Title
Crawling through the educational pipeline: Latinas, poverty y educación

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7hc3f05d

Author
Hernandez, Angelica Victoria

Publication Date
2012

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
Crawling Through the Educational Pipeline: Latinas, Poverty y Educación

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Angelica Victoria Hernández

2012
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Crawling Through the Educational Pipeline:
Latinas, Poverty y Educación

by

Angelica Victoria Hernández
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
University of California, Los Angeles, 2012
Professor Daniel Solórzano, Chair

In the academic literature, the daily lives of Latinas are rarely told by Latinas themselves. Data on the lives of this population come out in social science forums in the form of statistical analyses often neatly organized in tables and colorful graphs. This dissertation goes against the grain of most quantitative analyses by positing that the “how” and “why” behind the statistics is where more nuanced understanding comes from. Through an auto-ethnographic testimonio, the story behind the statistics will unfold (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Using critical race theory as an overarching framework, I offer the counter narrative as a critical framework to capture the complexities that are often overlooked when researchers use the “scientific method” (Delgado, 1995).

This project had four objectives: (a) to use critical race theory (CRT) as a tool to better understand the experiences of Latinas living in poverty and going through the educational
pipeline, (b) to examine the educational and social challenges of Latinas living in poverty and making their way through the educational pipeline, (c) to reveal one of many “voices” of the poor, and (d) to make definitions of poverty more comprehensive by including the crucial element of experience.

This study focused on the educational experiences of Latinas as they progressed from elementary school through college, a trajectory commonly referred to as the educational pipeline. This study posited intersections of race, class, and gender as impactful factors in a student’s movement through the educational pipeline.

The 11 auto-ethnographic testimonios in this dissertation provided a deep understanding of the long-term effects of poverty, offering a detailed description of the mechanisms the authors used to navigate the educational pipeline (Solórzano, 1995). In the forms of work they have chosen to do, the women have enacted productive responses to what I have dubbed a Pedagogy of Poverty, replenishing the store of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2002). Most notably, the dissertation indicated that these Latina women have the ability to change the structures of oppression by having the courage to reveal their own vulnerabilities and the fortitude to stand on the side of humanity.
The dissertation of Angelica Victoria Hernández is approved.

Kay Sanders
Don Nakanishi
Mike Rose
Daniel Solórzano, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles
2012
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my late mother, Maria Angelica Velasco Hernández; I now understand all that you sacrificed for me. Gracias for supporting my dream to be a doctor, for speaking to me in Spanish, for sharing your love of art and beauty, for teaching me to navigate this life, and for reminding me que si se puede. Dios es Grande.

Also, to my life partner, Tracy Mestres, and our children, Mattias and Maya. I have learned valuable lessons from each of you, thank you for walking with me on this journey.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures .............................................................................................................. viii

List of Tables ................................................................................................................ ix

Chapter One: Introduction .............................................................................................. xiv
  Teaching Race ................................................................................................................. 1
  Telling the Story .............................................................................................................. 8
  Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................. 12
  Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 13
  Significance of the Study ............................................................................................... 14

Chapter Two: Literature Review .................................................................................... 15
  Defining Poverty ............................................................................................................. 15
  Characteristics of Deficit Thinking ................................................................................ 19
  The Narrowing of the Educational Pipeline for Latinas ............................................... 21
  Ecological Model .......................................................................................................... 23
  Gaps in the Model .......................................................................................................... 28
  Merging Bronfenbrenner with CRT and Testimonio ..................................................... 29

Chapter Three: Methodology ......................................................................................... 31
  Personal Standpoint ....................................................................................................... 32
  Study Rationale for Auto-Ethnographic Testimonio ....................................................... 34
  Primary Methods of Data Collection .......................................................................... 36
    Auto-Ethnography and Testimonio as Method .............................................................. 36
    The Social Category ...................................................................................................... 37
    The Academic Category ............................................................................................... 38
    The Personal Category ................................................................................................. 38
  Grounded Theory as Method for Data Analysis ............................................................. 39
  Grounded Theory as Method ......................................................................................... 39

Chapter Four: Documenting a Pedagogy of Poverty ...................................................... 41
  The Research Participants: Introductions .................................................................... 42
    Luna ............................................................................................................................... 43
    Violeta ........................................................................................................................... 45
    Carmen .......................................................................................................................... 45
    Monica .......................................................................................................................... 46
    Patricia .......................................................................................................................... 47
    Susana ........................................................................................................................... 48
    Consuelo ....................................................................................................................... 48
    Maria ............................................................................................................................. 49
    Vanessa ........................................................................................................................ 49
    Shalah ............................................................................................................................ 50
  Defining Poverty ............................................................................................................. 51
  Experiencing Poverty within the Home and the Neighborhood .................................... 56
  Housing ........................................................................................................................... 59
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: 2012 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia .......................................................... 17

Table 2: Participant Demographics ................................................................................................................................................. 43

Table 3: Dissertation Topics by Participant .................................................................................................................................. 98

Table 4: Framing the Language: Majoritarian Versus Counter-Story ......................................................................................... 125
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: 2012 Math Worksheet Used at Beaver Elementary School in Norcross, GA. ...........................................2

Figure 2: Percent of Population 18 and Younger in Poverty in 2003 by Chicano/as, African Americans, and Whites ..............................................18

Figure 3: Educational Attainment Pipeline in 2004 ..........................................................22

Figure 4: Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1990) ...............................................24

Figure 5: Bronfenbrenner’s Macrosystem ..............................................................................25

Figure 6: Bronfenbrenner’s Exosystem ................................................................................27

Figure 7: Bronfenbrenner’s Mesosystem ..............................................................................27

Figure 8: Bronfenbrenner’s Microsystem .............................................................................28

Figure 9: 7th-Grade Teacher Comments .............................................................................33

Figure 10: Integrating the Social, Academic and Personal Categories .................................37

Figure 11: Luna’s Father and Uncles ....................................................................................45

Figure 12: Honor Society Congratulations Letter to Monica .............................................47

Figure 13: Example of the Food Stamps We Received .........................................................67

Figure 14: Los Callejones: Los Angeles Garment District Alleys .....................................76

Figure 15: Low-Cost Mass-Produced Items For Sale .........................................................78

Figure 16: Pedagogy of Sacrifice Model ..............................................................................82

Figure 17: Pedagogy of Resistance Model ...........................................................................88

Figure 18: Pedagogy of Community Cultural Wealth .........................................................92

Figure 19: Grade Report from 3rd-Grade ............................................................................101

Figure 20: My Mother Before I Was Born ..........................................................................105
Figure 21: My Mother Holding Hands with Alerico D. Ortega .....................................105
Figure 22: My Mother Circa 1974 ...........................................................................106
Figure 23: Members of the Press at the Office of the Mayor, Los Angeles, 1965 ........107
Figure 24: My mother’s El Aguila New’s press card, circa 1960 ..............................107
Figure 25: My Mother’s Refrigerator .......................................................................109
Figure 26: Change and Bills That I Found in My Mother’s Purse ............................109
Figure 27: Man-Jo’s was a Fast Food Restaurant That Had Pinball Machines ........110
Figure 28: Service Entrance of Congress Theater .................................................111
Figure 29: The Congress Theater Located Across the Street from the Shoe Store ....111
Figure 30: Jules Five and Dime ..............................................................................112
Figure 31: Milwaukee Avenue ................................................................................112
Figure 32: The Alley Behind our Apartment ...........................................................113
Figure 33: 1st-Grade Report Card ..........................................................................115
Figure 34: 2nd-Grade Report Card ..........................................................................115
Figure 35: 3rd-Grade Class Photograph ................................................................116
Figure 36: 3rd-Grade Progress Report ...................................................................117
Figure 37: 3rd-Grade Report Card ..........................................................................118
Figure 38: 4th-Grade Report Card ..........................................................................119
Figure 39: 5th-Grade Report Card Lincoln Elementary, Whittier, California 1980 ...121
Figure 40: 6th-Grade Class Photograph ................................................................122
Figure 41: United States Marine Corps, 1988 .......................................................124
Figure 42: 2100 N. Milwaukee Avenue ..................................................................128
Figure 43: The sidewalk in front of Cid’s Tacos ......................................................128
Figure 44: Cans of Donated Food .................................................................134
Figure 45: Cover of Newspaper, October 2, 1987 ........................................136
Figure 46: My Study Space ........................................................................137
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my life partner, Tracy Mestres, for her patience while I followed my dream to become a scholar and writer.

Gracias a mis hijos Mattias y Maya. Son un regalo de dios. Espero que ustedes van a seguir luchando para los derechos humanos de todos. Somos todos hermanos y hermanas que merecemos respeto, amor y compasion.

To my advisor, Dr. Danny Solórzano, thank you for your unstinting support while I pursued my doctorate and became a mother. Thank you for opening your door and creating a safe place for me to be a scholar, a woman, and a mother.

To Dr. Mike Rose for showing me that academic writing does not mean writing without passion. You are a great example of a cultural critic.

Thank you Dr. Don Nakanishi for supporting my work early on and staying the course.

Gracias, to my dear friend and colleague Dr. Kay Sanders, for always believing in me and leading by example. I love you.

To my research group, thank you for helping me create and participate in a safe critical space where truth and justice could be debated, analyzed, and redefined. To my colegos/as Argelia Lara, Pedro E. Nava, Bert Cueva, Eduardo Lara, Marta Rivas y Crystal Alvarez for your encouragement and support.

A special thanks to Dr. Daniel D. Liou for starting the writing groups that kept us accountable and connected. To the women that led the way: Dr. Rebecca Burciaga, Dr. Tara Watford, Dr. Corina Benavides Lopez, Dr. Maria Malagon, Dr. Maria C. Ledesma, Dr. Dimpal Jain, Dr. Vanessa Ochoa, and Dr. Dolores Calderon.
Thank you to the women who shared their testimonios with me: You helped me document the strengths and intellect we have as a community, as women of color, and as individuals.

Thank you to Channing Work for rescuing me countless times with your love, humor, and mad skills on the computer.

Thank you to my teachers along the way, Dayla Buby Sims, Ann Vucetich, Laurie Atkinson, and Mardy Olivas, who made a difference.

Last, but not least, my friend and editor, Dr. Annalisa Weaver. Thank you for being my writing buddy, for the endless cups of coffee grounds, ashes, and laughter. For Rip Van, thank you for sharing your home with me.
VITA

Angelica Victoria Hernández, Doctoral Candidate

EDUCATION
University of California, Los Angeles, anticipated 2012
Doctoral Candidate, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies
Doctorate in social science and comparative education
Dissertation: Crawling Through the Educational Pipeline: Latinas, Poverty y Educación

University of California, Los Angeles, May 2005
Master of arts in psychological studies in education
Thesis: Adolescent Relationships and Disclosure of Sexual Orientation

Whittier College, May 1997
Master of arts in education, clear credential
Thesis Title: Compulsory Heterosexuality in High School: Ignoring the Needs of the Non-Heterosexual Students

Whittier College, May 1995
Bachelor of arts in child development, teaching credential

DePaul University, 1995-1996
Sociology master’s program

CONFERENCE ACTIVITY
“Chicana Psychological Theoretical Perspectives on Autohistoria: A Redefinition of Autoethnography Through Family Telling Case Method.” Conference of Chicano and Chicana Scholars Panel, National Association of Chicano and Chicana Scholars (NACCS), Pasadena, California, April 2, 2011.


PUBLICATIONS

EXPERIENCE
Graduate Student Researcher October 3, 2003-December 2004
Principal Investigators, Susan Cochran, Ph.D. and Vickie Mays, Ph.D.

Data Collector/Graduate Researcher September 2000-June 2001
New Relationship Study
Principal Investigator, Professor Carollee Howes, Ph.D.
Data Collector/Graduate Researcher  March 2002-March 2003  
*Connections for Children, Inc.*  
*Principal Investigator, Professor Carollee Howes, Ph.D.*

Data Collector/Graduate Researcher  June 1, 2001-February 15, 2003  
*L.A. Housing Authority Child Care Training Project*  
*Principal Investigator, Professor Carollee Howes, Ph.D.*

Data Collector/Graduate Researcher  August 2000-February 2002  
*Applied Developmental Psychology*  
*Principal Investigator, Professor Carollee Howes, Ph.D.*

**TEACHING POSITIONS**

Guest Lecturer, Mount Saint Mary’s College,  
Department of Sociology  
Brentwood, CA  

Guest Lecturer, Whittier College  
Department of Education  
Whittier, CA  

**VOLUNTEER WORK**

Open Hand Chicago-Delivered Meals on Wheels for People with A.I.D.S.  
Frank M. Rhodde Center-Youth Group Facilitator-Generation Q  
Anti-Violence March, Chicago, IL.  
A.I.D.S. Walk Chicago  
Rachel Rosenthal Theatre Company  
Carrie-On  
The Painted Turtle

**HONORS**

Department of Education Graduate Scholarship 2003, University of California, Los Angeles  
Hoyt Scholarship 2002, University of California, Los Angeles  
Gay Youth Award 1989, Martin Ruiz Scholarship  
PVT to Lance Corporal-USMC, Meritorious Promotion
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the educational experiences of Latinas as they progress from elementary school through college, a trajectory commonly referred to as the educational pipeline. This study will posit the intersections of race, class, and gender as impactful factors in a student’s movement through the educational pipeline. In isolation, each of these variables reveals aspects of an individual’s evolution along his or her educational path; however, by incorporating the three variables as units of analysis, this study will provide a multiple and layered perspective, offer a thorough description of the connections among the variables, and further understandings of the intricacies of race, class, and gender as they implicate the subject of education. This project has four objectives: (a) to use critical race theory (CRT) as a tool to better understand the experiences of Latinas living in poverty and going through the educational pipeline, (b) to examine the educational and social challenges of Latinas living in poverty and making their way through the educational pipeline, and (c) to reveal one of many “voices” of the poor, and (d) to make definitions of poverty more comprehensive by including the crucial element of experience.

Teaching Race

To understand the experiences of Latinas in the educational pipeline, one must first understand the social implications of race. Racial differences have historically been (and continue to be) seen as deficit from the “norm.” The norm includes the experiences of the White middle class, which is also considered the majoritarian perspective\(^1\) (Delgado, 1989). With this dominant ideology in place, people of other races are assessed through White middle class values and experiences. Within this frame there is little room for difference.

\(^{1}\) *Majoritarian perspective, majoritarian story, and majoritarian narrative* will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. Majoritarian narratives refer to the “stock” story that is told and received as “truth” in the traditional interpretation of history, which “its own superior position is seen as natural” (Delgado, 1989).
Categories of race have long been defined by physical features and have varied according to the current social and political climate. Since 1790, the U.S. government and the U.S. Census have been the primary authors behind these race categories. Paired with these categories came distorted stereotypes about People of Color—categories that have served to justify policies (educating Whites separately from Blacks), curriculum (tracking Students of Color in vocational tracks), and overall deleterious perceptions and attitudes toward People of Color Stereotypes about race. Racism has been prevalent throughout the history of education in the United States and is reinforced and perpetuated today, as seen in this math worksheet that was assigned and distributed to students in Norcross, Georgia in 2012. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1. 2012 math worksheet used at Beaver Ridge Elementary School in Norcross, GA.

Dominant ideology sets the race equation: *different equals inferior*. Dominant ideology is based on the status quo, and those who do not follow the prescribed order are relegated to the status of “other,” and treated accordingly. Such treatment is not isolated to small elementary school children, who may not have a critical awareness that they are being treated differently;
racism afflicts educated adults as well. A recent lawsuit (2012) by UCLA physician Dr. Christian Head, the only African American head and neck surgeon at the David Geffen School of Medicine, offers an example of the blatant racism People of Color still experience today. Of being featured in a graphically racist image by his colleagues, Head has stated, "To hear the groans and laughter, I just thought it was so dehumanizing . . . I think the purpose of it was to suggest that I was subhuman. It was a very graphic, sexual act, and I think the lack of response afterward was astonishing” (Savali, 2012). His attempt to make a formal complaint through the chain of command has been met with retaliation from his peers, other faculty, staff and medical students.

Similarly, Black feminist theorist bell hooks (1996) poignantly illustrated the shame and confusion she experienced as child looking in books with pictures of people with faces that looked like hers, but were labeled “savage”:

When she learns of slavery in school or hears the laughter in geography when they see pictures of naked Africans – the word savage underneath the pictures – she does not connect it to herself, her family. She and the other children want to understand Race but no one explains it. They learn without understanding that the world is more a home for white folks than it is for anyone else . . . (p. 31)

The disparity between how this child views herself as a Person of Color and the view presented in the text fuels her confusion. Although the textbooks in circulation today may not include such blatantly racist images, educators still use and regard textbooks as documents of truth for teaching everyone a particular history that may or may not include them. Regardless, the lesson comes from one perspective, which frequently favors the majoritarian story. Though textbooks are more likely to err on the side of politically correct, racist language is still very much a part of the discourse, particularly in our highly polarized American politics—with a Black president and deep ideological divides over immigration and Homeland Security. Even today the rhetoric of
“civilization” is applied as a short cut to racial, ethnic, and cultural denigration, as one current media conservative radio host has recently said,

Mexicans . . . criminaliens . . . the world lowest of primitives are from Mexico, without skills, without culture, who don’t share our language, not share our hygiene, haven’t been vaccinated . . . there are millions of leeches from a primitive country leeching off of you.²

How are children whose parents are immigrants from Mexico supposed to respond to such characterizations?

“Where are you from?” This question is not a simple matter of geography, but is loaded with images, stereotypes, and judgment. In Los Angeles, as elsewhere, this question is one many People of Color dread, as the popular media has demonized neighborhoods in (South Central Los Angeles, East Los Angeles) with images of violence and dilapidation. I have witnessed and experienced the hesitance and shame associated with this very question. In the presence of my mother, I would refrain from answering and let her respond. She had four different answers, choosing one depending on whom she was speaking with—and her mood, I imagine. She was either from Corpus Christi, Chicago, Los Angeles, or Monterey, Mexico. The last one was the least frequent response. That she offered random answers was never open to discussion. She had her reasons for alternating the answers, a reason I understand today better than ever.

Race is not a simple category, and understandings of it must incorporate the complexity and range of experiences it embodies. Scientific research often presents race as a definitive, quantifiable entity: “0” equals White, “1” equals Black, “2” equals Hispanic, “3” equals Asian, and “4” equals Other. They all fit nicely into a column. But such algorithms are too simplistic. The real world does not work like this. Race is complicated, and the lives behind the numbers reflect rich, complex, and multifaceted experiences. Critical race theory (CRT) provides the

theoretical tool for understanding and appreciating the fullness and diversity of these experiences. Taking into consideration each piece individually—and in combination with the others—is critical to understanding the experiences of People of Color.

But what happens when People of Color themselves express reluctance to accept their race and experiences? My childhood is full of examples of such resistance. My aunt showed me off as proof that we were Spaniards not Mexicans. Mexicans were Indians; the Spanish were European. My white flesh was her security; I was the evidence she did not have with her own three children. I was the last child of the 16 children of three immigrant siblings. It was clear to me at an early age: The goal was to produce the whitest child. Color was an important commodity in my family.

The effort to earn an education as a person at the cross-section of race, gender, and class is the focus of my dissertation. Using 10 testimonios, as well as my own story, I seek to provide insight into being Latina and poor while navigating a system that was not meant for people like me. Below, I quote from a graduate seminar discussion about the importance of race as a construct. Published as an essay in the Journal of Poverty, this piece exemplifies the intricate nature of race, reinforcing that numbers alone cannot capture the story and that a fuller story can be told when race, class and gender are not isolated from one another:

Race and class penetrate all aspects of life. There is no separation. There is no costume one can change and step out of in order to fit in. Race is the blood that surges through your body with every thought and every breath. Race follows you through the house, across the street and down the hall. You cannot shake it off, cover it up or hide it with a degree. You are born into the story, born into the history. For many People of Color life begins as a struggle; as it continues, it becomes more complex and more inflamed.

During my childhood, race in the home was tied completely to poverty. The rich were white and the poor, brown or black. The equation was simple; immigrant plus broken English equals poor. Race in the community was tied exclusively to violence and territory. Racial grouping defined the boundaries; an alley, a building or a lamppost delineated these boundaries. The Puerto Ricans
owned one side of the neighborhood and the Polish the other; we learned to negotiate our safety by planning the best escape route. As a result of this training, alleys were memorized, fences and walls scaled and speed became the most critical element. How quickly can you get back to your side? The attachment to your race or place of belonging was situational; it depended on the level of threat. As needed you might be able to talk your way out of the confrontation. Spanish was an asset and curse at the same time. Loyalty was negotiable and understandable; you do what you can to get out of a situation and get back to where you “belong.”

These experiences leave the echo of gunfire branded in your memory. The smell of burnt rubber filled the air as the piercing sirens raced to the scene. It happened so often that one became anesthetized to the trauma . . . it was part of the landscape . . . part of your neighborhood. This is the life of the poor. The unloading of bullets sounded like firecrackers on the 4th of July . . . the only difference is that one stifles freedom the other celebrates it. Violence seemed to be the only cause of death to People of Color. It was only the Whites that died peacefully in their sleep. They seemed to be the only ones that did not suffer. Race and poverty bleed into each other.

Race and the external world were linked like a chain to power. The faces of my people are still serving dinner and appetizers, carrying backpacks for the children they look after, scrubbing toilets at the university and telling their children, “educación es poder.” Those in power are not represented by brown skin; those in power do not trill their Rs nor do they have Spanish surnames. It is the sea of white faces that dominates the television screen, the movie screen, the board meetings and the universities. Penetrating the ranks is a difficult task, the path has been carefully constructed, and the invitation is not extended to all.

“As always the white person has dominated the person of color. That is why you get educated, Angelica. Having an education all the world can be equal.”

This is part of the “American Dream” the idea that education serves as the great equalizer. Education may make our lives different from our immigrant parents, but equal to those in power, we are not. I disagree with my mother’s statement as I disagree with the fantasy of the “American Dream.” It is more difficult than that, it takes more than desire, showing up, giving 110% and making sacrifices. It takes deflecting the constant and subtle whispers that there is no room for you. It takes energy to keep your head from looking down at the ground and holding it upright, it takes practicing your own mantra to remind yourself that you are here and you deserve to be. Solórzano (1998) confirms this pattern in his work with Chicana and Chicano scholars. According to Solórzano, Chicano/a scholars felt out of place, felt their professors had lowered expectations of them. The Latino scholars also had accounts of subtle and not so subtle race incidents.

Getting into college is not the most difficult part of the college experience for People of Color. The focus has been on who gets in, but who stays and graduates are equally important. The support system remains the same; the

---

3 Maria V. Hernandez (personal communication May 2002)

4 The concept that with hard work and determination, anyone can achieve success and prosperity.
language includes a coding system that excludes many. It mimics the stage that is set in society. Merit serves as the qualifier and experience gives you the edge. It assumes that you are not working to put yourself through college, contributing to your families finances and worn down by years of discrimination. The college experience is gravely different for the “other.” The isolation of being one of the few or the catching up one must do to compensate for what was missed in school; one is left out of breath at the end of the day from this constant battle. Reinvigoration comes from the realization that the system has yet to notice you . . . perhaps it is the adrenaline from the flailing arms that keeps you going. As I walk through the halls of UCLA and picnic on the lush green lawn I can’t help but wonder how I got here. It was not until I left Chicago that I knew something was wrong. You see, the sirens came less frequently, the smell of burnt rubber disappeared and gunfire was just an echo. No one asks me, “Where you from?”

Now, I read scientific journals about how race and poverty effect youth. I sit in class and listen to my professors analyze and reiterate the findings of empirical studies. I sit attentively and listen to my peers critique the authors’ procedures, dissect the measures used and examine the statistical significance of a given variable. They are talking about me, but my experience is only anecdotal\textsuperscript{5}! The “real” evidence is in a database somewhere.\textsuperscript{6}

The commentary above provides one example of how the complexity of race is lived. Race is a lived experience—a phenomenological way of interacting with the world—as well as an academic subject in journals, universities, and case studies. How do we reconcile these two often-opposing lenses of consideration? This dissertation does not take poverty as an object of analysis. As someone who has lived at the intersection of class, gender, and race, and has achieved awareness of how all of these discourses inflect and reflect my experience, I seek to enfold my story with the stories of 10 other women so that I may produce a larger understanding of how these facets of identity are regarded, managed, and disciplined by educators. The testimonios in this dissertation represent 11 voices and one voice, 11 lives and one story of how Latinas come through the educational pipeline in the face of opposition and who have, in turn, enriched, enlivened, and uplifted the many communities in which they circulate. Their

\textsuperscript{5} A term used to discredit an experience or, in the case of this dissertation, discredit a life.

\textsuperscript{6} Personal response essay to graduate seminar at UCLA Spring Quarter 2002, Race and Education.
experiences and understandings of their culture, as they have come to recognize, constitutes a kind of wealth that grows by being passed on, proposing a rich cultural inheritance that has nothing to do with the kind of social capital that privileges the possessions and status of one person at the expense of the rest.

**Telling the Story**

In the academic literature, the daily lives of Latinas are rarely told by Latinas themselves. The data on the lives of this population appear in sociological, anthropological, psychological, and educational publications in the form of statistical analyses neatly organized in tables and colorful graphs. However, as I argue throughout this dissertation, true understanding comes from the *how* and the *why* behind the statistics. The story is in the daily lives, the chronology of the day, the experiences, the feelings, the defeats, and the successes within each day. Many assumptions are made to fill in the blanks for which traditional research methods cannot account. I argue in this dissertation that the richness and depth in the lives of Latinas cannot be fully understood using a top-down, objective scientific method. Using critical race theory as an overarching framework, I posit the *counter narrative* as a critical framework to capture the nuances often overlooked when using the “scientific method” (Delgado, 1995). The counter narrative provides a perspective that is often marginalized and silenced. *Testimonio* falls under this framework as defined by the Latina Feminist Group (2001). *Testimonio* includes a narrative that does not speak for one person, but for the experiences of a community. The intention and method of the *testimonio* are to make visible stories that are too often left out of the academic forums under the guise of being “too personal,” “not scientific,” or “just anecdotal.”

---

7 The term *Latina* will be used from this point forward as it will be the narrative/testimonio of one Latina.

8 The counter narrative and counter-story serves as a tool to the challenge of the majoritarian story (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).
This dissertation makes a virtue out of these qualities, seeing the very private revelation format of the *testimonio* as a way in to understanding experiences that although unique to these women reveal volumes about the lives of thousands of others whose voices will never be heard. Thus the testimonio will be used as a methodology that serves to address the questions presented later in this research project.

In order to fully understand the intersectionality of race, class, and gender at the educational pipeline, we need to look beyond the bar graph and investigate the stories behind the statistics. We must put away our questionnaires and do what is required to understand life at this intersection of identities—knowing that these stories and people who tell them will challenge the dominant or *majoritarian narrative*\(^9\) (Delgado, 1989). The following examples represent the unspoken and often unrecorded experiences of the poor. Their stories are both quotidian and life altering, including as they do the daily struggles to get to and from school via public transportation; celebrating academic success in a climate of lowered expectations, skepticism, and suspicion from teachers and peers; and the value and role of social support networks that go unrecognized and unappreciated in dominant discourse. Their stories present an intuitive knowledge and way of knowing that can rarely be found in a textbook or a classroom.

Just as race cannot be reduced to a number or code, the lived experience of being poor cannot be fathomed through numbers. The experience of poverty cannot simply be itemized as a variable. Poverty is not only about deprivation of income. For many being poor is internalized\(^10\) in ways that are impossible to capture in a survey, a short answer questionnaire, or demographic information. It includes being dependent on other systems to maintain one’s daily life, be it on

---

\(^9\) See Footnote 1.

\(^10\) I propose that there are parallels between internalized racism and internalized poverty.
public transportation, medicine, government agencies, school, or communities. For example, it is about taking public transportation for two hours to get to work (with three buses and the wait time) to get to a job that would take 30 minutes by car. This counter-story accounts for missing school to see doctors who do not take appointments, but sees patients as they see fit. The counter-story includes a family waiting for a check to arrive to an unsecure mailbox, leaving a parent or child to dutifully wait for the mail carrier. It also shows the helplessness of waiting for medical insurance stickers in the mail before you can see a doctor or go to the emergency room. The counter-story takes you to into the classroom when the teacher announces, “Raise your hand if you get Free Lunch” as the pink tickets are distributed to the few who have reluctantly raised their hands. The counter-story takes you into the church office where clothing vouchers are distributed for school clothes. The counter-story waits in the market while you hand a cashier a dollar food stamp to buy a penny candy in order to get the 99 cents change for the bus.

The emotional impact and the negation that occurs for children living in poverty are profound. Below is my memory of the endless lines I waited in with my mother and brother.

The wait always bothers me, no one else I know waits in line for free food. There are a bunch of ladies carrying their babies in their arms. Several of the ladies also have toddlers at their knees. One lady is trying to keep her kids from climbing on the railing and running up and down the stairs. She doesn’t want to loose her place in line so she gives up after a while. There is an old man and five old women waiting too. They have covered their heads with newspaper to hide from the sun. I wonder if they know each other or they just shared the newspaper? I have seen them before; I think the old man lives upstairs from the liquor store and one of the old ladies takes the bus we take to get to St. Mary’s.

The 5-pound brick of cheese is camouflaged in a cardboard colored wrapping with the words, “USDA GOVERNMENT CHEESE-Not for resale.” Every adult in line gets a brick. Along with the cheese is a bag filled with rice, beans, powdered milk and creamed corn. It is the usual; unless it is around a holiday then the extras come. For Thanksgiving there is a can of candied yams and a box of mashed potato mix. The Christmas bag has a can of cranberry sauce and box of stuffing. Stapled to the bag is a slip of paper with an invitation to Christmas dinner in the church gym.

---

11 See Footnote 8.
Join us for  
Christmas Dinner  
Saturday December 23, 1979  

Turkey, mashed potatoes and all the fixing’s  
Save room for the pumpkin pie  
See what Santa Clause brings all the boys and girls!

I never like the Thanksgiving dinners at church. I am always handed a plate with all the food squashed together. I hate peas; they taste like dirt and feel gross when they pop out of their skin in your mouth. The cranberry sauce always stains the roll and makes it soggy. The gravy on the mash potatoes slimes the stuffing and makes it wet. The turkey is dark meat and I hate dark meat. Dark meat has veins and stringy stuff that is stuck on it; the skin is always wet and jiggles when I move the plate. I hate my food touching everything gets contaminated with gravy or cranberry sauce. Why can’t I make my own plate?
All I want is a slice of white meat, stuffing and a roll. I hate Thanksgiving.

Christmas is worse. Everyone has to be served dinner first before we can get in line for Santa Claus. I always have to go to the bathroom and never get to eat because my stomach hurts. I always have a stomachache. I have to go in the girls’ line; I hate the girls’ line. Most of the girls are wearing dresses with black or white shinny shoes, the ones with the strap and buckle. The boys have on ties and long sleeve shirts. Joe and I have matching t-shirts except mine is ripped. It used to be Alex’s but now its mine. He ripped it when he is going under a fence. I don’t care; it’s my favorite shirt. I know which present I want. It is the blue one with a red ribbon tied to it. It is the nicest present plus it has a little box attached to the top. The other presents weren’t wrapped very nicely. I can also figure out what the presents are from the shape. If they are tall and skinny, they’re stupid dolls. If they are small square boxes they are probably jewelry and if they are big and round, they are probably stuffed animals. I want a coloring book and crayons. I think that is what is in the blue present I want that one. I have to go to the bathroom, again but I don’t want to get out of line.

“Ho…ho…ho…Merry Christmas.”
I don’t want to talk to him; I just want the blue present. One of the lady elves walked me in front of Santa. He patted his lap and wanted me to sit on his lap, but that is for little kids, I am not little and I am not going to sit on his lap.

“Have you been a good little girl this year?”

“Yes.”

“What did you put on your wish list?”

“A Winnie the Pooh coloring book and crayons, the big ones with the sharpener on the back and all the colors like lots of different reds, and silver and gold, and…”

The lady elf put her hand on my back and tried to move me along.
“Merry Christmas.”
She handed me a present that was wrapped in snowflake paper.
“But, I wanted the blue…”
Joe was already sitting down at the table and opening his present. He got a racetrack with a red and yellow car.
“What did you get?”
“Some stupid girl thing. I don’t want it.”
“But what if it is cool?”
“It is gonna be stupid, I know it. I wanted the blue one. I wished for it the whole time I was in line and then Santa started talking to me so I couldn’t tell the lady what I wanted and she didn’t let me finish talking to Santa and then she handed me this dumb one and I wanted the blue one and…”
“Don’t cry. You can play with my racetrack. You could pick the color of the car first, just don’t cry. We’ll play as soon as we get home I promise.”

This story is the story of many; I was not the only child in the line waiting for cheese, not the only child at the Thanksgiving dinner, and not the only child waiting in line for a Christmas present. The lives of the poor must be seen in their entirety, these stories are not linear nor can they be confined to a histogram. This story and many stories like them provide a glimpse of the experience of the poor.

**Statement of the Problem**

Issues related to race, class, and gender, along with the roles prescribed to each, are taught implicitly and explicitly in our education system. As students, we have been taught our history, who its important characters and heroes are, what to value, how to define and respect a body of knowledge, and what is expected—and not expected—of us. Education takes place through a top-down approach that regards students as empty vessels in need of knowledge.

Freire (1993) has famously referred to this hierarchical mode of teaching as the “banking” method. According to the banking metaphor, education becomes an act of depositing information into the student. The relationship between teacher and student is strictly that of knowledge holder and recipient, in which the student is expected to receive and commit content to memory. Several

---

12 Personal reflection essay, September, 2004
problems exist with this educational structure. First, it assumes that students cannot be active agents in their own education. Second, it assumes that each student comes into the classroom with the same experiences as everyone else, as if their lives our homogeneous. Third, it implies that knowledge is “owned” by the educational structure and dispensed accordingly. As such, knowledge is distributed as is seen fit. Classes are organized to accommodate some children and those who do not fit are placed in tracks, remedial classes, or simply displaced. This project aims to show that despite an educational system that maintains and perpetuates the status quo, students are active change agents for the better of themselves and their communities.

**Research Questions**

In order to explore the above issue, I propose two questions related to the experiences of Latinas living in poverty, their educational pipeline, and their agency.

1. What educational and social challenges do Latinas living in poverty face along the educational pipeline?

   **Rationale:** Asking this question will allow me to uncover both the educational and social challenges. Educational challenges include—but are not limited to—students being “sorted” onto tracks, schools maintaining and perpetuating social inequities, accepting or rejecting racial and class stereotypes, and having to learn the “codes” of the institution in order to succeed. Social challenges include—but are not limited to—living within multiple identities, challenging teacher’s low expectations and having to justify your presence on campus (Hurtado, 1996).

2. How do Latinas living in poverty respond to educational and social challenges associated with poverty?
Rationale: While question one examines educational and social challenges; question two examines the responses to the challenges. These responses include accepting or rejecting deficit thinking and racism projected upon the poor, recognizing one’s own agency, and internalizing poverty.

Significance of the Study

This research study is significant because it give voice to and addresses challenges in the educational pipeline for People of Color and the poor. To address the research questions, I will rely on personal experience, the academic literature from sociology, psychology, feminist theory, history, and critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical frame. Chapter One provides an introduction to the complexities of race, class, and gender. An auto-ethnographic testimonio illustrates and offers a portrait of my lived experience as a Latina student who has lived the majority of my life in poverty. Chapter Two will provide a review of current literature on the topics of poverty, the Latino/a educational pipeline, characteristics of deficit thinking and Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1990). In conjunction with Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1990), I will introduce a theoretical frame that includes tenets of critical race theory, Latino critical theory, Chicana feminist theory, and testimonio. Chapter Three outlines the support for auto-ethnography and testimonio as the method for this dissertation.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will focus on four topics that are at the crux of this dissertation: (a) the poverty literature, standard definitions of poverty as well as operationalized definitions—including those of the U.S. Census (b) the deficit framework literature, including characteristics of deficit thinking (Ogbu, 1991) (c) the Latino/a educational pipeline and contributing factors to the educational experiences of Latinos/as (Solórzano & Yosso, 2006), and (d) the ecological systems model of human development as it pertains to education (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This review seeks to provide several different perspectives on the issue of Latino/as in the education pipeline living in poverty.

Defining Poverty

There are many variations of poverty, including one citing lack of a socially acceptable amount of money (Merriam-Webster, 2008), having few or no material possessions (Word Reference, 2008), and the condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support (Dictionary.com, 2008). The academic literature offers more categorical definitions, some more nuanced than others. Notably, definitions that circulate in the mainstream have an overwhelming tendency to draw upon limited understandings of poverty, often ignoring the multidimensional aspects that come with a consideration of experience.

Ashworth, Hill, and Walker (1994) have defined transient poverty as having one short poverty spell for the duration of a year, persistent poverty as one non-short poverty spell lasting over one year, and permanent poverty as one unceasing poverty spell lasting continuously for 15 years. Rank and Hirschl (2001) have used the PSID Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), which is a nationally representative, longitudinal sample of households and families interviewed
annually since 1968. Still others define poverty conceptually, as the absence of resources to meet basic needs (Huston, 1994). The Social Security Administration’s definition of poverty, developed in 1964 and revised in 1969 and 1981, is based on family size, sex of the family head, and number of children under 18. In short, poverty has no one set definition.

In the United States, the statistical definition offered by the Census is the most commonly used and consulted. It is based on an income threshold or poverty threshold and is determined using a 48-cell matrix of thresholds based on family size, number of children, and age/elderly status. The following calculation applies to all 50 states and is updated yearly: (a) for a family of four with two children, the amount is $22,811, (b) for a family of three with one child, the amount is $18,106, (c) for a family of two with one child, the amount is $15,504 (U.S. Census, 2011).

Poverty guidelines, on the other hand, are used to access eligibility for government assistance. These guidelines apply to 48 of the 50 states and determine eligibility for federal programs including Head Start, Community Food and Nutrition Programs, Food Stamps and Medicare. The guidelines for 2012 by household are $11,170 for a single person, $15,130 for a family of two, $19,090 for a family of three, and $23,050 for a family of four (Department of Health and Human Services, 2008).
### Table 1

**2012 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons in Family/Household</th>
<th>Poverty Guideline ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>23,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>27,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>30,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>34,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>38,890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. For families/households with more than 8 persons, add $3,960 for each additional person*

Families living under the federal poverty guidelines are considered poor, whereas families living on less than twice the poverty guideline are considered low-income. A family of two would make less than $29,420 and for a family of four would be living on less than $47,700 (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2011).

The official definition of poverty, as stated by the U.S. Census Bureau, is based on a single dimension: income. Although the poverty guidelines as established by the Department of Health and Human Services include several factors, the bottom line is still income; however, this characterization of poverty is insufficient. Poverty is multidimensional. It is not only about income (Children’s Defense Fund, 2005), poverty is also about deprivation of experiences and social exclusion (Burchardt, Le Grand, & Pichaud, 2002). The Social Security Administration and the U.S. Census do not consider social exclusion one of the components of poverty. Social exclusion refers to barring full participation in society due to discrimination in the following forms:
• Legal exclusion (i.e., discriminatory practices)
• Economic exclusion (i.e., due to economic deprivation, families cannot afford to live in a district with a better school system)
• Exclusion due to lack of social goods (i.e., not providing translation services, not knowing how and where to sign up for college prep classes)
• Exclusion due to stigmatization (i.e., a child rejected for being unkempt, wearing soiled or distressed clothing) (Burchardt et al., 2002).

Each of these examples is an inextricable part of being poor (Burchardt et al., 2002), but often poverty is defined as a construct of social status with little regard to the daily experiences of the poor themselves (Saunders, 2003). The daily experiences of the poor are critical to understanding their experience in the educational pipeline. Figure 1, below, provides a graphic of the racial difference between Latina/o children, African American children, White children, and children of poverty (Ochoa, Lopez, & Solórzano, 2009). The issue goes beyond income. The differences among races are disproportionate. (See Figure 2)

![Figure 2. Percent of population 18 and younger in poverty in 2003 by Chicano/as, African Americans, and Whites.](source)

Corcoran and Chaudry (1997) have argued that childhood poverty is distributed unequally, citing race as a critical component. Poverty is clearly racialized and gendered: Nearly 30% of Latino/a children in the United States is poor (U.S. Census, 2007), a statistic that drives the question that this dissertation seeks to answer and that, I believe, has been inadequately addressed (Corcoran & Chaudry, 1997). Traditionally, researchers have looked at poverty in large-scale studies that focus on poverty and community violence, child abuse and peer aggression (Garbarino, 1999), and poverty and the lack of stimulating materials and experiences (Bradley & Corwyn, 2001). These studies have concluded that poor families are less likely to encourage and take their children to educational and cultural events, and have linked poverty to negative parenting (Bolger et al., 1995; Brody et al., 1999). Although some benefits come out of traditional studies on poverty—such as the need to redistribute resources—these same studies serve to perpetuate and maintain a cultural deficit perspective of the poor. The following section provides examples of historical and current patterns of deficit thinking.

**Characteristics of Deficit Thinking**

In this review of deficit thinking, I briefly examine the concept’s history, effects, and justifications, and how deficit thinking informs understandings of poverty. Research informs policy, policy informs education, and a spherical path that begins with “scientific evidence” ends with distorted deficit perspectives. Both the media and schools themselves create and shape the attitudes that are valued by the dominant class (Valencia, 1997). Media (owned, operated, and produced by the dominant class) reinforce negative stereotypes that are grossly distorted and misinformed (Gilens, 1996). Indeed, these majoritarian beliefs tend to pathologize poverty, reinforcing the circumstances as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Bolland, 2003). Clawson and Trice (2000) have stated that the media perpetuates stereotypes of the poor as lazy, undeserving,
irresponsible, and criminally deviant. Deficit thinking attributes the culture of poverty to a lack of work ethic, improper family values, and an ethic of dependency (Jones & Lou, 1999).

These experiences are paired with a general view that ascribes blame (Heller, 1966; Ogbu, 1990) to the poor for their circumstances. Perspectives on poverty and the poor come from a cultural deficit framework. Valencia (1997) has outlined six characteristic of deficit thinking, which include:

1. Blaming the victim: consists of blaming the person instead of acknowledging an institution deficit or any other contributing factors (i.e., silencing students with didactic teaching and leaving no room for dialogue, critique, or student contribution)

2. Oppression: deficit thinking itself is a form of oppression in that it uses power and authority to isolate a group (i.e., using standardized tests to place students on an academic path that leaves them in low-level classes whose credits do not count toward graduation)

3. Pseudoscience: research done by deficit thinkers under the frame of scientific method, (i.e., The Bell Curve and then setting up policies that derive from deficit thinking research)

4. Temporal changes: refers to the research climate based on the historical and political period (i.e., educating “a-risk” children and celebrating ethnic holidays as an attempt to recognize People of Color)

---

13 See Solórzano and Solórzano (1995) for a more extensive look at the at least four theoretical models used to explain the low educational attainment of Latino/as.
5. Educability: refers to perceived deficit behaviors, deficit intellectual, and linguistic abilities (i.e., isolating Latino students for remedial classes and making them ineligible for college entrance)

6. Heterodoxy: refers to the ideas and actions that go against the norm (i.e., penalizing Latino/a students for challenging the “norm”)

Both media and schools are cultural institutions that carry messages about race, class, and gender and contribute to the public discourse (Valencia, 1997). Often, they construct images of marginalized people as transmitters of deficiencies (Pearl, 1997). Current conservative rhetoric accuses “Mexicans [of] ruining schools and a lot of life in America.\(^{14}\) In many ways, the popular media and social climate bear a powerful influence over the educational experiences of People of Color.

**The Narrowing of the Educational Pipeline for Latinas**

The dropout rate for Latino/as far exceeds the dropout rate of Whites, African Americans, and Asians. Several unique characteristics contribute to Latino/a high drop out rates, which according to Levin (1987), begin in elementary school with a focus on academic remediation instead of academic enrichment (as cited in Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995). Latino/as are tracked into low-level classes that are not only dull and didactic, but are also do not fulfill graduation credits (Tejeda, Martinez, & Leonardo, 2000). Tejeda et al. (2000) have reminded us that dropping out is not only a process, but that it also has a history for Latino/as. The trend is neither new nor temporary. The failure is systemic (Pearl, 1991; Perez, Solórzano, & Valencia, 1997) and comprehensive (Chapa & Valencia, 1993; Solórzano & Solórzano, 1994).

Solórzano and Yosso (2001) have used the “pipeline” metaphor to provide a visual context, including “leakage points” in the pipeline for Latino/as educational trajectory. They traced the educational experience of 100 Latino/a students as they began elementary school and continued through postsecondary school, identifying leaks in the pipeline and isolating challenges that the 100 students faced and where school failed them. Of the 100 students, nearly half dropped out of high school, as noted in Figure 3, below (Ochoa et al., 2009).

![Figure 3. Educational attainment pipeline in 2004.](image)

The traditional educational structure does not view students of color as holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002); instead, it tracks them into remedial classes rather than academic enrichment classes (Haycock & Navarro, 1988; Oakes, 1995). However, in Diaz-Greenberg’s (2003) research on the emerging voice in Latino/a students, students reported that they did not see their teachers as their only source of knowledge. This finding challenges the premise that power and knowledge are necessarily hierarchical. Further contradictions reside in the deficit perspective and the critical race perspective, the former of which focuses on negative aspects of students, their family, their culture, and their communities.
The critical race perspective focuses on unequal attributes in society and the education system, and on the inequalities between Communities of Color and Whites. I use the Latino/as educational pipeline literature to reveal the barriers and challenges that are presented and overcome by students. Although I rely on research on poverty, deficit thinking, and the educational pipeline, these concepts will be used in conjunction with Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1990).

**Ecological Model**

In this section, I present Bronfenbrenner’s (1990) Ecological Systems Theory as an example of a holistic approach to education. This framework will help address my research questions by allowing the whole child and his/her experiences to be included in the analysis. A holistic approach to education refers to understanding the child in relationship to his/her environments, which consist of home, school and community. Bronfenbrenner’s graphic model depicts the child at the center of nested ecological systems. The model consists of four layers, which either directly or indirectly influence the development of the child. These layers include the macrosystem (society), the exosystem (institutions), the mesosystem (family), and finally the microsystem (the child). Bronfenbrenner conjectures that the layer closest to the child, the mesosystem, most directly effects the child’s development. As one moves away from the child, the influence is less direct.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model provides a clear framework in which to evaluate the embedded influence on the child. The concentric circles incorporate the individual, the family, the community, and society. I use Bronfenbrenner’s (1990) model in order to visualize the multiple “layers” that serve to socialize the child. The nested layers are organized as a hierarchical model that includes roles, rules, and beliefs. Bronfenbrenner’s model will be
presented in its entirety. (See Figure 4) The following figures (4–8) will include several examples of what contributes to each layer.

Figure 4. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1990).
The macrosystem refers to societal and cultural values, rules and roles under which we all live. These include cultural beliefs (i.e., patriarchy), politics (i.e., conservative climate), social values (i.e., heterosexuality), and policies (i.e., meritocracy). (See Figure 5) This category is the largest of the four and includes the enforced and often covert costumes and ways of being. (For example, educational policies may not support or acknowledge a child’s native language if other than English.)

Figure 5. Bronfenbrenner’s macrosystem.
The next layer, the exosystem, narrows the environment to social structures that although not necessarily bearing a direct impact on an individual, nonetheless influence him/her. These include government agencies (i.e., law enforcement), the school system (i.e., curriculum), community resources, (i.e., parks and libraries) and housing (i.e., affordability), (see Figure 6). The child does not have an active role in this system, but is affected by the circumstances. For example, this system may include the parents’ job schedule, travel schedule, and job stress.

![Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1990), Revised](image)

*Figure 6. Bronfenbrenner’s exosystem.*

The following layer, the mesosystem, includes more intimate and immediate environments. The mesosystem refers to the relationship between two or more environments. This includes, the child and school, the child and neighborhood, the child and church, etc. (See Figure 7) This layer focused on relations between contexts. For example, a child may have a negative experience with their peer that may lead to difficulty in school.
The final layer, the microsystem, encompasses the child’s most immediate environment and includes relationships with family, the child and parents and the child and siblings. (See Figure 8) This layer acknowledges that the most direct interaction takes place with the child. Bronfenbrenner also recognized children as active agents who help construct their setting—they are not passive participants.
Bronfenbrenner’s model follows a traditional way of viewing influence on a child’s development. The model is structured and read as a hierarchical model with the outside, society, influencing inner layers at the center of which resides the child. This model follows an “outside looking in” perspective that places the power on the external layers. Although Bronfenbrenner has acknowledged that the child is not passive, this model does not suggest a reciprocal relationship between the family and the social structure, or community and social values.

Gaps in the Model

Notably, Bronfenbrenner’s model does not account for critical variables such as race, class, and gender. In order to provide a thorough account of development, an ecological perspective must take such identity and experiential factors into account. To redress this gap in Bronfenbrenner’s theory, this project will provide an alternate perspective that will challenge the hierarchical structure that has dominated education research and will account for social class,
racial histories, institutionalized racism, classism, immigration status and social position and the effects these issues have on Latinas living in poverty going through the educational pipeline (Garcia-Cole et al., 1996).

**Merging Bronfenbrenner with CRT and Testimonio**

Critical race theory (CRT), auto-ethnography, and *testimonio* provide strategies that rightfully situate race, class, and gender at the center of analysis—instead of in the margins. Based on this foundation, I will bring these variables to the forefront in order to answer the stated research questions: What educational and social challenges do Latinas living in poverty face along the educational pipeline, and how do Latinas living in poverty respond to educational and social challenges associated with poverty?

CRT provides a lens that focuses on the historically unaddressed racist and classist dialogue that dominates social science research on poverty and education. Using this lens allows us to see the overlooked and often ignored relationships between the dominant class and historically marginalized people. CRT cuts through the layers of history to contextualize current forms of subordination. CRT has five central tenets; they are:

1. The centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination.
2. The challenge to dominant ideology.
3. The commitment to social justice.
4. The centrality of experiential knowledge.
5. The interdisciplinary perspective.

These tenets provide a guide for engaging with and challenging perspectives that ascribe blame to People of Color for their own circumstances. These are tools available to explore the
multiplicity of factors that contribute to a deeper understanding of racialized power relationships.

CRT focuses on Communities of Color instead of White middle class culture (Yosso, 2005). Along with CRT, I will use LatCrit to address elements that are not include in CRT, such as ethnicity, language, citizenship, and identity, as a lens through which to look at poverty and education (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Using CRT and LatCrit serves to place the focus on racialized and gendered experiences, offers a transformative response, and utilizes interdisciplinary knowledge (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

I will focus on one of the five tenets of CRT identified by Solórzano (1997, 1998)—the centrality of experiential knowledge. This tenet refers to the strength of the lived experiences of students of color by including methods of testimonio (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). This tenet of CRT will drive my methodology. The lived experience of People of Color provides a critical lens through which to elucidate the racialized assumptions in current social attitudes; the testimonio will be a critical method of gathering data.

My proposed study will illuminate my own lived experience as a counter-story in the form of a testimonio. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) have characterized the counter-story as a tool that serves to analyze, expose, and challenge the majoritarian story. It is used as a response to the majoritarian story that has been perceived as “truth” (Delgado, 1989). The importance of this work goes beyond proving the poor are not to blame for their circumstances, but rather endeavors to unearth the various stereotypes and forms of discrimination and prejudice to which the poor are subjected.

The literature has revealed that poverty, deficit thinking, and the educational pipeline have a long history as subjects of traditional research methods and theory. Pursuing this subject further, and in ways I believe to be more multifaceted, I intend to provide an alternate
perspective that does away with *deficiency* as a symptom, offering a critique and providing a different angle from which to view the issue of Latinas being *pushed out* of school (Kelly, 1993).

Tara Yosso (2006) has offered valuable critical race counter-stories as a way of challenging stereotypes and prejudices toward People of Color in the educational pipeline, positing Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), a model that names the assets people in communities of color have and value in their community. Importantly, these assets have not been valued or acknowledged by mainstream culture, but constitute a form of knowledge that the community posses and exchanges with one another via family, friends, and community. Yosso’s model (2006) is comprised of several elements, which she breaks down as:

- *Aspirational capital* (AC)—refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers
- *Linguistic capital* (LC)—includes intellectual and social skills attained through communication experience in more than one language and or style
- Familial capital (FC)—refers to cultural knowledge nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition (see Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002).
- *Social capital* (SC)—refers to networks of people and community resources (that may help a student attain a scholarship)
- *Navigational capital* (NC)—refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions; includes individual agency
- *Resistant capital* (RC)—refers to knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Freire, 1970, 1973; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

To answer the following questions, this dissertation will use qualitative methods to explore the educational experience and educational pipeline of Latinas who have lived in poverty. My method for data analysis will be grounded theory (GT). The goal of GT and of my dissertation study is to generate a conceptual theory that will provide a better understanding of the educational experiences of Latinas living poverty. Within this method, I will also use auto-ethnographic testimonio, defined by The Latina Feminist Group as a “means of bearing witness,” a way of telling the stories of our lives as well as an instrument to theorize “oppression, resistance and subjectivity” (p. 2). As such, this study’s research questions are:

1. What educational and social challenges do Latinas living in poverty face along the educational pipeline?
2. How do Latinas living in poverty respond to educational and social challenges associated with poverty?

**Personal Standpoint**

To answer the stated research questions with breadth and depth, it is necessary to investigate multiple areas. Combining several data sources will provide a clearer picture of the educational pipeline of Latinas living in poverty. Guided by Delgado Bernal’s (1998) theory of cultural intuition, I will honor my own experiential knowledge as a Latina pursuing a doctorate. My own story and the deficit perspective that has followed me through the educational pipeline motivate me to do this research. This dissertation is an opportunity to address the missing pieces, the overlooked, and ignored stories of a marginalized group that has been subjected to

---

15 This is not to generalize the experience of all Latinas living in poverty, but to provide an example of one Latina whose story is echoed in the poverty literature.
false perceptions and distorted stereotypes. As a prompt, I include my progress report from 7th-grade (See Figure 9), whose teacher comments, I posit, are representative of teacher perceptions of me as a student and are unfortunately not an exception for students of color. As her remarks indicate, this teacher was extremely critical, perceiving me as a “trouble maker” and always anticipating my misstep.

Figure 9. 7th-grade teacher comments.
**Study Rationale for Auto-Ethnographic Testimonio**

Virtually all of the research on Latino/as in education is aggregated to include all Latino/as regardless of socioeconomic status. Therefore, the statistics do not reveal differences in experience between the poor and the nonpoor. This study seeks to shed light on this critical lacuna.

Data analysis will be framed using critical race theory and auto-ethnographic *testimonio* as a lens. These analyses will capture variables that have been left out of large-scale studies (Bennett, 2003). Bennett (2003) has argued that researchers using small-scale studies are looking for mechanisms and conditions under which outcomes occur, rather than for frequency of outcomes. According to Yin (1989) the focus should be on analyzing multiple interactions, which provide evidence behind the story of navigating the educational pipeline. Analysis cannot be one dimensional (Chapman, 2005); indeed, small cases require careful history taking, intuitive judgment, reference to theoretical knowledge (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006), and *cultural intuition* (Delgado Bernal, 1998). These intricacies are vital aspects of gathering and producing knowledge, which is one of the goals of this dissertation.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) have considered small sample studies as a means to obtain specific knowledge about specific situations. This process allows for previously silenced groups to produce *new knowledge* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The new knowledge that this dissertation project intends to contribute is to a greater understanding of the experience of being poor, being Latina, and navigating the educational pipeline. This knowledge is not to be *restricted* or *owned*, but to be used for knowledge building and providing educational opportunities to all (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

---

16 A benefit of small sample studies is that they provide a breadth and depth that is not often found in large-scale studies. A limitation to small sample studies is that they cannot be generalized to a larger population.
Wall (2006) has argued that in most quantitative studies the researcher speaks neutrally for everyone. Indeed, in many qualitative narrative studies, one of the intentions is to give voice to historically marginalized people (Russell, 1998). Traditional scientific research often minimizes the role of the researcher as an objective player in the research process or treats the researcher as a potential contaminant (Wall, 2006). CRT opens the discussion about the critical role of the researcher and asks the researcher to acknowledge his/her own multiple consciousnesses (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Some critics of small samples target researchers who use autobiographical work, which they perceive as “self indulgent” and “narcissistic” (Coffey, 1999)—a perspective made manifestly evident in the response and critique of Rigoberta Menchú’s narrative. A challenge to this critique is that when done well, auto-ethnography provides a unique perspective that could not be replicated in a survey, structured interview, or observation.

This chapter will provide the rationale for the methods I will use to conduct the study as well as a how these methods will be applied. The two methods I will use are auto-ethnography (Duncan, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and testimonio (Latina Feminist Group, 2001), which I will refer to as an auto-ethnographic testimonio throughout this text. This individual’s story will be examined through two methods: the perspective of traditional research and the use of auto-ethnographic testimonio. The data will be categorized into three distinct domains, the first will be the academic, which will include historical and current academic literature on the issues of poverty, education, and Latino/as. The second will be the social, which refers to the historical and current social climate of poverty, education, and Latino/as. Finally, the third will be the

---

17 Rigoberta Menchú was awarded the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize, but was still critiqued for having dramatized the story of the people of Guatemala by anthropologist David Stoll (1999). "Throughout history, the victimizers and conquerors have been the ones to write history. This is the first time we are getting to write our own history and we are going to defend it. Some people are not going to like that."

35
personal, which will include personal artifacts that capture my own path through the educational pipeline within the historical and current climate toward Latino/as living in poverty in the education system. As it evolves and develops, this story will offer a deeper understanding of poverty and its implications in the educational system.

**Primary Methods of Data Collection**

**Auto-Ethnography and Testimonio as Method**

Auto-ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and testimonio are both important elements in this research study, as they are both methods supported by the tenets of grounded theory. Guided by Chicana feminist theory, I will use an auto-ethnographic testimonio as the method of storytelling. Through auto-ethnographic testimonio, the story behind the statistics will unfold (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). An auto-ethnographic testimonio will provide deep understanding of the long-term effects of poverty and will allow for a detailed description of the mechanisms used to navigate the educational pipeline (Solórzano, 1995).

The model below, Figure 10, represents the three categories that will guide data collection and data analysis; they will be analyzed in connection with each other in order to understand the complexities of movement through the educational pipeline for Latinas. These categories are (a) popular social media, (b) social science academic literature, and (c) personal auto-ethnographic testimonio.
Figure 10. Integrating the social, academic and personal categories.

This study will provide an intersectional (academic literature, mass media, auto-ethnographic testimonio) view of the educational pipeline for a Latina living in poverty. The external layers include a view of the social climate through mass media and academic literature. The internal view will be the personal via an auto-ethnographic testimonio. Once the data is gathered, themes will be extracted from each of these resources following the principles of grounded theory.

The Social Category

By investigating the social category, as typified by the popular media, the popular view of Latinas and of the poor will be examined. In order to document dominant contemporary social perceptions, both national news and government databases will be analyzed. The analysis will take the form of collecting, sorting, and categorizing data in anticipation of emergent themes.

Newspaper articles will provide a sense of the political and social climate around poverty and Latino/as. The content of this data will revolve around popular perceptions and debates
around the issues of poverty, Latinas, and education. Government policies will be outlined to better understand the criteria for assistance provided to the poor. These policies will include educational services such as Head Start and lunch programs.

**The Academic Category**

The academic category will include the academic literature on poverty, characteristics of deficit thinking, the educational pipeline, and the ecological systems theory presented earlier in Chapter Two, the literature review. Grounded theory views the literature as another source of data. The analysis will follow the recommendations of GT by sorting, coding, and categorizing the data. Social science databases will be searched in order to understand the view projected through the academic literature that documents the social, political, and academic disparities between Latino/as and Whites and between the poor and nonpoor.

**The Personal Category**

The personal/testimonio category will provide an inside look at a successful Latina who lived in poverty from birth through college. This category will include autobiographical writing, academic writings, photographs, and a detailed analysis of the educational pipeline.

Data collection will involve consultation with a variety of documents, which will provide context for the story. A collection of historical and current artifacts related to poverty, education, and the social climate of Latinas will frame the issues being studied. These documents, along with personal interviews, comprise a ranging story that covers over 20 years of educational experiences interacting with 20 years of educational and social policy. Each voice is an important part of understanding the social phenomena through understanding of the factors (poverty) contributing at each level (elementary, middle school, high school, community college,
college, and graduate school) in the pipeline. This timeline will contain significant life events that reveal the circumstances under which the poor live.

Cumulative files will be obtained and analyzed for content in order to find patterns over time. These files will include report cards that will provide a snapshot of a child’s educational experience by the denotation of grades, courses, teacher comments,\textsuperscript{18} absences, tardies, and notes. To date, few studies look at student report cards as an analytical tool to understand Latino/a educational attainment (Duncan et al., 1998), but report cards provide a direct link to the unique student/teacher relationship, revealing teacher expectations (Sanders, 2004 \& Liou, in progress) and perceptions of the student in ways that quantitative and aggregate data cannot.

Historical photographs can provide a glimpse of the living conditions of the poor in ways that text cannot. As visual archives, photographs can add to stories often told only through statistical data. The overlap of circles in Figure 10 indicates a shared perspective among the respective (a) academic, (b) social, and (c) personal categories, visually representing a unique perspective of being at the hub of several marginal identities with respect to the dominant framework. The social and academic circles are intentionally hierarchical, as they are seen to have greater cultural value than that of the individual or personal.

**Grounded Theory as Method for Data Analysis**

**Grounded Theory as Method**

Data collection will focus in three areas: the social, academic and personal. Each category will contribute to answering the stated research questions by providing a context under which the educational experience of Latina living in poverty can be situated. Data analysis will follow the principles of grounded theory. Using grounded theory will allow the data to reveal themes that will help addresses the two questions proposed in this dissertation. Grounded theory is flexible

\textsuperscript{18} Comments made directly onto the report card about student’s effort, attitude, and work ethic.
in that it allows emergent themes to reveal themselves. Based on the principles of GT, theory emerging from the data cannot and should not be forced to fit into an already-established framework. Grounded theory stands alone as a methodological theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2007).

One of the defining characteristics of GT is its modifiability as new data enters the picture. The recursively comparative method allows new data to be incorporated with the old data being reassessed in light of each new data source.

In this chapter I have outlined the methodology I will use and have provided a rationale for the study. It is not the intention of this research to provide one answer to each proposed question, but rather to furnish a new perspective with which to look at the lives of Latinas living in poverty and their status at the margins impacted their educational experiences.
CHAPTER FOUR

DOCUMENTING A PEDAGOGY OF POVERTY

In order to explicate the emerging concept Pedagogy of Poverty, I divide the findings in this chapter into multiple sections. The phrase “pedagogy of” is an explicit homage to Paolo Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” a foundational theory of the subjugation that has become naturalized in the hierarchy between teacher and student. This phrase also references my belief that the cultural exchange that took place for the women in this study was, in fact, a teaching and learning experience that occurred in their homes, school, and communities. I posit Pedagogy of Poverty as the theoretical and practical knowledge that poor and other marginalized people possess and exchange (hooks, 1984).

The chapter begins with a brief introduction to the participants: 10 women who identified having experienced poverty at some point in their lives, which was one of the factors for eligibility in this study. The majority of the women spent early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood in poverty. In addition to being women who had grown up in poverty, the two qualifications for the study were that they identified as Latina/Chicana or Mexican and either held a doctorate degree or were in the process of earning a doctorate.

The following section introduces the participants’ own definitions of poverty and is followed by examples of how these women lived their daily lives “in poverty” in their homes, schools, and communities—with each sphere presenting a unique set of challenges and barriers. According to these participants, experiences of poverty included living in unconventional housing situations, facing low teacher expectations (Good, 1987), being subjected to

19 Early childhood (age 0–5 years old), middle childhood (age 6–11 years old), adolescence (age 12–17 years old), early adulthood (age 18–30 years old)
microagressions (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso 2000), being tracked into vocational courses (Fernandez, 2002), confronting blatant forms of racism, and being excluded (Bañuelos, 2006).

In the final section of the chapter, I expound upon my emerging theory of a Pedagogy of Poverty, which I use to summarize and analyze the collective responses from the testimonios of these women. This section includes an introduction to three critical pedagogical tools, two of which I have formulated—a Pedagogy of Sacrifice, a Pedagogy of Resistance—and one derived from the work of Tara Yossa—a Pedagogy of Community Cultural Wealth. I use these theories to elucidate the participants’ narratives of “success,” and discuss them in greater detail in Chapter Six.

The Research Participants: Introductions

In many studies, researchers introduce their study participants by supplying an inventory of characteristics that they themselves find interesting and relevant to the study or that they believe the reader will value. In the spirit of testimonios—and as a way of honoring the method of the testimonio—each participant in this study had the opportunity to write her own introduction. This method insured the inclusion of a very critical element of testimonio: the subjective recording of the participant’s own story (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). As such, the introductory paragraphs below come directly from the participants, with footnotes and bracketed definitions inserted by the author where necessary for clarity.

Table 2 provides the pseudonym chosen by each participant as well as her self-identification of race, when she received or expected to receive a Ph.D., location of birth, immigration status of her parents and, finally, if she was raised by a single parent. Identifying this statistical data was important because such variables have been deployed by deficit thinkers to justify extreme immigration laws, influence educational policies, and promote racialized
discourse about the “problems” in today’s schools. The women identified themselves as Latina, Chicana, Mexican American, Mexican, or Central American. Each identity held an important meaning to their personal identities.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pseudonym</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violeta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consuelo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shalah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Luna**

Luna was, at the time of this study, completing her Ph.D. at UCLA. Her dissertation was entitled *Conceptualizing the Racialized and Gendered Educational Experiences of Low-Income Chicanas and Native American Women in Higher Education: Testimonios of Resilience, Survival, and Hope*. She was raised by a single parent, her father, who was of Mexican origin
and was a Bracero immigrant worker in the 1950s.\(^{20}\) Her passion for social justice stemmed from early educational experiences, during which ineffective, racist teachers whose deficit ideologies took precedence over their responsibility as educators. Luna grew up in poverty and was the first member of her family to attend college. In college as a MEChista,\(^{21}\) Luna learned to embrace a strong working-class Marxist ideology as a political platform to advocate for social justice. Luna considered herself an interdisciplinary “social justice feminist scholar” and remained grateful to everyone and everything that guided her on the educational path to the Ph.D.—especially her father (See Figure 11), family, and spirituality. Luna planned to use her Ph.D. as a revolutionary tool for embracing humanitarian principles, as she remained dedicated to seeking change for those with the least access to power. She was raised by her father and uncles and lived her early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood in poverty.

\(^{20}\) Members of The Bracero Program, a guest worker program that ran from 1942 to 1964, brought laborers from Mexico in an effort to address labor needs that emerged as a result of World War II. The undertaking was not without controversy; many felt that the program exploited Mexican workers who were eager for cash work.

\(^{21}\) MEChA, which stands for Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, is an high school and college club for Mexican Americans. According to journalist Gustavo Arellano, MEChA’s reputation for belligerence and extremist rhetoric is exaggerated. He explains: “To be a Mechista is to care for those who face the same struggles you once did, to preach the gospel of education to immigrants so they can prosper and assimilate.”

Violeta was born in Tijuana, Mexico and arrived in the United States as an undocumented child at the age of four with her parents and sister. Her parents later had two more children in the U.S. She and her family struggled through poverty, deprivation, and social marginalization. In 2010, Violeta earned her doctorate from an internationally renowned university. Both her parents had 6th-grade educations from rural Mexico, thus, Violeta was the first in her family to graduate from middle school and then high school. She also held a master’s degree in education from a private university in Northern California. Violeta had lived her early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood in poverty.

Carmen

Carmen had already earned a doctoral degree and was, at the time of this study, balancing motherhood and working as a senior research associate. She was born to immigrant parents and
raised in Los Angeles. Although her family lived with financial limitations, she did not associate
shame or inferiority with her humble upbringing. Rather, hard work and dignity were always part
of her values and vision for life. She regarded her working-class background as a lived
experience that gave her strength and perspective on a daily basis. She had lived her early
childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood in poverty.

**Monica**

Monica was born and raised in San Gabriel County by a single mother. She moved from
place to place, from family members’ houses to friends’ houses, following a stepfather who was
a migrant farm worker. Despite frequent moves, Monica excelled in school both socially and
academically. As indicated in Figure 12, Monica’s school praised her impressive academic
achievements at an early age. At home, she had lived her early childhood, middle childhood,
adolescence, and early adulthood in poverty.
Figure 12. Honor Society congratulations letter to Monica.

Patricia

Patricia held a doctoral degree and, at the time of this study, was an assistant professor at a Cal State University. She was born in Los Angeles and raised in Orange County by her immigrant parents. She considered her schooling to be very good and had been prepared and tracked to go to college, although she was one of a few Latinas on a college track. She had lived her early childhood in poverty, but moved into middle class as she entered elementary school.
Susana

Susana was born in South Central Los Angeles and had been raised by hard-working immigrant parents. Although her family had struggled financially, she was inspired by the dedication and sacrifice her parents made everyday as they worked long hours in sweatshops not only to survive, but also to save enough to make their entrepreneurial dream of owning a *tiendita* (a small family store) a reality. Their drive greatly impacted and inspired Susana as she moved through the educational pipeline. Susana held a bachelor’s degree in political science, a master’s degree in education, and—at the time of this study—was a third-year doctoral student at UCLA. She had attended school in a predominately Latino neighborhood, where one distinguished oneself from the “really poor” by wearing brand-named clothes. She lived in the heart of the site of the LA Uprisings\(^{22}\) and remembered the billowing smoke that covered her neighborhood. She had lived her early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood in poverty.

Consuelo

Consuelo was a doctoral candidate in the data analysis phase of her dissertation. She was born and raised in the central valley (Kern County) by her immigrant parents. She had lived her early childhood and middle childhood in poverty. As the daughter of farm-working parents, Consuelo spent some of her summers assisting her parents in the fields. Being the oldest daughter, she later bore the responsibility of taking care of her two younger siblings. While her two older brothers worked the fields after school along side their parents, she spent afternoons taking care of her younger brother and sister and cooking and cleaning the home. Although her parents worked hard to make ends meet, she felt secure because her grandparents lived right across the street, and she could always run across the road if she needed anything. As a student,

\(^{22}\) The 1992 Los Angeles Riots have been renamed the *LA Uprisings* by social justice practitioners as a way of acknowledging the event as a political, social, and racial call to action.
Consuelo had always done well in school. Her older brother, who was the first in her family to attend a university, had motivated her to do well in school to prepare herself to attend a university. Both her parent’s sacrifices working the fields, and her brother’s example, drove her interest in pursuing a university education. She had lived her early childhood and middle childhood in poverty.

**Maria**

Maria was born in Guatemala and immigrated to the United States at age 15. Her family was forced to immigrate to the U.S. due to the civil war there.²³ In going North, her family sought to escape poverty, fear, and the violence of war. As an undocumented immigrant, she lived in fear and in poverty, but she and her family always chose to stay positive and focus on the values important to them, such as education, hard work, family, and contributing to society in a positive way. As a first-generation student, she had navigated the educational system and held a bachelor’s degree in cultural psychology, and two master’s degrees—one in educational psychology and one in counseling. She had been a teacher, counselor, and coordinator in K–12 schools and held a teaching and counseling credential. She had also been a college professor in both private and public universities and was, at the time of this study, completing her doctoral dissertation. Her passion was to work with low-income and minority students and their families so that they could achieve their goals and dreams just as she was.

**Vanessa**

Vanessa was a 32-year-old Chicana transfer student pursuing her doctoral degree at a major research university. She was born in San Diego, California and raised in the city of Riverside by her parents, grandmother, and relatives. Born into a military family, Vanessa had

---
²³ From 1960–1996, Civil War raged in Guatemala among factions associated with the government, right-wing paramilitary organizations, and left wing insurgents.
lived her early childhood in family housing at the Naval Air Station in New Orleans, Louisiana. Although she had lived in military housing, Vanessa’s early memories were of her parents working multiple jobs and spending numerous hours in the base child care program. As her family made its way to California, her parents were able to cut back on the number of jobs they had, but nonetheless commuted countless hours around the Southern California area. This arrangement continued throughout her adolescence and early adult life. Vanessa was not truly aware of her family’s status until her father retired from the military. From then, her family struggled with maintaining consistent work and essentially became underemployed for several years. During this time, her mother also struggled to find regular work, which pushed Vanessa to start working at 15-years-old. As Vanessa moved into early adulthood, her family continued to struggle and eventually lost its family home of 18 years. Without a home and living with relatives, Vanessa carried multiple jobs while attending college full time. One of her motivations for completing college was to never become homeless again. For several years, Vanessa had lived on her own and found ways to make ends meet. As such, she continued to be self-aware of the different opportunities her peers had had, like playing sports, traveling, and participating in school activities—opportunities she had missed due to the lack of transportation and the unavailability of her parents. Her work ethic derived directly from seeing her parents struggle financially and experiencing hardship around basic needs. She had lived her early childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood life in poverty.

**Shalah**

Shalah could not identify a specific time that she and her family had lived in poverty but recalled getting food stamps and free and reduced lunch in early elementary school. Shalah was a powerful woman from the “amazing community” of Boyle Heights. Raised in the beauty of her
parents’ aspirations and sacrifices, Shalah had always realized that she had the responsibility to make her parents proud of her. She had witnessed the *ganas* (perseverance) and *lucha* (drive) that her parents would devote day-in and day-out to make their small business flourish in order to raise their children in an economically stable and supportive home. Therefore, Shalah was the product of immigrant dreams, struggles, and love!

These 10 women shared at least two characteristics: They had been poor at one point in their lives and they were Latina. These commonalities were the thread weaving through the story not only of *their* lives, but also of the lives of the people around them. Racial identification would follow them as they navigated their way through the corridors of high school and sat as the “only Latina” in their college classes. Their experiences of being poor would linger in their minds as they set and reset goals with each new barrier and challenge.

**Defining Poverty**

This section will focus on answering the question, “How do you define poverty?” Each participant’s response is documented. I pooled the responses that shared similar definitional elements and isolated elements that provided alternate definitions. Defining poverty proved to be a difficult task. Most popular and academic understandings of poverty are based on basic governmental or historical categories, which equate poverty with an objective and measurable lack of food, clothing, shelter, and ability to meet “basic needs.” This lack of material necessities tends to serve as a universal definition that separates the poor from the nonpoor. As I highlighted in Chapter One (Introduction) and Chapter Two (The Literature Review) of this dissertation, a goal of this study is to add components to the standard definition of poverty to include what I believe to be crucial—*experience.*
I began this project thinking about the definition of poverty as someone who has
experienced poverty and what precisely the standard definition overlooks. To arrive at a more
nuanced and subjective understanding, I asked participants how they would define poverty.

Below are the responses they provided:

Luna stated:

Let’s see. I would define it . . . for me poverty is not being able to afford
somewhere to live, having food in your refrigerator, or clothes. Not having
enough money to make a living and being in a place that is just really difficult
financially.

Violeta said:

I think if I were to put it in two words, “not having.” So, not having money, first
and foremost, but also not having sometimes-basic needs for school. Sometimes
not having the proper school supplies, not having . . . when I was in athletics, not
having the proper shoes or the proper athletics gear and how to raise money to get
those things that I needed. Not having access to tutors when I was doing badly in
math. Not having sometimes my parents around, especially my dad because he
had to work different jobs to basically make ends meet. I think those two words,
“not having” is like for me what poverty really means. It’s like a lack of, not
having. [emphasis mine]

Carmen stated:

I define poverty, being unable to do things that force you to have to make ends
meet where the children are an intricate part of that involvement, where they
become, in essence, part of the child labor in the family economy. So I think that
when a family really struggles financially, they have to sort of pull from any
avenue is when you see yourself in a situation where you're poor. [emphasis
mine]

Monica offered: “I guess people that have a low basic unsteady income and struggle paying the
basic needs, like basic groceries, utilities, housing, struggle to pay for it. The basic roof over the
head, meals, you know.”

Patricia explained:

Well we do free and reduced lunch, plus additional factors like receiving – but we
do recognize the qualitative niches of like, okay, there’s times when families are
unstable and stuff, so there was an early period in my family’s life when we were really unstable, like my dad would like have $20.00 for food and he’d be like, should I go gamble or not?

Susana offered:

For me, I guess, when I think of poverty, I think people who can’t afford food or economical hardship, so it’s all kind of economical, in terms of just money, not having enough of it, or not having enough to survive. So that’s how I think about poverty. So I guess it would be, ‘poverty is the level of having either money or not sufficient money to survive.’” So when, I guess, in an application, compared to the medium household income, we always fell below that, so that’s why I put “yeah.” And I guess in that category, I do fall under free and reduced lunch, so it’s poverty. Okay, because that’s gonna be kinda hard to gauge poverty, because in my eyes, I don’t see myself or our family as poor, but then in comparison to certain things, like if we got the free and reduced lunch, then we were. So if we do the free and reduced lunch, all of the years. I always got it.

Consuelo offered the following definition:

So to me, poverty is just not having anything, like nothing to eat, really, really struggling. To me, poverty means that you have nothing. You have nothing to eat, no clothes, you’re practically almost homeless. And I feel like sometimes, I don’t feel that I was ever hungry or didn’t have anything on the table. I mean, I didn’t have the best of stuff or food, but I had stuff to eat. So to me, poverty is just not having anything, like nothing to eat, really, really struggling.

Maria stated: “I think its lack of resources, like difficulty surviving every day. Like having to worry about having money to eat, to pay for what you need.”

Vanessa explained:

I think my definition, I guess, based on my experience, would generally be poverty includes you not having money to even eat, to purchase any lunch, like school lunches or even at the grocery store or for dinner or what have you, so that feeling of going without, being hungry, to me, it would define poverty. But also having to figure out how to take care of medical care, having parents with medical needs and not having even insurance, I would include that. And as well as having a home, so being homeless, I think is, for me, that defines my experience of being poor or experiencing poverty. So I think those were the main factors. So I think poverty would also be like, should consider or include the fact that if you depend on credit, then it doesn’t make you rich, it just makes you that you’re – And I don’t think we usually consider that, or people who might be in between that might be like, okay, we have X amount, we make this much money, they assume
that you can afford all these extra things, but it’s like well, if you have all these bills to pay . . .

Shalah stated:

I know there are different layers of poverty, but how I would define it right now, at 34 years old and in all my experience, is not having clean clothing, shelter, not feeling supported, feeling alone, and seeing a lot of those men in downtown L.A., that’s the picture I paint when I think of poverty . . . so when I think of poverty and defining it, I think of Los Angeles street and all those people out there, that’s what I think of. I think of not having a home. [emphasis mine]

Many of the participants’ definitions made reference to a lack of financial security. Six of the participants gave definitions that separated and objectified poverty; they did not make references to themselves or to their own lived experiences. As such, their responses were consistent with standard (i.e., government determined) definitions of poverty. Patricia, Consuelo, Vanessa, and Susana made references to their family or their experience.

In retrospect, I realized that the question itself was loaded. I wondered why they had offered up standard definitions—why not say, “I have tried to forget that painful past, poverty is horrendous.” (Or, were they, in fact, “forgetting” by virtue of offering such conventional definitions? Did the question provoke memories of a forgotten time, a repressed time?) Was the fact that I was their peer/colleague influencing their answers? Were their lives as doctoral students that far removed from their experiences of being poor? Perhaps they had intellectualized their own experiences. Undoubtedly, it is easier to address an issue when it is separate from you. Could it be that these women had been socialized (and educated) to discuss social issues in a rote and objectifying way. Perhaps these responses had not been thought out. Perhaps they had been caught off guard . . .

I thus realized that the difficulty in answering the question, “How would you define poverty?” may have to do with the question itself—as well as with the timing of the question. I
could have provided a prompt to get what I wanted by asking for a definition that included a personal experience. Such a question could have looked like this, “Considering that you experienced poverty for the majority of your life, how would you convey what it means to be poor to someone who doesn’t understand the layers of deprivation, doing without, and sacrifice?”

Vanessa’s definition touched on many aspects of poverty, including having bills to pay, being homeless, and lacking medical care and insurance. Violeta remarked on how poverty had affected her participation in school sports, academics, and family time. Both of these women shared a part of their own history in their definition without explicitly stating that their descriptions referenced their experience. Shalah acknowledged the multiple dimensions of poverty, including “feeling alone,” then shifted her definition to a much broader reference to “the men in downtown L.A.” Consuelo and Susana used their definition to exclude themselves from their experience of having been poor.

Although bound by certain constraints due of the dissertation format, I tried to represent their stories, uninterrupted by my own questions and curiosities. Instead of probing and directing the discussion, this testimonio format honors participant voices and interpretations without judgment about accuracy and facts. The stories themselves and the way they are told is the story—interruptions, self-corrections, variations, self-interpretations, and all. Telling one’s own story and honoring one’s own voice democratizes the experience. Giving voice may not bridge the divide between gender, race, and class, but it validates one’s story as equal in importance to the majoritarian story—the privileged discourse that has historically supplanted the discourse of the “other,” in the case of these women, the poor, and people of color. Narratives are about
choice, and each of these women shared what they felt they could share. The following sections give a first-hand account of the challenges the women in this study confronted.

**Experiencing Poverty Within the Home and the Neighborhood**

The question, “What educational and social challenges do Latinas living in poverty face along the educational pipeline” provoked multifaceted and complex responses. Through the process of storytelling, a layered impression of the barriers and challenges of poverty emerged. The day-in and day-out of living in poverty illuminated the profundity of what these women had navigated. Narratives of their lived experiences conveyed intricacies that could not be fully captured in an interview or survey; indeed, these testimonies tell a story that goes beyond definitions, statistics, and stereotypes. Their testimonios gave an intimate view of their thoughts and feelings about familial circumstances, poverty, stereotyping, and societal view of Latinas, the poor, single parents, immigrants, and women.

The difficulties these women and their families faced were abundant; many felt that something was always looming over them. The burden of their life circumstances weighed on their minds, their bodies, and their spirits. Reflections on their experiences with poverty in their homes, schools, and communities yielded stories of the multilayered challenges they faced on a daily basis. The difficulty surrounding this topic was palpable; many of the women reported never having discussed “being poor” with anyone—some had not even revisited the topic with their own parents.

During their testimonios, I asked the participants if they had ever experienced a signal incident or epiphany: “Was there a moment or event that brought your poverty right in front of you?” My reasoning for this prompt was based on frequent comments or references participants had made about not knowing how poor they were until they had left their neighborhood, school,
or other specific community. I noted that often the comparison brought blatant differences to
bear. For me, at the age of 10 arriving in Whittier, with its grassy hills, perfectly landscaped
lawns, and trimmed trees offered a stark difference from the environment I had grown up in in
the inner city of Chicago. The barren dirt fields we used as playgrounds were riddled with weeds,
and plants hid discarded bags of chips, candy wrappers, and cigarette butts.

For other women, a person had shamed them, making it clear to them that they were
different—a laugh, a stare, or a sneer brought their reality crashing down. Receiving food stamps
was formative, solidifying that their “paper money” was different from the green bills their peers
used. Vanessa knew that her family did not spend any money on anything that was considered
“luxurious,” nonetheless, she stated, “I don’t even think I knew I was poor, like to be honest, I
really didn’t realize. I knew that we didn’t spend money that other people did, like on dance
classes.” For her part, Luna stated,

I remember growing up and realizing that there had to be a way out. Why does he
have to work all the time? . . . I didn’t have words. I didn’t really understand what
was poor or poverty or anything like that . . . I knew something was different. It
was probably about age 8 or 7.

For other women, being poor involved being secretive. It was apparent from an early age that
receiving help from the government was perceived in a negative light and should not be
discussed. Both Carmen and Consuelo shared that they were very aware of the stigma associated
with receiving welfare. Carmen remembered:

My mom and me learned to not disclose that information because of the stigma
and criticism that people had for families that were collecting [government aid],
sort of like the sense that we were a burden on society and that tax dollars paid by
other people were pretty much providing our income.
Consuelo stated,

I don’t think we were ever on welfare. But it was just because they were always working and kind of like you don’t want to live off the government in a way because you’d rather work for it, I think.

Monica offered the following,

I actually didn’t realize that I was poor until like I got to college and my roommate – I had two roommates. One of them, her dad was like a diamond distributor and I was like, “That’s a job?” And then one of my other neighbors, her dad was like superintendent of the [inaudible] Unified School District in Santa Cruz. And they used to like fly up all the time and bring her food and goodie bags. I used to feel sad like; my mom doesn’t even visit me. My mom doesn’t send me anything. She doesn’t love me. Yeah, feeling like oh, maybe my mom doesn’t even love me. She doesn’t visit me. She doesn’t send me fancy things like this, like clothes or stuff. But you know, she didn’t have the money. She couldn’t take vacation. She couldn’t afford a flight.

Violeta remembered distinctly:

I had totally been excelling at school. I had done so good at the university. I graduated with honors and the whole bit. I get to Stanford and it was the first time in my life that my identity of what it meant to be poor and undocumented just like was put in front of the mirror and in front of me on a daily basis . . . The kind of wealth that I encountered at Stanford, I only thought existed in books or in movies.

Carmen stated, “By the time I was in the fifth grade I felt very ashamed of being Mexican because of the poverty. Because to be Mexican where I grew up meant you were poor.”

Some of the women had known at a very young age that they were “different.” They were conscious of family circumstances, ones that—ideally—parents would be able to keep from children so as not to burden them with “adult issues.” Not all participants had experienced the innocence of not knowing, and some reflected on the ambiguity of their situations, perhaps knowing that their families had received help, but being unsure about the extent of that help. Some participants were not sure what their family had been eligible for or what their family had or had not received.
Monica’s awareness came later in life; as a college student, she recalled, Monica had struggled with wanting her mother to be like the other mothers; she, too, wanted visits, “goodies” and “food.” Her roommate’s circumstances served to remind her of the financial limitations in her life, because her mother “didn’t have the money, couldn’t take a vacation . . . couldn’t afford a flight.” Her grief was obvious as she equated being visited and sent “things” with being loved. Carmen tied together race and class as if one equaled the other—an equation many of the participants made.

Discussions of poverty often involved hazy memories, especially when participants tried to describe what poverty looked like. Participants responded to abstract notions of poverty with uncertainty, as if trying to recreate a feeling, situation, or specific experience; nevertheless, a clear identifier for the participants was what they called home.

**Housing**

Participants described where they had lived during childhood. Descriptions ranged from tracked housing in a middle-class neighborhood to the laundry room of a family friend. It was very soon clear that any standard definition of home did not apply to all of these women and their families. Instead, having a home may have meant living with extended family, staying in converted garages, or moving frequently to stay with different friends. Any assumption of having a predictable and stable space, one of comfort and safety, was supplanted by realities of unpredictable, transient, and often overcrowded living arrangements. The following examples provide a clear illustration of some the challenges endured by the poor in relation to the idea and reality of “home.” Monica stated, “Throughout my experience from preschool all the way through, we moved a lot just because I think it was part of being poor . . . [and] our instability of not having a place to live.” Vanessa recalled:
It didn’t appear that we were poor, per se, but we went without a lot so that we could have [a house] . . . there were kids in my neighborhood that had both, they have the house, have a running car and have dance classes, have all the fancy school supplies or new clothes. It was a new neighborhood, new houses . . . There were very few people of color that lived in that area, and a lot of it was like single family, like white couples that maybe were just having kids, starting to have kids. Yeah, I would say like around the time we moved in, it was like that, but it definitely changed after the early ‘90s because you see the end of the Cold War, you see this transition of white flight24 [Boeing manufacturing plant closes25].

Monica remembered,

It was hard, there were like ten of us in this house, and I remember having to go to the bathroom and read to study because I had nowhere to really go. But normally, I would have gone to a coffee shop or like anywhere to sit down and read, but uncle was so paranoid that after 8:00, he put the alarm on the house and you couldn’t go in or out. It was like a prison. That’s what it felt like.

Conversely, Consuelo recalled that her family’s home was used as a base for other family members and friends who worked the fields:

So at first, it was like this [sic.] tiny, little rooms . . . we always had friends from Mexico who came and worked the fields, too, so they stayed with us . . . I remember . . . I think it was like four or five of us in one little room, like bunk beds, and I think two of my brothers slept in one bed, then the other one slept up there, and then I slept on another bed right next to them . . . the other room was taken by the friends or relatives who came to work . . . later, my dad extended the room where we all slept, and there came a point where I don’t know if it was because we got older, or I got older as a daughter, so he decided he didn’t want . . . to have people over anymore.

Maria recalled her first home after having arrived from Guatemala with her family:

We lived 14 people in a two-bedroom house, just for like maybe like three months because that’s when we just got [here]–On the living room floor because it was like weird because it was a closet and then we slept outside of that closet on the

24 “White flight” refers to mass migrations of White people out of neighborhoods with increasing minority populations. Often induced by racially based fear and anxiety, these exoduses have often involved White populations moving to more homogeneous suburban neighborhoods.

25 With the closure of many U.S.-owned factories (i.e., the collapse of Detroit’s car industry in 1980, which left in its wake tainted grounds and carcasses of once glorious buildings visually polluting the community) over the last 20 to 30 years, communities have been left with abandoned factories, decreased property values, depressed communities. The families that must remain often do so because they do not have the means to relocate. The poor are left with little choice about what happens around them, their mobility is tied to their ability make money.
floor . . . other people slept in the living room. Oh, in that house, it was a closet. It was pretty big, and so that’s where my dad and my mom slept. Uh-huh, on the floor or on the sofa.

Carmen said:

I was always raised through the time that I was 13, we lived in a garage. We never had a formal home. But to me, because it wasn't a house, it didn’t mean that it wasn't our home and so I never associated that with being poor.

In an attempt to gain a better understanding of where the women lived, the neighborhoods in which they walked on a daily basis, their surroundings, and the resources that had been available within their communities, I provided each participant with a visual map of the address they provided. The maps covered a two-mile radius. My intention was to use the “navigational map” as a guide and tool to capture the nuisances of the neighborhood. I imagined a walk through their lives, block by block, as they, say, made their way to their best friend’s house. I wanted to know where their school was, where they played video games, bought a pack of bubble gum, where their friends lived. I wanted literally to map their experiences. Unfortunately, this exercise proved unproductive. My attempt to paint a picture of their neighborhood via a “navigation map” that would complement their narratives served as a poignant reminder that the aim of this dissertation was to let them tell their story not to direct and externalize their memories and lives on a diagram. Neither an ink trail nor a photo could accurately represent what their words so pointedly described. Still, some participants honed in on details of their neighborhoods—places, objects, sights that had come to embody their childhood experiences. Consuelo described the neighborhood store: “[It was a] store called Coronet or like you could buy other stuff. They had clothes. Just any other—you can buy a gift to go to a party, you would go to Coronet.” Maria referred to the small Korean markets that could be found in abundance around Los Angeles especially before the 1992 Uprisings:
Korean stores like grocery stores where you find—I don’t know how they’re called. I just knew like it was on the corner or my mom saying, “Go to the Korean store and get like something else,” because it was cheaper there or whatever. Like that’s one of the things that you know how to shop because you have to.

The matter-of-fact way that the women spoke of having homes with limited space and overcrowding offered little sense that they had experienced feelings of deprivation about privacy and space. As they described their homes and communities, their tone, demeanor, and manner of speaking normalized their situation. Hearing their descriptions, I was urged to offer a prompt, asking, “How would someone else describe your neighborhood?” My own insider/outsider (Collins, 1986) positionality was the impetus behind this prompt. I remembered my own experience as a community college student in Chicago. My classmates would ask me, “Where do you stay?” I thought the question was odd and should have been, “Where do you live?” After a few corrections, I thought more about the context of the questions and reflected on my housing situation at the time. I was, in fact, “staying” on the couch at my cousin’s house with her two young children and husband. I had recently moved to their couch from my other cousin’s couch with his wife and infant child. The language of “staying” came to embody the itinerant, reliant aspects of poverty and housing. It thus became clear from the participant descriptions that the “insider” position I held assured them that there was no judgment about their circumstances.

**Neighborhoods**

To the prompt “How would someone else describe your neighborhood?” the participants offered a range of responses, Consuelo struggled to find the words to describe her neighborhood and community, explaining:

I think they would definitely see a big difference from what they’re used to here, and it’s very rural. It’s like two or three streets out here, and then everything else is a field. So it’s where like if you pass through there, you could see the poverty. I don’t even know what it looks like, but it just looks really, really bad.
As she pointed to a map of her neighborhood, Consuelo continued by delineating what was defined as a “good area”: “Here are the railroad tracks. So pretty much if you lived on this side, you’re doing pretty good.” For her part, Maria offered the following definition: “If you have somebody who has appreciation for new and diversity, then I think there’s a lot going on. If they didn’t have appreciation for diversity, then they would say, they would be scared of being there.” Maria seemed to intellectualize the different potential responses, so that one would either experience “appreciation for diversity” or “fear” from being around difference. Monica provided a clear picture of a neglected urban space: “Like the streets are kind of not repaired. The street signs, some of them have fallen down and you don’t see street names. Yeah, so I remember there was a lot of conflict with the Mexican Mexicans.” Consuelo remembered being praised about where she lived:

So we moved to the other side of town, which is supposedly the nicer part where most of the white people live on that side. So I remember how I went to school. And I changed my address. So I took a note saying that I had changed my address, and I gave it to the teacher so that they would change it in my records. So my teacher made a big old announcement about how my family had moved.

Some participants offered clear examples of how an outsider would view the poverty of the areas in which they had grown up. The delineation of train tracks separating the “good” from the “bad” neighborhoods made clear boundaries between them and us. Some participants offered specific references to urban disrepair (broken down street signs), whereas others offered only abstract “you know it when you see it” assessments—like Consuelo, who explained, “You could see the poverty. I don’t even know what it looks like, but it just looks really, really bad” [emphasis mine]. The rural setting was difficult to put into words, but was assessed as “bad.” Consuelo’s lack of words for describing her neighborhood spoke to the degree to which poverty is also a mode of experiential deprivation, a subjective experience of not having material
resources or access—an experience itself defined by lack. What about the poverty could one see? The constraints—physical, emotional and material—were demonstrated clearly. The lens through which these woman saw their lives and the memories they held about them were less cut and dry. Carmen commented on how outsiders may have viewed and described her neighborhood, focusing on the pejorative, reductive language of many characterizations:

_Ghetto._ I really don't like that word. I think it's very easy for someone to use that word without understanding what people who live in those types of neighborhoods go through. I think it has a very derogatory connotation to it. I think it [ghetto] criminalizes people, it stigmatizes people because they live that way because that's what they want when in reality, for a lot of families, a lot of what happens in the immediate surroundings like the graffiti and the gangs, which I agree are bad, isn't necessarily something that comes out of their own immediate family or circumstances.

Carmen felt that the language outsiders used to describe her neighborhood and other neighborhoods like them confines and reduces people to criminals. The few people who engage in delinquent behavior have a deleterious impact on neighborhoods, diminishing quality of life for families like Carmen’s who live, work, play, and go to school in the neighborhood. Violeta pointed to the map and stated, “Those were the railroad tracks. Basically, in 84, 85 this part of Orange County started being called the ghetto.” In her characterization, Violeta raised a crucial and enduring issue that has been used as a political tool: the partitioning of neighborhoods [read: de facto segregation] with such structures as railroad tracks, freeways, and other physical barriers to keep one area separate from another. For good reason, the phrase “the wrong side of the tracks” has historically been used to describe poor areas.

Susana described how her neighborhood was televised worldwide as the events of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprisings unfolded around her home. Susana, her family, and people in her neighborhood were:

---

26 The phrase comes from the era in which railroads were being built, and the “wrong” side was downwind, where the soot and smoke from the train blew into areas where brothels were located and immigrant laborers lived.
community had witnessed an historical moment. They were subjected to the noise pollution (sirens, car alarms, helicopters), visual pollution (smoke, broken windows, abandoned buildings), and fear that gripped the entire country. She explained:

In the 1992 uprisings, they burned down [our] library, so for a while we didn’t have a library anymore. I remember seeing clouds of smoke everywhere. You would just look around and you would see black smoke. And when we did drive around to go somewhere, like, to the market, I remember seeing people up on their roof, like, of businesses, with – you knew they were – they had all this like the [bullet proof] vest and everything, ready to do something if anyone started looting their place. I remember seeing that on top of [inaudible] markets.

But we were just more scared, because during that time, we couldn’t really go out. Everyone was looting. And I remember we – it was more scary than anything, but I know my parents were also kind of pissed off at the fact that some people were taking advantage of the situation by getting new furniture out of it, and it was just like it didn’t make sense to just burn down a store or loot a store and have no purpose in really why you’re looting. And so we – my mom bought me some there, and it was like a Korean – I don’t even know if it’s Korean, but it was an Asian kind of swap meet, and that was gone. That was gone. They burned that whole thing down. No, the ones that I remember was a Latino market. The Korean market, they burned those down. I remember seeing the black-owned businesses, people would put, “this is a black-owned business.” Because I remember across the street there was a florist, and it was a black-owned business, so they put that sign and they never did anything to that. But right across from the flower shop, there was this big Korean swap meet; it was almost like a huge store, but it was different little vendors, but they were Korean, because I remember my mom bought me socks there one time. The ones that have – I don’t know if you ever saw them – they had like a little bolita, like a little pompom – What I remember during that time, is not being able to go out. We couldn’t go anywhere, which I didn’t want to go anywhere.

In these descriptions, Susana detailed an event and a perspective that few people have. Her neighborhood was under siege, on fire, the center of the turmoil. While the Uprising was happening, Susana’s parents tried to distinguish the “us” and the “them.” The categories were confusing and complex. The looting and burning of community resources did not make sense to them as they watched their own community implode.
Diet

One prominent theme that emerged related to diet and access to food, both at school and at home. Food stamps were the primary means used to buy the families groceries. Even as children, the participants had a clear sense of the restrictions around making purchases using food stamps and other government food programs like Women, Infants and Children (WIC), which meant purchasing only what was “allowed,” with specific guidelines for both consumer and store alike. Such regulations on food and goods had to follow proscriptions dictated by what that some critics have dubbed “the nanny state.” The notion the “government knows best” serves as a critique of the poor by enshrining the notion that they do not know what is good for them. In this vein, for many of the participants, the food stamp restrictions felt like punishment.

Some participants noticeably struggled to picture what food stamps looked like as material objects. According to Shalah:

They were blue and red and there were different denominations, and I remember her paying, but I didn’t conceptualize that as poverty because my parents have had their own business for 42 years now. Food stamps used to be like little papers, right? I remember my mom going to Johnson’s and she would take out these papers but I didn’t know what they were and I never asked.

Consuelo was ambivalent about knowing what aid her family had received: “I’m not quite sure we got food stamps, but I think we got like WIC and stuff like that. But I’m not positive about food stamps.” (See Figure 13)

27 Nanny State refers to a government’s micromanaging of its citizens’ behavior through laws concerning everything from banning dodgeball in public schools and mandatory seatbelt laws to banning consumption of certain substances and criminalizing private behaviors.
Figure 13. Example of the food stamps we received.

Note. They were packaged by denomination and color coded. Only single dollar bills could be used if they were torn out of the package. The cashier had to physically tear out the denominations of 10 or 20.

Monica had a vague memory of having used food stamps:

I just remember my mom had to pay with a paper that wasn’t money. My mom was given assistance like in the form of food and I think they were called vouchers. I don’t know where they came from, but all I know is that they were in the form of free food. I remember her using them to get stuff, but I don’t remember a lot.

Carmen recalled her family’s strategy to avoid being seen by others:

When we went to the market and we had to pay with the food stamps, I remember we would go at certain times where it wasn't too crowded because we didn't want to feel like we were holding up the line and that we ran into somebody we knew who would become aware of our situation and that would change their perspective of how they saw us. So we became very aware of sort of keeping it very – a very private and sort of unspoken sort of situation.

Carmen touched on a sentiment many women expressed: the self-perception of being a burden on society. For Carmen, this feeling manifested as investing energy and time so as not to “hold up the line” while the checker took the food stamps. For the poor, similar scenarios have played out time and time again; the food items cross the conveyor belt, go through the scanner, while
the nonfood items get rung up separately. Next, the cashier has to tear out each bill from its booklet; each bill is then stamped and placed in a special section of the till. Meanwhile, the person or persons in line may have grown impatient waiting for the nonfood items to be rung up, paid for, and bagged; whether intended, a similar reaction is provoked when someone has grocery coupons. The cashier has to scan each coupon, making sure the customer bought the exact item that matches the coupon. It has to be the right size, brand, and quantity . . .

Monica recalled with poignant detail the anticipation of the food stamps, the date the food stamps arrived, and the restrictions placed on use of the food stamps:

Toward the end, we were very tight, like when it was getting the end of the month, I remember my mom would be like – it was beans, potatoes and rice for dinner . . . I knew that the food stamps were only for food, like for groceries, and they weren’t like real money. You know, it was just that you could only buy this cereal or this juice or this cheese . . . I think we got paid like the first of the month and maybe like the middle of the month, the 1st and the 15th.

I remember we used to get food and we used to get – we could only buy certain food, like my mom never – we always wanted to buy – I didn’t know at the time, but my mom never let us buy like the sugar cereals, like Lucky Charms or Coco Puffs. We only got like the plain Rice Krispies, the plain Corn Flakes.

We wanted to buy candy or chips or sugar cereal. And she was like, “No, we can’t buy that.” Cash money, not food stamps, and they only had food stamps left. So I remember sometimes they would exchange cash, like they would sell their food stamps for cash to other people. And also sometimes my mom would buy food stamps and give people cash if we needed groceries or is someone needed the cash. I remember, you know, I remember our food changed too because my dad, he worked in the fields. He used to bring us cherries and avocados and fresh fruits and vegetables. So I remember that we ate better, you know? My mom would make tacos. We had more meat, fruits and vegetables. [We’d eat] less Raman [and] cereal. We really had a lot of carbs, and what did we eat? Like bologna, hot dogs, and like top Raman noodles and to this day, we ate that so much, I don’t like hot dogs. I don’t like bologna, and I hate those top Raman noodles. So I never eat those. I never buy those anymore because I’m not that poor.

Monica related her current diet directly to the diet she had had when she was poor. Her own observations about the type of food she ate, the quality of the food she ate, and the lack of choice
crystalized the experience of many of the women as they had struggled to secure enough food with their families. Monica also mentioned the exchange of food stamps for cash and vice versa, an illegal but necessary act.

Thinking back to my own childhood, I remember going into the corner store to buy a penny candy in order to get the 99 cents change for the bus. It was a common practice along with getting whatever coin combination for a dollar food stamp . . . the urgency I felt as the bus approached . . . the exchange seemed fair at the time. Then, as a teenager working at a large grocery store chain, I could not tolerate the waste generated on a daily basis. My own experience with deprivation took hold of me, and I would defy company policy. During my shift, I would place opened or damaged cans, pastries, and breads on the back wall. People would come to the store once it closed to get the food, so I wouldn’t put it in the large dumpsters as instructed, I’d place it neatly in a cardboard box so they wouldn’t have to pick through the trash in order to eat.

**Eating Out.** Many of the women discussed not having had the means to eat out like their peers. If they did go out to eat, they did not go to restaurants, they went to fast food chains like McDonalds, Carl’s Jr., Burger King, or they ate from taco trucks, a form of dining that has recently been reinvented as a gentrified, trendy destination. (The food truck crowd has changed, too, with fashionable “foodies” not only eating at food trucks, but also “following” them through Facebook and Twitter). For these women, eating from a taco truck was considered an extravagance. It was considered “going out” for dinner—a treat for the family. Susana recalled her own family’s ritual for going out to dinner:

*We actually did go out to dinner every Friday. We [my brothers and I] always wanted burgers and just like clockwork, el viernes was Burger King night. But not just any BK, we always went to the BK that is in the University Village, close to USC [on Jefferson]. Not sure why we always gravitated to that one specific place but I remember liking that location because it was always nice and clean. I guess in comparison to other fast food restaurants in the hood, the USC BK would be*
the nicer one. When we didn't feel like burgers we would go to my uncle's taqueria on Broadway and Florence to get some tacos. So those two spots were the main places we went out for dinner on Fridays. Saturdays were usually spent in the park so we ate lots of carne asada throughout the city's parks.

Susana and her family made a conscious choice to go to a specific Burger King. Around that time, the area surrounding USC had been cleaned up for the student population—part of the university’s attempt to create a college-like town; however, four blocks off campus, stores and restaurants had—and have—not been modified or gentrified for the local population. In her testimonio, Patricia did not cite a specific restaurant but had indelible memories of the rare experience of eating out in the least expensive possible way; she explained:

Every once in a while we would go to a Mexican food restaurant. When we went to restaurants my sister and I had to share a meal based on a choice my mother gave us. . . . it usually was based on budget. Bertha and I would share a soda and my brother would eat off my parents’ meal. My mom would ALWAYS order the least expensive thing on the menu.

Of course ordering the least expensive thing on the menu usually means ordering something you don’t particularly want, but will eat. Several of the women noted having carried this pattern of ordering into adulthood. The decision between want and need seemed to be clear-cut for many of the women, a lesson taught at a young age. Not only did the government tell them that they couldn’t have sweet cereals, but also family-based economic restrictions would follow them throughout their lives. For many of the participants, eating out provoked feelings of anxiety, shame, and deep awareness of their socioeconomic realities. As Vanessa said,

So a lot of my friends did eat out regularly. Usually, if I was with them, I would feel embarrassed if we went to go eat and I wouldn’t have money to buy myself something. But their parents would be like, no, no, I’ve got it. And I always felt like I was a burden on to them, so I was very self-conscious of it . . . I was constantly aware of those kinds of things because feeding one other person; it’s a big deal in my family.
I had never even went [sic.] to Jack-in-the-Box until after I finished high school. If we did eat out, it was like El Pollo Loco or something a little bit on the healthier side, but most of the time, we had to eat at home.

Likewise, Carmen recalled:

We never went to places where waitresses waited on us or where formal dinnerware was already set. If we went out, it was to eat tacos from a catering truck or we bought chicken from KFC or hamburger meals from Spartan burgers, a lot of home cooking, a lot of basic staples like rice and beans. Meat was sort of extra.

**Charity Food: Churches and Food Banks.** Churches and food banks were a resource that several of the participants and their families had relied upon to put food on the table. As Maria recalled,

Sometimes it was hard finding food. You know, we didn’t get stamps because we couldn’t qualify, but we would go to church . . . Here at least we could eat and go to the church to get food. In Guatemala, we couldn’t go anywhere because there wasn’t nothing [sic.] I mean there were some days where my family in Guatemala had to eat herbs, wild herbs from the los campos [fields], you know, where we lived. Sometimes we didn’t know what we were eating, and like we would find a tomato or something and make something out of it. Like there we sometimes, we were really hungry.

Here, at least we had food banks and I mean the church, you know. We would go to church to get food. They would just give you, they were like pre-made bags I remember the rice. And sometimes they would give us cheese, and that was like, that was awesome. Like you know, like the mozzarella or whatever, the thick, the cheese that comes in the block. There were tortillas too in the package and rice or tomatoes, the tomato cans. There would be corn and you know, like green beans, and then it would be some like mashed potatoes, [there] would be a lot of cans.

Monica had comparable memories of receiving meals from charitable organizations, describing free meals her family had received in the local park.

Community resources like food banks and churches play a major role in feeding the poor. This practice is so common that many community service assignments in middle school, high school, and college involve students “feeding the poor.” One event that makes the news rounds
every year is the Los Angeles Mission’s Christmas Event, which feeds about 5,000 people on Christmas Day.28

**Experiencing Poverty Within the School**

When defining their experiences in school, many participants attributed negative experiences to issues around class, gender, or race. For most of the women, such experiences began when they had started attending school.

**County Food**

To the study participants, eating school lunch was yet another conspicuous way of dividing the poor from the nonpoor. Qualifying for free or reduced lunch meant that you were poor. The queue for the free and reduced lunch line was separate from the paying-for-lunch line. Getting free or reduced lunch meant that one had to go to the office and pick up tickets or cards that were different from those of students who paid full price for their lunch. The older they got, the more aware students became of who received a free lunch. That paying students and ticketed students were designated different areas of the cafeteria manifestly reinforced the differences. The food itself was also different; paying students had choices not given to ticketed students. As Susana remembered:

> In high school it gets different, because then kids don’t want to use their ticket, just because they don’t want county food, county food was the free food that you get with your ticket, so it’s like the staple bean and cheese burrito that comes wrapped up in that same green paper that we’ve seen since middle school.

Along similar lines, Monica recalled,

> I had a lot of friends that had cars, and I remember a few times we’d go to like Del Taco or McDonald’s, but I didn’t have any money. We’d go to Wienerschnitzel, and I never had cash. I remember feeling like embarrassed that I didn’t have the money to buy the McDonald’s or that. But they didn’t make fun of me. Nobody ever made fun of me, [they] never brought it up.

---

Often, high school students gain the opportunity to leave campus for lunch—a cherished privilege that students relish as a “rite of passage” to being independent and grown up. For Monica, the contradiction resided in the distinction between having the opportunity to eat off campus and the means to eat off campus. The feeling of embarrassment about not being able to fully enjoy the privilege annulled the pleasures of independence.

For Vanessa, lunches brought out her family’s economic between-ness—as well as the illogic and irony of many government food programs. As she stated,

We didn’t have excess, so they [parents] couldn’t afford to buy us lunch, but we didn’t qualify for free and reduced lunch. I remember we did have to pay something. My mom would complain and say that was too expensive. But I don’t think it was free or reduced.

Her family did not qualify for free or reduced lunch, but the cost of lunch was an obvious point of contention for the family. Violeta recalled the isolation and lack of choice for those in the free lunch line:

Every morning the office at the school would give the teacher the cards of the kids who had free lunch and right before lunch we would all get our cards. Usually the other lines had two or three choices, but the free lunch line only had one choice and that was it. It was like an assembly line. I don’t want to get in the stupid free lunch line because it was a separate line from the rest of the school kids. If you were looking from the outside, it was all the Mexican kids in that separate line and all the other kids were white.

Luna did not recall feeling so belittled, but she did remember being a recipient of the free or reduced lunch program:

Yeah. In elementary school I remember getting tickets for free lunch. All I knew is that we had tickets and that they gave us tickets all the time. We thought we were part of a special group is what we thought.

Whereas Consuelo affirmed having been a recipient, but did not expand upon any memories of the experience, offering only “Yeah. I got reduced lunch,” Maria remembered lunch with a hint of envy:
The AP kids would have their sack of lunch and they had like fancy stuff. Well, their sandwich and then they had like the fancy cookies. I don’t even remember what cookie, Oreo cookies I remember. And then we had, we went to the cafeteria.

Bringing one’s own lunch via a brown paper bag or a cool lunch box was synonymous with choice. Indeed, ownership of one’s food seems like a basic right, but for students who received “county food,” choice was the domain of the privileged.

Clothes

Like the habits they had developed around food and diet, decisions relating to clothing purchases as adults remained deeply ingrained in childhood patterns. Poverty and the compensatory efforts it provoked were hard to shake. Recalling Patricia’s memories of her mother, who “ALWAYS order[ed] the least expensive thing on the menu,” Maria explained: “I still would look for the cheapest thing or something that I knew that they would be able to pay for.”

The women in the study spoke about their clothing and the pressure they felt about not being able to afford the same styles or brands as their peers. Susan described a very elaborate process of keeping her shoes “clean,” so as to distinguish herself from the poor kids and not get “picked on.” She stated,

I think in high school, that’s when also you become more aware of the differences in poverty level. So I guess everyone was economically disadvantaged, but we don’t see ourselves as poor. But there are these little markers that differentiate those levels with how we dress.

She went on to describe a ritual of keeping her shoes clean, which included using shoe polish and white chalk. Vanessa recalled a constant preoccupation with what she wore,

I wouldn’t say like one experience, it was consistent. I would see the toys that other kids would have, I didn’t have those toys. I would even see like even their backpacks or the clothes that the other kids would have or the new shoes, my mom would purchase clothes and shoes for us that would have to last us a few
years. So, yeah, she may have spent a little bit more for us, not based on, like everyone else wearing their Jordan’s, the brand name stuff, but not us. So it wasn’t like one experience, it was a bunch of things that I was constantly aware of it.

Maria had limited say in what she wore, as she did not get to choose her clothing from a clothing store:

We did get clothes at church. Like I think it was like twice or three times a year, and I forgot to mention that. So you would just go and say, okay, how old are your kids, and then they had like different stations like where you had clothes for like little kids or for teenagers or stuff like that. My mom worked as a housekeeper, so the people that she worked with they’d give her clothes. We would get really happy because that’s when we would get new clothes. If our pants were already like ripped my mom would fix them.

Even with the opportunity to purchase new clothes, Maria still made decisions based on the price: “I worked at a swap meet, but we bought our clothes at a second-hand store because they’re cheaper.” Luna tied her experience of being poor to the fact that she and her sister went to school everyday in their one school outfit: “I remember that in elementary school. I remember seeing other students and realizing that my sister and I were wearing the same clothes everyday and realizing, ‘Wow, we really are poor.’”

Vanessa recalled her experience, acknowledging that the particular ritual of buying shoes and of having to make do with what she had informed her decisions to the present day:

Sometimes my shoes, I would outgrow them, my toes would be scrunched up and I’d still have to wait until there was enough money to buy shoes, or I’d have to wear my sister’s shoes. When I got older, I started using my friends’ shoes, ones that they didn’t want anymore because they, not so much because they were trendy, of course, that was part of it, but they fit better. It even influences me now, like I buy shoes a little bit bigger because I want to be able to wiggle my toes in my shoes. We would shop at the mall, and we would get jeans, not Levis, we wouldn’t really get name brand things. She would get it a little bit big so that we would grow into it, or I would wear my sister’s hand-me-downs.

Susana revealed her family’s strategy to get name brands at a discounted price so as to not get ridiculed:
So as long as I had something that I wouldn’t get picked on, because people notice everything. People notice having Payless shoes. People notice that you don’t have that brand name. We would go early Saturday morning to *Los Callejones*\(^29\) that’s where you could get cheap stuff, cheap shirts, like three for ten, four for ten.

Figure 14, below, shows the busy garment district in the alleys of downtown Los Angeles.

![Figure 14. Los Callejones: Los Angeles garment district alleys.](image)

Violeta recalled her effort to save all her money from babysitting in order to get the clothes she wanted:

> Throughout the whole year I would save up all my money because I knew that I wanted cute clothes for the next school year. So I would save up all my money and we would go shopping during the summer and I would spend all my money that I saved up all year on things that I could afford. This was at Kmart or at Zody’s\(^30\) or whatever back then. I did that until I was fourteen.

Consuelo recalled her own sister ridiculing her clothing, which she had very consciously picked out with cost in mind: “We usually got our clothes like Family Bargains.”\(^31\) My sister sometimes

\(^{29}\) The alleys of downtown Los Angeles in the garment district, known for inexpensive goods including clothing, housewares, etc.

\(^{30}\) A discount retail store that sold clothes and furniture.

\(^{31}\) A bargain place kind of like Big Lots.
said that I always [wore] granny clothes.” Vanessa recalled the clash she experienced between what was cool and what was utilitarian: “And then if we were cold, we would wear ponchos\textsuperscript{32} like our grandmother took care of us and that’s what she knew and that’s what we did.”

Obtaining clothing was an additional barrier, while the clothing itself served for many as another indicator of difference from their peers, another signifier of difference. Los Callejones offer a low quality, low cost item, but at what price? The back alleys of urban cities filled with vendor after vendor have verified associations with sweatshops, whose cheap, low-quality items represent oppression and exploitation by companies that profit off the labor of men, women, and children working under dreadful conditions. (Figure 15, below, shows one example of the products sold in the alley markets—mostly cheap plastic imports and substandard clothing and goods). But when seeking clothing, some people do not have the luxury of stopping to consider the political and humanitarian implications of their purchases—thus, those without means often unwittingly participate in the cycle of oppression of others.

\textsuperscript{25} A traditional Mexican jacket pullover with no sleeves
Figure 15. Low-cost, mass-produced items for sale.

Experiencing Poverty in the Community

Most of the participants began to work years before they were legally allowed to do so. Their contribution was a necessary commitment to the family as a whole. Their job choices were limited to those available in communities in which they lived. Most of the participants were still in junior high or high school. Because of their language skills, the level of job they were qualified to do may have been a tier higher than that of their parents, but they still would be considered low-skill, low-paying jobs. The participants were very aware of the struggle their parents had in their jobs; how lack of mobility dictated their options, multiple forms of exploitation they had endured, the lack of job security, and the demanding physical labor required.
Work

Work contributed to the family economy and was expected. Several of the participants took on parental roles with their younger siblings and were responsible for the house. Their duties included cooking family meals, cleaning the house, and caring for siblings. Working outside the home provided another form of contribution. Vanessa’s and Violeta’s descriptions outlined a hierarchy of job status. A “good” job for many of the participants was a job that did not require the same back-breaking labor of their parents’ work, a job that provided a dependable paycheck, and one with potential benefits (like employee discounts or free food). Remarkng on the kind of work she found, Vanessa stated, “I was working at Wal-Mart and like where I grew up, those are the jobs you want to get, like Wal-Mart or Home Depot, you’re not working fast food, and so you’re set.” Maria began working as a young child before coming to the United States; she explained:

I was maybe like 9 or 10 I would sell Avon in Guatemala . . . I also worked during school. Like after school I would work at a swap meet, and then on the weekends I had shifts at a swap meet, like one in the morning and one in the afternoon, the other one on the weekends. And then when I was 16 [years old]. So I didn’t want to ask, I’d worry them, and they already had a lot of stuff going on themselves. Like they were exploited and treated really badly at their jobs. So I didn’t want to mention it. So but sometimes when I – there was something that I really needed or that the school would send a note or something, then they would know, and so they would say, “We’ll do something.”

Carmen recounted coming into awareness about the nature of the work she and her family did and how work that initially felt normal started to take on socioeconomic dimensions as she got older:

I never saw doing things like collecting cans or any of the other things we had to do to meet our income as we're poor. It was just like, oh this is so what we do. So then I think I started to become more aware of like my immediate surroundings.
Violeta remembered her own contribution to the family division of labor, stating:

I started driving, at 14. Then I went and got a job at Carl’s Jr. and I told them that I was 16. Since I had a social security number, they didn’t care you know, so I was 14 and working and I didn’t have a worker’s permit. From there, Carl’s Jr., that was cool because then I would get free food or food for my family sometimes.

So at 14, I got my car, but now I look back and it was because my mom and my dad really needed another person to be responsible and to drive people around. I didn’t have a driver’s license. I didn’t even have my papers then. So anything could have happened. But I think that even though anything could have happened it’s like, that’s how much the need was . . . “I don’t care if I don’t have a driver’s license.” . . . [My parents] needed someone to take my sister to school or for us to do afterschool stuff. They couldn’t come pick us up because the school district had gotten rid of the bus system, the free bus program. So if you wanted to get the bus permit you had to pay $80 or something a semester which was a lot for my parents because there were two of us and plus my brother in school so there’s three of us.

For many, like Violeta, family members depended on each other, whether through a contribution of time and family care, sharing driving responsibilities, or adding a paycheck. The family worked as a collective unit with a focus on survival and making ends meet. Responsibility to this effort was not limited by age or gender. Consuelo provided a perfect example of this dynamic as she and her family worked the fields in the Central Valley picking grapes. She explained:

They would do like the grapes. I don’t know how – like in the Central Valley, they have the grape vines. So you get there, and you start picking. It’s actually the ones that you lay out on a sheet, and they dry up, and then that’s how they get raisins. So that’s what they mostly did during the summers. But then like in the winter is when you prune the grape vines, and then it’s really cold, and your fingers get all frozen.

So then one person cuts the grapes, another person puts it over the sheet, and then there’s a person who does what I was doing, which is probably the most simple thing to do. So they would have the younger people do it. Then I remember, when I got older, I started doing the cutting, too, and spreading it on the sheet making sure that – and then you just go on to the next one, and if feels like an eternity. At the end – what I would be in charge of was laying out the paper. I
remember that. So then I would lay out the paper, and you put like a wooden frame over it.

The educational and social challenges seem to have bled into each other, as many of the same issues that arose in the home were replicated in the community and in school.

**Rising Up: Latinas Respond to Educational and Social Challenges**

The previous section addressed the question “What are the educational and social challenges Latinas living in poverty face?” These challenges included surviving with few resources, experiencing isolation at school, having unstable housing, and feeling weighed down by both the stigma and experience of being poor. This section will examine how these women responded to the many challenges they faced. In the spirit of grounded theory (see Chapter Three), I allowed the responses to organically yield their respective categories. As a method, grounded theory allows for a deductive approach to raw material and honors the responses of study participants instead of forcing information to fit pre-established criteria. These categories classify the experiences and responses these women faced in educational, domestic, and social settings. The compilation of these attributes comes from their *testimonios* and privileges the manner in which they told them. These responses, and the three thematic categories into which they fit, collectively constitute a model I am calling a Pedagogy of Poverty.

The second half of this section provides examples of how the women in this study dealt with and responded to the challenges they faced as they moved through the educational pipeline. Their formidable responses to the many barriers manifested in both their social worlds and their academic worlds and echoed what Chicana feminist scholars have identified as remarkable strengths in this community. The women of this study reinforced Chicanas as active agents (Cordova, 1994), producers of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Hollings, 2006), creators of
theory (Moraga 1983a; Saldivar Hull, 2000), and as having oppositional consciousness and being resistors (Bañuelos, 2006). 

**Emergent Model of Pedagogy of Poverty**

**Pedagogy of Sacrifice**

Pedagogy of Sacrifice (POS) speaks to the various sacrifices that the participant herself made or witnessed and that her parents and family have endured in order to provide a better life for them (See Figure 16) (Hernandez, 2011).

![Pedagogy of Sacrifice Model](image)

*Figure 16. Pedagogy of sacrifice model.*

Pedagogy of Sacrifice conceptualizes the notion of modeling and teaching the implications and benefits of delaying gratification. In the context of this dissertation, “delaying gratification” represents doing *without* so that a greater goal may be achieved later. Notably, by “gratification,” I mean fulfillment or compensation, not necessarily immediate pleasure. This pedagogy is an internalized process that involves reflection, consciousness (and self-consciousness), and *conocimiento* (a more intuitive than fact-based kind of knowing), (Anzaldúa, 2002), acknowledging a distant history, apprehending that history through accrued understandings, and being able to interpret and appreciate those early experiences differently. The lessons of this pedagogy are profound in that they compel individuals to modify their own behavior and to recognize a sense of collective responsibility to self, family, and community. Some of the challenges enumerated by participants included:
• Parents working long hours
• Working through illnesses
• Being exploited
• Experiencing racial battle fatigue
• Confronting racial and class micro-aggressions—spectrum
• Incurring debt beyond their own families’ yearly income
• Immigrating
• Working multiple jobs
• Working extra hours
• Working late hours
• Taking public transportation

The women in this study had witnessed their families’ struggles and had endured many struggles of their own. These experiences, paired with reflective thought, constitute a Pedagogy of Sacrifice. With benefit of retrospect, the sacrifices are able to serve an edifying purpose—as seen with the participants, who, upon reflection, gained new perspectives about their experiences and assigned the sacrifices new purpose and meaning. In many ways, the participants were able to see that the many sacrifices made by themselves and others were for a greater good: the intention of securing a better future and outcome for their families and for themselves. Some parents stated this objective directly—“I do this work, so you don’t have to”—whereas others did not speak of the sacrifices, but rather modeled it through their actions.

Patricia described her “job” in the house as a tender gesture of love in the face of the utter fatigue her father experienced working two full-time jobs. As she detailed, the innocence of her daily task was at once tender and excruciating. She stated:
I remember my job... was to wake up my dad from the morning shift so he could go to his graveyard shift and put his socks on, that was like my job when I got home from school, put your dad’s socks on when he’s asleep.

Patricia also recognized her parents’ dedication, explaining, “I think having this conscious awareness of the struggle that my parents made and I remember it being hard.” Many of the women knew that their parents were exhausted and under a great deal of stress to make ends meet. They were overworked, underpaid, and taken advantage of based on their immigrant status, lack of English-speaking skills, and/or limited educations. As Maria remembered, “[My parents] were exploited and treated really badly at their jobs,” Shalah acknowledged the sacrifices her parents made as well as their kindness, consideration, and capacity to inspire a deep self-motivation in her; indeed, their sacrifices served a deeply meaningful pedagogical purpose, as she explained:

They never made me feel like I owed them anything. [Speaking Spanish] it’s an internal ganas [drive] that I know I got from them, so if there’s any feeling of being indebted, it’s self-imposed. I learned ganas from my mom, especially.

Yeah, and I still see her in that chair. [An old rickety chair her mother uses daily as a seamstress] I think I have to give it everything, because they sacrificed so much for me to get my Ph.D. They don’t know any of this. I always tell them about their sacrifices, but I don’t want to fail them. My mom always tells me to just be happy and stop stressing.

Luna bluntly expressed her family’s reality by stating, “School was not the focal point at all. Survival was.” Many women in the study sought to have their parents and family share and experience some aspect of their “success.” This desire may have meant inviting family to college events, calling their family before and after an experience, and writing letters and sending pictures. These exchanges served as attempt to include their families in their experiences, to share with them as a way of showing them, “Look, can you believe it?” On this subject, Monica offered the following:
I tried to incorporate her like if my mom would try to save money and get here on the bus, they’d ride the bus, the train, you know, a cheap flight, whatever they could get. So I do remember having that like, “Oh I wish my mom were here to take pictures,” and things like that, you know? Because we got to wear nice dresses.

All of the women in the study desired a better life, seeing the circumstances of their parents’ and their own lives as a temporary state. They were sure that they would better their parents’ life by learning English, going to school, graduating from college, working with the same rigor, and *ganas* as their parents. On this subject, Consuelo declared, “Well, I always wanted to have a better life because I see how my parents struggled and how we were limited.” Likewise, Carmen explained the importance of reflecting what her parents valued:

> For [my parents], it was very important that we be well-educated not only in terms of manners and treating people with respect but also to have sort of a vision of what we wanted to do with our education as far as a career because they really distinguished the fact that they had a job, a back-breaking job, that was always very verbalized, that I was an immigrant and we were very well aware that immigrant experience and their struggles.

Vanessa remembered life with parents who were always working more than one job. It was clear that her parents valued her education and that nothing would interfere with that. She was an integral part of the family and her contribution was critical; she recalled:

> And so I remember my mom worked at a hospital and at the Officer’s Club at night. And then my dad, he worked with the military police on base, and then he worked at the Officer’s Club at night. So between my parents, they had four jobs. We still struggled a lot. My parents were always working, so I guess when I was younger, that’s kind of one example of like how many jobs just between my parents, four full-time jobs between two people is a lot.

I started in college and a year before I transferred to UCLA as an undergrad, my family and I became homeless and we lost our home of all those years. So I was heartbroken because if you can imagine, like even now in this conversation how much I keep referring to having this house and that was like the heart and center of our family. Everything we had went into that. And to lose it within one week – So both my parents had lost their jobs about the same time. I was in school fulltime and I was working part time just to pay for my stuff. I had to contemplate leaving school and I talked to my parents and they were like no, you
cannot. You have to stay in school. You have to break this cycle, and it’s through school. So they really were vocal about that. [emphasis mine]

One woman had experienced the tragedy of losing a younger sibling in an accident when she was in 6th grade. Around her, while peers focused on the latest fashions, music, and whether they could wear make-up, Susana was grieving a profound loss. She received no support from school, teachers, or staff, so Susana did what she knew how to do best: She continued to show up at school and put one foot in front of the other. She recalled the painful time:

Well, in between my elementary school and my transition to middle school, I lost one of my brothers. He was about to be five. I was more dealing with the loss of my brother and not really into any of those other stuff [experimenting with make-up and being in cliches]. You come face to face with death and the reality of death and it’s your brother. That part in school seems like a blur.

Others spoke of having sacrificed their health, as their bodies could not withstand the stress stirring in their minds. Violeta remembered:

I got sick. The whole time that I was at Northern California University I was ill. I broke out in blisters in my mouth the whole time I was there. I couldn’t get rid of them. I usually get stress blisters. “My body was shut down.”

Time management was a critical element in the lives of many of the women. Planning and structuring their days around the bus schedule was another example of sacrifice. Depending on public transportation not only takes time, but it also means you must rely on the bus being on time, so that the transfer bus can also be met on time. Vanessa recalled the multiple busses she took to get to and from school: “I took the bus from like from my continuation high school, I’d have to take three buses just to get to here, and then I would still have to walk a mile home.”

Sacrifice includes being self-sufficient and self-motivated. As an example, Consuelo had struggled with the decision to be in an Honors class with mostly White kids. It would require extra effort on her part. She would have to carve out study time, make a plan to get to and from the library, and comply with her family’s work schedule. Because it was summer, she would also
be working in the fields with her family. Consuelo remembered, “We’d, get up at like 3:00 in the morning, be at work at 5:00.” She continued:

You had to read The Grapes of Wrath over your summer break in order to be in English Honors, and I was like, okay, I got to do this. But then at the same time, it’s like all these people in my class are like mostly white kids. And so I was like man, I’m going to be the only one in that class.

I would have to go to the library, and you had to write like a two to three pages on a current event from Time Magazine or Newsweek. So I would have to do that every week in the summer, I forgot for how long, and then submit that. And then you could be in honors. Well, they would go to bed, and I would just stay up because it was like 8:00 at night because my parents would go to sleep early. By 9:00, lights were out in my house. Everything was dark. So if I was going to study, it would be there in the dining room table.

Maria recalled all of the work she had to do to catch up:

I have to find a way to get out of ESL, like to learn English. So I went to the counselor and they said, “Well, you need to take ESL 1, 2, 3, 4, and then, and I said, “Can I do night school? Can I do summer school?” And so they said, “You can do summer school,” but then at night, I would go with my mom to school to learn English. I didn’t really have [a teacher] who was really supportive.

The reflection aspect of the Pedagogy of Poverty is an active process, as Vanessa remembered:

They just kept on saying, “Keep on going and we’ll figure it out.” I kept telling myself was as long as I did well in school and finished, I wouldn’t have to go hungry again or I wouldn’t be homeless again.

Violeta recalled, “I knew that once I hit sixth grade that I was going to be the first one in my family to have more education than [my parents].”

Sacrifices came in many forms—obvious and subtle. Subtle sacrifices came by way of taking a sick day from work to go to a parent/teacher conference or risking job security to stay home with a sick child. What many take for granted these women did not. They took notice of what their parents did and did not do in order for them to have the opportunity for a better life.
Pedagogy of Resistance

Pedagogy of Resistance (POR) focuses on forms of resistance that the women in this study employed as a function of their endurance. (See Figure 17) This model establishes the frame for the participants’ internalization of transformational resistance.

*Figure 17. Pedagogy of resistance model.*

Pedagogy of resistance conceptualizes the process by which the women in this study encountered and overcame the many challenges placed before them. These challenges may have arisen as a consequence of deficit thinking by teachers and school administrators who intentionally block access for minorities as a consequence of institutional racism, classism, and sexism. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) have focused on the concept of transformational resistance, which distinguishes itself as an understanding and critique of oppression and a desire for social justice. Yosso (2000) has discussed how challenges presented by those with perceived deficits and stereotypes about Latinas can provoke the desire for those oppressed by this thinking to “prove others wrong.” Some of the acts of resistance are listed below:
• Navigating the Educational Pipeline
• Finding persons who can help, counselor, teacher, peer etc
• Providing tutoring to peers
• Walking past gangs to get to school
• Organizing Chicano group in high school
• Utilizing lived experiences
• Being persistent, aggressive as needed
• Anger fueled by injustice forced into action
• Participating in summer programs
• Self-preservation “I started to fight back”
• Going to night school/taking college courses in H.S.

The model of Pedagogy of Resistance includes being confronted with oppression as a victim/witness or both. Resistance is born from the experience and reflection on the experience—and is ultimately the end product. Luna reiterated this process:

I think that all the experiences that I went through as a young girl well into being a teenager and into as a young adult and as a woman. I think they were all fueled by struggle, some kind of struggle and I think that it’s almost as if you are immune and you become resilient in a very different way.

I also remember not liking school as a result of [a teacher] and feeling a lot of anger at a very young age and being very rebellious at a very young age and I would get in a lot of trouble as a result of that . . . I want to say that anger was probably a big fuel for me because I had teachers along the pipeline always tell me what I couldn’t do.

Many of the women in this study were either told—or witnessed their peers being told—that they would amount to nothing, were wasting their time, were too stupid to be in school, or did not deserve to be in school. Luna recalled two very distinct moments, one in high school and
the other in graduate school, in which she was subjected to someone else’s disparaging perception of her. Luna remembered,

I was encouraged not to get pregnant by my counselor. I remember being put in a room and told pretty much that I was inadequate and that they were so disappointed in my exams . . . I was basically being pushed out. I remember trying to plead my case while I was crying, saying, “I don’t want to quit. I don’t want to quit.”

Despite have little to no privacy in their homes, these women carved out a space for themselves to do their homework. Maria remembered the uncomfortable work space she had created:

I would sit in front of the bathtub, and so I would just do my homework here because I could close the door. Sometimes I would use the kitchen table, but like when my sister was there or my dad and they already, like my sister would have, her homework was done, and then it was night, so I would just go to the bathroom because I’d close the door. So they could do their thing and I’d be there. Sometimes, I mean like when we would come, my sister and I would sit at the kitchen table and do it there . . . it was really uncomfortable. The bathroom had tile floor, which was all broken and it was the little tiles. I still remember the floor. It was really nasty.

Carmen, who lived in a garage, stated, “We did our homework at the school. The school had a library.” Most of the women in the study did not have a support system at school, nor did they understand the process of applying and preparing for the transition to college. Nonetheless, they found a place for themselves in college, finding a way to access the information they needed. Only 2 of the 10 women had a family member who had gone to college. The other eight women had to navigate the pipeline to college on their own. They went to their community college, asked their professors, their peers, the counseling office. They sought out information that is readily available to so many others. Violeta had ambivalent feelings about college, lacking the support but not the motivation, as she recalled: “I didn’t trust counselors because no one ever told me about college even though I did everything you need to do to go to college. It was like I had
to do it. I have no choice.” Monica also had the drive to pursue a college degree: “I knew that I
wanted to go to college. I didn’t understand the difference between graduate school and
bachelors and . . . PhD. But I think I did find out from my friend when I got to college.”
The exception among her friends, Luna was nonetheless determined:

I was the only one that went on to [community] college from our group. Somewhere deep in like the spirit, I knew that it was the only way out. I knew I was going to transfer, so I had my eyes set on UCLA and I stayed an extra year. I made sure that I double-checked everything that the counselor told me because for some reason I had a lot of distrust. I ended transferring to UCLA.

Several of the women in the study found ways not only to exist in the space they created, but also to make a mark, to take action and challenge the perceptions others had of them. Whereas Monica stated, “I became president of the Students Association,” Carmen recalled, “I found ways to inquire about information.”

The women’s perspectives and actions provide a solid example of how their resistance served them in the spirit of Solórzano and Delgado Bernal’s (2001) transformational resistance. They constantly negotiated what was expected of them and what they expected from themselves. The latter always surpassed what others thought they could do—and sometimes even surpassed what they themselves had imagined.

**Pedagogy of Community Cultural Wealth**

Pedagogy of community cultural wealth (POCCW) honors social history, behaviors, values, and personal experience as their own dynamic form of wealth (Yosso, 2005). Community Cultural Wealth is a network of shared knowledge among community members—knowledge that comes from and enriches the community (Hernandez, 2011). (See Figure 18)
Some of the examples of community cultural wealth include:

- Language brokering
- Translating and transcribing
- Being mentored and mentoring
- Organizing tutoring programs for immigrants
- Drawing upon familial knowledge and experience (i.e., “My brother told me”)
- Being supported by Chicana professors
- Honoring parents as professors
- Learning through *platicas, cuentos, and ejemplos*
- Advocating for others and self
- Learning to navigate the system and passing on the knowledge

Yosso (2005, 2006) has defined community cultural wealth as a form of capital, an accumulation of assets and resources historically accrued in the lives of people of color.

- Aspirational capital (AC)—refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers
- Linguistic capital (LC)—includes intellectual and social skills attained through communication experience in more than one language and or style.
• Familial capital (FC)—refers to cultural knowledge nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition (see Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002).

• Social capital (SC)—refers to networks of people and community resources (community resources that may help a student attain a scholarship).

• Navigational capital (NC)—refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions, includes individual agency.

• Resistant capital (RC) – refers to knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Freire, 1970, 1973; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Although participants acknowledged that their neighborhoods were low income and, to outsiders, may be considered “poor” or the “ghetto,” they acknowledged that it was their community. They found what worked for them. They navigated their neighborhoods to get the better prices. They knew where to go to get what they needed, whether it was a local toy drive for Christmas presents or a less expensive gallon of milk. They “navigated” their communities in a way that kept them out of gangs, playing at local parks, participating in reading programs at the local library, and helping others. Participants discussed how these skills served them in their efforts. According to Maria:

I feel like they didn’t know how to navigate the system. And honestly, like now I know I knew – like I was resourceful, but I didn’t know what it was that was different. So we started. And then after that because some of the kids couldn’t stay, so we ended up doing it at church on Saturdays.

The women of this study had one or two people along the educational pipeline whom they felt connected with them and had made an effort to help them with information and access to
resources. One participant dubbed such people, academic angels. Patricia detailed her own experience with educational advocates:

It turns out that I was probably one of the first Mexicans kids to be enrolled at that school. So, they had to hire a tutor for me, literally for me so that I could have someone to translate during the whole day in kindergarten. So, she would follow me around. Actually, this is her. That’s her [shows photograph]. I don’t even know what her name is but I remember her face. She followed me around the whole day, however much time that was, and so then I learned English really quick. The next thing I know, I’m talking English. I’m understanding what’s going on.

Carmen also had someone who believed in her, who was willing to sponsor her AP exams because he believed in her:

I remember that – I went because I thought, okay, I want to take it but when it came down to paying the deposit and then paying the test I realized how expensive it was . . . and he took money out of his wallet and he said, here, I want you to go and pay the deposit and I don't want you to worry about how you're going to pay me back. If you're able to pay me back, fine and if you're not, that's fine as well . . . it's also very emotional for me because the fact that he personalized that belief in me and he took that time and money out of his wallet to do that for me, I mean it was so motivating . . . But that for me was such a changing moment because no one had ever done that.

Vanessa expressed concern about the responsibility families bear to make sure their children receive a proper education, when sometimes they are unable to even provide for themselves:

I guess a lot of the blame is placed on families and parents as if they’re inadequate or they intentionally don’t want to provide stuff for their kids or their priorities are out of place or whatever. But that’s not necessarily the case; especially in places like California where, I mean, how many fulltime incomes do you need just to survive? I mean, it’s just so skewed, either you’re like okay and are doing, you can afford all these things or you’re just slipping by and there’s no in between.

Often parents served in the role of academic angel. As Patricia explained:

My dad always helped me with math too, but sort of because he, my dad always has worked a lot . . . And there was also, my parents were always there, like my dad worked a lot but I hardly remember feeling his absence like he was always at my assemblies and awards and if I needed a post board in the middle of the night, my parents were always there, taking me to the library when I needed to go, so
that’s the way they supported me, they were just always there, super supportive and encouraging.

Maria also benefitted from parental support:

Well my parents, [inaudible] they always believed in me. They always said, “Anything we can do to help you succeed.” And it was funny because I mean they would help, I mean they would help me with what they could . . . And so anything they could, they would provide for me.

Sometimes parental academic support included lessons in social justice as well, as Luna described,

He [my father] was my history professor, he was my social justice researcher in regards to the knowledge I gained because he was probably the biggest teacher I’ve ever had and it was from pláticas [talks] at home, just him telling me what the system was in regards to his experiences, based on being Mexicano and a laborer. There was also something very powerful about my dad.

For Consuelo, support came from her brother, who believed she could aim higher than a cashier job:

I remember walking with my older brother and thinking I’ll be okay if I’m a cashier. That’s the kind of job I want. And my brother was like you’re stupid. Like why would you want to do that? But to me, that was like better than working in the fields. It’s like a step up because I don’t have to be out in the heat, and I don’t have to be standing. But to me, that didn’t seem like a difficult job. But for my brother, I think he was at another level, so he was like you’re stupid. “Why would you want to be a cashier?”

Pride in her sister inspired Shalah to pursue a degree: “My sister is the middle child and she got her undergrad, her M.B.A., and her PhD. So, that for me really instilled this pride about going to school and being able to learn English.”

For these women, pursuing an education was not only about earning a degree, but it was also about navigating an often-complex system involving paperwork, deadlines, and protocol. Many of these women had to learn as they went along. Their responses often reference “cultural brokers,” intermediaries who facilitated the efforts of those seeking to understand the intricacies
of another culture in order to access resources and navigate unfamiliar systems. As Violeta explained:

A lot of the people that I was meeting in college had a similar experiences...They were the cultural broker [who] learned two languages early on . . . they were also poor . . . they were taken to the doctor’s appointments [to translate for parents and fill out paperwork] . . . they were these really high achieving people like myself . . . definitely, I feel like that being a cultural broker . . . made me really confident in dealing with people in power.

Maria took on the role of cultural broker herself, helping herself and others develop better language skills:

The Korean [kids] . . . didn’t speak English, and the Latino kids . . . didn’t speak English either– so I organized a group of kids, a group of my [Latino/a] friends for the Latino kids, [and a group of my Korean friends for the] Korean kids. We did Korean flyers and Spanish flyers [to invite the kids to our tutoring sessions].

Role models from outside the community often made a dramatic difference, as Violeta explained: “I got to take a mini course with Gloria Anzaldua. It changed my life. I got to take a course with Cherie Moraga. Those are two Chicana lesbians that had taught me through my undergraduate.” For many, access to icons of their culture served to motivate and inspire. Violeta continued: “It was the first time I learned about Chicanismo and MECHA and that there were all these other, the science and engineer clubs that were at universities. I had no idea that there was this brown educated world.” Violeta was motivated by early role models: “In the second grade, I had my first set of brown teachers. Mr. Santa Cruz was a teacher. I write about this tutor and I call her my little academic angel because I have no idea what her name is.” Whether from academic figures who used their own time and money, cultural icons whose own lives demonstrated the possibility of taking a different path, or parents who made poignant sacrifices so their children could succeed, ultimately, all of the women in this study chose their intellectual and political paths.
In the forms of work they have chosen to do, the women enacted productive responses to the Pedagogy of Poverty, replenishing the store of Community Cultural Wealth and paying back what they had learned. Indeed, their intellectual, spiritual, political, and advocacy commitments are noted in their dissertation topics. (See Table 3) As Luna succinctly explained: “[U]sing all of those lived experiences in the service of helping others in the future.” As per the definition of the dissertation or doctoral process, each woman has become an expert in their topic. Their work has the power to change policy, influence educators, and, most important to me, challenge deficit thinking. Moreover, these Latina women have the ability to change the structures of oppression by having the courage to reveal their own vulnerabilities and the fortitude to stand on the side of humanity.
Table 3

Dissertation Topics by Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>Conceptualizing the Racialized and Gendered Educational Experiences of Low-Income Chicanas and Native American Women in Higher Education: Testimonios of Resilience, Survival, and Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violeta</td>
<td>Fronteras de Nuestra Educación: Documenting the Pedagogies of Migration of Mexican and Chicano/o Undocumented Immigrant Households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Riding the Yellow School Bus in a Post-Brown Era: Experiences of Mexican-Origin Students in a Integrated Suburban School Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>Learning Communities with Transfer Opportunities for Latina and Latino Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Trenches Under the Pipeline: The Educational Trajectories of Chicano Male Continuation High Students in California.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susana</td>
<td>Many Shades of Brown: The Educational History of Chicanas &amp; Chicanos in South Central Los Angeles in the 1930s &amp; 1940s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consuelo</td>
<td>Living the Dream, Facing Reality: Experiences of Undocumented Latina/o Graduate Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Central American Youth (Re)Claiming Identities: The Influences of Family, Immigration, and Schooling on Identity and Aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td>Crawling Through the educational pipeline: Latinas, Poverty y Educación,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>Chicano/Chicana Students in California Continuation School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shalah</td>
<td>A Portrait of an Effective High School Counseling Program and its Impact on LatChicana/o Academic Preparation and the College Choice Process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion to Chapter Four

This chapter addressed the two research questions, which ask about the challenges that Latinas face coming through the educational pipeline and the ways they have negotiated these challenges. This chapter introduced the participants, whose testimonios provided personal definitions of poverty. Experiences of poverty in their homes, their schools, and their communities provided insight into the specific and diverse nature of struggling with poverty as Latinas. Their responses to these challenges yield to our discussion of the model of the Pedagogy of Poverty, which includes Pedagogy of Sacrifice, Pedagogy of Resistance, and Pedagogy of Community Cultural Wealth. These testimonios issue a challenge to preconceived ideas about who the poor are, who Latinas are, and how Latinas respond to their experiences of poverty. These narratives go against the grain of stereotypes that abound in both society and the academic
literature. That these women are able to tell their stories, give voice to their experiences, recognize valuable lessons from the past, and commit to acting on their knowledge both for themselves and others is part of the richness of these findings.

Reflecting their themes, the next chapter offers my own testimonio. This project began as a singular testimonio, until I recognized that other Latinas sitting around me in classes had similar stories to share. The following testimonio explores my own experiences with lowered teacher expectations, racially charged environments, social exclusion and class- and race-bound biases—as well as the penalties for challenging the majoritarian narrative.
CHAPTER FIVE

DOCUMENTING MY PEDAGOGY OF POVERTY

This chapter will go from the present time to the past, because today I possess the critical tools to genuinely assess my history. Rather than adhering to the thematic organization of the previous chapter, my testimonio will weave multiple narratives and ideas, meander and follow an instinctual path rather than a prescribed one. The literature review remains relevant to the discussion, but not in an expected way. I see my story and those of the participants as a corrective and an antidote to many of the literature’s academic conclusions about Latinas in education and about the poor. As mentioned previously, this project was undertaken in the spirit of honoring personal narratives and, as such, embodies all of the fragmentation, recursivity, and imperfection of human storytelling. But it is in these qualities that the strength of the testimonio resides; it is, by nature, an antiteleological format, one that privileges multivocality over hierarchy, honors difference over the patriarchal imperative. Thus, the following “narrative” is a gathering of impressions, thoughts, and images rather than a story with a clear-cut beginning, middle, and end; moreover, the story does not yet have a conclusion.

As a critical race scholar, I have gained a perspective through which I cannot help but see my own history—and understand the histories of others. Events as I experienced them in the past (and long thought of them) have changed in light of what I have learned as a student. More importantly, the memories themselves have changed and the burden of accountably has transferred to where it belongs—onto the oppressor not the oppressed. I recall my childhood and my educational experiences—to the best of my ability—providing documentation of both in the form of photographs, maps, report cards, essays and projects, certificates and awards. For example, figure 19—a report card from 3rd grade—serves as an artifact of my educational
experience. As a supplement to my story, these archival materials capture perceptions in their historical moment. In this case, the report card makes clear that, like some of the other participants, I was often absent from class—in this case, not attending school for the entire first quarter for reasons that remain unclear to me today.

Figure 19. Grade report from 3rd-grade.
In this last chapter, I will chronicle my own educational experience through the academic pipeline as a Latina living in poverty. As I tell my story, I will address such themes as diet, government aid, housing, education, and community, some of which also emerged out of the participants’ testimonios. The original plan for this project was to create my own testimonio, to narrate my own education and how poverty impacted my experience. In reflecting on my story with members of my dissertation research group, I became aware that others shared my experiences. They, too, had grown up in poverty and yet, as a mode of self-preservation, had detached themselves from their pasts. I have found that to maintain focus, graduate students often consciously step into an academic role in order to assimilate into the academic culture. I made this self-transformation as well.

At some point in graduate school, I found myself organizing my elementary and middle school reports. Looking at these pieces of my material history, I was struck by the teacher comments and the quantitative scale on behavior and citizenship. My graduate course work at that time was dealing with concepts of deficit theory, critical race theory, and cultural poverty. The convergence of the personal and theoretical was poignant. I knew then that I had a story to tell. In graduate school and on the brink of beginning my dissertation, I realized that I had finally shared a research space with a community of scholars with whom I felt safe and supported enough to reveal my history.

I am now days away from graduating from a top tier research institute—12 years, two children, and three deaths later. In 1999, I received the good news about acceptance to graduate school. I believed that this experience was going to teach me to be a “good” researcher, but most importantly I thought that having a Ph.D. after my name would legitimize my story—and me. I felt that without these academic credentials, no one would believe what I had to say, somehow I
would be discredited as producing exaggerations or even fiction, or that—as I have experienced most often—my story would be dismissed as an exception to the rule. The ugly stereotypes of Mexicans I had seen on television (lazy, opportunistic, exploiters of resources) or in other media went against everything I knew about my family and me.

What does a White girl know about race, poverty, discrimination, low teacher expectations, and microagressions? Let me first acknowledge my “privilege” of having a phenotype that reflects my White (absent) father, a reality that took years for me to understand. I did not see myself as different from my brown brothers and cousins. I saw myself as an extension of my family of first-generation Mexican Americans, whose parents came from Mexico in the day when people could simply walk across the border in the 1940s bringing their thick accents, and cultural and religious beliefs with them. I was born to a woman who based her ideas of good and bad as in the Bible and the word of God. She was afraid of Black men and thought that homosexuality was the devil’s making. Little did she know that I would challenge the core of her belief system by just being me.

**Defining Poverty**

Both popular and academic literature fails to provide sufficient definitions of poverty. Although most definitions cite lacking the bare necessities, medical care, clothing, and a stable place of residence, the missing part of most characterizations is experience. The most sufficient definition to date from either academic literature or layman’s writing was the concept of social exclusion presented by Burchardt et al. (2002). Unlike definitions offered by the Social Security Administration and the U.S. Census, which do not take into consideration social exclusion, Burchardt et al. (2002) have examined the complex ways in which legal, social, and educational issues implicate and explicate experiences of poverty as well as how poverty entails many forms
and permutations of lack—lack of language expression and professional support, lack of clothing and regular meals, and so forth. (For purposes of this dissertation, poverty is understood not as an objective political category but rather as a daily and deeply felt personal experience.

**Documenting My Own Pedagogy of Poverty**

My life experiences motivated me to write this dissertation. The narrative of my own educational journey was full of struggle and strife, and I knew that my own story needed to be told. I was born in 1970 to a single mother who already had four boys. My mother had immigrated from Mexico 30 years before I was born, had a thick accent, *universidad* under her belt, and a dream to educate her “childrens.” We lived in the inner city of Chicago. Growing up in extreme poverty and attending schools with mostly White teachers, I had never had my ideas validated nor had I ever felt that my experiences were anything other than individual, isolated—and isolating.

There was one huge disparity between the life my mother lived before I was born and the one she led after. Whether it was the stress of caring for five children as a single parent or the break in her mental health, something cracked. Photographs of her bear out the dramatic difference in her appearance and, likely, disposition. (See Figures 20 and 21)
Figure 20. My mother before I was born. (Front right, with clutch, gloves, and stole, circa 1968).

Figure 21. My mother holding hands with Alerico D. Ortega. Alerico D. Ortega, 1962 Vice President (1968) Board of Public Works Commissioners City of Los Angeles.

The woman in the shiny dress, ballroom gloves, and made-up face was a distant memory that only my oldest siblings held. I had only glimpses of this mother from portrait photographs I had seen at my uncle’s house, tucked away behind the photos of his eight children. Our life had little glamour in it. My earliest memory of my mother— with some photos to corroborate— was that
she was a little old lady who wore a babushka, (See Figure 22) polyester pants, and some variation of a patterned, flowered polyester shirt. The past was a mirage. She looked and acted nothing like the women I later saw in photographs (see Figure 23), newspaper clippings and from my brother’s endless stories of my mother’s work for the news press and reporting on the radio (see Figure 24).

Figure 22. My mother circa 1974. I was four years old.
Figure 23. Members of the press at the office of the Mayor, Los Angeles, 1965. (My mother is the first woman on the left).

Figure 24. My mother’s El Aguila New’s press card, circa 1960.

We always lived somewhere along the poverty spectrum—with evictions, homelessness, relying on the generosity of others along the way. To this day, when I see a homeless man or women on the bus bench or sleeping at the entrance of a closed business, I wonder, how did this happen? Where is his family? Does anyone care for her? Does anyone know where he or she is?
I wonder about them as I try to understand my own experience with homelessness. We were homeless before the term “homeless” was the concern of academic journals or featured on the front page of the local newspaper. I realize today that becoming poor does not have a set path; no one plans to be poor. What I know is that my life was greatly affected for being poor.

Housing for my family was never stable. We never owned a house, although each of us promised our mother that when we were rich we would buy her a beautiful house with a white picket fence. It would have a rose garden with all her favorite colors lined up along the walkway to the front door. The five of us may have promised, but none of us came through. My mother died in the bedroom of her apartment, the apartment we had all lived in at one time or another in our adult lives. She left us with $333.00 in her savings account, a refrigerator filled with small cartons of juice from the “club” as she called it, dozens of tortillas molding in the meat drawer, and a case of expired muffins she had received from the church. Figure 25, below, taken shortly before she died, shows her refrigerator drawer, full of government pears, juice containers from “El Club,” a dried Mother’s Day corsage, and condiment packages. The food was for the poor, she would tell me. I reminded her that we were not poor anymore. I had a job as a private tutor for affluent families in the Westside of Los Angeles. I could by her all the fresh food she needed; she would never have to stand in line anymore for food, clothes or anything else.

Clearly, the feeling of being without had never left her as she hoarded expired bread, overripe fruit, and cases of yogurt. No one ate the food. In a fit of frustration, I would tell my mother that she didn’t need food from the church. She was 80 years old, so I had hired a caregiver who purchased fresh fruits and vegetables and prepared daily meals. I made sure that she was well taken care of. She went to the Senior Citizen Center (El Club) everyday and had lunch with her friends for $1.25. She would bring leftovers from there and put them in her purse.
Part of my weekly visit involved clearing out the refrigerator, the kitchen, and her purse. As indicated in figure 26, the amount of change she carried could add up to a heavy load.

*Figure 25. My mother’s refrigerator.*

![Image of a refrigerator with food items and change]

*Figure 26. Change and bills that I found in my mother’s purse.*

This life bore the psychological vestiges of the life we once lived, eating food that was inexpensive and often going without. For a treat, we would go to Man-Jo’s. This Chicago restaurant was where I would go when I had quarters to play games—it was also a hang out for the local “Latin Hoods.” (See Figure 27) My mom’s behavior so many years later clearly showed that this life was never far from any of our memories. We used to be hungry; we used to stand in
line for food, clothes, and toys. We used to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners with complete strangers at a community church. *We used to.*

![Man-Jo's Fast Food Restaurant](image)

*Figure 26. Man-Jo’s was a fast food restaurant that had pinball machines.*

In college I read my first work of Black political thought: *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* by bell hooks. I engaged with the book as I had engaged with myself many times, shaking my head with disapproval at the book’s depiction of how the poor were treated. So entranced was I by the book, I read and underlined the majority of the text.

All my life, television, radio, and talk in the classroom—even friends and acquaintances—had sent a critical and reproachful message about the poor. But there was no discussion among friends about what *we* did not have nor were any references made to being poor; however, I became aware of my family’s circumstances when I was nine and returned to California from Chicago.

By the time I arrived in California, I was hyper-vigilant, aggressive, and street wise. Living in the inner city of Chicago, I had heard gunshots and learned to distinguish among the different gang insignia, graffiti, territories, and colors, been forced to go to unsafe places.
I knew gang members and people who had died in battles of retaliation between one gang and another. I had seen marijuana, been in fistfights, jumped by a schoolmate, bullied, and, in 1977, kidnapped and raped in the service entrance of a local theater. (See Figures 28—gate and padlock are new; photo taken 2002; and 29). I know the dark side of urban living: the worst scenarios involving drugs, violence, abandoned buildings and the desperation of living in an impoverished and dangerous neighborhood. Jules Five and Dime and Milwaukee Avenue were where we would spend time and buy sundry items like gum and toys. (See Figures 30 and 31). Figure 32 shows the alley behind out our house, where we played and where gang members hung out. The train—known as the “El”—shattered our windows every time it passed by, underscoring the feeling that we lived on the “wrong side of the tracks.”

*Figure 28. Service entrance of the Congress Theater.*
Figure 29. The Congress Theater located across the street from the shoe store.

Figure 30. Jules five and dime.

Figure 31. Milwaukee Avenue.
But these experiences were only part of the story. My testimonio aims to synthesize all of the insight and knowledge I gathered from living in an impoverished area with limited resources, where success for me (and children like me) meant overcoming extraordinary odds. But rather than focusing on the obviously negative aspects of the story, this testimonio will highlight incidents of achievement and resistance, courage and transcendence. Because it is written (rather than oral), my testimonio will appear more formal than the previous testimonios. This story is told in first person, inspired by both the documents and papers from my life and the stories of the other participants, whose words stirred memories about my past and prompted insight about where I have arrived in my life. As I mentioned previously, I will offer anecdotes that resonate with some of the themes raised by the participants — and explore aspects that are unique to my testimonio.

I begin with my acceptance into a doctoral program graduate school. I did not know exactly what I was getting myself into, nor did I understand how universities and colleges were tiered and assessed. I knew that Harvard was at the top—the rest of my ideas came from movies
like *Dead Poet’s Society*, in which a group of young White males with a White male teacher in a corduroy blazer reads the work of old dead White men so that they the students could learn to be free. I was a bit confused because I was under the impression that smart young White men already were free. In fact, I was sure that they were in charge and held the monopoly on power positions in society, in politics, the military, the economy, and the classroom. Needless to say, I wanted their power. I wanted to stand on the desk and recite poetry, but their story did not resonate with me. Bell hooks got my attention with her deep down understanding and her way of knowing that I could not articulate.

When I arrived in the program in 1999, I did not know a lot about what a research university was. I had earned an my M.A. from a private liberal arts college at which class was held on the front lawn of school, and we called professors by their first names. In that program my perspective was welcomed and often embraced. Arriving at the big research university, I realized that I was naive and unsocialized to academic protocol because everything I knew about college and my aptitude suddenly seemed irrelevant and thoroughly inadequate. It was like I was starting my education all over again.

No matter what, I had come a long way. In elementary school, I had attended many different schools, had accrued excessive absences. My report card (See Figure 33) shows 12.5 absences during the first quarter; the instructor comment in another report card (See Figure 34) cite “excessive absences” for the third quarter, with 19 total absence 12 tardies.
Figure 33. 1st-grade report card.

Figure 34. 2nd-grade report card.
I attended then left St. Sylvester for 3rd-grade and spent a few months at North Shore Seventh Day Adventist School. (See Figure 35) My mother re-registered me at St. Sylvester, but eventually stayed with the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Figure 35. 3rd-grade class photograph.
Figure 36. 3rd-grade progress report.
Perseverance and improvisation were already part of my repertoire. One of my friends in 4th-grade was in MGM (Mentally Gifted Minds). Because I had been to so many schools by the time I was in 4th-grade and figured the records wouldn’t be so good, I told my teacher I had been in MGM at my previous school. Though my report cards said nothing about being in MGM, they did note that I showed “consistent interest” in my work. Teachers saw that I had promise, so, I was put in MGM until I transferred to another school (where they may have figured out that I had never been part of the program). Although I tried to get back into MGM programs, the office said that there was no paperwork to support my claim. That was the end of that. For the
time, I remember feeling that I was as smart as Julie and my new peers who were in MGM.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 38. 4th-grade report card. (La Habra California, 1980).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I had been in four different 4th-grade classes in two states. I had gone to nine different schools. By the time I started my second 5th-grade at Lincoln in Whittier (see Figure 39), I had</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
made up my mind to look more like a girl, so I wore a dress. I was going to act more feminine, it lasted only about two hours. By recess, I was racing up and down the blacktop playing basketball with the boys. Lisa Brellenthin, a schoolmate, whom I eventually became friends with, wrote about that same first day in a college class nearly 10 years later (circa 1990).

“The Wild One”

The first day of [school] was very exciting. Many of us knew each other from previous classes and there was a bond built upon similar experiences and feelings of superiority. Everyone came to school early on the first day . . . but among us was an intruder. Not just the new kin in school, but one very different from the rest of us. The class seemed to be overcome by a uniform dislike for the outsider. You could see how everyone glared, their judging eyes already condemning this person to solitude and mockery . . . when I first saw Angie, I decided that she looked very bizarre, especially that first day. I felt that she looked somewhat out of character; she looked at the ground most of the time, seemingly very uncomfortable. Her wild red hair looked as if someone had been combing it for days and still couldn’t get it to behave. Her light skin and numerous freckles had already won her ridicule, but to top it off, her childish Sunday dress made her look like an overgrown six year old. Angie was the whisper on everyone’s breath that day, and she knew it. She spoke to no one, never smiled, but she never glared back at us silly girls, not did she cry. She made her mark on everyone’s mind that day.

The excerpt captures a scene that was repeated each time I entered a new school. To the teachers and students, I was odd, viewed as an outsider, perceived as different. Brellenthin’s observation of “her childish Sunday dress made her look like an overgrown six year old” speaks volumes of the disconnect between who I was and who I tried to be. My hair and my clothes were symbolic of the poverty that shone right through me. My reclusiveness on that day was a protection for what I expected to come next. I was ready for a fight, ready to defend myself from my teachers, ready to prove them wrong— and I did. It took Brellenthin and her friends years of distance and judgment to come around and befriend me.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERFORMANCE CODE</th>
<th>FALL CONFERENCE</th>
<th>FIRST SEMESTER REPORT</th>
<th>SPRING CONFERENCE</th>
<th>FINAL REPORT</th>
<th>FALL CONFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROWTH IN SKILLS &amp; KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>READING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vowel attack skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral fluency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITTEN LANGUAGE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling assigned words correctly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct spelling in written work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using correct punctuation and grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing and developing ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwriting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHMATICS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning the fundamentals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to reason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL SCIENCE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring knowledge of history and geography</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing research skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCIENCE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALTH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFFORT</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing ideas and materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing independently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral expression of ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROWTH IN CIVIC ETHICS</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is courteous and considerate of others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows self control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects rights and property of others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects classroom rules</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects playground rules</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 39.** 5th-grade report card Lincoln Elementary, Whittier, California 1980.
These experiences remained close to me even as applied to graduate school, 20 years later. Part of the application process was the autobiographical statement. Being truthful about my own life circumstances was bittersweet. The genre of the autobiographical statement is a challenging one, but I tried my best to put together a genuine reflection of my life experiences. Describing my childhood, I explained:

We moved back and forth between Chicago and Los Angeles in an attempt to find refuge. We spent nights at Union Station and the downtown Greyhound Bus depot in desperate attempts to get back to Chicago. In Chicago we would find ourselves in the same position.

At age 10 my brother and I were sent away to live with a family from church. This was the first time I had participated in a conventional family environment. There was Mr. and Mrs. Rutherford, their three children and now my brother and me. I read my first book in its entirety while we lived in this home, *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret* by Judy Blume. This family had books
everywhere. Each child had his or her own bookshelf overflowing with books. I could not help but think, “They sure are rich.”

I am uncertain as to exactly when I learned that education was power. Considering my mother’s financial situation, I understood college was not going to be in my immediate future. I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps (See Figure 41) during my junior year of high school and departed soon after graduating. Two of my brothers had joined the military, I imagine for the same reasons. I entered the service with the hope of receiving the G.I. Bill and experiencing a life far different than the one I had lived. I would have stability, discipline, and I would be self-sufficient. My naïveté about the Marines, that of traveling to faraway land in the safe and structured environment was abruptly shattered by the reality of my new experience. I entered an institution, which did not welcome women and did not embrace minorities. I quickly found myself the prey of fellow Marines. My stint in the USMC was short lived due to incidents of sexual assault. I graduated from boot camp with honors and a meritorious promotion to Lance Corporal in recognition for my leadership ability. These accomplishments did not insulate me from my fate. I was honorably discharged after only nine months in the Marines, one month shy of eligibility for the G.I. Bill. No honor or recognition could keep me safe in an institution that promoted aggression while suppressing and persecuting victims of aggression.

Within a few months I enrolled at a community college in Chicago, Illinois, not far from family . . . Academically, I proved to be an enthusiastic student. From the first semester forward I made the Dean’s List. Subsequently, I was awarded the Harold Washington Academic Scholarship, for each of the four semesters I attended Wilbur Wright College. In order to finance full-time matriculation I began cleaning houses, which allowed for some flexibility in my schedule. In addition, I became a nanny and did other odd jobs, which supported me during undergraduate and graduate school. Although I moved back and forth between Chicago and Los Angeles twice during my college career, I never lost academic momentum nor took leave from my coursework. School was a sanctuary, a place where I could build on the feeling of empowerment I had discovered years earlier.
Only later did I realize that the reader would play a lot in determining the meaning of my words. One could read it as a narrative of strength and determination by an author who holds valuable knowledge and has something of significance to bring to the table; another—a deficit thinker—could read it and feel a patronizing sympathy, an impulse to “rescue” the author. In the case of my advisor, she had taken the latter stance. I knew of her patronizing attitude because I had accidentally been privy to my file—in which she had noted that I was “at-risk”—a designation that revealed volumes about what she thought of me. I did not know that I would come full circle and that my desire for a “formal” education would be a recapitulation of my childhood. I became a pawn in the name of “graduate school socialization,” and my experiences were devalued as not having trained me with a rigorous critical eye.

* * *

The social science lens I have developed in my graduate studies has brought a lot to my understanding of my own life and of the language that is used to describe and characterize experience such as mine—language that is an accepted part of the majoritarian rhetoric of
poverty. Table 4, below, offers two columns of terms: on the left are terms that have become synonymous with the poor and minorities. These words are used in academic research, popular media, and political expression to maintain/inflame the stereotypes. The right hand column shows terms that challenge the majoritarian story, illuminating the other side of the story. The language used by critical race theorist and Latino critical theorists reveals a rich history that includes fighting for equity in education (East Los Angeles School walkouts, 1968), having deep roots in resistance (McLaren, 1994), and using storytelling as a means of liberation (Delgado, 1989).

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing the Language: Majoritarian Versus Counter-Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Majoritarian Story</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop out (Bryk &amp; Driscoll, 1988; Lubeck &amp; Garrett, 1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilation (Hunt, 1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk (Maning &amp; Baruth, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged (Herrnstein &amp; Murray, 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficient (Lewis, 1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally deprived (Bereiter &amp; Englemean, 1966; Lewis, 1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meritocracy (Marks, 1981)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming the victim (Lewis, 1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historicism (Popper, 1957)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Cultural Knowledge (Valencia &amp; Solórzano, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of Poverty (Lewis, 1961; Payne, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naming one’s reality (Crenshaw, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underclass (Peterson &amp; Jencks, 1991)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conceptual themes listed under “majoritarian story” are code words that mask the racist and classist dialogue perpetrated and maintained by academia, popular media, and the public sphere—as well as by teachers, administrators, and policy makers. This language plays a
powerful role in perception, relegating those it designates to social and educational destinies that, once set, are hard to alter. The different view, under the column “counter-story,” challenges the concepts posed by the majoritarian story. The two are not dichotomous, but tell very different stories. My previous advisor labeled me “at-risk.” I have been told that poor people are just looking for handouts. I have been told that Mexicans don’t have the same values around education, as do Whites. I have heard and been assaulted with the terms and ideologies that are listed in the left column. For each accusation, each critique, each blatant attack on Latino/as and the poor, what remains absent is context—the racist, classist, sexist structures that exist and are enabled in and by our schools, business, politics, and beyond. With the language from the table above in mind, I now return to my testimonio—a counter-story that will touch on the theories raised in Chapter Four beginning with the Pedagogy of Sacrifice (POS). As mentioned previously, Pedagogy of Sacrifice speaks to the various sacrifices made or witnessed to provide a better life (Hernandez, 2011).

Many of the sacrifices that I witnessed and have endured were based on unstable housing, lack of food and other resources, and working instead of living a child’s life. When I was six, my mother made friends with a shoemaker we called El Viejo. He owned a shoe store that had an upstairs apartment (See Figure 42) that we rented. Situated in an industrial area, this apartment was not ideal for a family with children. The street was home to a large movie theatre (see Figure 28), a second-hand appliance store, a Laundromat, a Salvation Army store, a hardware store, a fruteria, a Mexican restaurant, an A & P grocery store, and a host of other small businesses.

The clearest memory I have of food and its relationship to poverty comes from this period of my life. My daily staple was eggs, tortillas, Lipton Soup, and cereal. I remember opening the packet of the tomato or green pea soup and pouring the hot water over the powdered
substance. I stirred and stirred until the powder unclotted. Eventually the water and powder would mix and turn the appropriate color, red for tomato and green for pea soup. The only way to make the soup last was by crumbling as many saltine crackers in the bowl until you had what resembled a paste.

Throughout my life, I remember going to churches and getting bags of food. I also remember holiday dinners at local churches from the flyers posted on the telephone pole in the neighborhood. That flyer was the anonymous invitation we needed and accepted. I remember eating tortillas with lettuce and Thousand Island dressing. We used to go to a Seventh Day Adventist Church and have potluck after church. We never contributed to the potluck, but depended on the meal each Saturday.

Rather than going to the movies with friends or playing at the park, I learned how to sell shoes from El Viejo. I used to help customers measure their feet, get the right sized shoe, and package their goods. I eventually learned how to use the huge machine for repairing shoes. I remember the numerous tools: the hole punch for the belts and shoe lace holes, the clippers, the jar of glue, the liquid dyes, the wax polishes, the multiple sized blades used to shape the rubber soles that were replaced, the heel plates, the insoles, the sheets of rubber used for the soles of shoes, the shoe horns used to place a person’s shoe on for them, heel grips, and the varying lengths and colors of shoe laces.
At one point I got my own shoe shine kit, complete with three wax polishes—neutral, black and tan—one brush, a polishing cloth and my own spit. I would stand on the street opposite the shoe store (see Figure 42) and yell, “Shoe shine.” I also sold Snicker bars and Cañela chicles. At the same time, I worked at the local A&P grocery store helping customers with their groceries. I would wheel their groceries to their car, load them and return the cart. I would get a quarter or a simple thank you.

During the summer, I would help sell raspadas (sno-cones) with a neighbor. We would roll the makeshift cart through the streets yelling “Raspadas!” I remember the huge block of ice
and the metal ice shaver used to fill the paper cones with ice before pouring on the sweet syrup flavored with coco, lima, piña, or fresa. We pushed the cart until the block of ice had melted and been shaved down to a thin sheet, then we headed back home.

Along the way, I picked up many skills from my male cousins and my friends’ parents. I knew how to do light landscaping, hang dry wall, tape (I was told that the Mexicans are the tapers), and paint. I washed and detailed cars. I knew how to lay rebar and pour cement for a driveway or sidewalk. I had many skills.

By the time I was 16, I got my first job with an hourly wage, medical benefits, and a regular paycheck. It was at Alpha Beta, a grocery chain in Southern California that was bought out and renamed as Ralph’s and others in the late 1980s. I was a bag girl with a keen eye for detail and an even keener eye for helping people. I built many lasting relationships with community members. I met and befriended many people. If a Black person or a seemingly gay or lesbian person was in line, the other baggers would avoid the check stand or make remarks about the customer. I would be sure to greet the person and give a little extra attention. My superiors always acknowledged and praised my hard work and customer service skills. So much so that I was asked to work the night shift.

I was still in high school and under the impression that this raise and movement up the ranks was something for which I should be grateful. The stress of the job and my inability to get to school on time was a devastating sacrifice that I thought I had to make. I realize now that it was illegal to have a minor working that shift. I did horribly in school, mostly because I missed classes frequently. I lost about 20 pounds in a few months’ time and nearly failed several of my classes. I quit the night shift and was reinstated as a part-time employee. I redeemed myself in school and was “Most Improved Student,” as well as nominated to give the graduation speech.
I made a decision about going to college based on my lack of information. I knew I could not afford college. I didn’t have money, and my mom was in no position to help me. The obvious thing to do was to join the Marine Corps. Supposedly, my college would be paid for when I completed my enlistment. I did not see any other way I could pay for the application fees, let alone the actually college tuition, books, and so forth. I did not know that I had to take the SATs. I didn’t even know what they were, when they were scheduled, or that they had anything to do with college acceptance. After a brief stint in the Marine Corps, I enrolled in a community college.

During college (community college through master’s degree), I cleaned houses as my job. I even cleaned my professors’ houses, friends’ houses, friends of friends’ houses, and the house of the chairwomen of the education department. I traveled 90 miles round trip to clean an apartment on weekends. This job was the only one that would allow me the flexibility to go to school full time, satisfy my teaching practicum, and have enough study time for my coursework. I also did odd jobs. I painted the interior of houses. I did landscaping, and installed sprinklers. I was also a live-in nanny for several years, staying in what was considered the “maid’s quarters,” a small room off the driveway that had a basin and a refrigerator. I had access to the downstairs bathroom, which I shared with the young boy I cared for. There was no exchange of money; it was an exchange of a room for 20 hours a week of childcare, which included picking the boy up from school, preparing dinner, bathing, and helping him finish his homework. When I look at this exchange now, I realize how skewed the arrangement was.

Although I attended several colleges, I ended up with a California Teaching Credential and a bachelor’s degree in Child Development. These certifications allowed me to teach. I taught in many different communities in East Los Angeles, Rowland Heights, and Whittier.
also have the privilege of teaching citizenship classes to persons applying for U. S. citizenship. I
prepared them for their interview at the Immigration and Naturalization Services office, filled out
and submitted their application for citizenship, and prepared them for the written and oral exam.
I worked in this role (and as an English as a Second Language teacher) at a housing project in
Los Angeles for many years. My experience as a teacher allowed me to be the teacher I wished I
had had. I exercised compassion, extended my support, made myself available to parents and
students, believed in my students, embraced their contributions to the classroom, and fought like
ehell to get them what they needed when I was not enough.

When I started this dissertation, I did not know how I was going to write about my own
mother and fit her into my dissertation. I had very strong feelings about my mother and our
circumstances. For many years I blamed her for being poor. The clothes I wore embarrassed me.
It seemed that nothing really fit me well. I remember getting shoes that were too big for my feet
and having to stuff them with toilet paper or squeezing into shoes that were much too tight,
because they were name brand and I wanted to have what my peers had. I remember squeezing
into pants and shorts that were a few sizes too small. Most, if not all, of my clothes were either
handed down from one of my brothers, a second-hand store find, or given to me by a friend. My
new pants or shoes were compliments of a church voucher that my mom had obtained. I
remember looking through the Sears catalog and making a wish list. I would write the name of
each item I wanted, they were usually organized by category: clothes, bedroom, bathroom, living
room, and kitchen. I would make my own spreadsheet with a ruler, pencil, and notebook paper. I
would pick out outfits from the pages, including socks, underwear, and shoes. I would do the
same for my mom and brother. Then I would organize a blueprint of sorts where I would draw
in the items needed for a living room, dining room, bedroom and kitchen. Each item would have
the price next to it, which I would total by category, and ultimately subtotal. I had a very active imagination.

I had fantasized about all the what ifs: What if I had a father? What if we had a car? What if we had money? What if I could buy whatever I wanted? What if I didn’t have to work? What if we lived in a nice house? What if . . . ? The questions were constant and recurrent. Such episodes of fantasy often followed a situation in which I confronted “not having.” On a few occasions, we would miss the last bus back home. If that happened, we would make our way to a 24-hr hospital and wait in the lobby until morning for the first available bus. We had also been stranded in downtown Los Angeles and slept at the greyhound bus station. I was always extremely frightened when this happened. It seemed that every horrible urban legend settled in my head on these nights.

Resistance has traditionally been viewed as a negative response to the status quo and often as a self-defeating behavior; however, I argue that resistance is a form of human agency (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995). Using a CRT and Latino critical theory lens provides a frame for a deeper understanding of resistance and its many forms. As discussed earlier, Pedagogy of Resistance (POR) focuses on forms of resistance employed as a function of endurance (Hernandez, 2011). Pedagogy of Resistance functions in the same vein as transformational resistance, which consists of paired thought and action; in this model, the act of resisting must be a critique of oppression and the desire for social justice (Delgado Bernal, 1997; Giroux, 1993; hooks, 1990; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). This form of resistance provides the greatest possibility for social change. Many other forms of resistance have been established using the criteria for liberation, including resilient resistance (Yosso, 2000), resistance for survival and resistance of liberation (Robinson & Ward, 1991), and internal and external transformational
resistance (Delgado Bernal, 1997). Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) parse out various behaviors and responses to oppression:

- Reactionary behavior: not a form of resistance because it lacks critique and is not motivated by social justice
- Self-defeating resistance: follows a critique of oppressive structures, but is not motivated by social justice
- Conformist resistance: based on a desire for social justice, but provides no critique of the system.
- Transformational resistance: has a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice.

Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) have further stated that CRT and LatCrit’s theory of resistance differs from other resistance frameworks, in that they:

1. Challenge traditional paradigms (i.e., Latina students using different forms of resistance to challenge institutional barriers)
2. Include gendered and racialized experiences (i.e., Latina students as active resistors throughout the educational pipeline)
3. Offer a transformative response to racial, class, and gendered oppression (i.e., Latina students doing well academically and socially despite actual and perceived barriers)
4. Utilize interdisciplinary knowledge (i.e., students understanding different forms of oppression and the historical attitudes about race and class.)
My own response to oppression resistance. I didn’t know that my attitude and behavior would later be included in a resistance framework. I just knew intuitively never to surrender, never to give in to the perception of who I was or what I was capable of doing. My resistance showed up in many forms: I excelled in school, I was always being prepared, asking for clarification, sitting in the front seat, and taking what I needed, and leaving the rest behind.

By the time I was in 4th-grade, I had a clear understanding of my poverty. Though seemingly a minor detail, our kitchen cabinet with several examples of food donated to us—a daily, visible reminder of our status. (See Figure 44) We had moved to what seemed to be a middle class neighborhood: People owned their houses, drove one or two cars, had their kids signed up in American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO), went on vacations over Christmas break and had both parents working. I never played organized sports until I was in Whittier and played through the YMCA. I remember not having to pay for sports because we got a form that we filled out instead. There were lots of forms to fill out, some were referred to as Financial Hardship Statements, Financial Aid forms, tuition deference, free lunch applications, fee waivers, I was familiar with them all.

*Figure 44. Cans of donated food.*
Church and government vouchers were a source of funding for us, allowing us to make necessary purchases. Often anticipation about making a new purchase turned into anxiety about making the right decision, as I discussed in an essay I wrote 10 years ago:

The storefront was simple, but easy to spot because of the skateboard posters and stickers on the glass of the front door. The wood carving of a skateboard with a Vans inscribed on the deck greeted us. The doorbell rang as we made our way in the store. The first display was lined with Hawaiian tropical material, browns, greens and tans. They were all slip-ons. On the left was a series of checkered blues, reds and the ever-popular black and white. My stomach starts to cramp and I can feel beads of sweat form on my lip and under my eyes. I have the chills and immediately ask the teenage sales girl, if they have a restroom. My body is now balled over; my legs are shaking as I pray. “Please God, let my stomach ache go away. Please.” I have prayed this prayer as often as I had put my shoes on. It was daily and more often than not, multiple times a day. I pulled my fists into my stomach and tried squeeze my stomach empty.

My mom was talking to the girl when I came out of the restroom. I started down the opposite wall, trying to pick something to try on. There were high tops with canvas and suede trim. Jon Bowater had the same ones in blue. I had to be really sure though, so I went around the store again and stopped at the Hawaiian printed slip on. They were so cool. My brother was already trying on a pair of blue tie-ons blue is his favorite color. Orange was my favorite color, which is probably why the Hawaiian print caught my eye. There was orange in the flowers. Before I could ask the girl anything she asked me my size. I knew I was a little smaller than Joe because I always got his shoes, when they were too tight for him. She asked me to stand on the metal measurement, my toes ended right at the four. Joe was already walking around the store in his shoes; he kept stopping in front of the mirror to see the front, sides and backs of his shoes. The girl left before I could tell her which ones I wanted. She came back with a box and handed me a blue tie- on just like Joe’s.

I didn’t say anything and just tried them on. I didn’t even walk around in them. When we went up to the counter, my mom took a slip of paper out of the envelope she was holding. Right there across the top was the word “Voucher.” Under the name of the store it was written, “Blue deck shoes.”

Pedagogy of community cultural wealth (POCCW) honors community cultural wealth, as explained in Tara Yosso’s work (2005). Cultural wealth is an exchange of knowledge among community members—knowledge that comes from and enriches the community (Hernandez, 2011). Community Cultural Wealth includes the following forms of capital: aspirational capital,
familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, resistance capital and linguistic capital. The more I understood the Yosso’s model of community cultural wealth, the more I could make out the players in my own life. My mother was at the helm—she navigated resources for us to have vouchers for clothes, shoes, food, and furniture. In 1987, Whittier experienced a 7.2 magnitude earthquake. (See Figure 45)

Figure 45. Cover of newspaper, October 2, 1987.

Our apartment was condemned, with little to salvage from the disaster. I remember my mother filling out paperwork with the American Red Cross. After staying with family friends, we found an affordable two-bedroom apartment. Soon after came the beds came along with matching dressers and mirrors. It was my first time having bedroom furniture. I was 17. I remember organizing my clothes in the drawers with military precision and obsessively polishing the veneer dresser top with furniture polish. I wanted it to last forever. I finally had a bed with a headboard. I remember how I always wanted things to match. My bed sheets were always a mismatch, the pillowcase one print, the fitted sheet another, and flat sheet another. I wanted a matching set of sheets. I finally got them as birthday gift from a family friend. I was 18.

I have always been compelled to help people, even as a very young child. I was the student who introduced myself to the new kid. I was so familiar with that position. I would protect kids who were being bullied by intimidating the bully. I held Bible study for the kids in
the hall closet of my apartment building. I volunteered to run errands for elderly people in my neighborhood. I shared my notes with kids who were absent. I dropped off schoolwork for friends who were sick. As a teenager, I would translate for my Spanish-speaking neighbors, would transcribe letters in English, and read over papeles de importancia, as we called them. It could have been a rental agreement, letter from the welfare office, medical correspondence, school letters. From 5th grade, on I did the majority of my homework at Whittier College library, which was open until 11pm. While in graduate school, I have engaged with many young people of color and mentored them in filling out financial aid forms, tutored them in study skills, purchased educational materials for them, provided computers, and contributed to their academic and social endeavors with financial help.

![Figure 46. My study space.](image)

One of the goals of this dissertation has been to expand the definition of poverty to incorporate the experiential element of being poor. As demonstrated in this dissertation and the 11 testimonios, poverty is not only about not having resources. Being poor carries with it the unnecessary burden of proof that one is capable, intelligent, and worthy of the same goods and services that other human being have the privilege to obtain. A poor person is not broken; she or
her is not less than, and should not be considered “lucky” to have an opportunity for education, a fair and equitable job, safe and predictable housing, and the rights and privileges granted to all.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION

Two broad-ranging research questions guided this study:

1. What educational and social challenges do Latinas living in poverty face along the educational pipeline?

2. How do Latinas living in poverty respond to educational and social challenges associated with poverty?

As anticipated, the educational challenges included examples of schools maintaining and perpetuating social inequities, such as “sorting” students onto tracks, and students accepting or rejecting racial and class stereotypes, and having to learn the “codes” of the institution in order to succeed. Social challenges included living under the shadow of racial and class bias, challenging teacher’s low expectations, and having to justify your presence in the classroom and your right to an education. Although these two questions formed the foundation of the study, the testimonios—as I have discussed—honored ideas, themes, confirmations, and detours as they emerged from the participants’ narratives. In gathering these 11 testimonios, I sought to expand our understandings of the complex experiences of Latinas living in poverty coming through the educational pipeline. Implicitly, these testimonios speak to the shortcomings of academic and governmental definitions of poverty, whose statistical representations can never flesh out the educational and social challenges such women face.

Indeed, one thread clearly ties together the 11 testimonios in this dissertation: how each woman participated in the cycle of uplift by virtue of her achievements and by sharing the stories of her achievements, itself a form of depositing knowledge derived from one’s experience into the collective of Community Cultural Wealth. What emerged from these narratives was a
dynamic of reciprocity, whereby the participants shared and exchanged their knowledge and experiences with their communities. Communities, in this case, could be families, colleagues, peers, students, even people with whom one has cursory exchanges. The findings from these testimonios complement the six tenets of Yosso’s model of community cultural wealth (2006), which are (a) **aspirational capital**: “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of barriers” (p. 41), (b) **linguistic capital**, defined as “intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences in more than one language/style” (p. 43), (c) **navigational capital**, which refers to “skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (p. 44), (d) **social capital**, understood as “networks of people and community resources” (p. 45), (e) **familial capital**, comprised of “cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community, history, memory, and cultural intuition” (p. 48), and (f) **resistant capital**, which is “knowledges and skills cultivated through behavior that challenges inequality” (p. 49). This model validated the various forms of knowledge evidenced in the 11 testimonios. Together the narratives present a series of interlocking and self-perpetuating encounters that fit and move like gears in a machine. Each participant was generous and inclusive with her knowledge whether with peers in a classroom situation or with members of their communities. In contrast, social capital, as defined and used by Bourdieu, is passed on as a legacy or exclusive possession that upholds the right and privileges of the dominant class. I use this term “legacy” intentionally, as it resonates with the ways that generations of dominant society have perpetuated their entitlement to education at the expense of people equally—or even more—qualified. In spite of the efforts of affirmative action proponents, consideration of legacies (dubbed by some as “affirmative action for the rich”) in making school admissions decisions remains a prominent practice. Whereas the strength of social capital is based upon how few people possess it,
Community cultural wealth is strengthened by the expansion of the network and is fortified by increases in the population of those who have access and exchange it.

The testimonios served to provide depth and breadth to understanding the intersectionality of poverty, race, and gender as they are implicated and explicated in the educational system. They also supported the importance of depicting the lived experiences that must be part of the operational definition of poverty. To say that someone is poor and lacks access to housing, food, and resources is at once too vague and too narrow. This instrumental definition makes it easy to make quantitative assessments and to pass judgment about how poor people can fix their situations. Providing an historical and lived experience of poverty guides educators, policymakers, and the public at large a sense of the complexity, history, and the possibility for gaining insight into the part they play in either perpetuating or dispelling the rampant stereotyping around poverty. The way we vote, the way we teach, and the way we communicate with each other plays a part in generating negative perceptions of the poor. Ultimately, it is our responsibility to bring stories and lives to statistics, to bring lived narratives to theories. The sooner we can personalize poverty, the sooner we can understand it.

Collectively, in telling about lives of poverty, the participants contributed an overarching narrative of guidance and possibility. Their stories and the lessons they learned along the way are part of a larger discourse of race and class, offering a dramatically different lens through which to consider these issues. Collectively, these stories provide poignant corrective to highly politicized quantitative methods of assessing and discussing poverty, indicating the overwhelming importance of approaching the subject with an ethic of care and an appreciation for diversity.
As stated in the introduction, this project had four objectives: (a) to use critical race theory (CRT) as a tool to better understand the experiences of Latinas living in poverty and going through the educational pipeline, (b) to examine the educational and social challenges of Latinas living in poverty and making their way through the educational pipeline, and (c) to reveal the many “voices” of the poor, and (d) to make definitions of poverty more comprehensive by including the crucial element of experience.

These objectives were met—and even exceeded my expectations. The honesty and detail of the testimonios provided a raw and uncensored look into the lives unveiled for this project. Their vulnerability and exposure tells a story that cannot be told often enough by—and to—girls and women across the nation. In an educational system intended to provide equal opportunity education, it’s time to create higher expectations for teachers in how they receive, teach, and socialize their students. Of the many crises impacting education today, bias against poverty seems to be a final frontier. This dissertation seeks to provoke further discussion and thought about how educators, policymakers, and stakeholders can diminish the barriers many students face in seeking to access their basic right to an education.

Implications

Implications for Theory

This study contributes to the literature by challenging deficit theory in three ways. First, it brings to light the negative trajectory and deficit thinking embedded in research about low-income Latino/as. Second, it brings together research and experiential knowledge (knowledge derived from lived experiences, Solórzano, 1998) by producing a counter-story (Delgado, 1989). Third, as a collection of testimonios, this study will challenge deficit theory by asserting that
experiential knowledge is an asset that Students of Color bring from their communities and homes into their classrooms.

The aim of my dissertation study was to humanize the story behind the statistics of Latinas who live in poverty and navigate the educational pipeline. It is a counter-narrative that reveals the other side of the story (Delgado, 1989) and illuminates the strengths possessed by Communities of Color. In offering transformative responses to an issue often over-simplified by policymakers, educators, and scholars, this dissertation adhered to Delgado’s (1995) suggestion about the importance of People of Color telling their stories to ensure an accurate account.

According to Solórzano and Yosso (2001), the counter-story can help build community among those at the margins and challenge the perceived wisdom that upholds the hierarchies at society’s center, teaching others by constructing a world that combines and equally honors academic knowledge and community knowledge.

**Implications for Methodology**

Using the testimonio method proved to be a productive way to get participants to open up around subjects that they might have otherwise deemed uneventful. These nonevents provided richness and texture about living in poverty as a Latina coming through the educational pipeline. Much more so than the interview format, testimonios honor the organic development of narratives and the discursive ways that people experience their lives. By recounting these experiences, the participants drew upon memory through the lens of their contemporary lives as scholars. As I indicate of my own experience, many of these women were transforming their memories and experiences into narratives for the first time. By honoring their narratives and their roles as tellers, the testimonio format validates the epistemology of personal experience. As such,
This methodology proved meaningful to me as a researcher and a participant as well as to the participants whose words and knowledge made this study such a rich one.

Another important aspect of the methodology was the inclusion of primary and archival material. Close consultation with report cards, photographs, stories, and other educational artifacts—certificates, teacher notes, and essays—provided a snapshot of perceptions of the participant’s work, ability, and behavior. Such materials serve as time capsules, reflecting perceptions at work in their historical moment. Although the maps did not prove productive for this study, I believe they could be useful if consulted with each participant in person. Taking a virtual tour could elicit conversation and provide a visual elucidation of daily life experiences and neighborhood changes.

Too often data is held up as the primary means of informing decision making and theoretical interventions; my hope is that the methodology of this dissertation serves to underscore the value of testimonios and other personal knowledge–centered practices.

Implications for Practice

In order to make the findings of this dissertation matter for the practice of teaching, we must raise awareness among future educators about their own perceptions and experiences of race, class, and gender. For them to retrace the narratives of their own experiences through the educational pipeline, analyze how they were supported (or not supported), and look at the interconstituency of those three issues would be a valuable effort. In the practice of self-examination, teachers should ask if they themselves have been benefactors of the educational system; what did their support systems look like, and how can they, in turn, pass those advantages and forms of support onto their students?
Before change can happen in schools, recognition of the problem must occur at the top—where policymakers, district administrators, and school administrators make the decisions that affects children’s daily lives and life-long educational experiences. Through training and professional development as well as a massive paradigm shift in the way poverty is considered and treated, teachers can bring as much change to the biases around poverty as they have to the biases around race and gender. All three of these issues—and the way they implicate and explicate each other—require as much attention in classrooms, schools, and districts as do issues of accountability, high-stakes testing, and twenty-first century skills.

**Implications for Policy**

The findings and conclusions from this study can provide instructive guidance to those responsible for making educational policy. The conversation about racial segregation is still active today. How race relates to the achievement gap, de facto inequality, and policy change remain front-page subjects; but the relevance of these same subjects to people of poverty receives far less attention. Reformers attending to problems relating to race, classroom quality, and academic achievement would go far by adding to the equation such issues as poverty and academic expectations, considering how these myriad issues may be ameliorated through effective policy-making efforts. While this dissertation has consistently argued that the issues and problems of race, class, and gender interrelate in powerful ways, some specific attention to poverty and the educational pipeline is necessary. Policy affects the daily experience of children of poverty. For example, the very act of getting lunch can become a stigmatizing act, as children are segregated into lines for free and reduced lunch and the full pay. For parents, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) activities should take place in timeframes that are amenable to working
parents. Policy must provide legislative answers as well as community resolutions. A *New York Times* article from May 20, 2012 stated:

> Despite the Horatio Alger myth that anyone can make it in America, moving up the socioeconomic ladder is hard going: children from low-income families have only a 1 percent chance of reaching the top 5 percent of the income distribution, versus children of the rich, who have a 22 chance. (Kirk, 2012, p. 1)

The hope is that this dissertation presents a convincing argument that this one percent also deserves a great deal of attention.

**Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study is my simultaneous role as researcher and a participant of this study; however, in abiding by the tenets of Critical Race Theory, I felt it was important to place my own experience at the crux of this dissertation to challenge the dominant story and redistribute new knowledge. Part of my role as the researcher is to build rapport with the participants. Due to the sensitive subject matter (race, poverty), participants may have been reluctant to share potentially useful and relevant information. Another limitation was the small sample study, which does not allow for generalizability to a larger population; notably, however, my intention was not to generalize, but rather to provide specific information on a specific topic.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The following recommendations for future research are based on what could be done to better to understand how we can keep the burden of prejudice and bias off the shoulders of students and facilitate the experience of People of Color coming through the educational pipeline by treating them as “holders and creators of knowledge” (Delgado, 2002):

1. Conduct a study with a larger sample size from urban areas around the country
2. Incorporate the community cultural wealth model as examples of knowledge
3. Undertake a similar study with a population at the beginning of the educational pipeline as a way of determining when and how negative patterns are set.  
4. Conduct a study with a different race.  
5. Interview educators about their own educational experiences and how those experiences inflect how they teach.

This study went against the grain of quantitative studies and other work that focuses on statistics instead of stories. This researcher recommends that further research be conducted that honors the voices of those who have experienced given phenomena rather than on numbers that ultimately obscure lived realities.

Conclusion

This study provided an in-depth, insider look at the lives of Latinas who have gone through the educational system, lived in poverty, and challenged—and continue to challenge—perceptions of the poor and of Latinas. These women have successfully navigated the educational pipeline by being reflective, drawing upon parental and community support, and having a deep understanding of how to negotiate a climate often hostile to identities such as theirs. In doing so, they rejected the constraints of racism and stereotypes. This study offers the collective experience of people who have been placed at the margins but confronted and transcended the formidable and entrenched obstacles meant to impede them. These women are not exceptional in their early life experiences, indeed they share many experiences with mothers, sisters, and grandmothers; however, they are a new generation of college-educated women occupying positions in the academy that enable them to interrupt the story of White privilege. They are taking their knowledge back into their communities, creating a positive and productive culture and allowing their knowledge to circulate and proliferate for the next generation coming...
through the educational pipeline. In a high-stakes era of accountability, instilling change in how educators treat the poor and People of Color may not be considered a high priority. In actuality, the implications of not making these changes are huge. Educational change efforts can make a difference in a significant percentage of the population. As I believe the testimonios in this dissertation have indicated, the problem may not look urgent but it runs deep and impacts self-perception and self-efficacy, with far-ranging implications. When students are honored as participants in their own education and as keepers of knowledge with its own inherent value, they will become agents of change themselves, perpetuating a sense that schools are vibrant, supportive, and actively engaged communities committed to the achievement of all students.
REFERENCES


