming from domestic violence, Laria learned to keep things to herself. “I just know that with my mom... my dad would hit her. A lot of the times she wouldn't even cry loud, she would cry to herself so that we wouldn't hear her. I was always listening, I was always hearing.” While her mother was struggling to muzzle the unleashing of her pain, Laria learned a life lesson that she continues to practice. Those moments as an auditory observer taught her not to share her personal struggles, “like even now it had been a long time, it had been a couple years that I hadn't shared my story... the death of my husband.” It is difficult to break old habits, but Laria has recognized that, “letting those things out, it's like healing. You heal the kids... healing to your soul to your heart and I think it's good.” Considering all that Laria has been through, has seen, and has heard, she steadily maintains a personal philosophy, “I'm a very strong believer in religion and God because the bible teaches you how to live...like college

teaches you how to live... like my profession teaches you that you need to start teaching your kids from birth all the way to five.”

Casilda. Although Casilda had her first child as a high school student, she managed to complete her prerequisites, “I graduated early with a three point something GPA.” Despite the knowledge that she had gained as a newly minted high school graduate, she still carried a naiveté “I could have gotten a scholarship if I would've applied and all that, but I didn't know what scholarships were. I didn't know what free money was. I didn't know what continuing your education was.” Driven to support herself and her son, Casilda walked into her local workforce office. Upon entering, a gentleman proceeded to inform her of a medical assistant program. After learning that she could have the tuition paid entirely through a grant and that childcare would also be included, Casilda was encouraged to go and inquire about this program at the “technical college.” “I went and I talked to the school. I was like I wanna register what is it that I need to do? I want to do it through this grant tell me what I have to do.” Casilda completed the nine month training while also working at Burger King part-time, in 2005 Casilda was certified as a medical assistant.

In general, Casilda hopes for a wider blanket of education, perhaps in communication. “You're talking to me in Spanish but I'm talking to you in English. It's not that it bothers me that much, but people do need to be educated. They need to be speaking English if you talk to them in English, especially at a grocery store or at a local store... at the gas station.” This experience exemplifies the change in the landscape, where maybe thirty years ago the population was predominately English speaking and prohibitive of the seeping Spanish language and culture.

Rosita. Upon graduating high school, Rosita ambitiously entered college “I’m currently in college, this is my last semester. I’m gonna get out with my BBA in finance and management...a double major.” Her feelings about nearly completing her bachelor’s degree are lukewarm because “it’s just like... well I’m finally gonna get it, but at the same time I’m applying for grad school” and also because “I come from a family where everyone has a degree. So for me to get a degree it’s just what’s expected. It’s not an accomplishment you know, you were supposed to do it.”

While Rosita may come across as indifferent about this particular accomplishment, she does recognize and appreciate the value of the knowledge she has gained. Majoring in finance is “very important. I’m always like you should budget and save money and stuff, so to me it’s important to do it because you save a lot of money than going out to eat and it’s healthier.” Rosita’s education also taught her to be vigilant surrounding other life issues. “You learn to really know what you’re signing when you sign a contract and stuff” says Rosita, adamantly. Signing documents is not escapable, but gaining acumen for the experience is important, “it’s just very common sense what you’re learning everybody signs mortgages throughout their lives but you may be signing something that you don’t know.” Her common sense approach prepared her for a career objective that she had been working on “I’ve always worked in restaurants so my goal is to open a restaurant, like I even did a business proposal and everything of how I want it. I have that ready.”

Primed for a path in the restaurant industry, Rosita shares another important element of enlightenment through her formal education experience. “I know a lot more stuff then before when I got out of high school. Like if you take a science class and you

learn to identify rocks it may not be useful with your finance major, but at least you're aware that there's different rocks... it's just different.” Rosita’s access to higher education has cultivated her good sense and in turn provided her with a global awareness.

Relationships

Maria. “I think there’s immediate family... secondary family you know it just depends... my kids are my everything.” Maria’s relationship with her children is a winning example of her role as a mother and what she hoped to accomplish in that role. She immediately set out to create a durable bond with her sons. She began by breastfeeding her first born and according to Maria, that resulted in him becoming “a momma’s boy.” There was a sense of completeness in this mother-son relationship, so much so that her husband, at that time, felt uncomfortable interacting with him. She wanted her husband to feel what she felt and wanted her sons to also experience the love of their parents. In order to attempt at accomplishing this, her second son was not “breastfed”... “We would bottle feed him so he [her husband], felt more comfortable with him.”

It became heartbreaking for Maria; her idea of her children having the “balance of two parents” was foreclosed due to her husband’s abandonment. Her principal desire was “just to...to protect my kids and what gave me courage is like if my mom did it in Juarez with no help it was not going to be as difficult for me.” As her relationships were effectively fluid, Maria reflected on her experience as a child with her mother raising children alone, for the fortitude that she would need moving forward.

Maria’s “secondary” family “would be my mom and my sisters you know which... um... um... we try to stay in touch a lot.” Her relationship with her mother was

steep; growing up, “I feel that my mom was more negative and you know that affected me in my relationships.” That “negativity” affected the type of relationship that Maria would have with her paternal grandmother and the only logic that Maria can apply reverts back to her mother, “I don’t know it was some kind of jealousy, I think you know. Now I go back and think that it was... you know...from my mom’s part.”

Maria shares, a glimpse of her mother’s delicate side when the decision was made to come to the United States “It was more because of my mom didn’t want us to lose my dad.” There is a moment of silence as Maria’s tears surge from her eyes, “sorry” she responds, “it’s okay” I replied. Her tears were the product of thinking back to when her mother was raising Maria and her siblings, alone in Mexico, “it was hard for my mom”. Their swift exit from Mexico also complicated her memory of her mother, “my mom had to cross the river with my two older sisters”; Maria slept through the journey while traveling with her aunt and other siblings in a van. The “reward” for crossing the border “would be that we had our dad.” The benefit was great, but the fear was greater, knowing that “we were not allowed to be here legally.”

Maria cherishes the relationships she has with her sisters, today. As young girls they certainly experienced the sibling rivalry that most of us experience with our own siblings. In her time of need she knew that she could rely on her sister. “I ended up homeless because my ex-husband... you know ...we lost our house so I went back to live with my sister.” Circumstances brought Maria and her sister closer together. Shortly after moving in, Maria gave birth to her third son, she now had a one year old, a two year old, and a newborn. At the same time, Maria felt the sadness that her sister felt with her unsuccessful attempts at getting pregnant. Maria somewhat told her sister “we can share

my baby.” Following that supportive remark, Maria began to notice a difference, “I would be exhausted and I would wake up and my baby wasn’t there. So she started doing that you know helping me.” Unexpectedly, “she actually took it very serious”, says Maria of her sister’s help. Her son spent time back and forth from his mother’s house to his aunt and uncle’s house. There was a gradual transfer of parenting and then the point of no return, “I couldn’t just take him because I love my sister too... you know ...love my boy like her own and my brother-in-law it was like his baby too.” Her brother-in-law and her son grew to “have a bond that’s indescribable.”

One specific relationship took Maria through an extraordinary personal journey. She had a relationship with a “very young” man, with whom she would eventually bear her fourth child. They met as neighbors when the friendly attraction began, but Maria remembers that her attitude towards entering into a new relationship was “no, it’s just for fun. I didn’t want anything serious.” Well, serious became more serious. Maria recalls her grandmother coming to visit during the honeymoon phase of their relationship. During that visit she had a bit of advice for Sebastian, “you take care of my granddaughter... she deserves to be happy so if you’re not gonna make her happy you better just walk away.” He did not walk away and according to Maria he tried to make a happy family.

He, short of begged, Maria for a child. This was unthinkable for Maria considering this was a rebound relationship meant for entertainment and having a child "would require some kind of commitment." Ultimately, Maria became pregnant with her fourth son by Sebastian. She "slapped" him upon receiving the news that she was with child. Maria knew that somehow he manipulated the circumstances surrounding her

conceiving. "He kind of planned it...that he was gonna get me pregnant." While she "was very upset", she was also thankful to God that her "little angel came."

The force of her hand to his face would not shake the undesirable habits that Maria did not wish to be permanently bound to. Maria knew all along that "he had...um... some problems...you know um...he had alcohol and drug" problems. She swallowed deep with each short pause and filler, almost as if she wanted to quickly wash down what she was going to say, before she said it. Despite that being the case, Maria attempted having a durable relationship with Sebastian; however it wavered for "thirteen years...fourteen", it was a cyclical pattern of "separate and come back...separate." This cycle ended when Maria realized that "it was a sick relationship." "I was connected with him. It was ...um like...a codependency that I had with this other person." In essence Maria too, became addicted. She became absorbed in the routine of a relationship that had always been imbalanced, "it wasn't all in and it wasn't all out."

Laria. Laria's focus on relationships is considerably surrounded by her relationship with her husband. She has a traditional perspective on what marriage means to her, it consisted of "a big wedding" and perhaps symbolically getting married in church reinforced her concept of marriage, "I got married to be with my husband for the rest of my life". This coincided with another one of her conventional convictions of marrying one man and staying "with one man".

Laria also subscribed to the expectancies of her relationship with her husband. After they were married, "he didn't want me to work" during the "first four years" of their marriage. As a result, Laria continued to miss out on the prospects that education could offer. Given her circumstances, "education was not reinforced".

Laria was twenty eight when her husband passed, she had two sons and an over bearing case of depression. When her immediate feelings of grief and loss came to pass, she began to be showered with advice from those around her. "Get married so you won't be alone" was their advice, but Laria's experience had left her with a permanent scar and thinking of a potential new relationship as everlasting provoked her response, "who knows maybe I'll get married and he'll die before me again".

The contemplation of dating, for Laria, presents dual perspectives. On one hand Laria knows what she would not want in a partner. "I was married to a Mexican man and the machismo was too much. I don't want to be with a man like that anymore. I wanna have my space." On the other hand, if Laria were to begin dating, she is certain that her current path in higher education would be derailed. "If I start dating, I know that I'm gonna put my school on hold." Fearing that this would be the case, Laria reassures me and mostly herself that at "fifty three [years of age]" she does not "need to date."

The angst of not completing what she set out to achieve by going to college is significant. Laria was inspired to return to school by her oldest son, who had joined the United States Army and upon accomplishing his term, he began attending the university and has secured a position in the healthcare field. In the long term, Laria anticipates that he will become a doctor. This inspiration became a "reason" that Laria "got back into school". She hoped that she could effect change in her youngest son and "motivate" him. According to Laria, her youngest son "didn't see school as being important".

Despite his rebellious ways as a young teen and his preferred vices as a young adult, Laria always worked on having a positive relationship with her son. She took great strides in making sure that he was important and that he knew she loved him regardless of

what worries he bestowed on her. "What really helped me was...um...being able to talk to him...to embrace him". The communication between her and her son flourished the most during his times of deepest darkness. When words just would not do it, "a lot of the times [Laria] would cry with him" in solidarity and listened as he spoke; "a lot of times he would talk to me that a lot of the times he just couldn't get out".

No matter what had happened in their lives, Laria could not imagine being anything other than *there* for her sons. There was no crossing the lines between love and disfavor, as she had done with her husband. When Laria's husband had done something that was against her liking she would make sure to compensate herself for enduring such dissatisfaction. Laria would confront him, "ok, you came drunk today" and then she would "hit him". Other times she would wait and "wouldn't put lunch the next day." Her sons received unconditional love, "with a son you can't pay yourself", says Laria. They could never do anything that warranted her payback response.

Casilda. Casilda's relationship with her mother was segregated. "At an early age" Casilda learned to emotionally respond to her mother with, "I'm gonna stay away from you." The mother-daughter bond skipped Casilda because according to her, "she would obviously prefer my two older sisters over me." The input that was provided to her, by her mother, made an impression on Casilda as she grew up. "When you start pushing somebody away, people learn." When her mother said "no I'm not gonna help you with your son" and "I'm not gonna teach how to cook" Casilda was learning that her relationship with her mother was disconnected. However, even at a young age, Casilda knew what the role of a mother consisted of. Her inwardly reply to her mother's actions

was muddingly restated, “You’re my mom you're supposed to support me.” And with a deprived look on her face, Casilda continues, “She cut those ropes at an early age.”

Casilda cherishes the relationship she has with her son. He is unlike any typical child she has encountered, “he’s more of an adult”. He is easy going and at the age of seven, does not require too much parental guidance in comparison to other children his age. On the contrary, “he's more of the type that would take care of me”, says Casilda. Her primary focus is on taking care of him. His maturity parallels that of his life experiences surrounding his parents break-up. Casilda recognizes that “he's gone through so much” as a result of the dissolution of their relationship. “When we first got separated he got really depressed” he suffered emotionally and began showing the physical symptoms of depression, “he was losing weight, he wasn't eating, he was peeing on himself,” and “he was pooping himself.” Her son was “about four years old” when this was going on and Casilda witnessed how much he was digressing. “It was hard for me to see him go through that” added Casilda. This was enough to catapult Casilda’s will to survive, “I was like I cannot let this guy put me down”.

Had her son been taken away from her, Casilda believes that her circumstances would have been glum, “I would have probably lost the house and probably wouldn't be working”. Not only would her socio-economic status have suffered, but Casilda predicts that her overall quality of life would have been compromised as well “I probably would be an alcoholic or something a drug addict I don't know I never tried drugs but you never know... somebody takes something that's part of you that you've bonded with for so long it's taking part of your life as well.”

Rosita. Rosita's relationship with her father was more hands off than hands on. Rosita describes him as someone who "used to drink a lot; he was an alcoholic." Rosita's paternal grandfather often had disputes with his son - Rosita's father - about his drinking fearing that he would fatally end his life and that of Rosita and her siblings. Rosita recalls having been "involved in several accidents." One accident in particular, remains unforgettable; Rosita's father "crashed" during one of his drunken trips with his family "the windows shattered" and Rosita suffered a gash to her forehead. She softly stroked the scar, trying to show me. "I still have it" she says.

As a child, "at times" Rosita's father "was very loving" and playful. "He would play with us and encourage us to play soccer and track and stuff", Rosita adds. However that was not enough to cement his relationship with Rosita based on what she thought he should have been doing to cultivate and nurture a father/daughter relationship. Rosita's most vivid memory of her father was "drinking most of the time." Any prospect of Rosita having a relationship with her father was dwarfed by his relationship with alcohol and perhaps any other productive contributions to his household, "like he never bought a house he never did anything."

Rosita treasures the relationship that she has with her mother. She admires her mother's emotional fortitude. According to Rosita, one important reason for the admiration she holds for her mother is because, "she put up with my dad for so long and I wouldn't be able to do it." Another considerable reason was, upon learning that her mother had been a rape victim, in Mexico, resulting in a viable pregnancy, "that makes her even more of a better person to know."

Rosita's only critique of her upbringing by her mother was that she was not very encouraging when it came to extracurricular activities. Her mother's work ethic outweighs this minor and unimportant attribute. Her mother owns "two houses that are in *Juarez*"; they were purchased, single-handedly, from funds earned while "working two jobs." Rosita continues with her verbal display of love and affection for her mother, "I love her to death and I would do anything for her. "She's my life. She's the greatest person ever. I can talk to her about anything. She's my best friend."

Rosita did not have a close relationship with her siblings mostly because of their age difference; however, after the birth of her daughter, Rosita admits that "we got close when that happened." Her sisters have taken on a supportive role when it comes to the relationship that they have with Rosita and Rosita's daughter. Rosita describes a time when her financial aid, at school, was questionable, "They told me we may not pay your last semester you may pay for it so I spent all summer working." Her sister's stepped in and took Rosita's daughter to "Disneyland and they've taken her to Sea World here in San Antonio and they take her out on field trips and my daughter loves them." Rosita credits her daughter as the reason for her reunion with her siblings, "I think it was my daughter that made it for us like to be close."

Rosita's relationship with her daughter's father was a seemingly committed one. It began with an assurance of friendship, "He was my friend for almost four years before we started dating." Their friendship turned into something more serious and "then we dated for like three years." During that time, Rosita became pregnant with her daughter. She became distraught at the news that she received prior to giving birth to her daughter "doctor's said that I had gotten an STD." This marked the beginning of the end of her

relationship with her daughter's father. It also impacted Rosita's future interest in other men, "it's hard because...I can't socialize that well with other men."

Esperanza. Esperanza shared her stories about the variety of relationships that are or have been important in her life. Esperanza describes the qualities of the boyfriend who lived with her prior to her epileptic seizure, "ese muchacho supo valorarme y salir adelante, pues todo me arreglo... todo la traila" meaning "that man knew how to value me and move ahead, well he fixed everything for me...the entire trailer." Unfortunately, Esperanza experienced the heartbreak of ageism. She describes the time when her then boyfriend decided that he wanted out of the relationship, "*cuando entre a los cuarenta años en adelante a mi me agro ¿cómo se le llama esa en la.... ¿la menopausia? ándele si a me agarro muy frágil esto*" meaning "from the time I turned forty years old and on I began, what is the name of it...**menopause?** Yes. It was got me very hard." Esperanza has remained without the companion of a partner and confesses about her feelings, "*si se siente uno sola, si se siente uno... como dice la otra palabra...desamparada, si se siente uno el que alguien no vaya venir más tarde para yo poder darle un taco*" meaning "yes one feels alone, yes one feels like...what's the other word...helpless, yes one feels like no one is going to come home so that I can give him a taco." Esperanza enjoys providing her daughters food when they come home from school. She misses being able to provide her partner a plate of food when he arrives from work.

Esperanza's relationship with her mother was bitter sweet. Being that Esperanza was limited in her ability to support her family, her mother was her exclusive resource for attaining the means to sustain the family. For the most part, Esperanza talks about her mother as someone that she appreciates because "*ella nos tiene aquí, pos muy cuidada...*

nos proteja nos ayuda y todo, se apura porque comamos” meaning “she has us here, well very protected...she protects us...she helps us and everything, she hustles so that we eat.” Esperanza recognizes how valuable her mother is to her and describes what her mother symbolizes to her “*sin mi mama no soy nada... no llego a nada. O sea por ejemplo ay cuenta como se fuera el marido*” meaning “without my mom I am nothing...I wouldn’t get anywhere. For example, it’s as if she were my husband.”

Esperanza also holds conflicting feelings towards her mother. They are mostly related to how her mother treats her in comparison to her other two siblings. “*Se ha convivido más con migo. No me trata como trata a mi hermano y a mi hermana... muy feliz... muy contenta y que esto que orto que fue que vino... y con nosotros si nos regana*” meaning “She has lived with me the most. She does not treat me like she treats my brother and my sister...very happy...very happy and this and that and the other...she scolds us [Esperanza and her daughters].” Esperanza is visually emotional when she goes on to tell me how sad it makes her to know “*que mi mama me tiene alejada de ella*” meaning “that my mother has me distant from her” and it makes Esperanza feel “*muy triste... muy mal, porque con ellos sí y con migo no cuando yo soy la que necesito más la ayuda*” meaning “very sad...very bad because with them yes and with me no when I’m the one that needs the most help.”

The relationship that Esperanza does have with her sister revolves around the contributions that Esperanza’s sister makes toward Esperanza’s social needs. According to Esperanza, her mother “*no quiere que mi hermana lo sepa no más quiere mi mama que sepa lo bonito*” meaning “does not want my sister to know my mom only wants her to know the pleasant things.” However limited, Esperanza’s sister is aware that Esperanza

lacks, “*ella, de allá, nos manda para el espacio*” meaning “she, from over there, sends us money for the space.” Although Esperanza is grateful for the contributions that her sister makes, it is “*muy triste*” meaning “very sad” for Esperanza because she does not have any control over what type of relationship she would like to have with her sister.

Chapter Analysis

In this particular chapter, all of the participants shared lived experiences that contributed to the subthemes that make up this overall chapter. The subthemes speak to how the participants fulfill their role as single-mothers. They specifically describe critical moments that shaped the way they exercised fortitude in the face of need. It is important to point out that while every participant shared lived experiences that support the subthemes in this chapter, the subtheme on relationships is the only chapter that includes perspectives from all participants. This makes for an interesting contribution to funds of knowledge.

There were four subthemes that generated the overall theme of fulfilling the role – economy, space, learning, and relationships. Collectively, these subthemes contain the lived experiences that describe the challenges that the participants faced as single-mothers. Table 3 presents those specific moments broken out by subtheme, I will then move on to provide an analysis of the collection.

Table 3: Stimuli/Response - Fulfilling the Role Chapter

Participant	Subtheme	Stimuli	Response
Casilda	Economy	In need of food and was denied public assistance	“being who I am, of course I started asking family here and there if they...you

			know...if they had extra food can we have it, they're like of course."
Casilda	Economy	Casilda's aunt replaced Casilda's dish washing detergent.	Casilda realized that although dawn was "freaking expensive" it lasted longer than her usual choice.
Esperanza	Economy	Esperanza barter with the church in order to make ends meet	After accumulating hours, Esperanza approaches the father and asks "will you help me father, for groceries?"
Esperanza	Economy	Showing me what her refrigerator contained	There was a carton of <i>mole</i> that was half full and had been given to her by a neighbor
Esperanza	Economy	When her daughters are in need (menstrual cycle) and waiting is not an option.	" <i>tomo un trozo de tela y me lo corto en pedazos</i> " meaning "I take a piece of fabric and cut it into pieces"
Maria	Space	External influences were blocked out	"I made my own little world in my house"
Laria	Space	Her parents as a source of support	Laria also made her own "little world"
Maria	Learning	A teacher's attempt to convince Maria to medicate her son	"give him more work"
Laria	Learning	Her mother's experience with domestic violence	Laria learned to keep things to herself
Casilda	Learning	Not starting her higher education sooner	"I didn't know what free money was. I didn't know what continuing

			your education was”
Rosita	Learning	Learning outside of her major	“Like if you take a science class and you learn to identify rocks it may not be useful with your finance major, but at least you’re aware that there’s different rocks”
Maria	Relationships	Sympathetic to her sister’s unsuccessful attempts to become pregnant	“We can share my baby”
Laria	Relationships	The payback	Laria would “hit him” or “wouldn’t put lunch the next day” [husband] “with a son you can’t pay yourself”
Casilda	Relationships	Casilda’s mother pushing her away	“she cut those ropes at an early age”
Rosita	Relationships	The birth of her daughter	“we got close when that happened.”
Esperanza	Relationships	Feelings of being alone	“yes one feels alone, yes one feels like...what’s the other word...helpless, yes one feels like no one is going to come home so that I can give him a taco.”

Chapter Analysis

The participants talk revealed markers associated with food insecurity and funds of knowledge. Food insecurity relates to the lack of food resources accessible to

individuals and families as a whole. Food insecurity also acts as a descriptor that characterizes the quality and quantity of the food that is available (Dean & Sharkey, 2011; Sharkey, Dean, & Johnson, 2011). Casilda and Esperanza specifically shared lived experiences where decisions surrounding food had to be considered as a result of not having traditional means to provide for their households.

When Casilda's food and financial resources had depleted, she resorted to asking family and friends for any extra food that they could part with. The majority of those contributions consisted of canned food and any other food that others could part with. Esperanza's scarcity with food was also associated with her financial deficit, due to her inability to be gainfully employed. Her social network consisting of neighbors and friends also contributed to Esperanza's food needs. Both of these participants generated agency that triggered their social capital, thus uncovering the "collective social functioning" that is common in rural poverty stricken regions with food insecurity challenges (Dean & Sharkey, 2011, p. 1455; Walker, Holben, Kropf, Holcomb Jr, & Anderson, 2007).

Funds of knowledge (FoK), originally introduced by anthropologist Eric Wolf (1966), aimed "to define resources and knowledge that households manipulate to make ends meet in the household economy" (Hogg, 2011, p. 667). An extension of FoK was later developed by Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez (1988) demonstrating the exchanges of knowledge within *Colonia* communities. Hogg (2011, p. 667) cites Vélez-Ibáñez (1988) contribution to FoK via *Colonia* communities.:

...information and formulas containing the mathematics, architecture, chemistry, physics, biology, and engineering for the construction and repair of homes, the repair of most mechanical devices including autos, appliances and machines as

well as methods for planting and gardening, butchering, cooking, hunting, and of ‘making things’ in general. Other parts of such funds included information regarding access to institutional assistance, school programs, legal help, transportation routes, occupational opportunities, and for the most economical places to purchase needed services and goods. For the most part, clustered households are very self-sufficient and do not depend greatly on the market for technical assistance (Vélez-Ibáñez, 1988, p. 38).

I assert that the participants in this study and particularly in this chapter lend their lived experiences as a means of increasing the funds of knowledge scholarship. The economy subtheme has a correlation with funds of knowledge in that it exposes how Casilda and Esperanza exercise their self-sufficiency in order to make ends meet as in the case of Esperanza who barter her cleaning services in exchange for groceries or a payment to her utility bill. Esperanza also shares her creativeness in providing an alternative to sanitary napkins when her daughters are in need. Casilda adds to funds of knowledge through her decision making surrounding household changes; exchanging her dish washing detergent from Palmolive to Dawn was decided upon due to her aunt’s introduction to the long lasting effectiveness of the product and not through marketing efforts made by the company.

The talk of space also adds to funds of knowledge as it reveals how Maria and Laria chose to exclude external influences while raising their children by making their “own little world”. Their home space became the places where they were the authority, where their voice was unanimous and unopposed. Learning through life experience further connects to funds of knowledge as these life experiences enhance how the participants circumnavigated specific scenarios. Maria shares her story regarding her son in grade school and the teacher’s attempt to convince Maria to consider medicating her son due to his hyperactive personality. Maria did not see a problem with his energetic

nature and responded to the teacher with “give him more work”. This response is discloses how Maria’s autonomous decision making supersedes that of a teacher and that the common belief of staying busy is better than medication. Relationships are also discussed at length, in this chapter. They showcase sympathy, retaliation, neglect, unification, and loneliness, while adding to the “social distribution of funds of knowledge” (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992, p. 322).

**Part III: Discussion: Synthesis, Theory, Researchers' Contributions, Study
Limitations and Summary**

Chapter 8: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore and describe, in detail, how single-mothers, living in the Colonia along the U.S. Mexico border, make sense of their lives in this context. This study had two goals; the first goal was to gain an insider's perspective of the personal world of single-mothers living in the *Colonia* of *El Portaje*. The second goal was to find out how single-mothers perceive their lives in the *Colonia* in which they live. Towards that end, my research question was: What does it mean to be a single-mother living in a *Colonia*? In this chapter, I provide a synthesis of the chapter analysis that was provided in part two of this dissertation. The purpose of the synthesis is to answer the research question and demonstrate the relevancy to the field of conflict resolution.

Although theory was not initially imposed in this study, a subaltern theoretical perspective is considered as well as oppression. I argue that there is a duality that takes place in this region, but more specifically in *El Portaje*. I zoom in to the borderlands to offer a theoretical perspective related to the entrapment framework and Chicana theorist contributions. The chapter continues with considerations for future research, study limitations, and concludes with a summary of the study.

Synthesis – Answer to the Research Question

What does it mean to be a single-mother living in a *Colonia*? Taking the narratives that have been presented by way of portraiture and the analysis rendered for each chapter, the answer to the research question is offered as the synthesis or the

qualities of the analyses (R. J. Chenail, personal communication, April 23, 2014). It is as follows:

To be a single-mother in *El Portaje* means that, the participants in this study, manage their conflict/challenges by being strong, resilient, gritty fighters resourcefully utilizing upon positive frames of mind, helpful relationships, and life lessons. A single-mother in this scenario is also subjected to be a conflict resolution specialist by negotiating, mediating, facilitating, and problem solving inter-personal and intra-personal conflicts, thus giving a new meaning to alternative dispute resolution. To be a single-mother in *El Portaje* also means to consider the context and only focus on what can be changed or controlled.

Theoretical Perspective

Subalternity. In an attempt to provide a holistic theoretical application of subalternity, it is important to understand what subalternity is. It then becomes appropriate to begin with subaltern studies that were intended to initiate an interest in the voiceless subject in the post-colonial third world context (Guha & Spivak, 1988). Along that same vein and separate from that body of work is the celebrated essay of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* It is Spivak's position that as subaltern subjects, they cannot speak for themselves. Who they are, as post-colonial subjects, exclude them from a proper history. Representation of subaltern groups or the subaltern subject requires that the thinking class research the lived experiences of those subaltern individuals in order to provide an individual account of the subaltern status. Researchers lack persuasion into the subaltern individual's trajectory (Spivak, 1988). We

have yet to be interested enough to dig through the histories of individuals and re-present their truthfulness.

The diligent work of committed post-colonial scholars (Guha & Spivak, 1988), who along with Spivak (1988), concluded that the revisionist history was entirely the reason why it became difficult to record the individual's lived experiences. Spivak (1988) contests the histories surrounding Hindu divorce and widowhood and challenges inconsistent arguments, perhaps perceived as laughable, calling them "kettle logic" (p. 100). The histories were manipulated and essentially erased, leaving subaltern subjects with no access to the truth surrounding their conditions (Spivak, 1988). This, then, becomes a justification for the voiceless subjects.

Guha's (1988) investigation revealed that populations of people living on the margins were demonstrating in opposition of their status, their intentions were deliberate and thought out. Accessible histories regarding this display of rebelliousness have been captured to depict these subaltern subjects simply as bystanders, but not directly responsible for the opposition. The importance of Subaltern histories is to re-present scenarios where individuals united in their insurgent cause, had their voices originally suppressed by simply being an "empirical person" to actually being a catalyst for change via uprising movements (p. 46). Through the study of subaltern peasants, Guha (1988) compellingly dissects the dominant discourse.

There are three types of discourse attributed to representation of the subaltern histories as it related to the peasants. 1) Primary discourse, 2) Secondary discourse, and 3) Tertiary discourse (Guha, 1988). The first two types are linked directly to a source of hegemonic power. Dominant discourses, considered as primary discourse, were

orchestrated and perpetuated by government. Commoners who did business with natives were also influential in maintaining this 'official' rhetoric. It guided government action plans and policy. Secondary discourse was written for a particular audience not directly working within government. The histories were highly regarded amongst its readers and not questioned. These accounts brush over the surface of the subaltern's history through "monographs...or as statements"(Guha, 1988, p. 52). At the tertiary level, the discourse is no longer dominated and imposed by government. The perspectives of those who choose to write about the histories do not have a responsibility to government; therefore, the writings should occupy a distinctive form. Guha (1988) praised the work of those who chose to genuinely re-present the peasant as subaltern and acknowledges that this work has come a long way towards providing a body of literature that holds relevancy and deserves to be revisited. By re-examining these narratives we can begin to unveil, what has been, up until now, the implication that the individual phenomenological experience is not considered. However, there are some accounts related to the subaltern individual, albeit scarce.

Bhadra (1988) focused his efforts on exposing the individual histories as a means of acknowledging that there is a subaltern presence in post-colonial history and that is a step in the right direction. Bringing forth the actual accounts of those individuals considered as rebels to uncover that the only reason they were rebels was due to their prescribed circumstances. The story of the individual has been excluded and only mentioned in a cursory stroke. However, almost thirty years ago, Bhadra (1988) accomplished this while investing in capturing the stories of four individuals who were considered Indian rebels in the "rebellion of 1857.....against the British" (p. 129) and

back then the stories captured had taken place one hundred and thirty one years prior. Today we are approximately two hundred and sixty years removed from the original phenomenon, yet the importance to re-present these stories is still valid.

This appeal is echoed in more current subaltern scholarship. Nearly three decades after the debut of these subaltern studies, we have not managed to place our focus specifically on the individual as the voiceless subject. We should not only be further along in the journey to re-present subaltern histories, but we should also be "widening the net of 'subaltern studies' yet further, to embrace those non-humans" as possible subaltern subjects (Phillips, 2013, p. 165). While I believe that taking on the task of considering non-humans as subaltern subjects would be challenging, we have not made enough headway on human subaltern subjects, in the western world so as to regard other possible non-human subjects. However, I will leave that interest to other scholars that is not a point that will be explored here.

Since women are at the center of this study, I am sympathetic to women as a subaltern group. I am attentive to the plight of subaltern women in the spivakian sense. Spivak (1988) calls our attention to the gender issue related to subalternity which is the missing narratives of women. We are asked to recognize that, if the lived experiences of subaltern individuals are missing, then the absence of the female narrative is certain. Undoubtedly, women participated in uprisings; however, the dominant discourse surrounding gender favors the male. When, as a group the subaltern voice is devoid and histories are nonexistent, the focus on women results in a greater injustice.

This was the case and quite possibly the motivation for Spivak 's (1988) focus on women who were subjected to *sati* in post-colonial India. There were clear disadvantages

for these women. The stratification of women is significant in any context; however, there is an implicit position for the woman in the post-colonial landscape. Strata related to ethnicity/skin color are inconsequential, that is precisely the "colonial subject-construction"(Spivak, 1988, p. 90); therefore, it does not lend relevance to her liberty. As is the case on the borderlands, being a minority and living there is irrelevant because that is precisely the population that inhabit these spaces. In a colonized space, being a minority who is treated unjustly does not translate into a qualification for freedom.

In this case then, it becomes impossible to reach the individual narrative. Not only were those the circumstances, but it also became fertile ground for speaking for women. As Spivak (1988) put it, "white men are saving brown women from brown men" (p. 92). This illustrates the voiceless women and how they somehow required 'saving'. It is not any more different under the conditions that rendered Koreans as "disposable commodities" (Hübinette, 2007, p. 121). Adopted Koreans are told what their circumstances are and how it can be better; they are provided with resources derived from biased sources. Throughout their human journey, Korean adoptees are exposed to injustices that become inescapable, similar to post-colonial Indian women (Hübinette, 2007; Spivak, 1988).

Speaking for the 'other' is not uncommon "given western colonialism's dominance for the past five centuries"(Ling, 2007, p. 3). Ling (2007) goes on to explain the insensitivity - this is my term not Ling's- of the western world and how it (the western world) suggests that it is worthy of being an example to others and those third world countries could benefit from the west as model and a catalyst for change. Adding that post-colonial theory could very well change the subaltern scholarship landscape by

"recogniz[ing] and document[ing] the ability of the subaltern (whether slave, prostitute, servant, clerk, or lieutenant) to 'remake' the colonizer's hegemony" (Ling, 2007, p. 13).

Given this perspective, it opens up the possibility to explore subalternity not only in third world settings, but anywhere a silenced center exists. Therefore, the more we choose to focus on the stories of the 'other' the more we eradicate the traditional masculine control that has been longstanding. Furthermore, we should also task ourselves to re-examine the margins to provide an accurate depiction of what life is really like there (Ling, 2007).

This invitation to explore, research, investigate, and re-present the stories of those who live on the margins, is resounding.

The cadre of scholars who have aided in defining subalternity have done so through very rigorous scholarship. After what has been presented here, subalternity can be defined as individuals who cannot speak. When they did manage to speak it was in a form of organized rebellion; however, they continued to be silenced and were not credited for their opposition. Since these were typical circumstances, it was far more difficult to access the individual voice. The discovery of the levels of dominant discourses examine just how much hegemony controlled histories and aided in producing government policies. The implication was that individual phenomenological experience is not considered; however, the work of subaltern scholars proves to be prudent albeit scarce in presenting the accounts of individuals. Gender also becomes a variable to consider when discussing subalternity. When we move from general accounts of subalternity to more detailed histories, women are neglected.

Prior to the prevalence of subaltern studies, presented here, Fanon (1965) was writing about altering "the order of the world" through decolonization (p. 36). He argued

that delving into the details of a nonindependent territory was not required, for the most part, the injustices of memorable and documented events have been impressed upon us. However, it is necessary to consider the structure by which colonization was constructed. It is only then that we will be able to deconstruct and rebuild a decolonized norm (Fanon, 1965; Leyva, 2003). Essentially, subaltern studies are representative of the investigation and deconstruction of colonized systems. Bringing forth these histories allows us to examine 'truths' that propel this development.

Through the deconstruction of systems, which I consider to be the investigations into the subaltern phenomena, and the reconstruction of it, via subaltern studies, the challenge has been in attaining the histories of the colonized individual, and more so of the colonized woman. This is not surprising considering the very nature of the circumstances. In making strides towards re-presenting the woman, Mohanty (1988) cautions us to avoid "compos[ing] a singular "Third World Woman"" (p. 334); further exemplifying the demand and relevance of the individual female account.

Subalternity can be conflated with oppression. There is, however, a significant difference. In comprehending subalternity, as it has been defined above, it is important to recognize the difference and refuse this, perhaps common, consolidation. It may be that, the obfuscation surrounding the oppressed and the subaltern is relatable and used interchangeably, it creates this unification. In his lecture series, Campbell (2011), points out the common equivocation between subaltern and oppressed. He goes on to assert that, while all subaltern are oppressed, not all oppressed are subaltern. The orthodoxy of hegemonic control is to dominate the historical narratives, thus creating and perpetuating a subaltern status by which no access to histories is a condition. Oppressed peoples;

however, do have access to these histories. In considering the borderland context, I acknowledge that subalternity and oppression are in play simultaneously, rather than an erroneous conflation.

The Borderlands

“Let us now move to consider the margins”(Spivak, 1988, p. 78), the margins here are the U.S./Mexico borderlands. This marginalized region is no exception to the vacancy of the women's narrative. There was an intentional omission of Chicana histories; the feeling was that these women did not make significant contributions to be considered worthy of being mentioned, much less have entire stories written about them (González, 2004). There is hope for the re-presentation of Chicana women histories. Historical files recording the woman's presence, still exist (González, 2004). However, the sentiment remains the same, there has to be a reason alluring enough to effect this change (González, 2004; Spivak, 1988). The borderlands become an interesting space and an even greater phenomenon to study if we consider how much we have advanced as a nation, yet still unable to scrub out the colonized stains of our history.

Leaving Mexico for a better quality of life with access to human needs were the reasons for the participant's and their families taking the transnational risk. They leave their personal histories when they leave their native country. The revisionist history, then, becomes the entrapment processes by which are applied via law enforcement and vigilantes, thus becoming the dominant discourse (Guha & Spivak, 1988; G. G. Núñez & Heyman, 2007; Spivak, 1988). This history is created by lawmakers, politicians, and common citizens who vow for an American America, ignoring this country's own past as a colonizer (Brenner & Leighton, 1984). The participant's stratification is also worth

mentioning since the more stratified she is, the more she is removed from the dominant discourse (Spivak, 1988). Therefore, being Mexican, female, a single-mother, and living on the borderlands disqualifies her as having any connection to the hegemony. The stratification placed upon Mexican women, Chicanas, or Mexican-Americans in this region is also done through the very culture in which she exists (Anzaldúa, 1987).

The contributions of (G. G. Núñez & Heyman, 2007) will serve as a framework for understanding the duality of subalternity and oppression on the borderlands. On the periphery there is a "regional and national-scale" barrier, while on the interior, obstruction is experienced through "personal-level phenomena" (p. 356). These obstacles are created by multi-level, multi-agency law enforcement and compounded by personal limitations on the part of the individual. However, constrictive this sounds, these areas are considered as "regions of refuge" (Vélez-Ibáñez, 2004, p. 1) for its populations. The dynamics that take place in this region are fluid despite the ever present restraints that materialize as structural violence (Kleinman, 2000). This is the intersectionality that sustains the subaltern/oppressed flow.

Although all people living on these margins are oppressed, there is a difference in their status. "Citizenship, which differentiates the colonized from national minorities, allows minorities to change culturally and assimilate individually in the dominant culture" (Vélez-Ibáñez, 2004, p. 2). As new immigrants arrive, the subaltern is present. As those subalterns move into the minority category, the oppressed is present. There is a simultaneous cyclical presence of both groups. They interact and remain committed to helping one another, they exercise a "morality of risk" while creating their "trapped

"refuge" communities" (G. G. Núñez & Heyman, 2007, p. 359). The women who participated in this study share similar connections.

Three of the five women who participated in this study openly discussed their citizenship status and shared their experiences surrounding their situations. Maria shared her experience of coming to the United States as an undocumented child, which meant that she had a covert transnational experience. Upon her arrival, her father, who had already been in the United States for several years, working, made arrangements to "fix [their] papers". Maria had moved from subaltern to oppressed, rather quickly; however, the uncertainties of what her rights were, kept her from moving freely (G. G. Núñez & Heyman, 2007). She attended an American school and found solace against the culture shock, through sports. Her free spirit and enjoyment of sports would gain her and her team frequent wins. Only to ignite anger in the opposing team, who were also their peers at school. The anger would be projected as bouts of physical violence and name calling, but Maria felt there was nothing she could do because she did not know her "rights". According to Maria, the kids who were bullying her and her friends, were also Hispanic and knew Spanish, they simply chose not to speak it, seemingly evident of the colonized becoming the colonizer (Fanon, 1965).

Maria and Laria shared a phrase that I found interesting in this context; making their "own little world". They apply "refuge" a little more intimately, in their personal space. I would adopt "peace scapes" (Hiller & Vela, 2013, p. 161) and apply a modified version to this phrase. The term was first coined by Hiller (2010) as part of his research findings of a biographical research study focusing on "nonviolent peace and social justice activists" (Hiller & Vela, 2013, p. 161). For Laria and Maria, their imposed identities as

single-mothers left them to make inexperienced decisions. They realized that they had to be "mom and dad" and in this role, they were critical to the development of their children. Creating their own safe spaces was away to instill safety and security in their surroundings. I would then assert that they embodied fluid "peace scapes" (Hiller & Vela, 2013, p. 161) as their identities as single-mothers were cultivated.

For Esperanza, the application of the entrapment process is extended to include her citizenship status, her body via her health, socio economic status, and the absence of a loving family. Esperanza once had a pretty decent life. She was in a committed relationship with a *muchacho* - young man - who treated her and her daughters well. As she started to experience health related issues he decided to leave the relationship. She suffered a nearly life-ending epileptic seizure that keep her confined to her own body. As a result she was physically limited and that had an effect on her ability to earn wages to support her family. She lives in a deteriorating trailer home without hot running water and does not have a source of transportation. Renewing her visa fell through the cracks, thus leaving her in an unauthorized immigration status. Esperanza displays "overlapping and interacting entrapment processes" and a "near-permanent sense of liminality"(G. G. Núñez & Heyman, 2007, p. 357) . Esperanza also exhibits a unique subaltern/oppressed phenomenon. She had authorization to be in the United States, she would have been considered an oppressed minority. However, the failure to renew her visas places her in a subaltern and entrapped position. Adding to the "distribution of sadness" (Vélez-Ibáñez, 2004, p. 3).

The ability to document is there, the willingness should be matched. We must get past social and political ideologies in order to keep the decolonization momentum going

(Anzaldúa, 2009). Irrespective of what our interests are and what we specialize in, the slightest investments into the feminist history will break away the revisionist history and it will add to the area where histories are absent (Castañeda, 1992). Dare to take risks by making contributions that will take us, our histories, and our future, into a more profound exploration ultimately becoming a constant presence.

Consideration for Future Research

'Point of view'. Sammut and Gaskell (2012) challenge the current terminology landscape surrounding the practice and application of "scientific inquiry"(p. 46). They assert that there is a need to call for change within the field, so that, as researchers, we can add to the breadth and depth of the phenomenon and its significance. This expansion is proposed by considering the participant's perspectives surrounding "human social behavior" (p. 47) as it relates to her conditions. Typically, social science methodologies guide researchers towards explaining, describing, as well as conveying an understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena surrounding an individual's circumstances. Within social science research, the focus has been on the individual's simultaneous interactions between thinking about the phenomenon and participating in the phenomenon. In order to take on this proposition, we must first consider adding to the methodological terminology (Sammut & Gaskell, 2012). The authors proffer their position.

The urge to narrow our research focus is made as a consideration for what has been typically unexplored. The divergence from this focus is satisfied, in this case, via "the individext - individual in context" (Sammut & Gaskell, 2012, p. 48). Making this practice part of the scientific inquiry process requires description and defining. Sammut and Gaskell (2012) propose seeking out the individual's point of view as a source of

examination in social science research. They define the point view as a perspective, original to the individual. This perspective is associated with the individual's coherent experiences, which she believes and deems to be true and contain a rational explanation. It is characteristic of the individual's perspective towards an incident or thing that bears significance within practical judgment. Simply put, it reveals another feature of the occurrence that is clear to the individual (Sammut & Gaskell, 2012). The authors expand on making their case for this advance.

In order to reach this level of investigation, Sammut and Gaskell (2012) seek to achieve this examination as it takes place in their natural state, or "in situ" (p. 47). The need, then, would be to generate an accepted use of terms that would compel social science researchers to maintain the order of characteristics that create the occurrence (Sammut & Gaskell, 2012). Preserving the sequence of those elements of the phenomenon is significant to achieving this level of investigation. Accomplishing this, adds a robust layer to social science research. Researchers inclined to execute such an approach are assured of the parameters needed to honor this technique. To establish this, the authors have created a definition that considers the conditions under which the behavior occurs and is directly related to the participatory action of the individual; furthermore, they remind us that maintaining its structure throughout its application is important (Sammut & Gaskell, 2012).

In consideration of the usage of points of view research, one must become familiar with two features that characterize the point of view:

- (a) the point of view is a *relational* construct, that is, in having a point of view, human subjects do not merely act toward a social object or some other subject,

they interact with other points of view simultaneously in the process of adopting a particular standpoint toward a social object. The point of view is a *point* among others.

(b) the point of view is *relative*, that is human interaction is particular to subjects given the conditions and contingencies in which it manifests (Sammut & Gaskell, 2012, p. 48).

Through the practice of examining points of views, we can extend our familiarity of human social behavior. During the analysis of this idiographic study, I came across a revelation; there was something interesting taking place within the participant's narratives. I observed that, in their narratives, the participants were enduring challenging life experiences, yet still maintaining a clear focus on what was important to them. I was unsure of what *it* was; however, considering Sammut and Gaskell's (2012) contributions on point of view, there is a pocket of space, within their narratives, that warranted exploration. I attempt to add my contribution to this gap, below.

Preference *in situ*

My observations of the participant's lived experiences led me to find that, while the women were experiencing their unique circumstances, they were also moving ahead with their responsibilities, to their families, as single-mothers. It appeared to me that the participants were functioning from a preference point of view. This point of view is exhibited in various ways by all of the participants. Here I will present a point of view from a study participant to showcase how her preferences took place *in situ* and how they profoundly shape the way that we understand the phenomena from their perspective. The fluidity of their points of view and there contextualization with be highlighted.

Laria. "I like to go very pretty to church because I have a lot of pretty clothes and like I don't go out anymore so I just wear my high heels 'cause to work I don't wear high heels." Laria's routine of attending church has deeper, possibly non-religious implications. I observed three such implications. First, with respect to her attire, Laria, having been a school teacher, misses the opportunity to showcase a formal dress. Second, every Sunday she practices the routine of dressing up, making the first mass, and spending time with her family. Lastly, she seizes the opportunity for companionship with her church community and family.

The Sunday ritual has dissolved and Laria is left to make meaning of her life. In our understanding of the meanings that shape the way we think and feel about our personal lives we define the abstract by applying it to our own lives. Our own lived experiences are not significantly different from a life that is lived on the margin. In understanding what the margin is we must recognize that the margin is not only a predefined geographic space, the margin is also a preconceived ideology.

Ideologies surrounding the borderland landscape are "constructed through diverse representational discourses (scientific, literary, juridical, linguistic, cinematic, etc.).....and the representation [of the geographical space] is not a relation of direct identity, or a relation of correspondence or simple implication" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 334). Discourses on the topic of the borderland region tend to get represented in a particular context not parallel to other realities. As an example of representation by mainstream media, I argue that there is a fabrication of a dominant ideology of the borderlands, through a national, and perhaps international, media presence. Series, such as *Border Wars*, exclusively frame an image of crime and violence directly linked to the

U.S./Mexico border and ripens as violence against "the moral order" (Kleinman, 2000, p. 226; National Geographic Society, 2014). Conversely, the rhetoric surrounding *life* on the border is vaguely featured. In less than five minutes we are presented with the poignancy, resiliency, and ambition of borderland residents. The irony of the photo of a service member, in the armed forces, hanging on the wall of a family home, in the marginalized space of the United States, is difficult to overlook (Quinones, Newman, & Sherwood, 2012). The polarity is overwhelming, yet, in coherence with the point being made here.

Up until now, I have presented a limited evaluation of this phenomena taking place at a higher level. Considering that context, it is important to funnel down this interpretation and specifically focus on Laria's point of view. In quoting Laria directly I present her point of view on her wardrobe - from her on referred to as the wardrobe point of view- and her reason for wearing "pretty clothes" to church on the weekend. The wardrobe point of view features the central characteristics as prescribed by Sammut and Gaskell (2012). This point of view is simultaneously interacting with other points of view such as not "going out anymore" and not "wear[ing] high heels to work". Rather than focusing on what she no longer does and dismissing her wardrobe entirely, she prefers to optimistically highlight her wardrobe by wearing to Sunday mass services. This point of view is relative to the "conditions and contingencies in which it manifests" meaning that it is occurring *in situ* (Sammut & Gaskell, 2012, p. 48). The wardrobe point of view is original to Laria in that it is her experience. She truly believes that she "goes pretty to church" in comparison to the wardrobe that she wears to work.

This is a snapshot of what is important to Laria and I argue that, collectively, points of view via narratives help create an individual's own dominant discourse. Also

important to note, is the empathy that this type of examination will allow us to practice. Examining points of view is also applicable to our personal lives. At some point we are faced with conditions and contingencies that require our action. In the workplace - do we sit in wait and expect our superiors to offer his defense against unjustly work practices? Do we stand up and use our voice? Do we wait until we are rescued by our divine beliefs? Whichever choice it is, the space that we occupy while we carry out our preference is universally valid and ripe for consideration of future research.

Study Limitations

This research study was limited in that the time spent in the field was fixed due to my overall limitations and obligations. Financial resources also dictated how much time I could realistically spend in the field. Based on these limitations, I had to make decisions surrounding my sample size which resulted in a total of five single-mothers. Perhaps a traditional phenomenological study would have afforded greater saturation and the convenience of generalizability. Since that was not the case, I opted for a three-part interview process. This study was also limited to one *Colonia*. A multiple site case study could generate a broader view of life in various *Colonias*. Conversely, an ethnographic study could potentially contribute a wider scope of knowledge into a variety of issues that can only be explored through the investment of time that conventional ethnographic research calls for.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore and describe, in detail, how single-mothers, living in the Colonia along the U.S. Mexico border, make sense of their lives in this context. Background for the phenomenon was presented in

chapter one as a way to display the need for this study. A statement of the problem and significance of the study complimented this effort. Chapter one also offers a discussion of subaltern theory that is expanded upon in this chapter.

A survey of the literature surrounding the topic of poor single-mothers in urban and rural regions, excluding *Colonias*, is presented in chapter two. Literature related specifically to *Colonias* was also collected and captured in chapter two. The compilation of literature in this study exposed a gap surrounding the missing voices of single-mothers and their lived experiences raising children in their *Colonia*. This void, along with my personal experience as presented in the preface, triggered the exploration of what it means to be a single-mother in a *Colonia*.

The methodology was selected based on the ability to strategically and realistically conduct field research given my limited resources. Since I had a small sample size, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the best fit. IPA embraces the novice researcher and encourages small sample sizes for a robust analysis utilizing an idiographic approach. Initial noting considered descriptive, conceptual, and linguistic comments that established the frameworks for the portraits in the subsequent section.

Part two of this study contained the findings. Chapter four introduces the reader to the context – the *Colonia* of *El Portaje*. It also provides an introduction to the participants. Chapters five through seven represent a superordinate theme and contain the respective subthemes. The portraits are all written to highlight the participants' lived experience within a particular subtheme. A chapter analysis concludes each chapter (five

through seven) and presents the qualities of the participants talk, as well as how it is applied to other concepts.

Part three consists of the final chapter of this dissertation – chapter eight. This chapter begins with the answer to the research question. It consists of the qualities of the qualities of the analyses that were presented in chapters five through seven. Immediately following is the theoretical framework of subalternity. Subaltern theory is consulted, but it is determined that it is not exclusively applicable in this context. Oppression is best suited to describe the theoretical lens by which we can understand the phenomenon of life on these margins. I do argue however, that there is a duality of subalternity and oppression that is shared in this space. The borderlands are specifically highlighted to feature the oppression that is imposed through entrapment processes. I also include the perspectives of Chicana scholars who have written about this special region.

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