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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Navigating the Sexual Politics on the High School Campus: *Testimonios* of Young Chicana/Latinas

by

Mayra Alejandra Lara

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2018

Navigating the Sexual Politics on the High School Campus:

Testimonios of Young Chicana/Latinas

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by

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This dissertation written by Mayra Lara, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

6-15-18

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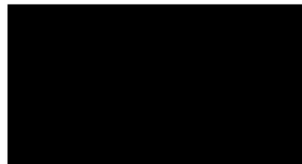

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work exists because of the unconditional love, support, and mentorship I received from individuals inside and outside of academia. My journey began when, as a graduate student at Long Beach State, my professor Michael Dumas said I needed to pursue a doctoral degree. He reminded me that my voice is important and necessary. It was the first time I felt I belonged in academia. Michael, thank you for gifting me the sense of belonging, I carry it with me always.

To Antonia Darder, I lack the words to express my gratitude. What follows is an attempt to thank you for your guidance, love, and mentorship throughout this journey. I could not have completed this work had it not been for your words of encouragement and reminders to be patient with my process. From you, I learned the importance of being in harmony with my body, trusting myself, and listening to my intuition. All of which are things academia had forced me to forget; thank you for offering the space that allowed me to remember. I also want to thank you for building a community of Darderian scholars, for reminding us to construct knowledge together, and for opening the doors to your home which helped create a space for collective healing. *Gracias, mil gracias.*

To the other *mujeres* who completed my committee, thank you for your time, feedback, and encouragement. Dolores Delgado Bernal and Deena Gonzalez, thank you for sharing your wisdom with me, for pushing my analysis, for engaging with me. The day of my proposal defense I was in awe of you all. I remember sitting in front of you, listening to you speak about my work, listening to you share your own stories, and I recall it being an out of body experience. It was the first time I had ever been in a room of only women in academia and I wanted to absorb

it all. *Gracias* for those moments, for showing me that it's possible to be a strong Chicana/Latina in academia.

I want to thank my parents, Miguel *e* Irene Lara, for encouraging me, for believing in me, and for the many sacrifices they made for our family. Dad, you once said, "I don't know where you get your intellect from, your love for learning." To this, I answered, "I get it from you, from both of you." You always filled our home with reading material and for that I am eternally grateful. Dad, every day you read the newspaper, *La Opinion,* and kept us abreast with what was going on around the world. Mom, you have always loved books. Reading was your calm and it became mine too. You both spoke to us openly, acknowledged our opinions, and together we pushed each other to continue learning. That is where I get it from, from both of you.

You taught me to be myself, to hold my head high, to show by example and together we did it: we survived academia. From you I received the strength to speak my truth, to hold space for others, to build community, to take risks, and to follow my dreams. You filled our home with love, you taught us how to love each other unconditionally, I will never be able to fully thank you. I don't think the words exist. All I can say is I love you, I hope I have made you proud, and that this is the life you envisioned me living.

I dedicate this work to my siblings: Cynthia, Natalie, Miguel, y Alyssa. Thank you for your love, honesty, and space to be unapologetically myself. Each of you inspires me in different ways and has fueled my entire self. Cynthia, thank you for always taking care of me. From the time I was an undergraduate student at Long Beach State you always called and asked if I was okay. On the days that I wasn't, on the days that academia was breaking me, you were there to lift me up. *Gracias, mil gracias.* Natalie, thank you for asking questions, for telling everyone

about my work, and for keeping me grounded. You are the social butterfly that I wish lived within me and I regularly try to channel my inner you. Miguel, you challenge me in ways that you may be unaware. Thank you for pushing me to think of things differently and for being open to engaging with me, even when we disagree. Thank you for traveling with me, for taking risks, and for your morning messages. *Te quiero mucho*. Alyssa, this dissertation is especially for you. From a young age you saw the world in ways I wish I could have when I was young(er). I admire how in tune you are with your entire self and the fearlessness with which you use your voice to resist. You embody strength and I hope that you get to experience academia free from violence. You all are my rock, my village, I am thankful that I get to experience life with you. *Los quiero.*

To my friends Jessica, Martha, and Mandy, thank you for your unconditional love and support. You are the mirrors that help show parts of myself I often forget or refuse to see. Thank you for being patient with me, for the laughs, the critiques, but most importantly I am grateful to build a community of strong women with you. Through this process you helped me breathe, see clearly, and stay true to myself. *Las quiero mucho.*

I am appreciative and indebted to the Darderian scholars who encouraged and supported me during the most challenging moments of the doctoral program. Bibinaz Pirayesh, Emily Bautista, Frederick Smith, Kahlil Almustafa, Nadia Despenza, and Russell Castaneda Calleros, I'm thankful for your friendship, honesty, and scholarship. It has been an honor to grow alongside you all and I consider it a privilege to call you my colleagues. Thank you for the writing sessions, the happy hours, the critiques, and the love we have for one another.

While in high school, as an undocumented student, there were times when accessing academia seemed like an impossible feat. A special thank you to Carlos and Thelma Valverde,

my high school mentor and college counselor, who guided me and did not allow my undocumented status to act as a barrier for academic success. Thank you both for being an instrumental part of my personal and professional growth. My academic journey would be incomplete without you. *Mil gracias.*

To Farima Pour-Khorshid, you have been such an incredible friend and sister. The stars aligned to bring us together; I thank our ancestors for making it happen. Thank you for your willingness to build community with me, for the countless writing sessions, for getting me to the finish line. I am inspired by your wisdom and strength. *Te quiero mucho*.

I want to thank the six young women who privileged me with their stories, who ventured to co-construct knowledge with me, and without whom I wouldn't have completed a doctoral degree. *Gracias* for your strength and for trusting me with your stories, I carry them with me always.

Lastly, to all of the *mujeres* in my life, *gracias*. I carry your strength, wisdom, and passions. I hope I've made you proud.

DEDICATION

Para mi abuelita Irene. Gracias por guiarme a través de este proceso. Hago este trabajo en su honor. Espero algún día conocer su historia completa.

To my abuelita Irene. Thank you for guiding me through this process. I do this work in your honor. I hope to one day know your full story.

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ABSTRACT

Navigating the Sexual Politics on the High School Campus:

Testimonios of Young Chicana/Latinas

by

Mayra Alejandra Lara

By employing *pláticas y encuentros*, this qualitative study examined the *testimonios* of Chicana/Latina youth and their experiences with navigating the sexual politics on the high school campus. Six young Chicana/Latinas, all of whom graduated from the same high school in South East Los Angeles, participated in the study. The study used two frameworks: Chicana/Latina feminist theory and critical pedagogy to analyze the young women's *testimonios*. Findings speak of their daily struggle with adults policing, objectifying, and containing their bodies; as well as the benefit of a third space, counterspaces, for self-actualization. This study contributes to this field by identifying how Chicana/Latina youth experience schooling and what they believe must happen in order to ensure that the school community and larger society is more responsive to their experiences with navigating sexual politics in and outside of the educational context.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We are "written" all over, or should I say, carved and tattooed with the sharp needles of experience . . . .Some of us are forced to acquire the ability, like a chameleon, to change color when the dangers are many and the options are few.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1995)

As a young woman, sexual harassment was part of my daily life. Like many women, I learned to dismiss these experiences as consequences of being born female. Sometimes these acts of violence occurred while walking with my sisters to the grocery store or to a friend's house. Other times, they transpired while I was with my parents, which left me particularly rattled, as my parents failed to protect me and instead dismissed these acts as ramifications for my gender. However, I felt most violated when I encountered sexual harassment during school hours and on my way to and from school as they were difficult to escape. This is well exemplified by a disturbing memory of feeling both violated and powerless at age 15:

> *We were making our daily trek to school. Mom was driving our colossal maroon Chevy Astro van, my sister Cynthia was on the passenger seat, Natalie sat on the center row, and I had ensconced myself in the back. We were easing our way up the freeway ramp when I turned to look left. The driver of the silver car next to us smirked at me and I, bewildered, continued looking in his direction. Methodically, he unzipped his pants, took out his penis and proceeded to masturbate. I hastily looked away, shocked, unable to move. I sat, frozen wishing I'd never looked left.*

On account of my girlhood and my Latinx upbringing, when I became a high school English teacher in a predominately Latinx community, I yearned to protect the young women with whom I worked. Thus, I built my curriculum around literature and writers whom I considered central to the growth of people of color, including women. Throughout the years, I continued this work and naively thought that because they didn't speak about it to me directly, girls did not experience sexual harassment to the extent I did when I was growing up. During my ninth year of teaching, however, I faced an awakening as Latinx female students began to speak to me about the sexual harassment they faced on a daily basis. Their stories reinvigorated my desire to act as an ally to these young women and, by so doing, gain a greater sense of understanding and empowerment over my own experiences of harassment when I was their age.

Around the same time, the LA Fund—a Los Angeles based nonprofit—launched the Girls Build LA Campaign that asked girls across Los Angeles County to identify a problem in their community, design, and implement a solution that could generate widespread change. As a response, a team of seven girls and I turned my classroom into an afterschool counter space, Girl Talks, where students gathered to speak to one another about their daily lives. Beautiful stories about dreams, desires, awakenings, and teenage love materialized. However, along with these, were poignant and disturbing stories about pain, violence, and familial struggles. These difficult and formerly silenced experiences engulfed the air around us.

It was, moreover, through these accounts that I began to learn how pervasive sexual harassment was for girls in and outside of our campus and was reminded that, more often than not, schools and classrooms enact a culture of both silence and subordination over the lives of young women of color (Applebaum, 2003; Darder, 2012; Freire, 2012; hooks, 1994), which

resemble gendered and racialized inequities present in society and often inhibit the establishment of intimately caring relationships between students and teachers. Further, I was reminded that Latinx students—and students of color in general—experience debilitating acts of microaggression from their teachers (Cammarota, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2010) that perpetuate destructive racist and sexist stereotypes; and that Latina students, in particular, encounter overwhelming challenges in school that are deeply rooted in discriminations that attack the integrity of both their gender and ethnicity (Cooper, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Although sex and sexuality are pervasive in high schools—hallways, bathrooms, cafeterias, and classrooms—seldom are the sexual politics that young Chicana/Latina students must navigate a major topic of discussion. This is not surprising, given that sexuality education is sparsely covered (Fine, 1988; Fine & McClelland, 2006). When sex education does occur in public schools, usually in health or biology classes, Michelle Fine (1988) argued it is largely associated with victimization and danger; rarely does it include a discourse of desire. She further asserted that this curriculum often posits young women as the objects of male sexuality and seldom are they subjects in their own right; instead, young women are left with only one decision to make—say yes or no—to a question that may not be theirs. As a result, young women are inherently voiceless, uninformed, and unable to construct a critique of gender and sexuality. Thus, girls live in a sexual paradox filled with elation at the anticipation of sexual activity coupled with anxiety and worry disabling them in their negotiations as sexual subjects (Fine, 1988; Fine & McClelland, 2006). This is particularly problematic because those most likely to be

victimized—through violence, harassment, disease, or pregnancy—by nonexistent critical conversations about sex and sexuality are low-income adolescent females.

It is not surprising then that, within the sexual politics of the school campus, sexual harassment is a normal, and often expected, part of the school day for middle and high school youth (Hill & Kearl, 2011; Lipson, 2001; Stein, 1995). Most damaging, sexual harassment in schools often happens while many people watch and rarely is something done about it (Stein, 1995). When sexual harassment happens in public and it is not denounced, it is gradually normalized and becomes part of sexual politics of the school culture, creating a debilitating learning environment. Currently, nearly half of middle and high school students have experienced sexual harassment in school (Hill & Kearl, 2011). These acts of violence have a crippling effect on students that result in absenteeism, trouble sleeping, inability to study, and feeling ill (Hill & Kearl, 2011).

Moreover, Hill and Kearl (2011) reported that experiences with sexual harassment and sexual violence affect Black and Latinx youth more negatively than they do White students. For example, Black students are more likely than White students to quit an activity or sport and get into trouble at school; Latinx students, on the other hand, are more likely than White students to stay home from school. Thus, it is clear that although there have been efforts by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights to involve educators and educational leaders in eradicating sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, students do not have access to adults who will honor their experiences, name them, and act as allies in their struggle to navigate the oppressive sexual politics on their school campus. Instead, young women, in particular, are still largely silenced and blamed when they experience these violations.

In fact, although legislation such as Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in education, exists, most teachers and school leaders do not consider sexual harassment violence (Stein, 1995) and do not perceive it as a problem students experience (Charmaraman, Jones, Stein, & Espelage, 2013). This could be because faculty and staff receive more professional development on bullying than they do about sexual harassment involving students (Charmaraman, et al., 2013); thus, they are unaware of the harmful effects and their role in creating a harassment-free school culture. Instead, the absence of preparation, coupled with school personnel's discomfort with and intolerance of sex and sexuality in schools, creates a culture of silence that harms adolescent females. As a result, students know that although school personnel often witness incidents of sexual harassment, they cannot turn to faculty and staff to validate and confirm these acts of violence because when students do report it, these experiences are often trivialized, and they, the targets, are demeaned and/or interrogated (Stein, 1995). In addition to experiencing these acts of violence, young women's needs are neglected, leaving them to navigate the sexual politics of school on their own, including beliefs and actions that are mired in asymmetrical relations of power that shape interactions between men and women (Millett, 2000) within schools. Navigating the sexual politics can be particularly difficult for young women because they are having to deal with gender power dynamics between peers as well as the power dynamics that exist between students and teachers, in addition to the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and class. Consequently, students reject school as it fails to honor their humanity.

Notwithstanding the historically low dropout rates, Latinx students still have the highest dropout rates (9.2%) among minority populations (National Center for Education Statistics,

2016, Table 219.70). More specifically, 8.4% of Latinx female students are pushed out of school before obtaining a high school diploma (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). These numbers are not surprising considering that schooling reinforces hegemonic ideologies linked to patriarchal social values and structures that perpetuate gender exclusion (McLaren, 2015)—a phenomenon especially damaging for girls of color. Equally problematic, most seminal research on girls has been conducted using the experiences of White girls; thus, rendering the experiences of girls of color invisible in the discussion of the problem (Griffin, 2004; Ruiz Gonzales, 2008).

Historically, women of color have been absent from research that honors their voice, stories, and history in general and with respect to sexual violence specifically (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010). As Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) argued, women of color are marginalized from feminist and antiracist discourse because these are structured to respond to one or the other, and women of color live in the intersectionality of both; thus, they are trivialized within both. The absence of women of color's experiences with sexual violence is particularly problematic, because U.S. commercial media hypersexualizes women of color (Gaytan & Goode, 2013.). Latinas are portrayed as either virgins or seductresses (Gonzales, 1980); as a consequence, "it becomes easier to justify violence against them" (Gaytan & Goode, 2013, p.1). This portrayal of Latinx women, their marginalization in feminist and antiracist discourse, the lack of comprehensive sexuality education in schools, and the culture of silence help perpetuate the sexual violence that Chicana/Latina youth experience.

More specifically, according to a 2016 report by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, nationwide, 6.7% of 9–12 grade students have been forced to have sexual intercourse, including 10.1% of Latinx females in that age group. Additionally, 11.4% of Latinx

female students have experienced physical dating violence and 14.2% have experienced sexual dating violence. In fact, as of 2010, the lifetime sexual victimization of Latinx women is 17.2%; moreover, victims of childhood sexual assault were more likely to experience sexual violence in adulthood (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010). Thus, it is clear that the absence of Latinx adolescent girls' experiences in research, in tandem with critical conversations about sex and sexuality, has damaging effects that can extend over a lifetime.

Additionally, much of the work that does study Chicana/Latinas' encounters with race and gender microaggressions in education focuses on college and university undergraduate and graduate students (Hunn, Harley, Elliott, & Canfield, 2015; Lester, Yamanaka, & Struthers, 2016; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Solórzano, 1998), which engenders the need to research girls' experiences with the sexual politics they must navigate in K–12 education. This is particularly so given that research has shown that "teachers often overlook, ignore, and avoid Latinas in the classroom" (Zambrana, 2011, p. 93) and Latina girls frequently experience microaggressions based on race, class, gender, and language (Cammarota, 2014; Olsen, 1997; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999). Thus, Latina students frequently reject school because experiences with microaggressions leave them feeling powerless and isolated, as if they do not belong (Cooper, 2012).

Research Questions

In an effort to conduct a study that can contribute to unveiling the experiences of sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions on the schooling experiences of Chicana/Latina high school students, the following overarching questions guided the research:

- What are the experiences of sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions of Chicana/Latina high school graduates?
- How do Chicana/Latina high school graduates speak about these experiences and how do these affect how they feel about themselves, their school participation, and their understanding of self?
- What suggestions and recommendations do Chicana/Latina high school graduates believe would make the school environment and the society truly responsive to their experiences with sexual harassment?

Purpose and Significance of Study

This study aimed to understand the sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions Chicana/Latina high school students faced, and how these encounters influenced how they perceived their experiences with respect to how they felt about themselves, their school participation, and their understanding of self. Moreover, I sought to provide Chicana/Latina girls a space to tell their stories, which have generally remained silenced and few studies have addressed. Through this process, this study gave voice to Chicana/Latina high school students, humanized their experiences, and allowed them to challenge sexism in schools, in order to move toward social change. Further, the study hoped, through the perspectives of the participants, to increase awareness and consciousness of educators and educational leaders in ways that will engender new and effective ways to critically engage and humanize the schooling experiences of girls of color in general, but most specifically those who have experienced sexual harassment at school. Additionally, the hope is that, through this study, the U.S. Department of Education will potentially revisit Title IX in order to help create safe counter-hegemonic learning spaces for

girls, by moving to dismantle systems of domination that have pushed Chicana/Latina and other female students of color further to the margins of society. At the heart of this work is the desire to improve the overall educational experiences of Latinx female high school students.

Theoretical Framework

Two key conceptual frameworks underpin this research into the experience of Chicana/Latina high school students with issues of sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions. These are Chicana/Latina feminist theory and critical pedagogy. The first, Chicana/Latina feminist theory, embodies a direct connection to historical and contemporary questions of racialized gender oppression as experienced by Chicana/Latinas in U.S. society. The second, critical pedagogy, forthrightly engages the cultural politics and hegemonic structures of education that perpetuate social and material oppression within schools and society.

Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory

Historically, Chicana/Latina women have been integral members in larger social movements including the Mexican Revolution, United Farmworkers unionization, and the Chicano Movement (Blackwell, 2011; Garcia, 1989). However, by failing to include the oral histories of women of color feminists, historical writings have silenced these voices and rendered them invisible from significant historical movements. To illustrate, Blackwell (2011) explained that although there is “clear historical evidence of Chicana activism and the emergence of Chicana feminism as early as 1968” (p. 14), numerous accounts of the Chicano movement claim that Chicana activists did not begin to organize until the 1980s, thus, placing the inception of Chicana feminism with the decline of the Chicano movement. It is important then, to understand

the origins of Chicana feminist thought in order to dismantle narrow definitions of feminism as well as to better understand the ways in which feminisms have been historicized.

Although women were active participants in the Chicano Movement, they struggled to be recognized as equal political partners and were often treated like secretaries and cooks (Blackwell, 2011; Garcia, 1989). Moreover, Chicano movement historiography often discredits Chicana feminist by claiming they were race traitors who were dividing the movement by presenting their agenda, or depicting them all as lesbians or sexual deviants, who were antagonistic to Chicano culture (Blackwell, 2011; Garcia, 1989; Gonzales, 1980). Moreover, archival documents of the Chicano Movement as well as the iconography of the Nueva Chicana illustrate that in addition to being a political project, Chicano nationalism was a gendered project that often captured and utilized women's bodies only to show their erotic and reproductive labor (Blackwell, 2011). What male leaders failed to recognize is that through their chauvinism, discrimination, and sexual harassment, they were perpetuating the oppressive nature of the dominant culture.

Further, "at the cultural level, the Chicano movement emphasized the need to safeguard the value of family loyalty" (Garcia, 1989, p. 219) and with their involvement in the movement, Chicanas were beginning to critically interrogate their patriarchal roles in the traditional family structure. Additionally, while the Chicano movement focused on addressing issues of racial oppression, Chicanas maintained that the movement lacked an analysis of sexism (Garcia, 1989). Thus, Chicana/Latina feminist perspectives confront the limitations of traditional patriarchal and liberal feminism by focusing on race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality, thus, addressing "the shortcomings of traditional patriarchal and liberal feminist scholarship" (Delgado Bernal, 1998,

p. 559). Moreover, Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship “validates and addresses…issues of immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and the contradictions of Catholicism” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 561).

Schools have always been contested spaces for Chicana/Latinas (Elenes, Gonzalez, Delgado Bernal, & Villenas, 2001). When they entered the university for the first time, Chicanas experienced racism, classism, and sexism; particularly because of the “unmistakable reality of a pervasive system of oppression based on group membership” in education (Hurtado, Haney, & Garcia, 1998, p. 662). Thus, in their quest to survive the university and counter feelings of alienation, these women turned to the Chicano movement as a survival strategy and surrogate home as it offered links to the communities they left behind. Unfortunately, however, because of “racial hostility, sexual politics, and lack of reproductive health care and guidance” (Blackwell, 2011, p. 43), many Chicanas did not finish their studies. Those who did continue in academia struggled as they gained critical consciousness and were rejected by their families as well as the men in the movement believing that critical consciousness was equated with antifamilial values and perceived as a threat to masculinity (Blackwell, 2011). Moreover, links to feminism were wrongly equated to a Chicana’s “denial of her culture and alienation from that upon her entire identity is based” (Gonzales, 1980, p. 49); as a result, feminism was uncritically construed as a threat to the aims of the Chicano movement.

In response, the Chicana Feminist movement and Las Hijas de Cuachtémoc deduced that “the struggle is not with the male but with the existing system of oppression” (Blackwell, 2011, p. 6). Although there were setbacks with setting the movement in motion, a partnership between Hijas de Cuachtémoc and *Encuentro Femenil*—the first Chicana feminist scholarly journal—

generated a vital feminist print culture that "provided a space for women to contest the limiting masculinist politics embedded in the gendered project of Chicano nationalism" (Blackwell, 2011, p. 8). Women could now dialogue, create new political identities, and debate around myriad issues in a scholarly fashion, where their voices were finally heard and validated. Having a space to engage in dialogue and create empowering identities and social agency is particularly important for Chicana/Latinas because, as Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) explained, we have to navigate our home, academic, psychological, sexual, and spiritual lives. Anzaldúa (2012) argued in her work that we live in *Borderlands*, spaces that are "physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (p. 19).

Thus, Latinas, because we live in these *Borderlands* coupled with the effort to "capture [our] complex, layered lives . . . [have] reclaimed *testimonio* as a tool . . . to theorize oppression, resistance, and subjectivity" (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 19). As such, Chicana feminist research aims to "dismantle cultural deficit models, attitudes, and behaviors" (Elenes et al., 2001, p. 599) found in the field of education. More in depth, Chicana feminist pedagogies aim to "interrupt current [educational] practices that are detrimental for the advancement of Chicana and Chicano education" (p. 599). Additionally, Chicana feminist epistemology exposes "human relationships and experiences that are probably not visible from a traditional patriarchal position or liberal feminist standpoint" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 560). The guiding principles that inform Chicana/Latina feminist theory and guide this dissertation are: Borderland/La

Frontera, *conocimiento, nepantla, la facultad*, pedagogies of the body, *agravios*, mestiza consciousness, third space, and decolonial imaginary.

Anzaldúa (2012) spoke of the intersections of class, gender, sexuality, multiracial experience, citizenship, and nationality, along with hybridities of language and culture including bicultural and bilingual experiences. She argued that Chicana/Latinas reside in the *mezcla* (hybridity) of these as they mix and create "borderlands," an oppositional space and consciousness that affords Chicana/Latinas the insider/outsider knowledge and perspective. Thus, through the principle of Borderlands/La Frontera Chicana/Latinas possess the ability to fight "against concrete material forms of oppression" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 7) and marginalization, begin to heal, and develop new consciousness. Anzaldúa (2002) described this new consciousness and ways of knowing as *conocimiento*. The path toward *conocimiento* requires deep self-reflection as it "questions conventional knowledge's current categories, classifications, and contents" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 41) and engages the full body. *Conocimiento* is a performative task embodied over seven stages, beginning with *el arrebato*, a violent attack where there is a sudden awareness that the world is shaken from under you, exposing fears and entirely changing the self. The path to *conocimiento* comes to fruition with shifting realities and allows for a shift to a more inclusive identity.

Nepantla is the second stage of *conocimiento* and occurs most often as it helps transition between the other stages. Anzaldúa (2002) explained, *Nepantla* is the site of transformation because it is here when we begin to question what we have always known as true, where we are exposed, and open to other perspectives. Thus, *Nepantla* is the in-between space that requires critical reflection toward rediscovery and consciousness raising. In concert with a deep sense of

knowing is *la facultad,* or experience and intuition. More specifically, Anzaldúa (2012) described *la facultad* as "a quick perception arrived at without consciousness or reasoning" (p. 60) but rather an acute awareness that engulfs our sense of reality.

Chicana/Latina feminist theory also concerns itself with issues of the body as "it reminds us that it is critical to acknowledge the self and its locations" (Cruz, 2014, p. 201). Memory and history, Pérez (1999) contended, are imprinted upon the body; as a result, the body remembers what the psyche attempted to forget. Thus, the body is a "pedagogical device, a location of recentering and recontextualizing the self and the stories that emanate from that self" (Cruz, 2014, p. 201). Flores-Ortiz (2003) explained, that the body "is often the site where women's oppression is recorded" (p. 348), and part of what the body encodes are *agravios*, assaults that often lead to isolation, numbness, and depression. In an effort to heal, Chicana/Latinas often seek *mestiza consciousness* where we "envision the erasure of marginalization" (Diaz Soto, Cervantes-Soon, Villareal, & Campos, 2009, p. 760), where "we change the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 102), and enter a third space where, as Pérez (1999) explained, Chicanas become subjects rather than objects of history. This allows for movement into the decolonial imaginary where we challenge "power relations, to decolonize notions of otherness to move into a liberatory terrain" (Pérez, 1999, p. 110).

Critical Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy as a theoretical lens places significant attention on questions of culture and power. It is an approach that "loosely evolved out of a yearning to give some shape and coherence to the theoretical landscape of radical principles, beliefs and practices that contribute

to an emancipatory ideal of democratic schooling in the United States during the twentieth century" (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009, p. 2). This school of thought argues that knowledge is socially constructed in schools, where some forms of knowledge are legitimized and celebrated by the dominant culture while others are marginalized (Darder et al., 2009; McLaren, 2009). Thus, critical pedagogy is committed to the liberation of the oppressed and the historical possibility of change (Darder, 2015a). At the heart is a conceptual lens dedicated to creating a culture of schooling that supports culturally marginalized and socioeconomically disenfranchised students (Darder et al., 2009). Chicana/Latina youth have been historically marginalized because of their gender, race, and class (Blackwell, 2011; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Elenes, et al., 2001; Garcia, 1989); thus, employing critical pedagogy to underpin this research is in sync with the overarching aims of this study.

The guiding principles that inform critical pedagogy are cultural politics, historicity of knowledge, dialectical theory, ideology and critique, hegemony, resistance and counter-hegemony, praxis, dialogue, and conscientization (Darder et al., 2009). In an effort for an emancipatory culture of schooling, "critical pedagogy calls upon teachers to recognize how schools have historically embraced theories and practices that serve to unite knowledge and power in ways that sustain asymmetrical relations of power" (Darder et al., 2009, p. 10). These views of education permit schools to function under an ongoing struggle over what is considered legitimate knowledge (Darder et al., 2009). Thus, through the principle of cultural politics, critical pedagogy seeks to legitimize the histories and socioeconomic realities of subaltern students (Darder et al., 2009) and the critical educator must then be concerned with emancipatory

knowledge, which "creates the foundation for social justice, equality, and empowerment" (McLaren, 2009, p. 64).

Moreover, Darder et al. (2009) argued that, from a critical pedagogical perspective, "schools must be understood within the boundaries of the historical events that inform educational practice" (p. 10); as such, students, and the knowledge they bring to the classroom must be understood as historical so that students can begin to see themselves as subjects of history. Thus, in the practice of historicity of knowledge, students begin to recognize conditions of injustice as well as develop social agency to transform injustices they face. Through a dialectical view of knowledge, students can engage their world and recognize that societal problems are not isolated events; rather, they are moments that emerge from interactions between individuals and society (Darder, 2015a).

Linked to the development of students' social agency, ideology is used to "interrogate and unmask the contradictions that exist between the mainstream culture of the school and lived experiences and knowledge that students use to mediate the reality of school life" (Darder et al., 2009, p. 11). Additionally, ideology offers teachers the insight and language to interrogate their own views about knowledge and critically evaluate their practice as educators and begin to recognize how the dominant culture becomes embedded in the hidden curriculum—"informed by ideological views that structurally reproduce dominant cultural assumptions and practices that silence and thwart democratic participation" (Darder et al., 2009, p. 12).

Central to this work is the notion of hegemony, which "acknowledges the powerful connection that exists between politics, economics, culture, and pedagogy" (Darder et al. 2009, p. 12). Hegemony, according to Peter McLaren (2009) "refers to the maintenance of domination

not by the sheer exercise of force *but primarily through consensual social practices* [sic]" (p. 67). Hegemony cannot work without the support from ideology, which is a way of viewing the world that we accept as common sense and natural. Ideology functions negatively when it is linked to a theory of domination, which "occurs when relations of power established at the institutional level . . . are unequal privileging some groups over others" (p. 69). These power relations are imprinted in discourse or discursive practices, which are "*rules that govern what can be said and what must remain unsaid, who can speak with authority and who must listen* [*sic*]" (McLaren 2009, p. 72). Hence, this critical principle challenges teachers to recognize their responsibility in transforming classroom practices that perpetuate systems of domination that negatively impact the lives of marginalized students.

The principles of resistance and counter-hegemony are also paramount to this study. As aforementioned, Latina students frequently reject school because experiences with microaggressions leave them feeling powerless and isolated, as if though they do not belong (Cooper, 2012). Via a theory of resistance, critical pedagogy aims to explain the complex reasons why subordinate groups fail within the educational system; most importantly, this critical principle "begins with the assumption that all people have the capacity and ability to produce knowledge and to resist domination" (Darder et al., 2009, p. 12). Consequently, it seeks to uncover the extent to which student dissent is associated with their struggle against dehumanization or the perpetuation of their oppression. Counter-hegemony, on the other hand, refers to safe spaces that employ liberatory practices and honor the voices and experiences of those who are at the margins of public institutions, which are imperative to the success of Latinx youth in schools.

Essential to critical pedagogy is the notion that theory and practice are inextricably linked to our understanding of the world and our lives within it; thus, "praxis is conceived as self-creating and self-generating free human activity" (Darder et al., 2009, p. 13) and helps us understand the world as it exists and how it might be. Hence, human activity emerges from a continuous interaction of reflection, dialogue, and action (Darder, 2015a). Dialogue, according to Freire (2012), is the principle of most importance to the practice of critical pedagogy because, in concert with analysis, it serves as the foundation for reflection and action. Most notably, Darder et al. (2009) posited that dialogue "speaks to an emancipatory educational process that is above all committed to the empowerment of students through challenging the dominant educational discourse and illuminating the right and freedom of students to become subjects of their world" (p. 13) and engenders a dialogical relationship between student and teacher, where each actor has something to contribute and receive; consequently, they learn from each other. Dialogue is centered in the development of critical consciousness or "conscientização." Conscientização is the process by which "students, as empowered subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of the social realities which shape their lives and discover their own capacities to recreate them" (Darder et al., 2009, p. 14). By employing these principles, "students and teachers move freely through the world of their experiences and enter into dialogue anew" (Darder et al., 2009, p.14).

Methodology

The critical qualitative methodology that informed this study was that of *Testimonios*, a narrative approach fundamentally anchored in a Chicana feminist theory that recognizes the significance of Chicana voices in speaking their own experiences and linking these to larger structures of racialized and gendered inequalities. In an effort to recognize the young women's

everyday experiences as well as my personal relationship with them and epistemology as researcher I employed *pláticas y encuentros* as the method for data collection. Also centered in Chicana/Latina feminist theory, *pláticas* are conversations that take place on an individual, one-on-one setting, whereas *encuentros* refers to group conversations (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016), which will produce participants' *testimonios*. *Testimonios* provide storytellers with a voice to move from oppression and marginalization and become empowered survivors, which is why using *testimonios* in educational research is central to the process of critical consciousness (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012).

Consistent with this critical qualitative methodology, a three-stage research process was employed; it includes:

- **Stage One:** Group *plática* (*encuentro*) - Orientation to the Study
- **Stage Two:** Individual *pláticas* with each participant
- **Stage Three:** Group *plática* (*encuentro*): Member-checking to discuss themes present in individual *pláticas*.

The methodology and research design are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, however, what is important to note here is its coherence and resonance with both the theoretical underpinnings of Chicana/Latina feminist theory and critical pedagogy.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

The delimitations of this study include the following all participants self-identified as Chicana and/or Latina; they were all recent high school graduates from the high school where I taught; most participated in Girl Talks; and most participants were students in one of my English classes. Although some may view these delimitations as problematic, because of the sensitive

nature of this study, it was important that participants and I already had an established positive working relationship. As such, these delimitations aided in that process. There are some, from a traditional research lens, who might consider the use of a methodology rooted in *testimonios, pláticas, y encuentros* as a limitation. However, the rich data obtained from the young women in this study reflects greater depth and richness than could be obtained through a method that, although it may include many more participants, remains on the surface of the issue. A major underlying assumption that informs this study then is that the participants remembered their experiences in high school in meaningful ways and told their stories honestly. To ensure this process, anonymity and confidentiality were preserved, participants selected their own pseudonyms, and they had the option of withdrawing at any time without ramification.

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Agency:** the capacity to act independently and to make free choice
- **Chicana:** a Mexican-American woman or girl.
- **Latina:** a woman or girl of Latin American origin or descent.
- **Latinx:** a gender-neutral alternative to Latino, Latina, or Latin@.
- **Race and Gender Microaggressions:** the systemic, everyday forms of racism and sexism that "take the form of subtle, layered, and cumulative verbal and non-verbal assaults . . . that are committed automatically and unconsciously" (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012, p. 365).
- **Sexism:** prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination on the basis of sex.
- **Sexual Harassment:** unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature, and offensive remarks about a person's

sex.

- **Sexual politics:** the beliefs, actions, and dynamics that are concerned with how power functions between men and women (Millett, 2000).
- **Testimonios:** A testimonio is a history told by a narrator as the protagonist or witness of factual events; it allows the storyteller to create knowledge and move toward liberation (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012).

Organization of Dissertation

This chapter has provided a discussion of the manner in which this study, through employing the theoretical lenses of Chicana/Latina feminisms and critical pedagogy as well as the methodology of *testimonios, pláticas, y encuentros,* worked to challenge dominant discourse of Chicana/Latina high school students by creating a place for their experiences of sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions to be spoken and analyzed. The following chapters provide a critical articulation of the literature, methodology, narrative data, analysis, and conclusions.

In Chapter 2: Literature Review, I review four main literatures: (a) patriarchy, (b) sexual violence in the larger societal context, (c) sexual harassment within the educational context, and (d) trauma and the body.

In Chapter 3: Methodology, I outline the methodology that informs this study: *testimonios, pláticas, y encuentros*, a research method anchored in Chicana feminist theory. It includes a description of participant selection and data collection procedures. Additionally, it includes an in-depth description of each stage of this research study.

In Chapter 4: *Testimonios*, I offer the *testimonios*, narrative data, of the young women who bravely agreed to honor me with their stories of experiences with navigating the sexual politics of the high school campus. In an effort to preserve the integrity of their voices, this chapter is absent of any analysis.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusion includes analysis of the *testimonios* anchored in Chicana/Latina feminist lens and critical pedagogy. It also includes a discussion of the researcher's findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

POWER, SEXUALITY, TRAUMA, AND THE BODY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of the body is indisputable; the body moves, acts, rememorizes, the struggle for its liberation; the body in sum, desires, points out, announces, protests, curves itself, rises, designs and remakes the world.

Paulo Freire (1993)

Sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions are acts of violence that are rooted in patriarchal societal structures. Because of the subtle form these violations often take, seldom are they named, condemned, or rectified. Instead, survivors are blamed, shamed, and further victimized for failing to protect their bodies. When these acts of violence transpire in schools, students find themselves unprotected and invalidated; thus, they reject school because these experiences leave them feeling powerless and isolated. In addition to experiencing these acts of violence, students find themselves, as noted earlier, having to navigate the sexual politics at work in their schools. The aforementioned not only outlined the importance of listening, documenting, and honoring the stories of young women survivors, but also helped explicate the importance learning from their recommendations to make the school environment and the society truly responsive to their experiences.

In an effort to provide a critical articulation of the problem, what follows is a review of the literature that engages: (a) patriarchy (b) sexual violence in the larger societal context, (c) sexual harassment within the school context, and (d) trauma and the body. In doing so, this chapter helps identify the conditions and contexts of sexual violence as experienced by Latinas living in the United States.

Patriarchy

In her discussion of the inception of patriarchy, American historian Gerda Lerner (1986) argued that patriarchy—which took 2,500 years to complete—was historically created by men and women through values, customs, laws, and social roles. This process, according to Lerner, began with the commodification of women's sexuality and reproductive capabilities. To illustrate the earliest commodification of women's bodies, Lerner pointed to the inter-tribal exchange of women during the Neolithic period—generally thought to have occurred about 10,000 BCE—when women were exchanged as a means to produce more children, whose labor could then be used to increase agricultural production. In essence, Lerner explained, much like land, women became a resource acquired by men and this exchange continued through arranged marriages and slavery.

For example, Lerner (1986) explained that, during the Mesopotamian era, daughters of poor families were sold into marriages or prostitution in order to further their families' economic interests and to secure more financially advantages marriages for their sons. Moreover, during times of slavery both men and women were exploited as workers; however, women were also always exploited as providers of sexual services and as producers. Thus, Lerner (1986) asserted that because the "enslavement of women, combining both racism and sexism, preceded the formation of classes and class oppression . . . Class is not a separate construct from gender; rather, class is expressed in genderic terms" (p. 213). More specifically, for "women sexual exploitation is the very mark of class exploitation" (Lerner, 1986, p. 215) and class is mediated through women's sexual connections to men. These connections thrive in the patriarchal family structure, in which women are always daughters or wives, linking their economic dependence to

men. For example, if a woman is not in the workforce, but her husband is a wealthy business man, then we might categorize her as member of the upper class. Conversely, as Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei (2010) explained, "when women lose their husbands, through divorce, widowhood, or desertion, they often change their class position in a downward direction" (p. 290).

According to Lerner (1986), the patriarchal family structure afforded women some opportunities, economic power, and control over their lives; however, much like the development of women's groups, associations, or economic networks, this is merely illusionary and unwarranted freedom because while helping to ameliorate the condition of women, these reforms do not change patriarchy and neglect to emancipate women. Instead, according to Lerner (1986), in order to transform and abolish patriarchy, "reforms need to be integrated within a vast cultural revolution" (p. 217). Further, Lerner (1986) contended, patriarchy functions only with the cooperation of women, which is secured through

> gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining "respectability" and "deviance" according to women's sexual activities; by restraining and outright coercion; by discrimination and access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women. (p. 217)

Women's cooperation is most vividly highlighted in Shahrazad Ali's (1990) controversial book *The Blackman's Guide to Understanding the Blackwoman,* in which she advised Black men to physically chastise Black women in an effort to reestablish their authority in the Black community.

Sexual Politics

In her discussion of sexual politics, Kate Millett (2000) explained, "sex is a status category with political implications" (p. 24); as such, it is important to define politics as "power-structured relationship arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (p. 23). The political space, Millett contended, was created to ensure that some groups have representation while others do not. In this schema, for those who do not have representation in political structures, their oppression is continuous and unchanged; thus, they live in interminable political struggle and opposition, which is central in the discussion of sexual politics. Patricia Hill Collins (2004) defined sexual politics as a "set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame all men and women's treatment of one another, as well as how individual men and women are perceived and treated by others" (p. 6); thus, based on placement in systems of race, gender, and sexuality, people experience distinctive sexual politics.

Millett (2000) contended, because our society is rooted in patriarchy, sexual dominion is the most pervasive cultural ideology and it is upheld through consent or imposed through violence. Sexual politics garners consent through the socialization of both sexes that is rooted in patriarchal notions that dictate male and female temperaments as well as sex roles, both of which are learned and conditioned behaviors. These are passed down through the family and society, which are the chief contributors to the sustainability of patriarchy. In the family, as within society, prescribed attitudes about behaviors and status are learned and then reinforced through peers, within institutions such as schools, and other informal and formal settings. As a result, Millett (2000) explained, by adolescence young men develop aggressive impulses whereas young women learn to circumvent theirs, resulting in a general acceptance of '"aggression is

male' and 'passivity is female'" (p. 32). These patriarchal ideas about gender and power continue today and are often manifested through sexual violence.

Sexual Violence Against Women

The existence of patriarchy is rooted in the sexual exploitation of women, and although patriarchies vary across time, place, and material contexts (Hunnicutt, 2009), they have helped normalize sexual violence against women. In fact, according to The World Health Organization (WHO) (2016a) factors specifically associated with sexual violence perpetration include: beliefs in family honor and sexual purity, ideologies of male sexual entitlement, and weak legal sanctions for sexual violence, all of which are inherent in patriarchal structures and values. It is not surprising then that violence against women was not regarded as a serious social problem until the early 1970s, with the reemergence of the Women's Movement and when women scholars in philosophy, literature, law, and sociology began examining violence against women in unprecedented numbers (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

Moreover, as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) contended, resources and concern for violence against women only materialized when it was no longer understood as only a problem in impoverished communities of color. Thus, battering, sexual aggression, and rape—once seen as private family affairs—became largely recognized as a system of domination that affects women as a class. However, Crenshaw posited that the rhetoric in support of the Violence Against Women Act of 1991 only served to politicize the problem in the dominant community and allowed White women survivors to become visible but did little to disrupt the patterns of neglect that made it plausible for violence against women to continue in communities of color. Instead, Crenshaw (1991) argued, the "experience of violence by minority women is ignored, except to

the extent it gains white support for domestic violence programs in the white community" (p. 1260).

Rates of Sexual Assault of Women

To gain an understanding of violence against women, in 1996, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted a national telephone survey on men's and women's experiences with violent victimization (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) in which they found that approximately 1.9 million women were physically assaulted annually in the United States. They also found that rape is a crime primarily committed against youth, the risk of violence varies among minority women, women experience significantly more partner violence than men, violence against women is primarily partner violence, and stalking is a significant social problem. Although declared a public health problem, 20 years later, sexual violence against women is omnipresent.

More specifically, in a 2013 study The U.S. Department of Justice (2016) found that from 1995–2005 the rate of sexual violence against U.S. women declined 64% and remained unchanged from 2005–2010. In a 2012 study of sexual violence, the CDC found that nearly one in five women reported being raped at some time in their lives and, according to WHO (2016b), about one in three women worldwide will experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or violence by a non-partner. In the United States, poor working-class women who live in rural areas have experienced the highest rates of sexual violence (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). Roe Bubar (2009) explained that Native women have the highest incidents of sexual assault in the United States, while Alaskan Native women have the highest incidents of sexual assault of any women in the United States. More specifically, in their study, Greenfield and

Smith (1999) found that in their lifetime, one in three Native women will be sexually assaulted and nine out of 10 Native women who are raped were raped by White or African American men, which makes Native women more likely than any other ethnic group to experience sexual assault from someone from another ethnic group (Bubar, 2009). Most troubling, most acts of sexual violence (78%) involved an offender who is a family member, intimate partner, friend, or acquaintance (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016), which further illustrates the ways in which sexual violence is used as a practice of social control in order to dominate and suppress women.

The U.S. Department of Justice (2016) also found that, in 2003, 59% of rape or sexual assault victimizations were reported to police; however, in 2009 and 2010, that number declined to 32%. The reduction in police reports are possibly a result of the fact that, historically, women who come forward about their rapes are scrutinized to determine if they are victims or culprits of their own attacks. Moreover, women who are sexually autonomous are less likely to be vindicated if they were raped, thus less likely to report (Crenshaw, 1991). The U.S. Department of Justice (2016), however, found that the most common reason why survivors did not report sexual assault was because of fear of reprisal. This finding is not surprising, considering that 78% of all sexual assault crimes were committed by a person known to the survivor.

Risk Factors Associated with Sexual Violence

According to WHO (2016a), lower levels of education, exposure to child maltreatment, witnessing family violence, attitudes that are accepting of violence and gender inequality, among others, are risk factors associated with both intimate partner and sexual violence. Further, there are short- and long-term physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health problems for survivors of sexual assault; for example, unintended pregnancies, induced abortions, gynecological issues,

and sexually transmitted infections. Additionally, experiencing sexual violence can lead to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, and suicidal attempts. WHO (2016a) further explained that children who grow up in violent households may experience violence later in life or become perpetrators. Similarly, women who are survivors of intimate partner and sexual violence "may suffer isolation, inability to work, loss of wages, lack of participation in regular activities and limited ability to care for themselves and their children" (WHO, 2016a). Moreover, women often find that sexual harassment and sexual extortion are occupational hazards, which hinder their ability to improve their economic status. Evidently, the social and economic costs are wholly damaging and can have ripple effects.

Public Misogyny

Much like the 1970s reemergence of the Women's Movement, the 2016 United States presidential election results placed sexual violence at the forefront of national conversations. As such, the election became a public arena in which questions of gender politics, sexuality, and asymmetrical power relations collided and were made only more spectacular, given the public misogyny that laced campaign rhetoric and references to Hilary Clinton, the first woman to ever become a major candidate for president of the United States. The 45th president of the United States, among other things, ran on a misogynistic agenda that glorified degrading and violating women. More specifically, the president celebrated sexual assault when he, in a 2005 conversation caught on hot microphone, was heard stating that women allow him, and powerful men like him, to "grab them by the pussy" and later dismissed these words as "locker-room banter" (Fahrenthold, 2016). After the *Washington Post* released this video, the Rape Abuse Incest National Network, which takes calls from across the nation, experienced a 35% increase in

calls because his words “felt painfully intimate” (Paquette, 2016). In similar ways, the current #MeToo Movement and #TimesUp campaign have exposed the sexual violence against women in the entertainment industry.

Indira M. Henard, executive director at DC Rape Crisis Center, explained that this current influx of concern about sexual abuse could also be because people did not always associate someone groping them as sexual assault, and now they do. In fact, it was not until 2012 that the FBI expanded its definition of rape to include offenses beyond men penetrating women against their will, so now people understand unwanted fondling as sexual violence and are coming forward about their attacks. Although women across the United States are distressed over the president’s rise to the White House and the exposure of sexual violence against women across society, women of color have been particularly rattled as they experience sexual violence in more nuanced ways than White women do (Tsui & Silman, 2016).

Sexual Violence Against Women of Color

Crenshaw (1991) contended that “racism is linked to patriarchy to the extent that racism denies men of color the power and privilege that dominant men enjoy” (p. 1258); thus, the intersection of race and gender make the experiences of violence for women of color different than that of White women and act as a reminder that “not all women are equally oppressed” (Andersen & Collins, 2010, p. 61). In fact, “racism contributes to the cycle of violence given the stress men of color experience in dominant society” (Crenshaw, p. 1258). However, Audre Lorde (1992) contended that because of the battle against racial eradication that Black men and women share, some Black women refuse to accept that sexual hostility is implemented within Black communities. Lorde (1992) further elucidated that, exacerbated by “racism and the pressures of

powerlessness, violence against Black women . . . often becomes a standard within [Black] communities . . . but these woman-hating acts are rarely discussed as crimes against Black women" (p. 509). Instead, they are normalized and will continue to exist until, as Kalamu ya Salaam asserted, women revolt and men are made "conscious of their responsibility to fight sexism" (as cited in Lorde, p. 509).

Rape as Social Control

Angela Davis (1985) explained that rape was used as a tool to control and discipline the Black community and, for women, has been perceived as an occupational hazard. During times of slavery, it was understood that women's bodies were accessible at all times to slave masters and their surrogates. Moreover, Davis expounded that, in "freedom," domestic work was the job most frequently open and available to Black women and these women were often the victims of sexual assault by the White men in the families for which they worked. More specifically, as Joyce E. Williams and Karen A. Holmes (1981) elucidated, rape or "the threat of rape, is an important tool of social control in a complex system of racial-sexual stratification" (as cited in Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1266), particularly because women of color are often forgotten while White women's stories are sensationalized, creating a sexual hierarchy in which certain female bodies are held in higher regard than others. To illustrate, Davis spoke about a rapist who, in the 1970s was tormenting the Northern California Berkeley community. Although initially he attacked scores of Black women, it was not until he began raping White women and a well-known Black woman television newscaster, that the police began to pay attention, which further explained the ways in which women of color are made invisible particularly by the very people who are supposed to protect them.

In fact, as Davis (1985) contended, "the experience of Black women has been that the very same white policeman who would supposedly protect them from rape, will sometimes go so far as to rape Black women in their custody" (p. 10). Davis told a horrific story of a woman she and a friend found on the side of the freeway: she had been raped several times by White men who dropped her on the side of the road. Later, "when police found her, they too raped her and left her on the freeway barely conscious" (Davis, 1985, p. 10). This type of abuse of power is not limited to the United States. In fact, in Vietnam U.S. soldiers received official instructions to search Vietnamese women's vaginas with their penises as part of their missions (Eisen, 1975). It is not surprising then that "women of color are often reluctant to call the police . . . a force that is frequently hostile" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1257) toward communities of color.

Further, because of their failure to develop an analysis of racism in rape culture, Black, Latina, Native American, and Asian American women were initially reluctant to associate themselves with 1970s anti-rape movement (Davis, 1985). In fact, Lorde (1992) argued that while White women ignore White privilege and "define *woman* in terms of their own experience alone . . . women of Color become 'other,' the outsider whose experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend" (p. 507). As a result, Crenshaw (1991) argued, "intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles" (p. 1246); thus, women of color largely suffer alone. Moreover, because these intervention strategies were based on the needs of White women, they were often not accessible to women of color. Instead, because "women of color occupy positions both physically and culturally marginalized

within dominant society . . . information must be targeted directly to them in order to reach them" (p. 1250).

Although similar, the social and economic costs for women of color have been more acute because historically many women of color "are burdened by poverty, child care responsibilities, and the lack of job skills" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). The burdens that women of color experience as a consequence of gender and class oppressions

> are then compounded by the racially discriminatory employment and housing practices women of color often face, as well as by the disproportionately high unemployment among people of color that makes battered women of color less able to depend on the support of friends and relatives for temporary shelter. (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245–1246).

Moreover, as Davis (1985) has reminded us, "poor women, and specifically women of color, continue to be targets of sterilization abuse" (p. 3), which further elucidates the varied forms of violence women of color experience.

Sterilization Abuse

According to Dorothy E. Roberts (1991) women of color have been subjected to sterilization abuse for decades. Roberts contended that physicians and other health care providers have negative perceptions of women of color being unfit to care for their children, viewing their family size as too big, and not trusting that these women could effectively use birth control. These beliefs substantiated doctors' efforts for forced sterilization. In fact, one study found that, under a 1973 federally funded program, 43% of women who were sterilized were Black although they only made up 33% of patients (Roberts, 1991). Moreover, Spanish-speaking women are

twice as likely as those who speak English to undergo forced sterilization mainly because they are coerced into undergoing these violent procedures.

> There were many forms of sterilization coercion. In the 1960s, Puerto Rico, for example, earned the dubious distinction of having the highest sterilization rate in the world, with women of childbearing age in Puerto Rico 10 times more likely to be sterilized than white women in the United States. By 1965, over 30 percent of Puerto Rican women had been sterilized. (Darder, 2015b, "The Legacy of Medical Apartheid," para. 9)

In the 1970s, some doctors would only deliver babies or perform abortions on the condition that Black women would agree to sterilization. Roberts (1991) further explained that women were also pressured into sterilization under the threat that their welfare benefits would be eliminated. Hence, coercive sterilization was used to control the fertility of women of color, and Latina women specifically, and served as a mechanism to take command of the culture of poverty (Peña, 2010). In other words, as Susana Peña (2010) explained, forced sterilization was a medical "solution" to control a social "problem": culture of poverty. It is not surprising, then, that forced sterilizations were federally funded in conjunction with the family planning initiative of the War on Poverty during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration (Stern, 2005).

Although the numbers are a bit unclear and difficult to substantiate, since sterilization has been studied, it has been clear that immigrant women, women of color, and poor working class women are disproportionally targeted (Stern, 2005). In fact, when Paul Popeneo, a social hygienist studied sterilizations in the 1930s, he and his colleague found that Mexicans and African Americans were operated on at a rate that exceeded their population (Stern, 2005). At precisely that historical period, the eugenics movement in the United States moved to supposedly

eradicate negative traits of society using forced sterilization policies which, resulted in 34 states enacting sterilization laws and an estimated 64,000 women being sterilized (Darder, 2015b). About this Darder (2015b) noted, "Women of color in US urban settings and on reservations were specifically targeted for sterilization without consent or under questionable circumstances."

More specifically, California's sterilization program was primarily concerned with gender norms and female sexuality, issues that have historically targeted women of color. In fact, Stern (2005) explained that, during the 1920s, there was a rise in sterilization of girls and women who were deemed immoral, loose, or unfit for motherhood, and most men and women who were sterilized were part of the working class or lower middle class. In *Relf v. Weinberger* (1974), Native and African American women came forward about being deceived into sterilization when they thought they were agreeing to the contraceptive Depo-Provera, a birth control injection. Similarly, in *Madrigal v. Quilligan* (1978) working-class migrant women filed suit after being forcibly sterilized in a California county hospital. Moreover, "In 2013, concerns over sterilization abuse were raised by a study that found almost 150 women had been illegally subjected to sterilization in California prison medical facilities from 2006 to 2010" (Darder, 2015b). Hence, in the last century, women of color have found themselves overwhelmingly targeted because of their race, class, gender, and immigrant status.

Immigrant Women

Immigrant women are particularly susceptible to violence because they are often isolated from their family and friends (Raj & Silverman, 2002). In addition to isolation, there are numerous motives for violence against immigrant women including economic insecurity, legal vulnerability, and cultural gender roles (Raj & Silverman). Studies (Hass, Dutton, & Orloff,

2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Rodriguez, 1995; Song, 1996) have shown that 30% to 50% of Latina, South Asian, and Korean immigrants have been physically or sexually victimized by an intimate partner. Further, as aforementioned, sometimes cultural ideologies about gender norms helped to disempower women and increase the possibility of abuse (Raj & Silverman). For example, in Asian and Middle Eastern immigrant communities, it has been culturally acceptable for men to "discipline" women with physical violence if women do not stay within prescribed gender roles (Huisman, 1996; Kulwicki & Miller, 1999; Song, 1996). Similarly, in Mexican and South Asian communities, although understood as harmful to women, marital rape has been viewed as a male right (Abraham, 1998; Davila & Brackley, 1999). Sexual violence against women in these populations has often manifested in different ways including male control of sexual and reproductive decision making, accusations of sexual inadequacy, and infidelity or threats of infidelity (Abraham; Raj & Silverman). Women's immigrant status has not only made it difficult for them to leave their abusive relationships, but also complicated women's ability to seek both formal and informal help (Raj & Silverman).

To begin, immigrant women tend to have little knowledge of services available for survivors (Hass et al., 2000; Huisman, 1996; Song, 1996; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Sometimes immigrant women's lack of knowledge is a direct result of agencies failing to conduct outreach in these communities; further, when agencies have conducted outreach, it was often done in superficial ways that do not include immigrant women's home language, which only helped to further isolate and "other" immigrant women survivors. However, research (Raj & Silverman) has shown that immigrant women who have sought help often returned to their communities, which could mean that they also returned to violence. Therefore, Raj and Silverman concluded

that community education is necessary in order to better meet the needs of immigrant women survivors.

Sexual Violence Against Chicana/Latina Women

For centuries, Latinas have survived systemic sexual violence as it underpinned the invasion and colonization of Latin America, as *conquistadores* raped Native women in pursuit of regional conquests (Gaytan & Goode, 2013; González-López, 2010). In fact, Ramón A. Gutiérrez (2010) argued, the "conquest of the Americas was a sexual conquest of [Native] peoples. [Natives] were made objects both of desire and of derision, vessels that reproduce households, and ultimately, the profitability of a massive mercantile empire" (p. 14). In fact, Native women, because of their reproductive capabilities, transformed labor into gold as they birthed mixed-blood children spawned only to labor and serve (Gutiérrez). As a result, the history of Latinx sexuality begins with the conquest and continues with an examination of the connection between bodies, gender, and power (Gutiérrez).

It is not surprising then that a significant number of Latinx women have experienced a lifetime of sexual victimization (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010). Most problematic, historically, female survivors have suffered the most from sexual violence as they were publicly humiliated, dishonored, and isolated from their families because they failed to protect their bodies (Gutiérrez, 2010; Ramos Lira, Koss, & Russo, 1999). In contemporary times, systemic sexual violence against Latinx women—and women of color in general—continued, as survivors were made invisible by antirape laws that prioritized White women's bodies over all others (Gaytan & Goode, 2013). More specifically, Gillian Greensite, director of Rape Prevention Education at the University of California, Santa Cruz, asserted, "rape laws made rape a capital offense only for a

Black man found guilty of raping a white woman. The rape of a Black woman was not even considered a crime, even when it became officially illegal" (as cited in Gaytan & Goode, 2013, p. 2).

According to the Pew Research Center (Stepler & Brown, 2016), the Latinx population has increased nine fold since 1960 from 6.3 million to 55.3 million by 2014 and is currently the largest ethnic or racial group in the United States. Research also showed that a disproportionate number of Latinx have experienced socioeconomic disadvantages (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003), which put them at risk for social problems such as intimate partner violence (Hazen & Soriano, 2007). Findings from the National Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence Survey (Breiding, Smith, Basile, Walters, Chen, & Merrick, 2014) showed that in the United States an estimated 13.6% of Latinx women were raped during their lifetimes, and 35.6% experienced sexual violence other than rape during their lifetimes.

Latinx Communities and Sexual Violence

In Latinx communities, sexual violence against women has manifested in different ways, including the belief that family and community come first, and Chicana/Latinas understand family harmony as their responsibility, thus, placing themselves last, which makes them vulnerable to intimate partner violence (Raj & Silverman, 2002). Moreover, in Mexican communities—and Latinx communities in general—male gender roles often dictate that men be dominant and aggressive; they must be respected, and they are entitled to female partners. As a result, male sexual jealousy justifies violence (Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Song, 1996), and women stay with their abusers because they are devoted to their partners and relationships (Bauer, Rodriguez, Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000). Equally

problematic, research has shown that in Latinx communities women often view abuse as acceptable and normal aspects of relationships (Bauer et al., 2000; Perilla et al., 1994; Raj & Silverman, 2002), so they do not always acknowledge it as wrong or illegal and instead remain in violent relationships. Even when they have acknowledged the abuse, women "are often called upon to understand, anticipate, and absolve the behaviors of men leading to narratives that suggest men are often the victims of *descontrol* [*sic.*]" (Flores-Ortiz, 2003, p. 355), which has posited women as nurtures and protectors; thus, furthering the *pobrecito* narrative that protects men. Additionally, Chicana/Latinas immigrant and/or undocumented status has often complicated women's ability to report or leave abusive partners.

For some Mexican women, migration to the United States marks the beginning of sexual emancipation as they no longer feel impelled to comply with obligatory sex with their partners (Peńa, 2010). However, because Latinas have often been targets of sexual violence in the migration route to the United States, and because they have experienced sexual coercion once in the country, immigration to the United States is not always liberatory (Peña). In fact, U.S. policy further victimizes immigrant women, seeing that under the 1990 marriage and fraud provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act, "a person who immigrated to the United States to marry a United States citizen or permanent resident had to remain 'properly' married for two years before applying for permanent resident status" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1247). This provision has made it impossible for undocumented immigrant women to leave their abusive husbands, particularly because the application for permanent status required both spouses' signatures, so women were obligated to stay in violent relationships for fear of deportation. As a result, migration has often been simultaneously liberatory and oppressive (Peña).

Further, many women depend on their husbands for information regarding their legal status, which has made them vulnerable to spousal violence (Crenshaw, 1991; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Additionally, even if threats of deportation are unfounded, because of language barriers and lack of knowledge, many women who are permanent residents continue to suffer intimate partner violence (Crenshaw). As is true for women of color in general, cultural norms in Latinx communities often discourage women from reporting or escaping battering situations (Crenshaw; Raj & Silverman). As a result, violence takes different forms.

To begin, Latinx men often control sexual decision making—when and where to have sex—and/or reproductive decision making, including prohibiting women to take birth control or coercing them into sterilization (Abraham, 1998; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Moreover, because sexual abuse and rape often are neither recognized nor made punishable in countries where Latinas come from, most do not know that marital rape is punishable in the United States (Gaytan & Goode, 2013). Emotional abuse has also been omnipresent and can include verbal abuse in front of children, family, and friends as well as openly criticizing women's looks, cooking ability, mothering, or modesty (Raj & Silverman). Latinas' partners might also ridicule their lack of or limited English proficiency, education, and work skills, which can be particularly debilitating and make it difficult for women to function in the United States without their partners (Perilla et al., 1994; Raj & Silverman, 2002).

Further, because families, mothers, and community women have also condoned or ignored abuse, women suffered silently and have been forced to be self-sacrificing for the sake of their families and communities (Hass et al., 2000; Huisman, 1996; Perilla et al., 1994; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Most problematic, even when women seek help from community and religious

leaders, they are often compelled to stay in the relationship and not speak publicly about their abuse (Huisman, 1996; Perilla, et al., 1994; Raj & Silverman, 2002). In fact, the Catholic church considers sex a marital duty; thus, priests often petition women to concede to their husbands when they demand it (Ramos Lira et al., 1999; Ahrens, Rios-Mandel, Isas, & del Carmen Lopez, 2010). Gutiérrez (2010) contended, for residents of Spanish America, the Roman Catholic Church furnished the basic categories to regulate the human body and its social life. Thus, through daily teachings from the pulpit, religious leaders voiced the Church's vision of a properly ordered body politic demonstrated through bodily behavior.

People, according to the Catholic church, are defined as composed of body and soul. When a child is conceived, from a man and woman, and birthed into this world, it is stained with Original Sin and is cleansed only through baptism. However, the body still carries with it the sinful qualities of the flesh; thus, theologians consider marriage a remedy to humanity's sinful state (Gutiérrez, 2010), an ideology that serves to problematize and facilitate sexual violence. This is so because, according to the Catholic Church, the two most important objectives of marriage are procreation and the satisfaction of conjugal debt; thus, intercourse was treated as a contractual exchange (Gutiérrez, 2010). Consequently, marriage offers a blanket consent for sex on demand, and if wives do not comply with their husbands' sexual requests, they are failing to perform their religious duty and impeding their husbands from performing theirs as well (Ramos Lira, et al., 1999). As a result, sexual violence—rape, specifically—becomes normalized in the marital context.

Moreover, because the Catholic Church values purity and virginity, women survivors of rape were considered to have failed their religion seeing that they were taught to resist rape even

at the price of their lives (Ramos Lira et al., 1999). This request from religious leaders only helps normalize sexual violence against women, reinforce male dominance over women, and—because the Catholic church encourages women to stay married irrespective of what happens in the relationship (Ahrens, et al.; Ramos Lira, et al.)—embolden the cycle of violence in Latinx households. When women do succeed in getting help and leaving their abusers, immigrant communities often alienate and fault divorced women and their children for dismantling the family unit, making it difficult for survivors to start anew.

Sexual Victimization

Although intimate partner violence is not the only way Chicana/Latinas experience sexual violence, most of the literature has overlooked other forms of victimization that women experience (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010). Carlos and Sabina (2010) asserted that by not examining the other forms of victimization in tandem with intimate partner violence and sexual violence, this limitation potentially overestimates the impact of any specific form of violence such as stalking and threats. As a result, it is difficult to understand the full spectrum of violence that Latinx women experience. As aforementioned, sexual violence manifests in varied ways, including, sexual harassment, unwanted sexual pressure, sexual abuse, sexual assault or rape, prostitution, and trafficking (Gaytan & Goode, 2013). Often complicating things for Chicana/Latinas is the socialization process inherent in Latinx households. For example, at a young age, Chicana/Latinas are taught the importance of respecting their bodies by remaining sexually abstinent until marriage (Gaytan & Goode). Similarly, Latinas are instructed to be hypervigilant in their interactions with men (Gaytan & Goode). As a result, if they disclose being

sexually assaulted, Latinas risk shame for themselves and their family as well as being judged for failing to protect their bodies as inculcated from an early age (Gaytan & Goode).

According to Gaytan and Goode (2013), not only are adolescent Latinas at higher risk for sexual violence but many are also susceptible to patriarchal attitudes about gender and sexuality. The fact that open communication about sex and sexuality are often discouraged in conservative Latinx households in tandem with a deep value for respecting elders and authority figures makes it difficult for Latinx youth to deny or challenge inappropriate requests from adults (Gaytan & Goode). Most problematic, in an attempt to maintain the family unit, parents often deny the sexual abuse of their children and/or may minimize the abuse (Gaytan & Goode), so adolescent survivors continue to be in the presence of their perpetrators. This is particularly problematic because research has suggested (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010) that the most common perpetrators of victimization experienced in childhood are relatives and other nonfamily individuals known to the survivor. Moreover, similar to the adult women in their lives, most adolescent Latina survivors do not readily seek assistance; in fact, most only look for services well into adulthood (Gaytan & Goode), which might be because survivors of child sexual abuse are 4.3 times as likely to experience sexual violence in adulthood (Cuevas & Sabina).

However, “sexual silence” is not a cultural trait exclusive to Latinx communities; rather, González-López and Vidal-Ortiz (2010) argued, it is shaped by “multiple forms of social inequality affecting other cultural groups as well” (p. 313). For instance, Latinx living in the United States are silenced about sexuality because of gender inequality, homophobia, and the dehumanization of children, all of which affect other Western and Westernized societies (González-López & Vidal-Ortiz). To illustrate, González-López and Vidal-Ortiz explained that a

gay man may not speak about his romantic relationship with relatives because of homophobia; a woman may to speak about being a survivor of rape because of gender inequality; and a child may not speak about sexual abuse by a family member because in patriarchal societies children are unprotected and highly vulnerable. Thus, sexual silence is not intrinsic to culture; rather, it is about control, power, vulnerability, and inequality. Most importantly, when discussions are centered around culture, they fail to address concerns about racism, socioeconomic marginality, and discrimination that affect Latinx living in the United States; so these remain unexamined (González-López & Vidal-Ortiz).

As aforementioned, there are significant impacts to survivors' physical, mental, emotional, and reproductive health. Psychological impacts of sexual victimization are numerous. Cuevas and Sabina (2010) found that different experiences with sexual assault were all associated with different forms of psychological distress, including PTSD symptomatology, depression, anxiety, anger, and disassociation. Moreover, Cuevas and Sabina learned that increased levels of anger and disassociation were significantly linked to experiences of childhood sexual abuse; whereas in addition to the two aforementioned psychological distresses, adult sexual victimization was associated with increased levels of depression. The social impacts to survivors can be severe, given that women are often ostracized by their families and communities who blame them for their assaults (Gaytan & Goode, 2013). Further impacting their psychological and socioeconomic wellbeing, survivors often lose work time because of medical appointments, health conditions, and court dates (Gaytan & Goode); thus, the economic consequences of sexual violence are substantial.

Young Chicana/Latinas and Sexual Violence

Much like the women in their lives, girls of color experience race, class, and gender simultaneously and lack power and privilege when dealing with the dominant culture (Letendre & Rozas, 2014), which places them at higher risk for sexual abuse. In their 1992 study, the AAUW found that children tend to conform to gender roles by ages eight and 10, and, by the time they enter adolescence, girls have low self-esteem and negative images about themselves. These findings are not surprising considering that for women of color beauty is marked by how closely they are to the White spectrum (Ruiz Gonzalez, 2008); thus, historically, women are objectified because they are assessed based on skin color and body image (Collins, 2000). In school, Chicana/Latina youth are further victimized as they are often met with teachers who have low expectations of their academic performance, so they are left without safe spaces for self-actualization.

As previously mentioned, Chicana/Latina women are hypersexualized and this also holds true for young women; however, at the same time, they are reminded that they must be hypervigilant of their bodies and are held responsible for any sexual violence they suffer. Most problematic, Chicana/Latina youth are reminded that they must respect their elders, which only works to facilitate their sexual assault because they are forced into silence in hopes that one day they can get away. Norma Alarcón (2001) described Chicana/Latina youth's position more eloquently in her poem "Forced by Circumstance." She wrote:

> Forced by circumstance to be a woman
>
> I've lived far from your scent

though your face follows me

reminding me of the unsaid

The Issue of Sexual Harassment

The term "sexual harassment" originated in the 1970s and was first recognized by the courts in *Williams v. Saxbe* (1976) as a form of sex discrimination under Title VII in the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 (Hill & Silva, 2005). According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), sexual harassment can include unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal of physical harassment of a sexual nature. However, the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), explained that sexual harassment does not necessarily have to be directed to a specific person or be specifically about sexual behavior. In fact, although not always covered by sexual harassment laws, negative comments about women as a group may be a form of sexual harassment and becomes illegal when it is so severe and frequent that it creates a hostile or offensive work or learning environment (EEOC), which helps to explain why most research concerning sexual harassment is directed at workplace harassment and harassment in academic settings. In addition to the EEOC's definition of sexual harassment, according to the United Nations (UN) among others, examples include:

- Unwanted letters, phone calls, or materials of sexual nature.
- Unwanted pressure for dates.
- Cat calls
- Asking about sexual fantasies, preferences, or history.
- Facial expressions, winking, throwing kisses, or licking lips.

Further, according to the UN, subtle sexual harassment is a behavior, but not a legal term. It is, however, unwelcome sexual behavior that could create a quid pro quo or hostile work environment if it is allowed to continue. Quid pro quo harassment is when employment decisions are made based on an employee's acceptance or rejection of unwelcomed sexual behavior (United Nations, n.d.). Given that sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination, it violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which is a federal law that prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, and national origin (EEOC). However, even though Title VII exists, many people across the United States still face workplace sexual harassment.

Goodman (1981) explained, "the history of sexual harassment dates back at least to the time women first traded their labor in the marketplace" (as cited in Fitzgerald, Shullman, Bailey, Richards, Swecker, Gold, Ormerod, & Weitzman, 1988). Fitzgerald et al. noted that, in 1908, a popular periodical published a collection of stories that chronicled the experiences of women who migrated into the city looking for work. Woven into these stories were countless tales of widespread and extensive harassment, which included accounts of women carrying knives for protection (Fitzgerald et al., 1988). Although it was evident that the workplace was a violent environment for women, not until 1980 did the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board institute the first comprehensive national survey of sexual harassment where, in the 2-year data collection period, they found that 42% off women experienced sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al. 1988).

According to the EEOC's workplace harassment task force, anywhere from 25% to 85% of women reported having experienced workplace harassment (U.S. Equal Employment Commission, 2016). Further, of the total number of complaints from the private sector filed with

the EEOC in the 2015 fiscal year, 45% was on the basis of sex. Contrastingly, in the federal sector, 7% of the total number of complaints were on the basis of sex. However, those numbers could be grossly underestimated given that in a testimony during an EEOC meeting focused on preventing and addressing workplace harassment Fatima Gross Graves (2015), the vice president for education and employment at the National Women's Law Center, explained that one in four women experiences workplace sexual harassment, and yet 70% of women said they have never reported it. Thus, much like survivors of sexual assault, women who are victims of sexual harassment often suffer alone. In her testimony, Graves also explained that low-wage workers faced particularly high rates of sexual harassment.

More specifically, women who depend on tips to supplement their already low wages, experienced sexual harassment at high rates. In fact, even though only 7% of women work in the restaurant industry, in 2011 they made up nearly 37% of the sexual harassment charges brought to the EEOC (Graves, 2015). However, Graves noted that women in higher paying jobs that have not traditionally been reserved for women—such as construction, firefighting, and mining—also faced high rates of sexual harassment. Often complicating things for both employers and employees, women whose work requires them to interact and please third parties are especially vulnerable to workplace harassment (Graves, 2015). Although it is clear that workplace harassment is a large societal problem, it is not the only space, nor the first space, where women have experienced sexual harassment.

Sexual Harassment and Education

According to the United States Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR), sexual harassment can be carried out by school employees, nonemployee third-parties (such as a

visiting speaker), and other students and can occur in any school program or activity, including school facilities, school bus, or other off-campus locations (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Although the aforementioned report by the OCR was last revised in 2008, Mary and Mayer (2016) argued that in the past 5 years, in the context of on-campus sexual violence, Title IX has gained national attention. This influx of attention has led to the development of the White House Task Force on Sexual Assault and has influenced the United States Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to update the obligations schools must meet in order to be in compliance with Title IX. Problematic, however, is that most of these efforts are geared toward higher education and not K–12 schools.

On the college campus. Since 2011, the OCR has investigated 243 institutions of higher education for failure to comply with Title IX obligations (Mary & Mayer, 2016). Meyer and Mary asserted that, as of January 2016, of those, 197 are still open and some are facing multiple complaints. These numbers are particularly troubling because in 2011 the OCR publicized a "Dear Colleague Letter" to all educational institutions receiving federal funding. In addition to reminding all educational institutions of their obligations under Title IX, this letter defined and outlined the different ways in which sexual violence and sexual harassment manifest on school campuses (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Additionally, as a response to the influx of on-campus sexual assault, the Obama administration announced a White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault which, along with the Office of the Vice President, authored a report titled "Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action" (2014). The report called for schools to adopt better policies and practices to prevent sexual assault on campuses across the nation and to respond more effectively when they do happen. To ensure that schools

live up to their obligations, among other things, the Task Force will provide "educational institutions with best practices for preventing and responding to rape and sexual assault [and] increase the public's awareness of an institution's track record in addressing rape and sexual assault" (White House Task Force, 2014). However, the current administration, under the leadership of Betsy DeVos, has reversed key Obama-era guidelines that may have detrimental consequences on survivors of on-campus sexual assault (Saul & Taylor, 2017).

According to a study by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), 61% of college students experienced sexual harassment; of those, 54% of Black and Latinx students and 64% of White students have experienced some type of sexual harassment (Hill & Silva, 2005). The study also found that student to student is the most common (80%) form of on-campus sexual harassment; however, about 7% of students reported being harassed by a professor (Hill & Silva, 2005). Most troubling, the Rape, Abuse, and Incest Network (RAINN) found that sexual violence, which includes sexual harassment, is more prevalent at college compared to other crimes; to illustrate, RAINN explained that college women are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted than robbed.

Moreover, the Campus Sexual Assault study found that Latinx female students were more likely to be victims of violent sexual assault than White students and that the prevalence of experiencing sexual assault increased once entering college, from 11.3% to 13.7% (Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007), making university campuses inherently violent spaces for women. Additionally, RAINN elucidated that students are at higher risk of sexual assault in the first months of the Fall and Spring semesters; more specifically, research has shown that 84% of university women who experienced sexual violence did so within the first

four months of entering the university (Gross, Winslett, Roberts, & Gohm, 2006), which for many students marked the beginning of their college lives.

Like experiences with sexual assault, the effects of sexual harassment on the educational experiences of survivors are numerous. These include having difficulty studying or paying attention in class, trouble sleeping, loss of appetite, no longer participating in activities or sports, and skipping class or dropping out of a course (Hill & Silva, 2005; Krebs et al., 2007). Although affecting both male and female students, research has shown that women suffer these effects in greater numbers than men. Not surprisingly, even though sexual harassment has been prevalent in educational spaces, most students do not report incidents to authorities, and men are less likely to reports incidents of sexual violence then women, which could account for the gender gap. In fact, the AAUW study (cited in Hill & Silva) found that more than one-third of survivors did not tell anyone about their experiences, half confided in a friend, and only about 7% reported to a university employee. More specifically, male students were more likely (44%) than female students to remain silent whereas female students were more likely (61%) to confide in a friend.

Although nearly all colleges and universities have policies around sexual harassment, and most students (79%) were aware of this, they did not report for several reasons including the belief that it is a personal matter, fear of reprisal, belief that it was not important enough to report, did not want to get the perpetrator in trouble, and belief that police would not or could not do anything to help (RAINN). Most problematic, however, although research has shown that 1 in 5 women has been sexually assaulted while in college (Krebs et al., 2007), the AAUW reported that in 2014 91% of colleges and universities reported zero incidents of rape, which does not align with research and further substantiates that students do not feel comfortable reporting

instances of sexual violence. On-campus sexual violence, however, is not limited to college and university campuses.

On the high school campus. Most survivors of rape and sexual assault are between the ages of 16 and 24 (White House Council on Women and Girls and the Office of the Vice President, 2014). In fact, the CDC reported that approximately half of survivors were raped before they were 18 years old (Black et al., 2011). Often problematizing the study of sexual violence in K–12 settings is that it is sometimes hidden in the guise of bullying. Similar to sexual harassment, bullying is defined as “repeated unwanted behavior that involves an imbalance of power though which the bully intends to harm the bullied student or students” (Hill & Kearl, 2011). According to Hill and Kearl, the main difference between bullying and sexual harassment is that bullying occurs throughout childhood whereas sexual harassment begins in adolescence. Hill and Kearl further explained that, although researchers find that sexual harassment can happen as early as elementary school, it has more to do with gender identity than it does sex itself. Most importantly, Hill and Kearl pointed out that although sexual harassment can affect students’ educational experiences, it can be a problem long before reaching the level of legal action.

In their study of adolescence experiences with sexual violence Young, Grey, and Boyd (2009) found that, in one school year, 40% to 50% of middle and high school students had experienced some form of sexual harassment. Not surprisingly, when studied over longer periods of time rates of sexual harassment are significantly higher (Hill & Kearl, 2011). In fact, the AAUW found that more than 80% of students had experienced sexual harassment throughout their K–12 schooling; more specifically, studies found that girls were more likely than boys to

suffer from this type of violence (Hill & Kearl, 2011; Young et al., 2009). More specifically, 56% of female versus 40% of male seventh through twelfth grade students experienced some form of harassment (Hill & Kearl). Most damaging, one in 20 girls who experienced sexual harassment switched schools each year because of the incident (Gordon, 2014). Further, because sexual harassment is such as widespread experience for girls, they often fail to recognize it as an act of violence (Leaper, Brown, & Ayres, 2013) and instead see it as a consequence of being born female. Internalizing harassment as normal is worsened when secondary school educators are ill-trained in handling allegations of student-to-student harassment; thus schools fail student survivors of sexual violence.

Although under Title IX of the Education Amendment, schools that receive federal funding are legally required to ensure their students safety by protecting them from sexual assault and harassment, little has changed in schools. This is often the case because our education system is decentralized, run as it is by individual states (Dating Violence Blog, n.d.). That laws vary from state to county to school district makes it difficult to develop policies regarding sexual abuse (Dating Violence Blog). In fact, since Title IX implementation, no school has had its funding revoked for noncompliance (Schonfeld, 2014). Lack of accountability coupled with school leaders not considering the short-term benefits of better policies outweighing the long-term benefits of adopting said policies makes it so that nothing changes in schools (Schonfeld, 2014). Thus, schools not only fail survivors by not adequately investigating instances of sexual violence, but also help to perpetuate violence. This often happens when educators are ill-equipped to deal with instances of sexual violence. To illustrate, an Alabama middle school student asked a teacher's aide for help after an eighth-grade classmate kept asking

her to have sex in the bathroom (Brown, 2016a). The aide outlined a plan to lure the boy in to the bathroom and catch him in the act. The plan, however, did not materialize as they expected, and the boy forced himself onto the female student before help arrived (Brown, 2016a). Although this is an extreme example, it highlights schools' failure to protect students while under their care.

Beyond a failure to protect students, schools further punish survivors of assault. For example, 17-year-old Daisy Coleman was forbidden from attending her senior prom because the school principal claimed that the school could not guarantee that she would not be harassed at the dance (Sneed, 2015). In doing this, school officials were further punishing and victimizing Daisy, which only helped to facilitate silence and victim blaming. Further complicating reporting practices, a report of sexual assault on school grounds means that the reporting party must admit that sexual contact happened; however, if school officials do not believe that the act was nonconsensual then the survivor of the attack can get in trouble for engaging in sexual activity during school hours, which is often considered a violation of school rules (Brown, 2016b). This was the case in Texas, where a student reported that another student raped her in the band room. The police who investigated the case determined that the sex was consensual, so school officials—relying on that information—decided that both the survivor and her attacker had violated district policy; as a result, they were both sent to the same alternative school. Once there, the survivor had to face her attacker on a daily basis (Brown, 2016b).

Similarly, in Sterling Heights, Michigan a 15-year-old high school girl was expelled after reporting sexual assault on school campus because school officials believed that the sex was consensual (Brown, 2016b). She explained that a high school senior manipulated her into going

to his car with him; once there, he locked all of the doors and forced her to perform oral sex. During the investigation, the boy explained that the act was consensual and had been planned for weeks; however, under Michigan law, because the survivor was under the age of 16, she could not legally consent (Brown, 2016b). Notwithstanding Michigan state law, the boy was never charged, both students were suspended, and the survivor's mother is looking for another school for her daughter. Instances like these send survivors the message that reporting could equate to expulsion.

The harassment gender gap. Hill and Kearl (2011) found that the gender gap holds true for both in-person and cyber harassment. The type of sexual harassment students experienced include unwelcomed sexual comments, jokes, or gestures; being called gay or lesbian in a negative way; being shown sexual pictures without consent; being touched in an unwelcomed way; being physically intimidated in a sexual way; having someone flash or expose themselves; and being forced to do something sexual. In terms of student-to-student sexual harassment, most students (54%) reported being harassed by one male student and 12% said they were harassed by a group of male students. Contrastingly, 14% of students who experienced sexual harassment said that one female student was the perpetrator, whereas 5% said it was a group of female students.

In terms of sexual assault, Young et. al (2009) concluded that over half (53%) of high school girls reported being sexually assaulted. The most common forms (51%) of sexual assault included kissing, hugging, or sexual touching without consent; however, others reported being forced to engage in oral sex (6%), rape (12%), attempted rape (1%), or other sexual acts (1%). Moreover, according to Gordon (2014), 12% of teenagers reported having sexually abused

someone they were dating and although the numbers were similar for young men and women, they did vary by age. More specifically, girls between the ages of 12 and 14 were more likely to be physically violent or seriously threaten their partners; whereas, boys were more likely to become perpetrators as they age.

Although sexual harassment is directed toward both genders, boys experienced verbal harassment at larger rates than girls; whereas twice as many girls experienced physical forms of harassment than boys (Timmerman, 2003). Additionally, research (Leaper et al., 2013) has shown that these acts tend to be more traumatic for girls than for boys. Experiencing sexual harassment in schools made students feel uncomfortable, disturbed, worthless, violated, and insecure (Lipson, 2001). Further, students questioned whether they could ever have happy romantic relationships and began to feel confused about who they were, which can lead to future abusive relationships. Similar to university students, experiencing school harassment can have behavioral and emotional consequences. Often, instead of reporting, students avoid the person who harassed them, do not participate as much in class, stop wanting to go to school, and begin to lose interest in eating. Girls of color, however, feel these acts of violence differently as they live in the intersectionality of race, gender, and class.

Student awareness of harassment. As aforementioned, the type and extent of sexual harassment that students experience are varied. Some of these experiences might be construed as more hostile than others; however, they are all felt equally violent. An eighth-grade girl in Hill and Kearl’s (2011) study shared that a boy tried to unzip her pants. Similarly, a seventh-grade girl told of being cornered in the soccer field, where students tried to touch her inappropriately, and a ninth-grade girl was called a whore simply for having more guy friends than girl friends.

When explaining why they engaged in acts of sexual harassment, most students expounded that they did so because it is just part of school life and consider it inconsequential. Other reasons included thinking it was funny, using sexual harassment as a tool for revenge, assuming the victim liked the behavior, peer-pressure, and wanting to date the person.

However, in her study, Jodi Lipson (2001) found that, when asked, students were able to identify and define sexual harassment. Although purely anecdotal, students' definitions were perfectly accurate, including an eighth-grade girl who described sexual harassment as someone invading another's personal body space or privacy. Students perceiving sexual harassment as unimportant could be because, under Title IX, schools are required to publish a notice of nondiscrimination, which must be widely distributed to students, parents, employees, and other relevant persons; however, it does not require schools to offer any other extensive training for students, families, or faculty and staff. However, under Title IX, if students are unaware of what kind of conduct constitutes sexual violence or that it is prohibited, it is a direct violation of federal law (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Failure of educators to address sexual harassment. Most problematic is that, in schools, sexual harassment often happens in public, where faculty and staff witness the harassment and yet do nothing about it (Stein, 1995). In fact, Lipson (2001) found that most acts of sexual harassment happen in hallways and in classrooms; when this happens, students receive it as a sign that sexual harassment is acceptable behavior and that they may be the next to be harassed and nobody will do anything about it. As a result, Stein (1995) contended that "schools may be training grounds for the insidious cycle of domestic violence" (p. 148) because girls are trained to accept battery and assault and boys receive permission to become batterers because it

is not condemned by the adults in school. Silence also occurs when school leaders fail to disclose information about on-campus sexual assault to students and their families. For example, in Phoenix, Arizona, a 16-year-old girl was sexually assaulted by one of her peers during a high school dance, but Pinnacle High School officials did not inform students or families of the incident. The OCR opened an investigation into Pinnacle High School's handling of the investigation, and yet, the school had not notified the parents or the community, citing that it would only do so '"if it makes sense to do so'" (Kingkade, 2016, para. 12).

Educators who fail to condemn sexual harassment often feel pressured to follow strict policies and procedures that deflect direct engagement with issues of sexuality, including sexual harassment with their students. As a consequence, teacher silence when students' make hypersexualized comments only serves to reinforce destructive paradigms of heterosexuality, which "eroticizes male dominance and female submission" (Pascoe, 2007, p. 10). Faculty members reaffirmed the theory that men play a dominant role in society and women are submissive to men's needs; thus, women's role in society is to reinforce heterosexuality, which conserves patriarchy.

Moreover, educators' silence helps to reinforce hegemonic masculinity, which supports "gender inequality at the top of social hierarchy of power" (Pascoe, 2007, p. 7). Further, Antonia Darder (2009) argued that educators are domesticated to consider teaching and learning as cognitive acts; thus, they do not concern themselves with the physical nature of their students. Instead, when working with youth, teachers are regularly policing physicality in the classroom and seldom engage in critical conversations about sexuality (Darder, 2009); in fact, for a lot of educators, topics of sex and sexuality are taboo and uncomfortable, thus it becomes easier to

ignore these than fully engage with and stop acts of violence that are regularly occurring in classroom spaces. This silence results in students who are survivors of sexual violence having to suffer in silence and often become increasingly isolated.

This is of particularly concern, given that, similar to college and university settings, teachers and other school employees also sexually harass students. More specifically, Lipson (2001) found that 38% of students reported being harassed by teachers or other school staff. However, a federal database to track teachers with histories of serious misconduct does not exist (McIntyre, 2016), so teachers can find themselves back in a public school classroom simply by crossing state lines (Reilly, 2016). In addition, incidents of sexual violence in schools go unreported or are underreported and educator sexual misconduct or ESM is largely understudied, so there is little data on incidents, predators, and targets (Johnson, 2010; Timmerman, 2003). Moreover, data that do exist are often misleading because studies have found discrepancies between data from official incident reports and anonymous student surveys (Johnson, 2010). However, the data that do exist suggest that sexual harassment by teachers occurs both in public spaces (i.e., during class time) and in spaces where students and teachers are alone (Timmerman, 2003).

In a 2004 report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education, Charol Shakeshaft (2004) found that studies report contrastive information about the gender of school sex offenders. For example, in its 2001 study, the AAUW reported 57.2% male offender and 42.8% female offenders; Paul Cameron and colleagues shared similar findings in their 1986 study on child molestation and homosexuality (Shakeshaft, 2004). Contrastingly, Corbett, Gentry, and Pearson (1993) found that 85% of perpetrators were men while 15% were women; Shakeshaft (2004)

reported that three other studies (Gallagher, 2000; Hendrie, 1998; Jennings & Tharp, 2003) shared similar findings. Although teachers are not the only perpetrators, in her study Timmerman (2003) found that they made up the majority (81%) of school-related adult offenders. Often complicating reporting rates is that teachers who sexually assaulted students were sometimes the ones who were most celebrated in their profession; thus, less likely to be considered suspects.

In fact, in the past decade, abuse allegations have doubled in the State of California; however, it is difficult to provide accurate statistics because a number of these incidents are not accurately tracked (Henry, 2015). For example, because the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office does not track professions of the accused in cases of molestation, "it could not provide statistics on school employees prosecuted for sex crimes" (Henry, 2015). Moreover, a federal report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office argued that K–12 schools "lack a systemic approach to preventing and reporting educator sexual abuse of students" (Adams, 2014), which is exacerbated by school districts' inadequate access to background checks and lack of training to recognize signs of sexual harassment and abuse. As a result, unwittingly, school districts "hire teachers and staff accused of sexually abusing students in other districts and states" (Adams, 2014).

However, Lee (2017) argued, not all sexual attractions and relationship between teachers and students are abusive. She contended that while she taught, she noticed that she and her colleagues regularly grappled with their sexual attraction to their high school students. She explained, teachers are routinely attracted to students and some of her colleagues acted on their urges and spoke of the different punishments her colleagues would have received because of their gender. Women, Lee elucidated, would receive a lesser sentence, if caught, then their male

counterparts because the acts are not viewed the same in society. Men are perceived as predators whereas women are glorified for helping students realize a fantasy. Although it may seem "natural" for teachers to be sexually attracted to students, the conversation cannot be devoid of understanding issues of power and dominance that underscore the schooling experiences of young people.

Differences also exist regarding the gender of students who are targets of sexual violence in schools. Shakeshaft (2004) noted that although most studies reported female students as those who were most sexually targeted, the proportions vary by study. Moreover, findings are skewed because the abuse of male students is less likely to be reported than that of female students; thus, the difference between both genders might be much smaller than what is reported. In comparison to its representative sample, the AAUW (2001) found that when considering race/ethnicity, students of color are overrepresented as targets of sexual misconduct by educators whereas White and Asian students are underrepresented. Interestingly, White students are more likely than Latinx students to report faculty or staff sexually harassing students (Lipson, 2001). This might be because of the power dynamics that exist in schools between students and teachers in tandem with research findings that say Latinx students are often ignored in classrooms; thus, they lack the agency to advocate for themselves. This raises concerns regarding both the screening of teachers prior to entering the classroom, as well as their lack of preparation to engage questions of the body (Darder, 2009) that manifest generally as intersecting microaggressions of race, class, and gender in the educational experiences of Chicana/Latina high school students.

Trauma and the Body

Emma Pérez (1999) contended, "Memory as history, as social construction, as politics, culture, race—all are inscribed upon the body. Inscriptions upon the body are memory and history" (p. 108). Inscribed upon the bodies of women is a violent history of systemic sexual violence as it underpinned the colonization of Latin America and continues with "past and present white supremacist and misogynistic ideologies" (Galván, 2016, p. 347), which continually brutalize the body. Pérez argued, women's bodies cannot erase a history that still brutalizes; thus, although women attempt to forget and erase the *agravios,* because women's oppression is recorded in their bodies (Flores-Ortiz, 2003), the memories persist and continue to haunt them.

Western psychology speaks of trauma as an historical event, something in the past that must run its course (Van Der Kolk, 2014), which creates a mind/body split that neglects to recognize the imprint that trauma makes on the body. In fact, Flores-Ortiz (2003) contended that "exposure to the multiple types of violence Latinas routinely endure does affect the psyche, the body, and the soul" (p. 347). In an attempt to make sense of the violence they have endured, and sometimes protect their abuser, women "internalize blame for the abuse and 'punish' themselves for the injustices suffered" (Flores-Ortiz, 2003, p. 351). This punishment is often inflicted upon the body, the culprit for the abuse, and can take many forms such as substance abuse, eating disorders, risky behavior, and self-mutilation (Flores-Ortiz, 2003). Additionally, as a survival mechanism, women leave their bodies in order to cope with and survive sexual abuse.

When describing her and her sisters' stories of incest, Josie Méndez-Negrete (2006) spoke about leaving her body or learning to sleep through her father's touch because it was better than recognizing the abuse. She and her sisters also coped by pretending the abuse was not happening to them. An avid music lover, her sister Felisa, while their father raped her, pretended she was a famous singer. This allowed her to leave her body, determine the abuse was not her fault and was not happening to her, but to someone else whose body she had abandoned. Mague, her other sister, "went up to the clouds" (p. 115) when their father assaulted her. She imagined herself among pink clouds with her sisters and friends playing hide-and-go-seek, but inevitably, voices from below always pulled her back to reality. However, "the body conditions the memory. The memory conditions the body" (Pérez, 1999, p. 109); thus as they grew, they stayed away from older men because they feared them, but they did not fear boys their own age because they didn't "associate violence with them" (Méndez-Negrete, p. 171).

Flores-Ortiz (2003) contended:

> Through the process of reconnecting the body, heart, and soul, women begin to hold accountable the men and women who injured them. In so doing, survivors hold the community and social structures that oppress and propitiate victimization accountable as well. (p. 357)

To Méndez-Negrete's surprise, when she and her sisters finally spoke their truth to the police, they believed them. Truth-telling began the process of reconnecting their bodies and begin to heal. Even then, however, the judge who sentenced their father was concerned about breaking the family apart and wanted to keep them together, in the same household, while their father sought treatment. However, Méndez-Negrete and her family now understood what freedom

looked like, so they demanded their father not be allowed to enter their home again, and so they began to regain a sense of agency, which is central to the journey of healing from violence (Flores-Ortiz, 2003).

The Body in Schools

Cindy Cruz (2014) contended "we must ask how the brown body is regulated and governed in schools" (p. 198) in order to reclaim narratives and embark on transformation. Only then can we create liberating and humanizing pedagogies that help students construct meaning that is felt in the whole body (McLaren, 1993). Antonia Darder (2015a) argued, educational policymakers and educators systemically silence any form of physical expression in schools because they fear the physicality of the body. Thus, students are expected to "leave their sexuality as well as other aspects of their cultural knowledge and lived histories at the door prior to entering" (Darder, 2015a, p. 75). As a result, educators do not "concern themselves with the physical nature of their students, unless one is deemed 'inappropriate,' at which time administrators . . . are summoned to evaluate and hopefully 'fix the problem'" (Darder, 2009, p. 219). In an effort to "fix the problem," from the moment children enter schools, educators contain and regulate students' bodies by demanding they sit in uncomfortable chairs, remain quiet, and not be too expressive—all of which are unnatural to a child.

Moreover, Antonia Darder (2009) argued, school faculty and staff fabricate rule-based pedagogical policies and practices that are guided by "conservative ideologies of social control, historically linked to Puritanical views of the body as evil, sensual pleasures as sinful, and passions as corrupting to the sanctity of the spirit" (p. 221). For young women, these policies and practices often "constituted a struggle for social power within a male-dominated culture and

oppressive economic system" (McLaren, 2015, p. 165). In fact, regulation of the body disproportionally affects female students and "is closely bound with the control of female sexuality and socialization" (Cruz, 2014, p. 199). This is particularly damaging for Chicana/Latinas, as images of them in the media stereotype them as hypersexualized and inferior, which further facilitates the need to contain their bodies in school.

Microaggressions

When psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce (1969) first proposed the term racial microaggressions, he explained that they are designed to "reduce, dilute, atomize, and encase the hapless into [their] 'place'" (p. 303). Moreover, Pierce (1969) maintained that when confronted with microaggressions the perpetual "lesson the black must hear is that he is insignificant and irrelevant" (p. 303). Pierce (1974) later described them as racial "assaults to black dignity and black hope [that] are incessant and cumulative" (p. 515). In subsequent research, Pierce and his colleagues argued that the "chief vehicle for proracist behaviors are microaggressions" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66) and further defined this phenomenon as:

> subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are "put downs" of blacks by offenders. The offensive mechanisms used against blacks often are innocuous. The cumulative weight of their never-ending burden is the major ingredient in black-white interactions. (p. 66)

Similarly, Peggy Davis (1989) defined microaggressions as "stunning, automatic acts that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of black inferiority" (p. 1576). Although Pierce's work and Davis's definition focused primarily on the experiences of

Black Americans, what they both described applies to people of color (POC) in general as they regularly experience microaggressions.

Notwithstanding that Pierce introduced the term in 1969, it continues to be an under-researched social problem (Solórzano, 1998), particularly in K–12 education. In fact, most research that does investigate microaggressions in education is focused on the experiences of undergraduate and graduate students (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, Solórzano, 2009), which engenders the need to research the ways in which secondary students experience microaggressions. Moreover, although Pierce focused solely on racial microaggressions, "it is clear that microaggressions can be expressed toward any marginalized group in our society; they can be gender-based, sexual orientation-based, class-based, or disability-based" (Sue, 2010); for the purpose of this study, however, the focus is on three forms of microaggressions—race, gender, and class—to illustrate the damaging consequences of intersecting bias and discrimination on girls of color.

Racial Microaggressions

People of color experience subordination through inferior education, housing, employment, and health services. Borrowing from Daniel Solórzano (1998), Audre Lorde (1992) and Manning Marable's (1992) definitions of racism are also used in this study. Lorde (1992) defined racism as "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (p. 496). Similarly, Marable's definition includes, "a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color" (p. 5). Solórzano argued that employing Marable's definition in tandem with Lorde's

is important because Marable shifts the discussion of racism from a Black/White discourse by incorporating multiple voices and experiences. Further, he argued that these two definitions "take the position that racism is about institutional power, and people of color in the United States have never possessed this form of power" (Solórzano, 1998, p. 124).

Generally, overt racist acts are usually not socially condoned; however, during private interactions and conversations racism manifests in covert ways thus taking the form of microaggressions (Solórzano, 1998; Sue 2010). Some examples include:

"You speak English very well."

"I'm not racist. I have several Black friends."

"I don't think of you as Mexican."

"You're not like the rest of them. You're different."

"When I look at you, I don't see color."

Derald Wing Sue (2010) argued that microaggressions are so pervasive they are often unrecognized, which highlights Pierce's (1974) contention that Black Americans (and people of color in general) "must be taught to recognize these microaggressions and construct [their] future by taking appropriate action at each instance of recognition" (p. 520). Particularly because, from birth, people of color are subjected to microaggressions from myriad people and places, including the media, peers, friends, employers, and teachers. Further, even though any one "microaggression alone may be minimally impactful . . . when they occur continuously throughout a lifespan, their cumulative nature can have major detrimental consequences" (Sue, 2010, p. 7). Most notably, Sue (2010) contended that it is not White supremacists

> who pose the greatest threat to people of color, but rather well-intentioned people, who are strongly motivated by egalitarian values, who believe in their own morality, and who experience themselves as fair-minded and decent people who would never consciously discriminate. (p. 23)

This is particularly so, given that microaggressions generally occur below the level of awareness of well-intentioned people.

In his discussion of microaggressions, Sue (2010) maintained that there is a taxonomy of racial, gender, and sexual microaggressions that includes three types of microaggression messages: (a) microassaults, or deliberate and subtle or explicit disparaging nonverbal and verbal attacks; (b) microinsults, or insensitive and rude subtle snubs of someone's racial heritage, gender, or identity; and (c) microinvalidations, or verbal or nonverbal attacks that nullify and negate the racial and gender realities of women and POC. Sue explained that, among others, the themes present in microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations include: ascription to intelligence, second-class citizenship, assumptions of criminal status, ascribing to the myth of meritocracy, and denial of individual racism. The aforementioned help to invalidate people of color and legitimize White knowledge and existence.

Sue (2010) continued by asserting that environmental microassaults may constitute displaying Nazi swastika, burning a cross, and hanging Playboy bunny pictures in a male manager's office; verbal microassaults, on the other hand, include racial epithets such as using the N-word when referring to African Americans. Further, Sue contended that microinvalidations are perhaps the most damaging of all microaggressions because of how directly and insidiously they deny the histories and realities of women and POC. Although valid, I find that what Sue is

describing are blatant acts of racism and sexism, not microaggressions. To give acts of racism and sexism a different name is to sanitize these acts and diminish their effect on women and POC.

Gender Microaggressions

The term *gender microaggressions* originated from research on racial microaggressions. Solórzano's (1998) examination of how racial and gender microaggressions impact the career paths of Chicana and Chicano scholars and is the first known empirical research study to use the term. According to Sue (2010), gender microaggressions are a direct result of the blatant, unfair and unequal treatment of women and is sexual harassment, physical abuse, and discriminatory hiring practices. What makes gender microaggressions different from sexual violence, however, is that gender microaggressions often take the form of subtle sexism and often come from well-intentioned men who would not deliberately discriminate women and who believe in gender equality (Sue, 2010).

Although they might not be intentional, acts of gender microaggression "place women at a disadvantage, infantilize or stereotype them, and treat them in such a manner as to deny them equal access and opportunity" (Sue, 2010, p. 12). Moreover, because gender microaggressions are less overt than sexual violence, they are dismissed as inconsequential, leaving victims feeling isolated (Gartner & Sterzing, 2016). Moreover, similar to experiences with sexual violence, gender microaggressions can lead to multiple health problems including depression, trauma, and lower self-esteem. Particularly because, as Sue (2010) contended, "gender microaggressions occur frequently and they devalue their contributions, objectify them as sex objects, dismiss their accomplishments, and limit their effectiveness in social, educational, employment, and

professional settings" (p. 12). Further, fueled by patriarchy and sexism, he asserted that there are many messages embedded in sexual objectification microaggressions. These include the understanding that a woman's body is not her own, her mere presence is for men's pleasure, and that women are weak and inherently dependent of others. These patriarchal messages hold true within the hidden curriculum of education.

Microaggressions in Education

In her work concerning the law and microaggressions, Davis (1989) contended that the "court was capable of . . . microaggression because cognitive habit, history, and culture left [the court] unable to hear the range of relevant voices and grapple with what reasonably might be said in the voice of discrimination's victims" (p. 1576). Davis's discussion of the courts participation with microaggressions also holds true for schools. In his study with Latinx college students, Solórzano (1998) found that students felt out of place—a feeling that can be construed as resulting from subtle forms of race, gender, and class discrimination. Students cited the lack of professors of color as fueling their feelings of not belonging in academia because they were ignored and made to feel invisible. In addition to feelings of alienation, Solórzano concluded that students were stigmatized as minority students, which resulted in faculty having lower expectations of them, which speaks true in K–12 education (Oakes, 1985). Lowered expectations were not only true because of ethnicity, but students also felt them because of their gender and language, which manifested in faculty members and fellow students not listening to them or taking their work seriously, because of Spanish accents or because they were female.

In classroom settings Sue (2010) explained, "male students are more frequently called upon to speak or answer questions by their teachers than are female students. The hidden

message in these microaggressions is that women's ideas and contributions are less worthy than their male counterparts" (p. 12). Not only do students experience microaggressions that attack their gender, but they also find their language, culture, and ethnicity under attack. In fact, Latinx students frequently reject school because experiences with microaggressions leave them feeling as though they do not belong (Cooper, 2012). Moreover, Latina students report being less likely to feel a sense of belonging in school (Cooper, 2012), which is why it is critical that they have access to counterhegemonic spaces that help them make sense of their schooling experiences. A doctoral fellow in Solórzano's (1998) study said it best, when she said:

> I don't need to be raped to be scared of walking in certain areas at night. Likewise, I don't need to be called a greaser to wonder what my professors or fellow students are thinking about regarding the quality of my answers or my work. Something doesn't necessarily have to happen directly to me to know that sexism and racism exists. (p. 130)

Although Solórzano's work is primarily about the experiences of Latinx students in higher education, students in K–12 schools also feel alienated and discredited because of their gender and ethnicity.

Spanish equals deficient. Latinx students often experience microaggressions that label them deficient for speaking Spanish. Students in Julio Cammarota's (2014) qualitative case study were part of a group—the Social Justice Education Project (SJEP)—that provided them opportunities to document experiences of microaggression as they went through their school day. Students' journal entries demonstrated that they routinely heard '"Speak English; we are in America'" (Cammarota, 2014, p. 329) from their teachers as they walked down their high school's hallways and felt ridiculed by these assertions. Although, students were provided with a

counterhegemonic safe space to voice their experiences, it is not clear that this group also provided the language and tools necessary to resist those experiences of microaggression, seeing that students would often fail their classes instead of asking for help or finding alternate ways to navigate those hateful spaces (Cammarota, 2014). Perhaps for these students, failing was the only way to resist and cope with experiences of microaggression.

Conversely, in her *testimonio,* Celia Alvarez recalled that students, who had a good command of the English language, like she did when she was in school, were “privileged” and separated from other students because of their “difference” (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). This blatant segregation created a culture in which students perpetuated dominant ideology by inadvertently internalizing that English-dominant students were academically and intellectually superior to Spanish-dominant students (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). Under such conditions, some students may succeed at navigating the school system whereas many others do not.

Contrastingly, as Teresa Sosa and Kimberley Gomez’s (2012) qualitative case study demonstrated, Latinx students’ resilience bolstered when teachers view students’ bilingualism and biculturalism as assets in their learning. Unfortunately, educators often failed to recognize that, as child translators, bilingual students were “placed in adult roles to negotiate business, health, family, and school transactions” (Prieto & Villenas, 2012, p. 416), so they carried more knowledge than they were given credit for. And yet, women’s *testimonios* in Pérez Huber and Cueva’s (2012) study illustrated that when students’ knowledge is recognized, when their language and culture are not only accepted, but also celebrated via counterspaces, young women begin to feel a sense of belonging and empowerment as well as exercise resistance and resilience.

Unfortunately, however, Latinas do not always have access to these spaces and instead have to find other ways to resolve who they are and where they belong.

Navigating microaggressions. In addition to being seen as deficient because of their language, Latinas must navigate a myriad of intersecting microaggressions that result when class, cultural, and gendered inequalities collide. One example is apparent in the manner in which working class Latinas are often perceived as irresponsible because of their gender. Latina students, more so than their male counterparts, habitually hear '"Pay attention in class . . . [and] don't get pregnant'" as a recipe for success (Hyams, 2006, p. 93). Most troubling is that Latinas are often forced to deal with school counselors and sit in classrooms with teachers who tell them that they are going to get pregnant and drop out of school "just like their mothers" (Cammarota, 2014; Taylor & Fernandez-Bergersen, 2015). At the same time, Latina students' families teach them to equate womanhood with modesty and chastity (Hyams, 2006), which differs greatly from the narratives they hear in school. This further problematizes their sense of self and belonging within the *Borderlands* (Anzaldúa, 2002), where Latinas reside.

In her *testimonio,* Linda Prieto (2012) recalled her family members' sexist rhetoric that labeled her a "whore" because she chose to leave her home not to get married but to go to college; simultaneously, Prieto's mother emboldened her to pursue her academic dreams. Similarly, Ruth Behar (2001) discussed the dissonance between school life and home culture through her poetic *testimonio* that delineates a young Latina's journey to womanhood by learning from her mother to suppress her sexuality, ignore her body, and fear men (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001); regrettably, this pilgrimage is all too familiar for young women of color.

Experiences like these posit Latinas as women who are more interested in having a family than pursuing an education (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001); thus, reinforcing the notion that they inherently do not belong in academia. And yet, as Elizabeth Cruz Godinez (2006) alluded to in her poetic *testimonio* "I Am," Latinas crave academic success; she wrote: "I dream that I will get far/I try to represent my people/I hope that you can see my goals/I am a strong-willed Chicana" (p. 14). Stories such as the aforementioned epitomize the importance of having educators like Cruz (2012) and access to counterhegemonic spaces, so that young Chicana/Latina women can make sense of their school, home, community, and social lives.

Critical loving mentorship. Weiston-Serdan (2017) contended, a critical mentoring program for young girls of color must be centered on the idea that the mentoring process "must not only make a difference for the young [women] in schools, but also radically change the way schools operate for young [women]" (p. 85). In order to do so, schools must recognize that the work requires they address—and help young women address—the "systemic and institutional challenges of race, class, gender, sexuality, ableism, and so on" (Weiston-Serdan, 2017, p. 9) that are endemic in schools and society as opposed to focusing solely on increasing attendance, test scores, grades, behavior, and other quantifiable metrics of success. Equally important, schools must recruit and train adults who will act as mentors and not authoritarians, meaning that the school will probably have to look beyond faculty and staff, as power relations have already been established. Moreover, Weiston-Serdan (2017) argued, mentors should be women of color, schools must not be afraid to look at community elders to act as mentors, and each student should have more than one mentor as a means to provide a "diverse mentoring 'village' to produce the necessary support system" (p. 17).

Although representation matters, simply recruiting women of color will not provide young women with the type of mentorship and guidance they need. In fact, Berta-Ávila (2014) asserted, "Speaking the same language or sharing similar backgrounds is not sufficient, if the pedagogy enacted in the classroom and school community perpetuates oppressive values" (p. 278). All too often, students of color are met by faculty and staff of color who have internalized racist, classist, and sexist notions of the dominant culture and reinforce them through the hidden curriculum. Thus, in order for critical mentorship to be effective, the curriculum and school environment must reflect the realities of students. Only then can schools offer an "environment of choice, voice, understanding, reflection, dialogue, empowerment, access, and power" (Berta-Ávila, 2014, p. 287) where students can develop the agency to act and advocate for themselves. However, Berta-Ávila warned, agency cannot be actualized via isolated incidents; rather, it is developed through authentic everyday teacher/student interactions. Berta-Ávila (2014) further explained, offering students of color an environment where they can recognize their own reality and "how it exists within the White hegemonic framework opens the door for understanding how they are swayed by dominant theories that contributes to their own oppression" (p. 286).

Chicana/Latinas specifically call for a third space, a Xicana sacred space (Diaz Soto et al., 2009), where women become the subjects rather than objects of history (Pérez, 1999) and can engage in the path of *conocimiento* in order to arrive at the healing state of Mestiza consciousness, where they "envision the erasure of marginalization" (Diaz Soto et al., p. 760), and where "we change the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 102). It is particularly important for students of color because, although they are "holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as though their histories,

experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misrepresented, or omitted in formal educational settings" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 106).

Voicing the Unspoken

As the literature shows, for centuries, Latinas have survived systemic sexual violence that has translated into a lifetime of sexual victimization for many women. The existing conditions of Latinx women are often complicated by sexism, racism, Catholicism, and immigrant status, as they influence survivor's ability to come forward about their experiences. Further, much like the women in their lives, Latinx girls experience race, class, and gender simultaneously and lack power and privilege when dealing with the dominant culture (Letendre & Rozas, 2014), which places them at higher risk for sexual abuse. In school, Chicana/Latina youth are further victimized, so they are left without safe spaces for self-actualization, which is why it is critical that they have access to counterhegemonic spaces that help them make sense of their schooling experiences. The aforementioned, coupled with the lack of literature documenting the experiences with sexist microaggressions as experienced by Chicana/Latina youth, points to the necessity of this critical narrative study.

By listening, documenting, and honoring the stories of Chicana/Latina high school students, this study sought to create a counterhegemonic space for voicing the unspoken; for their silenced words and experiences with sexual harassment and violence to not only be heard, but to provide a foundation for educational change and a path to healing. Healing, Méndez-Negrete (2006) explained, does not always occur in the process of telling, but rather in the reclaiming of survival. More specifically, Méndez-Negrete (2006) elucidated, healing begins to materialize when survivors recognize that they did all they "could to stay alive under the

circumstances" (p. 185). As such, this anticipates drawing from their experiences and insights in ways that can help educators better address the academic and emotional needs of Chicana/Latina students by transforming the microaggressions that negatively impact their lives in school.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Ahogadas, escupimos el oscuro.	*Drowning, we spit the darkness.*
Peleando con nuestra propia sombra	*Fighting with our own shadows*
el silencio nos sepulta.	*the silence buries us.*

Gloria Anzaldúa (2012)

When I read Gloria Anzaldúa's poem above, I thought about my grandmother, *mi abuelita Irene*. She seldom shared stories about her life, but when these narratives did materialize, my *abuelita Irene* spoke with unobstructed candor. Her anecdotes were lively, colorful, painful, and necessary. I soon understood that although these were the stories of her life, absent in all of them was her voice. *Mi abuelita* spent her entire life surrounded by people, yet her tales were filled with a sense of loneliness. Her voice felt distant, and I often wondered about everything that was left untold. Similar to Anzaldúa's (2012) poem, my grandmother was buried with her silence, and I am not sure I ever truly knew her. In turn, with the exception of folk tales I have heard over the years, I know little about my ancestors or the land I come from. The angst of not knowing is what drives my desire to listen, document, and honor the stories of young Latinas.

Although when Anzaldúa wrote the poem, she was speaking specifically about gendered language, the same holds true when women and girls are denied the opportunity to tell their stories. Anzaldúa (2012) explained that when language is a male discourse, women are robbed of their female being; similarly, when women and girls' stories are left untold not only do they lose their female being, but they also lose a part of their humanity. The first line of Anzaldúa's poem,

"*Ahogadas, escupimos el oscuro,"* describes the desperation and strength women live with. Even when drowning, women "spit the darkness" that they have experienced, yet are told they cannot speak. That silence buries them; as a result, there is an ahistorical approach to women's lives and their humanity is not fully recognized. The first line tells of women's desire to tell their stories, and I believe that this longing exists because women from past generations want us, the future generations, to know their lives and their struggles. Thus, this poem serves as a call to action to ensure that silence does not bury the young women with whom I work.

This study does not aim to coalesce all experiences of sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions as experienced by Chicana/Latina youth. Rather, the research methodology employed in this study allows for specific stories to be told for the purpose of contributing to the discourse on educational policy as this relates to youth of color matriculated from public schools. More specifically, although qualitative research began to focus on capturing student voice beginning in the 1990s (Casey, 1995; Davidson, 1996; Miron & Lauria, 1998), studies centered on capturing the lived experiences of Latinx youth are of particular importance. This is true because in reviewing the literature on Latinx students, Marcos Pizarro (1999) explained that the research addressing critical problems of Latinx youth in schools does not include their point of view to any substantial degree. As a result, students are posited as the objects of educational research, and we are left with an incomplete picture of the educational experiences of Latinx youth as they are often absent from or silenced within this discourse (Fernández, 2002). With that in mind, this study aims to give voice to the young women whose narratives have been left untold.

This chapter discusses both critical narratives, *testimonios,* and *pláticas y encuentros* as they guide this study. This is followed by a discussion of the research methods employed in this study, including research study and design, participant selection and description, as well as data collection and analysis. Finally, delimitations and limitations of the study are discussed.

Research Questions

In an effort to conduct a study that honors young women's voices and stories as well as contributes to unveiling the experiences of sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions on the schooling experiences of Chicana/Latina high school students, the following overarching questions guide the research:

- What are the experiences of sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions of Chicana/Latina high school graduates?
- How do Chicana/Latina high school graduates speak about these experiences and how do these affect how they feel about themselves, their school participation, and their understanding of self?
- What suggestions and recommendations do Chicana/Latina high school graduates believe would make the school environment and the society truly responsive to their experiences with sexual harassment?

Methodological Framework

While reviewing the literature, I encountered several studies that document instances of sexual harassment on middle and high school campuses. Most studies (Hill & Silva, 2005; Hill & Kearl, 2011; Young et al., 2009; Leaper et al., 2013; Lipson, 2001) however, focused on reporting quantitative data that spoke about the prevalence and impact of sexual harassment on

middle and high school youth. Fewer studies focused on authentically capturing the voices of young women of color. Thus, in this study I aim to fill that void by employing *testimonios*, *pláticas, y encuentros* to capture the experiences of participants in their own voices.

Although quantitative and mixed methods studies, like those present in the literature review, are instrumental to understanding the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions young women experience, they do little to capture the complexity of meaning embodied within young women's narratives. Stories collected in this study provide the researcher the opportunity to listen and learn about participants' experiences with sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions in school as well as identify themes that speak to how participants' feel about themselves, their school participation, and sense of social agency.

Critical Narratives

Narrative research is an interdisciplinary methodological approach that is practiced in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, education, and cultural studies (Casey, 1995). This approach includes various research practices including personal narratives, narrative interviews, autoethnographies, *testimonios,* storytelling, an analysis of personal stories, and the relationship of these narratives to larger societal conditions that helped shape them (Casey, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As a methodology, critical narratives are instrumental in academic research, as they serve to "shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414), in addition to helping explain a phenomenon of human experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the foremost reason for engaging in narrative research is that people are storytelling creatures who lead storied lives; thus, through narrative inquiry, researchers study the ways humans experience life. Seeing that this study aims to

understand Chicana/Latina youths' experiences with sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions in school, narrative inquiry is most appropriate.

Moreover, storytelling allows marginalized participants to make their story public, enables them to reflect on their lived experiences, helps to destabilize the dominant discourse, and can be transformative as well as empowering experiences for the storyteller (Fernández, 2002). Additionally, storytelling "can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Through this study, I hoped to help strengthen those traditions within the young women with whom I worked. Further, the narratives employed in this study help ensure, as DeVault (1990) explained, that this part of participants' lives does not disappear; rather, ensure that they are "included in the language of the account" (p. 101). Furthermore, critical narratives help encapsulate the fact that "naming is political" (DeVault, 1990, p. 110) and, by sharing their stories, participants are engaging in a political act. Further, Mary Kay Kramp (2004) explained, narrative inquiry privileges the storyteller and in doing so, unlike traditional research, reconfigures the interviewer and participant relationship to one in which the researcher hands authority to the storyteller. Thus, she contended, it assumes personal involvement as a condition for researchers to collect and interpret participants' narratives and requires that the researcher pay close attention to what participants have to say.

Thus, interview questions or prompts are broad and open ended as well as structured and unstructured to give participants the opportunity to express themselves freely and extensively. Moreover, prompts must allow participants personal freedom and choice because, as Kramp (2004) explained, it gives each participant the power to construct her own narrative, resulting in a greater understanding from the telling.

Testimonios

A *testimonio* is a history told by a narrator as the protagonist or witness of factual events; it allows the storyteller to create knowledge and move toward liberation (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Although it is difficult to indicate the birth of *testimonios*, they have been accepted as a literary mode since the 1970s, "in large part as a result of the liberation efforts and the geopolitical resistance movements to imperialism in Third World nations" (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 526). Chicana scholars view testimonios as a tool that makes them "agents of knowledge" because, as Patricia Hill Collins (1991) explained, they allow Chicanas/Latinas to "'speak to the importance that oppression, [and] . . . knowledge play in empowering oppressed people'" (as cited in Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 527). More specifically, scholars see *testimonios* as "an effort by the disenfranchised to assert themselves as political subjects through others…and in the process to emphasize particular aspects of their collective identity" (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Testimonios differ from other forms of narrative research practices in that it "engages the reader to understand and establish a sense of solidarity as a first step toward social change" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Within the field of education, Delgado Bernal et al. contended, researchers are employing *testimonios* to confront educational inequities within and systemic oppression of Latinx communities. With that in mind, a *testimonio* is a process, a product, pedagogy, and can be transformative for both storytellers and listeners.

As a process, or methodology, the act of giving testimony—or *testimoniar*—serves to recover previously untold or silenced experiences, also termed *papelitos guardados* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). This methodology is primarily concerned with giving voice to those who

have been silenced and the product, much like the stories themselves, can take different forms including text, video, performance, or audio. The varied forms *testimonios* take aid in the process of transforming the self and society and have the potential to reach myriad audiences.

As a pedagogical tool, Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) explained, *testimonio* "lends itself to a form of teaching and learning that brings the mind, body, spirit, and political urgency to the fore" (p. 368). Moreover, *testimonios* bridge together critical consciousness and the desire to take action as a means to connect with others with love in order to bring collective healing. Listening, Delgado Bernal et al. further argued, is central to the practice of *testimonios* because in doing so the listener is to engage the storyteller, or *testimonialista*, in an effort to understand and reveal that which is most essential. Most transformative is that when people are open to listening to *testimonios* that differ from their own realities, through reciprocal storytelling, this pedagogy can elicit personal growth.

Influenced by Paulo Freire's (2012) *conscientização*— "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35)—*testimonios* are used as tools to construct knowledge and for liberation from oppressed realities (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Here, writing and telling are not only practices of liberation, but also political statements as readers and listeners become aware of the lives of the oppressed (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). More in depth, *testimonios* embody the pedagogy of the oppressed, as they allow the "oppressed [to] unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation" (Freire, 2012, p. 54), via readers, listeners, and members of the oppressed community, the use of *testimonios*

"becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation" (p. 54) and speak to the vocation of being fully human.

Testimonios provide storytellers with a voice to move from oppression and marginalization and become empowered survivors, which is why using *testimonios* to capture the experiences of participants is central to uncovering how these experiences affect how these young women feel about themselves, their school participation, and their social agency. Moreover, through the process of telling, participants might be able to transcend pain and move toward healing; similarly, listeners and participants alike could push for societal transformation. Most importantly, although a *testimonio* is told through one voice, it carries the voice of many and could help bridge love between students and schooling, given that, as hooks (2003) explained, love "is the foundation on which every learning community can be created" (p. 137).

Pláticas y Encuentros

Pláticar, or to talk, has been central to the work of Chicana/Latina feminist theorist as it allows for sharing *testimonios* about lived realities. Godinez (2006) described *pláticas* as individual or group conversations, which she termed *encuentros*, and are a "way to gather family and cultural knowledge through communications of thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations" (p. 30). Central to the use of *pláticas y encuentros* as methodology is the importance of relationship and reciprocity between facilitator and participants (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). It also requires the facilitator of the *plática* to be open and vulnerable with participants to allow for theorization. As such, *pláticas* are not simply used to obtain information from participants, but rather "to allow them to assess or theorize about their own lived experiences" (p. 109).

Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) explained, there are five principles that guide Chicana feminist *plática* methodology. The first principle is that this methodology draws on Chicana/Latina feminist theory, which draws "attention to the multiple ways systems of oppression effect the daily navigations of some people, to the benefit of privileged others" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 109). Second, *pláticas* as methodology honor participants as co-constructors of knowledge and "is grounded in respeto for the contributor as a holder and creator of knowledge" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 111). Third, a *plática* methodology connects everyday lived experiences and research inquiry. In other words, instead of dismissing participants' lived experiences as trivial or unrelated to the purpose of the study, a *plática* methodology "draws them in as part and parcel of research inquiry" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 112). Fourth, *pláticas* as methodology provide a potential space for healing. Traditionally practiced by *curanderas*, healers, Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) explained, by "nature, the plática is a spiritual act, for the very power to listen fully with all five senses and healing comes from the curandera's own spiritual connections" (p. 113). The fifth, and last, principle of *pláticas* as methodology is that it "relies on relations of reciprocity and vulnerability and researcher reflexivity" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 114). This means that trust is pivotal, researchers must be open and honest with participants and they must be willing to share what they ask of participants.

Ultimately, by employing *pláticas y encuentros*, it was my hope that in storytelling participants could participate in the political act of naming their experiences, construct conditions where they could subsequently create their own stories for themselves, and also change the stories they live by (Clandinin, 2006).

Research Design

Participant Selection

Beginning the participant selection process was unique, as I created a distinctive bond with potential participants. All young women selected identified as Chicana/Latina, were 18+ years of age, and graduated from the high school where I taught, which is located in South East Los Angeles. Because of the nature of the study, I utilized a purposeful sample of convenience as I had built a strong teacher-student relationship with the young women and, through Girl Talks—an afterschool program I advised—and papers they wrote in class, they had shared their stories with me including experiences with sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions in school. Further, for this particular study, employing a purposeful sample of convenience helped alleviate some of the difficulties with gaining access to institutions and individuals that Flick (2014) outlined.

The initial list included 11 potential participants who graduated from high school. I contacted all 11 participants regarding the study. In addition to the aforementioned qualifications, I required that the data collection timeline and meeting locations did not pose a problem for participants and myself. The study required that participants be available for a one-hour *encuentro* with all participants, a minimum one-hour individual *plática*, and a minimum one-hour member-checking *encuentro,* equating two-and-a-half to four hours of their time. The 11 potential participants received an Informed Consent form (Appendix A) and note expressing my thanks for participating in this initial step of the study. The participants who returned the Informed Consent form were invited to the initial *encuentro* with all participants.

Setting

All participants, while enrolled in high school, were residents of Southeast Los Angeles—a region of Los Angeles County—that houses 26 different neighbourhoods (The Los Angeles Times, n.d.). More than half (69.3%) of the population in Southeast Los Angeles identified as Latinx (The Los Angeles Times, n.d.), which is not too far removed from the county (48.4%) as a whole (United States Census). Seeing that all participants had recently graduated from high school, data collection took place during the summer months before participants left for college or while they were home visiting from college. The initial *encuentro* occurred in a conference room secured by the researcher that was accessible to all selected participants. All *pláticas* took place at an agreed-upon time, in that same conference room, as participants' all expressed feeling comfortable in that space. The *pláticas* were followed by an *encuentro*, at an agreed upon time, in that same conference room. The purpose of this *encuentro* was to clarify points and expand on their stories.

Data Collection

***Encuentro*.** During the one-hour *encuentro,* I thoroughly explained the data collection process to participants, helped them become familiar with the time commitment their participation required, proposed that they select the pseudonym I used when I wrote each individual *testimonio*, and addressed the importance of anonymity. I also used this time to answer any questions they had about the process and their participation in this study. Additionally, I provided them with a sample timeline of their individual participation to help them determine if they were willing to and had the time to participate in the study.

Participants were also asked questions (Appendix C) regarding their experiences in high school and recommendations for positive high school experiences.

The primary purpose of the *encuentro* was to allow the girls to articulate what helped them navigate high school. Conducting this *encuentro* helped me honor Flick's (2014) recommendation to provide participants "sufficient and adequate information . . . as a basis for giving . . . consent" (54). All participants were thanked for their time, consideration, and participation in the study. The researcher then contacted—via phone or email—participants who expressed interest in participating in the study to schedule their initial one-hour *plática*.

The *encuentro* was audio taped in an effort to capture the entirety of participants' stories and ensure the integrity of their voices. Moreover, audio taping the *encuentro* allowed me, the researcher, to honor the importance of listening, which is a special feature of Dale Spender's discussion of "woman talk" (DeVault, 1990). The audio tape was transcribed in its entirety by the transcription service Verba Link.

***Pláticas*.** The *testimonios* in this study were created from individual *pláticas* with participants. I employed *pláticas* because I asked the young women to "remember and recount their experiences" (Flick, 2014, p. 265) with sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions in school. Before their *plática*, participants were presented with a Personal Data Form (Appendix B). on which they selected their own pseudonym and wrote their personal biographies. I started each *plática* by asking participants to speak about her life history as well as referenced information the she included in the Personal Data Form. The *plática* organically progressed after this initial inquiry and participants were asked to talk about their experiences with sexual harassment and sexism in school. When it seemed helpful

to the participant, a structured prompt was used (Appendix C). The researcher also inquired about their school participation and social agency. Additionally, participants were asked about suggestions and recommendations they had for their school environment and society to be truly responsive to their experiences. Through this process, I honored the fact that although a *testimonio* is told through one voice, it carries the voice of many (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012), in this case countless other girls who cannot tell their story.

The sessions were audio taped in an effort to capture the entirety of participants' stories and ensure the integrity of their voices. Moreover, audio taping each participant's individual *testimonio* allowed the researcher to honor the importance of listening, which is a special feature of Dale Spender's discussion of "woman talk" (DeVault, 1990). Audio tapes were transcribed in their entirety by the transcription service Verba Link.

Member-Checking *Encuentro*. After reviewing the audio tapes, transcriptions, and my notes from the *pláticas* and *encuentro,* more prompts were developed to address gaps in participants' stories and provide an opportunity for them to expand on their *testimonios*. Additionally, I shared how I interpret poignant parts of their accounts to ensure that my interpretation was correct and that their story was told in a way that is comfortable for them.

This *encuentro* was also audio taped in an effort to capture the entirety of participants' stories and ensure the integrity of their voices. Moreover, audio taping the *encuentro* allowed me, the researcher, to honor the importance of listening, which is a special feature of Dale Spender's discussion of "woman talk" (DeVault, 1990). The audio tape was transcribed in its entirety by the transcription service Verba Link.

Coding and Analysis of the Data

As aforementioned, *encuentros* and *pláticas* were audio taped and transcribed in their entirety. Transcriptions were carried out by Verba Link, a transcription service. Copies of transcribed person-to-person *pláticas* and *encuentros* were reviewed by the researcher, in order to code ideas and notate themes present. Data were manually coded with the use of color codes to identify themes. By highlighting recurring words, phrases, and sentences, the researcher was able to discern themes and create a thematic structure.

Participants were shown initial narrative transcripts during the member-checking *encuentro* as an opportunity to verify facts. Member-checking also offered an opportunity to fill gaps in participants' *testimonios*, gain feedback in my initial interpretation of their stories, and procure clarification where needed. Audio of member-checking *encuentro* was also transcribed by Verba Link. Data analysis occurred after the *pláticas*, *encuentros*, and field notes were coded and thematic structure created.

Audio tapes and transcripts were studied in their entirety to understand what was said; comprehend what each question and reply meant to each participant and the researcher; and capture what the researcher learned from the data (Briggs, 1986). After transcripts were coded, data analysis started. In an effort to develop clear themes and honor each participant's story, field notes and transcripts from each *plática* and *encuentro* were analyzed individually. Further, in-depth analytical notes were taken during the analysis process. The *testimonios* collected were analyzed through a Chicana/Latina feminist and critical pedagogy lenses.

As Kramp (2004) suggested, I paid close attention to the language each participant used in her *testimonio* and engaged the narrative in its entirety before addressing individual

excerpts that stood out to me. By attending carefully to each story, I became familiar with each participants' inflection, language, and story as a means to uncover themes in their individual narratives and help in identifying shared themes in participants' *testimonios*. Moreover, this process helped in describing the social phenomenon this study aimed to understand.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

The delimitations of this study included the following: all participants self-identify as Chicana and/or Latina; they are all recent high school graduates from the high school where I taught; most participated in Girl Talks; and all participants were students in one of my English classes. Although some may view these delimitations as problematic, because of the sensitive nature of this study, it was important that participants and I already had an established positive working relationship. These delimitations aided in that process. There are some, from a traditional research lens, who might consider the methodology of *testimonios, pláticas, y encuentros* for my study as a limitation. However, the rich data obtained from the young women in this study reflect greater depth than could be obtained through a method that, although may include many more participants, cannot engage the deeper concerns related to the phenomenon being studied. Assumptions that informed this study include: participants remembered their experiences in high school, they answered honestly, anonymity and confidentiality were protected (participants selected their own pseudonyms), and participants could withdraw at any time.

Conclusion

As a methodology, narrative inquiry allows researchers to gather data about participants' lived experiences, which is important and necessary work. *Testimonios* specifically, by their mere existence are a challenge to the status quo, as they bring to light marginalized voices that would have otherwise been silenced and dismissed by the power structures in academia (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Most importantly, *testimonios* call researchers and storytellers to "reclaim solidarity within one another" (p. 371), and through this study I hope to have honored that commitment. My challenge was to ensure that each young woman's story is told in a way that honor and respects her humanity.

CHAPTER 4

AS TOLD THROUGH OUR VOICES: *LOS TESTIMONIOS*

Healing begins as we begin to re/member the violations, as we give voice to the atrocities committed in the name of love, and as we name the traumatic events that marked our lives. As we make our secrets public, we reclaim our bodies and our spirits.

Yvette Flores-Ortiz (2001)

This chapter introduces the *testimonios* of six Chicana/Latina youth participants comprising this study. At the time of the *pláticas*, three had completed their first year of college and three had just celebrated their high school graduation. These *pláticas* and *encuentros* took place during the Summer of 2017. In concert with Flores-Oritz's words, the hope that drove this study is that through these *pláticas* and *encuentros,* young women could name "traumatic events that marked [their] lives," reclaim their bodies, and begin to heal.

Participants

Participants differed in socio-economic status, citizenship status, and ethnic identification. Table 1 highlights the participants who inform this study. To protect their identity, participants self-selected or were assigned pseudonyms. This chapter begins with each young woman's *testimonio* derived from our *pláticas,* followed by our *encuentros.*

Table 1

Participants' Personal Information

Name	Identity	Year graduated high school	Age	Place of Birth
Alicia	Chicana	2017	18	Sylmar, CA
Mia	Chicana	2017	18	Lakewood, CA
Bianca	Latina	2017	18	Los Angeles, CA
Grace	Latina	2016	19	El Salvador
Laura	Latina	2016	19	Los Angeles, CA
Ximena	Chicana	2016	19	Monterey Park, CA

The *Testimonios*

Alicia

Alicia was a U.S.-born, self-identified Chicana from Southern California. She grew up in a Spanish-speaking, family-oriented, religious household with her mother and brother. Alicia described herself as a strong, smart, kind, and determined young woman. She spoke of her home life as "just us three . . . Like, holidays, usually just us three." She described her brother as "acting like the man in the family," and from a young age being "really overprotective" of Alicia and her mom. Amid tears, she described her absent father as an exceptionally conservative devout Catholic who financially provided but was away with his second family. Although not always present, she shared that he supported her academic aspirations, but did not allow her to have a boyfriend because "expectations are higher" for her.

Alicia characterized her mother as her best friend and shared that she "has more of a say than [her] dad does." In fact, unbeknownst to her father, Alicia's mom "let [her] have a

boyfriend," but shared that "it's kinda scary ‘cause if [her dad] ever finds out, he's probably gonna be upset," seeing that he forbade dating until she graduates from college. Although her mother was her best friend and kept Alicia's relationship a secret, she held different rules for Alicia and her brother. When speaking of this imbalance Alicia shared:

> My brother's allowed to go out a bit more than I am. Or I mean my mom tells him to go—be home by a certain time. But if he comes home a little bit later, she brushes it off a bit more. When I go out and it's just a group of girls, they're always texting and calling, like, "Are you guys okay? Be home at this time." And then, when I'm not home at this certain time, even if I'm a minute late, then all hell breaks loose.

Her closeness with her mother was exemplified when she recounted her experience with learning how to speak and read English. Alicia explained that she had attended a bilingual preschool where they separated students based on English language proficiency:

> They had an English table and a Spanish table. I remember, once, I had friends in the English table, so I went to go sit with them. And then, the teacher told me that I didn't belong there because I didn't know how to speak English, and it was—I get emotional. I don't know why.

Tearful, Alicia continued:

> She told me that I couldn't speak English that well, so I remember going home and telling my mom. She got really emotional ‘cause she didn't know how to help me. I remember after that happened, my mom took me to the library, and she tried her best. This is emotional. Just gonna take a little breather here. She, um, tried her best to teach a language that was foreign to her.

Alicia then described carrying a backpack filled with papers she could not read. She detailed how everywhere she went, when she found a paper on the floor, she'd pick it up and deposited in her backpack. Alicia would later use these scraps of paper to write on and practice until she eventually picked up the language and "got to sit at the English table." She spoke of her transition from the Spanish table to the English table with delight, "I felt proud that my mom taught me rather than the teachers."

Teachers made school difficult for Alicia to navigate. She recalled that her teacher was "nice to some group of students, the ones who knew English more." Alicia explained that her teacher "was more serious when it came to talking to" Spanish-speaking students, and although she described her preschool as "bilingual," she noted that students there never learned together: English-speaking students and Spanish-speaking students were always segregated. Her elementary school experience fared better, and she became "excited to learn new things." Smiling, she recalled her middle school years as "really great." Alicia described herself as "one of the top students" and spoke about caring teachers who tutored students who struggled with the material.

> Teachers would kind of pick up on certain things and they would hold us back after school or after class and ask us, "Did you understand the material?" And you would feel more confident to say, "Okay, I didn't understand this." And they would offer a time during lunch or during nutrition for us to come in and get extra help.

Unlike high school, she continued, students felt as though they received that type of support from all teachers, not a select few. Alicia said high school "sucked." She described teachers as

"different" and said that "there's just some teachers that you could tell didn't really care about you as much. I feel like it kinda seemed like they didn't even like their job."

Growing up a girl. For Alicia, growing up a girl meant a push toward rebellion. Not because she wanted to, but because she was not a rule follower, and being a girl, according to Alicia, was comprised of many rules:

> From the start, you're always expected to be girly, fragile, and pretty. You can't play with cars, you can't like boy cartoons, like *Spiderman*. You're always expected to have your hair done and wear dresses. And then, as you got older, you're expected to wear makeup and paint your nails. I hate knowing that people expect me not to do something. Even if I don't want to do it, I just don't like knowing that people don't want me to do it. So that just makes me want to do it even more. I guess I don't really like to follow the rules as much.

In school, being a girl "sucks." Particularly in high school because that is when "sex culture" emerges. According to Alicia, during this time, girls are supposed to wear makeup and have more "developed bodies." If girls' bodies are not "fully developed," like Alicia described her body, then boys and girls "make you feel like you're still a little girl. Like, that's cute, but it's not sexy, or it's not hot." Alicia also spoke of this time as frustrating because society teaches that girls

> aren't really supposed to be seen as sexual beings. You're not supposed to crave it. You're not supposed to want it. And when you do or when you say that you do, usually, the boys are like, "Oh, she's a ho." Or, "She's a slut. She's easy." But when guys express themselves as sexual beings, then all the guys are like, "Oh, props." Or "Good job," or

> they say their stories and get a pat on the back. But then, when girls say it, it's like, "Oh, you did that? Like, you're not supposed to do that. You're a ho."

Hearing young women described as "hoes" made Alicia angry because "we're humans and those feelings are natural." She continued, "I just never understood why a guy could do it, but girls couldn't, especially because the female body is always praised in the media." For Alicia, social media, specifically, added a layer of cruelty to being a girl in school:

> Students—usually boys—would make pages on Instagram and they would call them "Exposing [high school name] hoes." They would post a bunch of pictures of naked girls who had sent those pictures to boys. These images would get around everywhere, and it would really torment the girls that were on there, especially because everybody knew about them. And then, everybody would just talk about it in our school and even schools around the area. So it was really bad.

Alicia recounted that young women who were victims of this torment felt "really sad," because they choose to send nude photos to a specific person whom they trusted and now everyone knew what their body looked like, which was something deeply personal.

Although widespread, Alicia explained that students did not report these acts to administrators because it was widely known that "they couldn't really do much about it." In fact, Alicia continued, administrators always "took the dress code more serious than anything else." She spoke of school administrators being more concerned with students following the school's uniform policy than ensuring that every student was "in a good classroom, learning what they were supposed to learn, and being taught in a good way." Alicia explained that school

administrators' relentless concern for students' attire helped uncover where their real interest lay: the school's reputation.

Traveling to and from school was particularly troubling for Alicia. She recalled regularly being cat-called by "old men" and described the experience as "really disgusting 'cause I could be your daughter." Alicia continued, "I don't know how to describe it. Like, it's just really nasty. It just disgusts me enough to the point where I can't even put it into words." She explained her frustration with not "even" being able to walk to school unencumbered because she is a girl and said that she started to feel as though it were her fault:

> Maybe it is what I'm wearing or the way I walk or the way I perceive myself. Um, I started feeling like it was my fault because it would happen so often. I didn't really understand why it would happen. But it just didn't—it didn't feel good.

Hypervigilance and the dress code. Being hypervigilant about her appearance continued once she got to school because Alicia felt that staff members sexualized girls' bodies. She described parent volunteers and school administrators detaining girls who wore shorts and whose bodies were "more developed"—even when they followed the school's "three-finger" rule—and refuse to let them continue with their school day until a family member delivered "appropriate" clothing.

One morning a staff member stopped Alicia at the school's entrance and told her that her shorts were too short. To that Alicia retorted: '"Are you serious?' So I just walked away because I was like, 'I'm not gonna have this conversation with you because they are not too short.'" This ordeal, however, was not limited to shorts. Alicia recalled an experience with wearing jeans ripped at the knee:

> The rule is you could have ripped jeans if they're ripped from the knees. Like, the knee down is fine. They were ripped from the knees, and they—usually parent volunteers or administrators—were telling me that they're way too ripped. And I was like, "Well they're ripped from the knees, and the rules say that I could wear this, so I'm gonna wear this."

Alicia described the experience as annoying because she could not understand how a knee or "a piece of thigh is provocative in any way." Not only were these experiences annoying for Alicia, they were also uncomfortable. She recalled, the dean and the principal

> would stop us and say that we were showing too much skin, especially because they were men telling me that, it felt—it felt really nasty because it's like, 'Why are you looking in those areas if you're seeing that in that way?'

These experiences with administrators were particularly uncomfortable for Alicia because she only recalled one experience where boys in school "looked at [her] that way." Thus, for her, "it felt wrong" because school administrators are not "really supposed to be looking in those areas." These incidents caused Alicia to be more hypervigilant about what she wore. She described assessing her outfits and telling herself, "Okay, I can't really wear this because then they're probably gonna look at me different." Alicia reflected, "what girls are wearing is not the problem. It's the people [they're] hiring."

Speaking out. One Friday, in protest, a large number of 11th- and 12th-grade students decided to wear ripped jeans. As a response, school administrators marshalled students into the auditorium and held them there for a large part of their first period class. Once there, the principal told them that they were expected to dress professionally—in uniform—when they go

to school because that is how students show they are ready to learn and they will be required to wear uniforms in future jobs, so it is good they get accustomed to it now. For Alicia, this incident "waved a red flag because, usually, in jobs that you wear a uniform, it's the McDonald's or Jack in the Box jobs. I mean also, other jobs like being a doctor and stuff. But, I don't know. I felt like he was insinuating we were only good for service jobs."

While in the auditorium, Alicia spoke out and said, "there's no correlation between what we wear and, like, how we learn." To this, the principal told Alicia not to argue with him. She recalled, "and that's all he would say. Just screaming not to argue with him." Alicia felt angry during this experience because the school principal had the opportunity to share how he felt and now she wanted to do the same, but was repeatedly silenced. She described her anger as rooted in the principal treating her like a child

> especially because it was something that I wasn't being rude about, I was just sharing how I feel, and they weren't listening to me. The least they could've done was just listen rather than just respond, like, "Don't argue with me." It sucks.

Alicia's frustration was not limited to the school's dress code; she also spoke about wanting her culture represented in the curriculum. She spoke of wanting to learn "more about our culture and also oppression, White privilege, and things like that because it affects us and a lot of students don't know that." She explained that she knows of this because her AP English teacher included it in her lessons and it made Alicia "more determined to be successful simply because a lot of people don't expect us, as Latinas, to be successful." She spoke of this teacher, and three others, as mentors because although they did not have a "really close" relationship, Alicia knew these teachers would give her "legit advice."

Mentors. For Alicia, these teachers—her mentors—went "an extra mile to relate to students and actually give them advice that would be useful rather than advice that you'd just give to someone just so they could go away and not bug you anymore." Most importantly, these teachers not only "taught what students were supposed to learn, but also incorporate a personal connection to the lesson." Having these mentors made Alicia look forward to going to their class because she knew that she would learn something useful and applicable to real life. "Technically," Alicia explained, "we're supposed to be learning something that we're gonna use later on, but it didn't really feel like that in every class for me." She believed that every student should have a mentor

> because you just feel like—you start feeling like an adult on campus actually cares about you. It feels good to know that at least one person will have your back and will help you on your path to get through school.

School, Alicia explained, is tough to get through and "it's not really the curriculum, it's the environment." In her closing reflection on her experience, she quickly noted, "I'm just glad that I'm out of high school."

Alicia planned to graduate from California State University, San Bernardino, with a degree in Communications.

Mia

Mia was a self-identified Chicana from Southern California. Her life had an interesting beginning as she was accidentally delivered to the wrong family—who had birthed a boy and later sued the hospital—but was quickly reunited with her mother. She described herself as beautiful, Brown, Chicana, *y chingona*. She spoke of her mom as strong and resilient and

described her father as “kind of an asshole.” Mia explained that her dad was in her life momentarily, but as she got older, she learned of his abusive behavior and decided to stop seeing him. This decision, Mia explained, was an easy one to make.

Mia described her family as mostly Mexican, although, she recounted, her grandmother was born in San Francisco to a Spanish mother and Canadian father. At a young age, however, Mia’s grandmother and great-grandmother moved to Tijuana, Mexico; as a result, Mia’s grandmother “was raised Mexican, in Mexico. And she identifies as Mexican, ‘cause she was raised there. But she’s actually White.” In Mexico was where Mia’s grandparents met and started a life together. Now, Mia, her mother, grandparents, and aunt all lived together in what she described as a home filled with “a lot of people who always want to talk to [her] and know [her] business.”

Growing up a girl. Growing up a girl was frustrating for Mia because friends and family always wanted her to “like girlie things and play with other girls.” She remembered being instructed to wear dresses, allow her hair to grow out, and shave her legs and underarms. Hearing these things left Mia confused because she could not understand why people cared “so much.” She explained, “It’s my body. I don’t know why it would affect them, or why they felt that I, I needed to do that, [or] any woman would need to do that.” As a ten-year-old Mia remembered wondering, “Is there something wrong with my body?”

In school, Mia recalled noticing a paradox between what boys and girls were allowed to do. She found it strange that students were the ones who regulated what was and was not permitted for each gender. For example, girls

> couldn't do the things that the boys were doing. You couldn't run the races that they were doing. You couldn't play with them. You had to play jump rope. You couldn't play handball. And if a girl did want to do that, she would be labeled a tomboy, and masculine.

As they got older, Mia recalled noticing that students no longer created the divide, so "things felt better." That feeling, however, was short lived.

The dress code and body. Mia spoke of a sexist high school dress code policy that permitted boys to push boundaries, but was confining for girls. For Mia, the policy itself was not the problem, but rather the adults who were entrusted with enforcing it. She explained that when she and her female classmates wore skirts to school—or any clothing that showed their legs—parent volunteers would hold them at the door and not allow them on campus. When these incidents happened she remembered thinking: "Oh. My legs are not to be seen? They're not appropriate for school? I felt bad. I felt like it was my fault, like I should be covering up." A female student being pulled out of class to call a parent or someone at home to bring them pants was routine for girls. Mia recalled telling herself, "Okay, I have to do this today," or "I can't get into school today." Looking back, Mia reflected, "it's kind of terrible that I had to . . . that I was just used to that, to not being able to get into school because of what I was wearing." These early morning confrontations only marked the beginning of what girls faced during the day. Mia recollected:

> My teacher said, "I notice that you wear skirts a lot. Uh, they let you in with those?" And I was like, "Well, I'm here. So, yeah, they do." And it was, it was weird that he noticed, because, I mean, he's a teacher. He has other things to worry about than what a student is

> wearing, often. I felt a little disgusted, because, I mean, he's a grown man. And I am not grown. I am a student.

Adults, however, were not the only ones whose comments Mia found revolting. The school's hallways and stairs were often contentious spaces. Mia remembered:

> One time I was on the stairs, and the stairs would get pretty packed. So um, one time I heard this boy say um, to his friend, "Dude, you could straight up grab another girl's ass right now." And I was like, "Oh, I wish, I wish he would try to touch me, 'cause I, I'm ready."

Being "on guard." Incidents like this one made Mia feel like she always had to be "on guard." Every time she walked down the hallway and noticed a group of boys she thought to herself: "Oh, I hope nothing happens." She attributed her hypervigilance to teenage boys "not having a filter or anything like that. They just do whatever they want, whenever they want because they don't get in trouble. I mean, if they keep doing these things it's because nothing's really happening to them, for them to stop."

Mia continued to recount another incident with an adult on campus: it was lunchtime and she was participating in the school's Clothesline Project—an organization whose mission is "to educate students and the community that violence is a problem everywhere, help is available, there is hope and a path to healing" (The Clothesline Project). She described making a t-shirt and being "bent over the table . . . not really bent, like just slanted." Mia continued, "then the office lady came up from behind me, and she like grabbed my butt, and she, and she said um, 'Don't bend over.' And I don't know. I don't know if I was showing something." She remembered

blaming herself: "I felt bad, like, it's my fault that I was showing something. And maybe she was . . . maybe she was just trying to help me out."

That day Mia went home, stood in front of her mirror, examined her outfit, and concluded: "I wasn't showing anything, 'cause I had shorts under. It was fine." That is when Mia became angry because, as she explained, "first of all, she shouldn't be touching me. She could have said it in a better way. And I wasn't showing anything. And so I was just mad, because why would she do that?" What was most problematic, Mia explained, was that this administrative assistant attended an anti–sexual harassment presentation that Mia helped organize: "So it's like, you're doing this, but you're over here." Mia found this contradiction puzzling, but concluded that it was common behavior among adults.

In PE, she recalled, all students were expected to equally participate in class; however, when students (both male and female) were off-task, the teacher commented, "'Okay, ladies. Stop chitchatting.'" Mia felt irritated with his words because her teacher was fueling the stereotype that women gossip. However, she recalled thinking, "I'm used to it," so she became numb to his comments and decided to "just let it go." Now, looking back, Mia declared, "That did happen. And people are saying those things. And it's upsetting."

Recognize students' humanity. Several times, during our *plática,* Mia spoke of wanting "to be treated as a person." She spoke of faculty and staff not understanding that students live complicated lives, which sometimes meant having responsibilities other than school. She recalled, sometimes students could not go to school for reasons outside of their control, but they were not asked, "What's going on? Why are you missing school?" Instead, students often heard, "You need to be in school," followed by a list of consequences, including being excluded from

the graduation ceremony. In response to this, Mia explained, “they really wanted you to go to school because of the money. But they didn’t take into consideration why [students] are absent.” For Mia it was simple, all staff had to do was ask.

She emphasized craving “being listened to, instead of being brushed off” and getting into trouble. Mia felt that her and her classmates’ opinions were regularly deemed unimportant. She explained, in class, teachers, “especially older teachers” would not address students’ comments directly, rather, they would allow students to speak, ignore what was said, and continue with their lesson. These episodes made Mia feel “like a kid. Like, what I was saying didn’t matter, wasn’t true or right.” Mia recalled feeling isolated because it seemed that other students “didn’t notice what teachers were doing, or didn’t make the same connections [she] did.” That’s when she realized that she was experiencing school differently than her peers.

Conflicts and rules. Mia recounted a conflict that occurred with her teacher over a joke that she perceived as a racializing remark.

> A white teacher turned off the lights, and he said, “Where is so-and-so,” because that boy that he mentioned was dark skinned. And I was like, “that’s racist.” And he was like, “No. It’s a joke.” And I was like, “Well, it’s racist, because his skin is dark because of his race.” And then he said, “Well, look at another student. She’s light skinned, and she’s the same race.” And I was like, “I know, but it’s still racist. Why would you even say that to a student?”

Other students, including the student who was the target of the joke, laughed at the time. However, later the student singled out became withdrawn, which led Mia to believe that he actually felt badly about “the joke.” Seeing this, Mia remembered thinking it was good that she

“called [the teacher] out,” even if she was the only one voice and subsequently was labeled a “bitch, ‘cause [she’s] ruining the joke, ruining fun time.” She never felt that she could report this teacher because as a teacher “he has more power than me.” Mia explained, “he could probably just say, ‘I didn’t do that,’ or, ‘That’s not true.’ And they would believe him over me.” Instead, every day, as Mia walked to his class, she told herself: “Okay. That’s a racist teacher, and . . . I have to deal with that.” Experiences like this one made Mia dislike having to go to school.

She remembered thinking, “I don’t like being there. I don’t . . . .I’m not gonna go to any activities.” Mia did not attend school dances, except for prom, and was only involved in one club, GBLA, her senior year of high school. Before then, Mia “went to school, and left” which made it all tedious and routine. It was not the activities that Mia disliked, but rather the fact that they were connected with her school. The only reason Mia joined GBLA was that it was not really part of the school, so “it functioned under its own kind of rules and it was a smaller group of like-minded people.” Maybe, Mia reflected, if participating in school were not engulfed with so many rules she might have participated more.

Mia planned to graduate from California State University, Long Beach, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing.

Bianca

Bianca was a self-identified Latina from Southern California who “was born with another person,” her twin sister. She described herself as a great friend, hardworking, shy, yet outspoken young woman who finds joy in her own solitude. At the beginning, their life was a bit tumultuous as they moved from place to place because their living situation did not always work out. Bianca recalled having to “pick up everything and move somewhere else” on a regular basis;

now, however, life is more stable. In addition to her twin sister, Bianca has both an older and younger brother. She characterized her relationship with her older brother as “okay” and reflected that it got better once he moved out to go to college. Laughing, she described her twin sister as a “cool kid” and liked the fact that she gets to be with her “24/7.” They knew everything about each other, and Bianca liked it that way. Of her little brother, Bianca said that the large age gap between his siblings and him made him feel a bit isolated and alone, but he made due as her “mom’s shadow.”

She described her household as matriarchal because her dad was not around much. He left for work, came home, and went to sleep, so she only saw him for “five minutes, then he does it again.” Although Bianca did not spend much time with her father, she explained that they had a good relationship, and, as a result of his busy schedule, Bianca’s mom made all of the decisions and was deeply involved in her children’s lives. Jokingly, she spoke of her parents as “teenage parents” because they “don’t act like adults sometimes”; they were responsible, she clarified, but their “goofiness” was what makes them child-like.

With fondness, Bianca recounted that her parents always talked to their children as adults and involved them in adult conversations. This was something that she both liked and disliked because it made it so that she and her siblings “had to grow up a lot quicker than most kids because they had to see the negative side of life.” There were times she wished her parents did a better job of shielding her and her siblings from real life difficulties, because maybe they “wouldn’t be afraid of the world so much.” Contrastingly, Bianca said that being exposed to real life at a young age helped strengthen her relationship with her parents to the point that she felt she can speak to them about anything without fear of judgment or rejection. She also spoke of

them as progressive and liberal people who granted their children a lot of freedom. This, Bianca said, is a good thing because it thwarted her urge to rebel, which sometimes compelled her mom to call her "a prude," but Bianca was okay with that label.

Inappropriate teacher behavior. School, for Bianca, was always contentious. When talking of her elementary school experience Bianca said that she "didn't like it because they handled situations very poorly." In fourth grade, Bianca was appointed attendance monitor. Her duties included walking to every classroom and collecting teachers' attendance rosters. One teacher "was, um, verbally assaulting girls." She recalled,

> I would go into this class, um, and he would tell us little comments like, "Oh, you're looking cute today," and stuff like—some very—and I mean we were young, but we weren't stupid, so we knew there was something off with that, but we didn't know how to address it because we were never in this type of situation before, so we didn't know what to do.

Bianca explained that he also took "pictures of girls, not naked or anything," but when they were outside in the play area this teacher would approach girls, who were not his students, and say, "Come on, let's take a picture. Let's take a picture." Because most students and adults were not aware of the comments he made, they would pose for him and conclude that he was promoting school spirit. Once, as an assignment, Bianca's teacher asked students to design and distribute surveys school-wide. Bianca was assigned to poll "that class." When she received her assignment, Bianca told her teacher that she did not want to go to that class because the teacher made her uncomfortable. As a response, Bianca's teacher spoke to her and two other girls and they explained to their teacher how they felt.

Bianca remembered her mom wanting to press charges, but the other two moms were reluctant because "he's just saying things. He's not touching the girls." School administrators agreed. Although Bianca was young, her mother made a point to explain to her everything that was happening including school administrators' reluctance to discipline the teacher. Her parents used this incident to inculcate the idea that she must always speak up even when the adults around her are not protecting her. Thinking back, Bianca exclaimed: "Looking at it now it was kinda—it was very fucked up that [administrators] didn't do anything. I mean, what are they there for?" The following year, the teacher did not return. His absence, however, was attributed to budget cuts, not his behavior.

During this time, Bianca described herself as a "very, very, very, very shy person" who did not socialize much with others. She continued, "if I was in a classroom, most of the kids didn't even know what I sounded like. I was super shy. And it's crazy now that you think about it, 'cause I don't shut up now." Reminiscing, she uttered, "maybe those experiences caused me to be that way. I'm not necessarily sure, but I notice that those experiences have affected me when I'm not aware that they are affecting me." She continued to describe feeling defensive when a guy approached her; even if he had the best intentions, she found herself in high alert.

School and rules. For Bianca, middle school was a place inundated with rules and students finding ways to break them. For example, students were only allowed to wear solid colored sweaters; prints were not allowed. There was a three-finger rule for wearing shorts; in other words, if students wore shorts, they could only be "three fingers above the knee." There was also a small period of time when students were not allowed to hold hands, because "you know, that's how teen pregnancies begin." Students were not allowed to walk in groups of three

or more “because that’s a gang. That’s what they said: ‘That’s what a gang does.’” This rule, Bianca exclaimed, was the most ridiculous because the lunch area lacked enough seating for all students, so they got in the habit of walking around the small field. However, if adults who were supervising noticed students were walking in a small group they would split them up and say, “We don’t condone violence in this school.” Although Bianca enjoyed high school, it too was filled with futile rules. However, she resolved not to dwell on the negative and allow them to affect her high school experience.

Mentorship. Bianca blossomed during her first year of high school and credited two seniors who “took [her] under their wing, introduced [her] to clubs, teachers, sports, and all these opportunities.” It was their mentorship that propelled her to join the leadership class where “you kinda have to be very vocal and stuff, so [she] had to become vocal and express [herself] and not be so shy.” Bianca continued,

> I’ve continuously grown since then and have stopped using my sister as my armor. I used to have her go out into the world and tell me how it is. If it wasn’t for those two boys who took me under their wing, I would’ve been a whole other person.

During her senior year, Bianca decided to do the same and mentored a sophomore girl:

> I didn’t really hang out with her often, but I kinda showed her—I explained to her how to be successful in high school, and what to do, and stuff like that. I took her under my wing. I saw a lot of potential in her, she is really smart, but I also saw that she was kinda lost. I gave her a lot of my SAT prep books, my notes from classes, books I had, and I showed her what to do with it all, not just give it to her and be like, “Bye.” She said it’s helping her, so that’s how I can give back.

One thing that she wished she could have done differently was build stronger friendships with people. She explained that she spent too much time concerned with doing what was necessary to get into college as opposed to building relationships with folks, which she regretted.

Growing up a girl. During our *plática,* Bianca proclaimed, “I love being a girl.” However, she also expressed a down side to being a girl.

> Yeah, my gender experiences a lot of oppression, I had a little bit more rules than my older brother did, I get catcalled on the street a lot, and it bothers me, obviously. But I try not to let it get to me too much because then I become super frustrated.

Sitting up taller and with a smile on her face, Bianca proclaimed, “I love being a girl though, I just love it.” However, as she made a fist Bianca explained that there are times when she forced herself to ignore harassment because “you realize you’re five feet tall, and if you’re attacked, you’re going to die or something like that. So you have to bite your tongue because you’re basically defenseless.” Times like these were when she became frustrated, not because she was a girl, but because she was small: “I think that’s what bothers me the most. I’m not weak because I’m a girl. I’m physically weak because I’m, like, five feet tall, 100 pounds. What can I do?” However, Bianca has found one way to make up for her size: using her voice.

When she was around her family members, whom Bianca described as “very, very, very sexist,” she raised her voice because it was the only way to guarantee she was heard. She continued, “I’m not yelling because I’m angry, I’m yelling because it’s the only way they’ll hear me. So that annoys me because then they label me bossy or a bitch. And that’s not fun.” Nevertheless, smiling, she proclaimed, “I like being loud and assertive. It gives me joy.” Unfortunately, Bianca explained, these labels, and others, followed her to school.

In school, being a girl meant "dealing with unnecessary hurdles." Bianca described herself as goal-driven and determined, which was what enabled her to become Associate Student Body president, but it also meant that she had to cope with how others perceived her in school. Students would say, "she thinks she's better than everybody. She thinks she's all that," which turned into labeling her "untouchable." Bianca explained that this label made it so that she could not date because boys were afraid "she would have the pants in the relationship." Contemplative, she declared that if she were a boy she would not have faced this problem because "the male leaders in my school were super popular and well-loved. They were idolized and I was the bitch who thought she was better than everybody."

I asked her how she knew people were not fond of her. To this, she responded: "I could see it in their faces. And," Bianca continued, "when I had crushes on guys and tried to pursue something, they would right away be like, 'Oh you're cute and all, but I would never date you because you'd be too much." Bianca expressed that these comments bothered her because she "has feelings too and they forgot about that." Moreover, she declared, "it doesn't help that I'm light skinned, have green eyes, and blond hair." She continued, "everybody labeled me the white girl and, I was like, um, 'I'm Mexican too ya'll.' It didn't help that my Spanish is terrible, so they were like, 'Oh, you're not a true Hispanic girl.'" She and her sister regularly ask themselves, "What are we?" followed by a lengthy conversation with their mom who refused to believe that they struggled with their identity. Bianca spoke of wishing she had learned to speak Spanish fluently at a young age and lamented that learning it now has become increasingly difficult. She concluded, "It's like I have an identity crisis because of how I'm seen and who I really am and I don't know what to do."

Good teachers. Bianca spoke of "good teachers" helping her get through school. She described her leadership teacher, whom she had for all 4 years of high school, as being the first adult on campus with whom she felt she could genuinely converse. This teacher, Bianca continued, "saw potential in me and helped me realize that adults aren't as scary as I thought they were," and thus began her first close relationship with an educator. Then she spoke about her tenth-grade English teacher, me.

Bianca explained that I was always vocal about my beliefs and, because she often agreed with me, she saw me as a strong woman. She witnessed students and I speak openly with each other and saw that they respected me, even when our viewpoints differed, which was a first for her. This, Bianca declared, she took personally because I wasn't apologetic about what I thought or felt, so she thought: "I could do that too." And she did. She joined Junior State of America—a youth organization dedicated to help students become effective civic participants—and actively engaged in debates. She was no longer afraid to say what she felt or argue her point because she "saw that in somebody." Another English teacher, Bianca continued, "literally said whatever was on her mind, she was very funny and said whatever she wanted;" so, Bianca concluded: "I wanna be like that." As a result, Bianca maintained that the three of us (teachers) helped shape her identity and become who she is today. The conversation moved to her speaking generally about "good teachers." Bianca stated:

> Students can tell when the teacher cares about what they're doing. They don't have to become your best friend or anything like that, but you can just tell when they care. And I feel like that's more important to students than whether or not we covered the material. I

mean obviously you learn something, but you also learn about yourself and in some classes that just doesn't happen.

Bianca also spoke of liking most of her teachers, but found herself "biting her tongue" regularly. She recounted an incident with her ninth-grade English teacher who, one day, scolded and ridiculed her in front of the whole class. "I was really mad," she asserted, "nobody likes to be vulnerable in front of the whole class. He didn't have to do that." Bianca continued, "I couldn't speak to him the rest of the year. I was like, 'I'm not talking to you.' I'd submit my work, he would return it with a grade, and then there was nothing." Years later, when Bianca was a junior, he saw her in the hallway and asked her how she was doing, she refused to answer. Instead, she thought to herself: "You're not gonna treat me like crap one year then be Mr. Nice."

Sexualizing girls' bodies. Bianca maintained that there were many teachers who sexualized girls' bodies, but most did it in subtle ways. She stated, "We can tell. We have eyes and we can see when theirs are wandering. I've seen it happen, not with me because my body is child-like, but with more developed girls. I see eyes wandering." Bianca explained that she had always been observant and she noticed when male teachers "glanced and looked away, then glanced and then looked away, and glanced, and they just didn't know how to stop, I guess." She took a deep sigh and elucidated, "I've never seen the boys—the people my age, sexualize. I'm sure they look, but they don't do it, at least I've never seen them do it in a way that's predatory or gonna make the girl feel uncomfortable." Laughing uncomfortably Bianca expounded, "I've seen male teachers make an excuse. They'll say something like 'Oh, you have something on your shirt,' or something like that, but we all know it's because you're just looking at her, like, that's your excuse for noticing."

Sometimes, Bianca clarified, "some teachers kind of flirt with students too. They're not saying anything inappropriate. It's just their tone." She described these incidents as "gross" and, with a deep exhale, explained that she would simply roll her eyes "and be whatever." Once, however, during a more obvious interaction, she "called the teacher out." Bianca recounted,

> I was like, "What are you doing?" and he's like, "What do you mean?" and I'm like *[in sing song voice]* "What's this? What are you doing?" and he was like, "I don't know what you're talking about," and became very, like, professional, like, "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm a"—and then walks away. I was kinda known by a lot of teachers, so I kinda felt comfortable enough to say, "Yo dude. What are you doing?"

Bianca shared that although she felt good about drawing attention to his inappropriate behavior, she felt annoyed that she had to do so and wanted it to stop because it is "gross."

Racism in school. One of Bianca's many frustrations with school included adults being unable to relate to students in authentic ways. She described an assembly where administrators played an inspirational video for students; this included famous people of color such as Beyoncé and Oprah "two black women that White people deem successful." So, Bianca concluded, the message was "'If they can do it, so can you,' kinda crap. I mean I love both of them, but, like, it was the two women that are acceptable to White people—*ugh,* it's just so frustrating." Of the administrators who made this decision, Bianca said, "(a) they're a little racist, and (b) they just don't have any desire to develop any sort of personal connection with students, so they're ignorant to our culture and our experiences." With a deep exhale, she elucidated,

> When administrators or teachers do that, it's like a slap in the face to students. I'm not expecting a White middle-class man to fully understand the experiences of some

> students, but as long as students know they care and that they're trying—not just putting a video—in a way that's relatable, that's all.

Bianca explained that students did not always agree with her and would say, "Oh, you're looking into it too much," but, she continued, she did have "woke" friends whom she could talk things through, which helped.

Bianca shared one incident involving a substitute teacher and a classmate: "There was a student in class named Thomas. The teacher said, 'What, Thomas? In this area? Wow. What?'" Bianca looked at her two friends in class and questioned, "Did she—what?" The substitute teacher continued, "Yeah, that would never happen ten years ago." As a response, Bianca asked the teacher directly, "What do you mean?" The teacher answered, "Yeah, before there was Pedros and Marias, and now you're getting Thomas and Geraldine. In this area?" Bianca recalled a classmate saying "You know, there's a lot of connotations with that statement." This classmate explained that it was offensive to make assumptions based on people's names. The teacher retorted, "Well, I'm two percent Native American and I stand up for you people."

The student questioned the teacher's use of "you people" and an intense back-and-forth ensued. Stuttering, the student continued to stand his ground and the teacher raised her voice to a yell. Frustrated, Bianca stood exclaiming, "What you said was very racist. I don't care how Native American you think you are. That's offensive." The teacher questioned, "Wait, why are you offended?" Bianca replied, "I'm Latina too." The teacher replied, "Well, I'm sorry." Contemplatively, Bianca ended this account with: "Students, we're not stupid."

Bianca attended the University of California, Los Angeles, and studied Political Science.

Grace

Grace was a self-identified Latina from Southern California. She was born in El Salvador and immigrated to the United States when she was 2 years old, under Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation. With the forty-fifth president in office, Grace was worried that she and her family may risk losing this protective order, their jobs, her opportunity to continue studying, and face deportation. Although it is a temporary designation, Grace and her family did not live in constant fear of separation as they do now. Moreover, Grace lost a cousin due to gang activity in the region; thus, returning to El Salvador could mean living amid continuous violence.

Currently, she lived with her mom and younger brother. Grace described her mom as a strong woman, whom she was proud of because of the strides she had made in the United States. After a long pause and with watery eyes, Grace continued, "I didn't really have my mom . . . she was always working. It was really hard. But you know, I'm still proud to be her daughter 'cause I know she was working this whole time for us." In her senior year of high school, however, things changed because her mother received a promotion. With a raise, and no longer working multiple jobs to stay afloat, Grace felt more like she had a real parent, which she loved, and they were continuously working on building a strong mother-daughter relationship.

Life in school. Grace described middle school as "crazy, but fun." There, she blossomed academically and remembered crying the first time she got a D grade in class. Sighing, Grace described receiving multiple academic awards and wishing her mom could have been present to witness those moments. Once home, Grace recalled her mom throwing her certificates away and saying, "I don't need these. They're just paper," which crushed her. However, Grace explained, "She didn't know how to be a mom then. But she's growing, so it's okay."

She described high school as disappointing because she "didn't learn anything until senior year." Grace explained that her senior year was when she was exposed to "good teachers," so she "learned a lot and was excited to go to school." During her ninth-grade year, she skipped school regularly until she was caught and was forced to reassess her decision; at that point, however, she had failed seven courses. Her sophomore year was not much better. Grace spoke of this time as her "rebel years" and "just didn't care." She described attending classes every day, but simply falling asleep at her desk. "I was really bad. I don't know what was wrong with me." However, Grace also shared that she was exposed to teachers who "didn't really know how to teach, or they just gave up on teaching." To illustrate, she spoke of a math teacher:

> He would literally just tell us what to do then give us the answers. So, I really didn't learn anything 'cause he basically gave us the answers. And for extra credit, we could buy a box of tissues and we'd get extra credit on our tests. So I just took the easy way out.

It was during her 11th-grade year that things started changing for Grace as she realized that she wanted to go to college and needed to do well in school to make that happen. She credited her close friends who granted her valuable advice and helped her get her "shit together." Grace also described her high school days as "dramatic because that's when all the fake friends came in . . . and that killed [her] high school experience."

Teachers. Grace regularly spoke of "not learning much" because of teachers who "didn't really care." She shared her experience with her math teacher whom she had all 4 years of high school: "He knew my name and he helped me, but it wasn't really helping. He was giving me answers and helping me get the easy way out. I guess to him it was helping. But I actually wanted to learn." Grace described her ninth-grade English class: "All we would do is watch

movies in her class. Movies about the Holocaust. And she would just give us questions and we would have to answer them. And that was basically her class." Grace recalled questioning: "What am I learning from this?" To which the teacher responded: "Oh you have to learn about what Jewish people went through." Grace remembered exclaiming, "No, this is English class, I should be learning how to become a better writer." However, nothing changed, and students continued learning about the Jewish experience. Grace explained, "I feel like it was because she was Jewish. She was really into that. It's all we would do."

Grace also recalled a teacher who would:

> literally kick [her] out of class every single day for laughing or turning to wave at someone . . . He'd be like, "Oh, why are you looking that way? You're supposed to be looking at the board. Get out of my class." And I was like, "What? Like, I can't look anywhere else?" And I would go back to class afterwards, and he wouldn't even give me an assignment to do while I was out of class. So I was literally doing nothing in another class, just had my head down or something.

Grace spoke of wanting to have better teachers so that she could learn more before starting her senior year, hoping to avoid remedial courses in college.

Senior year encompassed "good teachers" and Grace was once again excited to learn. With a smile, she recounted, "The teachers I had didn't give that vibe that they gave up on education already. They actually, you know, they actually taught us. And they didn't treat us like kids anymore. They were actually teaching me." Grace spoke of "learning a lot" in my English class and credited small group discussions, essay writing, and whole class discussions as helping her succeed in class. She told me, her former teacher, "You let us talk freely and I liked that

‘cause some teachers wanna be so right that it makes us not want to say anything. You let us talk ‘cause everyone has different opinions, different thoughts.” Grace also expressed feeling limited in other classes and appreciated the freedom to speak her voice.

Suddenly, Grace recalled, she “felt like middle school again: nerdy.” As she said these words, Grace reminisced about her middle school years: “In middle school, I feel like I actually did have teachers that wanted to teach us.” She spoke of middle school teachers inculcating the idea that in high school, students would be treated like adults, so they needed to prepare for this change. In that vein, Grace felt like teachers treated students like adults and taught the best they could. Once she got to high school, though, she felt that teachers were counting the days until students were “out.” Senior year, though, was different.

Growing up a girl. Grace described growing up a girl as “annoying, hard, and frustrating.” She expressed that “guys or the world limit girls” with what they can do and “don’t think we can do bigger and better things.” In her home, being a girl meant that the responsibility of household chores fell upon her: laundry, dishes, cooking, caring for her younger brother, all of which made her feel like the parent of the house. Graced recalled numerous arguments with her mom and remembered questioning: “Mom, do you really think this about yourself? If you were still with my dad, you think you’d wanna be stuck just doing chores?”

In school, things did not differ much. Grace remembered hearing, “Oh, you can’t do this ‘cause you’re a girl. Oh, you can’t be this because you’re weak” from classmates, mostly young men. When she heard these words, Grace would retort, “Dude. You don’t know me. Like, maybe I can lift more than you” and expressed feeling annoyed that she had to go through this process. Most frustrating for Grace, when girls were having a bad day, she recalled young men uttering,

"Oh, she's on her rag." This statement bothered her the most because she felt that girls were not permitted to have a "bad day" and when they did it was attributed to a "part of our womanhood" and wished young men understood the problem with this view. However, Grace concluded, "Guys don't understand a thing. I guess they wanna be the stronger ones." She also spoke about being a girl in high school as "uncomfortable," which was different than her current experience of freedom in college.

Something that contributed to her "uncomfortableness" in high school was her 11th-grade English teacher who would banish her from class only to compliment her upon her return. He would say: "Oh, you know you look beautiful today," or "I like those jeans." Grace recalled thinking, "you shouldn't be doing that" and feeling uneasy in his presence. She continued, "I was even scared to leave his class. Like, turning my back." Grace and a classmate would wear their backpacks on the front of their bodies in an effort to cover themselves, and recalled thinking, "We're supposed to be safe. Feel safe at least. And, like, we're not because of how a teacher, a male teacher, is looking at us and telling us these things."

Grace also spoke about "slap ass Fridays"—something that started in middle school and reemerged, albeit for a short period, in high school—where students would walk down the hallway and "slap a girl's ass. They would always go for the girls." Both male and female students participated in "slap ass Fridays," but Grace shared that "girls would probably do it to girls as a joke." She explained that it was accepted for girls to "do it" to other girls because they "messed around like that. But when a guys does it to a girl, that just looks really wrong and feels really uncomfortable." Grace recalled a day when one of her friends "did that" to her and the following ensued,

> I smacked him in the face. I was like "Don't do that to me." "It's slap ass Friday." I was like, "I don't care. I'm not doing that to anyone. Don't do that to me." And it's like, it's just really uncomfortable 'cause then, I was like all iffy next to him. And I had him for two classes after he did that. And I was like, "I don't wanna be next to you. You made me feel really uncomfortable today." You know, it kind of ruined my day. Slap ass Friday, I don't even know who came up with that. I just hope that still doesn't happen.

Grace spoke of threatening to report the student, but never did because he stopped and never "did that" to her again.

Grace also shared that girls were regularly judged because of their behavior and labeled "hoes," which only contributed to her going through high school feeling "uncomfortable" on a daily basis. She recalled breaking up with a boyfriend and "talking to his friend a few months later," so students started calling Grace a "homie-hopper." She spoke of "guys never being labeled, even when they're getting with every girl we know. Just 'cause [girls] do it, it's bad." Grace also shared feeling frustrated because "girls would do it to girls too" and recalled a time when her close friend was "talking to two guys at the same time." When another friend found out, she called her a "ho." Grace responded, "Don't say that. As long as she's not doing anything with anyone, you can't label her anything. And even if she was, why are you even gonna say anything? It's no one's business. It's her business." Grace recalled living in a contradictory and dichotomous state: if girls date guys they are labeled "hoes," if they reject guys they're labeled "bitches." All she wanted was for students to accept that sometimes girls liked someone and sometimes they did not, it was that simple.

Grace also spoke about a “dumb” dress code that limited students clothing options. She explained,

> We couldn’t wear shorts. We couldn’t wear tights. We couldn’t wear ripped jeans. We couldn’t wear skirts. Are you serious? It was just dumb. It’s not the way we dress that keeps us from learning. It’s you for holding us back while we get this situation fixed.

She elaborated that she witnessed students pulled aside for wearing skirts and blocked from going to class because they were “breaking the rules.” Some girls, Grace explained, did not wear short skirts, they wore regular skirts, “and they held them back for that. Just for wearing skirts. That’s really ridiculous.” She recounted a time when school administrators held her friend in the office for two class periods until her mom delivered a pair of pants for her to wear in school. Grace concluded, “It’s not the dress code. It’s the people. She could have sat in class and done her work. That’s all she had to do. Sit in class and do her work.”

Safe streets? Grace expressed facing street harassment on a regular basis and sometimes it occurred en route to and from school. She recalled, “I’ve been touched before in the bus. I get on the bus and someone grabs my butt. Like, dude come on. I’m literally just walking down the bus.” This experience was mild, however, compared to what she faced on her way home from night school.

> My class wouldn’t end ‘til 9:00. I had to walk home. And I got followed three times. It would take me half an hour to get home because I had to walk around making sure no one’s following me . . . I was really scared. No one appreciates being followed. The fact that guys literally do that is annoying and gets me mad. And even gets me sad ‘cause we’re literally doing nothing, we just don’t know what’s gonna happen.

Remaining vigilant elongated her route home and did not make her feel any safer. As a result, Grace decided to "Uber" home, even if it cost her money. She explained, "I wanna be safe. I just wanna be a girl walking down the street with no one following me, or looking at me, or saying comments, you know?"

Mentorship and guidance. Grace spoke of a counselor who made her "blood boil" because she neglected to offer Grace any post–high school guidance other than "You don't need to take the SATs to get into community college." Angry, Grace remembered thinking, "I'm not stupid. They pay you to help us not say 'your GPA is low, so don't bother.'" Upset by this interaction, instead of going to class, Grace tucked herself into the restroom and gave herself the following pep talk:

> I'm not gonna let her bring me down. Take 'em. I messed up, but I'm not stupid. We messed up, but we're not stupid . . . she brought me down a lot. And I needed someone else to talk to, but there was really no one else.

After describing this incident, Grace boasted, "My grades aren't good. But my SAT scores were really amazing." Not only did this counselor shame and, in essence, abandon Grace academically, but she also refused to help Grace with her financial aid application.

Because Grace was an undocumented student, her counselor explained that completing a financial aid application was not necessary; instead, Grace needed to complete the California DREAM Act application. However, Grace proceeded, "She didn't tell me how. She didn't tell me what I needed. She didn't even tell me the deadline." She reminisced about when I was her English teacher, helping Grace with the process and together figuring it out. Once finished, Grace thought, "Why couldn't my counselor do that? What was it? Was it so hard? They literally

pay her to be a college counselor and she can't do that?" Fortunately, there was another teacher, a friend of the family, who helped Grace with her college applications because Grace "didn't know what [she] was doing." Of this experience Grace shared, "You know, it wasn't that hard. But I was just scared of making a mistake. I don't get what was so hard for the counselor to help me" and confidently pronounced, "I feel like she needs to be removed."

Currently, Grace was attending Santa Monica Community College and plans to transfer to a University of California.

Laura

Laura was a self-identified Latina born in Los Angeles. She spoke of loving growing up in her small South East Los Angeles town because her family lives there, she knows all of her neighbors, and she cannot imagine living anywhere else. She described herself as a supportive, goofy, empathetic, dedicated, and joyful young woman. Laura characterized her family as "not that close" because they did not know how to communicate with one another; instead, they regularly yelled at each other. She noted that tensions over their current socioeconomic status strained their relationships. Her mother was an undocumented immigrant who was unemployed. Her father was a carpenter, but was fired because his alcoholism stood in the way of his work. Adding to this tension, her father always said, "*Yo soy el rey de la casa*!" (I'm the king of the house!), which meant he dictated the rules and everyone's life. Laura explained that her mom attempted to intervene by exclaiming, "I'm also here. I'm your partner," but her father never respected this, and so the rules remained.

Living under her father's strict rules and alcoholism angered Laura. She attempted reasoning with him by asking, "How do you think it makes my mom feel? How do you think it

makes us feel?" When Laura strove to stand up for her mom, her sisters, and herself, her mother would implore Laura, "Stop; you're making things worse." This request both angered and saddened Laura because she was trying to help, but her methods were not working. Her father, unaccustomed to someone contradicting him, yelled over Laura in an attempt to hold his ground. This caused Laura to "stay quiet and feel useless." She wanted things to change in her home, but said she "didn't know how to change it."

She spoke of her older brother trying "to jump in once in a while" to defend her and her mother, "but he wasn't really home, so he couldn't really see what was happening." Her younger sisters, Laura continued, "stayed close to hear what they say in case something happens, like, something major. But I don't wanna get to that point. I wanna stop it before something actually does happen. Something physical." The only way she and her siblings knew how their mother was feeling during all of this is when she began to cry, "So she doesn't really express the way she feels until it's gone too far." Even when they were children, it was difficult for her mom to "show them love." However, things had improved and it was positively affecting Laura's relationship with her sisters. Laura explained, "As time passed [mom] did have more patience, and she started showing us more love. With my sisters, I'd say communication improved a lot; we show each other more love and that's a plus."

Growing up a girl. "Damn, it's hard" were the first words Laura uttered when sharing her life growing up a girl. She continued, "There's this idea that men are superior than girls and you just feel like you're treated unfairly. It's just the observation you make with your community as well as within your friends." She first noticed this paradox in her home, as her brother—who was three years older than Laura—was afforded privileges that were not available to her. For

example, her brother was allowed to go out and did not have to supply his parents with an address or a destination; he simply said, “I’ll be back.” Contrastingly, Laura had to ask for permission and share where she was going and with whom. Although she was now in college and lived on campus, the same rules held true now that she was home for the summer: Laura disclosed where she was going and her parents sometimes refused her permission to leave. Not only did her parents regulate when and where she could go, they also monitored what she wore.

Laura noted that her mother “never liked [her] wearing shorts.” She would say, “You’re showing too much leg, and there’s guys around the house; you have to show respect.” Her brother, however, “could walk around shirtless with his boxers” while Laura “couldn’t even wear shorts when it’s 100 degrees outside because [she’s] showing leg.” That, Laura described, “was always the hard part.” She continued, “Even if I’m wearing a tank top my mom thinks I’m showing too much skin; that’s how old school she is. Growing up like that is hard ‘cause you suffer.” Of this experience, Laura recalled,

> My mom made it feel as if it weren’t safe. Like, I love my dad and my brother, and she didn’t even think it was safe. They’re my dad and brother, what would they be thinking? It makes me feel thoroughly unsafe.

Laura attributed her father’s drinking as the catalyst for the precautions her mother wanted Laura and her sisters to take. She explained that alcohol might inhibit her father from “thinking right and he might get out of control.” But, in response to this, Laura protested, “I don’t think my dad is like that.”

Life in school. Laura described herself as “the smart one of the class” during her elementary school years. She remembered having a small group of friends who would did

everything together: recess, sitting together in class, and going to field trips. Middle school, however, was “tougher, academic wise,” but attending tutoring helped her master her math and science courses. About high school Laura exclaimed, “I liked it the most ‘cause that’s where I evolved the most.” She spoke of struggling academically, but also learning a lot and growing socially: “that’s where I found who I am and what I liked.” As a ninth grader, Laura did not have any friends, so she joined “as many clubs and things as [she] could” and credited this decision for improving her high school experience. Ultimately, though, Laura credited teachers for her successes.

She spoke of entering college as a psychology major; however, at the end of her first semester, she decided to be a teacher because “school teachers do a lot for you.” Laura also shared that her mom always volunteered in school, in fact, she does not remember a time when her mom was not actively involved in a school Laura attended. But, Laura lamented, “It wasn’t enough” because her mother never told Laura or showed that she believed Laura “could do it.” So, Laura continued, “elementary school teachers, that’s where it starts. If you don’t have love at home, you have to have the love somewhere,” and Laura received a lot of love from her teachers and friends. This love made school her “happy place.” School was where Laura felt she loved her life: “sports, clubs, extracurricular activities” were her life.

Good teachers, Laura proceeded, “were the ones who encouraged you to raise your hand, participate. Even if I was wrong sometimes I always raised my hand to participate because I wouldn’t have known I was wrong if I didn’t raise my hand.” Beaming, Laura declared, “Just talking about [school] makes me smile. It was just a place where I could be me.” Life however,

was not always perfect in school; because Laura felt that because of her gender, she "wasn't treated right."

Vigilance and girls. "Specific teachers," Laura asserted, "male teachers would make you feel uncomfortable." She recounted checking her uniform blouse and ensuring it was securely buttoned up before asking the teacher for help or walking to his desk. Laura maintained, "Some teachers, not all of them are bad. But I just – you had to watch out and be careful." She elucidated that there were "certain comments they would make and certain looks they would give . . . There was a difference how they would behave with the girls than with the guys."

Laura described a "specific teacher that would act nicer to girls than with guys." Sighing, she continued, "I don't know. I mean, that's not necessarily a bad thing, but it's not a good thing either. I don't know that just made me feel uncomfortable." Of this uneasy feeling, Laura declared, "There was a lot of awkwardness happening there. Um, he would try to make small talk a lot. I don't know. I don't know how to explain it; it was just weird."

Laura proceeded to speak about the dress code that placed more rules on girls than boys. Girls had to "make sure shorts weren't too short; make sure pants didn't have any holes; make sure [they] weren't wearing sandals; make sure [they] weren't showing [their] breasts. Because God forbid a button gets undone and then [they're] in trouble." Laura also spoke of "sexism within the parent [volunteers] towards the kids." She clarified that parent volunteers treated young women as though "they were disrespecting themselves when all they really wanted to do was wear shorts because it was hot. Or wear jeans that had some holes because it was fashionable." Laura deplored that "they were really, really conservative, so they did do that a lot. They did target the girls more than the guys."

Laura proceeded to share that she had "been harassed in school and outside of school." She explained that she "was one of those girls that evolved quickly, [her] curves were showing and was evolving faster." She spoke of "troublemakers" whom she had in P.E. class, and recalled,

> I was walking towards the locker room to change, and I don't think I had anyone around me; it was just me by myself. And he just comes and talks to me and, out of nowhere, he just grabs my ass. And he was like, "Damn girl you have a big ass." And I was like, "What the hell? What are you doing?" But I didn't do anything because it was the first time that anything like that ever happened to me. I just didn't know what to do. I didn't know if that was normal or not so, um, I just stayed quiet. And then he did that a couple more times, and that I was like, "Dude, like, stop; like, I don't like it." That made me feel really uncomfortable and it was one of my peer classmates. I just didn't know what to do about it. I didn't tell no one.

Laura stated that this experience made her feel "really uncomfortable and harassed," and she knew that she was not the only person whom that student "did that too," but Laura did not say anything to anyone.

She then explained that "there's just a lot of cat calling when you're a girl," which made it difficult to go about her day. In fact, she was making her way to our first *encuentro* and as she turned the corner, she noticed "a guy just standing there waiting for someone." According to Laura, he proceeded to stare at her. As she walked passed him, he yelled, "Damn that ass!" Laura retorted, "Dude, shut the fuck up." She explained, "I don't really curse, but it just made me feel horrible," and this happened on a daily basis, so she often told herself, "Calm down."

To combat cat calling Laura recalled her uncle's words, "If you ever experience that, look at the person in the eye, and then whoever looks away first is a weaker person;" so when someone glared at her, she stared back and inquired, "What? What are you looking at? Can I help you with something?" Laura explained, "That's all I could do." Making a fist, Laura declared, "sometimes I just walk faster with my fists closed because I didn't know what to do with my hands." Laura shared that when she walked with her younger sisters, she always stayed vigilant "just in case someone is after [them], or following [them] or something;" she just wanted to "protect them too."

Laura then described one of the "hardest things" that ever happened to her. She was 15, a sophomore in school, before her sisters started high school, which meant that Laura walked to and from school alone.

> I was walking to school one day . . . and then, um, I guess the car was just following me. He was slowing down, and then, um, he just started masturbating. And then, um, he was just saying stuff to me, and I was just like, "Walk faster; try to walk faster walk faster. He's gonna open the door and try to kidnap you." I just didn't know what to think of it.

As she continued to walk, Laura attempted to pretend nothing was happening by "not letting any noise in." She explained that she was not physically covering her ears, but she was trying not to hear anything the man was saying to her. When Laura approached a street light, she heard a honk, looked toward it and saw her friend and her friend's mom in their car offering Laura a ride to school. "Yes, oh my God yes!" was Laura's response. She jumped in the car, it turned the corner, and she went through her school day as though nothing happened.

Laura then shared,

> Although he didn't touch me, that was way worse than when the middle school kid touched me. 'Cause I didn't know what was gonna happen to me, 'cause it was an adult man and I was a fifteen-year-old . . . I can't believe I forgot about that.

Once in school, Laura could not think of anything other than this incident. She recalled asking herself, "What do I do? Who do I tell? Should I even tell someone?" Laura explained,

> So, that day I didn't pay attention to no class . . . You just start blaming yourself. And it's just—that's just not right. That's not what a girl in school should be thinking. Or should be wasting her time thinking about.

After school, when Laura arrived home, she cried and told her mom everything that occurred. Her mother consoled her, and wished Laura would have said something earlier, but Laura explained that it was "okay because nothing physically happened to [her]." As Laura sat reliving that moment, she shared,

> My heartbeat is racing. I'm kinda happy though that I forgot about it because I didn't let it get to me. I didn't let it scare me. I just have to let go of those bad experiences to give space to new good ones.

She continued to describe "a horrible feeling" as she tried to "relive it and remember all those details." Laura concluded, "no one should ever go through that."

Mentors. Laura spoke of doing "okay" in high school. She was getting Cs and, laughing, declared, "Cs get degrees." If not for teachers, who acted as mentors, Laura would have continued receiving "Cs and never gotten in to college." With these teacher mentors, Laura explained, "I let everything out; I would cry to them. I would laugh with them. They're just

awesome people." She described staying to speak to these teachers after class and proclaiming, "I don't wanna leave your class." Laura loved that these teachers also trusted her, which was "awesome to know that an adult trusted you and made you feel like you were important, and you were responsible, and you were doing something right with your life." She remembered thinking, "If a teacher likes me, anyone could like me."

Laura spoke of her history and Associate Student Body teacher who not only encouraged her to take on school-wide leadership roles, but also made herself available to Laura when she and her family were going through a tough time. Laura remarked, "It's nice to have those teachers who make you feel like everything's gonna be okay . . . and you just wanna make them proud." She spoke of considering me one of her mentors because I "helped her with college applications and all of that. Together we went through it, you and me." Laura regularly thought about making her mentors "proud and not disappoint[ing] [us]." Especially now that she knew she wanted to be a teacher, she saw us as people to look up to and wanted to do the same for her future students.

Laura studied Liberal Studies at California Polytechnic University of Pomona.

Ximena

Ximena was a self-identified Chicana from Southern California. She described herself as a respectful, responsible, and goal-oriented individual. Her household consisted of her parents, brother, and their dogs. Growing up, she and her brother were the only kids around, so she busied herself playing with their dogs and older brother, with whom she was "really close." Both her parents worked and adjusted their schedule so one of them could drop her and her brother off at school and the other pick them up. Ximena recalled her father doing her hair every morning,

and she being bullied at school because of it. She tried "teaching him how to make two ponytails to make it a little different, but they would always come out really uneven;" but he tried, and that was important for Ximena. Once Ximena entered high school, her mother stopped working because she "thought that teenage years were the hardest kids usually go through and wanted to stay with [Ximena] for a while." She described this time as "nice" because Ximena spent more time with her mom and was able to "see her more."

Ximena described her parents as supportive, and she appreciated that her dad took the time to tell her brother that he must "treat girls the same way he would treat his sister, or would want someone else to treat his sister." Currently, while home for the summer, Ximena worked with her dad and recalled a coworker pointing out that her dad "didn't treat [her] anyway differently than he did [her] brother when [her] brother worked for him." Of this, Ximena said, "I guess they thought that he should treat me differently because I was a girl. And he didn't." In response to this coworker, her father replied that Ximena and her brother were equal.

Life in school. Ximena spoke of being close to her teachers in elementary school "because they were awesome" and some were also her ballet instructors. As a young girl, Ximena recalled thinking it "interesting to see them at school and outside of school as well." She also enjoyed her middle and high school years, partly because she and her brother attended the same schools and partly because she made close friendships in those spaces. For Ximena, high school was a "learning experience."

She spoke of disliking public speaking and recalled losing the class treasurer election because of it. "During my speech my opponents best friend laughed in the middle of [it]. I was very confused . . . I just lost my focus and kind of panicked." Although she had not yet perfected

the art of public speaking, Ximena practiced regularly in an effort to improve. Aside from public speaking, Ximena did not appreciate teachers, particularly P.E. teachers "complaining when girls were on their period." Although, she never experienced menstrual cramps that inhibited her from participating in class, Ximena did think that teachers needed to understand "everyone is different" and adapt to those differences.

Playing sports. Reminiscing, Ximena spoke of loving to be an athlete and playing soccer. She explained, "Soccer helped me de-stress, or forget about grades, or other things like that. It was just a way to have fun and spend time with other girls who would go through the same thing." Ximena was junior varsity captain for three years, which she enjoyed particularly because, "varsity was always very competitive. There was more tension between the girls." Contrastingly, junior varsity "was more about having fun, and it wasn't always about winning." One of her favorite memories about being an athlete was "thinking this is incredible. You automatically make friends."

Ximena and her teammates regularly spent time outside of school and practices together. She explained, "We would go ice skating together. We would go out to eat after every Friday practice." As captain, Ximena made an effort not to tell her teammates what to do; instead, she "tried to help them learn. A lot of the girls," Ximena continued, "didn't know how to kick the ball," so she helped them learn whilst having fun. The effortlessness of making friends in high school was what Ximena missed most. In college, she shared, it was much harder to make friends and have strong connections with people.

Ximena also spoke of a dress code existing as a way for adults to police what students should wear. She described a teacher "who would make [students] line up every single day to

make sure" they were wearing their uniforms. One day, Ximena recalled, the bell rung and "the hallways were really crowded." She and a few other students did not realize the teacher and her classmates were already inside. The teacher looked outside, saw her and eight other students still standing there and "got really mad because he thought [they] just didn't want to go to class." Ximena continued, "He made us stand in front of the classroom and give an explanation of why we were late to class. We said we hadn't noticed most people were in class because there were other students in the hallway." After the interrogation, the teacher asked students to take their seats and Ximena recalled feeling "mad because it wasn't really [their] fault. Even if it was, I don't think we should have been asked to stand in front of the classroom." Standing there Ximena remembered

> being like really nervous, or like scared. . . . You could tell that when [students] were trying to give their explanations their voices were shaky and were probably afraid of getting into more trouble than just being late.

She was currently a pre-business economics student at UCLA.

The *Encuentros*

The *encuentros* were a space to introduce the research study, hear their collective voices, and capture commonalities among the participants' stories. It was also an ideal time to share preliminary results of the study and to receive feedback from the young women about their impressions or additional comments that came to mind. The following describes major issues from the research that were further discussed among the participants during the *encuentros*.

Dress Code: Inhibiting Students' Learning

The hypervigilance around school dress code was a prominent topic of discussion during our *pláticas* and *encuentros*. The young women spoke of facing close inspection of their clothing upon walking on campus. Laura elucidated, "It kind of felt like I walking into a kind of prison . . . you had to make a line and then enter this like system . . . it didn't feel like it should've felt going to school." More specifically, for most of the young women, it felt as though the focus was more on students' wardrobe than on the learning that took place within the school building, which extinguished their desire to be there. Mia spoke of this process as a vetting system, to decide on who was and was not permitted entrance and allowed to learn that day.

Alicia voiced that girls and boys were not held to the same rules and expectations. For example, as a girl,

> you felt like you had to watch what you were gonna wear because right away you were gonna get sexualized. Your body was sexualized by staff members at school which is really inappropriate because they're staff members. Not even the students do that. It was a mess.

Bianca added that the staff members' main excuse was "You're distracting the male students." She also noted, "Never in high school was I sexualized by another student. I don't think so. I'm sure it happened, but I wasn't sexualized by any male students. I was more sexualized by the teachers." Bianca maintained that the "your clothing affects your learning" rhetoric is invalid because "adult men are the ones who don't know how to look away and they just like to sexualize teenage girls because they're young and youthful."

In response, Alicia contended, “What the girls wear wasn’t the problem, more so the type of people they’re hiring at the school.” With her hands up in the air, Alicia argued,

> I mean if they’re saying that we’re distracting by a piece of leg, a knee, I don’t know, that says a lot about the type of people that are inside the school. Shouldn’t you be concerned that a male adult in this school is looking at that area on my body? Because not even the students are looking there.

Bianca echoed Alicia’s frustration and added that the policy was inhibiting students’ education. She explained, “They are stuck outside for like an hour because they had to go get changed. God forbid you ruin your education, but they’re leaving them out for an hour or two, missing classes;” then questioned, “What does that show you?” This sentiment resonated with Alicia, and she recalled morning announcements that asked, “Teachers, take the time to check that every student is wearing uniform.” Hearing this made Alicia question, “really? You’re gonna take the time to say this? We’re in class.”

Agreeing, Mia contended, “I did feel sexualized because I like to wear skirts.” She described a time when she was held at the school gates by a staff member who “said that my skirt was too short and I was gonna show my underwear to everyone, and I was like, ‘Well that wasn’t my goal this morning when I put on my skirt.’” Teary eyed, Mia explained waiting in the office, while missing half of her first period class, then being able to go about her school day only after someone from home brought her pants to wear. The young women also told of girls “with more developed bodies being stopped the most.” Bianca spoke of “having small breasts,” so she was not required to button up her uniform polo shirt. However, a friend of hers with “larger breasts was pulled aside and asked to button her shirt all the way up.” When Bianca

questioned the distinction, she was told “Well you can’t see anything, so you’re fine,” which was an upsetting experience for both girls.

They also spoke about the school’s “ripped jeans” policy implemented differently for boys and girls. Girls were stopped “if they had a hole above their knee. Boys would have whole thighs from their jeans missing and their boxers showed and they were walking around school fine. Whereas girls were stopped and had to change.” One Friday, all, if not most, 11th- and 12th-grade students decided to wear ripped jeans to school in protest of the policy. As they entered school grounds, “the majority of the people they stopped were girls and once the girls started complaining they stopped one or two guys.” Administrators corralled students to the auditorium, where students were told that if they wear ripped jeans they were signaling that they were not ready to learn. Moreover, the dean of students declared, “We hold the same standards in school as they would at church. You have to come to school wearing what you would wear at church.” With a grin, Mia responded, “My God lets me wear whatever I want.”

The young women had different opinions on the purpose of the dress code. Laura believed that “the dress code was made to make everyone feel equal, not worry about what they were wearing, and get ready faster in the morning.” Although she agreed that this may have been the purpose of the dress code when it was established, Bianca felt that it evolved into “a way for [adults] to desexualize teenagers, keep [students] hormones calm to make sure [students] learn.” Contrastingly, Mia thought that the uniform was established so adults could show students “that they had power over us . . . so that they can tell us what do to, what to wear.” Grace agreed and added, “school was just trying to be really controlling.”

The young women spoke of speaking up for other girls when they were accused of dress code violations, but “hated the fact that it was still pointless because it didn’t really solve anything.” When they were dismissed or ignored, the young women spoke of feeling “really mad or annoyed so it’d ruin the rest of the day because that’s all [they] could think about.” They wanted a dress code that included student input and allowed students to express their individuality. About this, Ximena adamantly stated,

> When you’re in high school you’re still trying to figure out who you are and your fashion is part of your identity. It’s not gonna disrupt your learning…if you want to continue learning, then you’ll do it regardless of what you’re wearing...students have the common sense to wear school appropriate clothing.

Feeling Uncomfortable

The young women also spoke about encounters with teachers whose verbal or nonverbal behaviors made them feel uncomfortable. These verbal behaviors included compliments from male teachers, which “seemed really creepy.” Grace shared, “I hated knowing I had to go every single day to that class. It was annoying.” Laura also shared a similar sentiment,

> Just being in the same room as that teacher gave me chills. The way he would look at me and sometimes made eye contact creeped me out. I didn’t feel safe. I had to be more cautious. . . . Maybe, if I made the wrong move or something, he would pay more attention to me, which was not what I was trying to do.

Also noted was a difference between classrooms in which the young women felt uncomfortable and those in which they felt comfortable. Laura shared, “In classrooms where you felt comfortable you interacted more with the teacher, which is what you should be doing. You

should be learning, communicating with one another." In contrast, Alicia explained, "When you're uncomfortable in a classroom, you don't know what to do . . . you don't feel safe learning there." Instead, they spoke about "checking the time, wondering when it's time to leave." Bianca, for example, described the contrast between her English class junior year and senior year:

> I was super excited to go to my English class junior year. I loved that class. It was super-fun, super-engaging. She, the teacher, was amazing and so it actually made me want to be at school. Whereas my senior year English class I hated it so much. It was such a hostile environment. I'm sure she was a nice woman outside of school, but she was not very engaging or compassionate. She was just very like, "I'm gonna call you out on your crap in front of everybody. I don't care if it makes you feel sad for the rest of the day." I didn't want to be there. In my junior year I was thriving, but my senior year I was not motivated at all.

The young women agreed that most students wanted to learn, but they needed "good teachers" to be able to accomplish this.

Curricula Inclusive of People of Color, Including Women

Alicia spoke of wanting teachers who took "in mind the type of students that are in school." She offered their predominantly Latinx community as an example and suggested that teachers should include students background "and things they could relate to in the curriculum. And also include the struggles that we're gonna face and are facing, because that's gonna help us out in the real world." Bianca agreed, but expanded that it "must be authentic and applicable, otherwise it's disrespectful to us." They enthusiastically shared stories of teachers who

recognized the lack of "people of color or women in assigned books, so they would give us work by people of color or women so that we could learn and read something that wasn't by a white man." Similarly, they articulated wanting curricula that spoke about colonialism, or included guest speakers who could share first hand experiences, or a "How to Live 101" course that discussed finances and student loans. In short, they wanted to see themselves in school and wanted to learn practical knowledge that they could use later in life.

Bianca spoke of learning more in classes where teachers moved outside of required texts, "Students became more like engaged because they were learning about people that looked like them and came from our world." Alicia shared that in her 12th-grade English class, they "would always talk about topics that affected [them] personally and things [students] could really relate to;" as a result, students were "more passionate about everything." In that class there were debates and "everybody would share their different opinions . . . it just felt real. Like how a classroom should feel like." Alicia continued, "In other classrooms nobody would really talk. It'd just be the teachers talking throughout the whole period."

Mentorship

Most participants spoke of "surviving high school" and counting down the days they had left. However, they also listed mentors, close friends, and playing sports as highlights of their schooling experience. They spoke of mentors as role models who offered advice. Laura explained, "Role models weren't what I expected because you got to see that part of them that they don't really show to other students, so you know they're human too." Grace shared that she appreciated being able to "talk freely and feel like [teachers] were actually listening." Most important to her was that these teacher mentors spoke to students "like [they] were grown," as

opposed to treating them like children. To echo that sentiment, Bianca noted, "My favorite thing about my mentors is that you actually form a relationship with them."

Bianca recalled "making fond memories" with teacher mentors and appreciated that "they made [her] feel like a person." Alicia was grateful for teacher mentors who offered resources and/or directed students to the right person "if you were ever in trouble or needed help with something." Alicia also shared that when she started high school, she immediately thought her counselor would be her mentor; but, she continued, "getting to know [counselors] you could kinda tell that they didn't necessarily care for you as much." She elucidated that teacher mentors

> related to you on a level that other adults on campus didn't, and they made you feel like somebody on campus actually cares about you . . . it's not the counselors' fault, it's just the teachers did have more time with you so they get to know you better and got to know you for you, so it was easier for teachers to bond with you.

Bianca retorted that although she understood Laura's point, she did notice that their counselor only "paid attention to those who she saw that were gonna be successful, and she kinda forgot about everybody else." Although Bianca was one of the students whom this counselor paid attention to, she explained that she did not like the way the counselor treated other students. Bianca regularly heard this counselor tell students, "Don't even bother. Don't even try. You're not gonna get in." These comments infuriated Bianca because she considered the role of the counselor as someone who is "supposed to motivate [students] and want them to succeed but not tear them down."

The young women then noted that course enrollment was the counselors' primary role, but maintained that they were often enrolled in incorrect courses because the course they needed

did not have a space for them. They found this experience frustrating because they regularly felt as though they were "wasting time" in a class they did not need, want, or had already taken. Alicia shared that she was once enrolled in the wrong class and attempted to explain this to her counselor. Instead of listening, the counselor exclaimed, "You're wrong. I put you in the right class." This exchange angered Alicia, so she decided not to speak to the counselor again and instead spoke to the teacher who made the course change for her.

Before having a mentor, Grace spoke of "not caring much." However, once a teacher helped her and became her mentor, Grace felt like "someone finally believed in [her], so [she] decided to do better and change." Without a mentor, Laura felt "lost and didn't know what to do, where to seek guidance." During her last two years of high school, she had a mentor and "wasn't lost anymore." They all agreed that people could not be trained to be mentors, because teachers "can't be trained to talk to a student like a person. You can't train human connection."

Summary

The *testimonios* and *encuentros* of the six Chicana/Latina recent high school graduates have provided here a glimpse into the major issues and experiences these young women faced and the insights and social agency they employed to resist the hostilities they encountered. Of the six participants, one was now enrolled in community college, two attended a University of California school, and three were enrolled in a California State University school. They all spoke of enjoying the newly found freedom that college life now afforded them. The following chapter provides an analysis of the themes identified in this chapter from the *pláticas* and *encuentros*. The hope is that by making the issues raised by the young women visible, grounded conclusions and recommendations can be made that will make the high school environment and society far

more responsive to the experiences of young Chicana/Latina women and their social and academic needs.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The body . . . must endure, resist, and struggle to become free from the ideological and corporal entanglements that domesticate youth.

Antonia Darder (2012)

The *testimonios* here have privileged the lives of six Chicana/Latina youth and exposed how these young women experienced the sexual politics of their school campus and how they challenged (de)sexualized practices, expectations, and ideologies. Although they each differ in various ways, interwoven, their narratives offer a glimpse into some of the pedagogical experiences of many Chicana/Latina youth in U.S. schools as they struggled to “become free from the ideological and corporal entanglements” (Darder, 2016, p. 3) that domesticated them. Their *testimonios* explicated similar approaches for confronting and countering institutional marginalization and oppression. The overarching themes derived from these *testimonios* speak to the need for pedagogies that honor the humanity of Chicana/Latina youth and the importance of learning from their recommendations to make the school environment and the society truly responsive to their experiences.

It is important to highlight the narratives of these Chicana/Latina youth because girls of color experience race, class, and gender simultaneously and lack power and privilege when dealing with the dominant culture (Letendre & Rozas, 2014), which places them at higher risk for exploitation. Further, as previously mentioned, images of Chicana/Latinas as hypersexualized and inferior “serve as a tool of mass education, demonstrating to audiences that Latinas, as a social group, are available for exploitation and domination” (Pedleton Jiménez, 2014, p. 131),

which only works to facilitate their sexual assault. Moreover, Chicana/Latina youth have been historically marginalized because of their gender, race, and class (Blackwell, 2011; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Elenes et al., 2001; Garcia, 1989) and, as these narratives help elucidate, in schools Chicana/Latina youth are further victimized as they are often met with faculty and staff who police their bodies.

Students also found themselves having to navigate sexual politics—the beliefs and actions that are concerned with how power functions between men and women (Millett, 2000)—in schools. Consistently identified throughout their *testimonios* are *agravios* to their bodies by pedagogical policies and practices meant to protect. Although the young women told of challenging institutional practices and resisting by demanding that their voice be heard, these *agravios* negatively impacted their academic and personal lives. As such, this study seeks to privilege their stories to ensure their voices are heard and their humanity recognized.

The narratives in this study yielded five emergent themes regarding the schooling experiences of Chicana/Latina youth. These are discussed in the context of personal, academic, and social conditions the young women experienced while in school. The five themes include: (a) the dress code, (b) inappropriate faculty and staff behavior, (c) speaking out, (c) confronting racism, and (d) mentorship and guidance.

An examination of their experiences gives voice to the larger Chicana/Latina schooling experience. Analyzing these themes through the lenses of Chicana/Latina feminist theory and critical pedagogy tell of young women's experiences that embody the existence of power relations, which are imprinted in discursive practices that blame and shame them for "having a sexed, female body" (Pérez, 1999, p. 115). What follows is a discussion of the five themes that

emerged in this study, which will be examined individually. Together, they serve to offer insights into young women's lives and the importance of creating spaces, in schools, that are responsive to their social and academic needs.

The Dress Code

The *testimonios* of the young women in this study tell the story of their daily struggle with adults policing, objectifying, and containing their bodies. As Antonia Darder (2009) explained, educators do not "concern themselves with the physical nature of their students, unless one is deemed 'inappropriate,' at which time administrators . . . are summoned to evaluate and hopefully 'fix the problem'" (p. 219). Similarly, Cindy Cruz (2014) reminded us, "We must ask how the brown body is regulated and governed in schools;" for these young women, their bodies were regulated and "fixed" through a disembodying dress code policy that created a dialectical tension between young women's freedom to be in harmony with their bodies and adults' deep moralism seeped into notions of protecting. Darder (2009) argued

> conservative ideologies of social control, historically linked to Puritanical views of the body as evil, sensual pleasures as sinful, and passions as corrupting to the sanctity of the spirit, continue to be reflected in the narrow, rule-based pedagogical policies and practices of schooling today. (p. 221)

As such, the dress code policies that were built to protect the bodies of these young women worked to govern, de-eroticize, and disembody them and "constituted a struggle for social power within a male-dominated culture and oppressive economic system" (McLaren, 2015, p. 165). They also functioned as another component of the sexual politics young women had to navigate in school, particularly because they dictated the type of education the young

women received as their access to education was regularly thwarted by these policies. In fact, regulation of the body disproportionally affects female students and "is closely bound with the control of female sexuality and socialization" (Cruz, 2014, p. 199). This idea runs through many of the *testimonios* as the young women described the *agravios* they experienced with the dress code.

As an institutional practice that commodified young women's bodies, the dress code helped illustrate how "school practices and policies . . . are inextricably tied to gendered ideologies of power and control" (Darder, 2009, p. 223). Laura described walking to a prison-like environment that required students to form a line, wait as adults inspected their bodies, and, if deemed appropriate, proceed inside thereby acting as the gatekeepers to learning. Bianca, Alicia, and Mia spoke of it as a vetting process that worked to (de)sexualize, control, and objectify their bodies. They recalled being, or witnessing other young women be, interrogated over their attire and not understanding how parts of their bodies were provocative. Here lies the continuum with which the young women lived: (de)sexualized and deemed dangerous in the same breath. They understood that adults were sexualizing their bodies, utilizing the dress code to de-eroticize them, and demanding they contain their bodies or risk blame for causing others to desire them. As such, the dress code functioned under the posture of a patriarchal society that leaves women only two options: "to be seduced; not to be seduced" (Pérez, 1999, p. 115). In school, young women were tasked with the latter; thus, held responsible for the violence they endured, while young men attended school virtually unaffected by this same dress code policy, which speaks to the endemic sexual politics young women navigated.

The ideology that women are held responsible for men's unwanted advances validated the social practice of inspecting girls' bodies at the door and denying their entrance. At the same time, young men were permitted to continue their day uninterrupted; thus, reinforcing acceptance of heterosexuality, which "eroticizes male dominance and female submission" (Pascoe, 2007, p. 10). In fact, Bianca explicated that staff members' primary excuse for enforcing the dress code was because young women were "distracting the male students." This rhetoric helped to conserve patriarchy as it reaffirmed the theory that men play a dominant role in society, and women are submissive to men's needs; thus, women's role in society is to reinforce heterosexuality, which conserves patriarchy. Peter McLaren (2009) explained, hegemony "refers to the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force *but primarily through consensual social practices* [*sic*.]" (p. 67). As such, the school's dress code policy helped faculty and staff maintain domination over young women, their bodies, and their access to an education.

In reflecting on her experience, Mia spoke of a time when she was held at the school gates by a staff member who "said that [her] skirt was too short and [she] was gonna show [her] underwear to everyone." To this statement, Mia retorted, "Well that wasn't my goal this morning when I put on my skirt." She then described waiting in the office, missing half of her first period class until someone from home brought her pants to wear. Similarly, Grace spoke of a friend who "could have sat in class and done her work. That's all she had to do. Sit in class and do her work," but could not because school personnel were seeped in maintaining any semblance of power and conservative ideologies of the female body as so threatening that they denied Mia and other girls an education.

The dress code also served to normalize and facilitate dualistic thinking that, by default, posited young women as dangerous. In an effort to be designated safe and (re)gain ownership of their bodies, young women were tasked with hiding their sex; thus, they too inspected their bodies before making their way to school. Laura shared, girls had to "make sure shorts weren't too short; make sure pants didn't have any holes . . . ; make sure [they] weren't showing [their] breasts." When reflecting on her experience, Mia spoke vividly about standing in front of her mirror, choosing to wear (appropriate) skirts, being held at the building's doors, not allowed in, and left thinking her legs were unsuitable for school. She recalled blaming herself for not "covering up" and hiding her body: the object of desire. In retrospect, Mia thought it terrible that she "was just used to that, to not being able to get into school because of what [she] was wearing." This routine close inspection of their own bodies and self-blame helps to exemplify the ways the dress code helped facilitate the emotional and psychological violence young women endured through "erasure of the body and the annihilation of the flesh in the traditional rubric of classroom life" (Darder, 2009, p. 221).

Expressed by the young women here is the constant frustration with being held responsible for the *agravios* they experienced because of a disembodying dress code policy. Bianca maintained that the, "your clothing affects your learning" rhetoric is invalid because "adult men are the ones who don't know how to look away and they just like to sexualize teenage girls." Similarly, exacerbated, Alicia shared, "I mean if they're saying that we're distracting by a piece of leg, a knee, I don't know, that says a lot about the type of people that are inside the school."

Inappropriate Faculty and Staff Behavior

As tears streamed down their eyes, it became clear that encoded in their bodies were the *agravios* they endured. The dress code acted as the mechanism with which young women were "called to understand, anticipate, and absolve the behaviors of men" (Flores-Ortiz, 2003, p. 355) and helped excuse male objectification of girls' bodies. The burden of anticipating the behaviors of men began from the moment these young women stepped outside their doors. As she sat, with her hands pressed tightly against her legs, Alicia spoke of the difficulty of finding the words to describe the *piropos* (cat calls) that made part of her daily school commute. "It's just really nasty. It just disgusts me enough to the point where I can't even put it into words." She explained her frustration with not "even" being able to walk to school unencumbered because she is a girl and said that she started to feel as though it were her fault:

> Maybe it is what I'm wearing or the way I walk or the way I perceive myself. Um, I started feeling like it was my fault because it would happen so often. I didn't really understand why it would happen. But it just didn't—it didn't feel good.

As is the case with most victims of violence, Alicia wanted to find meaning in these violations as well as an explanation for the behaviors of men who made it virtually impossible for her to walk peacefully. Because it was so widespread and because she had been domesticated to take responsibility for the assaults she experienced, Alicia internalized blame and punished herself by scrutinizing her person as the process to understanding the *agravios*. Although these incidents occurred outside of school, the effects traveled with the young women into the classroom.

During our *plática,* Laura shared a repressed memory: she was a sophomore on her way to school when a man, masturbating in his car, started following her. Laura then described the

process of dissociation that happens during abuse (Méndez-Negrete, 2006; Van Der Kolk, 2014). As she continued to walk, Laura attempted to pretend nothing was happening by "not letting any noise in." She explained that she was not physically covering her ears, but was trying not to hear anything the man was saying to her. In her attempt to keep her body safe and cope with what was happening, she separated her mind and body. Although physically present, her mind was trying to erase that moment until finally, by chance, a friend and her mother came to Laura's rescue. Once in school, Laura was unable to focus and blamed herself for the assault. As she concluded her account Laura whispered, "I was a fifteen-year-old . . . I can't believe I forgot about that." Finally safe, Laura's body and mind became one again and she was able to remember.

As they entered their school building, these young women were met by men who reproduced feelings of fear and hypervigilance. "Specific teachers," Laura asserted, "male teachers would make you feel uncomfortable." Young women felt most insecure with male teachers because they mirrored and perpetuated the violence students experienced both inside and outside of school. Present in most of their *testimonios* was a collective knowledge about which teachers were safe and which were dangerous. By informally sharing this list with one another, young women were committed to protecting and carving out safe space for themselves.

Laura spoke of a teacher whom students knew was dangerous: "Just being in the same room as that teacher gave me chills. The way he would look at me and sometimes made eye contact creeped me out. I didn't feel safe. I had to be more cautious." Although Laura recognized that this teacher's classroom was a harmful place, like many women before her, she held herself responsible for her safety. She maintained, "Some teachers, not all of them are bad. But I just – you had to watch out and be careful." Laura told of being worried that if she "made the wrong

move or something, he would pay more attention" to her, so before walking to his desk or asking for help, she examined her uniform blouse and ensured it was securely buttoned. Laura and her peers did what they could to ensure their safety, sometimes that meant covering their bodies, the object of desire.

When speaking generally about male teachers Laura elucidated, there were "certain comments they would make and certain looks they would give. . . .There was a difference how they would behave with the girls than with the guys." As was true with the dress code, this routine close inspection of their own bodies and hypervigilance exemplifies the ways that sexual harassment as a function of the hidden curriculum facilitated the emotional and psychological violence young women endured in classrooms. Echoing Laura's experience, Mia recollected:

> My teacher said, "I notice that you wear skirts a lot. Uh, they let you in with those?" And I was like, "Well, I'm here. So, yeah, they do." And it was, it was weird that he noticed, because, I mean, he's a teacher. He has other things to worry about than what a student is wearing, often. I felt a little disgusted, because, I mean, he's a grown man. And I am not grown. I am a student.

Mia's *facultad* told her something was wrong. She had encountered men like this outside of school and now was forced to face them again in school, a supposed protected space. This teacher's comments were in the guise of ensuring students followed the dress code policy, when in actuality, the fact that he took inventory of what Mia wore on a regular basis spoke to his hypervigilance of her body, sanctioned by the school. His inquiry pointed to his sexualizing her body, exposing his discomfort with it, and deeming it inappropriate for learning, all in the same breath. This classroom sexual harassment as a function of the hidden curriculum resulted in

granting him power over her body. By speaking those words, this teacher eliminated Mia's ability to be in her body, move freely in his classroom, and learn. Although upset and uncomfortable, Mia challenged this teacher's comments by asserting that her presence in his class proved her body suitable for school, demonstrating her resilience in defying the sexualization of Chicana/Latina bodies.

These *agravios* were not only the result of male teachers' comments, but from their behavior as well. Bianca spoke of teachers' "wandering eyes" that sexualized girls' bodies. She described noticing when male teachers "glanced and looked away, then glanced and then looked away, and glanced, and they just didn't know how to stop, I guess." The idea of male teachers not knowing how to stop is akin to the *pobrecito* syndrome, "the notion of men as weak and out of control" (Flores-Ortiz, 2003, p. 355), which again places blame on young women for failing to protect their bodies from frenzied men. Bianca further explained that she had "seen male teachers make an excuse. They'll say something like 'Oh, you have something on your shirt,' . . . but we all know it's because [they're] just looking at her." By attempting to find an excuse for their lasting glares, these teachers projected their discomfort onto students in the pretense of saving them from embarrassment and preserving their positions of power. For young women, these experiences with male teachers reinforced the fact that women cannot and do not "live comfortably within a patriarchal order" (Pérez, 1999, p. 81).

Teachers, however, were not the only ones who took part in sexual harassment as a function of the school's hidden curriculum; administrators, too, were culprits. The *agravios* from administrators were particularly distressing for Alicia because she only recalled one experience where boys in school "looked at [her] that way." Thus, for her, "it felt wrong," seeing that school

administrators are not “supposed to be looking in those areas.” These incidents caused Alicia to be more hypervigilant about what she wore. She described assessing her outfits and telling herself, “Okay, I can’t really wear this because then they’re probably gonna look at me different.” Moreover, Alicia poignantly spoke of the systemic problem that plagues young women, “What girls are wearing is not the problem. It’s the people [they’re] hiring.”

The attack on girls’ bodies was so ubiquitous that even staff members who considered themselves allies to girls participated in the assaults. Mia described making a T-shirt during a lunch activity, she was “bent over the table . . . not really bent, like just slanted” when an office clerk approached her from behind, grabbed her butt, and said, “don’t bend over.” Immediately, Mia blamed herself thinking that she was “showing something. And maybe [the clerk] was . . . just trying to help.” Remembering she was wearing shorts underneath her skirt, which was customary for Mia, she realized there was nothing wrong with her body, she was fine. Upset, Mia recalled asking herself, “Why would she do that?” The constant need to understand why adults violated their bodies was a heavy burden young women carried with them in school. They found themselves examining their bodies, being hypervigilant as they walked the hallways and entered classrooms, and blaming themselves when they experienced *agravios*; this was the psychological toll they carried.

Adults, however, were not the only ones whose comments Mia found revolting. The school’s hallways and stairs were often contentious spaces. Mia remembered:

> One time I was on the stairs, and the stairs would get pretty packed. So um, one time I heard this boy say um, to his friend, “Dude, you could straight up grab another girl’s ass

right now." And I was like, "Oh, I wish, I wish he would try to touch me, 'cause I, I'm ready."

Bianca had a different account, "Never in high school was I sexualized by another student. I don't think so. I'm sure it happened, but I wasn't sexualized by any male students. I was more sexualized by the teachers." Bianca not rendering boys dangerous is akin to Méndez-Negrete (2006) and her friends staying away from older men because of the violence inflicted upon them, but never associating violence with boys their own age. Present in most of the young women's *testimonios* is a keen awareness of the power teachers had over students. Although Bianca acknowledged that boys might have sexualized her body, she did not label them dangerous because she never observed "them do it in a way that's predatory or gonna make the girl feel uncomfortable." Whereas teachers personified power, which affected how these young women lived in the world.

During most of our *pláticas,* I witnessed these young women begin to transform. As she reminisced, Bianca experienced an *arrebato,* the sudden awareness that her shyness, her fear of speaking up, and her uneasiness when guys approach her might be directly linked to negative experiences with male teachers. She became silent for a moment, looked down at her feet, and took a deep breath. It was as though she had broken free from a self she scarcely recognized. Mia, too, started to transform. I witnessed her affirm the *agravios* she experienced by declaring, "that did happen to me," and with that she too began to heal.

Speaking Out

Peter McLaren (2015) contended that, in schools, there is foreboding silence about how students (re)create meaning in life, which engenders a necessity to listen to the stories students

tell and honor their voice. Voice, he explained, “refers to the cultural grammar and background knowledge that individuals use to interpret and articulate experience” (p. 180). Thus, schools must provide space for students to express the ways they define themselves and name experiences because it helps educators understand how meaning is produced and how students are experiencing school. However, schools seldom allow students from materially disadvantaged circumstance to assert their individual and collective voices as a means of self-empowerment. This is not surprising considering that schools legitimize the knowledge and voices of the dominant culture, while invalidating the lived experiences of girls of color.

Darder’s (2009) discussion of the absence of the body in teaching and learning, as well as the neglect or fear of teachers to engage with issues of the body when these surface within schools explains the significance of young women’s dissenting voices and demands that they be heard, particularly when such instances occur. Although some of the young women in this study chose silence as a strategy for survival, others spoke their truth as a means to reclaim their humanity. In doing so, these young women were developing a home-grown feminism in their desire to (re)claim their bodies and agency.

Bianca regularly drew attention to male teachers’ inappropriate behavior because she wanted them to know that she was aware they were sexually attracted to female students. In doing so, Bianca was combating oppressive patriarchal features and the sexual politics of school and directly rebelling against ideological schooling practices that called for her to be a passive subject. However, Bianca shared that although she felt good about drawing attention to teachers’ inappropriate behavior, she felt annoyed that she had to do so and wanted male teachers’ behavior to stop because it was “gross.” Bianca was summoning the end of female exploitation at

her school by rejecting a culture that holds women accountable for assaults on their bodies. However, in expressing her frustration about having to call teachers' attention to their behavior, Bianca signaled her struggle for ending the violence that young women endure: this task should not rest on her or her peers. Nevertheless, by voicing her aversion to teachers' actions, she regains power over her body and indicates solidarity with the other young women at her school who may not be able to voice their dissent.

In an effort to resist and challenge the dominant discourse that deemed their bodies inappropriate, 11th- and 12th-grade students staged a collective demonstration by wearing jeans ripped at the knee, which were prohibited in school. In doing this, students were "rebelling against the authorized ideological codes of the school that situated them as passive subjects who were not permitted to exercise critique of existing social arrangements" (McLaren, 2015, p. 165)—social arrangements that conserve patriarchal social values and structures that perpetuate gender exclusion. Frustrated by the harassment they experienced and the sexual politics they had to navigate, students sought power through their collective voices and hoped that it would bring about change.

After escorting students to the auditorium for disobeying the dress code policy, the dean declared, "We hold the same standards in school as they would at church. You have to come to school wearing what you would wear at church." With those words, the dean displayed school administrators' need to preserve conservative ideologies of social control by regulating the students' bodies (Darder, 2009). He, atop the auditorium stage, offered the school's vision of a properly ordered body politic demonstrated through bodily behavior affirmed by patriarchal literacies constructed in society: namely, the female body must be contained. The message was

clear; students were required "to check their sexuality . . . at the door" (Darder, 2009, p.222). Grinning, Mia responded, "My God lets me wear whatever I want." Mia's words were an act of resilience and resistance to the subordination she and her peers encountered as Chicana/Latina youth in this school.

In an attempt to reveal the irrationality behind the dress code policy, Alicia, too, spoke out and said, "There's no correlation between what we wear and . . . how we learn." The principal interpreted her dissent as a threat to his power and authority; so, he retorted, "Don't argue with me" and continued to repeat that phrase while Alicia persisted in voicing her frustration against a dress code that sexualized her body. Acting on his need to "obstruct the establishment of democratic approaches" (Darder et al., 2006, p. 18), which called for a more humanizing dress code policy as an administrator, he emulated women's oppression in society by refusing to listen. Alicia felt angry during this exchange because she and her peers had crafted this act of resistance as an empowering moment in which they could utilize the time and space to fight against the oppressive sexism imbedded in their school culture. Instead, administrators seized the moment to exert their domination over students and the containment of their bodies.

Alicia described her anger as rooted in the principal treating her like a child, which speaks to the paradox in which girls exist in school: (de)sexualized, infantilized, and objectified in the same breath. Mia echoed Alicia's sentiment by speaking of wanting "to be treated as a person" and craving "being listened to, instead of being brushed off" and getting into trouble. Mia felt that her and her classmates' opinions were regularly deemed unimportant. She explained, in class, teachers, "especially older teachers," would not address students' comments directly; rather, they would allow students to speak, ignore what was said, and continue with

their lesson. These episodes made Mia feel "like a kid. Like, what I was saying didn't matter, wasn't true or right."

Mia's sentiments are true for students from marginalized communities. In an effort to escape poverty, they participate in the oppressive functions of schooling by joining classroom conversations, only to be silenced, ignored, and made to question their intellect. She also pointed to the regularity with which students were penalized for expressing thoughts that differed from the dominant discourse that is legitimized in schools. The pressures of succeeding academically and resisting dominant patriarchal ideologies speak to the conditions young Chicana/Latinas must negotiate and reveal the psychological pressures they encounter in schools.

Confronting Racism

Darder (2012) explained that racism is one of the most damaging forms of human oppression in the United States, but that it is also difficult for those in the dominant culture to understand. As a result, racism remains largely unexamined in schools by well-intentioned educators who would never consciously discriminate. The results, however, are damaging for young people, as they become isolated and are stigmatized as minority students, which results in their teachers having lower expectations of them (Solórzano, 1998). One of the ways in which racism is perpetuated in schools is through language domination, the process whereby the language students bring into the classroom is "systemically silenced and stripped away, through values and beliefs that render it inferior to Standard English" (Darder, 2012, p. 35). Latinx students, because they reside in the *borderlands,* between two languages, they are susceptible to being alienated, labeled "other," and forced to negotiate their identity at a young age.

In her *testimonio,* Alicia spoke of her experience having to negotiate her identity through language when she was in preschool. Her class included English- and Spanish-speaking students; as a response, her teacher physically separated students by having them sit at different tables. This separation illustrates the ways educators have historically labeled Latinx students' home language a deficiency and used it to segregated and stigmatized them (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Alicia, wanting to be close to her friend, sat at the English table; however, her teacher pulled her away explaining that Alicia did not belong there because she did not speak English well. This blatant segregation creates a culture in which students perpetuate dominant ideology by inadvertently internalizing that English-dominant students are academically and intellectually superior to Spanish-dominant students (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). As she spoke, Alicia began to cry. She took deep breaths in an effort to control the tears that were streaming down her face. Theory of the flesh reveals how the body remembers pain and trauma; although Alicia said that she did not know why she was emotional, it was clear that she carried the trauma of thinking she did not belong, of feeling inferior, and knowing she could not actively participate in school like her peers did.

Alicia continued to recall daily trips to the library with her mom who, after hearing Alicia's distress about not being allowed to sit on the English table, was determined to teach Alicia a language that was foreign to them both. Eventually, Alicia picked up the language and "got to sit at the English table." The library became Alicia's counterspace; a place where she and her mom created counter-strategies to engage in the process of learning English and combating racist classroom practices. Alicia spoke of her transition from the Spanish table to the English table with delight, "I felt proud that my mom taught me rather than the teachers." Having her

mother there to support her provided Alicia with a sense of comfort and grounding during a time when she had to confront an antagonistic schooling environment.

Most of the young women's *testimonios* told of explicit racist encounters with teachers. In an effort to survive being in class Mia told herself, "Okay. That's a racist teacher, and . . . I have to deal with that." She never felt like she could report teachers who spewed racist remarks because she recognized the teacher-student power dynamics that existed; thus, Mia used silence as a mode of survival. Experiences like this one made Mia dislike going to school. She did not participate in extracurricular activities or attend school events; that was her way of resisting a hostile learning environment. There were instances when the school attempted to build a more culturally inclusive learning environment, but these acts were usually glazed with "see you can make it too" rhetoric and Oprah-like success stories that pinned students as deficient.

Bianca told of a particular time when school administrators pulled all seniors into the auditorium to show them an inspirational video of "successful" people of color. The video included famous people of color such as Beyoncé and Oprah "two black women that White people deem successful." So, Bianca concluded, the message was "'If they can do it, so can you,' kinda crap. I mean I love both of them, but, like, it was the two women that are acceptable to White people—*ugh,* it's just so frustrating." Through this video, administrators were playing into racist and classist notions of who is and who is not an acceptable person of color. Both Oprah and Beyoncé are women of color who fit into capitalistic notions of success; thus, administrators were using their success stories as a way to reproduce the values of the dominant culture. Of the administrators who made this decision, Bianca said, "(a) they're a little racist, and (b) they just

don't have any desire to develop any sort of personal connection with students, so they're ignorant to our culture and our experiences." With a deep exhale, she elucidated,

> when administrators or teachers do that, it's like a slap in the face to students. I'm not expecting a White middle-class man to fully understand the experiences of some students, but as long as students know they care and that they're trying—not just putting a video—in a way that's relatable, that's all.

Bianca, like many of the other young women in this study, wanted access to authentic, culturally relevant curricula and critical educators who validate students' experiences and do not pit them against racist, classist, and gender normative notions of success.

Mentorship and Guidance

Present in most of the young women's *testimonios* was the importance of teachers who acted as mentors and helped them navigate school. It was clear that they thrived when they had access to mentorship that engaged with them in mind, body, heart, and spirit. Weiston-Serdan (2017) explained, a critical mentoring program for young girls of color must be centered on the idea that the mentoring process "must not only make a difference for the young [women] in schools, but also radically change the way schools operate for young [women]" (p. 85). In order to do that, schools must recognize that the work requires that they address—and help young women address—the "systemic and institutional challenges of race, class, gender, sexuality, ableism, and so on" (Weiston-Serdan, 2017, p. 9) that are endemic in schools and society—as opposed to focusing solely on increasing attendance, test scores, grades, behavior, and other quantifiable metrics of success. Although it is beneficial for young women to have women of color as mentors, it is not sufficient "if the pedagogy enacted in the classroom and school

community perpetuates oppressive values" (Berta-Ávila, 2014, p. 278), which is what the young women experienced with their college counselor.

The college counselor, a Latina who had a similar upbringing as the students she served, reinforced ideologies of the dominant society by only giving her time and energy to students who were academically successful and discouraging others from applying to college. Alicia shared that when she started high school, she immediately thought her counselor would be her mentor; but, she continued, "getting to know [counselors] you could kinda tell that they didn't necessarily care for you as much." Frustrated, they turned to teachers who encouraged and validated the voices of these young women in ways that were previously absent. They spoke of mentors as role models who offered advice. Bianca explained appreciating teacher mentors who "made [her] feel like a person." Bianca's sentiment of feeling fully human speaks to Darder's (2009) assertion that a horizontal view of student-teacher relationships that acknowledge and respect students as well as allows teachers to establish meaningful interactions with students helps to eradicate the myth that teaching and learning are solely cognitive acts that require a separation of mind/body.

If not for teachers who acted as mentors, Laura did not think she could have succeeded in school and gone to college. With these teacher mentors, Laura explained, "I let everything out; I would cry to them. I would laugh with them." Similarly, Grace shared that she appreciated being able to "talk freely and feel like [teachers] were actually listening." Most important to her was that these teacher mentors spoke to students "like [they] were grown," as opposed to treating them like children. To echo that sentiment, Bianca noted, "My favorite thing about my mentors is that you actually form a relationship with them." These young women and their mentors fully

engaged their mind, body, and soul when they worked together, which helps counter beliefs that brutalizing students through "humiliation and self-doubt" (Darder, 2009, p. 227) somehow prompts rigor and academic success. Instead, together, they created counter-spaces in which both student and teacher could engage in humanizing pedagogical practices.

Mentorship, however, not only constituted recognizing students' humanity, but also offered resources that were otherwise inaccessible. For example, Laura spoke of considering me one of her mentors because I "helped her with college applications and all of that. Together we went through it, you and me." By guiding Laura, I filled a void left by her college counselor, whose extensive workload drove her to prioritize students whose academic achievements were deemed more valuable by the dominant culture. Alicia, too, was grateful for teacher mentors who offered resources and/or directed students to the right person "if you were ever in trouble or needed help with something." She elucidated that teacher mentors

> related to you on a level that other adults on campus didn't, and they made you feel like somebody on campus actually cares about you . . . it's not the counselors' fault, it's just the teachers did have more time with you so they get to know you better and got to know you for you, so it was easier for teachers to bond with you.

Before having a mentor, Grace spoke of "not caring much." However, once a teacher helped her and became her mentor, Grace felt like "someone finally believed in [her], so [she] decided to do better and change." Without a mentor Laura felt "lost and didn't know what to do, where to seek guidance." During her last 2 years of high school, she had a mentor and "wasn't lost anymore." It was in these third spaces with teacher-mentors that the young women began to see themselves as subjects rather than objects of history and started to (re)create narratives that

honored their humanity. They all agreed that people could not be trained to be mentors, because teachers "can't be trained to talk to a student like a person. You can't train human connection." Moreover, these young women felt that to connect with students, teachers had to be willing to connect with them as worthy human beings.

The Path to *Conocimiento*

During our *pláticas* and *encuentros,* a third space, these young women became the subjects, rather than objects, of their history. They told their stories in community in an effort to produce their own knowledge and ways of being. Anzaldúa's (2002) concept of *conocimiento* teaches that painful experiences are part of the process that lead us to heal and transcend oppressive experiences, which is something that this third space offered. The *testimonios* in this study illustrated some of the stages important to the path of *conocimiento.* Briefly, this process can be thought of in the following ways.

El Arrebato

The young women shared feeling like their bodies did not belong in school, which led them to internalize narratives that spoke of the female body as dangerous. Mia remembered thinking: "Oh. My legs are not to be seen? They're not appropriate for school? I felt bad. I felt like it was my fault, like I should be covering up." Anzaldúa (2002) might have described this experience as the first stage of *conocimiento, el arrebato*—the sudden awareness that the world is shaken from under you exposing fears. For these young women, it was the fear of there being something wrong with their bodies; thus, they moved painfully through the school building almost disconnected from their bodies.

Nepantla

This new awareness of their bodies can be described by the second stage, *nepantla*, where we are caught in the in-between space that requires critical reflection as we move to rediscovery and consciousness-raising. A developing reflective consciousness about the *agravios* they experienced related to their bodies and their responses to these *agravios* were evident throughout the narratives, Alicia spoke of not understanding how a knee or "a piece of thigh is provocative in any way." She recalled the uncomfortable process of recognizing male faculty and staff sexualize the bodies of young women, and found herself questioning: "Why are [they] looking in those areas?" This sense of confusion and desire to seek answers speaks to the painful stage of *nepantla*. In this stage, the young women began to uncover the myth of their bodies as dangerous and moved to transform their existing conditions.

Coatlicue

Present in their *testimonios* is also the third stage, *Coatlicue,* where our "shadow-beasts," (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 553) internalized oppression, emerges, and stage four, the call to action, where we begin to resist systemic oppression as we move toward healing. The young women had internalized the idea that their bodies were evil and needed to be contained; thus, they participated in regularly inspecting their bodies and blaming themselves when they experienced violations. Laura described girls making sure, "shorts weren't too short . . . pants didn't have any holes . . . [they] weren't showing [their] breasts. Because God forbid a button gets undone and then [they're] in trouble." However, their resistance was present when the young women spoke up, reminded faculty and staff that their bodies were appropriate for school, expressed their concern about being sexualized, and opposed everyday racism in classrooms. Although their

feelings of empowerment were momentary, they demonstrated resilience against the subjugation they experience in schools.

Conocimiento

We see the fifth stage of *conocimiento*, a stage of revising "the scripts of [our] various identities, and [using] these new narratives to intervene in the cultures' existing dehumanizing stories" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 559), in the counter-spaces that the young women co-created. Alicia spoke of her mom helping her learn English within the walls of the local library. All of the young women spoke of teacher-mentors who helped them see themselves as fully human, (re)create their narratives and how they saw themselves in the world, and helped them navigate and survive their oppressive learning environments. Bianca recalled "making fond memories" with these teachers and appreciated that "they made [her] feel like a person."

During our last *encuentro,* it was clear that the young women were appreciative of the time and space to speak of their experiences in school. It was also evident that they were continuing on their path of *conocimiento* toward transformation, with what seemed to be a new sense of their own social agency and greater consciousness of what they had experienced with respect to the sexual politics on their high school campus.

Implications

Highlighting the *testimonios* of these Chicana/Latina youth from Southeast Los Angeles, an impoverished and marginalized community, is important. Chicana/Latinas and their families often look to schools to help actualize their life goals, dreams as well as financial stability. That these young women found themselves frustrated with being held responsible for the *agravios* they experienced because of disembodying and violent policies and practices is significant.

The narratives also exposed another missing discourse in academia: the contentious relationship between high school girls and their male teachers, specific to sexual harassment and the sexual politics of the school campus. All of the young women lived and attended high school in a predominately low-income, Latinx community, and most witnessed or were victims of direct violations from male teachers. Their *testimonios* help raise the question: are these the experiences of young women of color in subaltern communities or do they more generally speak to experiences of young women in high school?

Moreover, were the young women in this study perceived as more powerless because of their gender, class, and ethnicity, making it easier to target them without fearing consequences? This surely could not have been the first occasion that young women experienced gender and sexual violence in school, so why is it such a silenced discourse in academia? What is clear is that the sexual politics of the high school was an inherently violent terrain for Chicana/Latina youth in this study, in that it “transmits and reinforces those ideologies that reflect the prevailing values and ethos of a capitalist, male-dominated, hierarchical, middle-class social structure” (McLaren, 2015, p. 165).

Given the current political climate and the outpour of women who have come forward about their own experiences with sexual violence in work, college and university campuses, and daily life through the #MeToo movement and #TimesUp campaign, it should be expected that these violations also occur on the high school campus. This implication becomes increasingly important as youth are mandated, by state and federal law, to go to school, while policies, such as Title IX, passed to protect the bodies of young women, are slowly being withdrawn (Tatum, 2017). Moreover, the fact that teachers are ill-prepared to engage in conversations about the body

and view the topic of sex and sexuality as taboo only helps facilitate and normalize sexual violence in school. This is particularly so given that girls as young as middle school are also participating in the #MeToo campaign and sharing their own experiences of sexual harassment and abuse (Simmons, 2017).

The young women also spoke about a sexist and (de)sexualizing dress code policy that caused them to inspect their bodies and blame themselves for the violations they experienced. As implied by the young women's *testimonios,* they could discern when policies and practices were targeting them because of their gender. As such, schools must conduct a close audit of the policies and practices they employ to ensure they are not causing unintended harm and further marginalizing and alienating students because of their race, class, or gender.

Present in their *testimonios* was also a desire to voice their truths and for their lived experiences to be taken seriously. They told of speaking up when they or others experienced *agravios* because of their gender or race only to be dismissed and silenced. They also expressed choosing to remain silent because past experiences had taught them that speaking up was not worth the effort. An implication of this is that schools must create spaces for young women to authentically speak their truths without fear of repercussions. Ideally, listening to students should happen on an ongoing basis before they feel discriminated against because of their race, gender, or class. Also, whenever possible, to alleviate fears of being penalized academically, students should be permitted to give feedback anonymously.

The presence of teacher-mentors and culturally responsive curricula are important factors in feeling a sense of belonging for Chicana/Latina youth. Their *testimonios* confirm that even having one person who validates their voice and humanity makes a difference in how they view

themselves and their abilities to succeed academically; this includes having educators who authentically incorporate the works of people of color, including women, in their curricula. As such, there should be a concerted effort in schools to provide educators with the tools and resources to build culturally responsive curricula. Further, schools should look to building strong critical mentorship programs for students and not be afraid to look outside of the school to members of the community as well as community elders to act as mentors when school faculty and staff cannot fill this need.

Recommendations

This study raises questions about the extent to which male teachers are prepared to deal with the burgeoning sexuality of their students and their own capacity to remain steady and supportive as adults. Darder (2009) contended that teachers are not equipped because there is an underlying acceptance that the body must be removed from teaching and learning. As a result, students are abandoned because the body is not dealt with as a cite of struggle and knowledge, and teachers, themselves, do not deal with their own sexuality. Chicana/Latina youth attend schools everyday across the nation; however, they are not always treated with respect and dignity. Instead, they are often met with educators who silence, ignore, and (de)sexualize them. The following provides a glimpse into recommendations that could make a difference.

Hear Our Voice

As one of the themes present in their *testimonios,* Chicana/Latina youth crave being listened to and having their humanity recognized. Thus, rather than imposing a series of recommendations from the researcher's point of view, it is important to listen to what Chicana/Latina youth have to say first about what needs to happen in order to make the school

environment and the society truly responsive to their experiences with sexual harassment. The following summarizes—in their own words—the recommendations made in the *testimonios* of the six Chicana/Latina youth in this study.

The dress code.

Mia: Let the kids wear what they want.

Alicia: I agree with Mia and think I'd let them wear what they want because either way if they like decide to further their education in college, they don't care what you wear. You can show up in anything and it's like people are still learning. So I don't think that's something that would distract you from your education.

Ximena: I agree with Mia because I feel like when you're in high school you're still trying to figure out who you are and your fashion is sort of part of your identity or what you wear. So I don't think, like Alicia said, it's gonna disrupt your learning. If you want to continue learning, then you'll do it regardless of what you're wearing.

On hiring practices.

Grace: I'd feel a deeper background check because like that teacher that made me feel really uncomfortable, he had this blog and he would talk about like his personal stuff and you would like, you could read and he kind of seemed really desperate. I'm not gonna lie. He seemed really desperate and so like I felt that vibe in class and that's why it was really uncomfortable for me. So I'm like deeper background check or look more into him or anyone in general.

Alicia: I think maybe I'd ask a lot of hypothetical situations and then try to figure out how they would handle it or like try to figure out what they're gonna try to incorporate to

the system that we don't have and then maybe, depending on their answers, if we do hire them, kind of go to their classroom more often. When they're barely—when they're beginning and stuff just to see if they're actually like doing what they said they would do and then kind of—I don't know—maybe take like—have students take surveys and then like anonymous surveys because I know a lot of them don't like to say their name. And then if like the answers aren't good, actually try to do something about it so then try to talk to them. Like okay so we haven't had the best feedback. What are you gonna try to do to improve it? And if not, maybe try to look for somebody else that would, um, help the students out more.

I would also try to reach out to the previous schools that they taught in if they have and then see the experience that they got from them being a teacher. And if it wasn't positive, then I don't think they're gonna do like a positive impact in my school so maybe look for somebody else because that's also important. I don't know if they actually do that or kind of—I don't know—figure out a way where you could also get the students', um, opinion on that teacher from like the previous schools that they've taught in because I feel like the students are more honest than the staff members or like the teachers would be.

Bianca: Relating to that about looking into, um, their previous school, well, the teacher that was there at our year got kicked out to another school. So it just shows how like they don't care what you've done at previous schools because if you had the job somewhere else, that means those—that school like bypassed his past and let him work there. So it just—so I, I would assume that they're like well, they probably don't even contact – I mean I'm sure they know, but whether or not they do something about it is different.

Ximena: In college, um, teachers actually—professors actually ask you to write evaluations and they used parts of like what students say in their resume so I guess they can do that as well.

On school curricula. Mia: For history classes I would try to incorporate more than just like, um, Europe and more of like Africa and other countries that are not just white and learn more about their history instead of just the colonization of those countries.

Bianca: I would like to learn about other cultures if I were learning about – in a way that people spend so much timing learning about like Europe and stuff like them as individual like have nothing to do with, with other cultures and like an isolated like learn what they are, not how they are props to Europe or something like that.

Also, maybe like finance classes or stuff like that, taxes, like How to Live 101?

Grace: I'd want classes that can help girls, you know, classes that can help us, that can actually help us outside of high school.

Ximena: Taking a Life Skills class in eleventh grade instead of ninth grade like we did would make a difference because, um, like job applications, I don't think we were old enough to work yet or they would also make us fill out the common app. They were teaching us how to do it there and it's like not the right time to do it yet. So I guess it would help having it later on.

On mentorship.

Bianca: We need mentors but I feel like a lot of the stuff mentors do can't be trained. Like, like you can't train human connection. Like you can't train a teacher to like oh, this is how you talk to the student like a person. You know what I mean? Like I'm sure there's

things that, that can be trained but like I don't know if you can like fully train a mentor. I think it's just a lot of it comes—it's just the person that they are and they're just gonna like —It's not gonna change now that they're a teacher. It's just maybe amplified because you have all these kids that look up to you and stuff like that, but I don't know if it can be taught.

Other Important Actions

In addition to the recommendations the young women made during our *pláticas y encuentros,* in order to make the school environment and the society truly responsive to their experiences with navigating the sexual politics of school, there are other important actions schools need to take. These actions must be directly linked to addressing the need for nondiscriminatory policies and practices; robust Title IX training for all school administrators, faculty, staff, and volunteers; and the need for allowing students' dissenting voices as well as authentically listening to their stories.

Nondiscriminatory policies and practices. The young women named the dress code policy as (de)sexualizing and deliberately sexist. The fact that they named it as such exemplifies the amount of psychological trauma they endured, as adults at school inspected their bodies and often deemed them inappropriate for school. Experiencing this policy and the continuous policing of their bodies illustrates the ways "conservative ideologies of social control . . . continue to be reflected in the narrow, rule-based pedagogical policies and practices of schooling today (Darder, 2009, p. 221). Thus, schools must create systems in which different students, teachers, parents, community members come together to evaluate the policies and practices employed at the school. As they evaluate each policy, they must ask themselves: What is the

purpose of this policy? Who benefits from its existence? Does it discriminate students based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, language, or disability? Is it moving students closer to educational opportunity or further away?

In addition to assessing school policies in this manner, schools should seek the input of the entire student body. It is important to recognize that, although students want to make their voice heard, often issues of power and control make it difficult for students to speak their truth without fear. Thus, anonymously surveying students as well as faculty and staff on all current policies and practices could help us to gain a better understanding of the degree to which they are discriminatory. Further, it is important not only to examine these policies, but also to implement recommendations that come from such evaluations.

Title IX training. Although Congress enacted Title IX with two chief objectives: "to avoid the use of federal resources to support discriminatory practices in education programs, and to provide individual citizens effective protection against those practices" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2001, p. 16), it has not been effective in eradicating gender discrimination in schools. In the context of on campus sexual violence, Title IX has gained national attention. This influx of attention has led to the development of the White House Task Force on Sexual Assault and has influenced the United States Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to update the obligations schools must meet in order to be in compliance with Title IX. Problematic, however, is that most of these efforts are geared toward higher education and not K–12 schools. K–12 educators are not required to have extensive Title IX training. Instead, educators are required to know the law exists, but not appreciate what it means.

Thus, schools should be required to offer robust professional development training that addresses the origins and application of Title IX at their school sites, what educators and educational leaders must do to be compliant, and ways to maintain a safe reporting climate and survivor-centered approach. Moreover, there should be a discussion of sexual harassment, specifically, including the ways in which it differs from sexual assault. This conversation must convey that, although the two differ, they are both acts of violence and must be treated as such in order to ensure students can safely go to school. Understanding what constitutes acts of violence, however, is not enough. School administrators, teachers, staff, and volunteers must know the exact protocols for reporting these acts of violence and kept abreast to ensure appropriate actions are taking place.

Offering safe spaces and allowing students' dissenting voices. As previously mentioned, in schools, Chicana/Latina youth are further victimized, so they are left without safe spaces for self-actualization, which is why it is critical that they have access to counterhegemonic spaces that help them make sense of their schooling experiences. Thus, schools must provide space for students to express the ways they define themselves and name experiences because it helps educators understand how students are experiencing school, helping them become more responsive to their needs.

Future Research

There is a need for future research related to the experiences of Chicana/Latina youth in schools. One includes an examination of girls' experiences with sexual violence in schools, with specific attention to policies, practices, and relationships with adults on campus. It is paramount to investigate if what the young women in this study experienced occurred because of the

subalternity of the young women seeing that they live in racialized conditions, or if this phenomenon exists in schools across the nation. Lastly, it is important to study the ways in which Title IX trainings are enacted in schools across the nation. Faculty and staff on college and university campuses are mandated to undergo Title IX training, however, the same does not hold true for K–12 educators. Thus, an investigation of the degree in which teachers and administrators are trained is necessary.

Conclusion

Through the strength and power of *testimonios,* we begin to uncover "how systems of power have privileged certain kinds of narratives that serve to undermine and invalidate others" (Cruz, 2014, p. 196). The *testimonios* from this study illustrate the schooling experiences of Chicana/Latina youth in U.S. public schools. These *testimonios* demonstrate Chicana/Latina youth's efforts to (re)claim their bodies and challenge the sexual politics, structural sexism, racism, and institutional power structures. Issues raised by the young women are in concert with literature in the field that explain ways in which the hidden curriculum of education functions to maintain patriarchal notions of gender, power, and detachment of the body. The findings suggest that the following factors influence the success of Chicana/Latina youth: (a) mentorship and guidance, (b) listening to their voice and honoring their humanity, (c) access to third space, counterspace for full actualization, (d) authentic culturally relevant pedagogy.

This study set out to understand the schooling experiences of Chicana/Latina youth. Specifically, I wanted to understand the sexual harassment and sexist microaggressions Chicana/Latina high school students face. More importantly, I was interested in knowing how these encounters influenced how they perceived their experiences with respect to how they felt

about themselves, their school participation, and their understanding of self. The young women spoke of policies and practices that (de)sexualized their bodies, feeling as though they needed to be hypervigilant and to police their own bodies (or risk blame for the violations they endured), and wanting access to curricula that was representative of students in their school.

A consistent thread among all *testimonios* was the desire to be heard, feel safe, and validated in school. These young women struggled daily to have faculty and staff recognize their humanity and acknowledge that their bodies were appropriate and belonged in school. For Chicana/Latina youth, the struggle to secure a humanizing schooling experience continues.

Epilogue

It is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving in. In short, it is impossible to teach without a forged, invented, and well-thought-out capacity to love.

Paulo Freire (1998)

I always considered teaching to be a privilege and approached my work with love. When I first entered the classroom, I tried to channel the style of my favorite high school teacher and mentor, Carlos Valverde, until I became comfortable with myself and my new role. I was committed to showing students that there were multiple ways of being in the world, all of them valid and important. In this vain, I listened to their stories. I invited them to reflect on their experiences in my classroom; and, although it was sometimes difficult to hear their critiques, I listened with an open heart and worked to bring their suggestions to fruition. The practice of listening allowed me to bestride the delicate balance between teacher, mentor, and ally and

helped me transform into the Chicana/Latina teacher I wished I had when I went through primary and secondary school.

This journey was never easy because while I helped young people advocate for a more humanizing schooling experience, I clashed with school administrators who were bent on taking the authoritarian role in containing students. These conflicts ultimately led me to leave the classroom. I found that I could no longer be in harmony with myself in this contentious space, so I left. Being away and listening to the voices of the young women in this study—who were once my students—afforded me the clarity to reflect on my own practice as an educator. I learned about the silences they carried with them when they sat in my class. I learned about the unspoken truths behind their smiles. I saw in their bodies yearning to tell their truth, heal, and move forward with their lives.

While listening, I, too, embarked on a path of *conocimiento.* I experienced an *arrebato* as I thought about everything I missed while I taught. I ask myself if I did not see the violations young women experienced on a daily basis because I did not want to acknowledge them as true or if it was because I really did not see them. I ask myself this particularly because I sat in the school's leadership committee and was often the only dissenting voice against the sexist dress code—but I did not know about the leering looks and inappropriate conduct of colleagues. I did not know that young women were inspecting and hiding their bodies out of fear of enticing a male teacher. I was not aware, and yet, I was there, every day, I was there.

I was there with Mia during the lunchtime activity. I was the teacher who, alongside students, organized the event, so I was there and I didn't see it. During our *plática,* Mia confirmed my presence. From the moment I heard her words, I wondered if I, too, was complicit.

Did I see it and not think it inappropriate because the clerk was a woman? Was I complicit? I will never know the answers to those questions, what I do know is that it happened and Mia suffered in silence.

With Dr. Darder's love, compassion, and guidance, I came to this work seeking to honor the voices of the young women I worked with every day, which could only be done by approaching the work with humility and a degree of openness. From these young women, I learned that they, too, want their stories told. They want others to know that girls often suffer in silence, that their experiences matter, and they deserve an education that validates their existence and does not demonize their bodies. I also learned that the day I return to the classroom, I must remember to listen to the bodies of my students. I must trust my intuition, I must continue to offer a third space for self-actualization, and I must continue to do this work with love. I learned that the work is never finished, and I will return to the classroom one day, because that is home.

Most importantly, I learned that the world needs to listen to the wise voices of Chicana/Latina youth. Just listen, so we may honor their humanity.

APPENDIX A

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

Date of Preparation ___________________________________

Loyola Marymount University

(Title in Lay Language)

1) I hereby authorize Mayra A. Lara, M.Ed. to include me in the following research study: As Told Through Our Voices: Chicana/Latina Youths' Experiences in High School.
2) I have been asked to participate on a research project which is designed to understand the experiences of Chicana/Latina youth in high school and which will last for approximately 2 months.
3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that I am a female student who identifies as Chicana and/or Latina and have recently graduated from high school.
4) I understand that if I am a subject, I will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute focus group, a 60-90 minute individual narrative interview, and an optional 30-90 minute member-checking interviews.
   The investigator(s) will
   ____.
   These procedures have been explained to me by Mayra A. Lara, doctoral candidate.
5) I understand that I will be audiotaped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these tapes will be used for teaching and/or research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the tapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.
6) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts:
   ____.
7) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are
   ______________________ ____________________________.

9) I understand that Mayra A. Lara who can be reached at [redacted] or [redacted] will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.
10) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.
11) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice to (e.g., my future medical care at LMU.)
12) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.
13) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.
14) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

Subject's Signature ___________________________________ Date _________

Witness ____ Date ________

APPENDIX B

Personal Data Form

This information will be used only for the research study entitled: **As Told Through Our Voices: Chicana/Latina Youths' Experiences in High School.**

Personal Information	
First Name	
Last Name	
Pseudonym	
Birthday	
Home phone	
Mobile or cellular phone	
Email Address	
High school graduation year	

You may attach paper is additional space is needed
Tell me about yourself (i.e. likes, dislikes):
Tell me how you describe yourself:
Tell me about your post-high school plans:

APPENDIX C
Interview Prompts

Focus Group

The primary purpose of the focus group is to allow the girls to articulate what helped them navigate their high school experience as well as to identify recommendations they have that would make the school environment and the society truly responsive to their experiences. The questions that will help guide this focus group are:

- What was it like to be in high school?
- What, if anything, helped you with your high school experience?
    - Was there anything about high school that helped you get through school?

Individual *Plática*

Life History Information

I want to get to know you and your story.

- Place of birth
- Age you came to the United States, if applicable.
- Where you grew up
- Family structure and characteristics
- Socioeconomic status
- School experience (schools attended)

Growing up Female

- Tell me about being a girl/growing up
- Tell me what it’s like to be a girl in school?

- Have you ever felt harassed because of your gender or identity?
    - **Prompt:** How did that make you feel?
- Have any of these experiences affected your school participation?
    - **Prompt:** How did that make you feel?
- Thank you for your time, do you any questions for me?

Individual Member-Checking Narrative Interview

The primary purpose of the individual member-checking interview is to review the initial themes that emerged from the initial narrative interviews and to ensure that their stories are told in ways that are true to them. Prompts will be created after preliminary coding of individual *pláticas*.

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