

2004

# Central American immigrant women's perceptions of adult learning: a qualitative inquiry

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**Central American immigrant women's perceptions of adult learning:  
A qualitative inquiry**

by

**Ana Guisela Chupina**

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Major: Education (Adult Education)**

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**Iowa State University**

**Ames, Iowa**

**2004**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore how Central American immigrant women experienced and gave meaning to the phenomenon of adult learning in the Midwestern United States. Data collection followed Seidman's (1998) model for in-depth phenomenological interviewing, which combined interviews informed by the methodologies of life story and phenomenology. Three in-depth interviews were conducted with five Central American immigrant women living in a Midwestern metropolitan area. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were crafted into first-person narratives that captured the participants' life stories of learning. The transcripts were also inductively analyzed through a process that included naming topics, developing categories, and identifying themes. This analysis led to identifying common themes and major domains. Findings were represented in two ways: 1) five life stories of learning in Spanish with full English translations, and 2) eleven themes supported by quotations in Spanish with corresponding English translations.

The life stories reconstructed the women's learning experiences from childhood to adulthood and illustrated a shift between country of origin and receiving country. Key concepts in Elder's (1995) life course paradigm proved useful for interpreting similarities and differences among the participants' life stories. Six patterns revealed interacting factors that contributed to shaping the participants' self-concepts as learners and perceptions of learning: 1) historical change and timing; 2) socioeconomic status, rural or urban setting, and family composition; 3) gender socialization; 4) linked lives; 5) context of reception; and 6) human agency.

The themes uncovered three domains in the participants' experiences and perceptions of adult learning in the receiving country: Concept, Process, and Outcome. Especially revealing was that the participants' learning processes were continuous, informal and incidental, experiential, and relational. These findings underscored the influence of both internal and external factors on adult learning processes.

This inquiry offers a schematic interpretation of the findings that suggests that the phenomenon of adult learning was intimately bound to the participants' immigration experiences and shaped by the interplay of four elements: 1) Learner Identity, 2) U.S. Context of Reception, 3) Learning Process, and 4) Learning Outcomes.

## CHAPTER 1. OVERVIEW OF THE INQUIRY

With 28.4 million foreign-born residents in 2000 (Lollock, 2001), the United States was the largest recipient of international migrants in the world. On average, the United States receives 1 million authorized and 300,000 unauthorized international migrants every year (Martin, Larking, & Nathanson, 2000). Over the last 39 years, a radical shift in the national origins of U.S. immigrants has occurred. In 2000, the foreign-born made up 10.4% of the total U.S. population. When examined by region of origin, more than one half were born in Latin America, one fourth were born in Asia, and fewer than one eighth were born in Europe (Lollock, 2001).

Among those born in Latin America, Central Americans are one of the most disadvantaged groups to have arrived in the United States over the last two decades (Guzman, 2001; Rumbaut, 1996; Therrien & Ramirez, 2000). Triggered by economic decline, civil wars, and natural disasters, the immigration of Central Americans has more closely resembled a refugee pattern than a pattern of voluntary migration (Mahler, 1995). However, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has provided relatively few Central Americans with political asylum or authorization to reside and work in the United States (Gonzalez, 2000). On the contrary, the INS's classification of Central Americans as economically motivated immigrants has seriously restricted their eligibility for U.S. legal immigration status. Consequently, Central Americans have joined Mexicans in comprising one third of the approximately 8 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States (Porter, 2001).



In addition to U.S. immigration policy, movement of the American economy from an industrial to an information economy has contributed to making the United States a challenging context for reception of Central American immigrants. In an American economy characterized by industrial restructuring and downsizing, employment opportunities for newcomers have been available in either high-skilled professions or low-wage services (Bach, 1997). Difficulties obtaining legal status, low levels of formal education, and lack of proficiency in English have contributed to restricting the economic and social opportunities available to Central Americans in the United States.

Gender-based patterns of labor recruitment in the United States have made particularly difficult the employment mobility of immigrant women from regions of the world with less developed economies such as Central America (Repak, 1995). Most of these immigrant women are locked into poorly paid jobs as domestics, chambermaids, building cleaners, and sewing-machine operators. In turn, these types of employment have limited the women's access to formal education and to other kinds of learning that could contribute to facilitating their social and economic mobility. For instance, Paredes (1987) pointed out that "access or non-access to language training structures [immigrant women's] lives by organizing their pattern of employment, their isolation from society and their dependency on family and others" (p. 23).

Although building an accurate educational profile of Central American immigrants in the United States is difficult, it is possible to infer from general reports (Guzman, 2001; Rumbaut, 1996; Therrien & Ramirez, 2000) that a majority of Central American immigrants over age 25 will likely exhibit the following characteristics: 1) low levels of literacy in either Spanish or other native language, 2) fewer than 12 years of formal education, and 3) no or

minimal knowledge of the English language. Given the disadvantaged status of peasant women relative to that of peasant men in Central America (Bronstein, 1982), it is also likely that immigrant women will exhibit lower levels of formal education than immigrant men.

Within adult education, the profile of Central American immigrants has contributed to classifying them as a language minority population with low levels of formal education, which in turn has limited their access to educational opportunities. In particular, three interacting factors—race (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000), culture (Cassara, 1991; Hemphill, 1992; Jeria, 1999; Ross, 1988; Shannon, 2000; Sparks, 2002), and gender (Hamamoto & Torres, 1997; Paredes, 1987; Rockhill, 1990)—may be contributing to limiting the accessibility to adult education of Central American women.

Within adult education, four program areas would seem appropriate to addressing the literacy needs of Central Americans: Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), English as a Second Language (ESL), and Community-based Education programs. However, limitations such as inadequate funding (Wrigley, 1993) and inappropriate methods and materials (Graham & Cookson, 1990) have made mainstream ABE, ASE, and ESL education programs ineffective for meeting the needs and interests of non-English-speaking immigrants with low levels of literacy. On the other hand, community-based education has offered a viable alternative to mainstream adult education (Juhasz & Plazas, 1993; Osterling, 1998; Pruyn, 1999; Strom, Johnson, Strom, & Daniels, 1992; Velazquez, 1996; Young & Padilla, 1990; Zakaluk & Wynes, 1995). Popular education, in particular, has been considered ideal for working with Latin American immigrants because it bridges gaps between formal, non-formal, and informal adult learning (Jeria, 1999). Yet, the capacity of community-based programs for addressing specific community issues is often

limited by a lack of precise knowledge of learners' perceptions on the part of educators and program leaders (Jeria, 1990).

Developing an understanding of Central American immigrants' experiences and perceptions of adult learning is necessary for enhancing the opportunities available to this population in community-based as well as in other types of adult education. Given the gender-specific employment situations of Central American immigrants, finding ways for understanding and addressing the learning needs of women, in particular, seems imperative.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this inquiry was to contribute to developing an understanding of the phenomenon of adult learning among Central American immigrant women in the United States. Drawing on two qualitative research methodologies, life story and phenomenology, the inquiry specifically sought to examine the meanings that Central American immigrant women gave to their adult learning experiences in the United States. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings Central American immigrant women gave to adult learning, the participants' perceptions were examined within the context of their lives. Considering the employment challenges faced by Central American immigrant women, the inquiry also explored how these women related their roles as adult learners to work expectations.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the inquiry:

1. How do Central American immigrant women describe their experiences of learning in the United States?

2. How do Central American immigrant women perceive their experiences of learning in the United States?
3. What specific meanings do Central American immigrant women give to adult learning?
4. How do Central American immigrant women relate their roles as adult learners to work expectations?
5. To what extent do earlier experiences in the country of origin contribute to the women's understanding of adult learning and self-concepts?

### **Definitions**

Two concepts were central to the inquiry: “Central American immigrant women” and “adult learning.” They were defined as follows.

A Central American immigrant woman was defined as a female at least 18 years of age, who was born in one of five Central American countries—Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, or Costa Rica—and who had resided in the United States for one year or longer.

Adult learning was defined as “a cognitive process internal to the learner... that includes the unplanned, incidental learning that is part of everyday life” (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 6) and which is linked to and affected by the social world surrounding the learner. This definition of adult learning was rooted in a socio-cultural rather than an individualistic perspective of learning.

Underscoring the tension between individual and social perspectives, Merriam (1993) noted that definitions of adult learning varied among adult educators practicing in different regions of the world. According to Merriam, in North America a psychological perspective

has dominated; therefore, adult learning has been understood in terms of the concerns, issues, and characteristics of individual adults. But in other regions of the world, a socio-cultural perspective has been more prevalent; therefore, adult learning has been seen as a process that is intimately linked to and affected by the social world surrounding the learner. From the latter perspective, the way adults experience learning is as much a function of socio-cultural environments as it is of individual mental processes.

Pratt (1993) underscored a shift in thought about the concept of learning in American adult education. Pratt emphasized that during the 1950s and 1960s behaviorism fostered an understanding of learning as “change in behavior” (p. 16). However, as a result of Malcolm Knowles’s conceptualization of adult learning as andragogy (as cited in Pratt, 1993), adult educators progressively adopted an understanding of learning as being actively constructed by the learner instead of it being something that was “passively received from the environment” (p. 17). Consequently, under the concept of andragogy, adult learning came to be understood as “an interactive process of interpretation, integration, and transformation of one’s experiential world” (p. 17). Although andragogy emphasized an individual perspective of learning, Pratt stressed that adult educators have increasingly taken into account “the reciprocal relationship between the individual and social structures—each giving meaning and shape to the other” (p. 18).

The latter perspective was used as a basis for defining adult learning in the inquiry. Accordingly, adult learning was understood as a potential outcome of any activity in which adults participated and included three types of adult learning outlined by Courtney (1989): 1) informal, 2) non-formal, and 3) formal. According to Courtney, informal learning refers to the lifelong process whereby adults inform themselves about life. Informal learning takes

place in a natural way and may include accidental learning. In contrast, non-formal learning is accomplished in a deliberate, organized way, under its own standards of control. It is designated non-formal learning because it takes place outside the established educational system; for example, in churches, work settings, community halls, or rural social gatherings. Finally, formal learning is that which is organized and delivered through the established formal system. Adults who engage in formal learning usually attend schools, community colleges, universities, and other official sites of learning.

### **Rationale**

Historically, ignoring immigrants' perceptions of learning as well as their socio-cultural characteristics has contributed to making immigrant adult education programs unsuccessful. Instead of building on immigrants' strengths and interests, such programs have emphasized a deficit viewpoint and equated immigrant education with assimilation. For instance, Seller (1978) compared the level of success accomplished by Americanization and ethnic community programs from 1914-1924. Seller noted that the failure of Americanization programs was partially based on inadequate funding and inappropriate methods and materials. Ultimately, however, Seller argued that Americanization programs were unsuccessful because they failed to meet the immigrants' needs. Therefore, according to Seller, the primary reason for both the failure of officially sponsored Americanization programs and the success of ethnic community programs was that "immigrants defined [their] education more broadly" (p. 88) than did Americanizing educators.

As stated previously, popular education has been an alternative to mainstream adult education for addressing the learning needs of ethnic minority adults such as Central American immigrants. However, Jeria (1990) noted that the impact of popular education

projects has been weakened by a tendency on the part of program planners and educators to view and characterize learners' situations from a general and schematic point of view. Jeria stressed, "Popular educators lack precise knowledge. No diagnoses of problems are performed, little information is requested, and only the general characteristics of the reality of the participants are known" (p. 99). From this perspective, I believed that this inquiry could add to a more specific understanding of the reality of Central American immigrant women as perceived and constructed by them. In particular, the inquiry could yield insightful findings about the women's specific needs and expectations as learners. For instance, the inquiry could provide insights into women's perceptions of themselves as learners in relation to other aspects of their adult lives, such as work expectations. In addition, gaining insight into Central American immigrant women's individual experiences and perceptions of adult learning could help to illuminate broader societal conditions affecting other immigrant adult learners.

Studies of Central Americans have clearly indicated that gender, as a social system, has influenced the experiences of Central American immigrant women and men at various stages of the migration process (i.e., pre-migration, journey, settlement, and return). The literature suggests that immigration to the United States has presented women with challenges that are different from and often greater than those experienced by men. However, we know very little about the adult learning experiences of Central American immigrant women in the United States. Ethnographic studies (Hagan, 1994; Mahler, 1995; Repak, 1995) have paid only indirect attention to the influence of education on the immigrants' lives. None of these studies have examined the different kinds of learning—informal, non-formal, formal—experienced by adult immigrants in the new settings. From this perspective, besides

adding to the knowledge base of adult education, I believed that this inquiry could contribute to advancing an understanding of this population in other fields such as immigration studies and women's studies.

### **Significance of the Inquiry**

In my view, this inquiry is significant for at least three reasons: First, Central American immigrants make up, and are likely to continue making up, a significant proportion of recent Latin American immigration to the United States. Over the last two decades, the percentage of women in Central American migration flows to the United States has been close to 50%; at times, women have outnumbered men.

Second, the inquiry is significant because there is very little known about the learning needs and interests of immigrant women in general and Central Americans in the United States in particular. Because this inquiry conceptualized learning from a socio-cultural perspective and examined women's perceptions of adult learning within the context of their lives, it could contribute to advancing an understanding of contemporary immigrant women.

Third, the inquiry is significant because it informs the efforts of adult education professionals working at various levels of intervention. For instance, findings from this inquiry could inform the work of policy makers, program planners, educational administrators, and classroom instructors.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Although knowing in advance the role that theory will play in building research interpretations is incongruent with a qualitative inquiry, making explicit the researcher's conceptual framework for approaching an investigation is of utmost importance.



In the case of this inquiry, both my personal background and theoretical orientation contributed to its conceptualization. Specifically, my personal experiences of schooling and learning, as well as my understanding of three theoretical perspectives—Elder’s (1995) life course paradigm, Freire’s (1970/2000) philosophy of adult learning, and Schutz’s (1932/1967) phenomenology—influenced the way I thought about the concept of *learning* in relation to this inquiry.

### ***Personal Background***

In order to provide a framework for understanding my personal motivation for conducting this inquiry, I include a personal narrative of my experiences of learning and schooling in Guatemala, my country of origin. Two concepts run across my personal narrative of learning and schooling: change and marginality. As I undertook the inquiry, I was mindful of ways in which these concepts influenced my interpretations.

***Change.*** As I was growing up, I developed a mental association between learning and changing from one social environment to another. I attended an American school to obtain my elementary and secondary education in a country with many social contradictions. Being immersed in an environment that contrasted with the rest of my social world provided me with early insights into the dissimilar social conditions experienced by people in my country. In the American school, I was taught in a language that the majority of Guatemalans did not speak, and I was encouraged to pursue the ideals of a society with little resemblance to mine. Outside of the American school, what I heard and saw was very different. Cousins and friends who attended other schools seemed to follow other interests and cultural principles. In addition, the evident poverty of the majority of Guatemalans, especially Mayan Indians, contrasted with the beautiful buildings and serene surroundings of the American

school. Although I doubt that I was conscious of this at the time, my life was shaped by a daily shift between an American and a Guatemalan social environment.

Change was also part of my learning experiences in a different sense. I discovered dance when I was eight years old. As I was thin and non-athletic, my mother thought it would be a good idea to enroll me in dance school. I remember feeling like a fish in water when I took my first lesson. I did not care much about the socializing aspect of it. I was among upper-class girls whom I didn't know, but who knew each other. Nevertheless, when I was in class I felt there was nothing else I would rather do. Eventually, my growing interest in dance convinced my mother that it was better for me to enroll in the national dance school, which was predominantly attended by working- and middle-class children. The contrast in social settings was a shock for me. Every afternoon, I would go from the American school, which was located in an almost rural setting, to the national dance school, which was located in a downtown area.

These experiences led me to think of learning not only as a means for developing academic skills, but also as a strategy for developing the ability to function in different social settings. In addition, changing environments provided me with different ways of experiencing learning. While in school, I enjoyed math, geometry, and algebra. I loved working with numbers, geometrical figures, and algebraic formulas. Solving math problems gave me the good feeling of intuitively "seeing" or discovering something that was not apparent. In dance, learning meant working daily towards mastering physical skills that could enable me to articulate movement phrases. Looking back, I think I enjoyed dance because I worked towards attaining something that would never be mastered. I was not athletically oriented. My talent was in linking steps into spatial patterns that were capable of

communicating more than physical skillfulness. What I enjoyed most was to experience unanticipated movement such as doing a third pirouette on point when I was planning only on two. Overall, from these two ways of experiencing learning, I came to an understanding of *learning* as discovering and experiencing something that was unanticipated. These experiences, as well as my constant shifts between social environments, made *change* a central concept in my perception of learning.

***Marginality.*** I define marginality as a sense of not belonging to or fitting in with a given social group. While I was growing up, I experienced marginality in a rather paradoxical manner. Attending an American school was for me both a privilege and a source of oppression. On the one hand, it was a privilege to have the opportunity to get a bilingual education in a school that implemented progressive curricula and had the resources to provide classrooms with laboratory equipment and instructional technology. On the other hand, the school's social setting provided me with a sense of being oppressed. For many years, I thought that my feelings of inadequacy in school were due only to my introverted personality. But looking back, I realize that I often felt that I was not equal to the American children in my class. Somehow, I internalized that having dark skin, dark hair, and being Guatemalan was "less than" being fair-skinned, blue-eyed, and American. Although my academic skills were above average in my class, I always had a sensation that I was a "second-class citizen" in my school.

Recently, I learned that some of my Guatemalan peers grew up with the same feelings of marginality. The women, especially, felt there was a system in place whereby one was discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and class. To be fair, the school implemented a nonsexist education. However, the gender oppression came from

male Guatemalan peers who, in my view, might have been acting upon their own sense of social discomfort.

The concepts of *change* and *marginality* that began to form in my youth have followed me throughout my learning experiences as an adult, but in a different manner. My experiences as a graduate student in the United States have provided me with opportunities for clarifying how change and marginality can be approached in constructive and positive ways. My experiences have made me aware of the challenges posed by change and marginality, two concepts that are also closely linked to immigration. At the same time, I have learned to view change, marginality, and immigration as opportunities that can contribute to a person's development in a positive manner. It was with this disposition that I undertook the inquiry.

### ***Elder's Life Course Paradigm***

Elder (1995) provided a framework for examining human development from a sociological perspective that considered both "how dynamic worlds change people and how people select and construct their environments" (p. 102). Taking the socio-cultural environment as his point of departure, Elder integrated four key concepts for examining change in human lives: 1) historical change, 2) human agency, 3) linked lives, and 4) timing.

***Historical change.*** Historical time and place influence how an individual establishes his or her life course. The impact of social forces on a person's life course has developmental consequences. Hence, Elder (1995) underscored that "the later years of aging and its quality of life cannot be understood in full without knowledge of the prior life course" (p. 107).

***Human agency.*** Within the limitations imposed by their social worlds, individuals make choices about their lives that are based on their perceptions and assessments of

situations. According to Elder (1995), the choices people make are related to the person's "life history of experiences and dispositions. Individual differences and life histories interact with changing environments to produce behavioral outcomes" (p. 110).

***Linked lives.*** The lives of individuals are linked and interdependent. Because people's lives are intertwined, "personal actions have consequences for others, and the actions of others impinge on the self" (Elder, 1995, p. 114).

***Timing.*** Timing refers to historical location, the person's life stage at the time of social change, and the synchrony of a person's trajectories, such as work and family, with the trajectories of significant others.

As I conceptualized the inquiry, I believed that Elder's concepts would help me to view individual perceptions of adult learning within the context of the participants' development over the life course. I thought Elder's concepts would help me connect multiple-level factors shaping the way in which Central American immigrant women perceived adult learning in their lives. For instance, I thought that keeping in mind the concepts of historical change, timing, and linked lives could help me connect pieces of data that would otherwise seem unrelated, such as experiencing civil war, early learning experiences and choices, and participants' links to other people.

### ***Freire's Philosophy of Adult Learning***

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970/2000) advanced a critique of domination in society. Based on a historically situated Latin American reality of class oppression, Freire's critique denounced social injustice, exploitation, and oppression as deplorable violations to a fundamental human right: the freedom to transform oneself and one's world in ways that advance one's humanness. Accordingly, Freire rejected societies that violate this

right; for example, in societies in which some members fail to recognize the humanity of others, some members act like subjects while others are treated as objects, and all members are bound to dehumanization instead of humanization.

Freire (1970/2000) viewed humanization and dehumanization as real, yet fundamentally distinct, alternatives. While he defined humanization as the “vocation for becoming more fully human” (p. 44), he viewed dehumanization as a distortion of that vocation. In his perspective, humanization affirms human potential, while dehumanization stifles it. Consequently, in social contexts in which dehumanization prevails, both the oppressed and their oppressors are kept from actualizing their natural human vocation.

According to Freire (1970/2000), dehumanization is most bitterly experienced by the oppressed. For this reason, it is their task to eradicate social oppression. Only their struggle for regaining humanity can liberate both themselves and their oppressors from dehumanization. Only their quest for humanity can restore everybody’s freedom to transform themselves and their world in ways that advance their humanness.

The struggle for freedom poses external and internal challenges for the oppressed (Freire, 1970/2000). They must fight not only external constraints imposed by social oppression, but also an internalized view of themselves and the world defined by oppression. Freire noted two obstacles in this process. First, the oppressed are immersed in a reality of oppression. Although they perceive themselves as opposites from their oppressors, they adhere to them. Instead of aspiring to liberation, they seek to become more like the oppressors. In addition, an individualistic view of social mobility prevents them from recognizing themselves as members of an oppressed class. Second, as the oppressed begin to yearn for liberation, they experience fear of freedom. They have lived by prescription,

whereby others have always made choices for them. Their behavior has conformed to guidelines prescribed by the oppressors, and their consciousness has been transformed into one that emulates that of the oppressors. Therefore, they are fearful of losing what they know for the unknown. They are fearful of exchanging the security of conformity for the uncertainty of autonomy and responsibility.

Although I do not fully embrace Freire's dichotomizing way of conceptualizing the social world, I do believe that educational initiatives designed for working with adult learners who have experienced oppression must take into account the above challenges. For this reason, I believed that Freire's observations of the obstacles imposed by oppression on adult learners could be relevant to this inquiry.

As immigrant women from Central America are likely to have experienced oppressive social conditions, I thought Freire's (1970/2000) observations could provide a valuable frame of reference. For example, Freire claimed that "during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend to become themselves oppressors.... Their ideal is to be men [and women]; but for them, to be men [and women] is to be oppressors" (p. 45). Freire's assertion raised intriguing questions for me about the life choices and expectations of Central American immigrant women, in particular, their interests and dispositions for engaging in adult learning. Since members of the oppressor class in Central America have a disproportionate access to material goods at the expense of the extreme poverty of the oppressed, one might expect that working-class immigrant women would pursue a sense of being through material gains. On the other hand, the women's decisions to immigrate could suggest that they have a higher degree of critical consciousness

and better dispositions for transforming their lives and their world than fellow nationals who stay behind.

### ***Schutz's Phenomenology***

An important contribution that Schutz (1932/1967) made to the social sciences was his quest for the origin of the “meaning” of human actions. Schutz suggested that the origin of the meanings a person gives to his or her actions is found in that person’s stream of consciousness. However, in itself the content of this stream of consciousness has no meaning. It is only through reflecting upon an experience that has elapsed that a person makes meaning of his or her actions. Schutz emphasized,

It is misleading to say that experiences *have* meaning. Meaning does not lie in the experience. Rather, those experiences are meaningful which are grasped reflectively.

The meaning is the *way* in which the Ego regards its experience. The meaning lies in the attitude of the Ego toward that part of its stream of consciousness which has already flowed by, toward its “elapsed duration.” (p. 69)

Schutz also emphasized one’s limitation for entering another’s stream of consciousness. He asserted that it is never possible to fully understand another, because that would mean becoming the other person. At the same time, he noted the importance of interpreting behavior in context to understand the actions of others.

Schutz’s ideas contributed to my thinking about the relationship between experience, reflection, meaning-making, and interviewing. Schutz’s conceptualization of the meaning of human actions, as well as the thought that one is unable to make meaning of an experience while undergoing the experience, reinforced my decision to use in-depth phenomenological interviewing in this inquiry.



## Tentative Presuppositions

Based on my personal background, as well as on my review of literature relevant to the study of immigrant women from Central America, I approached the inquiry with the following presuppositions:

- ⇒ Central American immigrant women's perceptions of adult learning will likely be linked to their schooling experiences as children and young adults. Expanding the women's conceptualization of *learning* beyond schooling could be an outcome of the research process. In addition, the research process could contribute to forming a link between the women's perceptions of learning in adulthood and their work expectations.
- ⇒ Migration entails experiencing change. Migration carries opportunities for identifying, interpreting, and acting upon the cognitive and affective dissonance that occurs when a person is exposed to a new environment. Hence, migration could contribute to influencing not only Central American immigrant women's perceptions of themselves as learners, but also their views about the significance of adult learning in their lives.
- ⇒ Gender differences have been noted to influence Central American immigrants' experiences of migration; therefore, it is likely that cultural as well as contextual conceptualizations of gender will have some influence on the women's perceptions of learning.
- ⇒ Migration might provide Central American immigrant women with opportunities for expanding their social roles in ways that were previously unavailable to them. If that were the case, participating in social contexts that are new to them could contribute to influencing the women's sense of themselves as learners.

⇒ Despite coming from diverse educational and working backgrounds, the majority of Central American immigrant women will likely experience similar social conditions in the United States. These women will likely live at the margins of American society; therefore, their experiences may be influenced by marginality in the following ways:

- a) Unless they are working as live-in domestics in a mainstream American home, working-class immigrant women's exposure to the dominant WASP culture in the United States may be limited. Central American immigrant women, in particular, might be immersed in social contexts that expose them to U.S.-born ethnic minorities such as Mexican Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians, or to other immigrant and refugee groups of Asian, African, Eastern European, or Latin American origins. Accordingly, the women might experience acculturation processes that include the adoption of values from a diverse range of cultures. Such acculturation could be one of many factors influencing the participants' perceptions of adult learning.
- b) Marginality might facilitate maintaining values, attitudes, and behaviors learned in the immigrants' cultures of origin. If so, I could find that Central American immigrant women interpret and act upon their learning experiences from the cultural frames of reference prevalent in the women's countries of origin at the time of their departure.
- c) As women living at the margins of American society, Central American immigrant women might resist abandoning conventional gender roles and thus give up opportunities for personal development. From this perspective, the women's perceptions of adult learning could be associated with undesired change.

- d) Marginality may contribute to limiting Central American immigrant women's knowledge of the adult education opportunities available to them in the United States. With respect to language, in particular, limited interaction with English speakers could also contribute to hindering Central American immigrant women's investments in overcoming language barriers.

## CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT FOR THE INQUIRY

In this chapter, I review literature that is relevant for understanding the perceptions that Central American immigrant women have about adult learning, particularly, in light of their life experiences before and after immigrating to the United States. The chapter is comprised of four parts with multiple sections.

In Part One, I provide an overview of contemporary immigration to the United States, underscoring the shift in the geographical origins and the socioeconomic characteristics of immigrants who have arrived in the last 39 years. I place emphasis on the distinct features of immigration from Latin America and on the historical-structural forces that led to increased immigration from Central America during the 1980s.

In Part Two, I briefly explore female predominance in immigration to the United States since the 1930s, in order to focus on the historical development of research on immigrant women. I give special attention to challenges overcome by researchers in three areas: gender bias, ethnic- and discipline-particularism, and unitary frameworks of analysis. In addition, in Part Two, I review literature that has contributed to an understanding of Central American immigrant women, focusing in particular on the impacts of gender, class, ethnicity, and legal status on their migration and settlement experiences in the United States.

In Part Three, I locate the education of immigrant adults within the larger context of adult education. In particular, in Part Three, I outline an educational profile of Central American adult immigrants and provide an overview of educational opportunities available to this population in the United States. I give special attention to research concerning the educational experiences of Central American immigrant women. Finally, in Part Four, I offer

a summary of the literature in parts one, two, and three that underscores the rationale for this inquiry.

### **Part One: Contemporary Immigration to the United States**

International migrants are persons who take up residence outside their countries of origin for a period of one year or longer (Martin et al., 2000). With 28.4 million foreign-born residents in 2000 (Lollock, 2001), the United States was the largest recipient of international migrants in the world. On average, the United States receives 1 million authorized and 300,000 unauthorized international migrants every year (Martin et al., 2000). In Part One, I examine four topics in contemporary immigration to the United States that are particularly relevant to this inquiry: 1) third-wave immigrants, 2) types of migrants, legal status, and social support benefits, 3) immigration from Latin America, and 4) immigration from Central America.

#### ***Third-Wave Immigrants***

During its 228-year history, the United States has experienced three major immigration waves. The first and second immigration waves took place from 1841-1890 and from 1891-1920, respectively (Vecoli, 1996). Since 1965, the country has been undergoing a third immigration wave, which differs significantly from the former two waves (Reimers, 1991). Over the last 39 years, newcomers have been more culturally diverse (Rong, 1998) and more geographically dispersed than earlier immigrants (Massey, 1991). Today, U.S. immigrants represent many distinct faiths and cultures, speak many languages, and are from both extremes of the educational and occupational spectra. Recently arrived immigrants can be found in metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, New York, and Miami (Rumbaut, 1997) as well as in mid-size cities in the Sunbelt and Midwest regions of the country (Johnson,

Johnson-Webb, & Farrell, 1999). Therefore, it could be argued that third-wave immigrants are having an impact on all levels of American society and in most regions of the country (Massey, 1991).

In 2000, the foreign-born made up 10.4 % of the total U.S. population (Lollock, 2001). They comprised a highly heterogeneous group with respect to region of origin, geographic distribution in the United States, age, occupation, and educational attainment. However, when compared with U.S. natives, the foreign-born showed at least five predominant features. First, when examined by region of origin, more than one half were born in Latin America, one fourth were born in Asia, and less than one eighth were born in Europe; therefore, their ethnic backgrounds differed notably from those of the U.S.-born population. Furthermore, unlike previous immigrant groups, third-wave immigrants largely represented non-industrialized countries. Second, the foreign-born were geographically concentrated in the West, South, and Northeast regions of the country, and they seemed more likely than the native-born population to reside in central cities of metropolitan areas. Third, almost 80% of the foreign-born were of labor force age, 18 to 64 years old, whereas only 60% of the native-born were in that age range. Fourth, proportionately, the foreign-born earned less than natives did; hence, the foreign-born were more likely to live in poverty. It is worth noting that among the foreign-born living in the United States, Latin Americans exhibited the highest poverty rate while Europeans exhibited the lowest. Fifth, in terms of educational attainment, the foreign-born seemed less educated than the native-born population. Only 67% of the foreign-born over the age of 25 had completed high school, compared to 87% of the natives. Furthermore, over 20% of the foreign-born had less than a

ninth grade education, while only 4% of the native-born population exhibited such low educational attainment.

Considering the large numbers of international migrants arriving annually in the United States and the characteristics of recent immigrants, it seems appropriate to examine factors influencing contemporary migration flows. Scholars in the disciplines of economics, sociology, and political science have advanced theories that have helped to explain the shift in the geographical origins and the socioeconomic characteristics of contemporary international migrants, specifically of those who have arrived in the United States over the last four decades.

Economists have suggested four theories to account for international migration: 1) the neoclassical economy theory, 2) the new economics of migration theory, 3) the dual market labor theory, and 4) the world systems theory (Martin et al., 2000). Each theory emphasizes distinct economic factors that explain increasing migration from countries with less developed economies, such as Mexico, to countries with more developed economies, such as the United States. The different viewpoints offered by these four theories are described in Table 1.

Sociologists have explained the sustained flow of international migration in terms of social networks (Hagan, 1998). From a sociological perspective, migration fails to occur unless there are social networks linking potential migrants in labor-supplying communities with foreign communities where their labor is needed. Once migrants arrive in the host country, social networks take on distinct functions during different stages of the migration process.

Table 1. Four Economic Theories of International Migration

Theory	Description
Neoclassical Economy	Explains international migration in terms of supply-push and demand-pull factors, which influence individual migrants to seek employment in countries that offer better jobs, wages, and other economic opportunities than the country of origin.
New Economics of Migration	Views migration as a household resolution whereby migrants seek to minimize family income risks while overcoming family production constraints. This theory suggests that, despite being less affected by push-pull factors than extremely poor families, families with a fair income may be more likely to migrate because they will seek to maintain a favorable financial status and they will have the resources to finance relocation.
Dual Market Labor	Emphasizes that modern economies have a permanent demand for immigrant labor because of labor market conditions such as unstable, low-wage jobs that are unappealing to native workers, the permanent participation of women in the workforce, and diminished labor supply due to lower birthrates.
World Systems	Focuses on economic globalization and market penetration as factors that encourage international migration. This theory suggests that modern capitalism has created a globally mobile workforce. As developing economies have moved away from agrarian roots, people with new skills have sought better employment opportunities in urban sectors within and outside their home countries. Growing dominant-dependent links between developed and less-developed economies have further encouraged international migration flows.

Note: Based on Martin, S. F., Larkin, M. A., & Nathanson, M. N. (2000). *World migration report: 2000*.

Geneva, Switzerland: International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations (UN).



Sociologists have classified social networks in two categories: informal and formal (Martin et al., 2000). Informal networks include links among family and fellow community members, whereby migrants are helped with travel arrangements as well as initial economic support, housing, and employment in the host country. Formal networks, on the other hand, include links between authorized foreign labor recruiters and potential migrants, which facilitate legal migration. However, formal networks also include illegal trafficking networks dedicated to the smuggling of unauthorized migrants, which collect expensive fees through indentured labor or income earned by migrants already positioned in the receiving country (Hagan, 1994).

Political scientists have examined the impacts of migration laws in both sending and receiving countries. This approach has been especially helpful for understanding the historical development of immigration to specific countries such as the United States, where immigration laws have regulated the number and national origins of migrants welcomed into the country (Rong, 1998). Historically, laws governing U.S. immigration have reflected one of two views: cosmopolitan and nativist (Vecoli, 1996). A cosmopolitan view has favored unrestricted immigration. Based on the conception of the United States as a safe haven for the oppressed people of the world and immigration as an essential source of labor, some have argued in favor of free and unlimited immigration. Conversely, a nativist view has favored restricted immigration. Proponents of this view have argued that unlimited immigration would threaten the stability of the social order, the standard of living of native workers, and the country's values and national identity.

Analyzing U.S. immigration law chronologically, Vecoli (1996) showed how the interplay of these two positions—cosmopolitan and nativist—has regulated not only the sizes

and the origins of U.S. immigration flows, but also the racial and ethnic composition of American society. Vecoli started by pointing out that, prior to the arrival of the first and second waves of European immigrants, the American population was hardly homogeneous. For example, in 1790 people of African ancestry comprised almost 19% of the American population. Smaller groups of European heritage (i.e., Scots and Scot-Irish, Welsh, and Germans) together formed approximately 22%, and the English amounted to only 48% of the American population. Furthermore, these percentages did not account for Native American Indians, who were themselves a diverse group of nations. Therefore, according to Vecoli, “America was already a ‘complex ethnic mosaic,’ divided into segregated, quarrelsome groups by culture, language, religion, and race” (p.10).

During the first immigration wave (1841-1890), migrants arrived primarily from Western and Northern Europe—Germany, Ireland, England, and Scandinavia (Vecoli, 1996). Few immigration restrictions had been in place since the founding of the Republic. However, in 1882, two statutes initiated the progressive exclusion of undesired migrants. The first statute excluded migrants with either low moral standards or poor health such as criminals, prostitutes, and mentally challenged persons. The second statute prohibited the admission of Chinese laborers and barred Chinese immigrants from U.S. citizenship.

Then, during the second immigration wave (1891-1920), immigrants began to arrive from Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean—Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Italy (Vecoli, 1996). The distinct racial and ethnic origins of these immigrants produced a further exclusionary reaction in the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) population, which launched a campaign for enacting a literacy test requirement aimed at screening and excluding those less likely to assimilate into the dominant English-speaking

culture. Although Congress passed the literacy test requirement on three consecutive occasions, it was repeatedly revoked by presidential veto. In 1921, however, Congress passed an Immigration Act that established a quota system designed to reduce the number of Eastern and Southern European immigrants. Because immigrant quotas were based on the number of persons from particular countries already in the United States, this law also reduced immigration from Asian Russia, the Middle East, New Zealand, the continents of Africa and Australia, and most islands in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. In 1924, the law was expanded to admit Northern and Western Europeans and to exclude immigrants of almost every other national origin.

Undoubtedly, the 1921 and 1924 laws embodied nativist efforts to keep the make-up of American society within racial and cultural boundaries established by the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) population. Analogous efforts to preserve WASP prevalence, such as the recent controversial propositions to enact English-only bills in states with large non-English speaking immigrant populations (Crawford, 1996, 2001; Ochoa, 1995) continue to this day.

Between 1920 and 1960, the inflow of international migrants decreased because of U.S. restrictions, the economic depression of the 1930s, and World War II (Vecoli, 1996). However, in 1965, immigration reform eliminated the acts of 1921 and 1924. Instead of the country-by-country quota system, Congress adopted a bi-hemisphere approach that limited the annual number of immigrants admitted from each Hemisphere, regardless of national origin (Daniels, 1991). Hence, Congress allotted maximum annual immigrant quotas for both the Western Hemisphere (North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean) and the Eastern Hemisphere (Europe, Asia, Eurasia, the Middle East, Africa, and Pacific and Eastern

Atlantic islands). Because the Western Hemisphere had been exempt from the 1924 country-by-country quota system, the new law provided more control over the number and qualifications of immigrants admitted from the West (Keely, 1980).

Most critical in the 1965 Immigration Act, however, was the establishment of a preference system that opened up three major opportunities for potential immigrants: 1) family reunification, 2) employment-based admissions, and 3) refugee allowances (Martin et al., 2000). *Family reunification* allowed the entry of spouses, children, parents, and siblings of U.S. citizens and the entry of spouses and unmarried children of legal residents. *Employment-based admissions* allowed the entry of workers needed in the U.S. labor market who could show, through a labor certification procedure, that their employment would not displace any American citizen qualified for the job. *Refugee allowances* permitted the entry of refugees with particular emphasis on those resettling from overseas; for example, refugee allowances facilitated the arrival of migrants from Asian countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (Reimers, 1991).

Overall, the 1965 Immigration Act instituted four major policy changes: 1) it abolished the national origins quota system, 2) it placed greater emphasis on family relationships for selecting immigrants, 3) it established labor certification procedures, and 4) it set limits on immigration from the Western Hemisphere, where none had previously existed (Keely, 1980). These reforms would cause a radical shift in the origins and number of U.S. immigrants (Daniels, 1991; Reimers, 1991) that would alter the make-up of American society in ways that were unforeseen at the time (Vecoli, 1996).

The unforeseen outcomes of the 1965 immigration reform were many (Reimers, 1991). As anticipated, Greece, Italy, and Portugal initially became the leading European

sending countries in the Eastern Hemisphere. However, after 1965, immigration from Europe fell progressively as immigration grew steadily from Asia. In the Western Hemisphere, immigration from Canada decreased as expected, but immigration from the rest of the countries in the West increased dramatically. Although lawmakers did not intend to radically change traditional immigration patterns, the 1965 Immigration Act marked a turning point in U.S. immigration history that reversed the proportion of immigrants arriving from traditional and non-traditional source countries.

Indeed, the 1965 Immigration Act laid the foundation for the unique features of the third U.S. immigration wave. In particular, the new emphasis on family reunification triggered a chain of migration from non-European source countries. By 1979, the annual number of family members admitted from Asia, Mexico, Central and South America had exceeded 138,000 (Reimers, 1991). Yet, the number of unauthorized immigrants arriving from those countries also continued to rise. In 1986, seeking to gain control over illegal immigration, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which granted amnesty to 3 million undocumented immigrants (De Concini, Piller & Fisher, 1998) and instituted sanctions for employers hiring unauthorized workers (Hagan, 1994). During the 1990s, numerous family members of previously unauthorized Latin American and Asian workers, who had gained legal status through IRCA, arrived legally in the United States. In 1998 alone, 70% of all immigrants were admitted because of family reunification and a large proportion were from non-European source countries such as Mexico, China, India, the Philippines, and the Dominican Republic (Martin et al., 2000).

Another development associated with the 1965 reform that contributed to increased immigration from non-European countries was the admission of large numbers of refugees

from countries such as Cuba and Vietnam, where American-endorsed regimes fell to communist revolutions (Reimers, 1991). Although the 1965 refugee stipulations were originally intended to address individual, emergency, and isolated cases such as that of an individual in need of immediate medical care, the new provisions were applied, beyond the limits of the law, for the admission of large groups of foreign nationals. For instance, when President Johnson signed the 1965 Immigration Act, he ignored the act's original intent by announcing that all Cuban refugees who wished to leave the communist state would be welcomed into the United States. Hundreds of thousands of Cuban refugees were admitted to this country after 1965. Similarly, after the fall of Saigon in 1975, over 500,000 refugees were admitted from Southeast Asia, primarily from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

During the 1990s, two major changes in immigration law occurred (Martin et al., 2000). In 1990, an immigration act allowed an increase in the number of immigrants admitted for economic or employment reasons. In addition, a lottery system for obtaining U.S. visas opened up a fourth opportunity for *diversity immigrants*. Diversity immigrants were so identified because they were admitted only from countries that had sent fewer than 50,000 migrants in the previous 5 years. Then in 1996, three major laws were enacted to address the rise of authorized and unauthorized immigration. These laws were intended to expedite the deportation of criminal immigrants, to restrict immigrant eligibility for welfare and other social support benefits, and to reduce unauthorized immigration (DeConcini et al., 1998).

Taken in conjunction, the scholarly contributions of economists, sociologists, and political scientists have been useful for explaining the unique features of contemporary U.S. immigration. Arguing independently but in a similar vein, Massey (1991) and Reimers

(1991) noted that increased immigration from non-industrialized countries had been a combined effect of three major developments: 1) the emerging world-wide interdependence between low- and high-income countries, 2) the 1965 Immigration Act, and 3) the fall of American-endorsed governments in Cuba and in countries of Southeast Asia such as Vietnam. In an analogous manner, Hagan (1994), Mahler (1995), and Repak (1995) pointed out in separate studies that sustained immigration from specific Central American communities had been a combined outcome of three sets of factors: 1) U.S. labor market conditions, 2) U.S. immigration policy changes, and 3) transnational social networks.

### ***Types of Migrants, Legal Status, and Social Support Benefits***

Because international migration and resettlement can be challenging experiences (Cohen, 1980), access to appropriate social support benefits in receiving countries may be critical to the adaptation of migrants, in particular for those with limited economic resources. In general, the social support benefits available to international migrants in receiving countries are contingent on immigrant type and legal status (Martin et al., 2000). Based upon distinct migration motives, international migrants are classified as either voluntary or involuntary migrants. Voluntary migrants are persons who have moved abroad because of personal, professional, or work-related reasons. This category includes labor migrants, family reunification migrants, and foreign students. Involuntary migrants, on the other hand, are persons who have been forced to move in order to escape life-threatening conditions such as political repression, religious persecution, human-made catastrophes, or natural disasters. Accordingly, this category includes refugees, asylum seekers, persons displaced by war, and victims of environmental calamities. Because the decision to migrate may involve a combination of motives, it is often difficult to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary

migrants. Nevertheless, such distinctions are important, because receiving countries adopt distinct responsibilities toward different types of migrants.

In the United States, immigrant access to social support services is determined by legal status. International migrants who enter the United States legally are granted one of three statuses: 1) immigrant, 2) refugee, or 3) entrant (Spero, 1985). In general, voluntary migrants receive immigrant status, and involuntary migrants receive either refugee or entrant status. The distinction between refugees and entrants is based upon the migrants' moving trajectory. If involuntary migrants have been stationed as asylum seekers outside the country of origin before arriving in the United States, they are received as refugees. However, if the United States is their first country of asylum, they are received as entrants. The entrant status was first used to accommodate the arrival of large numbers of Cubans and Haitians who entered the country between April 21 and October 10 of 1980, but who qualified neither for immigrant nor for refugee status.

Once in the United States, a migrant's legal status determines that person's eligibility for receiving particular kinds of social support. Refugees are eligible to participate in resettlement programs whereby they engage in cultural adjustment and job-skills training (Repak, 1995). They are also eligible to receive cash for living expenses, housing subsidies, and medical assistance from state governments. The federal government later reimburses states for the expenses incurred in helping refugees adjust to their new environment. In a similar way, entrants are eligible for work permits and public assistance benefits, and states are offered federal reimbursement for assisting the entrants' settlement and cultural adjustment (Spero, 1985).



Immigrants, on the other hand, have experienced several changes in eligibility for social support services (Martin et al., 2000). Prior to 1996, legal immigrants held most of the same rights and responsibilities as U.S. citizens; therefore, they were eligible for most public assistance programs. In particular, immigrants were eligible for job-related and welfare programs, such as unemployment insurance or Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Still, they were not eligible for programs designed to meet special adjustment needs like those available to refugees and entrants (Spero, 1985). Then, in 1996, welfare reform law introduced a distinction between the eligibility for public assistance of legal immigrants and that of U.S. citizens (Martin et al., 2000). Consequently, federal welfare benefits became largely restricted for legal immigrants. Some of those restrictions, however, were relaxed in 1997 and 1998.

Overall, despite providing more appropriate social benefits to refugees as compared to those provided to immigrants, the U.S. government has maintained a laissez-faire policy towards immigrant integration into American society (Martin et al., 2000). This lack of a coordinated governmental approach has placed enormous responsibility both on the newcomers and on the communities in which they settle. Indeed, federal government policy concerning immigrant integration reflects the assumption that local institutions such as families, schools, and businesses will facilitate the adjustment of newcomers into each community through educational efforts such as cultural orientation, English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, and job-skills training. Nevertheless, some third-wave immigrant and refugee groups such as Asian Indians and Cubans, respectively, have fared better when compared to their Mexican and Hmong counterparts (Hamamoto & Torres, 1997). Such differences suggest a need to acknowledge variance among the adjustment

demands of third-wave immigrants and to carefully assess the adequacy in disposition and resources of local communities to facilitate the social integration and economic mobility of diverse groups.

### *Immigration from Latin America*

Immigration from Latin America increased after World War II, as the supply of European labor diminished in the United States and American firms sought new sources of low-wage labor (Gonzalez, 2000). A salient example of this shift in labor recruitment was the Bracero program, whereby U.S. government agents recruited Mexican peasants to work in the Southwest. Through the Bracero program, 5 million immigrant workers were hired to farm American land before the program ended in 1964 (Repak, 1995). Since the 1970s, however, the volume of Latin American immigrants has increased for other reasons as well. Economic crises, natural disasters, deteriorating social conditions, and political instability have led millions of Latin Americans, from all socioeconomic sectors, to seek refuge and better living conditions in the United States (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1997; Tinker, 1995).

Several scholars have argued that immigration from Latin America has been an indirect outcome of U.S. economic and military intervention in the region (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1997; Gonzalez, 2000; Repak, 1995; Rumbaut, 1997). According to these scholars, the social, economic, and political inequities causing Latin American flows have been maintained under the aegis of U.S. military intervention. Aimed at protecting the interests of American bankers and investors and seeking to stop the advance of Communism in the Americas, U.S. foreign policy has contributed to installing and supporting oppressive regimes in the region. Modern Latin American history is pervaded by incidences of American-endorsed dictatorships that have provided North American firms and the local elite

with privileged business opportunities at the economic and social expense of disadvantaged citizens. Not only have American firms such as the United Fruit Company benefited from unregulated and untaxed concessions, but American banking houses, such as the Brown Brothers and J. W. Seligman, have also gained from unsound loans granted to self-serving Latin American dictators (Gonzalez, 2000). In contrast, Latin American citizens who have been adversely affected by those transactions have been forced to seek employment abroad. Indeed, political and economic instability has led to a continuous drain of workers ranging from peasants to well-educated professionals (Tinker, 1995). For the same reasons, the elite classes of Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America have invested and saved their accumulated wealth in the United States, in turn, causing more economic decline and poverty among those who are most disadvantaged.

Some might argue that if indeed U.S. economic and military interventions have contributed to sustaining the aforementioned social and economic ills, U.S. immigration policy towards Latin America could reflect U.S. accountability to economically disadvantaged immigrants. For example, federal government policy concerning social support benefits for international migrants, which are critical for the economic and social integration of most Latin American immigrants in the United States, could adopt a more proactive approach for accommodating these newcomers. From my perspective, federally funded programs in adult education could be at the forefront of such efforts, expanding adult immigrants' opportunities for building a better future for themselves, for their children, and for American society at large.

Addressing the precarious situations of economically disadvantaged immigrants seems more urgent when examining specific elements that have distinguished Latin

American immigration from other immigration flows. According to Gonzalez (2000), Latin American immigration has differed from European immigration to the United States in three important ways. First, Latin American immigration flows have been directly connected to the growth of U.S. military and economic hegemony. Latin American immigration has grown parallel to U.S. political and economic interests, such as the political stabilization of particular geographical regions like Central America and the temporary demands for low-wage labor addressed through labor-recruitment programs like Bracero. Second, upon settling in the United States, most Latin American immigrants have not moved into a mainstream social status; rather, they have entered a linguistic and racial caste status that places them at a disadvantage when compared to previous immigrants of European origin. For instance, many Latin American families maintain the use of Spanish as their primary language, and they include members who are considered persons of color in this country. These two traits have made them vulnerable to cultural intolerance and racial discrimination in the United States (Rong, 1998). Third, Latin Americans have arrived in a post-industrial U.S. labor market that doesn't offer the unskilled factory jobs that once helped numerous European immigrants move into the middle-class. As the United States has moved toward an information economy, third-wave immigrants have found the American economy to be characterized by industrial restructuring and downsizing (Bach, 1997). Today, U.S. domestic labor demand abounds in either the high-skill professions or the low-wage services. Most Latin American immigrants are employed in low-wage agricultural, janitorial, garment, and construction jobs (Hamamoto & Torres, 1997).

However, it is worth noting that despite sharing analogous links to the United States, Latin American countries have exhibited different immigration patterns. Differences have

been noted in the following three aspects: 1) the historic time at which specific migrations occurred, 2) the socioeconomic characteristics of migrant groups, and 3) the settlement experiences of particular groups. Predominance among migrant-sending countries has varied over time (Gonzalez, 2000). During the 1950s, Puerto Rico dominated among Latin American sending nations. Cuba and the Dominican Republic dominated during the 1960s, followed by Colombia in the 1970s. In the 1980s, Central America became the main sending region. In a similar way, migrants of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds have predominated within different groups at different times (Tinker, 1995). For example, during the 1950s and 1960s, immigrants from Mexico were primarily of the working- and lower middle-classes, but during the 1970s and 1980s the proportion of university students, academicians, and high-level professionals increased. Finally, the settlement experiences of Latin American groups residing in different parts of the country have also varied (Hamamoto & Torres, 1997). While Cubans have attained significant economic and social gains through the establishment of ethnic enclaves in the Southeast, Puerto Ricans have experienced less social mobility in the Northeast. Seeking to provide a context for understanding the experiences of women who have arrived from Central America, the following section discusses specific elements that have distinguished Central American immigration to the United States from that of other Latin American countries.

### *Immigration from Central America*

While intra-regional migration has been longstanding in Central America, mass emigration to farther destinations, such as the United States, has been a relatively new phenomenon (Repak, 1995). In particular, Central American immigration to the United States escalated during the 1980s. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of Central American

immigrants living in the United States increased dramatically. The number of Salvadorans leapt from 94,000 to 701,000, Guatemalans increased from 71,642 to 226,000, and the number of Nicaraguans grew from 25,000 to 125,000 (Gonzalez, 2000). Today, Mexicans and Central Americans represent two-thirds of all Latin American immigrants; together, they comprised one third of the 28.4 million foreign-born persons residing in the United States in 2000 (Lollock, 2001).

The increased flow of Central Americans into the United States was a combined outcome of American cultural and economic penetration into the region, the dominant-dependent relationship between the United States and the less-developed Central American economies, and structural changes in the sending countries (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1997). Like other Latin American immigrants, Central Americans were drawn to the United States because of increased exposure to American culture facilitated by the mass media, a perception of better job opportunities attained through increased contact with American firms, the growth of transnational social networks, and improved means of transportation (Tinker, 1995). However, Central Americans, unlike other Latin American immigrants, were forced to leave their home countries because of a complex set of interrelated economic and political developments that converged into civil wars in three countries—Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua (Gonzalez, 2000).

### ***Economic Developments Leading to Central American Migration***

From a world-systems economy perspective, Hamilton and Chinchilla (1997) identified the increased migration of Central Americans to the United States as one effect of population dislocations, economic contradictions, and job opportunities resulting from the penetration of domestic and foreign capitalism into the region. Capitalism penetrated Central

America during the twentieth century as the region entered the world market through the production of export crops such as coffee, bananas, sugar, and cotton. The growth of an export economy produced two important developments. One was the increasing concentration of land in the hands of a few elite Central American families and American firms, such as the United Fruit Company, and the resulting country-by-country dislocation of peasants from fertile lands to marginal areas left for subsistence farming. A second development was the emergence of a seasonal migration pattern whereby dislocated peasants migrated back to export-crop producing estates during harvest time. In this scenario, peasant women were most adversely affected because, when the prices of export crops dropped, only the men were employed (Repak, 1995). In addition, seasonal migration often led to family disintegration. Consequently, women living in subsistence farming areas increasingly found themselves as heads of households with few wage-earning opportunities.

After World War II, the expanding production of export crops caused peasant dislocation and seasonal migration to extend across borders (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1997). By 1960, each Central American country was divided into capitalist zones, which included major urban areas and export-crop producing estates, and subsistence zones, which produced basic grains like corn, rice, and beans for domestic consumption. To earn a living, Salvadoran peasants had to annually migrate to cotton-growing areas and banana enclaves in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Likewise, Guatemalan Indians had to move into Southern Mexico to find work during the coffee harvest season. In addition, mechanized agriculture progressively displaced large numbers of farm workers from rural areas to urban centers, where they sought employment in the expanding industrial and service sectors.

During the 1970s, Central American economies were struck by increasing inflation, which harmed both the agricultural and industrial sectors (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1997). As the prices of agricultural export products dropped in the world market, the prices of import products needed for manufacturing, such as petroleum, increased. The number of jobs available in urban centers proved insufficient for accommodating the large volume of workers displaced from rural areas. Therefore, the unemployed of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua moved to neighboring countries with stronger economies such as Costa Rica and Mexico. Eventually, however, thousands of poverty-stricken Central Americans migrated to the United States in search of better employment opportunities.

Migrating to the United States not only helped the migrants overcome economic deprivation, but it also facilitated the economic survival of entire communities in the home countries (Martin et al., 2000). Because migrants maintained a strong bond with their families and communities of origin, they periodically sent back part of their earnings. Those remittances became an important source of economic survival for Central American nations. During the 1980s, remittances became so important to the national economies of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua that those governments asked the United States to suspend the deportation of unauthorized Central American workers (Tinker, 1995).

Economic conditions in Central America were also aggravated by natural disasters, such as earthquakes and hurricanes, which invariably affected the poor (Buckman, 2001). Major earthquakes struck Nicaragua in 1972 and Guatemala in 1976. The impact of those earthquakes was such that the economic damage extended into the subsequent decade. More recently, twin earthquakes afflicted El Salvador in January and February of 2001. Over 1,200 lives were lost and the destruction of property reached \$1 billion. In 1988, Hurricane Joan



swept along the Caribbean coastline of Nicaragua. Hundreds of thousands were left homeless, and the property damage surpassed \$1 billion (Gilbert, 1994). Ten years later, in 1998, Hurricane Mitch struck three countries—Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala (Buckman, 2001). This time Honduras suffered the greatest damage, facing a loss of over 5,000 lives and vast destruction of the country's economic infrastructure. The storm destroyed over two thirds of the nation's roads, 170 bridges, and 90% of the banana export-crop. To a lesser extent, the destruction of life and property in Nicaragua and Guatemala also contributed to the economic decline of the region.

Over the last few years, Central American economies have been adversely influenced by two unrelated events: 1) the global crash in the value of coffee, and 2) drought (Jordan, 2001). Because of over-abundant production of coffee in Vietnam and Indonesia, the international price of the export-crop has dropped to a point where it is not economically viable for Central Americans to work the coffee plantations. Consequently, unemployment is on the rise throughout the region. In addition, the region is facing a hunger crisis because of a drastic drought that has damaged the production of corn and beans, which have traditionally been harvested for domestic consumption. In conjunction, these two events have contributed to a noticeable increase in migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua to more prosperous Costa Rica and Mexico. Again, it is likely that many of these Central American migrants will eventually seek employment in the United States.

### ***Political Developments Leading to Central American Migration***

While economic crises afflicted citizens in every country of the region, the majority of Central American immigrants who arrived in the United States during the 1980s were from three war-torn countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua (Gonzalez, 2000).

Their primary reason for migrating was to escape the devastating consequences of political violence (Mahler, 1995).

During the first two thirds of the twentieth century, Central American politics followed a pattern of “two-party conflict between liberal and conservative factions of the elite, little popular participation in the political process and a long list of ever changing dictatorial regimes” (Buckman, 2001, p. 155). For the most part, struggles to increase popular participation in politics and demands for land redistribution were easily subdued with the aid of U.S. agencies, such as the CIA (Gonzalez, 2000). During the late 1970s, however, stronger demands for social and economic reform led by left-wing activists were met by fierce political repression from right-wing extremists and military officials (Schwantes, 1990). The region was rapidly immersed in political violence. On one hand, clandestine right-wing death-squads kidnapped, tortured, and killed hundreds of left-wing activists and political leaders in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. On the other hand, left-wing guerrilla groups kidnapped rich civilians and damaged infrastructure to undermine elite supremacy and autocratic rule. In the countryside, bloody confrontations between government armies and left-wing guerrilla groups affected and killed millions of innocent civilians. The lives of those who survived were altered forever, and many had no choice but to flee their homelands in search of personal safety and work.

**Guatemala.** Guatemala’s civil war, which lasted from 1960 to 1996, was the longest and bloodiest political conflict in the region (National Academy of Sciences, 1992). The 36-year conflict was rooted in the American-endorsed overthrow of the second democratically-elected president in Guatemalan history, Jacobo Arbenz (Gonzalez, 2000). Following the socialist orientation of his mentor and predecessor, Juan José Arévalo, President Arbenz

favored social welfare over protection of individual and foreign interests. Furthermore, President Arbenz, who was committed to land reform, intended to redistribute among dislocated peasants all idle lands, including territories under the control of the United Fruit Company. For that reason, he was overthrown in June of 1954 by an armed, American-endorsed invasion led by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. Unfortunately, undermining Guatemala's incipient democratic process and annihilating President Arbenz's attempt to modify the country's unjust economic structure set the conditions for civil war (Schwantes, 1990).

By 1960, most Guatemalans had lost hope of achieving social and economic reform through democratic elections (Buckman, 2001). Radical intellectuals and university students set out to organize popular resistance against dictatorship and economic exploitation. Populist groups such as labor unions, peasant organizations, health-promoting teams, and church congregations led by liberation theology-inspired clergy became numerous (Schwantes, 1990). Populist groups were especially active in the countryside where Mayan Indian peasants, who comprised the majority of the country's population, lived in extreme poverty. Moreover, inspired by the Cuban revolution, several guerilla groups produced an armed opposition in remote rural areas and urban centers (Gonzalez, 2000).

Left-wing efforts to organize popular resistance were met by harsh political repression from the government army and right-wing extremists. Anyone who was suspected of advocating social change was at risk (National Academy of Sciences, 1992; Schwantes, 1990). In cities, journalists, teachers, doctors, union leaders, middle-class professionals, social scientists, and university students were targets of paramilitary right-wing death-squads, such as the Secret Anti-Communist Army (Buckman, 2001) and the White Hand (Amnesty

International, 1998). In rural areas, health promoters, populist leaders, catechists and guerilla supporters were victims of military campaigns designed to eradicate insurgency. Yet, Mayan Indian communities suffered most as young peasants were either forced into military service or coerced into supporting guerillas (Schwantes, 1990). Unwittingly caught between two cruel opponents, Mayan Indians were forced to fight against their own people. Ultimately, entire indigenous communities became victims of the violence perpetrated by both sides.

Violent acts perpetrated by guerillas, right wing paramilitary groups, and the Guatemalan government army escalated during the late 1970s and 1980s. By 1976, 20,000 people had died from political violence (Gonzalez, 2000). Between 1978 and 1983, 440 Indian villages were destroyed and the residents massacred by the government army (Amnesty International, 1998; Randall, 1995; Schwantes, 1990). By 1985, the number of dead and disappeared had reached 75,000, and 150,000 civilians had fled the country (Gonzalez, 2000). Seven years later, the National Academy of Sciences (1992) estimated that the dead and disappeared would surpass 150,000 and 40,000, respectively, before the conflict ended.

The 36-year civil war ended on December 27, 1996, as the Guatemalan government and the united armed opposition, the Guatemalan United Revolutionary Front (URNG), signed a final peace accord (Buckman, 2001). Nevertheless, between 1960 and 1996, Guatemalans had endured 5 military coups and 13 presidencies, many of which had been imposed by the military through electoral fraud. Despite the newfound peace, thousands of Guatemalans continued to emigrate because of poor economic conditions, the aftermath of war, and popular distrust of the Guatemalan government's legislative, judiciary, and executive powers.

*El Salvador.* El Salvador's civil war, which took place from 1979 to 1991, originated from conditions analogous to those endured in Guatemala: concentration of land, economic power, and government control in the hands of a few elite families and military strongmen, a large underprivileged population, fraudulent elections, and recurrent coups (Buckman, 2001). As the smallest and most densely populated country in the region, however, El Salvador underwent an intense social polarization that escalated to revolutionary crisis in the late 1970s (Byrne, 1996). Indeed, the Salvadoran conflict was approached in absolutist terms. On one hand, a ruling landowner-military alliance refused to alter the country's political and socioeconomic structures that kept the majority of Salvadorans in extreme poverty. On the other hand, a growing opposition came to believe that the only avenue for social change would be to completely eradicate the traditional order and that violent confrontation would play an important role in doing so.

Although always supportive of the Salvadoran government, the role of the United States in the armed conflict varied over time (Buckman, 2001). Initially, the U.S. government supported efforts towards social and economic reform. In 1977, Romero, a conservative Salvadoran president, launched a repressive campaign against left-wing activists. Two years later, political violence threatened to destabilize the nation. Hence, in 1979 a group of liberal army officers overthrew Romero and installed a five-man *junta* to govern the country. The junta proposed three major economic and social reforms: 1) nationalization of key sectors of foreign trade, such as coffee marketing, 2) nationalization of some banks, and 3) land reform. Understanding the need for fundamental reform to diminish El Salvador's internal strife, the Carter administration supported the progressive junta with U.S. economic and military assistance.

However, because Salvadoran conservatives were adamantly opposed to reform, in 1980 the violence perpetrated by right-wing paramilitary groups increased dramatically (Buckman, 2001). The assassinations of the Salvadoran archbishop and the head of the country's Human Rights Commission shocked the international community. Shortly thereafter, six leaders of the centrist political front, two U.S. agricultural agents associated with land reform, and four U.S. women missionaries were killed. Seriously concerned by the Salvadoran government's lack of control over the violence, the Carter administration stopped all aid to El Salvador in late 1980. However, when President Reagan took office in 1981, secret intelligence reports suggested that the Salvadoran left-wing guerillas were being supplied with Soviet arms via Nicaragua and Cuba. President Reagan was convinced that the Salvadoran conflict was part of a worldwide communist scheme. Therefore, in February of the same year, the new Reagan administration resumed large-scale military and economic assistance to combat the Salvadoran guerilla front. During the Reagan and Bush administrations, El Salvador became the biggest recipient of U.S. military aid in Latin America. Between 1981 and 1989, the United States provided El Salvador with \$3.7 billion; 70% of that amount was used for weapons and war assistance (Gonzalez, 2000).

Despite providing continuous support to the anti-Communist Salvadoran Armed Forces, the United States urged consecutive Salvadoran governments to resolve political differences through democratic means (Buckman, 2001). Yet, fraudulent practices and disruption of electoral processes continued to fuel the armed conflict. By 1991 it seemed clear that neither side could win the war, and peace negotiations were initiated with the assistance of the United Nations (Mahler, 1995). According to Buckman (2001), the role of the United States was critical to advancing peace talks, as the U.S. ambassador to El Salvador

took the initiative of going into guerrilla-controlled territory in order to learn about the rebels' conditions for a cease-fire. In addition, in 1991 the U.S. Congress voted to cut military aid to El Salvador to half of the \$95 million requested (Repak, 1995). Finally, on December 31, 1992, the Salvadoran government and five Salvadoran guerrilla groups, known collectively as the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), signed a peace accord (Buckman, 2001). However, during the 12-year armed conflict, 75,000 Salvadorans had lost their lives and over one fourth of a population of 6.3 million had abandoned their homes (Byrne, 1996). An estimated 1 million of those migrants reached the United States, primarily as undocumented immigrants (Buckman, 2001).

According to some studies (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1997; Repak, 1995), the exodus from El Salvador to the United States was motivated by both economic and political factors. However, qualitative research findings suggest otherwise. Based upon in-depth interviews with Salvadoran immigrants in suburban Long Island, Mahler (1995) learned that many Salvadorans had endured extreme poverty before the civil war, but very few had migrated to the United States before 1979. Therefore, she concluded that poverty had not been the decisive factor in their decision to migrate. Instead, she remarked that the fear of losing their lives and the lives of their loved ones had been their primary consideration for leaving their home country.

*Nicaragua.* In contrast to the Guatemalan and Salvadoran armed conflicts, civil war in Nicaragua began with a nationwide popular uprising that ousted an American-endorsed dictatorial regime in 1979 (Buckman, 2001). For over 46 years, Nicaraguans had endured harsh political repression from the Somoza ruling family; hence, most citizens were ready for reform. Accordingly, the ousting of President Anastasio Somoza Debayle was led by a

broad-based coalition of citizens of diverse occupations and political ideologies, such as Marxist guerrillas, Catholic Church members, liberal journalists, and conservative businessmen.

The central force behind the revolution, however, was the guerrilla movement known as the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). On July 19, 1979, the Sandinistas gained control of the capital city, Managua (Buckman, 2001). Although immediately after Somoza's overthrow a three-member revolutionary junta (JRG) governed the country, a nine-member Sandinista National Directorate, controlled by the FSLN, established policy directives. In addition, these two organisms shared political power with the Council of State, a Sandinista-dominated legislative body representing diverse political and economic groups, the FSLN, and the Nicaraguan Armed Forces.

Even though the new revolutionary government was primarily nationalistic, the strong Marxist orientation of the Sandinistas soon became evident in Nicaragua's domestic and international concerns (Buckman, 2001). Domestically, Marxist ideology infused programs in schools, public media, and the national armed forces. Internationally, the new Nicaragua established relations with Communist-bloc nations such as the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, East Germany, and Cuba. The threat posed by Nicaragua as a pro-Communist nation in Central America produced the political reaction of national and international anti-Communists that led to civil war.

Again, the role of the United States was central to the armed conflict. Initially, the Carter administration worked with the Sandinista government, but when President Reagan took office in 1981, the American disposition changed (Buckman, 2001). Accusing the Sandinistas of providing military assistance to left-wing guerrillas in El Salvador, the U.S.



government suspended all aid to Nicaragua in the spring of 1981. Furthermore, fearing the Sandinistas would develop a strong pro-Communist military base in Central America, President Reagan authorized the CIA to help former Somoza supporters build an armed opposition capable of sabotaging and destabilizing the new Nicaraguan government. Known as the Contras army, the anti-Communist front operated from bases in Honduras and Costa Rica, under the covert supervision of the CIA and Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North in Washington, DC. At the same time, the United States used its global influence to isolate the Sandinista government internationally (Gonzalez, 2000).

The effects of international isolation and the Nicaraguan civil war, which lasted from 1979 to 1990, undermined the accomplishments of the Sandinista revolution (Buckman, 2001). In 1990, faced with tremendous economic difficulties and political decline, the Sandinistas called for democratic elections and lost to liberal candidate Violeta Chamorro of the National Opposition Union party. Over the course of the 11-year war, 60,000 Nicaraguans had lost their lives, and many more had fled the country (Gonzalez, 2000). Ten years after the end of the civil war, political differences between Liberals and Sandinistas, government corruption, and the resulting economic decline continued to stimulate Nicaraguan emigration.

### ***The Impact of Migratory Status***

Despite sharing similar migration motives, immigrants from different Central American countries were received differently by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Such disparity reflected U.S. foreign policy concerns (Repak, 1995). For example, between 1983 and 1990, over 25% of Nicaraguan asylum-seekers fleeing a Communist-led nation were received as refugees. By contrast only 2.6% of

Salvadoran and 1.8% of Guatemalan applicants, who fled nations with American-endorsed governments, were granted political asylum (Gonzalez, 2000). Hence, other than Nicaraguans, the INS treated most Central Americans as economically driven migrants, which diminished their opportunities to be welcomed into the United States. Those distinctions had serious implications for Salvadorans and Guatemalans, many of whom were forced to enter the country illegally and to become part of an underground U.S. economy that hired them as gardeners, cooks, and domestics.

The plight of undocumented Central American immigrants heightened when Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986 (Repak, 1995). Intended to stop the flow of unauthorized workers, the law placed fines on employers hiring undocumented workers. At the same time, the law granted amnesty to unauthorized immigrants who had entered the country prior to January 1, 1982. Because Central Americans arrived primarily throughout the 1980s, most were rendered ineligible to apply for permanent residency through IRCA. Furthermore, as the disastrous effects of war persisted after peace treaties were signed, the flow of unauthorized immigrants continued into the following decade. By 1996, the INS estimated that 335,000 Salvadorans and 165,000 Guatemalans had entered the country illegally (Martin et al., 2000).

Despite the challenges posed by INS regulations, the plight of undocumented Central Americans was alleviated by the activism of American advocacy groups, which refused to endorse U.S. foreign policy towards Central America (Gonzalez, 2000). During the 1990s, efforts made on behalf of undocumented Central Americans by civil rights lawyers, left-wing political organizations, and churches accomplished two major breakthroughs. First, in November of 1990, Congress suspended the deportation of Salvadorans by granting them

Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which was later extended to Guatemalans and Nicaraguans (Gonzalez, 2000). Initially, TPS allowed Salvadorans who had arrived prior to September 19, 1990, to work and remain legally in the country for a limited period of 18 months (Mahler, 1995). However, because TPS was intended to protect Salvadorans until the civil war ended, the program was extended several times. Following the 1992 Salvadoran peace accord, the TPS program became the Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) program. Eligibility of Salvadorans for TPS and DED ended in January of 1995.

Second, in 1991, the American Baptist Church (ABC) won a suit against the INS for discriminatory deportation practices (Martin et al., 2000). The ABC suit enabled Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans, who had applied for TPS or political asylum before 1990 and had been rejected by INS, to have their applications reconsidered. Furthermore, because many Central American applicants had been in the country for over 10 years and had become the parents of American-born children, the U.S. government made a third policy adjustment. In 1997, Congress approved the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA), which enabled the applications of Salvadorans and Guatemalans to be considered under pre-1996 rules. Prior to 1996, foreigners with good moral character, who had been in the country over 7 years and whose removal could cause hardship to their American families, were able to apply for U.S. residency. By extending pre-1996 rules, NACARA created an opportunity for 200,000 Salvadorans and 50,000 Guatemalans to legally remain in the country.

A different kind of respite for undocumented Central American immigrants was granted when Hurricane Mitch struck in 1998 (Martin et al., 2000). To aid in the recovery of the region, U.S. lawmakers granted TPS to 150,000 unauthorized Hondurans and

Nicaraguans so they could legally work in the United States and send remittances to their families. For the same reason, the deportation of unauthorized workers from other Central American countries was suspended. Still, opportunities to attain legal status, such as TPS, the ABC settlement, and NACARA, have proven insufficient to accommodate the large numbers of undocumented Central American immigrants. Today, Central Americans make up a significant proportion of the 8 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Porter, 2001).

### ***Settlement Patterns of Central Americans in the United States***

Upon their arrival in the United States, Central Americans settled in geographically delimited clusters, specifically in Western, Southern, and Northeastern metropolitan areas (Therrien & Ramirez, 2000). For example, Salvadorans and Guatemalans developed large communities in Los Angeles and San Francisco (Menjivar, 1999). Similarly, Hondurans established a large colony in New Orleans, and numerous Nicaraguans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans settled in Houston (Lipski, 1986). In addition, Quiche and Kanjobal Guatemalan Maya became prominent in Los Angeles, Houston, and Indiantown, Florida (Hagan, 1994). Likewise, Nicaraguans developed a Little Managua in Miami (Tinker, 1995). Finally, the number of Salvadorans increased significantly among immigrants living in suburban towns on Long Island (Mahler, 1995) and in Maryland (Gonzalez, 2000), and they became the largest group of international immigrants in Washington, DC (Repak, 1995).

While newcomers have continued to enlarge the aforementioned immigrant communities, the number of Central Americans settling in other parts of the country is growing. According to Johnson et al. (1999), the migration behavior of the Hispanic population as a whole has shown significant changes since 1980. Between 1980 and 1990,

states which had not previously been Hispanic immigration magnets, such as Nevada, Maryland, Georgia, and Minnesota, experienced large increases in Hispanic populations. Furthermore, between 1990 and 1994, eight non-traditional Hispanic magnet states experienced Hispanic population growth above the national rate of 28%—Nevada (41%), Arkansas (34%), Minnesota (33%), Iowa (32%), Tennessee (32%), Nebraska (31%), Maryland (30%), and Georgia (29%). According to Johnson et al., the shift in Hispanic settlement patterns reflected a national trend of employment growth in medium-sized metropolitan areas and rural communities in the Sun Belt and the Midwest.

### ***Settlement Patterns and Social Characteristics of Central Americans in Iowa***

In Iowa, Hispanics were recognized as the largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority in 1999, when the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that 62,000 Hispanics comprised 2.1% of Iowa's total population (Chew, 2001). However, sociologist Sandra Charvat Burke (2000) believed as many as 82,598 Hispanics could have been living in Iowa in 1999. Using school-enrollment data, Burke developed estimates of the Hispanic population in Iowa, by county, that differed significantly from U.S. Census Bureau estimates. For example, in 1998 the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that 265 Hispanics lived in Buena Vista county. However, Burke found that 589 Hispanic students were enrolled in Buena Vista schools the same year. Without accounting for parents, younger siblings, and older adults, the number of students enrolled in schools already doubled the U.S. Census Bureau estimate. Therefore, Burke cautioned that census estimates could be failing to capture the rapid growth of the Hispanic population in Iowa.

Over the 10-year period between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic population in Iowa increased by 153% (McCormick, 2001). Census 2000 reports placed the count of Hispanics

at 82,473, accounting for 2.8% of Iowa's total population (Beaumont, Kratz, & McCormick, 2001). Still, population experts suspect those figures could be greater if undocumented immigrants and other Hispanics, who did not respond to the census, were counted (McCormick & Beeman, 2000; Rood & McCormick, 2001). It is worth noting that many undocumented Central Americans living in Iowa may be among those undercounted by the 2000 census.

According to Johnson et al. (1999), Hispanic newcomers in Iowa, who arrived between 1985 and 1990, settled primarily in three metropolitan areas—Des Moines, Davenport, and Sioux City—which together became the homes for half of the state's overall Hispanic population. However, these metropolitan areas differed by the migration origins of the newcomers; for example, whereas the majority of Hispanics in Des Moines had arrived from abroad, most Hispanic newcomers in Davenport had migrated from a nearby community in Illinois and several rural communities in Texas.

In 1990, Hispanics living in Iowa were diverse in at least three ways: 1) ethnic origin, 2) citizenship status, and 3) occupational status (Johnson et al., 1999). First, with respect to ethnic origin, approximately 77% of Hispanics living in Iowa were of Mexican ancestry, 5% were Central American, 4% were South American, 2% were Puerto Rican, 1% were Cuban, and 11% were of other Latin American ancestry. Second, the citizenship status of Hispanics living in Iowa showed that 14% were non-U.S. citizens born outside the United States and 86% were either U.S.-born citizens, naturalized U.S. citizens, or individuals born abroad of U.S. parents. Third, in terms of occupational status, Hispanic newcomers were over-represented in transformative activities (e.g., manufacturing and construction) and distributive services (e.g., transportation, communication, wholesale, and retail trade). Unlike

their counterparts in Western states such as California, Hispanic newcomers in Iowa were under-represented in primary activities (e.g., agriculture, forestry, and fisheries) and personal services (e.g., entertainment, repairs, and dining).

Like Johnson et al. (1999), Burke and Goudy (1999) pointed out that year-round jobs in manufacturing, services, and construction had attracted recent immigrants of Hispanic origin to Iowa metropolitan areas. In addition, Burke and Goudy noted the settlement of Hispanic newcomers in non-metropolitan Iowa. Throughout the 1990s, non-metropolitan communities in Iowa experienced a surge of international and domestic Hispanic migrants, who arrived to fill factory-type jobs in food-processing enterprises such as meatpacking, poultry and egg processing, corn detasseling, and horticulture. Because of the location and year-round operation of food-processing plants, these created an unprecedented concentration of permanent Hispanic immigrant residents in non-metropolitan Iowa.

Indeed, according to Burke and Goudy (1999) a large number of Hispanic newcomers in Iowa, including Central Americans, have taken jobs in the food-processing industry, primarily in meatpacking. These are “low-skill and low-wage, but difficult, jobs with high turnover and potential for worker injury” (p. 4), hence, their lack of appeal to native workers. Hispanic immigrants working in Iowa meatpacking plants have varying levels of educational attainment. Although the majority of workers have less than a high school education, some have professional degrees earned in their home countries. Unfortunately, because either their college degrees are not considered valid in the United States, or because they lack proficiency in English, those former professionals are unable to seek better employment opportunities in the country. Equally important, Hispanic immigrants working in Iowa meatpacking plants have varying degrees of literacy. Whereas some may be conversant and

somewhat literate in English, others are literate only in Spanish. Still others are not literate in Spanish or their native languages, which greatly limits their employability beyond manual labor.

Burke and Goudy (1999) noted that gender differences might influence the interest and access of Hispanic immigrant men and women to English language instruction in Iowa. According to the researchers' observations, immigrant men may have greater opportunities to learn and practice English in the workplace than immigrant women do because the women either stay at home or have less opportunity to interact with native English speakers. In addition, Hispanic immigrant families might often consider it more important for the husband and the children to learn English than for the wife and mother. Furthermore, because of childcare and transportation issues, immigrant women may have less opportunity to attend English language courses than do immigrant men.

Overall, research findings presented by Burke (2000), Johnson et al. (1999), and Burke and Goudy (1999) suggest the importance of having not only an accurate count, but also a thorough understanding of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Hispanic newcomers at the local and national levels, so that social services and educational programs tending to this population are appropriately designed. Furthermore, in my view, it would be equally important to gain a deeper understanding of how gender status, as well as membership in other social categories, variously impact the migration and settlement experiences of men and women of Latin American ancestry in the United States.

## **Part Two: Immigrant Women in the United States**

As this inquiry centered on studying Central American immigrant women, in Part Two, I examine three relevant topics: 1) female predominance in immigration to the United



States, 2) the scholarly study of immigrant women, and 3) engendered inquiry into Central American immigrants.

*Female Predominance in Immigration to the United States*

Historically, international migration flows have been comprised primarily of young men who seek temporary work in countries that may provide them with better earning opportunities than those found in their countries of origin (Houstoun, Kramer, & Barrett, 1984). In the last century, however, the number of female international migrants has increased dramatically. In particular, three countries—Argentina, Israel, and the United States—have shown a longstanding predominance of female immigration since the 1950s (Tyree & Donato, 1986). However, the United States is the only country that has shown an overall pattern of legal immigration dominated by women for 50 years, 1930-1980 (Houstoun et al., 1984), and it has continued to receive a significant proportion of female immigrants over the last two decades (Enchautegui & Malone, 1997).

In general, according to Enchautegui and Malone (1997), theoretical explanations for increased female immigration to the United States have incorporated economic, familial, and cultural factors. Economic factors have been linked to the allure of employment opportunities in the United States for immigrant women. On one hand, neoclassic economy theorists have explained female international migration in terms of an “individualistic calculation of costs and benefits” (p. 18). On the other hand, systems economy theorists have viewed female international migration as just one element in a growing global capitalist system that benefits from immigrant women’s low-wage labor in receiving countries such as the United States. Familial factors have been related to the reunification of immigrant family members in the host country. Special attention has been given to the international movement of women as

part of a household migration strategy and to the role of social networks for effecting female international migration. Cultural factors have included cultural norms and barriers in sending countries that may promote or inhibit international migration of women to the United States. For instance, rigid gender roles and oppressive sexist norms in a sending country may stimulate educated women to emigrate in search of opportunities for expanding their social roles and contributions; however, the same cultural norms might inhibit women with fewer resources from emigrating. Overall, according to Enchautegui and Malone, the interplay of specific economic, familial, and cultural factors has promoted female international migration to the United States. To illustrate, the authors pointed out that in some sending nations, female migration has been encouraged because families believe that women are more likely than men to find work in the United States, to maintain close ties with their families of origin, and to send remittances.

In particular, according to Houstoun et al. (1984), female predominance in legal immigration to the United States from 1930-1980 was a result of family reunification, which increased the inflow of foreign-born women for two main reasons: 1) U.S. immigration policy changes, and 2) large numbers of marriages of foreign- and native-born U.S. residents to foreign-born women. First, the 1921 and 1924 Immigration Acts, which introduced a country-by-country quota system, succeeded in reducing the predominantly male inflow of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. At the same time, this gender-biased system established preference classes, which paradoxically facilitated the admission of foreign-born women rather than men. For instance, whereas native-born women lost their U.S. citizenship when marrying foreign nationals, the 1921 Act gave preferential immigration status to the foreign-born brides of U.S. male citizens. Later, the 1965 immigration reform, which

emphasized family reunification, facilitated the admission of family groups and secondary immigrant flows comprised largely of women and children.

Second, after WWI and WWII, female immigration increased because of the large numbers of marriages of foreign- and native-born U.S. residents to foreign-born women (Houstoun et al., 1984). On one hand, many naturalized U.S. citizens and foreign-born residents, who had arrived earlier, sought to marry women from their countries of origin. For example, from 1972-1979 Mexico was the “single largest source of alien wives of U.S. citizens” (p. 930). Houstoun et al. inferred that territorial contiguity and longstanding kinship links between families in Mexico and the United States facilitated marriages of Mexican women to both Mexican-born and U.S.-born men of Mexican ancestry. On the other hand, the presence of large numbers of young U.S. military servicemen abroad increased their opportunities to marry foreign nationals from noncontiguous countries that had few kinship links in the United States. For instance, U.S. military presence during wars in Europe and Asia in the 1940s, Korea in the 1950s, and Vietnam in the 1960s, generated new immigration flows comprised largely of women. In a similar way, subsequent U.S. military presence abroad during peacetime continued to produce immigration of foreign-born brides from other world regions (Donato, 1992).

Besides U.S. immigration policy and marriage, other factors such as refugee admissions, U.S. labor-market demand in typically female occupations, and social conditions in sending countries contributed to increasing female immigration to the United States. Although none of these other factors produced a sex differential in the overall group of new legal immigrants to the United States, each factor contributed to an increase in the proportion of female immigrants arriving from specific countries. For example, after WWII, post-war

refugees and political asylum seekers from Hungary, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Cuba included large numbers of women (Houstoun et al., 1984). During the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. labor-market demand in typically female occupations, such as nursing and domestic service, increased female immigration from the Philippines and Jamaica (Enchautegui & Malone, 1997; Donato, 1992) and El Salvador (Repak, 1995), respectively. Moreover, during the same decades, social conditions such as “women’s prospects for marriage at home and the strength of marriage as an institution” (Donato, 1992, p. 165) influenced female immigration from countries in the Caribbean and Central America. To illustrate, the common practice of consensual marriage in Jamaica (Donato, 1992) and El Salvador (Repak, 1995) made it easier for women of those nationalities to migrate as single independent women.

Seeking to gain insight into the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of female immigrants, Tyree and Donato (1986) examined data from a sample of 177,082 female immigrants, 18 and older, who arrived in the United States in 1979. The sample showed that female immigrants had arrived from numerous countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, Oceania, the Caribbean, and the Americas. The women’s age distribution showed a marked concentration in young adulthood: 26% were 18-24 years old, and 20% were 24-29 years old. Despite their relatively young age, 73% of all women in the sample were married; 49% of the women had arrived as wives of American citizens, foreign-born U.S. residents, or immigrant men.

Overall, in 1979, the socioeconomic distribution of U.S. female immigrants did not differ significantly from that of native-born women (Tyree & Donato, 1986). The immigrant women’s occupations included professionals, craftswomen, clerks, operatives, laborers, and service workers. Nevertheless, as the researchers compared data concerning women who had

arrived from specific world regions, marked differences arose. For example, China and the Philippines showed proportionately more elderly women than other countries. The Caribbean showed a high proportion of single and divorced women. Central and South America showed women who were older, more often single, better educated, and more affluent than did Mexico. With respect to occupational status, India, Egypt, Israel, Iran, Japan, Taiwan, and Canada showed large proportions of professional women. In contrast, Central America, the Caribbean, and Mexico showed large numbers of lower-status workers, and the Philippines showed a wide socioeconomic range, with high proportions of professional as well as lower-status workers. Finally, the majority of female immigrants who had arrived from non-European countries in 1979 exhibited characteristics that reflected the greater socioeconomic inequalities in the social structures of their countries of origin as compared to the United States.

Concerning Central American immigrant women, in particular, it is worth noting that the women who arrived after 1979 may have exhibited distinct demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, depending on their situations in the Central American exodus of the 1980s and 1990s. For example, Nicaraguan immigrants may have included a large proportion of women of high socioeconomic status who had abandoned their home country in order to avoid the effects of the Marxist-oriented Sandinista Revolution (Buckman, 2001). In contrast, Guatemalan immigrants probably included large numbers of Mayan Indian women of low socioeconomic status who had fled the highlands of their home country to escape genocide (Amnesty International, 1998). Moreover, because the opportunities for obtaining legal entry into the United States varied for Central Americans depending on their nationalities (Gonzalez, 2000), women arriving from the region most likely included

documented as well as undocumented immigrants. Consequently, in studying Central American immigrant women, scholars have found it important to examine how such factors as class, ethnicity, race, and immigration status have influenced the current situations of these women in the United States (Hagan, 1994; Mahler, 1995; Menjivar, 1999; Repak, 1995).

### *The Scholarly Study of Immigrant Women*

In spite of the increasing presence of women in international migrant flows, research concerning immigrant women was sparse prior to the mid-1970s (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Morokvasic, 1983; Pessar, 1999). A perusal of the literature suggests that, in the process of developing this area of research, scholars had to overcome multiple challenges. For instance, Morokvasic (1983) pointed out that literature on the topic emerged only gradually as acknowledgement of the economic roles of immigrant women in host societies made them worthy of sociological attention. Indeed, recognizing immigrant women's economic contributions enabled scholars to overcome distinct forms of gender bias often found in mainstream immigration literature. Gabaccia (1992) noted that ethnic- and discipline-particularism had hindered the study of women and migration prior to the 1990s. Despite the increasing number of studies on the topic, ethnic- and discipline-particularism had prevented researchers from recognizing immigrant women as a common ground for inquiry. In addition, limited interpretation schemes had impeded researchers from contributing valuable findings to themes outside those sanctioned by the interdisciplinary fields of immigration ethnic studies and women's studies. More recently, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1999) and Pessar (1999) pointed out the shortcomings of the unitary frameworks of analysis applied in research during the 1980s and 1990s, which centered on the study of women only rather than on gender differences. At the same time, these scholars advocated developing more

comprehensive and flexible analytical frameworks. Such frameworks would seek not only to advance an engendered understanding of migration processes, but would also seek to examine the interactions of gender, class, ethnicity, race, and legal status. To provide an overview of the conceptual and methodological challenges faced by scholars interested in the study of immigrant women, each of these issues—gender bias, ethnic- and discipline-particularism, and unitary frameworks of analysis—are discussed in separate sections to follow.

### ***Overcoming Gender Bias***

In her critique of immigration literature published before 1982, Morokvasic (1983) identified four sequential phases in the study of women and migration: 1) an absence of immigrant women, 2) a stereotypical view of immigrant women, 3) recognizing the presence of immigrant women, and 4) study beyond the reductionist outlook on immigrant women. These sequential phases denoted an evolution in thought concerning the status of immigrant women in immigration literature—from invisibility to main subject of investigation—that reflected a deliberate effort on the part of researchers to overcome distinct forms of gender bias in immigration scholarship. Although in the original work, the author referred to these as trends, from my perspective it is appropriate to use the term sequential phases instead, not only because of the suggested evolution in thought, but also because of the chronological order in which these phases occurred.

The first phase, the absence of women, was prevalent in immigration literature published during the early 1970s (Morokvasic, 1983). Studies reflecting this phase either presented immigrants as sexless units or used samples of immigrant men as a basis for generating general theories of migration. Morokvasic pointed out that the exclusion of

women was especially unwarranted in literature concerning predominantly female flows such as rural to urban movements in Latin America. Although this literature acknowledged the numerical significance of women in migrant flows, researchers systematically ignored females in their final analyses. Furthermore, the exclusion of women in research exploring international migration topics, such as the role of immigrant labor in host economies, led to a neglect of females in immigration policy-making. Consequently, women's invisibility in immigration literature carried over into immigration policy in various world regions including Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

The second phase identified in the literature consisted of only marginally including immigrant women, exclusively in association with the home and family (Morokvasic, 1983). Concurrently with the first phase, the second phase appeared in literature published during the early 1970s. Research associated with this phase relied on a stereotype of immigrant women as "dependants, migrants' wives or mothers, unproductive, illiterate, isolated, secluded from the outside world and the bearers of many children" (p. 13). Not only did researchers apply the stereotype to all immigrant women irrespective of country of origin, but they also homogenized the women's distinct cultural backgrounds under a common label: traditional. According to Morokvasic, conceptualizing immigrant women's cultures as traditional and juxtaposing their cultural backgrounds with the modernity prevalent in the host societies was a manifestation of ethnocentrism. Indeed, from an ethnocentric perspective and a stereotyped view of female immigrants, researchers approached immigrant women in terms of social problems. For example, researchers focused on immigrant women's "traditional" cultural backgrounds and interpreted those backgrounds as deficiencies or disadvantages for adjusting to the host societies. Furthermore, researchers evaluated



immigrant women's capacity for adapting to modernity exclusively on the basis of two Eurocentrically defined criteria: employment and contraception.

The third phase, recognizing the presence of immigrant women, emerged in literature published after the mid-1970s (Morokvasic, 1983). As social scientists began to acknowledge the economic contributions of female immigrants in host societies, they increasingly began to consider immigrant women as worthy of investigation. In addition, an awareness of the previous neglect of females led scholars to seek ways to redress the gender imbalance in immigration literature. Consequently, immigrant women became the main subjects of investigation in numerous studies that explored individual migration motives and experiences. Specifically at this phase, researchers emphasized a psycho-culturalist approach that examined women's individual experiences "within a perspective of adaptation to the 'host society' formulated in terms of an evolution towards some 'emancipated' state" (p. 14). For this reason, Morokvasic noted that, although they were contributing to redressing the gender imbalance in immigration literature, scholars at this phase were still failing to overcome the ethnocentric assumptions underlying previous research.

Moreover, Morokvasic (1983) pointed out several theoretical shortcomings in literature representative of the third phase. First, she remarked that emphasis on the individual characteristics and experiences of immigrant women had prevented researchers from developing the broader perspectives necessary to advance this area of study. Next, Morokvasic criticized the researchers' lack of references to immigrant women's cultural backgrounds before migration; indeed, most researchers had continued to use the female immigrant stereotype as the baseline for their investigations. Then, Morokvasic questioned the researchers' conception of behavior as being primarily determined by psychology and

culture. In particular, she criticized the researchers' emphasis on change as being linked to the assumed emancipatory effects of migration, such as women's increased access to employment in urban societies. Finally, Morokvasic expressed concern with research that studied the impact of gender independently from other criteria of social stratification and discrimination, such as class and ethnicity. Overall, Morokvasic concluded that at this phase, immigration literature represented a reductionist outlook for studying immigrant women that focused on examining individual motives and drives and on analyzing the impact of gender in isolation from other categories of analysis.

The fourth phase for studying immigrant women produced research that overcame either one or both of the analytical limitations posed by the reductionist outlook (Morokvasic, 1983). This phase appeared in literature published in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It included a wide range of research approaches that Morokvasic grouped into three main categories: 1) pioneering descriptive studies, 2) class analysis studies, and 3) social network studies. First, pioneering descriptive studies sought primarily to depict immigrant women's lives in the host societies. For instance, researchers used the life-history approach to examine women's experiences of racism as well as their strategies for resisting that form of oppression. Yet, the main purpose of this type of research was to inform and to describe immigrant women's situations in the host societies, rather than to advance theoretical generalizations. Second, class analysis studies argued that race and sex produced corresponding forms of consciousness and action among the working class. However, few studies analyzed the social class status of immigrant women workers or the contributions made by them to the working class struggle. Third, studies of social networks sought to identify similarities and differences among immigrant women's experiences in light of the

flexibility of their ethnic boundaries and the impacts of structural constraints. Central to this approach was for researchers to pay as much attention to the backgrounds of immigrant women as to their positions in the host societies. In this manner, researchers studying social networks were able to overcome some of the ethnocentric assumptions that had undermined previous inquiry.

To conclude, Morokvasic's (1983) four phases denoted an evolution in thought about the scholarly study of immigrant women that mirrored a process described in feminist phase theory, which has provided a framework for analyzing the progressive inclusion of women into the mainstream literatures of social sciences such as history, sociology, and anthropology (Tetreault, 2001). In particular, Morokvasic's first three phases reflected three forms of gender bias—invisibility, stereotyping, and fragmentation—which feminists have denounced as obstacles for women's integration into Western scholarly work (Sadker & Sadker, 2001).

#### ***Overcoming Ethnic- and Discipline-Particularism as well as Interpretation Constraints***

Indeed, gender bias impeded the advancement of scholarship concerning women and migration, especially during the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s (Pessar, 1999). However, according to Gabaccia (1992), prior to the 1990s, scholars interested in the study of immigrant women faced two other challenges: 1) a lack of comparison and synthesis in the literature, which resulted from ethnic- and discipline-particularism, and 2) interpretation constraints imposed by the prevalence of specific themes sanctioned by the interdisciplinary fields of immigration ethnic studies and women's studies.

According to Gabaccia (1992), the scholarly study of immigrant women was hindered by a trend, common among scholars in various disciplines, to examine immigrant life from a

perspective that was ethnic- and discipline-specific. From an ethnic-specific standpoint, scholars portrayed and analyzed immigrant life within particular ethnic enclaves, without giving due attention to the immigrants' interactions with native- and foreign-born individuals of other ethnic origins. Consequently, few studies identified similarities and differences among the experiences of immigrant women of distinct ethnic origins or across different historical periods. From a discipline-specific standpoint, scholars pursued questions and observed research methodologies that were traditional to their disciplines of study. Because researchers in distinct disciplines followed divergent methods and assumptions, cross-disciplinary communication on the topic was sparse. Prior to the 1990s, then, literature on immigrant women lacked comparison and synthesis not only because scholars had focused on specific ethnic populations, but also because researchers in distinct disciplines had failed to identify immigrant women as a common ground for inquiry.

***Discipline-particularism.*** Gabaccia (1992) argued the impact of discipline-particularism by providing an overview of conventional and emerging research approaches for studying immigrant women. In *Seeking Common Ground*, the editor included separate literature review essays in the three disciplines that had generated thus far the largest body of scholarly work on immigrant women: history, sociology, and anthropology.

In the field of history, American scholars traditionally studied immigration as a subtopic of U.S. history (Gabaccia, 1992). Like general U.S. historians, immigration historians were primarily concerned with exploring life in the public sphere, which was dominated by men (Weinberg, 1992). Hence, scholars did not consider immigrant women, who were viewed primarily as protagonists in the private sphere of home and family, as principal subjects of historical investigation. Only when immigrant women participated in

events such as wage earning, labor strikes, or the struggle for suffrage, which were associated with the sphere dominated by men, were they included in the public record. Consequently, most immigration historians chronicled the life experiences of immigrant men as gender neutral and, thus, representative of the history of both male and female immigrants.

During the 1970s, feminist historians and anthropologists argued that the study of immigrant women's experiences was necessary for a fuller understanding of immigrant culture (Weinberg, 1992). Feminist scholars began to examine the roles played by women in the public and the private spheres as well as the points of intersection between these two domains. Accordingly, they explored topics such as the intersection of work and family, family economics, and women-centered kin networks. In doing so, feminist scholars expanded traditional historical methodologies, which had been effective for recording public and political activities, by including research methodologies aimed at capturing the personal and subjective experiences of women in distinct contexts.

Nevertheless, as a disciplinary field, immigration history failed to adopt those new approaches to inquiry (Weinberg, 1992). Most immigration historians continued to consider immigrant women only in their roles as workers and as part of immigrant families. Consequently, from a historical perspective, the scholarly understanding of female immigrants and their active roles in migration flows continued to be restricted by a male-defined view. As Weinberg remarked, "'Women's history' is too often viewed by historians of immigration as a particular specialty, while 'history' remains mainly the story of men: immigrant women remain in a ghetto of their own" (p. 11). Unfortunately, the prevalence of a male-defined perspective has continued to prevent historians from gaining valuable insights

into the complexity of immigrant life as it has been experienced by the men, women, and children who have comprised international migrant flows.

In the field of sociology, research concerned with U.S. immigration was predominantly problem-oriented and policy-driven; for example, numerous studies emerged during the 1920s and 1930s in response to the second immigration wave that took place from 1891-1920 (Gabaccia, 1992). In a similar manner, the pursuit of third-wave immigrant women as a topic of research grew, parallel to the increased interest in immigration policy and women's issues that emerged separately during the latter half of the twentieth century (Simon, 1992). On one hand, sociologists developed a revitalized interest in immigration as unexpected outcomes of the 1965 immigration reform generated new policy debates. On the other hand, sociologists were attracted by the intellectual concern with women's issues created by the women's movement of the late 1960s. Interest in both topics, immigration and women, converged in numerous sociological studies of female migration patterns.

During the 1970s and 1980s the sociological approach to studying third-wave immigrants differed from that which had been used to study second-wave immigrants during the 1920s and 1930s (Simon, 1992). In the study of second-wave immigrants, researchers had focused on topics such as patterns of adaptation, acculturation, assimilation to American society, and family conflicts between first-generation immigrant parents and their U.S.-born children. Researchers had primarily relied on document analysis and observational methods; life histories had been drawn from letters, diaries, and first-person accounts. Moreover, most studies had focused either on the family or on the entire urban community as units of analysis.

In contrast, the sociological research agenda for studying third-wave immigrants during the 1970s and 1980s turned to economic issues (Simon, 1992). Instead of utilizing observational methods and subjective accounts, sociologists began to rely more on survey instruments and on information collected by governmental institutions, such as the U.S. Census Bureau, to obtain large data sets on the labor participation, educational backgrounds, job skills, income, mobility, and work ethic of immigrants. Accordingly, the unit of analysis in these studies was no longer the family or the community but aggregated individual behavior. In the study of third-wave immigrant women, in particular, researchers discussed demographic and labor-force characteristics of immigrant women in comparison to those of immigrant men and of U.S.-born women. In addition, researchers examined fertility patterns, changing roles within the family, and the triple oppression experienced by immigrant women because of their status as foreign-born, working-class, and female.

In the field of anthropology, interest in migrants and immigrants emerged during the 1950s and 1960s as ethnographers, who had traditionally studied cultures in third-world countries, began to examine the impact of the national and international migration of people from rural communities to urban centers (Brettell & deBerjeois, 1992). Nevertheless, prior to 1974, the study of women's participation in migrant flows was deemed unimportant. Because migration was considered an individual choice rather than a household matter, it was assumed that men were the ones making that choice. Therefore, men were generally viewed as the initiators of migrant flows and women were generally seen as the passive followers of fathers or husbands. However, after the publication of Rosaldo and Lamphere's *Women, Culture, and Society* in 1974 (as cited in Brettell & deBerjeois, 1992), gender became a

plausible category of analysis for mainstream anthropology. Thereafter, anthropological inquiry into immigrant women became increasingly significant.

Particular to the anthropological inquiry into immigrant women was the aim to holistically understand the phenomena of migration and cultural change as experienced and perceived by the women themselves. The depth and comprehensiveness of the understanding sought by researchers, as well as their primary methods of inquiry, were eloquently described by Brettell and deBerjeois (1992):

Using a variety of research methods (participant observation, the collection of life histories and case studies, in-depth interviews, etc.) to access how the women themselves understand their lives and the challenges posed by migration, [researchers] focused on how these experiences might differ from those of men and how geographical mobility, both within and across national boundaries, might alter not only culturally rooted understandings of what it means to be a woman, but also various other aspects of culture that individuals and families bring with them as they migrate or emigrate. (p. 42)

The new anthropological research on women and migration produced numerous studies that provided insight into various aspects of immigrant women's lives. Brettell and deBerjeois (1992) classified those anthropological contributions to the study of immigrant women into four distinct categories: 1) women's roles in the public and private spheres; 2) social networks, marital relationships, and parenthood; 3) indigenous concepts of illness and health and immigrant women's use of the U.S. health care system; 4) immigrant women, social class, and the State.



Within the first category, anthropologists studied how immigrant women's work roles intersected with their domestic and familial roles in the receiving society (Brettell & deBerjeois, 1992). Especially significant were findings that suggested a "disjunction between behavior and norms...that seem[ed] to have a powerful influence in the pace of change in various spheres of the life of immigrant families" (p. 46). References to such disjunction helped to underscore and explain the diversity among immigrant women's experiences, the complexity of women's roles in the new context, and the implications of immigrant work and family roles on their status as women.

In the second category, anthropologists pointed out the central role of women in creating and maintaining social networks that were instrumental for the survival and adaptation not only of newly-arrived immigrants, but also of family members left behind in sending communities (Brettell & deBerjeois, 1992). For example, researchers noted that single-mother immigrants often co-resided with other single-mother immigrants in the receiving society, while their children were left behind, under the care of grandmothers, in the sending communities. In addition, anthropologists explored the influence of migration on male-female relationships as well as changes in familial relationships between parents and their children.

In the third category, medical anthropologists provided valuable insights into immigrants' indigenous beliefs and practices concerning health and illness, pregnancy and childbirth, and anxiety and stress (Brettell & deBerjeois, 1992). Investigators identified differences between indigenous and mainstream healthcare concepts and practices, and they advocated a transcultural approach by U.S. health care professionals. In addition, anthropologists examined immigrant women's access to and use of the U.S. health care

system. In particular, studies revealed women's roles as keepers of family documents and as cultural brokers, facilitating interactions between the immigrant family and the medical bureaucracy in the United States.

Finally, anthropologists also examined how political and economic global processes as well as international and national class relations influenced the position of immigrant women in modern societies (Brettell & deBerjeois, 1992). Like feminist sociologists, feminist anthropologists noted a three-fold oppression of immigrant women based on ethnicity, class, and gender. At the macro-level of analysis, anthropologists studied the implications of women's participation in an international labor market. At the middle-range level of analysis, the focus was on immigrant women's restricted participation in only a few sectors of the economy. However, at the micro-level of analysis, anthropologists were more interested in women's internalized perceptions of class; therefore, they were intent on validating and learning from insider perspectives.

To summarize, although they followed distinct assumptions and methodologies, scholars in the fields of history, sociology, and anthropology developed overlapping research interests concerning women and migration in the United States (Gabaccia, 1992). Yet, prior to the 1990s, those points of intersection had not been consistent across disciplines. Whereas sociologists and anthropologists had adopted a broad perspective for studying and comparing female migration movements on an international level, historians had concentrated on studying female immigration and migration within the United States. On the other hand, while both historians and anthropologists had paid special attention to constructs such as culture, strategy, process, diversity, and subjectivity, sociologists had emphasized economic issues and structural factors influencing the advancement opportunities for immigrant women

in the United States. Indeed, subjectivity had been central in historical and anthropological investigations, but not in mainstream sociological research. Consequently, from a methodological perspective, historians and anthropologists had shared a holistic approach that had produced numerous in-depth case studies of relatively small groups of women in particular settings. Conversely, sociologists had concentrated on studying specific dimensions of women's lives, such as fertility patterns, by using large samples and inferential statistics for advancing theories capable of predicting human behavior on a social level. A deliberation on the implications of the conceptual and methodological differences derived from discipline-particularism as well as a brief overview of alternatives developed by researchers will follow the discussion of interpretation constraints.

*Interpretation constraints.* According to Gabaccia (1992), prior to the 1990s, the advancement of immigrant women as an area of study was also hindered because no discipline had claimed it as its central focus. Even interdisciplinary fields, such as immigration ethnic studies and women's studies, which could have done so, evolved in directions that overlooked the distinctiveness of those who were both foreign-born and female. In particular, during the 1960s and 1970s, both of these fields generated innovative work that, unfortunately, failed to take into account the interactions of ethnicity and gender.

In the field of immigration ethnic studies, scholars underscored the persistence of cultural diversity in American society and advocated fostering the concept of cultural pluralism as an alternative to cultural assimilation (Gabaccia, 1992). Accordingly, researchers focused on the characteristics of particular ethnic groups and on the positive influences of ethnicity in coping with discrimination and marginality. However, they made no distinctions between the experiences of men and women of common ethnic origin.

In an analogous manner, scholars in the field of women's studies pointed out dimensions unique to the female experience, such as "the origins and implications of a distinct female consciousness, culture, or value system" (Gabaccia, 1992, p. xiv), but they initially failed to recognize the influence of ethnicity on women's diverse experiences. At the time, scholarly work in women's studies concentrated only on race and class differences among women, and immigrant women were considered part of the working-class category. More recently, the field of women's studies has explored cultural diversity among women, but the concept of culture has been usually associated with terms such as racial, ethnic, or minority. Cultural topics such as foreign birth, nationality, language, and religion, which are particularly pertinent to understanding the experiences of immigrant women, have been less frequently studied. Consequently, immigrant women have been culturally grouped with U.S.-born women in categories that denote ethnic heritage such as European American, African American, Asian American, and Hispanic American or Latina.

In the absence of a cohesive, interdisciplinary approach to studying immigrant women, and influenced by prevalent views in the fields of immigration ethnic studies and women's studies, scholars in distinct disciplines were left with two alternatives: 1) studying immigrant women with the purpose of "integrating their experiences and stories into general gendered accounts of immigrant and ethnic life in the United States" (Gabaccia, 1992, p. xv), which implied interpreting research findings along themes traditionally studied in immigration ethnic studies, or 2) pursuing the study of immigrant women as a central focus and interpreting research findings in light of themes endorsed by the field of women's studies. Although scholars in distinct disciplines made different choices, these two

alternatives hindered researchers from contributing valuable findings to themes outside those sanctioned by the interdisciplinary fields of immigration ethnic studies and women's studies.

*Implications for the scholarly study of immigrant women.* Despite the challenges posed by dominant interpretation schemes as well as by ethnic- and discipline-particularism, the scholarship produced prior to the 1990s had both positive and negative implications for the development of immigrant women as an area of study. One particularly positive implication of discipline-particularism was that, although they had been working separately, researchers in distinct disciplines had contributed to developing a diversified body of knowledge. Working within distinct conceptual and analytical frameworks had enabled researchers to obtain valuable insights through methodologies traditionally unique to each discipline (Gabaccia, 1992). At the same time, discipline-specific methodologies had acted as different lenses for examining topics from diverse viewpoints. Consequently, by the early 1990s, scholars had developed specialized literatures on women and migration in fields as diverse as psychology, literature, American studies, social work, education, and law.

To illustrate how discipline-specific methodological approaches contributed to advance diverse viewpoints on a given topic, I refer to two studies of childbirth among Latin American immigrant women in the United States. One is Gorwaney, Van Arsdol, Heer, and Schuerman's (1991) sociological inquiry into the economic, social, and reproductive lives of immigrant women from Latin America, which gleaned valuable knowledge about the interrelationships and effects of various factors on fertility rates. Employing multi-mode regression analysis, Gorwaney et al. studied the effects of three clusters of variables—demographic (age, marital status), socioeconomic (region of residence in the United States, rural-urban residence, education, occupation, hours worked per week, income), and

assimilation (duration of residence, citizenship, language proficiency)—on the variance in fertility rates exhibited by a sample of 1% of Latin American women included in the 1970 and 1980 U.S. censuses. The researchers found that, regardless of the model, the effect of demographic variables was most apparent; age and marital status were “the strongest indexed determinants of immigrant fertility” (p. 580). Among the socioeconomic variables, education and employment had significant effects. Two assimilation variables, duration of residence and English language proficiency, were also significant in determining fertility rates. However, the researchers suggested that exploring cultural norms, such as different traditions in family size, could help to gain a fuller understanding of the variance in fertility rates only partially explained by socioeconomic variables.

The second study, Gonzales’s (1986) anthropological inquiry into the birthing customs and rituals of immigrant women, uncovered unexpected similarities in the attitudes and perceptions of two black women from Latin America, one from Guatemala and one from the Dominican Republic. Using case-study methodology, Gonzales sought to explore the meanings ascribed by these two women to fertility and birthing in the United States. The researcher learned that giving birth to a child in the United States, who could therefore be certified as a bona fide U.S. citizen, had been extremely important for both women, although it had meant adopting unfamiliar health-care customs such as giving birth in a hospital. Furthermore, Gonzales’s analysis and in-depth description of the two cases illuminated ordeals that immigrant women of color, who are of childbearing age, may experience in this country irrespective of their immigration status.

The two inquiries conducted by Gorwaney et al. (1991) and Gonzales (1986) examined childbirth among immigrant women from Latin America. However, each study

provided a unique viewpoint for exploring the topic. In conjunction, the two studies contributed to an understanding of fertility among immigrant women from Latin America, on both the societal and the personal levels. As these two studies illustrate, diverse contributions to the scholarly study of women and migration were a positive outcome of discipline-particularism.

On the other hand, discipline-particularism generated one particularly negative implication for the study of women and migration. Working within discipline-specific frameworks led scholars to conduct investigations at different levels of analysis, which were difficult to compare or to synthesize. As Tienda and Booth (1991) pointed out, “drawing inferences from studies conducted at different levels of analysis” (p. 51) proved to be a challenge, which very few scholars attempted to undertake in order to integrate disparate conclusions. In addition, overemphasis on single-level analyses contributed to developing a fragmented understanding of immigration phenomena.

Mindful of the challenges derived from divergent single-level approaches, some scholars argued against overly narrow conceptualizations in immigration research. For example, noticing an increasing interest in global economics and migration, Couch (1980) cautioned against an overemphasis on macro-level analyses that could easily focus on historical-structural forces without giving due attention to important micro-level factors:

Assuming for the moment the correctness of the argument that economics is a determinant of migration “in the last analysis,” one must still be very careful not to fall into a mechanistic view of migration, a view which sees the world as a large, self-regulating system of socioeconomic interactions. Even at a macrolevel, we must not

lose sight of the fact that history is made of real-life people operating within social structures, and not by the machinations of an inanimate omnipotent “system.”

(p. 454)

To avoid engaging in overly narrow conceptualizations, Couch (1980) suggested designing investigations capable of establishing links between micro-level, middle-range, and macro-level analyses. Couch argued that research at various levels could be more complementary if investigators systematically addressed factors and concepts that could act as links between two or more levels of analysis. For instance, Couch suggested that research on immigrant adaptability, which was typically conducted at a middle-range level, could consider linkage factors such as ethnicity and class. Examining such factors could help to connect immigrant adaptability with large-scale socio-historical forces; hence, such research could help to bridge gaps between findings drawn at the middle-range and macro-levels of analysis. Overall, although Couch acknowledged that theoretically fundamental differences could exist among research conducted at different levels of analysis, he strongly recommended that researchers adopt multi-level approaches.

Heeding Couch’s encouragement, immigration researchers have explored various alternatives to single-level inquiries, including interdisciplinary projects in which scholars from distinct disciplines have collaborated in designing multi-level studies. Still, 11 years later, Pedraza (1991) found it necessary to remind investigators again that “the theoretical and empirical challenge...facing immigration research inheres in its capacity to capture both individuals as agents, and social structure as delimiting and enabling” (p. 308).

Over the last 15 years, researchers have sought to overcome the limitations of discipline-particularism by implementing various alternatives, both independently and



collaboratively. Independently, scholars have begun to move outside the time periods, concepts, and methods traditional to their disciplines (Gabaccia, 1992). For example, historians have studied contemporary events, and sociologists as well as anthropologists have explored nineteenth-century issues. Conceptually, sociologists have paid greater attention to constructs such as culture and subjectivity, which had been previously neglected in the field. Methodologically, scholars have analyzed literary texts, oral histories, and statistical sources, irrespective of their disciplines; hence, observance of particular methodologies as well as application of separate methods has become less discipline-specific.

A natural result of this new approach to immigration research has been to conduct studies that combine multiple methods of data collection and analysis, which, in turn, have increased the feasibility of multi-level designs (Brettel & Simon, 1986; Pedraza, 1991). Although multi-method studies have been conducted by single researchers as well as by groups of investigators working within the same discipline, trailblazing inquiries have also been the product of collaborative efforts among scholars from distinct disciplines. Such interdisciplinary projects have not only contributed to developing a more comprehensive understanding of immigration processes, but they have also helped to advance comparison and synthesis in the study of women and migration.

Repak's (1995) case study of Central American immigration to Washington, DC, illustrates several of the research features formerly discussed. In particular, Repak's study exemplifies the appropriateness of a multi-method and multi-level research design for understanding the complexity of contemporary immigrant flows. The study was conducted between 1988 and 1990, and it involved two main groups of respondents—a pilot sample of 50 individuals and a random sample of 100 households—as well as multiple data-collection

methods such as life-history interviews, structured interviews, ethnographic materials, and a standardized survey. Initially, Repak conducted life-history interviews with 50 pilot study participants (30 women and 20 men), who were selected through a snowball sampling technique to expand the likelihood of interviewing equal numbers of documented and undocumented as well as long-term and recently-arrived immigrants. The information gathered from those interviews was used to frame the questions for a survey that was subsequently administered to a wider, randomly selected, sample of 100 Central American households. The survey was conducted in Spanish by three Salvadoran research assistants, which accounted for a low refusal rate (Repak, 1994b). In addition, Repak conducted structured interviews with major employers in the area and with 30 representatives of community service agencies tending to Central American immigrants. Moreover, to gain a thorough understanding of the sending and receiving contexts for this particular migration, the researcher also analyzed ethnographic materials, such as newspapers advertising suitable jobs for Latino workers and labor union reports on IRCA's implications for both foreign- and U.S.-born workers.

In separate articles, Repak (1994a, 1994b) stated that her purpose for using multiple methods of data collection and analysis was to complement quantitative data with life-history and ethnographic materials. However, given the findings of the study, one could conclude that her use of life-history and ethnography was critical to gaining a deeper understanding of this particular migration. For instance, the researcher herself acknowledged learning about important aspects, such as decision-making processes, personal motivations for migration, and plans for settlement and return, primarily through informal encounters and open-ended interviews (Repak, 1994b, 1995). Moreover, in *Waiting on Washington* (1995) Repak's

effective portrayal of the female-initiated social networks that were responsible for the continuous immigration of Salvadorans to Washington, DC, relied heavily on life-history recounts.

Equally important was Repak's (1995) focus on "gender as an essential element in the migration process" (p. 7), which from my perspective, was decisive to uncovering how the interactions of macro-level, middle-range, and micro-level factors had contributed to effecting a female-initiated Central American immigration to Washington, DC. By using a concept termed "gendered labor recruitment" (Repak, 1994b, p. 508), the researcher was able to link structural factors, such as the economic and political developments in Central America and the United States, with micro-level factors such as the increasing need for childcare services in Washington, DC, and the sponsorship of Guatemalan and Salvadoran female domestics by U.S. diplomats returning to the nation's capital. In this manner, Repak's research contributed to explaining how and why Central American women had initiated an immigration flow, during the 1960s and 1970s, to a city with no previously established Latin American community.

The significance of developing comprehensive analytical frameworks in immigration research that incorporate gender as a central organizing principle, simultaneously with other categories of analysis, is discussed in the following section.

### ***Moving Towards a More Comprehensive Understanding of the Engendered Migration Experiences of Men and Women***

Over the last decade, the scholarly study of women and migration has seen important accomplishments, including the publication of insightful studies in various edited volumes and several literature reviews of investigations conducted worldwide (Pessar, 1999). Still,

shortcomings in the research produced thus far have been identified in two areas: 1) the incorporation of gender as a basic theoretical category, and 2) the simultaneous consideration of gender, class, ethnicity, race and immigration status for examining the situations of contemporary immigrants in host societies.

In the first area, progress towards conceptualizing and incorporating gender as a central organizing principle in migration studies has been dilatory. Seeking to redress androcentrism in immigration research, scholars followed a process common to the broader feminist transformation of knowledge in the social sciences (Pessar, 1999). Initially, feminist scholars sought to fill in knowledge gaps by “correcting sexist biases and creating new topics out of women’s experiences” (Stacey & Thorne, 1985, p. 302). Later, these scholars found that incorporating gender as a central organizing principle would require a paradigm shift whereby the orienting assumptions as well as the conceptual frameworks basic to each discipline would need to be transformed. Hence, feminist thought matured from being female-centered to seeking an understanding of gender as a social system affecting all aspects of human culture. However, after comparing the development of feminist scholarship in various disciplines, Stacey and Thorne observed that feminist transformations of knowledge may have been “facilitated or impeded, by the traditional subject matter of a given field of inquiry, by its underlying epistemologies, and by the status and nature of theory within each discipline, and within feminist thought” (p. 303).

Referring to the scholarship on immigrant women in particular, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1999) noted that initial efforts to redress androcentrism had been counterproductive in three ways. First, in their haste to integrate women into immigration inquiry, scholars had added gender as a variable. Indeed, scholars working within quantitative research traditions had

included gender as a dichotomous variable, which could easily divide any population into two mutually exclusive categories: male and female. Such research had resulted in studies that had compared differences between female and male migrants, without contextualizing those differences within a broader discussion of gender as a central organizing principle in key social institutions such as families, immigrant communities, or labor markets.

Second, preoccupied with filling in knowledge gaps, scholars had developed an “immigrant women only” approach (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999, p. 566) whereby they had focused exclusively on studying women, separately from men. Hondagneu-Sotelo observed that such studies had paradoxically contributed to marginalizing women in immigration scholarship. In addition, she stressed that focusing only on women had retarded scholars’ understanding of gender as a social system, and that it had impeded them from examining immigrants’ constructions of masculinities and femininities as well as the influence of those constructions on migration outcomes.

Third, by putting women rather than gender at the center of their investigations, scholars had contributed to maintaining sex-role theory assumptions, which had been discarded in feminist scholarship. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1999) pointed out the negative implications of conceptualizing gender as “a relatively static attribute, not a fluid practice” (p. 566). Whether they had considered male and female roles to be biologically based, culturally determined, or part of a person’s cognitive development (McCormick, 1994), sex-role theory proponents had assumed that these roles implied only different, albeit complementary, activities. Moreover, sociologists working within such perspectives had argued that “gender is more central to the family than to other social institutions, and that gender arrangements function primarily to insure social maintenance and reproduction”

(Stacey & Thorne, 1985, p. 307). Consequently, immigration researchers had limited inquiry concerning immigrant women to kinship and domestic units (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999).

More importantly, researchers' attachment to sex-role theory assumptions had contributed to de-emphasizing issues concerned with power relations and social inequities based on gender.

Overall, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1999) suggested that, because of the counterproductive effects of those initial efforts to incorporate women into immigration research—adding gender as a variable, studying women only, and maintaining sex-role theory assumptions—progress in understanding gender as a central organizing principle in migration continues to be slow.

In the second area, Pessar (1999) argued the need to understand how the simultaneity of gender, class, ethnicity, race, nationality, and legal status may variously affect the lives not only of immigrant men and women, but also of their U.S.-born counterparts, people of color as well as whites. Exhibiting a more optimistic view than Hondagneu-Sotelo (1999), Pessar pointed out advances in the scholarly understanding of gender and patriarchy. Pessar observed that new immigration inquiries had avoided the fallacy of equating gender with women; she indicated that scholars had become increasingly interested in learning how men and women experience migration differently. In addition, she noted that investigators were challenging earlier feminist frameworks, which had insisted on the primacy of gender over other forms of oppression and on the treatment of social categories, such as class and race, as mutually exclusive structures. For instance, scholars already treating gender as a basic theoretical category had begun to acknowledge that other criteria of social stratification, such as class and race, could strip immigrant men of color of patriarchal status and privilege when they interacted with white men and women. For that reason, Pessar recommended that

scholars “discard the notion that gender oppression transcends all divisions among men and women” (p. 594), so they could build a more comparative framework for understanding migration and patriarchy. Overall, Pessar concluded that contemporary immigration scholars seemed to be replacing unitary frameworks of analysis with more comprehensive and flexible models, while still underscoring the need to simultaneously consider multiple categories of analysis.

In the following section, a review of engendered inquiry into the lives of Central American immigrants illustrates the importance of simultaneously considering the effects of gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and legal status on the migration experiences of these third-wave U.S. immigrants.

### *Engendered Inquiry into Central American Immigrants*

Engendered studies of Central American immigrants in the United States have found that migration and settlement processes are experienced differently by women and by men (Hagan, 1994; Mahler, 1995; Menjivar, 1999; Repak, 1995). Such studies have examined how gender, as a social system, has affected different aspects of these immigrants’ lives. However, given Central American immigrants’ diverse backgrounds, these studies have also explored interactions among gender and other factors such as class, ethnicity, nationality, and legal status.

This section focuses on findings that have advanced an understanding of Central American immigrant women’s experiences as compared to those of Central American immigrant men. Findings are organized according to four migration stages: 1) pre-migration, 2) journey, 3) settlement, and 4) return.

### *Pre-Migration*

Gender and class have variously influenced Central Americans' pre-migration experiences. Gender differences have been noted in the economic, social, and political conditions affecting Central Americans prior to migration as well as in factors influencing potential migrants' decisions to relocate to the United States. Class differences have been linked primarily to Central Americans' accessibility to legal documents for immigrating to the United States.

In the 1960s and 1970s, economic and social conditions, both in Central America and in the United States, facilitated a predominantly female immigration to Washington, DC (Repak, 1995). In Central American countries, it was common for rural single females to enter domestic service in urban homes at a young age; hence, female migration was an accepted practice in rural families. In addition, peasant and working-class women were more vulnerable economically than their male counterparts; for instance, during economic crises, women were the first to become unemployed. Moreover, women who were married or in consensual unions often found themselves with no male support to provide for their children. In the United States, white middle-class women were increasingly entering the workforce. At the same time, working-class women of color were abandoning domestic and childcare jobs for better occupational opportunities. This created both a larger demand for domestic and childcare services and a shortage of workers who could provide those services in metropolitan areas such as Washington, DC, and New York City.

Salvadoran and Guatemalan women were among those recruited to perform domestic and childcare services in Washington, DC (Repak, 1994b). A majority of these women were either single individuals or heads of households seeking earnings to support their families.



American diplomats and professionals, who were returning to the nation's capital after spending years in the Central American region, sponsored the legal immigration of hundreds of female workers.

Repak (1994b) underscored the autonomy exhibited by Central American women during decision-making prior to migration. According to Repak, these women made decisions to migrate on their own, "without the collaboration or assistance of male partners or fathers" (p. 519). In some cases, their decisions went against their male relatives' advice. Eventually, however, the women's pioneering efforts facilitated the relocation of multiple family members, males as well as females. Indeed, the predominantly female immigration initiated during the 1960s and 1970s led to a family- and network-based general immigration of Central Americans to Washington, DC, during the 1980s.

As noted previously, during the 1980s, economic decline and political turmoil contributed to an increased general immigration of Central Americans to the United States (Repak, 1995). Civil wars in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua had created a climate of fear and uncertainty for everyone living in the region. While old and middle-aged men often lost assets accumulated over a life-time, young men lived in constant fear of being drafted by either side in the various conflicts (Mahler, 1995). Women, who had become increasingly involved in the affairs of civil war, faced forms of political repression that were as terrible as those suffered by their male peers (Repak, 1994b). Furthermore, as the generalized violence increased, women became particularly vulnerable to assaults, rapes, and kidnappings (Menjivar, 1999). These economic, political, and social conditions compelled thousands of Central American women and men to abandon their home countries.

For those Central Americans seeking refuge in the United States, the implications of relocating varied depending on social class. Deciding to migrate presented extremely dissimilar challenges to Central Americans of different class backgrounds (Chupina-Orantes, 2002; Mahler, 1995). Whereas persons with sufficient economic resources had either the professional skills or the financial means to qualify for U.S. visas, working-class persons were typically unable to meet the same requirements. Consequently, thousands of economically disadvantaged Central Americans, who were seeking physical security and work in the United States, had to do so as undocumented immigrants.

### *Journey*

Legal status becomes central to immigrants' lives from the very start of their migration experiences, especially if they are unable to obtain legal documents to travel (Chupina Orantes, 2002). The uncertainty and danger pervading their journeys to the United States plague Central Americans traveling by land as undocumented migrants (Menjivar, 1999). The longer their journeys are, the greater their risk of either being abused and robbed by thieves or being detained, mistreated, and deported by immigration officials (Mahler, 1995). Although all undocumented immigrants are subject to such risks, women often face greater economic and social costs than do men (Hagan, 1994).

In an ethnographic study of undocumented Totonacapan Mayan workers in Houston, Texas, Hagan (1994) found significant differences in the initial migration experiences of women and men. During their journeys from Guatemala to the United States, men had traveled in small groups to Mexico and had hired a smuggler, commonly referred to as a *coyote*, for \$500 to take them across the Mexican-U.S. border. Women, on the other hand, had had to hire two coyotes. One coyote had helped them cross the Guatemalan-Mexican

border and another one had taken them through Mexico and into the United States.

Consequently, the women had ended up paying \$1200 each, over double the amount paid by the male migrants. Moreover, as potential victims of rape and male abuse, these Mayan women had endured much higher emotional and social costs than had the men.

Menjivar (1999) also underscored the dangers faced by undocumented Central American women traveling to California, who “in addition to extortion and robberies, [were] exposed to gender-specific crimes such as sexual assault and intimidation” (p. 606). However, she also pointed out that in some instances women had used their vulnerability to elicit preferential treatment from compassionate persons encountered during their journeys.

Mahler (1995) vividly described the vicissitudes experienced by Salvadoran women in their journeys across Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States to Long Island. Mahler learned that women had often been stripped, searched, and robbed by thieves. In some cases, women had also been raped and beaten, not only by thieves but by Mexican police officers as well. Upon their arrival in the United States, some women had nearly suffocated in airtight trailers; others had witnessed how easily undocumented immigrants who were trying to cross U.S. highways on foot could be killed by speeding cars. Although Salvadoran men had shared some of these difficulties, Mahler emphasized the greater emotional impact experienced by the women.

As reported in Hagan (1994), Menjivar (1999), and Mahler (1995), making the journey by land as undocumented migrants not only entailed different challenges for women and for men, but it also carried greater economic, social, emotional, and physical costs for women.

### *Settlement*

Settlement of Central American immigrants has been more thoroughly studied than the other three migration stages addressed in this review. In particular, findings have informed the following four topics: a) employment, b) social networks, c) impact of women's employment on family and gender relations, and d) legalization.

***Employment.*** Two major theories have sought to explain immigrants' incorporation into U.S. local economies: assimilation theory and structural theory (Wallace, 1986). Assimilation theory proposes that "occupational differences are reflective of immigrants' different backgrounds" (p. 665). Hence, according to assimilation theory, human capital variables such as education, previous occupation, and English ability will determine the occupational opportunities accessible to individuals upon immigrating to the United States. On the other hand, structural theory propounds that, despite human capital variables, the structure of a given local economy will determine immigrants' positions in the labor market, which, in turn, could restrict their, as well as their children's, opportunities for economic mobility within the United States.

Seeking to examine the applicability of these theories to third-wave immigrants to the United States, Wallace (1986) compared the labor market incorporation patterns of Central American and Mexican immigrants in California. On the basis of 1980 U.S. census data, Wallace noted that the Central American and the Mexican immigrant populations differed in terms of age structure, sex ratio, and human capital. Compared to Mexicans, Central Americans exhibited an older age structure, a sex ratio dominated by women in all age ranges, and higher levels of human capital variables—educational level, occupational background, and English ability. Those differences would suggest higher wages and more

occupational mobility for Central American men and women, according to assimilation theory. However, the data indicated otherwise.

Initially, Wallace (1986) observed that the occupational distributions of Mexicans and Central Americans were indeed dissimilar; for instance, Central Americans held more white-collar jobs than did Mexicans. Nevertheless, the majority of male immigrants in both groups as well as most Mexican women held blue-collar jobs, and a large proportion of Central American women worked as domestics in private households. Moreover, men and women seemed to be participating in different labor markets.

As Wallace (1986) compared same-gender groups, he discovered unexpected similarities among the labor incorporation patterns of Central Americans and Mexicans. Assimilation theory predictions didn't seem to explain the labor incorporation pattern exhibited by Central American men. Despite their human capital advantages, Central American men earned the same as Mexican men in the state of California. Therefore, Wallace speculated that Central American men could be entering labor-market patterns that had been previously established by earlier Mexican male immigrants. Wallace concluded that, for both groups of men, wage level and occupational mobility seemed to be determined by the structure of the state's economy as predicted by structural theory.

In contrast, the women's labor incorporation patterns seemed to reflect assimilation theory predictions (Wallace, 1986). Although in general the women earned less than the men in both immigrant groups, Central American women exhibited a slight but statistically significant advantage in earnings over Mexican women. Wallace theorized that higher levels in education, occupational background, and English ability could have translated into better earnings for Central American women who had arrived in California between 1970-1974 and

worked full-time. Still, women's overall lower earnings as compared to men's had prevented Central American women's income advantages from making a significant difference between the poverty rates of Central Americans and Mexicans.

In a subsequent study, Wallace (1989) examined the social and economic positions of Central Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area to determine the likelihood of three potential incorporation patterns: 1) Central Americans could begin at the lowest social and economic stratum and slowly improve their position with each new generation; 2) Central Americans could develop an ethnic enclave, retaining their ethnic identities and establishing some economic independence; or 3) Central Americans could get trapped with Mexican immigrants and Chicanos in the low-wage segment of the dual labor market, missing opportunities for improving their social and economic positions.

Wallace (1989) noted that the majority of Central American workers in the San Francisco Bay Area had jobs in low-wage economy sectors relying on Latino labor. The women were most commonly employed in the textile industry and in house-cleaning. The men were predominantly employed in food service, production, and repair jobs. In addition, Wallace observed that the men's occupational distributions varied by nationality. Whereas Guatemalans and Salvadorans exhibited similar occupational distributions, Nicaraguans were differently distributed. For instance, from 1984-1985 "Nicaraguan immigrant men [were] more than twice as likely as Salvadorans to report white-collar occupations and [were] only one-quarter as likely to report food service occupations" (p. 246). Wallace interpreted these variations as a manifestation of different educational levels as well as an effect of men's participation in different nationality-based job networks. Unfortunately, Wallace was unable to elicit comparable data for examining the women's occupational distributions.

After carefully considering the social and economic structure of the San Francisco Bay Area, Wallace (1989) concluded that, as a group, Central Americans were “encountering occupational and residential segregation patterns similar to those Mexican immigrants [found]” (p. 261). Although Central Americans were more likely to arrive as family units and to be engaged in a more permanent type of migration than Mexicans, Central Americans would likely remain in the same marginal economic position as Mexicans because of structural barriers. Therefore, according to Wallace, arriving in a city with an already established Latino labor force could turn into a long-term disadvantage for Central American immigrants.

Building upon Wallace’s work, Repak (1994a) sought to learn whether the social and economic positions of Central Americans in Washington, DC, could be best explained by the structure of the city’s labor market (structural theory) or by the immigrants’ individual characteristics (assimilation theory). Particular to this study was that, prior to the arrival of Central Americans, the nation’s capital had no previously established Latino labor force. Equally distinct was Repak’s central interest in gendered patterns of labor-market incorporation.

Repak (1994a) noted that professional and service jobs, rather than production and assembly jobs, characterized Washington’s labor market. This became an especially important factor in her analysis, since the majority of the Central American workers she surveyed had lived and held jobs in urban areas prior to their arrival in the United States. Indeed, most respondents had arrived with skills or work experiences in commerce, teaching, clerical work, assembling, and construction. Repak also observed that, at the time of the inquiry, the women exhibited higher levels of human capital measures than did the men. In

general, the women had higher levels of formal education and English-speaking ability. In addition, more women than men had legal status and had been in the United States longer as well.

In Washington, DC, the majority of Central Americans worked in one of three types of jobs: domestic service, construction labor, or restaurant work (Repak, 1995). Repak pointed out that the first two types of jobs were highly gender-segregated. Over 70% of the women surveyed were employed as domestics, and 61% of the men surveyed were employed as construction workers. Repak (1995) also noted a striking difference between the wage levels and employment mobility of women and men. Despite the women's human capital advantages, men's wages were significantly higher. For example, whereas the median wage for women in domestic service was only \$5.38 per hour, the median wage for men working in construction was \$9.18 per hour. A similar situation was true for employment mobility. Of the men working in the construction sector, 40% exhibited high-level mobility in wages and job status (Repak, 1994a), improving their earnings as much as \$88 every year (Repak, 1995). In addition, the men's earnings were \$16 higher for every year they had been in the United States. In contrast, 73% of the women surveyed exhibited no mobility in wages or job status, and 25% experienced only small increases in wages (Repak, 1994a). Only one woman exhibited high-level mobility. Unlike the men's cases, "length of time and work experience in the labor market [made] little difference for these women" (p. 123). Furthermore, for the few women who were able to move out of domestic service, improvement in job status was financially insignificant because the higher-status jobs available for immigrant women did not necessarily pay better wages.



Overall, Repak (1994a) found that, among these Central American immigrants, the influence of structural and human capital variables clearly varied by gender. Whereas structural factors such as sector of employment had determined men's levels of economic success, human capital variables such as English ability had had a greater, albeit limited, influence on women's wage levels and employment mobility. But because of the striking difference between men's and women's economic gains, Repak argued that "wage levels and employment mobility are more accurately determined by gender considerations in conjunction with the structural context in which international migrants labor" (p. 119).

Menjivar's (1999) findings agreed with those of Wallace (1986, 1989) and Repak (1995). In a comparative case study of 26 Salvadoran and 25 Guatemalan female workers in San Francisco and Los Angeles, respectively, Menjivar paid special attention to the women's diverse backgrounds. Salvadorans were more urban and more diverse in terms of class and occupational experience than were Guatemalans. In addition, Guatemalans were comprised of two distinct ethnic groups: Kaqchikel Mayan Indians and *ladinas*. In Guatemala, *ladinas* are distinguished from Mayan Indians because of their mixed Mayan Indian and Spanish cultural heritage. In spite of their diverse backgrounds, however, all these women shared a similar position in American society. Menjivar inferred that contextual factors such as government reception policies, local market opportunities, and community organizations' services had had a "powerful homogenizing effect on these Central American immigrants" (p. 607). For example, as the majority of these women were undocumented immigrants, legal status significantly restricted their employment opportunities as well as their eligibility for official resettlement aid. Therefore, despite their background differences, the women's social

and economic incorporation depended largely on the same kinds of informal contacts and services provided by community organizations.

At the same time, Menjivar (1999) indicated that, in California, immigrant women experienced different working conditions than immigrant men. Because the labor markets in San Francisco and Los Angeles were segmented by gender, the job opportunities available to immigrant women were different from those available to immigrant men. The men most often found employment as gardeners, janitors, busboys, and construction workers. In contrast, the job opportunities for women were restricted to domestic service in private households and janitorial work in office buildings. In Los Angeles, some women had opportunities for moving into factory jobs after working for some time as domestics.

An important effect of job segmentation by gender was that, whereas most women were employed in the informal economy, most men were employed in the low-wage bracket of the formal economy (Menjivar, 1999). Paradoxically, being employed in the formal economy made men more vulnerable to unemployment during recession. For the same reason, men had a harder time finding work after 1986, when IRCA sanctions increasingly restricted employers from hiring undocumented workers. The jobs available to undocumented men were more public and better regulated than those available to undocumented women. Consequently, although in general women were paid less for their work, they could find jobs more readily and work longer hours than their male partners could. In some cases, the woman's higher income made her the main earner in the household.

Mahler (1995) found an analogous disparity in the employment opportunities available to Salvadoran immigrant men and women on Long Island. However, she pointed out that employment opportunities on Long Island had been determined both by the local

economy and the immigrants' characteristics. Based on 1990 U.S.-census data and questionnaires collected from 202 adults participating in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes between 1989-1990, Mahler (1995) developed a profile of these immigrants. Salvadorans living on Long Island were predominantly male; men outnumbered women by 15%. In addition, this group exhibited a higher percentage of adults with low levels of formal education than did Salvadoran immigrants nationwide. Whereas, nationwide, only 18% of Salvadoran immigrants over age 25 had completed fewer than 5 years of formal education, 32% of Long Island Salvadorans could be classified at the same educational level. Not surprisingly, an inverse relationship existed in the percentages of Salvadorans classified as belonging to the next two educational levels: high school (38% nationwide, 16% on Long Island) and college (16% nationwide, 6% on Long Island).

Mahler (1995) speculated that census data for Salvadoran immigrants nationwide could be skewed toward more highly-educated respondents. At the same time, she pointed out that her own survey could also be skewed, since respondents attending ESL classes would likely be among the better-educated. Furthermore, her fieldwork observations, as well as her interviews with professionals tending to this population, indicated that a majority of Salvadorans living on Long Island had arrived from rural peasant communities in which the norm was for adults to complete fewer than 5 years of formal education. Taking into account such considerations, Mahler concluded that Long Island Salvadorans likely exhibited lower levels of human capital measures than Salvadoran immigrants nationwide, other third-wave immigrant groups, and the U.S.-born population over age 25.

Mahler (1995) emphasized the high cost of traveling from El Salvador to Long Island, which could have indicated immigrants' middle-class backgrounds prior to migration.

However, she pointed out that many immigrants on Long Island had been among the poorest Salvadorans who had either borrowed money or sold everything they owned to finance their trips. Therefore, she theorized that the Salvadoran immigration to Long Island more closely resembled a refugee pattern than a voluntary immigration flow.

On Long Island, Salvadorans were employed in several sectors of the economy such as domestic services, fast-food services, manufacturing, day-to-day labor, and informal services to co-ethnics (Mahler, 1995). However, the majority earned low wages working in service jobs that were gender specific. Men worked outdoors in landscaping, construction, pool maintenance, and grave digging. Women worked indoors in domestic work such as childcare and cleaning. Women also worked in catering and fast food services, often performing a combination of jobs throughout the week. To emphasize these workers' marginality, Mahler described the economic relationship between Salvadorans and native Long Islanders: "[Salvadorans] will toil from dawn to dusk manicuring Long Islanders' properties, but as these groups' paths cross again in the evening, the commuters see only sweaty, stained foreigners trodding the groomed streets of their village" (p. 53).

Like Menjivar (1999), Mahler (1995) found that women could find jobs more readily than men could because of the types of jobs available to them. Nonetheless, on suburban Long Island, Salvadoran workers experienced challenges that were nonexistent in urban locations such as San Francisco and Los Angeles. For example, since landscaping was seasonal, many men faced unemployment for as long as four months every year, from December into March. Because many native Long Islanders spent their winters in the south, women also faced periodic unemployment, but to a lesser degree than did the men. Becoming unemployed was especially detrimental for these Salvadorans, given their typically low

wages and the high cost of living on Long Island. For example, whereas, on average, Long Island workers earned approximately \$450 weekly, the median weekly salary for Salvadorans was only \$229. In contrast to their low earnings, Salvadorans paid as much as \$1150 in monthly rents for extremely substandard housing in ethnically and racially segregated neighborhoods.

On Long Island, Salvadorans developed creative strategies to overcome unfavorable employment and living conditions (Mahler, 1995). For instance, to afford housing expenses, single individuals, couples, and families often shared one apartment; diverse schedules diminished the discomfort caused by overcrowding and lack of privacy. Women with young children resorted to working at home by preparing food, sewing, and providing childcare for fellow immigrants. Older individuals with legal status became informal couriers transporting packages between Long Island and El Salvador. However, these strategies helped immigrants meet only their most basic needs.

Whether Salvadorans worked in Long Island's formal or informal economy, they seldom exhibited employment mobility (Mahler, 1995). In a few cases, English acquisition was key to economic advancement. Yet Mahler pointed out that low levels of formal education and hard working conditions had probably hindered most Salvadorans from learning English, despite their interest.

The five studies reviewed so far coincide in suggesting the following assertions about the incorporation of Central American immigrants in the U.S. labor market: 1) undocumented status restricted the accessibility of jobs to Central Americans; 2) most of the Central American immigrants studied earned low wages and were employed in gender-specific jobs; 3) it was common for men to be employed in the formal economy and for women to be

employed in the informal economy; 4) women were usually restricted to jobs as live-in domestics in private households, irrespective of the woman's educational background or work experience; 5) men were generally paid more for their work than were women; 6) undocumented immigrant women worked longer hours and found jobs with more ease than undocumented immigrant men (except in the case of the Totonacapan Maya in Houston, Texas); 7) the employment situations of Central American immigrants were "more accurately determined by gender considerations in conjunction with the structural context in which international migrants labor" (Repak, 1994b, p. 119) than by the immigrants' individual characteristics; 8) the labor incorporation patterns of Central Americans positioned them among the working poor in the United States.

Two other studies added particularly interesting insights on the topic. Chinchilla and Hamilton (1996) introduced a unique perspective on the work experiences of Mexican and Central American immigrant women in Los Angeles. Focusing specifically on women who worked in domestic service and in street vending, Chinchilla and Hamilton sought to explore how these women coped with, negotiated, and redefined their productive and domestic roles in an urban environment. The researchers observed that these women exhibited a tremendous degree of initiative, resourcefulness, and creativity. The women had learned to use public transportation to all parts of the city, they had transformed impersonal public sites into new spaces conducive to interpersonal interaction and networking, and they had been able to utilize domestic skills such as food preparation to earn a living as street vendors while still taking care of their young children. Furthermore, with the assistance of community organizations, these women had increased their skills, expanded their employment opportunities, and developed political experience. Therefore, Chinchilla and Hamilton

concluded that, despite exhibiting limited English language ability, facing difficulties associated with legal status, and encountering challenges linked to living in a metropolitan area, the women had

intentionally and inadvertently redefined urban space and the relationship between public and private spheres through their work as domestics in the 'private' sphere of others, their reproduction of domestic activities in public spheres as street vendors, and their use of public transportation to navigate public spaces linking their domestic spheres and those of others. (p. 25)

Schoeni's (1998) study of labor market outcomes of immigrant women in the United States from 1970-1990 situated Central American women's labor participation within a broader perspective. Applying multivariate analysis to 1970, 1980, and 1990 U.S. census data, Schoeni identified a growing gap between immigrant women and U.S.-born women with respect to work participation rates and weekly earnings. The gap varied, depending on the immigrant women's country of birth. Central American women, in particular, exhibited a substantial drop in relative earnings. In 1970 Central American women exhibited about the same weekly earnings as U.S.-born women. However, by 1990, the earnings of Central American women amounted to only 64% of the earnings of U.S.-born women. Schoeni found that the growing differences among the earnings of Central American women, immigrant women of other national origins, and U.S.-born women could be explained by disparities in the women's years of schooling, English language ability, and fertility. In particular, years of schooling explained "69% of the gap in labor force participation and all of the gap in weekly earnings between U.S.-born women and all immigrant women in 1990"(p. 75). Nevertheless, from my perspective, it would be worth considering that the influence of human capital

measures may not be as pronounced in the case of undocumented Central American immigrant women, who are typically underrepresented in U.S. census reports (Mahler, 1995).

***Social networks.*** Social networks play an important role in facilitating the immigration and settlement of Central Americans in the United States (Hagan, 1998).

However, the different social networks in which women and men participate seem to have important consequences not only for their economic welfare, but also for their social well being.

Hagan (1994) found that upon their arrival in Houston, Texas, Totonacapan Mayan immigrants participated in job placement networks that differed on the basis of gender. These networks contributed to producing different situations for men and women. Whereas the Mayan men immediately joined teams of fellow countrymen who were well-established as employees of a rapidly growing supermarket chain, the women took much longer to locate jobs as live-in domestics. Unlike the men, who benefited from well-established male networks, female newcomers had to rely on informal conversations between already-established Mayan domestics and their employers to find job opportunities. Once employed, women found themselves isolated from the immigrant community, working six days a week as well as evenings, for a monthly salary well below the minimal wage earned by the men.

As Mayan newcomers began to settle, they participated in community social networks that also differed on the basis of gender (Hagan, 1994). Again, the implications varied for men and women. Spending more time within the immigrant community, the men interacted daily “in the neighborhood, at the workplace, during soccer practices and games, and just hanging out or working on their cars” (p. 157). In contrast, the women spent most of the week isolated from the Mayan community at the employer’s home. Their contact with



established Mayans was limited to spending one weekend day in the neighborhood and attending church meetings or occasional life-cycle event celebrations such as baptisms and weddings. Consequently, in comparison to the men's employment and social networks, the women's respective networks were weaker and less extensive.

Because of their weaker and less extensive social networks, Mayan women moved through the settlement stages much more slowly than did men (Hagan, 1994). For example, in stage one, newcomers of both sexes were equally welcomed into sponsoring households in the Mayan community. However, during stage two, the men were able to secure an income and move into less crowded households much sooner than the women. Furthermore, the women's movement into stage two often meant leaving the Mayan community altogether or becoming part of two households, the employer's and that of relatives. During stage three, immigrants attained better and more independent living arrangements. Movement into this stage was contingent on job security and financial stability, which again were attained faster by the Mayan men. Moreover, because of the type of work available to the women, their challenges were greater. For most Mayan women, going into stage three meant moving from live-in status in a single household to day-to-day domestic work for several households. This, in turn, required some command of English and access to personal means of transportation.

Two other studies addressing Central American immigrants' social networks contrast with Hagan's (1994) insights into Mayan female networks. In separate studies, Repak (1995) and Mahler (1995) noted that women's social networks had greatly benefited Salvadoran *ladinas* in Washington, DC, and on Long Island, respectively. Repak (1995) pointed out that despite obtaining less economic success on average than did men, Salvadoran women had "exhibited stronger ties to social networks and profited from them to a greater extent than

men” (p. 183). Furthermore, their stronger social networks had benefited the immigrant community at large because women had been more prone to sponsor the legal immigration of family members of both sexes to Washington, DC, than had men. In a similar vein, Mahler (1995) emphasized that, on Long Island, Salvadoran women’s networks had been central to overcoming the daily challenges of living in a suburban area. For instance, women supported each other by sharing information on jobs and affordable shopping, babysitting each other’s children, providing transportation to friends, and writing letters for illiterate peers. In addition, women’s expressions of affection and concern comforted families facing difficulties such as the illness or death of a child. Salvadoran women’s social networks also contributed to fostering community bonds by celebrating life-cycle events such as children’s baptisms and birthdays.

*Impact of women’s employment on family and gender relations.* Gender differences in labor outcomes—types of employment, income, and vulnerability to unemployment—have led to dissimilar perceptions of gender roles among Central American immigrants (Menjivar, 1999). In turn, dissimilar perceptions have altered family and gender relations in various ways. In some cases, traditional gender relations have been transformed, improving the status of women within the family. In other cases, traditional gender relations have been reaffirmed, maintaining the subordinate status of women within the household. In extreme cases, strained gender relations have led to incidents of domestic violence against women.

Seeking to gain insight into the situations of immigrant women with pre-migration paid-work experience, Menjivar (1999) conducted intensive interviews with 25 Guatemalan and 26 Salvadoran women employed in California. Menjivar found that “for these immigrant women, entry into paid work in the United States [was] not an unqualified indication of

empowerment and improved status within the family” (p. 609). While some women believed that employment in this country had provided them with economic freedom and increased self-esteem, others spoke of carrying a double burden as they tried fulfilling work demands in the new environment, while still meeting the responsibilities assigned to females in traditional Latin American families. Menjivar concluded that, given women’s benefits and losses, it would be inappropriate to universalize the effects of immigrant women’s employment or to portray “these women’s experiences in simple or unidirectional terms” (p. 601).

Menjivar (1999) pointed out that several sets of factors intervened in producing the various effects of women’s employment on gender relations. For example, women’s higher incomes often led to family conflicts. As stated earlier, although both men and women faced severely constrained employment opportunities as undocumented immigrants, the women had more access to paid work. Working longer hours and more regularly, many women earned more than did their male partners. While in some cases a woman’s economic contributions led to her improved status within the family, greater earnings often placed women in vulnerable positions. This was especially the case when a man perceived the woman’s earning status as a threat to his authority within the family. In order to counterbalance the woman’s advantage, traditional Latin American gender relations were often reinforced within the household.

In other instances, the different kinds of employment accessible to immigrant women and men provided them with dissimilar opportunities for examining their views on gender relations in the new milieu (Menjivar, 1999). Whereas women’s jobs as live-in domestics in American households exposed them to more equitable gender relations in the United States,

men's limited contact with couples outside the immigrant community reaffirmed the men's expectations of maintaining traditional Latin American gender relations. Consequently, job segmentation by gender contributed to transforming women's perceptions, while at the same time it contributed to reaffirming men's traditional views.

Taking into account such diverse situations, Menjivar (1999) suggested that the effects of immigrant women's employment on gender relations were not solely contingent on women's earnings. Furthermore, she argued that the multiple effects of immigrant women's employment were an outcome of complex social processes, which were variously experienced by women and by men of different classes and ethnic backgrounds.

With respect to class, Menjivar (1999) pointed out that the meaning of work varied for women, depending on their class aspirations and ethnic backgrounds. Ladina Guatemalans and Salvadorans with middle-class aspirations perceived their employment as "a temporary strategy to get ahead" (p. 611). These women and their husbands held the ideal of a family in which the husband would be the sole provider and the wife would stay at home. Consequently, women with middle-class aspirations perceived work as only a means to compensate for their husbands' inadequate earnings.

In contrast, working-class indigenous women had "a different sociocultural perception of work" (Menjivar, 1999, p. 612). Although they were also motivated by economic need, indigenous women perceived work as an integral part of both women's and men's lives. Staying busy and working hard was a source of self-appreciation for indigenous women. Work was central to their identities as Mayans, women, and working-class persons. Therefore, unlike the cases of ladina Salvadorans and Guatemalans, indigenous women's labor participation was independent of their male partners' economic vulnerability.

With respect to ethnicity, Menjivar (1999) noted significant differences between the attitudes of ladino and indigenous Guatemalans towards women's employment in the United States. Because gender relations were initially more equitable among the indigenous Guatemalans, the Mayan men showed more support to Mayan women's improvement than the ladino men showed to their female partners. Furthermore, irrespective of gender, indigenous Guatemalans perceived the improved status of either sex as a desired gain. Hence, for these Mayan immigrants, gains in economic and social status as an ethnic group seemed to matter more than improved gender status. Nevertheless, Menjivar cautioned that it would be inappropriate to universalize her observations or to apply these insights to other Mayan groups residing in the country.

Indeed, Hagan (1994) found that employment in the United States had affected the Totonacapan Mayan women's position relative to that of men in two important, albeit apparently contradictory, ways. On one hand, being employed had provided women with a sense of freedom and independence that they hadn't experienced in the home country. On the other hand, being employed as live-in domestics had isolated the women and made them depend on the men for transportation and housing when they were back in the Mayan immigrant community.

In addition, Hagan (1994) commented on other factors affecting gender relations among Mayan immigrants. She observed that traditional Mayan norms seemed to be difficult to maintain in the United States. In particular, Mayan women complained about the men's lax behavior with regard to drinking, infidelity, and physical abuse. Hagan noted,

The absence of parents from the Maya households, and from the community in general, challenges another dimension of community formation—the Maya normative

structure. Without the watchful eyes of parents and other elderly kin, many singles in the community are likely to deviate from the behavioral norms that prevail back home. For example, it is not unusual to come across unmarried couples living together, couples separating because of extramarital relations, and cases of domestic violence. (p. 58)

From a different perspective, Mahler (1995) noted that, among Salvadorans on Long Island, gender relations were strained because men expected women to expand their roles as workers while maintaining intact their traditional family roles. For example, men would expect women to serve them with freshly prepared meals after they both returned home from a day of hard work. In addition, women were responsible for taking care of the children. Consequently, women carried a disproportionate degree of responsibility within the family.

In addition, disparity between women's and men's accessibility to employment also strained gender relations among Salvadorans (Mahler, 1995). Mahler observed that, when unemployed, some men would resort to drinking, and they would express their frustration by abusing women both emotionally and physically. Mahler suggested that domestic violence could have resulted from the many pressures experienced by Salvadoran immigrants on Long Island. However, she also pointed out that pressures associated with undocumented immigration could have aggravated post-traumatic stress conditions that had originated during the Salvadoran civil war.

***Legalization.*** Given the economic contributions of undocumented workers in the United States (Reubens, 1991), the 8 million undocumented immigrants living in the country (Porter, 2001), and the serious implications of being undocumented (Chupina-Orantes, 2002), one would expect for immigration law makers as well as for the immigrants themselves to be

proactive about legalization. However, for Central Americans, pursuing legalization has been a difficult and lengthy process, which hasn't always led to positive results (Mahler, 1995). Consequently, although many undocumented Central Americans are aware of the current anti-immigrant climate, thousands of them continue to wait for a new amnesty or legalization program that can help them obtain legal status in the United States.

Central Americans have pursued one of three options for obtaining permanent legal status: 1) they have asked relatives who are either legal immigrants or U.S. citizens to petition the INS on their behalf, 2) they have applied to legalization programs such as IRCA and NACARA, or 3) they have asked employers to sponsor their requests for permanent residence (Mahler, 1995). Each of these alternatives has presented different challenges for women and for men.

First, the increasing number of family reunification applications has produced a delay of as many as 5 years for petitions to be processed by the INS, the waiting period of new applications increasing every year (Mahler, 1995). Paradoxically, the waiting period has contributed to causing the disintegration of nuclear families. Since undocumented immigrants are unable to visit spouses or children still living in the home country, it is common for immigrant men, in particular, to start a second family with a new partner in the United States.

Second, applying to legalization programs has been especially difficult for immigrant women. For example, in Houston, Texas, the Totonacapan Mayan women had extreme difficulties applying to IRCA (Hagan, 1994). Because so many Mayan women worked as live-in domestics, they usually had to rely on a single employer for obtaining the necessary documentation. In Houston, most employers of Mayan domestics feared facing IRS charges

for failing to pay social security; therefore, they refused to provide the women with the affidavits needed to complete IRCA applications.

Third, being sponsored by an employer has been a costly and dilatory process pursued most commonly by women. On Long Island, for example, most Salvadoran women working as nannies resorted to employer sponsorship (Mahler, 1995). In some cases, the process took as many as 6 years, and the women had to pay several thousand dollars in lawyer fees. However, in Washington, DC, women accomplished legalization in a relatively timely manner, and they were more successful than men at finding employers who would sponsor them (Repak, 1995). Noting differences in Central American women's and men's accessibility to permanent legal status options, researchers have suggested that U.S. immigration laws, legalization programs in particular, could be carrying unintended gender bias.

Although less pursued by Central Americans, a fourth option for obtaining legal status has been to apply for political asylum (Mahler, 1995). A person may apply for asylum during a deportation hearing, suspending deportation until the claim is decided. Sometimes applicants are provided with temporary work authorization, but there is no guarantee that a person applying for asylum will be released from detention. Besides, proving that a person could risk persecution or death in that person's country of origin is often very difficult. In addition, Central Americans have a powerful reason for not applying for asylum: the lack of confidentiality of the process. Because of lack of confidentiality, immigrants denouncing political crimes fear not only putting their lives at risk, but also endangering the physical security of relatives and friends still living in the home country.



Finally, Central Americans have resorted to temporary legalization through two programs: Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) (Mahler, 1995). Through such programs, immigrants have been able to obtain authorization to live and work temporarily in the United States. TPS became available to qualifying Salvadorans in November of 1990, and it was later extended to include Central Americans of other nationalities. After 1992, the TPS program was renamed DED suggesting the imminent repatriation of Central Americans. Eligibility of Central Americans to both TPS and DED ended in January of 1995. TPS was again available to Hondurans and Nicaraguans during a short period, after Hurricane Mitch struck those countries in 1998.

### ***Return***

Closely related to the issue of legalization are immigrants' considerations for either remaining in the United States or returning to their countries of origin. Several studies of Latin American sojourners have found gender differences in immigrants' attitudes towards return (Sanchez-Korrol, 1989). While men have expressed interest in returning in order to regain male privilege, women have expressed more interest in remaining in the United States. It has been argued that women's preference for staying in the United States may be linked to increased economic independence and personal autonomy.

However, the literature on Central Americans suggests a different set of attitudes. For example, Repak (1995) found no gender-based discrepancies regarding return among Central Americans in Washington, DC. She pointed out that most women had arrived with a certain degree of autonomy since they had been independent income earners prior to migration. In addition, she observed that, irrespective of gender, Central Americans considered the postwar conditions prevalent in their countries of origin less than optimal for return. In a similar way,

Mahler (1995) found that although Salvadorans expressed disappointment about their settlement experiences on Long Island, they were well aware of the negative implications of returning to a country shattered by war.

On the other hand, Hagan (1994) noted that Mayan's decisions for remaining in the United States varied depending on four interrelated factors: 1) marital status, 2) residence of children, 3) time spent in the United States, and 4) gender. Among married couples, residence of children was a determining factor. Married couples with children residing in the United States were the most interested in remaining in the country. Their main concern was to provide a good education and better economic opportunities for their children. In contrast, parents with children still living in Guatemala remained undecided; their decisions seemed to be contingent on family reunification.

Among young single individuals, gender and time spent in the United States were the two most relevant factors (Hagan, 1994). On one hand, young single men were interested in obtaining legal status primarily because of short-term practical reasons. They wanted to make sure they could work and earn money, even if it was on a temporary basis. On the other hand, the attitudes of young single women varied depending upon time spent in the United States. Whereas female newcomers planned on returning to Guatemala, established women were motivated to remain in the United States. According to Hagan, time spent in the United States made a difference among women because the newcomers usually experienced feelings of discontent and isolation due to their employment conditions as live-in domestics. In contrast, established women were more aware of new opportunities available to persons of their gender in this country.

Overall, Hagan (1994) observed a shifting nature in Mayan men's and women's decisions to prolong and to legalize their stay in the United States. She noted that immigrants' decisions seemed to change along with their attitudes and with their exposure to new options and social relations, which kept shifting over time. Therefore, she concluded that the decision-making processes exhibited by the Totonacapan Mayan immigrants reflected the uncertainty and ambiguity of their settlement experiences in Houston.

### **Part Three: Viewing Central American Immigrant Women as Adult Learners**

In order to provide a context for understanding the learning experiences of Central American immigrant women, in Part Three, I explore the following topics: 1) adult immigration education in the United States, 2) education profile of Central American immigrants, and 3) adult education opportunities available to Central American immigrant women in the United States.

#### ***Adult Immigrant Education in the United States***

Although it has been marginalized in the official knowledge base of adult education (Merriam & Brockett, 1997), the education of adult immigrants has been an important area of practice in the United States. During different historical periods, policy makers as well as adult education theoreticians and practitioners have shown varying interest in adult immigrants, depending on four factors: 1) the social concerns underlying education projects (e.g., literacy, acculturation, social equity); 2) the goals guiding specific programs (e.g., U.S. citizenship, vocational training); 3) the newcomers' immigration status (e.g., refugee, legal

immigrant, undocumented); and 4) the immigrants' socioeconomic and cultural profiles (e.g., literacy, years of formal education, English language proficiency, and national origins).

For example, between 1914 and 1924, adult immigrant education became a priority in the United States as the country received large numbers of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe (Seller, 1978). Some of these immigrants had arrived from rural areas. Others had experienced political and cultural oppression in their countries of origin. Consequently, many immigrant adults were either "illiterate or semi-literate in their own languages and unschooled in their own ethnic heritage" (p. 84). At the same time, world events such as World War I and the Russian Revolution made Americans apprehensive of non-naturalized and non-English speaking immigrants, who could potentially be disloyal to the United States. Those concerns led to a massive Americanization movement, which focused on providing "English lessons for all" (p. 85) and on disseminating the ideals of democracy and capitalism. Seeking to acculturate as many immigrants as possible, officially sponsored programs proliferated in multiple settings such as night schools, factory schools, settlement houses, and churches.

Despite the efforts of official and private organizations, Americanization programs failed to reach the target population (Seller, 1978). The enrollment of non-naturalized immigrants in officially sponsored programs was low, and attrition among those immigrants who did enroll was disproportionately high. According to Seller, the failure of Americanization programs was partially based on inadequate funding and inappropriate methods and materials. Ultimately, however, Americanization programs were unsuccessful because they failed to meet the immigrants' needs.

In contrast, adult education programs established within ethnic communities were very successful between 1914 and 1924 (Seller, 1978). Aware of the cultural and intellectual interests of specific ethnic groups, immigrant organizations provided a variety of educational opportunities that helped the newcomers preserve their cultural heritages while learning to adjust to their new lives in America. For example, non-literate adults had opportunities to become literate in their native languages. In addition, immigrants had access to theater productions, lectures, and newspapers in languages other than English. Moreover, most immigrants trusted the community-based institutions—churches, unions, and cultural or fraternal organizations—sponsoring these adult education projects. Therefore, according to Seller, the primary reason for both the failure of officially sponsored Americanization programs and the success of ethnic community programs was that “immigrants defined [their] education more broadly” (p. 88) than did Americanizing educators.

Pursuing goals different from those of either the Americanization or the ethnic community programs, union-sponsored programs facilitated English as a Second Language (ESL) and other types of instruction in the workplace (Rosenblum, 1996). Starting in the early 1900s, labor unions were proactive in improving the working and living conditions of newcomers. Labor unions sponsored the education of immigrants so these workers could perform their jobs in a safe manner, participate fully in civic life, and contribute to strengthening labor-union movements. Therefore, union-sponsored programs sought to help immigrants develop not only job-related skills, but also a better understanding of the social and political forces affecting people’s lives in the United States.

Over the last two decades, labor unions have noted an increasing need for immigrant education in the workplace (Rosenblum, 1996). Labor union leaders have argued that current

jobs require greater levels of literacy and better communication skills than were necessary in the past. For example, entry-level warehouse jobs in shipping and receiving require workers to read and write English fluently. In addition, the increasing emphasis on teamwork and problem solving requires that workers be not only skillful communicators, but also knowledgeable about workplace organization. On the other hand, the constant incorporation of new technology requires workers to participate in retraining programs. In order to participate in technological training, workers must at least be proficient in the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics. Since retraining is usually conducted in English, limited English language proficiency often hinders immigrants from participating in such programs.

Indeed, as the United States has moved toward an information economy, the concept of literacy has also evolved (Taylor, 1989). In an increasingly dynamic information society, the concept of literacy has expanded from basic reading and writing to proficiency in a multitude of skills including computer operating, critical thinking, problem solving, and cooperative working, which are necessary in order to participate in mainstream America (Rosenblum, 1996).

These conditions represent an especially difficult challenge for immigrants who arrive from countries with less developed economies (Martin et al., 2000). As the demand for skilled workers increases in the United States, immigrants lacking the required skills are finding fewer employment opportunities. Furthermore, the types of jobs available to differently skilled workers tend to lock these immigrants in the lower ranks of American society. Obtaining any social or economic mobility is especially challenging for those immigrants who arrive with few years of formal education and little or no knowledge of the English language. Mexicans and Central American immigrants, in particular, are increasingly

lagging behind U.S.-born workers in earning capability. In 1990, for example, the average earnings of immigrants in these two groups were 50% lower than the average earnings of U.S.-born workers.

Gender-based patterns of labor recruitment make particularly difficult the employment mobility of immigrant women from countries with less developed economies (Repak, 1995). Most of these immigrant women are locked into poorly paid jobs, where they work as domestics, chambermaids, building cleaners, and sewing-machine operators. In turn, these types of employment limit the women's access to formal education and to other kinds of learning that could contribute to effecting their social and economic mobility. In a study of English as a Second Language (ESL) acquisition among Latin American immigrant women, Paredes (1987) pointed out that "access or non-access to language training [structured the women's] lives by organizing their pattern of employment, their isolation from society and their dependency on family and others" (p. 23). Although Paredes's study was conducted in Canada, the link between gender, type of employment, and immigrant women's access to language education seems equally pertinent to the current situations of Latin American immigrant women in the United States.

As in the past, the responses of contemporary adult education to the needs of specific groups such as immigrants, workers, and women have varied (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Educational programs have been initiated by outside agencies as well as by leaders within these groups. Among adult education scholars, approaches to adult immigrant education have varied, depending on the scholars' philosophical and political stances (Jeria, 1999). For instance, adhering to human capital theory, some scholars have argued that literacy, upgrading of basic skills, and English language acquisition would contribute to the social and

economic integration of “unskilled” immigrant women and men in the United States.

However, scholars holding critical perspectives have questioned the ethnocentric assumptions underlying human capital theory as well as the contributions of such positions to maintaining capitalistic hegemony. In particular, critical adult education scholars have condemned educational programs that approach immigrants from a deficit viewpoint and equate immigrant education with assimilation. Sparks (2002), for example, argued that a prevalent lack of understanding and respect for the language and culture of ethnic minorities had manifested into exclusionary practices that limited the participation of Latino men and women in formalized adult education programs. Accordingly, critical scholars have advocated recognizing the role of culture on learning, including the effects of associated factors such as values, beliefs, attitudes, motivation, and cognitive styles, as well as encouraging learner participation in program operation and decision making (Spanos, 1991).

In light of these considerations, below I: 1) outline an educational profile of Central American adult immigrants, and 2) provide an overview of adult education opportunities available to Central American immigrants in the United States. I give special attention to research findings concerning the educational experiences of Central American immigrant women.

### ***Educational Profile of Central American Immigrants***

Building an accurate profile of Central American immigrants in terms of their occupational skills, years of formal education, and English language proficiency is difficult. First, population experts tend to be inconsistent in grouping immigrants of distinct national origins. In some instances, reports merge Central Americans with other immigrant groups in categories such as Central and South Americans. In other instances, reports include Central



American immigrants indiscriminately with foreign- and U.S.-born Latinos of various nationalities. Such reporting makes important statistics, such as average years of formal education or median English proficiency level, of little use to researchers interested in studying groups made up of specific national origins. In addition, undocumented Central American immigrants are not represented in official reports documenting the educational and occupational status of legal immigrants in the United States (Massey & Schnabel, 1983).

Second, ethnographic studies of Central Americans in the United States have only paid indirect attention to the influence of education on the lives of adult immigrants; none of these studies has examined the different kinds of learning—formal, non-formal, informal—experienced by adult immigrants in the new settings. For instance, Mahler (1995) discussed the low levels of formal education exhibited by Salvadorans on Long Island as one element influencing the immigrants' employment options. But her research did not examine the immigrants' past educational experiences or their current participation in adult learning. In an analogous manner, Repak (1995) discussed the effects of formal education and English proficiency on the employment mobility of immigrant women and men in Washington, DC. Although she emphasized that Central Americans exhibited "a wide array of personal characteristics and high averages for education and skill level relative to Mexican immigrants" (p. 123), she also noted that it would be difficult to categorize Central Americans. Indeed, the population studied by Repak fit neither the manual labor category, typically comprised of immigrants with low education and occupation skills, nor the professional immigrant category. Like Mahler's, Repak's interest in the education of Central Americans was limited to its relationship with the immigrants' employability in the United States.

Despite the dearth of specific information, U.S. population experts have characterized Central Americans as one of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged and relatively young age-groups to arrive from Latin America over the last two decades. For example, Rumbaut (1996) reported that Mexicans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Dominicans were the four largest groups of Latin American immigrants to arrive in the United States in the 1980s. At the same time, these four groups exhibited the lowest levels of English proficiency and socioeconomic status among Latin American immigrant groups. Guzman (2001) reported that 1.7 million Central Americans represented 4.8% of the 35.3 million persons of Hispanic heritage counted in the 2000 census. The median age for Central Americans was 29.2 years as compared to a median of 35.5 years for the entire U.S. population. Therrien and Ramirez (2000) reported that, in 2000, the educational attainment of Hispanics over age 25 was lower relative to that of non-Hispanic Whites of the same age. Among Central and South American immigrant adults, 35.7% had not completed a high school education. Since other reports characterized South Americans as relatively more educated than Central Americans (Rumbaut, 1996), one could infer that Central Americans made up a significant proportion of the 37.5% of Central and South American adults without a high school degree.

These general reports suggest that a majority of Central American immigrants over age 25 will likely exhibit the following characteristics: 1) low levels of literacy in either Spanish or other native language, 2) fewer than 12 years of formal education, and 3) no or minimal knowledge of the English language. Given the disadvantaged status of peasant women relative to that of peasant men in Central America (Bronstein, 1982), it is also likely that immigrant women will exhibit lower levels of formal education than immigrant men.

*Adult Education Opportunities Available to  
Central American Immigrant Women in the United States*

Within adult education, the profile of Central American immigrants has contributed to classifying them as a language minority population with low levels of formal education.

Unfortunately, this classification may carry negative consequences for those immigrants who have expectations of benefiting from educational opportunities in the United States that were unavailable to them in their countries of origin. In particular, three factors—race, culture, and gender—may diminish the accessibility to adult education of Central American women.

First, as in the cases of U.S.-born racial and ethnic minority groups such as American Indians, African Americans, and Latinos, attention to Latin American adult immigrant learners has been marginal. According to Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2000) race has contributed to privileging some learners at the expense of neglecting others in adult education. Based on a socially constructed concept of race, foreign- and U.S.-born people of color have been perceived as inferior or deficient in relation to whites, who have been considered the social norm. Consequently, educational projects tending to the needs of groups other than whites have been qualified as education for “special” populations (p. 151) and have been addressed separately from mainstream adult education in the literature.

Second, cultural minority status has also contributed to shaping the attention paid to diverse groups of adult learners (Cassara, 1991; Hemphill, 1992; Ross, 1988; Shannon, 2000; Sparks, 2002). Attention to the needs of Latino adult learners, in particular, has been minimal (Jeria, 1999). Despite comprising a growing segment of adult learners in the United States, few studies about foreign- and U.S.-born Latinos can be found in adult education literature. Worthy of mention as an exception is Sparks’s (2002) study of the learning experiences of

Mexican Americans in the Southwest. In addition, according to Jeria (1999), the prevalence of deficit and minority perspectives among practitioners has contributed to making Latinos culturally “invisible to the field of adult education” (p. 58). Ignoring socio-cultural and historical factors that define the experience of Latinos in the United States, adult education practitioners have emphasized cultural assimilation. For example, programs attended by Latino adult learners usually entail “training in a language in which [learners] are asked to reproduce cultural symbols that teachers of adults think they don’t have” (p. 58). Cultural minority status, then, has led to ignoring important issues permeating the lives of both foreign- and U.S.-born Latinos that could be addressed in adult education practice and research.

Third, gender bias within the field as well as conventional gender roles within immigrant families have contributed to hindering the participation of immigrant women in adult education. On the part of adult educators, gender bias has delayed the design of programs that recognize the needs and strengths of non-English speaking immigrant women with low levels of literacy, Mexicans and Central Americans in particular (Hinojosa, 1986). While some of these women have benefited from educational and employment assistance, “it may [have been] more by accident than by design” (p. 129). According to Paredes (1987), the specific experiences of immigrant women have been excluded in curriculum design and classroom organization. Adult educators have not only ignored the merits of immigrant women as learners in new contexts, but have also failed to recognize that providing meaningful learning opportunities to immigrant women is urgently needed in order to ensure the welfare of entire immigrant communities (Hamamoto & Torres, 1997). In the case of Latin American immigrants, in particular, women play a central role in fostering the physical,

intellectual, and spiritual development of children and youth (Chavez, 1997); hence, neglect of these women in adult education could have far reaching social implications.

Over the last 15 years, some attention has been paid to barriers to immigrant women's participation in literacy education. In 1992, Cumming (as cited in National Institute for Literacy (NIL), 1994) identified four kinds of barriers to immigrant women's participation in literacy programs: 1) institutional barriers, 2) situational barriers, 3) psychosocial barriers, and 4) pedagogical barriers. *Institutional barriers* included the lack of on-site childcare, unfamiliar location of classes, and class schedules that conflicted with women's family responsibilities. *Situational barriers* encompassed access to safe and convenient transportation to classes, conflicting part-time work schedules, lack of familiarity with institutional practices and government services, and women's responsibilities to children or to extended family members. *Psychological barriers* referred to the attitudes of family members or community leaders toward the education of women beyond initial schooling and toward enhancement of employment opportunities that could conflict with women's conventional roles. *Pedagogical barriers* comprised instructional methods and materials that were not relevant to women's personal situations, appeared too "bookish" (NIL, 1994, p. 6), or threatened the women's cultural values and roles. As is apparent in all four types of barriers, conventional gender roles within immigrant families have contributed to hindering women's participation in adult literacy programs.

Bearing in mind that women's participation in education "is embedded in the power dynamics between men and women" (p. 91), Rockhill (1990) sought to understand how a group of Hispanic immigrant women who knew little English experienced literacy in their lives. Between 1978 and 1982, Rockhill conducted life-history interviews with 35 working-

class Hispanic women who had completed fewer than eight years of formal education. Although the women didn't speak directly about literacy, Rockhill developed intriguing insights from their stories. Rockhill proposed three general ideas for explaining immigrant women's educational experiences: 1) literacy is women's work but not women's right; 2) English language acquisition is regulated by material, cultural, and sexist practices that confine women to the private sphere of home; and 3) literacy is both threat and desire.

In my view, Rockhill's (1990) third proposition is especially interesting because it suggests a paradox. On one hand, according to Rockhill, immigrant women's participation in English literacy beyond the level of basic survival skills poses "a threat to the power (im)balance in the family" (p. 102); the symbolic power of education threatens the dominant status of men. Consequently, men's negative attitudes toward women's English literacy vary along a continuum from subtle undermining of women's learning to violent restricting of women to their homes. In that sense, literacy represents a threat in women's lives. On the other hand, for working-class immigrant women, developing English literacy is linked to their desire "to be somebody" (p. 104). Developing English literacy and becoming more educated is perceived by the women as a means for improving not only their lives, but also the lives of their daughters. In that sense, literacy represents hope in women's lives.

Unfortunately, in many cases, English literacy remains an unaccomplished desire for immigrant women in traditional marital relationships (Rockhill, 1990). Indeed, Rockhill found that "women were more likely to develop their English literacy skills once they were separated or divorced" (p. 103). In addition, other studies seem to agree with Rockhill's findings. For instance, in a documentary film about the lives of four Latin American immigrant women, Bautis (1991) portrayed the women's struggles to overcome gender-based

restrictions within their communities in order to pursue their educational interests in the United States. One woman, in particular, had to transform her marital relationship before developing the self-efficacy necessary to accomplish her professional goals. On the other hand, Melville (1978) found that, among married immigrant women, lack of English literacy contributed to eroding the women's ability to adjust to gender roles in the new setting. According to Melville, lack of English language proficiency created a sense of helplessness in the women, which, in turn, hindered their ability to interpret their rights and duties associated with gender roles in the new context.

Although from a different perspective, Hayes (1989) also explored barriers to the participation of Hispanic immigrant women in ESL literacy. Hayes developed a typology of Hispanic ESL learners, based upon the responses of 200 adults to the Deterrents to Participation Scale, Form LLS. Although the study included both women and men, the women made up 67% of the respondents; hence, situations specific to women were well represented in Hayes's typology. In analyzing the data, Hayes first identified four orthogonal factors: self/school incongruence, low self-confidence, lack of access to classes, and situational constraints. Then, she used disjoint cluster analysis to identify five types of low-literate Hispanic adults according to the learners' scores in the four deterrent factors. In Hayes's typology the least deterred learners (type 1) were those learners who exhibited mean scores on two factors--low self-confidence and situational constraints—more than one half of a standard deviation below the sample means. In other words, the learners who were most likely to participate in ESL did not consider self-confidence or situational constraints as significant deterrents. Hayes described type 1 learners as “young women who had lived in the United States for more than 6 years, who tended to have at least a primary education, and

who had school-age children, if they had children at all” (p. 58). In contrast, the most deterred learners (type 5) included persons who perceived self/school incongruence as a significant deterrent, whose age was higher than the average age of the total sample, and who exhibited the lowest levels in both unemployment and past educational attainment of all five groups. Hayes pointed out that, for these persons, learning English might not be as important given their success in securing jobs and their educational histories; hence, she described type 5 learners as “noneducationally oriented workers” (p. 60). Hayes identified types 2-4 respectively as employed mothers, educationally insecure homemakers, and culturally isolated unemployed individuals. Overall, Hayes’s study suggested that differences in age, gender, length of residency in the United States, and past educational background may contribute to different perceptions of the four deterrent factors—self/school incongruence, low self-confidence, lack of access to classes, and situational constraints.

Finally, findings from a study of determinants of Hispanic female participation in adult vocational education in Idaho (Wirsching & Stenberg, 1992) seem to be congruent with Hayes’s (1989) typology. In this study, three factors were predictive of women’s participation in vocational education: marital status, length of residency, and educational attainment. Conversely, three factors predicted the non-participation of women in vocational education: age; degree of acculturation; and situational, institutional, and psychosocial barriers.

### ***Adult Education Program Areas***

Within adult education, four program areas would seem appropriate to address the literacy needs of language minorities with low levels of formal education: Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), English as a Second Language (ESL),



and some Community-based Education programs (Merriam & Cunningham, 1989). ABE programs concentrate on reading, writing, and computation skills for learners below the ninth-grade level; programs focusing on fourth-grade level or below are designated adult literacy education. ASE programs tend to the needs of learners whose skills are above the eighth-grade level, but who have not completed a high school education. ASE programs include general education development (GED), high school diploma through examination, high school credit, and external diploma programs (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). ESL programs concentrate on English language acquisition and are designed for adults who are non-native English speakers. Community-based education programs originate from local initiatives and focus on addressing community issues such as basic education, ethnic history and culture, and civic as well as political education (Hamilton & Cunningham, 1989).

Within adult education, program areas cut across institutional lines; for example, ABE and ESL programs are offered in formal education settings such as community colleges and night schools as well as in non-formal education settings such as libraries, churches, union halls, and housing projects (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). At the same time, educational projects may incorporate two or more program areas; for example, a project designed to meet the needs of non-English speakers with low levels of literacy may include a combination of ABE and ESL. The following section addresses some concerns about the limitations of mainstream adult education programs for serving foreign-born Latinas and Latinos in the United States. In addition, the potential of community-based education for addressing the needs of Latino immigrants is briefly discussed.

***Program Limitations to Addressing the Learning Needs of Latino Immigrant Adults***

Besides being restricted by shortcomings derived from the racial, cultural, and gender biases mentioned earlier, the effectiveness of mainstream adult education programs for serving Latino adults is limited by two factors: inadequate funding and inappropriate methods and materials.

First, inadequate funding often hinders the effectiveness of ESL programs. Latino adults with low levels of literacy are often classified as “ESL literacy students” (Wrigley, 1993). The types of instruction available to these learners may include general ESL, basic literacy, family literacy, workplace literacy, and community-oriented literacy. However, the type of instruction available to these learners often depends more on the availability of funding than on the learners’ needs. Indeed, funding becomes a constant concern in the minds of ESL literacy educators, determining what they can and cannot do to enhance learning. Furthermore, because most ESL literacy programs depend on short-term funding of 1-3 years, the stability and continuity of these programs is constantly threatened.

Second, the methods and materials used in mainstream adult education programs are often inappropriate for learners who are both non-English speakers and have low literacy levels, because the methods have been designed with other types of learners in mind. For instance, ABE program designers have often assumed fluency in the English language on the part of learners and have therefore developed methods and materials to meet the literacy needs of native English-speakers (Graham & Cookson, 1990). On the other hand, ESL project designers have modeled their programs after foreign-language courses offered in post-secondary education. The methods and materials used in these programs have been

designed to meet the foreign-language needs of highly literate learners. Naturally, such materials are inappropriate for learners with low literacy levels.

In contrast with mainstream adult education projects, community-based programs have offered viable alternatives to addressing the learning needs of Latino immigrants (Juhasz & Plazas, 1993; Osterling, 1998; Pruyn, 1999; Strom, Johnson, Strom, & Daniels, 1992; Velazquez, 1996; Young & Padilla, 1990; Zakaluk & Wynes, 1995). According to Jeria (1999), popular education programs, in particular, could be ideal for serving Latino adult learners. Popular education is characterized by its focus on developing an education that is created by the people and for the people. It bridges gaps between formal, non-formal, and informal learning. Not only does it recognize the knowledge developed through daily experiences, but it also “proposes a new relationship between [person], society, and culture” (p. 59) that fosters the democratic participation of learners, praxis, and social change.

Despite the promising features of popular education, the effectiveness of such projects is sometimes limited by a lack of precise knowledge on the part of educators and program leaders (Jeria, 1990). From my perspective, developing an understanding of the kinds of learning experienced by Central American immigrants could contribute to enhancing their learning opportunities in popular education as well as in other kinds of adult education. Given the gender-specific situations of Central American immigrants, learning more about women’s experiences seems imperative. In my view, it is especially important to explore how these immigrant women give meaning to their learning experiences in the United States.

#### **Part Four: Summary of the Literature**

In this literature review, I have sought to locate Central American immigration within the broader context of international immigration to the United States. The literature suggests

that, as a group, Central American immigrants are one of the most disadvantaged groups to have arrived in the United States over the last 39 years. Triggered by economic decline, civil wars, and natural disasters, the immigration of Central Americans has more closely resembled a refugee pattern than a pattern of voluntary migration. Nevertheless, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has provided relatively few Central Americans with political asylum or authorization to reside and work in the United States. On the contrary, the INS's classification of Central Americans as economically motivated immigrants has seriously restricted their eligibility for U.S. legal immigration status as well as for official resettlement assistance. Consequently, Central Americans have joined Mexicans in comprising one third of the 8 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States.

In addition to U.S. immigration policy, movement of the American economy from an industrial to an information economy has contributed to making the United States a challenging context for reception of Central American immigrants. In an American economy characterized by industrial restructuring and downsizing, employment opportunities for newcomers have been available in either the high-skilled professions or the low-wage services. Difficulties obtaining legal status, low levels of formal education, and lack of proficiency in English have contributed to restricting the economic and social opportunities available to Central Americans in the United States.

Despite the female predominance in immigration to the United States since the 1930s, inquiry into immigrant women has been relatively sparse. Interest in immigrant women as principal subjects of investigation within immigration research emerged only in the late 1970s. In order to develop immigrant women as an area of study, scholars had to overcome

various challenges including gender bias, ethnic- and discipline-particularism, and unitary frameworks of analysis. In doing so, researchers followed a process common to the broader feminist transformation of knowledge in the social sciences. Over the last decade, researchers studying immigrant women have increasingly moved from a “women only” approach to examining the effects of gender on the migration experiences of both women and men. Movement towards more comprehensive and flexible frameworks of analysis has also led researchers to explore the simultaneous effects of gender, class, ethnicity, and legal status on the lives of immigrants.

Engendered inquiry into Central Americans has clearly indicated that gender, as a social system, has influenced the experiences of Central American immigrant women and men at various stages of the migration process (i.e., pre-migration, journey, settlement, and return). The literature suggests that migration to the United States has presented women with challenges that are different from and unequal to those experienced by men. In particular, scholars have provided valuable insights into Central American women’s migration motives, employment, social networks, gender relations, and legalization. However, literature on Central American women’s perceptions of learning or on their actual learning experiences in contexts that are new to them is sparse.

Building an accurate educational profile of Central American immigrants in the United States is difficult, given the dearth of nation-specific information and the under representation of undocumented immigrants in U.S. population reports. However, it is possible to infer that a majority of Central American immigrants over age 25 will likely exhibit the following characteristics: 1) low levels of literacy in either Spanish or other native language, 2) fewer than 12 years of formal education, and 3) no or minimal knowledge of the

English language. Given the disadvantaged status of peasant women relative to that of peasant men in Central America, it is also likely that immigrant women will exhibit lower levels of formal education than immigrant men.

Within adult education, the profile of Central American immigrants has contributed to classifying them as a language minority population with low levels of formal education. This classification may carry negative consequences for those immigrants who have expectations of benefiting from educational opportunities in the United States that were unavailable to them in their countries of origin. In particular, three factors—race, culture, and gender—could diminish the accessibility to adult education of Central American women.

Within adult education, four program areas would seem appropriate to addressing the literacy needs of Central Americans: Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), English as a Second Language (ESL), and Community-based Education programs. However, limitations such as inadequate funding and inappropriate methods and materials have made mainstream ABE, ASE, and ESL education programs ineffective for meeting the needs and interests of non English-speaking immigrants with low levels of literacy. On the other hand, community-based education has offered a viable alternative to mainstream adult education. Popular education, in particular, has been considered ideal for working with Latin American immigrants because it bridges gaps between formal, non-formal, and informal adult learning. Yet, the capacity of community-based programs for addressing specific community issues is sometimes limited by a lack of precise knowledge about learners' perceptions on the part of educators and program leaders.

Developing an understanding of the different kinds of learning experienced by Central Americans is necessary for enhancing the opportunities available to these immigrants

in community-based as well as in other types of adult education. Given the gender-specific situations of Central American immigrants, learning more about women's experiences seems imperative. This inquiry sought to address this void in adult education literature by exploring how a group of five Central American immigrant women gave meaning to their adult learning experiences in the United States.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter is comprised of six sections that describe the methodology followed in this inquiry: 1) General Methodological Approach, 2) Research Approach, 3) Participants, 4) Data Collection Procedures, 5) Data Analysis Procedures, and 6) Design Issues.

### General Methodological Approach

The literature on social research design offers diverse frameworks for organizing and comparing methodological approaches on the basis of the philosophical, theoretical, and practical elements that set them apart. In fulfilling the purpose of this inquiry, which was to explore Central American immigrant women's perceptions of learning, I undertook a qualitative research approach. My reasoning for undertaking a qualitative research approach followed Crotty's (1998) framework for understanding social research. Crotty suggested that four interconnected elements are basic to any research process: 1) epistemology, 2) theoretical perspective, 3) methodology, and 4) methods. In this section, I make explicit how my orientations and choices with respect to each of the above elements contributed to the overall design of this inquiry as depicted in Figure 1.

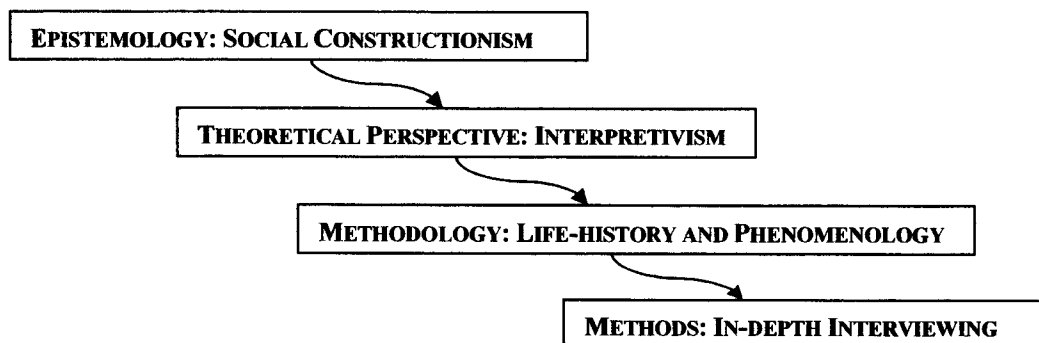


Figure 1. General methodological approach to the inquiry.



## *Epistemology*

Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge informing a study. It concerns the researcher's understanding of "what knowledge is, what it entails, and what status can be ascribed to it" (Crotty, 1998, p. 2). Different epistemological positions reflect distinct understandings of what counts as knowledge and of how researchers should go about knowing what they know. Crotty identified three major epistemological positions: objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism.

Objectivism centers on the notion that truth and meaning are inherent to objects and independent from any consciousness (Crotty, 1998). For example, a rock exists as a rock whether anybody is aware of its existence or not. Hence, when humans recognize a rock they are "discovering a meaning that has been lying there in wait for them all along" (p. 8). Consistent with the notion of an objective truth, researchers adhering to an objectivist epistemology believe that accurate and certain knowledge of "the truth" can be attained through the use of appropriate methods.

Constructionism, unlike objectivism, rejects the notion of an objective truth waiting to be discovered and holds that there is no truth or meaning without a mind (Crotty, 1998). While consciousness gives attention to the object, the object is shaped by consciousness. Meaning thus emerges from the interplay of subjects and objects. As humans interact with the realities of their world, they construct meaning of those realities. Therefore, from a constructionist viewpoint, knowledge or "meaning is not discovered, but constructed" (p. 9), and people may go about constructing meaning of the same phenomena in different ways. Nevertheless, according to constructionism, people always construct meaning out of something contributed by the object.

Subjectivism differs from both objectivism and constructionism because it rejects the notion of an objective truth while also suggesting that “meaning comes from anything *but* an interaction between the subject and the object to which [the meaning] is ascribed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). In subjectivism, the object makes no contribution to the meaning ascribed to it by the subject. It is the subject who imports meaning from different sources, such as dreams, primordial archetypes, and religious beliefs, to impose it on the object.

As a researcher, I brought a constructionist epistemological position to this inquiry. By seeking to understand how Central American immigrant women experienced and made meaning of learning in their lives, I was assuming that there was no objective truth of *learning* to be discovered or identified with precision and certitude. Instead, I embraced the opportunity to explore with the participants how they, as individuals and as members of particular social groups, made meaning of their learning experiences. In doing so, the participants and I reconstructed and reinterpreted their learning experiences beyond conventional meanings to generate an understanding or an interpretation of *learning*. From a constructionist perspective, there are no true or valid interpretations; instead, interpretations may be considered useful, liberating, oppressive, or rewarding (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, as this inquiry reached completion, the knowledge constructed by the participants and myself was plausible and suggestive rather than certain and conclusive.

My approach to this inquiry reflected specifically an epistemology of social constructionism. Social constructionism suggests that all meaningful reality is socially constructed (Crotty, 1998). The social origin of meaning may be explained in two ways. First, as persons make meaning of natural or social phenomena, they make use of interpretive strategies originated in social institutions that precede them. For example, persons make

meaning based on the symbols of particular cultures that they learn from social institutions such as family, school, and church. From this perspective, thoughts as well as emotions are socially constructed within specific social and historical contexts. Second, as persons encounter phenomena, they do not make sense of the world on an individual basis. On the contrary, social constructionism maintains that “the meanings with which [persons] are endowed arise in and out of interactive human community” (p. 55). By recognizing that the participants’ meaning-making processes and mine were influenced by the social interactions we experienced within specific contexts, as well as by our membership in particular social groups, this inquiry reflected a social constructionist epistemology.

### ***Theoretical Perspective***

Within Crotty’s (1998) framework, theoretical perspective refers to the philosophical stance informing a research methodology. Theoretical perspective not only provides a context for the research strategy, but it also grounds the methodology’s logic and criteria. A single theoretical perspective, such as symbolic interactionism, may inform methodologies as dissimilar as ethnography and grounded theory. At the same time, a particular methodology such as ethnography may be informed, in separate studies, by theoretical perspectives as diverse as positivism, symbolic interactionism, and critical inquiry. Therefore, the theoretical perspective informing a study may be thought of as “a statement of the assumptions brought to the research task and reflected in the methodology as [researchers] understand it and employ it” (p. 7).

Theoretical perspectives are associated with specific epistemological positions (Crotty, 1998). For instance, the theoretical perspective of positivism is informed by objectivism, and the theoretical perspective of interpretivism is informed by constructionism.

A particular epistemological position, however, may inform several theoretical perspectives. In social research, theoretical perspectives are ways of viewing social life and the human world, and they differ in the stances they take with respect to basic epistemological notions. For example, two theoretical perspectives informed by constructionism—interpretivism and critical inquiry—present very different philosophical stances with respect to the notion of culture. Whereas interpretivism is prone to “an uncritical exploration of cultural meaning” (p. 60) within a relatively peaceful world of human communication, critical inquiry is intent on denouncing the dynamics of inequity and oppression that prevail in an unsettling social world. Although it might not be immediately evident, research conducted from each of these two theoretical perspectives will be approached differently.

An interpretivist theoretical perspective, framed by social constructionism, informed this inquiry. Interpretivism emerged as an attempt to “understand and explain human and social reality” (p. 66) in reaction to positivism, which proposed undertaking the same approach to studying natural and social phenomena (Crotty, 1998). Unlike positivists who looked for the explanation, control, and predictability of phenomena, interpretivists searched for “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (p. 67). Therefore, from an interpretivist theoretical perspective, researchers assumed their findings to be co-constructed, value-laden, and context-specific.

According to Crotty (1998), interpretivism developed into three different historical streams: symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. Two of these—symbolic interactionism and phenomenology—differed in their attitudes towards culture as an inherited meaning system. On the one hand, symbolic interactionism considered culture “the meaningful matrix that guides our lives” (p. 71); culture provided a context for

exploring our understandings of social phenomena and was seen as enabling of people's understandings. Investigators adhering to this viewpoint sought to understand social worlds from the perspectives of insiders, by putting themselves in the places of others as they would in role-playing. Such role-playing was considered a symbolic interaction because it was possible only through shared significant symbols such as language. From this perspective, culture was not questioned or criticized; investigators trying to understand a specific social world from the viewpoint of insiders observed it closely and respectfully.

On the other hand, phenomenology approached culture with suspicion and considered it an element that could be enabling as well as hindering of meaning-making (Crotty, 1998). From a phenomenological standpoint, culture was enabling because it provided people with an extensive set of meanings. At the same time culture was hindering because it kept people from constructing unexplored significance; by imposing a particular set of meanings, it excluded others. For that reason, phenomenology encouraged persons to engage and to make sense of phenomena directly and immediately. In doing so, persons were asked to set aside "the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and to revisit [their] immediate experience of them" (p. 78) in order to arrive at reinterpretations. Underlying this call was a critical view of culture and of the understandings it imposed on people. It is with this attitude towards culture that I approached this investigation. Therefore, a phenomenological vein of interpretivism informed this inquiry.

### ***Methodology***

Methodology refers to the research design or plan of action for conducting a study (Crotty, 1998). Methodology is the strategy that guides a researcher's selection and use of methods, linking these to the desired outcomes of the study. For instance, if a researcher's

purpose were to make a cultural portrait of a social group, ethnography could inform the selection and use of specific data-collection methods such as participant-observation, unstructured interviews, and document retrieval. Nevertheless, because every research project is unique, researchers may need to develop strategies that are particularly appropriate for addressing the foci and purposes of their studies. In some cases, such strategies may include notions from more than one established methodology.

To fulfill the purpose of this inquiry, I drew from two qualitative research methodologies: life history and phenomenology. In a section to follow, I outline principles underpinning life history and phenomenology, and I describe how particular notions of each methodology were implemented in this inquiry.

### ***Methods***

Methods are the concrete techniques or procedures that researchers select for collecting and analyzing data related to a particular set of research questions (Crotty, 1998). In this inquiry, qualitative in-depth interviewing was the primary method of investigation.

Kvale (1996) conceptualized qualitative in-depth interviewing as a professional conversation that has a structure and a purpose. Although it may resemble an everyday conversation, a qualitative in-depth interview requires a specific approach to and technique for questioning. The interview structure is partly determined by the roles of the researcher and the participants; for instance, the researcher usually introduces the topic of the conversation and generally defines and monitors the situation. The researcher poses questions carefully, listens attentively, and follows-up critically on the participants' contributions. Nevertheless, participants are not expected only to respond to questions. Instead, the

interview process invites participants to “formulate in a dialogue their own conceptions of the lived world” (p. 11).

Qualitative in-depth interviews are technically semi-structured; they are neither structured questionnaires nor open conversations (Kvale, 1996). Researcher-participant conversations are usually based on “an interview guide that focuses on certain themes and that may include suggested questions” (p. 27). Qualitative interviews are generally audio-recorded and transcribed; the resulting texts, as well as the original audiotapes, are subsequently the basis for the analysis and interpretation of meaning.

As a research-oriented professional conversation, in-depth interviewing has a purpose: “*to obtain particular descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena*” (Kvale, 1996, p. 5). In fulfilling its purpose, in-depth interviewing emphasizes the interdependence of human interaction and knowledge construction. Kvale noted, “An interview is literally an *inter view*, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (p. 14). At the same time, the interview embodies the knowledge constructed; it may be seen as the *inter* happening when two persons exchange views. According to Kvale, such is the dual nature of qualitative interviewing: “the personal interrelation and the inter-view knowledge that it leads to” (p. 15).

From my perspective, qualitative in-depth interviewing was congruent with the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological orientations informing this inquiry. It was the most appropriate method for addressing the research questions guiding this investigation. As the primary data-collection method, in-depth interviewing was appropriate not only for eliciting participants’ life stories, but also for assisting the participants and myself in

interpreting those stories. Naturally, I implemented analytical and representational procedures congruent with in-depth interviewing. A detailed description of the procedures that I used for collecting, analyzing, and representing in-depth interview data is included later in this chapter.

### ***Rationale for Selecting a Qualitative Approach***

Why then did I choose to undertake a qualitative approach for conducting this inquiry? I offer three main reasons. First, qualitative research was particularly appropriate for fulfilling the aims of the inquiry. The inquiry sought to understand the meaning of *learning* as a human experience by eliciting first-person accounts and by focusing on the whole of the participants' experiences. The research questions guiding the inquiry reflected not only my interest in the topic, but also my personal involvement and commitment to understanding how Central American immigrant women experience adult learning in the United States. These aims are central to qualitative approaches in human science research (Merriam, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

Second, qualitative research is congruent with my personal and professional views on the construction of knowledge and the influences of ethnicity on people's interpretations of their social worlds. In my view, qualitative research is particularly appropriate for understanding, identifying, and addressing the learning needs of ethnic minorities in the United States. In order to design and implement sound educational interventions for working with minority groups, adult educators must first gain an understanding of how members of these groups participate in and make meaning of learning in their lives.

Third, qualitative research has proven valuable for advancing the field of adult education. Merriam (1989) argued that "many of the most significant contributions to the



field have been made...through the use of qualitative rather than quantitative research strategies” (p. 161); for example, important concepts such as marginality, service orientation, and perspective transformation have been inductively constructed through the use of qualitative research methodologies. Qualitative research in adult education has increased researchers’ potential for discovering unlimited, unanticipated findings. Furthermore, the researcher’s role as the main instrument in qualitative research has proven to be congruent with the field’s interest in learning how people experience and make meaning of their lives. Indeed, according to Merriam, “in investigating a field of social practice where social interaction and processes are of utmost importance” (p. 166), what could be better than the researcher’s sensitivity and analytic abilities for understanding how people construct and make meaning of their social worlds?

### **Research Approach**

This inquiry drew from two qualitative research methodologies: life history and phenomenology. This section outlines principles underpinning life history and phenomenology and describes how particular notions from each methodology were implemented in this investigation.

#### ***Life History***

Life-history inquiry has contributed to advancing knowledge in social science fields such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, education, gerontology, and women’s studies (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Life-history investigators have developed diverse approaches to studying people’s lives within particular social or historical contexts; for example, Cole and Knowles delineated differences among autobiography, autoethnography, biography, case study, life story, narrative account, and oral history. Despite exhibiting

disciplinary and methodological differences, life-history approaches share the “fundamental assumption about the relationship of the general to the particular, and that the general can best be understood through analysis of the particular” (p. 13). In other words, life-history researchers believe that in-depth exploration of individual lives-in-context may contribute to illuminating broader societal conditions. Going beyond the individual and “[placing] narrative accounts and interpretations within a broader context” (p. 20) differentiates life-history inquiry from other forms of narrative research that focus on understanding individuals’ experiences without emphasizing broader contextual meaning.

A conventional life-history study is usually guided by the following strategy (Cole & Knowles, 2001). The researcher studies in considerable depth the lives of a small number of participants. The investigator gathers data over extended time by using methods such as interviewing, participant-observation, and document collection. The investigator analyzes and thematically interprets the data; this includes considering the data in relation to discipline-based theories. To complete the inquiry the investigator represents his or her interpretation and theorizing about the participants’ lives in relation to broader contextual situations “in the form of detailed and rich life history accounts” (p. 13).

In recent years, life-history investigators have challenged conventional research notions such as the dichotomies of self-other, subject-object, and subjectivity-objectivity (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Instead of distancing themselves from research elements such as research questions and participants, life-history researchers have increasingly placed relationships at the center of their investigations. From a constructionist and arts-informed perspective, for instance, Cole and Knowles outlined the relationships of: a) researcher to the topic of study, b) researcher to participants, c) researcher to the research representation,

d) reader to the research representation, e) research topic to pertinent literature, and f) participants' lives to the contexts within which they are situated. In particular, Cole and Knowles recommended that researchers develop personal and professional attitudes for building researcher-participant relationships according to four principles: 1) relationality, 2) mutuality, 3) empathy, and 4) care, sensitivity, and respect.

*Relationality* entails developing authentic and intimate relationships between researchers and participants (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Authentic relationships are fostered with care, thought, sensitivity, respect, and trust. Researchers need to acknowledge elements of difference such as class, ethnicity, and gender between themselves and participants so they can pursue the ideal of egalitarian relationships. Equally important, by allowing personal and professional boundaries to blur, researchers could facilitate intimate research relationships to emerge. Intimacy in life-history research is the depth of connection and interpersonal resonance that brings researchers and participants closer together, thereby facilitating knowledge construction.

*Mutuality* concerns "how the roles and responsibilities of researchers and participants are determined" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 28). In order to achieve mutuality in purpose, process, and result one must develop equitable and authentically collaborative researcher-participant relationships. However, mutuality does not necessarily mean that the investigator and the participants share all decisions equally. Mutuality is rather about reaching agreements that honor the active participation of each person in the research relationship. For instance, by developing a collaborative stance, participants and researchers may work out practical and theoretical research issues such as meeting time and place, preventing

confidentiality breaches, and representing inquiry outcomes. In sum, mutuality suggests developing “informal, natural, and mutually satisfying [research] relationships” (p. 29).

*Empathy* in life-history research refers to the researcher’s sensitivity toward the person on the other side of the researcher-participant relationship (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Because life-history research elicits highly personal material, investigators must understand the implications of the research experience for participants. Hence, researchers must be reflexive about their roles and responsibilities. Reflexivity leads to “a heightened awareness of self, other, and the self-other dialectic ... [therefore it] is critical for the development of sensitive and responsive researchers” (p. 30).

*Care, sensitivity, and respect* are fundamental qualities for developing human relationships, according to Cole and Knowles (2001). These qualities must infuse life-history research to yield outcomes that go beyond focused inquiry purposes and promote life-enhancing experiences for both participants and researchers. Overall, fulfilling the four principles—relationality; mutuality; empathy; and care, sensitivity, and respect—is a means for honoring the humanness of the researcher-participant relationship as well as for eliciting rich information and insights. Ultimately, observing these principles will contribute to “[elevating] the representations of the researching process and analyses into richly evocative, experience textured, relationally authentic, and meaningful ‘texts’” (p. 26).

In this inquiry, I implemented a form of life-history research known as life story. Life story may be defined as an account of a life or of an aspect of a life as told by the individual (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Life story methodology is characterized by the specificity of information sought, for example the *learning* aspect of a person’s life, as well as by its final representation, which is often a flowing narrative in the participant’s own words. According

to Atkinson (1998), life story researchers seek to elicit “the insider’s viewpoint on the life being lived” (p. 59), and to identify the “connections, meanings, and patterns that exist in the story itself” (p. 64). Although stories usually concentrate on particular areas of a person’s life and are comprised of discernible parts, life story researchers interpret meanings by viewing the person’s story as a whole. Atkinson noted, “Whatever form it takes, a life story always brings order and meaning to the life being told, for both the teller and the listener” (p. 8). Hence, an important objective of life story methodology is to provide participants with opportunities for telling their stories as they choose to do so.

Implementing a life story approach was particularly appropriate for fulfilling three important aims of this inquiry: 1) viewing the participants’ experiences of adult learning within the context of their lives, 2) representing the voices of Central American immigrant women, and 3) developing quality researcher-participant relationships.

First, implementing a life story approach enabled the participants and myself to view the participants’ adult learning experiences within the context of their lives. This not only enhanced our understanding of individual stories, but it also contributed to illuminating broader societal conditions experienced by Central American immigrant women residing in the Midwest.

Second, following a life story approach facilitated including the participants’ whole stories, in their own words, in the final representation of the inquiry. This fulfilled one of my personal goals: to represent the voices of Central American immigrant women and to help increase their visibility in adult education literature. Equally important, I expect that providing access to the voices of the participants will contribute to enabling readers to gain

better understandings of the participants' lives and meaning-making processes so they can interpret the inquiry findings.

Third, incorporating principles of life-history research contributed to developing quality researcher-participant relationships. In conducting this inquiry, I observed the four principles outlined by Cole and Knowles (2001) to the best of my ability. For instance, I made preliminary visits to potential participants before asking them to make any decisions about participating in the study. The objective of these visits was to explain the study and to exchange ideas with Central American immigrant women about the research endeavor. My goal was to provide potential participants with sufficient information about the research process so they could make informed decisions and to establish the basis for relationships that would be conducive to expressing any biases, questions, or concerns that emerged throughout the process. Understanding my own limitations and theirs, and viewing ourselves as partners in a process that was relatively uncertain, my approach was to do everything I could to facilitate building mutually satisfying research experiences.

### ***Phenomenology***

Phenomenological inquiry seeks to address the fundamental question: "What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). As in the case of life-history inquiry, researchers have developed multiple approaches for addressing phenomenological investigations from distinct viewpoints. For example, transcendental phenomenology focuses on the essential meanings of individual experience, existential phenomenology centers on the social construction of group reality, and hermeneutic phenomenology concentrates on the language and structure of communication. However, all approaches to phenomenological inquiry share

an interest in “exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning” (p. 104).

As a strategy of inquiry, phenomenology focuses on “capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

Phenomenology is philosophically grounded on Edmund H. Husserl’s (1859-1938) basic assumption that “understanding comes from sensory experience of phenomena, but that experience must be described, explicated, and interpreted” (Patton, 2002, p. 106). The methodology is also based on the notion that “there is an essence or essences to shared experience” (p. 106). Essences are defined as the core meanings of people’s understandings of a particular phenomenon.

Phenomenology was established as a major social science analytical perspective with the 1932 publication of Alfred Schutz’s (1899-1959) book *The Meaning Construction of the Social World*. In this book Schutz (1932/1967) examined the role of objectivity vs. subjectivity in the social sciences and analyzed the nature of human action. Building on and reinterpreting Max Weber’s (1864-1920) “ideal types” methodology for understanding social phenomena, Schutz gave a phenomenological grounding to interpretive sociology (Crotty, 1998; Schutz, 1932/1967). According to Seidman (1998), two important methodological implications derived from Schutz’s work were: 1) one’s limitations for entering another’s stream of consciousness, and 2) the importance of interpreting behavior in context in order to understand the actions of others.

In a purely phenomenological study, the researcher focuses on descriptions of people’s experiences of a given phenomenon, which include the *what* and the *how* of the

participants' encounters of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). The researcher seeks to understand not only what people experience, but also how they interpret the world. The inquiry typically involves interviewing persons who have directly experienced a particular phenomenon such as learning, motherhood, reconciliation, or time. Since it is assumed that the researcher has limitations for knowing what another person experiences, the methodology calls for methods such as in-depth interviewing and participant-observation that bring the investigator closer to the phenomenon. In order to identify the essences of the phenomenon under study, the investigator brackets, analyzes, and compares the experiences of different people. The study concludes with the researcher's representation of the meaning, structure, and essence of the phenomenon as experienced by a particular group of persons. For instance, an empirical phenomenological study of *learning* within the field of psychology could yield a representation that includes both a naïve description (the concrete narrative of one participant's experience of learning how to drive) and a general description (the researcher's detailing of the essential meaning structure) of learning as a human experience (Moustakas, 1994).

In this inquiry, I implemented a phenomenological approach for fulfilling three main tasks at different points in the research process. First, during data-collection I undertook a phenomenological approach to elicit detailed descriptions of the participants' recent experiences of *learning* in the United States. This occurred after the participants had reconstructed their past learning experiences through life story. Next, I continued to draw on phenomenology when I asked each participant to reflect on the overall meaning of *learning* in her life, based on what she had reconstructed about her past experiences and on her detailed description of recent learning experiences. My focus was to understand how each



participant perceived the phenomenon of *learning* at the time of the interviews. Then, once all interviews were completed, I continued implementing a phenomenological emphasis to identify the core meanings of *adult learning* for this group of Central American immigrant women. However, my goal was not to outline the essence and structure of *adult learning* as one would in a purely phenomenological study. Instead, I concentrated on understanding the meaning of *adult learning* for the participants in order to develop a thematic representation of the insights gained in the inquiry.

Overall, implementing a strategy of inquiry that drew on life story and phenomenology contributed to developing my understanding of Central American immigrant women's perceptions of adult learning. From a researcher's perspective, the blending of the two methodologies was particularly helpful at the representation stage for addressing what Jones (2002) called "an inherent tension in the process of retelling individual stories in a way that [makes] sense to each participant while also telling the larger story intended to convey meaning to all" (p. 469).

## **Participants**

In this section, I describe the institutional resources I used for locating potential participants and the considerations that led me to selecting a purposeful sample of five participants for this inquiry.

### ***Locating Potential Participants***

In order to identify potential participants for the study, I drew upon relationships that I had built over the years with individuals and institutions committed to assisting Central American immigrants in the United States. Throughout my doctoral studies, I conducted several preliminary research projects exploring the situations of Latin American immigrants

in the Midwest. For instance, I explored contextual circumstances influencing the situations of undocumented immigrants, social programs designed to meet the specific needs of Latino immigrants, and the roles of religious education and dialogic learning in fostering perspective transformation among immigrants from Latin America. In undertaking these projects, I came to know individuals and institutions committed to improving the situations of immigrants from Central America. In particular, I developed ongoing relationships with administrators, ministers, staff, and community leaders in three institutions: a Catholic church, a Methodist church, and an immigrants' rights organization.

The first institution was a Catholic church assisting a large Hispanic congregation in a metropolitan area of the Midwest. I first visited this institution in 1997, while investigating the influences of personal and institutional interests on adult education program planning. As part of the fieldwork required for completing that project, I interviewed three individuals associated with this church: the Executive Director of Catholic Charities, the Vicar of Hispanic Ministry, and a staff member of the Hispanic Ministry. Since then, I maintained communication with the Vicar, who was well-known and appreciated in various Hispanic communities. Over the years, I met with him on multiple occasions to dialogue about the situations challenging Latino immigrants in the Midwest; his insights contributed to my understanding of contextual circumstances affecting working-class Latino immigrants in this region of the country. The Vicar always welcomed my interest in observing church-sponsored programs for adult learners, and he facilitated my interactions with staff and parishioners. In addition, the Vicar referred me to persons and institutions that held different viewpoints on the situations of Latino immigrants in the Midwest. My relationship with the

Vicar and with other members of this institution was helpful for identifying potential participants for this inquiry.

The second institution was a Methodist church in a metropolitan area of the Midwest where a relatively small, yet highly diverse, group of Hispanic immigrants met regularly. This church had assisted immigrants of various nationalities and religious affiliations for over 15 years. Seeking to address the spiritual, health, legal, educational, and material needs of Latino immigrants, the church was host to a special ministry created by the Methodist episcopacy to assist this population; for instance, the church provided sanctuary to undocumented workers who were in need of temporary protection. Since January of 2000, the church also sponsored an immigration law clinic to help qualifying immigrants legalize their status in this country. Every week the church held bilingual religious services, a children's Sunday school, and a Bible study for Spanish-speaking adults. In addition, the church acted as a co-sponsor to ESL and GED adult education programs.

I was introduced to the minister in charge of Hispanic Ministry at the Methodist church while working on a sociology class project that explored approaches to community-building and leadership for working with people on the margins of society. Although initially my assignment was only to conduct interviews with the minister, staff members, and parishioners, my interest in this church's particular approach to working with Latino immigrants resulted in a prolonged engagement of more than four years. Starting in the spring of 1998, I made weekly visits to the church. In the role of participant-observer, I attended religious services, assisted with the children's Sunday school, participated actively in the adults' Bible study, attended social gatherings hosted by members of the Spanish-speaking congregation, and volunteered to teach in the ESL program for one semester.

Participating in these activities gradually enabled me to interact with parishioners and church staff in a natural manner. Overall, my prolonged engagement at this institution gained for me a level of trust that contributed to eliciting the collaboration of potential participants in this inquiry.

The third institution was a non-religious organization associated with a Protestant church, which advocated for the rights of immigrants in the Midwest. My first contact with members of this institution took place in the spring of 1999 as I explored potential topics for designing a research proposal. Since then, I interviewed the director of immigrant rights on several occasions. I attended lectures and conferences sponsored by the organization, and I volunteered as a Spanish-English translator at immigration law consultations. Although my communication with members of this organization was not as regular as my communication with members of the previous two institutions, the staff collaborated in helping me identify potential participants for this inquiry.

### *Selecting Participants*

According to Moustakas (1994), there are no in-advance criteria for selecting participants in a phenomenological study. Instead, there are general considerations such as age, gender, and ethnicity, and essential characteristics such as having experienced the phenomenon under study and willingness to participate in lengthy interviews. Taking into account these considerations, the basic criteria for selecting participants for this inquiry were:

1. self-identification as being at least 18 years old and female;
2. self-identification as an immigrant living in the United States who was born in one of five Central American countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, or Costa Rica);

3. self-identification as a person of low- or middle-class background;
4. self-identification as interested and willing to explore the meaning of learning in the person's life by participating in the study.

In selecting a sample size for qualitative inquiries, the depth and breadth of the understanding sought become primary considerations (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). On the one hand, in-depth understanding might be better accomplished by holding repeated encounters or by spending extended periods with few participants. On the other hand, greater breadth of understanding might be better obtained through holding single encounters with a larger number of participants. Considering my interest in in-depth understanding and the time and resources required for conducting in-depth interviews (Seidman, 1998), I selected a purposeful sample of five women for this inquiry. A small sample size was especially appropriate for this investigation because the women selected lived in the same large Midwestern city and were exposed to similar contextual factors.

In order to select participants, I relied on a specific type of purposeful sampling: maximal variation sampling. Maximal variation sampling has been suggested as an adequate strategy for building complexity into the research before data collection begins (Creswell, 2002). This strategy acknowledges that different situations contribute to multiple perceptions and understandings of a given phenomenon, such as learning, in a world that is highly complex.

In this inquiry, maximal variation sampling occurred as data collection progressed. A new participant was selected only after a series of interviews was completed with the previous participant. I followed this strategy in order to elicit a multiplicity of perspectives on learning from participants who differed in characteristics identified in the literature as

potentially influential: age (Hayes, 1989); length of residency in the United States (Wirsching & Steinberg, 1992); marital status (Rockhill, 1990); motherhood (Hagan, 1994); educational attainment (Hayes, 1989); knowledge of English (Melville, 1978); employment (NIL, 1994); and immigration status (Chupina-Orantes, 2002). As shown in Figure 2, the participants in this inquiry differed in several of these characteristics.

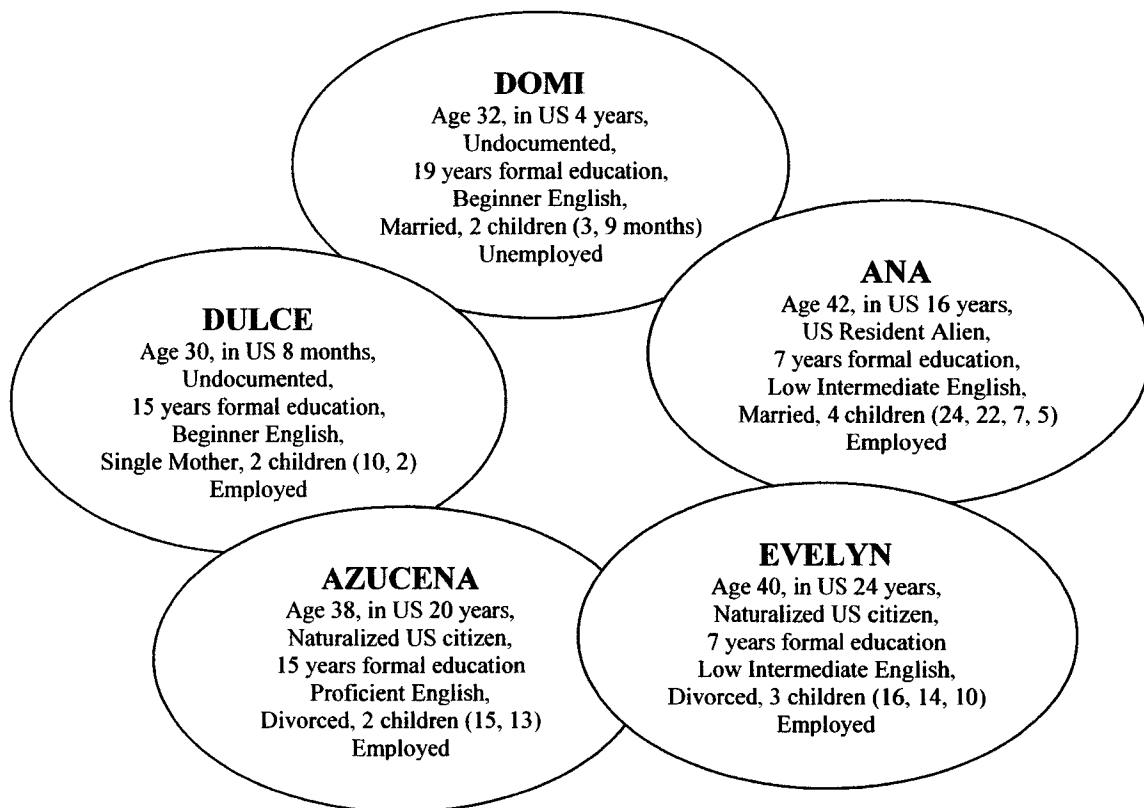


Figure 2. Participant characteristics.

### Data Collection Procedures

In order to collect data for this inquiry, I followed Seidman's (1998) model for in-depth phenomenological interviewing. Addressing the research questions that guided this inquiry required an understanding of the participants' perceptions of learning within not only

the context of their situations at the time of the interviews, but also within the context of their past learning experiences. I chose to follow Seidman's model because I was persuaded that "in-depth [phenomenological] interviewing encourages people to reconstruct their experience actively within the context of their lives" (p. 8).

Seidman's (1998) model for in-depth phenomenological interviewing combines two types of interviews that are informed by assumptions underlying the methodologies of life history and phenomenology. The model requires doing a series of three 90-minute interviews with each participant. Each interview is audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. In each series, interviews are done 3-7 days apart from one another so that the researcher and the participant may build upon and explore previous responses within a period that enables both reflection and continuity. I followed Seidman's specifications with one exception: my interviews with each participant took place 7-12 days apart from one another. I had to do this in order to accommodate the time constraints of individual participants. Contributing to the overall goal of examining each participant's experience and placing it in context, each interview concentrated on a distinct purpose.

The first interview, designated *focused life story*, established the context for the participant's experience. The participant was asked to tell "as much as possible about... herself in light of the topic up to the present time" (Seidman, 1998, p. 10). The goal was to help each participant reconstruct past experiences that may have contributed to how she participated in and made meaning of the phenomenon under study. In this inquiry, interview one was guided by the central question: *How did you come to perceive and to describe learning in the way you do?* In order to help each participant reconstruct her past experiences

of learning, I posed open-ended questions along three periods: Growing-up, Young Adulthood, and Migration (see Appendixes C and D).

The second interview, designated *the details of experience*, concentrated on helping each participant reconstruct the experience in concrete terms: What did she actually do? The participant was asked to share the concrete details of her experience of the phenomenon under study, at the time of the interviews. Seidman (1998) cautioned, “We do not ask for opinions but rather the details of their experience, upon which their opinions may be built” (p. 12). The purpose of the second interview, then, was to elicit the details of the participant’s experience of the phenomenon and to place that experience within the context of the social setting. In this inquiry, interview two was guided by the central question: *What is it like to learn for you now?* In order to help each participant reconstruct her contemporary experience of learning, I included two types of questions identified by Patton (2002) as experience and behavior questions and sensory questions (see Appendixes C and D).

The third interview, designated *reflection on meaning*, focused on the participant’s understanding of the experience. The participant was asked to reflect on the meaning of the phenomenon *learning*, in light of what had been shared in the previous two interviews. Seidman (1998) clarified, “The question of ‘meaning’ is not one of satisfaction or reward, although such issues may play a part in the participants’ thinking. Rather, it addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ [learning] and life” (p. 12). Accordingly, the central question guiding interview three in this inquiry was: *Given what you have said about your past learning experiences, and given what you have said about your learning now, how do you understand learning in your life? What sense does adult learning make to you?* In order to help each participant make meaning of the overall experience of



learning in her life and of how she actually perceived and described learning as an adult, I adapted Moustakas's (1994) general phenomenological interview guide (see Appendixes C and D).

It is worth noting that, with the exception of one interview series, all interviews in this inquiry were conducted in Spanish. The one exception was made to honor the request of one participant who, although she is proficient in both Spanish and English, preferred doing the interviews in English.

Completing the three-interview series with each participant required from five to nine weeks of dedicated work. This process included making one or two preliminary visits to explain the purpose of the inquiry, obtain the participant's consent in writing, and schedule interviews; preparing for each interview; conducting one 90-minute interview every 7-12 days; transcribing each of the three interviews in Spanish or English; constructing a first-person narrative in Spanish or English based on the participant's words; asking for member checks; translating the Spanish narrative into English; writing personal and methodological journal entries; and writing memos about theoretical insights gained throughout the process. Altogether, I required a period ten months for completing data collection.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

In most instances of qualitative research, the processes of data-collection and data-analysis occur simultaneously (Merriam, 1998). Starting with the first observation or interview, data-collection and data-analysis proceed in an interactive manner. For example, the analysis of emerging data informs further data collection; in turn, the newly collected data leads to more analysis and to the discovery of new insights that, again, inform further data collection. According to Merriam, "data that have been analyzed while being collected

are both parsimonious and illuminating” (p. 162); for that reason, she advised making data-collection and data-analysis simultaneous processes.

Nonetheless, different research designs may call for different levels of data analysis to take place during specific stages of the research process. For example, in his model of in-depth phenomenological interviewing, Seidman (1998) suggested avoiding any in-depth analysis of the interview data until all of the interviews included in the study are completed. Seidman argued that initiating in-depth analysis procedures before all interviews are completed could contribute to imposing the meaning of one participant’s interview series onto the series of another participant. At the same time, however, Seidman encouraged researchers to engage in other levels of analysis during data-collection. For instance, he advised researchers to be aware that some degree of analysis and interpretation is fundamental to interviewing. In a similar way, he acknowledged the usefulness of identifying potentially salient topics in early interviews.

In this inquiry, I applied Seidman’s (1998) strategy for analyzing in-depth phenomenological interview data. However, I found it necessary to make modifications that seemed congruent with the emergence of data and with my personal process for making sense of that data. For instance, Seidman’s strategy consisted of five discrete steps:

- 1) Transcribing interview tapes; 2) Studying, reducing, and analyzing interview transcripts;
- 3) Sharing interview data through participant profiles (which I called life stories) and themes;
- 4) Making and analyzing thematic connections; and 5) Interpreting the material.

In this inquiry, I modified steps two and three of Seidman’s strategy. My specific approach to data analysis is described in the following paragraphs.

### ***Transcribing Interview Tapes***

The first step in data analysis was to transform the taped interviews into a written text that could be studied. In order to represent the interviews as closely as possible, I transcribed the tapes verbatim, noting non-verbal expressions such as sighs, pauses, and laughter. I also paid special attention to punctuation, since it reflected my own preliminary analysis and interpretation of the interviews. At this point, I made two paper copies of each transcript (one to keep on file for further consultation and one to be used for identifying meaningful passages in the next step). However, by the end of data analysis, I had made four paper copies of each transcript. The first copy of each transcript was kept on file for further consultation. The second copy was used to reduce data for constructing the life stories. The third copy was used for naming excerpts with tentative topics, and the fourth copy was used for cutting out named excerpts to be placed on 4x 6 inch index cards.

### ***Studying, Reducing, and Analyzing Interview Transcripts***

The second step was to read carefully each transcript and to underline passages in the text that seemed of interest and importance. In doing so, I approached the text with an open mind to make the process as inductive as possible. However, I paid attention to signs of conflict, expectations, frustrations, resolutions, and hope, as well as to language that indicated “beginnings, middles, and ends of processes” (Seidman, 1998, p. 101).

After underlining the text, Seidman’s (1998) strategy suggested naming and classifying passages into tentative categories, still as part of the second step of data analysis. However, given the richness and the complexity of the stories provided by the participants in this inquiry, I found it better to focus on capturing each participant’s story as a whole before doing any tentative naming. Therefore, I modified the second step of Seidman’s strategy by

postponing the naming of transcripts until after the life stories had been crafted. Nonetheless, doing several readings of each interview series, underlining what was most significant in the text, and taking note of preliminary insights required judgment on my part. Therefore, step two entailed for me the beginning of analyzing, interpreting, and making meaning of the interviews. On a practical level, step two contributed to reducing and preparing interview data for further analysis.

### ***Sharing Interview Data through Participant Life Stories and Themes***

The third step was to shape the reduced interview data into a form that could be understood by readers and that could be referred to during further analysis. Following Seidman's (1998) approach, I used two forms of sharing interview data: life stories (which he referred to as profiles) and themes.

***The life stories.*** As stated earlier, I first concentrated on crafting the life stories of individual participants. In order to craft an individual life story, I followed a sequential process. First, I used one paper copy of the underlined transcripts to prepare the data for crafting the life story in the words of the participant. I used a number-based notation in order to identify and tentatively organize related passages that appeared separately on the transcripts (e.g., 1A, 1B, 1C; 2A, 2B, 2C, etc.). In this way, I was able to capture the coherence of the participant's story. Second, I worked with a computer-file copy of the three interviews to construct a single transcript of all the notated passages. I read the new transcript carefully, and I underlined only the most compelling passages; these newly underlined passages were the basis for crafting the participant's life story of learning.

Crafting the life story entailed weaving the newly underlined passages into a first-person narrative. In doing so, I sought to represent the participant's overall experience of

learning by paying special attention to context and process. If I found it necessary to include my own words for clarity purposes, I made it known by using brackets. In a similar way, whenever I found it necessary to omit a participant's words, I indicated so with ellipses.

Crafting the participant's narrative in the form of a life story was one way of sharing the knowledge gained during the three-interview process. As a finished product, a participant's first-person narrative was a life story crafted by me that captured a woman's experience of learning, as described and understood by her, within the context of her life. While the first-person narrative was the participant's story told in her own words, the way the story was put together reflected my interpretation of the woman's overall experience of learning.

Crafting individual first-person narratives in this manner seemed congruent with the approaches of life story (Atkinson, 1998) and phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Shaping interview data into life story enabled me to present the participant's experiences in context and to offer readers a better sense of the time and process of the participant's overall experience of learning. In addition, using the participant's words contributed to reflecting the participant's consciousness, which I expect will enable readers to gain a better understanding of the meanings and intentions of her narrative. Furthermore, crafting a life story in the participant's own words contributed to ensuring that her voice would be actively present in the final representation of this inquiry.

Once all of the life stories were crafted, I proceeded to identify the salient issues in each life story and to make connections among the women's descriptions and perceptions of learning. Key concepts in Elder's (1995) life course paradigm proved useful for interpreting similarities and differences in the participants' life stories. Six patterns revealed intersecting

factors that contributed to shaping the participants' self-concepts as learners and perceptions of learning.

***The themes.*** After the life stories were completed, I worked with a second paper copy of the transcripts that had been underlined during step two. In each transcript, I named the underlined excerpts with tentative topics. These tentative topics were later classified into tentative categories. Once the preliminary naming was completed, I made a list of tentative topics and categories for each interview series. These lists created a bank of topics and categories that was useful for analyzing subsequent series of interviews. Later, these lists were also useful for refining topics, categories, and themes in step four of data analysis.

Next, I cut out named passages and pasted them onto 4 x 6 inch index cards. In order to keep track of excerpts and their original sources, each excerpt was identified with a letter-figure label. For example, the label "Ea3" was formed by the capital letter "E" standing for the participant's pseudonym Evelyn, the lower case letter "a" corresponding to interview one, and the Arabic number "3" indicating that the excerpt was from page three of the original transcript of Evelyn's interview one. Then, I classified the cards with the named passages into separate stacks representing tentative categories. These stacks of cards were used later, when the interview data were re-classified into emergent categories and those categories were clustered into themes.

### ***Making and Analyzing Thematic Connections***

The fourth step was to re-classify into emergent categories the interview excerpts that had been tentatively named, pasted on cards, and stacked during step three of data-analysis. At this point, the stacks of cards identifying tentative categories contained excerpts from all of the participants' interviews. I began by searching for connecting patterns among the

excerpts contained in each stack of cards. This process led me to re-classifying excerpts, discarding some categories, discovering new categories, and reducing several categories into one. Because my focus at this point was to analyze data that was specifically pertinent to understanding the participants' experiences and perceptions of learning in the United States, some of the categories that emerged from interview one became less important. As a new set of categories emerged, I searched for connections among categories. Those connections among categories were the basis for identifying 11 themes. Next, further analysis of the 11 related themes led to uncovering three domains: Concept, Process, and Outcome. Finally, I presented and interpreted the interview passages according to the themes forming each domain. This thematic representation was a second way of sharing research findings in this inquiry. The inductive process I followed for developing a thematic representation of findings is depicted in Figure 3.

### ***Interpreting the Material***

The fifth step of data-analysis was to do an overall interpretation of the material. Although the process of interpreting began as soon as I contacted a participant for the first time, interpreting became the focus of data-analysis during step five. It was at this point that I sought to articulate what I had learned from the entire process—interviewing; transcribing; studying, underlining, and coding transcripts; crafting life stories; recognizing categories; and identifying themes and domains. Following Seidman's (1998) advice, I asked myself the following questions:

- What connections are there among the experiences of the women I interviewed?
- How do I understand and explain these connections?
- What do I understand now that I did not understand before I began the interviews?

- What surprising insights did I gain?
- What intuitive presuppositions of mine were confirmed?
- How were the interviews consistent or inconsistent with relevant literature?
- How did the interviews inform the research questions guiding the inquiry?
- How did the interviews go beyond the research questions of the inquiry?

In addition to articulating my new understanding of Central American immigrant women's perceptions of *adult learning*, I addressed how undertaking this research was meaningful for me. Seeking to be consistent with the principles of qualitative research and with the process of interviewing, in particular, I embraced the opportunity to explore how different aspects of the research process may have contributed to transforming my personal and professional attitudes towards adult learning, women's learning and migration, and social research.

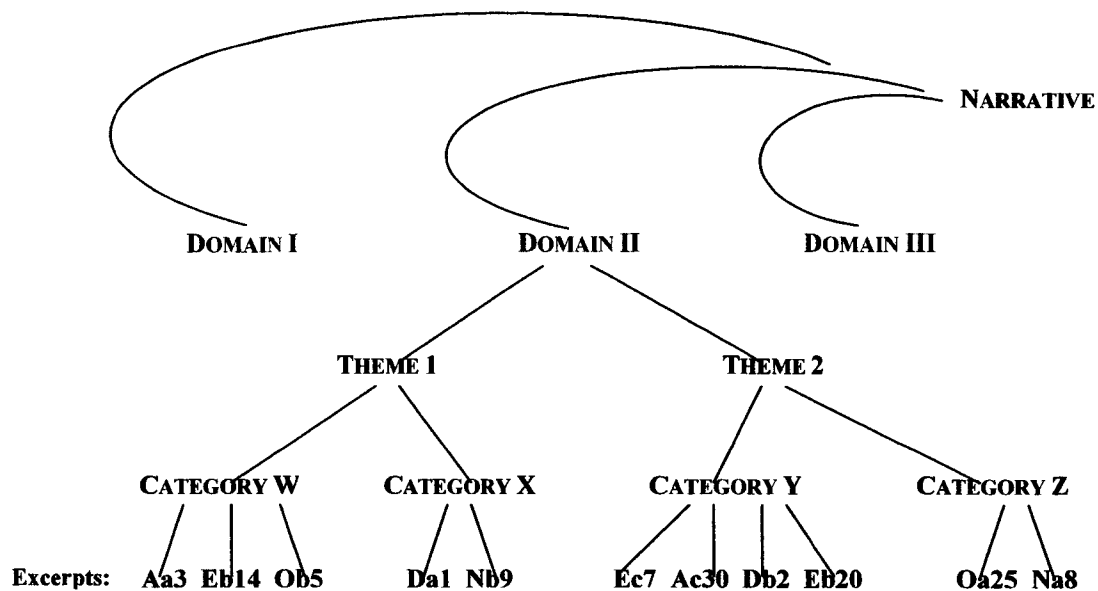


Figure 3. Inductive process for developing the thematic representation.



## Design Issues

Judging the quality of social inquiries requires the application of criteria that are intimately related to the specific audiences and intended purposes of particular research projects (Patton, 2002). According to Patton, the different philosophical principles, theoretical perspectives, and special purposes guiding these studies “will generate different criteria for judging [their] quality and credibility” (p. 542). Acknowledging some overlapping, Patton (2002) identified five contrasting sets of criteria: 1) traditional scientific research criteria, 2) social construction and constructivist criteria, 3) artistic criteria, 4) critical change criteria, and 5) evaluation standards and principles. Within the social construction and constructivist criteria, researchers have acknowledged the role that subjectivity plays in constructing knowledge. In particular, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed a subset of criteria that has been widely embraced by researchers and readers of qualitative research for addressing the trustworthiness of an inquiry.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), establishing trustworthiness requires addressing four questions related to the truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality of inquiries. Truth value concerns establishing “confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out” (p. 290). Applicability refers to the extent to which findings may apply to other subjects or in other contexts. Consistency concerns whether the findings could be repeated if the study were “replicated with the same subjects (respondents) or in the same (or similar) context” (p. 290). Neutrality relates to the degree to which the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the investigator may have unduly influenced the analysis of the inquiry. For addressing these questions—truth value, applicability,

consistency, and neutrality—Lincoln and Guba proposed four corresponding criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Recently, some authors have cautioned against creating a new scientific doctrine out of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria. Seidman (1998), for example, noted that, by undertaking a mechanistic approach to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of their findings, researchers often failed to understand the issues underlying those terms. In a similar vein, Talburt (2002) noted negative implications of using trustworthiness criteria uncritically. While exploring "uses of verifying data in the context of purposes to which research [was] put" (p. 4) Talburt argued the need for developing new understandings of techniques such as member checks and triangulation in order to transcend researchers' emphases on verification. In addition, Talburt advocated conceptualizing transferability as fluid in order to acknowledge "the reader as an active producer of the text" (p. 26) and to stimulate ongoing research interpretation and dialogue. Overall, Talburt suggested that understanding problems in conventional ways and emphasizing the verification of data would limit education research to "repeating itself and to repeating the status quo" (p. 4). Talburt emphasized,

If research is to do more than represent identities and experiences, readers are to do more than gain information about and understand these identities and experiences, and new thought is to be cultivated, the sorts of complications that I argue for through new uses of member checks, triangulation, and fluid transferability are a needed first step. (p. 25)

Recognizing the usefulness of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for judging qualitative research findings, but keeping in mind Seidman's (1998) and Talburt's (2002) caveats, I addressed trustworthiness issues in this inquiry as follows.

### ***Credibility***

For increasing the likelihood of credible interpretations and findings, I implemented three strategies: 1) prolonged engagement, 2) peer debriefing, and 3) member checks.

***Prolonged engagement.*** I implemented a prolonged engagement strategy in two ways. First, throughout the selection of participants I maintained a prolonged engagement with staff members in three institutions tending to the needs of Central American immigrants. My interactions with gatekeepers and with different groups of immigrants attending these institutions provided ongoing opportunities for testing my biases and perceptions. Equally important, my prolonged engagement with potential participants attending these institutions provided them with opportunities to test their biases about me as an outsider interested in conducting research on Central American immigrants.

Second, as I approached data collection, I developed a prolonged engagement with individual participants by: 1) doing preliminary visits before interviewing; 2) spending sufficient time with each participant during in-depth interviewing; 3) being available to participants beyond the time scheduled for interviews; and 4) maintaining contact with participants throughout the whole research process. In particular, implementing three 90-minute interviews over at least a five-week period with each participant contributed to establishing a prolonged engagement with every participant in the study.

***Peer debriefing.*** In order to implement a peer debriefing strategy, I required the assistance of three persons who helped me examine methodological issues and growing

insights. I requested the assistance of two faculty members experienced in qualitative inquiry and one colleague experienced in conducting research with Central American immigrants. Throughout the research process, I met separately with these peer debriefers for periods of one to two hours. I took notes of debriefing sessions for later consultation and auditing purposes.

The roles of the debriefers included asking challenging questions that I might have otherwise overlooked, helping me explore methodological next steps, being sympathetic listeners, and keeping a record of debriefed issues that could be used for later consultation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My role included preparing for debriefings, keeping an open disposition, taking notes of issues raised in each session, and reflecting on debriefing outcomes.

In order to prepare for debriefing sessions, I relied on three types of journal notations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout the whole research process, I wrote down field notes and emerging insights in three separate journals: a) a log of day-to-day activities, b) a personal log, and c) a methodological log. In the log of day-to-day activities, I kept a record of my contacts with gatekeepers and participants, and I noted my weekly research activities. In the personal log I included reflexive and introspective notations such as developing notions, new awareness of personal biases, expectations about possible findings, emerging questions, and feelings of frustration, anxiety, or satisfaction linked to the research experience. In particular, my personal log included visual representations of evolving concept maps. In the methodological log, I concentrated on recording methodological decisions made in accordance with the emergent research design. These journals helped to

document my actions, feelings, and thought processes and were used as the basis for periodical peer debriefings.

**Member checks.** According to Guba (1981), making member checks “is the single most important action inquirers can take” (p. 85) to enhance the credibility of their findings. In this inquiry, I did member checks during data collection and analysis. I used member checks on a regular basis to test my interpretations as they were derived from my interviews with individual participants. I documented not only when member checks took place, but also how the inquiry was altered as a result of the feedback obtained from participants.

Taking into account Talburt’s (2002) perspective, I was mindful about not limiting the use of member checks to verification. For example, I took note of the level of comfort with which participants embraced or rejected certain interpretations, which led to elaborating insights at different levels. I believe that conducting member checks in this manner contributed to increasing not only the credibility of inquiry findings, but also the depth of the understanding gained.

### ***Transferability***

For addressing the potential applicability or transferability of inquiry findings to other persons and to other contexts, I relied on two strategies: 1) purposeful sampling and 2) “thick” descriptive data. Both of these strategies are congruent with the exploration of context-bound social phenomena (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Purposeful sampling.** My rationale for using purposeful sampling was to “maximize the range of information uncovered” (Guba, 1981, p. 86) and to gain an in-depth understanding of Central American immigrant women’s perceptions of learning from “information-rich cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). However, purposeful sampling also

contributed to addressing transferability issues. In particular, documenting selection criteria and including not only a description, but also a life story of each participant in this inquiry could help readers assess the applicability of inquiry findings for interpreting the experiences of persons with backgrounds similar to those of the participants.

***Thick descriptive data.*** Since researchers and readers of the study will likely be interested in assessing the usefulness of inquiry findings for understanding the experiences of immigrant women in other social contexts, I am prepared to provide a thick description of the context in which this inquiry took place. Such description would include the demographics of the social setting as well as pertinent notations contained in my day-to-day, personal, and methodological journals.

### ***Dependability***

I addressed the consistency of findings in two ways: 1) establishing an “audit trail” (Guba, 1981, p. 87) and 2) arranging for an external auditor to assess the dependability of the inquiry process.

***Audit trail.*** I established an audit trail by documenting specific observations throughout data collection and analysis. For example, I kept the actual notes taken during interviews as well as informal notes written to myself during data analysis. In addition, notations made in the three journals described previously—day-to-day, personal, and methodological—contributed to establishing an audit trail.

***Dependability audit.*** Doing a dependability audit entailed examining the inquiry process externally. In this case the dependability audit was done by the chair of my dissertation committee, who was responsible for examining the audit trail and for commenting on “the degree to which procedures used fall within generally accepted practice”

(Guba, 1981, p. 87). In particular, the dependability auditor examined the adequacy of the procedures of data collection and the consistency of data analysis.

### ***Confirmability***

I addressed the confirmability of inquiry findings by: 1) practicing reflexivity and 2) arranging for an external confirmability audit.

***Practicing reflexivity.*** Addressing interpretational confirmability relied primarily on my practice of reflexivity. Conceptualizing the research design required me to make explicit the epistemological assumptions that led me to formulating research questions in a specific way, selecting the implementation of specific methodologies and methods, and seeking to represent inquiry findings in the form of life stories and themes. In a similar way, practicing reflexivity throughout the research process required me to become aware of and make known the origin of growing insights as well as the thoughts underlying the methodological decisions I made. Therefore, an important means of documenting my practice of reflexivity was to make weekly notations of introspections on my personal and methodological journals. Such notations were made available to others during peer debriefings and later consultations.

***External confirmability audit.*** In addition to practicing reflexivity, I addressed the confirmability of my interpretations by arranging for an external confirmability audit. Such audit was done by one member of my graduate committee who certified that every piece of information extracted from transcripts, journals, and other documents was supported by reference materials.

## CHAPTER 4. FIVE LIFE STORIES OF LEARNING

In this chapter, I present five stories of learning that were elicited and crafted according to the methodological procedures described in Chapter 3. The stories embody the voices of five Central American immigrant women: Evelyn, Ana, Dulce, Domi, and Azucena. While the stories reconstruct the women's learning experiences from childhood to adulthood, they also portray a shift between two cultural contexts—Country of Origin and Receiving Country. Accordingly, the stories are organized along five topics: 1) Childhood and Adolescence; 2) Early Adulthood; 3) Immigrating to the United States, 4) Recent Learning Experiences, and 5) Life, Learning, and Work Aspirations.

Each story is preceded by a brief introduction and followed by a postscript. The introductions describe the situations of participants at the time of interviewing and provide such information as age, length of residency in the United States, motherhood, years of formal education, knowledge of the English language, employment, and immigration status. The postscripts update the participants' situations according to conversations held several months after the interviewing process was completed. The postscripts were one way of addressing the fluid nature of circumstances, aspirations, and decisions in the participants' lives. In some cases, the participants themselves eagerly requested the writing of postscripts.

As stated in Chapter 3, including the participants' life stories, in their own words, in the final representation of the inquiry was an important research goal. For that reason, with the exception of Azucena's story, which was elicited and written only in English, the other four life stories are presented in Spanish and followed by a corresponding English translation. It is my hope that the Spanish narratives will provide readers who are fluent in Spanish with an opportunity to appreciate cultural nuances that may be otherwise difficult to



recognize. In translating those stories into English, I moved back and forth among the Spanish version, the interview transcripts, and my journal notes of each interview series. This strategy enabled me to focus on conveying the meanings underlying the participants' narratives instead of doing literal translations.

The chapter ends with a brief overview of six patterns identified across the five stories of learning. Although it was not anticipated in the research design, an overview of common patterns seemed not only appropriate, but also necessary for laying a foundation for interpreting the participants' perceptions of adult learning presented in Chapter 5. While helping to underscore similarities and differences among the participants' backgrounds and learning experiences, the identified patterns provide a glimpse into factors that contributed to influencing the participants' learning in two contexts as follows. Country of Origin:

1) Historical change and timing; 2) Socioeconomic status, rural or urban location, and family composition; 3) Gender socialization; 4) Linked lives; and Receiving Country: 5) Context of reception, and 6) Human agency.

### **Evelyn**

At the time of the interviews, Evelyn was 40 years old. She had lived in the United States for the last 24 years and had gone from having an undocumented immigration status to becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen. She was the mother of a 16-year-old daughter and two sons, ages 14 and 10. She and her children lived in a modest family house that was partially paid for. She and her husband were getting divorced after 15 years of marriage.

Evelyn had completed seven years of formal education in her native country. She worked 27.5 hours per week as the coordinator of food services in an elementary school. She

described her knowledge of English as low intermediate. She could understand English quite well, but she had difficulty speaking, reading, and writing it.

### *Evelyn's Life Story in Spanish*

What follows is Evelyn's life story of learning in her native language, Spanish. The English translation of her story begins on page 193.

#### *Niñez y Adolescencia*

Mi pueblo se llama Oloc. Está al norte de un país centroamericano. [Durante mi niñez], era un pueblo pequeño. Allí casi la mayoría de gente se conocía porque no había muchos habitantes. Yo viví con mi abuelita y mis tíos. Allí viví mi niñez hasta los quince años. Y siempre fui feliz allí, hasta que me vine para este lado.

Yo era la mayor de cuatro hermanos. Éramos dos hermanas, mi hermano, y yo. Cuatro. [Vivíamos] en diferentes casas. Tres vivían con mi tía, la hermana de mi mamá, y yo con mi abuelita, la mamá de mi mamá. [Mi mamá] trabajaba en la capital y cada mes llegaba a vernos a [Oloc]. La familia de mi papá [también] vivía en la capital. [Con ellos] nos mirábamos únicamente para las Navidades. Cuando salíamos de la escuela, nos llevaban a [la capital para] las vacaciones. Íbamos con una prima de mi papá. [Ella] era como hermana prima de mi papá creo y [vivía con] la abuelita de él.

***Yendo a la escuela primaria.*** [Mi escuela] era una escuela pública, la única escuela [primaria] que había allí en Oloc. Era la única. En la mañana era de mujeres y en la tarde era de hombres. [Las niñas entrábamos] a las 7:00 de la mañana y salíamos a las 12:00. [Los niños] estudiaban ... como de la 1:00 para las 5:00 [de la tarde].

Me gustaba ir a la escuela. Me gustaba estar con mis amigas. Ponía atención a las maestras cuando ellas nos enseñaban. Me gustaba compartir con mis amigas el tiempo y era

bonito para mí. [Lo que más yo disfrutaba era] el recreo, la refacción. Tomábamos [la refacción] a las 10:00. Nos daban atol, incaparina u otra clase de atol, y un pan ... y podíamos salir a jugar con las amigas.

[La materia que] no me gustaba [era] Geografía. No me gustaba y hasta la fecha. Hasta la fecha ... los mapas, memorizarse uno todos los estados y todo eso. No, no. Que yo ahorita ni sé cuántos departamentos hay en [mi país]. Nada, nada de eso. [No me gustaba] dibujar los mapas. Me gustaba pintarlos, porque era bonito colorear, pero dibujarlos no. Yo los repasaba para no dibujar.

[En la primaria] cambiábamos de maestra cada año. Me gustaba una maestra que tuve en 4o. [grado]. Era bien buena gente la maestra. Era bien paciente y nos enseñaba bien. [Fue] la única maestra que me gustó mucho ... porque no era gritona. [Ella] era bien tranquila. [Los demás maestros] lo castigaban a uno y ella no. Cuando no hacíamos la tarea, los demás [maestros] nos ponían en el pizarrón parados o nos sacaban afuera en el sol. Nos paraban ahí. Había una maestra que nos halaba la oreja. Nos metía las uñas en las orejas. Eran los castigos que teníamos. [Además,] la directora era bien enojadísima. Sí, bien enojada. Casi la mayoría le tenía miedo a la directora. Era muy estricta. Demasiado, que entre veces se pasaba de estricta.

[Cuando volvía de la escuela iba a] hacer la tarea. Ya después de hacer la tarea, a hacer oficio en la casa. A prender el fuego para el café, ir a traer agua si no había agua, o barrer, o lavar ropa, o irme a jugar con mis hermanos. [Fuera de la escuela yo aprendí] el quehacer de la casa. Mi abuelita siempre me decía, “Tenés que aprender porque el día que te casés tenés que saber todo. Si no te van a pegar, si no sabés lavar un trapo. O por si vas de

arrimada a una casa tenés que ganarte la voluntad de la gente haciendo oficio.” Pues sí, ella me enseñó todas esas cosas. El valor de saber el cuidado de una casa.

*Abandonando los estudios básicos.* Y pues sí me gustó la escuela hasta sexto... pero ya de ahí para el básico ya, no sé, como que ya no me llamó la atención. Los básicos estudiábamos de 1:00 a 6:00 de la tarde. Ya era en otra [escuela]. [Eran] otros maestros y todo eso. [La escuela] era mixta ... ya ahí habían muchachos y muchachas. Yo creo que me empecé a entusiasmar con un muchacho. Y ya pues casi no le ponía atención a las clases. No hacía mis tareas. Yo creo que eso fue lo que pasó. [En primero básico], dejé como nueve clases y reprobé [el grado].

[Estando en los básicos] ya me tenía que levantar temprano a hacer el oficio. Antes de irme [a la escuela] tenía que [ayudar a mi abuelita]. Los lunes, por ejemplo, mi abuelita vendía flores. Hacía ramos de flores y [yo] tenía que ir a venderlos a las casas, a cinco centavos el ramo. Yo sola iba con mi canasto a las casas a andar ofreciendo flores. Ya regresaba y me ponía a barrer o a lavar ropa. [Me compraban bastante] porque allá el lunes cree uno que es el día de las ánimas benditas. Mi abuelita nos enseñó esa creencia que los lunes uno se debe de encomendar a las ánimas benditas. Allá [en Oloc], todos los lunes se va al cementerio a ponerle flores y veladoras a los muertos. En la casa también les pone uno [veladoras y flores] y les reza. Sí, hasta la fecha yo sigo creyendo en eso.

Cuando uno es niño, no piensa como un adulto. [Ahora pienso que] si yo hubiera tenido a alguien ... que me dijera “Sigue, sigue,” [yo] sería alguien en la vida... con una carrera que hubiera seguido. No quise [seguir estudiando] porque no tuve mucha influencia. No. Nunca. No, porque mi tía, ella vivía con nosotros pero ... casi no había mucha comunicación entre ella y nosotras. Y mi abuelita nunca fue a la escuela. Mi mamá, pues no

vivía conmigo. Y mis primos, pues ellos iban a la escuela también pero pues ... por ir nada más a la escuela. Pero que tuviera una persona que me dijera, como yo les digo a mis hijos [lo importante que es el estudio], no. Nunca.

Bueno, [cuando] ya había reprobado primer año ... mi mamá sí me decía que siguiera estudiando. Pero yo le dije que no y que no y que me quería venir [a Estados Unidos]. Yo le dije, “¿Sabe que? Me quiero ir.” Entonces ella me dijo, “Bueno, ¿eso es lo que quiere? Pues me la voy a traer.” Y sí. Terminé el año como en octubre ... [y] me fui a la capital a pasar las Navidades cuando mi mamá se vino. [En la capital] viví unos días con una prima de mi mamá. Ella se vino en noviembre y yo me vine en febrero. Fueron poquitos meses la diferencia.

### ***Inmigrando a los Estados Unidos***

[Antes de viajar], no sabía nada [sobre este país]. Nada, nada, nada. Solo oía “Nos vamos para los Estados Unidos,” y yo creía que era una ciudad nada más. Como decían Estados Unidos, yo decía “No, pues ha de ser una ciudad grande ... que se llama Estados Unidos.” Pero no sabía que habían muchos lugares. No sabía cómo era aquí.

Haber subido a un avión ... fue lo primero. Porque nunca, nunca [había yo visto de cerca un avión]. Solo los mirábamos allá cuando pasaban y decían “Ah, ¡qué chiquito se miraban!” Pero ya cuando uno se sube al avión, ya son inmensos. [Afortunadamente, yo] no venía sola. Venía con otra señora, un niño y el señor que me trajo. El señor que me traía [me explicó] cómo sentarse, colocarse el cinturón, y todo eso. Sí, todo, todo.

***Llegando al sureste de Estados Unidos.*** Primero [llegué] a [una ciudad muy grande en el sureste de Estados Unidos]. Me acomodé más rápido porque allí estaba mi mamá. La tenía a ella conmigo. Ella ya había encontrado gente que la orientara mucho. Paisanos, sí

muchos paisanos habían allí de [nuestro país]. Ella ya tenía [una casa] donde estaba trabajando y le habló a la señora para que me consiguiera trabajo [en el] cuidado de casa ... y para cuidar niños también.

[Llegando], tuve que aprender el manejo de todas las cosas de acá. Las lavadoras, secadoras, aspiradora, todo eso. [Aprendí de] mi mamá y [de] otras personas que ya habían vivido mucho tiempo allí y que hacían el mismo trabajo que íbamos a hacer nosotros. Ellos nos decían como teníamos que hacer las cosas en los trabajos, como comportarnos en las casas, con la gente, con los niños, todo eso.

[Mi mamá y yo] estábamos separadas. Nos mirábamos los fines de semana nada más [porque] vivíamos [en las casas donde trabajábamos]. Nos quedábamos a vivir allí cinco días y [teníamos] dos días libres. Allí dormíamos en la casa. Allí nos daban nuestro cuarto. Nos levantábamos como las 7:00 [de la mañana] ... a hacer la limpieza, a arreglar la casa, y ya nos entrábamos como a las 8:00 de la noche.

[Yo] no sabía [inglés] pero me consiguieron una casa donde hablaban español. Bueno, en [esa ciudad del sur] casi la mayoría de gente habla español. Eso me ayudó mucho y también eso fue lo que ... hizo un poco que yo no fuera a la escuela. No tenía necesidad [de aprender inglés porque] toda la gente hablaba español.

En [esa ciudad viví] un año. Trabajé en casa limpiando [y] trabajé en una fábrica haciendo faldas. Nada más esos dos trabajos. [En la fábrica] nos enseñaron [a hacer] de esas faldas plegadizas. Teníamos que poner la tela en los patrones y plegarla bien, bien. Ya después metíamos [las faldas] no sé si en agua o en vapor para que ya quedara la tela así plegadiza. [Luego], las costureras se encargaban de coserlas.

[Ese primer año] aprendí mucho. Por lo menos a ser responsable. [Sobre todo, aprendí] de mi mamá porque teníamos la responsabilidad de mantener a nuestros [familiares] ... ella sus hijos y yo mis hermanos. Era la responsabilidad que teníamos. [Yo] le ayudaba a ella [con el ingreso de mi trabajo].

*Migrando hacia el Medio Oeste.* [Después de vivir en el sur], con mi mamá nos venimos a [una ciudad muy grande en el Medio Oeste de Estados Unidos]. Teníamos un paisano. Era pariente de un hermano que era solo de papá. Él nos dio posada cuando llegamos allí.

[Vivir en el Medio Oeste] fue diferente [para mí]. [Aprendí a] adaptarme a los nuevos trabajos que tuve que hacer. Porque no empecé como trabajaba en [el sur]. Aquí ya iba a fábricas. Trabajé en una fábrica de bocinas donde teníamos que instalar alambres. Era una línea donde pasaban las bocinas y teníamos que ponerle los alambritos a [cada] bocina. Allí los managers nos dieron entrenamiento. Habían varios [trabajadores y] cada uno tenía que hacer una cosa [diferente]. Luego, trabajé en una fábrica de café donde salía toda olorosa a café. [Tenía que] estar echando café para que se colara en las máquinas y ya saliera el café colado. Después, trabajé [también] en casa ... como en [el sur]. Trabajé un tiempo encerrada. Ya después trabajé por día. [El trabajo] es lo mismo encerrada y afuera. Es lo mismo. Llega uno, hace la limpieza, deja limpia bien la casa y se va.

Bueno, [allí] si me tocaba [comprar víveres] pero donde vivíamos habían tiendas cerca y hablaban español. No tenía uno ningún problema. [Por eso el idioma] no fue ... una barrera para nosotros. No. [Sin embargo,] fue [allí] cuando ya empecé a aprender un poco del inglés. [Aprendí] viendo la televisión. [Aunque había canales en español], me gustaba ver las

novelas americanas y los programas americanos como The Price is Right. Me gustaba ver las novelas. ¡Yo a las 2:00 p.m. ya estaba sentada viendo las novelas allí!

[En esa ciudad] tuve que aprender a andar en el bus, en los trenes, todo eso. Uno llega y no sabe nada. [Hay que] estar preguntándole a la gente. Ya después tuve que aprender a manejar, a conocer las calles. Sí, en esa ciudad fue donde yo aprendí a manejar. Tenía deseos yo de aprender y necesitaba aprender. Fue mi esposo el que me enseñó. [Él] tenía un carácter muy fuerte, me gritaba mucho, pero le hice ganas [y] aprendí. Dije “No le voy a hacer caso a los gritos. Yo quiero aprender.” Y aprendí, gracias a Dios.

[Viví en esa ciudad] casi doce años. Allí conocí [a mi esposo]. Cuando conocí a mi esposo, [yo] trabajaba por día. Estaba trabajando cuando resulté embarazada. Pero después tuve problemas con la niña en mi embarazo. El doctor me mandó reposo y ya dejé de trabajar. Y desde esa fecha hasta hace cuatro [años que] empecé a trabajar otra vez, me dediqué a mis hijos, a mi hogar. Allí [nacieron mis primeros dos hijos]. Sí, mi hija [mayor] nació antes de que yo me casara con mi esposo. Ya tenía 25 años cuando me casé.

***Migrando a otro estado dentro del Medio Oeste.*** [Después de vivir allí] fui a vivir a [una provincia en] México, con mi esposo. Pero no duré mucho [en México] ... como unos cuatro o cinco meses tal vez.

[Cuando volví a Estados Unidos], mi esposo tenía familia aquí [en otro estado del Medio Oeste]. Estaban su mamá y sus hermanos. Él dijo que se le hacía más corto venir aquí que ir hasta [la ciudad donde habíamos vivido anteriormente]. Que eran seis horas más ... para irme a ver allá. Cuando yo vine acá, mi esposo estaba en México y yo me quedé con la familia de él. Pero tuvimos un problema y ya me tuve que salir. [Estaba embarazada y] me faltaba como un mes para aliviarme. [Afortunadamente, en] el hospital donde yo iba había un



programa que se llamaba Outreach. Lo ayudaban a uno a buscar vivienda y hubo un muchacho que me ayudó. Lo llamé y le dije “ ¿Sabes qué? No tengo donde vivir. Tengo mis dos niños y yo estoy embarazada.” Y ya me dijo, “No te preocupes. Yo te voy a buscar un shelter” y me llevó a la YMCA. [Luego], tuve a mi bebé y regresamos allí a vivir. Allí viví como siete meses con mis hijos. Había mucha gente que me daba la mano. Americanos, porque allí solo americanos vivían. Me ayudaban a ir a hacer la compra. O me llevaban al doctor cuando los niños estaban malos o así. [Era] gente americana buena.

Cuando vine para [este estado] fue cuando empecé a hablar más el inglés porque casi no había mucha gente Hispana. En los hospitales, en las tiendas, o en las escuelas casi no había. [Tenía que hablar inglés] con las maestras [de mis niños] porque nadie hablaba español. Nadie, nadie. No encontraba gente como ahora, intérpretes y todo eso. Yo tenía que salir y hablar [inglés]. [Además], acá cuando yo vine, no había [televisión en] español y pues tenía que seguir viendo puro inglés.

Aquí he aprendido a salir adelante sola. He tenido mucha gente que me ha ayudado a sobrevivir con mis hijos. He aprendido, más que todo, el valor de las amistades. Acá hay mucha ayuda, mucha ayuda humanitaria porque no lo dejan a uno. [En especial, conocí a] tres personas bien buena gente. Son tres personas que han estado siempre al pendiente de lo que me pasa y todo eso.

[Primero] está la señora que me ayudó mucho cuando tuve al bebé. Ella se llama Anna. [Es] una señora americana muy amable que se dedicó a mí y a mis hijos. Ella trabajaba para [un hospital] de voluntaria. Es una señora bien buena gente que me llevaba adonde quiera. [Me llevaba] a las citas de doctor, al dentista, y me sacaba. [Yo] no estaba sola. [Ella] fue la que más me ayudó. Una maestra también me ayudó muchísimo a orientarme, [por

ejemplo], si necesitaba ir a los hospitales, necesitaba ayuda con mi niño que estaba chiquito, o si necesitaba leche o pampers. Aquí hay muchos lugares donde hay ayuda y ellas me decían, “Ve aquí, ve allá.”

[La segunda persona es] la maestra que me ayudó mucho. Ella es mi vecina. Ella fue la maestra de mi chiquito desde que nació. Era maestra de ... Early Childhood. Ella fue la maestra del niño por tres años hasta que él entró al preschool. Entonces hablábamos. Venía aquí a la casa. Me enseñaba como leerle libros al niño [y] me traía juguetes para él. Yo lo llevaba a la escuela cada semana. Cada ocho días íbamos allí a la escuela. Me daban rides. Me iban a traer a la casa y me llevaban.

[La tercera persona es] otra maestra también que todavía está allí. Teníamos buena amistad. Ella quería que yo me superara. Me decía siempre, “Mira, ve y aplica a este lugar.” Una vez me dijo, “Ve y aplica a este banco. Pon mi nombre y todo de referencia.” Ella no quería que trabajara así como lo que estoy haciendo ahorita. Porque ella quiere que yo sea algo más. Ahorita tengo tiempo que no la miro pero allí está todavía en la escuela.

[Cuando mis niños estaban pequeños], yo iba mucho a la escuela a ayudar. Cuando no trabajaba, me gustaba ir a ayudar a la escuela. [Eso] me ayudó mucho a ver como los niños llegaban a las clases y ya pues me envolví en el trabajo que estoy ahorita. Porque me gustan los niños. Y más, pues, trabajar para ellos. Saber que estoy haciendo algo para los niños. Sí, ahorita trabajo para ellos. [Me gusta] prepararles la comida y servirles.

### ***Experiencias Recientes de Aprendizaje***

[En la actualidad, aprendo] en mi trabajo ... Soy la coordinadora de Food Services en la escuela. [Atendemos] de 250 a 290 [niños] ... y algunos maestros. [En el trabajo] he aprendido a cocinar la comida para los niños ... [y] también a servir. Tuve que aprender ... a

usar los dippers, los [medidores] para poner la comida. Porque tienen números. Tiene que ver uno qué número le toca para embolsar la comida. En la fruta, [la medida] es como un seis, o un ocho [para servir] la porción a los niños.

Cuando yo empecé allí, mi compañera me enseñó. Ella es de Cambodia. [Ahora no está porque] tuvo un bebé. Ella me explicó cómo usar la máquina de lavar los trastes, cómo encenderla, cómo apagarla, cómo ponerle el jabón ... [como manejar] los hornos y encender las estufas. Todo eso ella me enseñó [en inglés].

En mi trabajo ... todas las mañanas hasta la 1:30 p.m. [hablo] solo inglés. Mi otra compañera, mi directora y todos ellos son puros americanos. Nadie habla español. Hay veces que me cuesta un poco ... hay palabras que no las entiendo pero les pregunto y ellas me explican bien. Yo lo entiendo mucho. Lo que me cuesta un poco es hablar. Todo el tiempo allí tengo que hablar inglés ... porque nada de español. Más bien ellas quieren aprender español porque les gusta. Dicen, "Ay, es que se oye bonito como hablas en español. Que enséñame ...". Y les digo, "Sí, sí." Ahí les vivo enseñando palabras.

*Describiendo el ambiente de trabajo.* [El espacio donde trabajo es] grande. De un lado está donde servimos. En otro cuarto está el horno, están otros sinks, otra mesa, [y] un carro ... para mantener la comida caliente. De ese mismo lado, está otro cuarto donde está la piscina, la computadora ... y donde almorzamos nosotras. [El salón donde comen los niños] es el gimnasio. Hay como doce mesas.

Tenemos la cocina donde preparamos los alimentos. No cocinamos mucho porque otra escuela nos manda la comida ya preparada. Hay veces que nosotros cocinamos nada más pizza o hacemos los sándwiches o cocinamos hamburguesas de pollo o chicken tenders. Si

tengo que hacer papas, tengo que poner el horno. Pero vegetales y eso nos lo mandan ya cocinado.

Tengo un cuarto donde está la línea donde pasan los niños. Hay una mesa donde ... hay vapor para poner la comida para que esté caliente. Y hay un vidrio para que lo tape. Enfrente [de la línea] pongo los cubiertos, ketchup o cualquier cosa que necesite ... y atrás la comida caliente. Al lado están los vegetales, las frutas, y los niños van agarrando su comida allí. Antes de pasar [en la línea, los niños] agarran su leche [de] un cooler. . Del otro lado está la máquina para lavar los trastes. [Hay] bastante equipo.

[Todas las mañanas], llego corriendo ... a encender el horno porque es un horno del tiempo de mi abuelita. Porque ¡Ay, Dios mío! [Es] ya viejísimo y tarda bastante para calentar. Varía el desayuno para los niños [pero] todos los días tengo que usar el horno. Hay veces que tengo panqueques, huevos, sausage, French toast, [o] tostados. Ya después abro los refrigeradores porque los dejamos con llave. Abro todo. Después de eso, tengo que poner jugo o fruta en la línea. [Luego], tengo que poner los cubiertos, servilletas, y jelly para el pan tostado. Después, tengo que llenar una cubeta de agua para limpiar las mesas, otro trastecito para que pongan los cubiertos ... [y] el bote donde echan el desperdicio de la leche. [Finalmente,] abro la refri ... para que los niños agarren su leche. Empiezo a las 8:00 a.m. a servir. Ya está la comida caliente [y] la paso a la línea. Los niños ya están esperando.

[Cuando] ya terminaron [de comer], los niños dejan sus trays ... en una ventana a la par de la máquina. [Voy] otra vez a limpiar, a recoger todo. Después que recojo todo, vuelvo a cerrar la refri de la leche, pongo todo otra vez en orden, y ya empiezo a lavar los trastes en la máquina. Me lleva unos 10 o 15 minutos lavando y ya pongo todo en su lugar. Tomo mi desayuno faltando 15 para las 9:00 a.m., [durante los] 15 minutos de break que tengo.

Yo solita tengo que hacer todo eso. La cajera ... llega como a las 10 para las 8:00 a.m. [pero] ella solo se encarga de sacar la caja ... y de estar cobrándoles a los niños. [Antes], mi otra compañera llegaba a las 8:30 a.m. [pero ahora] yo tengo que hacer todo sola. Hay veces que me mandan ayuda ... o también la cajera me ayuda.

Ya después empezamos a preparar lo del lunch. Esperamos que llegue el carro donde nos mandan todo. Otra escuela nos surte porque nosotros no tenemos allí una bodega. Cuando llega el carro a las 9:30 a.m., tenemos que picar verduras o poner frutas o gelatina en vasitos para los niños. Si tenemos que cocinar pizza, tengo que empezar a las 9:30 a.m. a cocinarla [y después] cortarla en pedazos.

[De] las 10:30 para [las] 11:00 a.m. tenemos que comer [nosotras]. No tenemos hambre porque es muy temprano. Hay veces que como bien en el desayuno y para el almuerzo [tomo] una ensalada nada más. Ya a las 11:00 a.m. bajan los niños y empezamos con el almuerzo. [Servimos] de las 11:00 hasta las 12:20 p.m. Tenemos que ... poner la línea, todo otra vez como lo hice en el desayuno. Bajan tres clases juntas [y] luego otras tres. Tenemos como 10 minutos de intermedio porque si bajaran todos no [cabrían] en el gimnasio y ... no nos daríamos abasto.

Después de eso tenemos que recoger todo otra vez. Sacar la comida [y] si sobró, mandarla ... a la escuela [donde] está nuestra manager. Ella es la que lleva el conteo de todo. [Además, tenemos que] lavar todos los trastes, limpiar todo otra vez, mopear [y] barrer. Cuando termino, yo me voy a hacer mi trabajo en la computadora.

***Aprendiendo a usar la computadora.*** [En mi trabajo] ahorita [estoy aprendiendo] el uso de la computadora. Eso para mí es nuevo. [Hace] dos meses que de repente llegaron y me dijeron, “Tu vas a aprender lo de la coordinadora y tienes que usar la computadora. Ven,

siéntate y te vamos a enseñar.” Mi manager me enseñó. [Ella] es americana [y habla] solo inglés.

Yo me encargo en la tarde de sacar todos los reportes. Tengo que hacer el reporte del día [sobre] cuánto dinero se manda ... a la otra escuela. [La cajera] cuenta, ... me da a mí el dato, y yo lo tengo que poner en la computadora. Cuánto dinero [ingresó], cuántos niños comieron, cuántos adultos comieron, cuántos niños pagan, cuántos niños son regalados, o cuántos niños tienen precio reducido. Esa es la información. [Los] viernes meto la información de toda la semana pero diario tengo que mandar papeles a mi manager. Tengo que mandarle todos los papeles a ella, diario, diario, diario [y] tengo que firmar. Tengo que hacer reporte de mes también pero mi manager es bien buena gente. Ella va y me dice, “No, ahora tú lo vas a hacer. Solo te voy a estar viendo nada más.” Y ya. Este mes así lo hizo. Me dejó solita a mí y ya lo hice.

¡Me gusta [usar la computadora]! [En el trabajo] han tenido confianza [en mí] y [a la vez] no me dejan sola. Yo les pregunto si tengo algún problema. [La manager] va y me [explica] o le digo, “¿Sabes que? Todavía no me siento capaz solita yo. ¿Puedes venir?” Y sí va ella. Mi compañera, la cajera de la escuela, [también] me ayuda ... cuando tengo un problema. Cuando pusho mal un teclado ... le digo “Mira, mira, ¿qué pasó acá?” Y dice “No, pues ya salte de allí” y ya me lo resuelve ella.

[Al principio me daba] nervios que no me fuera a salir [el trabajo] como tenía que hacerlo. [Ahora me da] a lo mejor un poco de stress porque es una responsabilidad muy grande la que tengo allí. Porque tengo que agarrar todos los datos de lo que pasa diario, diario ... [y] meterlos en el diskette. Y ese diskette me lo tengo que traer para mi casa. Diario me traigo el diskette donde meto toda la información porque dicen que puede quemarse la

escuela o puede pasar algo [y es mejor si] yo tengo la información. Y no la tengo que andar cargando en mi cartera sino la tengo que dejar en mi casa. Y sí es una responsabilidad que cargo conmigo.

[En el trabajo es donde] más he aprendido. Ahorita me siento orgullosa porque he estado superándome un poquito. Ya no estoy como antes. Me siento satisfecha porque la gente ha reconocido mi trabajo. No he tenido ninguna mala queja. Es bonito cuando están a gusto con lo que usted está haciendo y le dicen. Me siento contenta conmigo misma. Por ejemplo, ayer llegó una señora a trabajar allí conmigo. Yo trabajé para ella porque yo antes era trabajadora general. Iba a diferentes escuelas y ella era la coordinadora en la otra escuela. Ayer llegó conmigo y yo allí soy la coordinadora. Me siento rara porque yo trabajé para ellas y ahora ellas vienen a trabajar para mí. Me dicen, “Tú eres la boss.” “No,” les digo, “Yo no soy la boss” pero sí me siento ahorita como que estoy un poquito más en el puesto. Les digo, “No me esperaba esto yo.” Pero sí estoy contenta con mi trabajo.

### ***Aspiraciones Laborales y Académicas***

El puesto que tengo ahorita es el mejor pagado allí ... pero es una responsabilidad muy grande. Hay mucho papeleo ... entonces yo creo que allí no [voy a continuar]. Es el único puesto o de cocinera pero también tiene que tener mucha responsabilidad en la cocina porque tiene que cocinar para cuántos niños. O bakery. Estuve unos días trabajando en ... donde se hace el pan y las galletas [y] también aprendí. Aprende uno muchas cosas allí en la cocina. Dan cursos [sobre] como tiene uno que preparar la comida, a qué grados tienen que estar, o medidas, todo eso. La limpieza también, como el agua, lavar los trastes, desinfectarlos. Sí, hay mucho que aprender allí.

Ahorita quisiera [estudiar] a ver si todavía me da la cabeza. Siempre me ha gustado la belleza, el pelo. Estoy interesada en sacar la carrera de cosmetología y corte de cabello. Quiero ver si puedo seguir estudiando eso. Ya he averiguado pero es un full time y ahorita ... creo que no está en mis [posibilidades].

### ***Evelyn's Life Story in English***

What follows is the English translation of Evelyn's life story of learning. The original version of her story in Spanish can be found on page 179.

#### ***Childhood and Adolescence***

My hometown is called Oloc. It is in the northern region of a Central American country. During my childhood, it was a small town. Almost everyone knew each other because there weren't many inhabitants. I lived with my grandmother and with my uncle and aunt. I spent my childhood in Oloc until I was 15 years old. I was always happy there until I came to this country.

I was the eldest of four siblings. We were two sisters, my brother, and I. Four. We lived in separate houses. Three lived with an aunt on my mother's side, and I lived with my grandmother on my mother's side. My mother lived in the capital city and she came to town once a month to see us. My father's family also lived in the capital city. We saw his family only for Christmas. When we were on school break, we were taken to the capital city on vacation. We stayed with one of my father's cousins. I think she was my father's first cousin, and she lived with their grandmother.

***Learning in elementary school.*** My school was a public school. It was the only elementary school in Oloc. It was the only one. In the morning, it was for girls, and in the



afternoon, it was for boys. We started at 7:00 a.m. and got out at noon. The boys went to school from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

I liked going to school. I liked being with my friends. I listened to the teachers when they taught us. I liked spending time with my friends. It was nice for me. What I enjoyed the most was recess time. Snack time. We had a snack at 10:00 a.m. We were given a porridge-like beverage and a piece of bread, and we were allowed to go out and play with our friends.

The subject I didn't like was geography. I didn't like it, and I still don't like it. To this day ... learning maps, memorizing the states and all that. No, no. To this day, I don't know how many counties are in my country of origin. I know nothing about that. I didn't like drawing maps. I liked coloring the maps because I enjoyed using colors, but I didn't like drawing them. I would trace the maps to avoid drawing.

In elementary school, we would change teachers every year. I liked the teacher I had in fourth grade. She was very nice. She was very patient and she taught us well. She was the only teacher I liked a lot ... because she wouldn't yell at us. She was very calm. The other teachers would punish us and she didn't. When we didn't do our homework, the other teachers would have us stand in front of the blackboard or they would take us out of class to stand under the sun. One of the teachers used to pull on our ears. She would pinch our ears with her fingernails. Those were the punishments we had. On top of that, the school's principal was stern. She would get very angry. Most children feared her because she was very strict. It was too much. There were times when she was overly severe.

When I got back from school, I did my homework. Once that was done, I would do house chores: starting the fire for preparing coffee, fetching water if there was none, sweeping, or washing clothes. Sometimes, I went out and played with my brother and sisters.

Outside of school, I learned to do housework. My grandmother always told me, “You have to learn because the day you marry you will need to know everything. If you don’t know how to wash clothes, they will hit you. In case you end up living with strangers, you will need to earn the people’s good will by doing housework.” Yes, she taught me all those things ... the value of knowing how to take care of a home.

***Quitting junior high school.*** I enjoyed school up until sixth grade. Once I started junior high school, I don’t know, school was no longer appealing for me. In junior high, we studied from 1:00 to 6:00 p.m. It was a different school with different teachers. The school was mixed ... for both boys and girls. I think I started to get enthusiastic about a boy, and I stopped paying attention in class. I didn’t do my homework. I think that’s what happened. In seventh grade, I flunked nine classes and I failed the grade.

While attending junior high, I had to get up early to do house chores. Before I left for school, I had to help my grandmother. On Mondays, for example, my grandmother used to sell flowers. She prepared small bunches of flowers and I had to sell them door-to door for five cents apiece. I carried the flowers in a basket and I went out to every home by myself. When I got back, I had to sweep or do the wash. People bought a lot of flowers from me because in my hometown we believe that Monday is a day to commend one’s spirit to the blessed souls. My grandmother taught us that belief. In Oloc, every Monday one goes to the cemetery to take flowers and light candles for the dead. At home, one also adorns an altar with flowers, lights candles, and says prayers for the dead. Yes, to this day I continue to hold that belief.

When one is a child, one does not think like an adult. Now, I think that if I had had someone ... to tell me “Keep going to school,” I would be somebody in life ... I would have

pursued a career. I quit school because I didn't have much guidance. No, never. Because my aunt, she lived with us but there was very little communication between her and us. My grandmother never went to school. My Mom did not live with me, and my cousins went to school only for the sake of going. But to have someone tell me, like I tell my own children today about the importance of school, no. I never had it.

Well, when I had failed seventh grade, my mother did tell me to stay in school. I adamantly refused and asked her to take me to the United States. I told her, "You know what? I want to leave." She responded, "If that's what you want, I will take you with me." I finished school in October and left for the city to spend the holidays. When my mother left, I stayed in the city with a cousin of hers. My mother left for the United States in November and I followed her in February, only a few months later.

### ***Immigrating to the United States***

Before coming, I didn't know anything about this country. I only heard, "We are going to the United States," and I thought it was only a city. I thought, "It must be a large city called United States." I didn't know there were many places here. I didn't know how it was.

Getting on a plane ... came first. I had never seen a plane up close. In Oloc, we only saw planes from afar. As they flew high in the sky people would say, "Oh, they look so small!" However, when one gets on a plane, it is huge. Fortunately, I was not traveling by myself. I was with a lady, a young boy, and the man who was in charge of bringing me here. The man told me how to sit, wear the seat belt, and everything else. He explained everything.

***Arriving in a large city of a Southeastern state.*** I arrived in a very large city in the Southeastern United States. I settled quickly because my mother was there. I had her with

me, and she had found people who helped her get acquainted with the new environment. Many fellow nationals lived there. My mother was working as a maid, and she asked the lady of the house to find me a job in housework and childcare.

As soon as I arrived, I had to learn how to use certain things: the washer, the dryer, the vacuum cleaner, all that. I learned from my mother and from other people who had lived there for a long time and who did the type of work we were about to do. They told us how to do everything at work: how to behave at work, with people, with children, all that.

My mother and I lived separately. We saw each other only on weekends because we lived in the homes we looked after. We lived there for five days, and we had two days free. We slept in those homes. We were given a bedroom. We got up at 7:00 a.m. to clean and pick up the house. We retired to our bedrooms around 8:00 p.m.

I didn't know any English, but they found me a home where Spanish was spoken. In that Southern city, most people speak Spanish. That helped me a lot, but it also held me back from going to school. I didn't need to learn English because everyone spoke Spanish.

I lived in that city for one year. I worked doing housework and in a clothing factory making skirts. I held only those two jobs. In the factory, we learned to make pleated skirts. We had to place the cloth over patterns and fold it tightly. Then, we passed the skirts through steam to fix the folds on the cloth. Later, the seamstresses did the sewing.

I learned much in that first year. At least, I learned to be responsible. Above all, I learned from my mother because we both had the responsibility to look after my siblings. For her it was her children, for me it was my siblings. We both had that responsibility. I helped her with my earnings from work.

*Moving to a metropolitan area in the Midwestern United States.* After living in the South, my mother and I moved to a metropolitan area in the Midwestern United States. We knew a fellow national who lived there. He was a relative of a brother of mine only on my father's side. He received us in his home when we arrived.

Living in the Midwest was different for me. I learned to adapt to new types of jobs. I didn't start working like I had in the South. Here, I went to factories. I worked in a speaker-assembling factory where we had to set wires. The speakers ran on a line and we had to set small wires in every speaker. We received training from the managers. There were many workers, and each one was assigned a different task. Later, I worked in a coffee factory where I always came out smelling of coffee. My job was to pour coffee into a sifting machine. Afterwards, I also did some domestic work like I had in the South. I worked for some time as a live-in domestic. Later, I worked on a day-to-day basis. The work is the same as a live-in or day-to-day. One arrives, does the cleaning, leaves everything clean, and goes.

In the Midwest, I had to buy groceries but there were stores near my home, where Spanish was spoken. One didn't have any trouble. That's why language was not a barrier for us. No. However, it was there where I started to learn English. I learned watching TV. Although we had channels in Spanish, I liked watching American soap operas and programs like *The Price is Right*. I loved watching soap operas. Everyday at 2:00 p.m., I would sit and watch soaps!

In that city, I had to learn how to ride on buses and trains. One arrives without knowing anything. It takes a lot of asking around. Later, I had to learn how to drive and to know the streets. Yes, it was in that city that I learned how to drive. I wanted to learn and I needed to learn. My husband taught me. He had a strong temperament; he yelled at me a lot.

But I made an effort and learned. I said to myself, "I am not going to pay attention to his yelling. I want to learn." I learned, thanks to God.

I lived in that city for almost 12 years. I met my husband there. When I met him, I was doing day-to-day domestic work. I was working when I got pregnant. I had problems with my pregnancy, the doctor prescribed bed-rest, and I stopped working. Since that time up until 4 years ago, when I went back to work, I devoted myself to my children and my home. Two of my children were born in that city. My oldest daughter was born before I married my husband. I was already 25 years old when I got married.

***Moving to a different state within the Midwestern United States.*** After living in the Midwestern metropolitan area, I moved to Mexico with my husband. Yet, my stay in Mexico was short... perhaps only four or five months. When I came back to the United States, my husband had relatives living here, in another Midwestern state. His mother and his siblings lived in this state, and he said it was shorter for him to come here. Traveling back to where we had lived before would have meant an extra six-hour drive. When I arrived, my husband was still in Mexico and I stayed with his family. But we had a problem and I had to leave the house. I was pregnant and only one month away from delivering my baby. Fortunately, the hospital I went to had an Outreach program that assisted with housing. A young man helped me. I called him and said, "You know what? I am homeless. I have two young children and I am pregnant." He said, "Don't worry. I will find a shelter for you." He took me to the YMCA. I had my baby and went back to live at the YMCA. I lived there with my children for seven months. I received help from many people. It was only from Americans because only Americans stayed in the YMCA. They helped me shop for groceries or they took me to the doctor when my children were ill. Those were good American people.

When I came to this Midwestern state, I started to speak more English because there were few Hispanics. In hospitals, in stores, in schools, there were almost no Hispanic people. I had to speak English with my children's teachers because none spoke Spanish. I couldn't find people like one does today, translators and all that. I had to go out and speak English. When I arrived, there was no TV in Spanish so I had to keep watching it in English.

In this state, I have learned to be on my own. I've had many people who have helped me and my children survive. I've learned, above all, the value of friendship. There's a lot of humanitarian aid in this state. People don't abandon you. In particular, I've known three kind persons, who have always shown concern for me.

First is the lady who helped me when my baby was born. Her name is Anna. She's a kind American woman who looked after my children and me. She volunteered at a hospital. She took me everywhere, to doctor and dentist appointments, and out for fun. I was not alone. She helped me the most. She and a teacher, [the second person I will tell you about], helped me find my way around. For instance, if I needed to go to hospitals, if I needed help with my newborn, and if I needed milk or diapers for the baby. Many places provided aid for those in need and both women would tell me, "Go here. Go there."

The second person is a teacher who helped me tremendously. She's my neighbor, and she taught my son since he was born. She was an early childhood specialist and taught him for 3 years until he started pre-school. We talked. She came to my home, she brought toys for my son, and she taught me how to read books to him. I took him to school once a week. The program gave me rides to and from school.

The third person is another teacher who's still at my children's elementary school. We had a good friendship. She wanted me to better myself. She always told me, "Go and

apply for this job.” Once she told me, “Apply for this job at the bank. Give my name as a reference.” She didn’t want me to do the kind of work I do. She wants me to be more than what I am. I haven’t seen her for a long time but she’s still working in that school.

When my children were young, I visited their school often. When I wasn’t working, I enjoyed helping at their school. That helped me observe how the children attended classes, and it led to my involvement in the type of work I do today. I like children. Above all, I like working for them, knowing that I’m doing something for their well being. Yes, I currently work for them. I like preparing food and serving the children.

### ***Recent Learning Experiences***

Currently, I learn at work. I am the Food Services coordinator at an elementary school. We serve food for 250 to 290 children and a few teachers. At work, I have learned to cook and serve food for the children. I had to learn how to use dippers for measuring and serving. Dippers are numbered, and one has to look for the appropriate number for bagging the food. For example, a child’s portion of fruit is served with a 6- or 8-size dipper.

When I started working there, my co-worker taught me. She is from Cambodia. She’s not currently working because she had a baby. She explained how to use the dishwasher, how to turn it on, how to turn it off, how to administer the soap, how to handle the ovens and turn on the stoves. She taught me all that in English.

At work, I speak only English from morning until 1:30 p.m. My other co-worker, the principal, and all of them are American. Nobody speaks Spanish. It’s sometimes difficult for me. There are some words I don’t understand, but I ask them and they explain them well. I understand much of it. What’s difficult for me is speaking. I have to speak English all the time because there’s no Spanish. My co-workers want to learn Spanish because they like it.



They tell me, “Oh, it sounds nice when you speak Spanish. Teach us.” I say, “Sí, sí,” and I teach them some words.

*Describing the work setting.* I work in a large place. On one side, we serve the food. On the other side are the oven, the sinks, a table, and a cart to keep the food warm. On that same side is another room with the swimming pool, the computer, and a place for our meals. The children eat in the gym; there are about 12 tables.

We prepare food in the kitchen. We don't cook a lot because we get food delivered from another school. Sometimes we cook pizza or we make sandwiches, hamburgers, or chicken tenders. If I need to make potatoes, I have to use the oven. But the vegetables come prepared.

I have a room where we set up the line for children to pick up the food. There's a counter with steam to keep the food warm. A pane of glass covers the food. I place the silverware, ketchup, and other things in front of the line. The hot food is behind. The vegetables and fruits are on one side, and the children pick up their food as they pass through the line. Before going through the line, children take out milk from a cooler. On the opposite side is the dishwasher. There's a lot of equipment.

Every morning, I get there running ... to turn on the oven, because it's an oven from my grandmother's era. My God! The oven is very old and it takes a long time to heat. The breakfast menu for the children varies, but I need to use the oven every morning. I make pancakes, eggs, sausage, French toast, and toasts. I open the refrigerators because they're locked. I open up everything. Next, I place fruit or juice on the line. I place the silverware, napkins and jelly for the toast. Then, I fill a bucket with water for cleaning the tables. I place a small container for used silverware and a trash can for the children to pour milk leftovers.

Lastly, I open the milk cooler. I start serving at 8:00 a.m. The hot food is ready and I put it on the line. The children are already waiting.

When the children are done eating, they leave their trays on a window next to the dishwasher. I start cleaning again, and I pick up everything. I close the cooler, I put everything back in order, and I start washing dishes. Dishwashing lasts only 10 to 15 minutes, and I put everything away. I have breakfast at 8:45 a.m., during my 15-minute break.

I do everything by myself. The cashier arrives at 7:50 a.m., but she's only in charge of taking out the cash register and charging. My other co-worker used to arrive at 8:30 a.m. but now I have to do everything by myself. Sometimes, I get helpers or I get some assistance from the cashier.

We start preparing lunch. We wait for the delivery truck to arrive. We get supplies from another school because we don't have a storage room. Once the truck arrives at 9:30 a.m., we start chopping vegetables, and filling cups with fruit or gelatin for the children. If we need to make pizza, I have to start baking it at 9:30 a.m. so I have time to cut it into slices.

Our time for having lunch is from 10:30 to 11:00 a.m. We're usually not hungry because it's too early. Sometimes I eat well for breakfast and I only have a salad for lunch. The children come down at 11:00 a.m. and we start serving. We serve lunch from 11:00 to 12:20 p.m. We have to set up the line ... do everything again like I did for breakfast. Three classes come down at a time. We have 10 minutes between groups because if all the children came down at the same time, they wouldn't fit in the gym ... and we wouldn't be able to do the job.

After lunch, we have to pick up everything again. If there's any food left over, we send it back to our manager, who is at another school. She keeps track of everything. In addition, we have to wash the dishes, clean everything again, and sweep and mop the floors. Once I am done with that, I move on to work on the computer.

*Learning to use the computer.* At work, I am learning to use the computer. That's something new for me. Two months ago, they suddenly came and told me, "You are going to learn the job responsibilities of the coordinator, and you'll have to use the computer. Come, sit down, and we will teach you." My manager taught me. She is American and she speaks only English.

Every afternoon, I am in charge of doing reports. I have to make a daily report of the money sent to the other school. The cashier counts, gives me the amount, and I have to type it into the computer: how much money was received, how many children were served, how many adults were served, how many children paid, how many children ate for free, and how many children paid at reduced rate. Such is the information. On Fridays, I report on the whole week, but I report to my manager on a daily basis. I have to send her paperwork daily, daily, daily ... and I have to sign. I also have to do a monthly report but my manager is very kind. She tells me, "You will do it this time. I will only watch what you're doing." That is how she did it this month. She left me on my own, and I did it.

I like using the computer! At work, people have placed their trust in me. At the same time, they have not left me on my own. If I have a problem, I ask them. The manager explains it to me or I say, "You know what? I don't feel comfortable yet doing this on my own. Could you come?" She comes to my aid. My co-worker, the cashier, also helps me out

when I run into a problem. When I push the wrong key, I say, "Look! What happened here?" She says, "No. Get yourself out of there," and she solves the problem.

In the beginning, I was nervous about not being able to do the job. Now, I experience some stress because I have a lot of responsibility. Everyday, I save the data onto a diskette. I bring the diskette home because they say the school could get burned or something else could happen. Therefore, it's better if I keep the information with me. I can't carry around the disk in my purse either. I have to keep it at home. I hold that responsibility.

I have learned the most at work. Now, I feel proud because I have bettered myself a little. I am no longer like I was before. I feel satisfaction because people have recognized my work. I haven't had any complaints. It's nice when people are happy with one's work and they tell you so. I am happy with myself. For instance, a lady I know came to work yesterday. I used to work for her when I was a general employee. I went to several schools, and she was the coordinator at one of those schools. Yesterday, she came to work and I was the coordinator this time. I feel strange because I worked for them and now they come to work for me. They tell me, "You are the boss." I say, "No, I'm not the boss," but I do feel now like I am in a more desirable position. I tell them, "I didn't expect this." Yes, I am happy at work.

### ***Learning and Work Aspirations***

My current job is the best paid there. But it's a big responsibility. There's a lot of paperwork ... so I think I might not keep working there. That's the only job, or I could also be a cook. But that job also carries a lot of responsibility because one has to cook for many children. There's also bakery. I worked baking bread and cookies for a few days. I also experienced learning there. One learns many things in the kitchen. They offer courses on

food preparation, cooking temperatures, measurements, and all that. Cleaning is also taught, for instance, handling water and learning how to wash and disinfect dishes. Yes, there's much to learn there.

I would like to study, providing my brain still enables me to do so. I've always liked beauty, hairdressing. I'm interested in pursuing Hairdressing and Cosmetology as a career. I would like to go back to school for that. I've made some inquiries but it's a full-time commitment. I don't think it's within my reach to do it right now.

### *Postscript*

I visited Evelyn six months after our last interview. Her divorce had been finalized and she was concentrating on building a new life for her and her children. One of her sisters, who had recently immigrated, looked after the children while Evelyn was at work.

Over the summer, Evelyn had taken a temporary job outside the school system. As the school year was about to begin, she filed an application to do general maintenance work. To her surprise, she was offered a position as Food Services Coordinator at a large elementary school. Her former supervisor had recommended Evelyn for the job, and Evelyn had accepted the position. Evelyn asked me to point out that, despite her earlier doubts, she was meeting the challenge. The new job had enhanced her self-confidence and was providing her with continuous learning opportunities.

### **Ana**

At the time of the interviews, Ana was 42 years old. She had first worked in the United States at the age of 23, when she had fled from a bad marriage. After working as a live-in domestic for 1½ years, she had returned home. Three years later, she and her second husband had decided to immigrate for good. Over the last 14 years of her second stay, her

U.S. immigration status had changed from undocumented, to temporary protected status (TPS), to resident alien.

Ana had two grown sons, ages 24 and 22. The eldest lived in Central America and the youngest in the United States. She was also the mother of a 7-year-old daughter and a 4½-year-old son. She lived with her two youngest children and her husband in a mid-size home. Ana had completed 7½ years of formal education in her native country. At the time of our interviews, she worked 40 hours weekly at a tomato packing plant. She described her knowledge of English as low intermediate, but I noticed that her level of understanding and speaking ability was better than she thought.

### *Ana's Life Story in Spanish*

What follows is Ana's life story of learning in her native language, Spanish. The English translation of her story begins on page 231.

#### *Niñez y Adolescencia*

[Yo] crecí [con una pareja de] señores [mayores] que no eran mis abuelos. Mi mamá los conocía como sus suegros pero no eran sus suegros. Mi mamá se juntó con mi papá y luego por circunstancias ellos se separaron. La condición que mi papá le puso a mi mamá era que tenía que dejarme en esa casa porque los señores no tuvieron hijos. Yo no sé por qué motivos mi mamá me dejó [pero] tuve que crecer como hasta la edad de 7 años en esa casa.

Era la única casa que había allí [en] el campo. No había casas alrededor. Los señores eran muy humildes. Eran pobres. Sí más o menos tenían que comer pero eran [como] decimos nosotros muy tacaños o que no les gusta gastar para comer. Quizás porque no era su hija, [ellos no] me tomaban importancia y yo tenía que andar toda mugrosa, sucia.

Nomás éramos tres personas, [los dos señores y yo]. Mi papá llegaba de vez en cuando porque él tenía otra familia. A veces me veía y a veces no. No habían niños. Para mí era muy triste porque no tenía con quién jugar. Me sentía sola. Era deprimente para mí eso porque sentía como si yo a nadie le importaba.

No recuerdo exactamente si yo veía a mi mamá pero parece que no. Nomás sabía que era mi mamá. Mi mamá no tenía el tiempo, o [quizás] por [su] inexperiencia, o yo no sé porque pero no había una relación de madre e hija. [También] tenía una hermana que conocía muy poco. De vez en cuando la veía y me decían que era mi hermana. Tenía otros dos hermanos de la otra familia [de] mi papá pero [tampoco] los conocía. Los conocí después [cuando] regresé con mi mamá. Yo soy mayor que mi hermana de mamá y papá. De mis otros hermanos hay uno mayor que yo y otro menor.

[Mis padres] habían hecho como un contrato que al fallecer uno de [los señores] yo tenía que regresar con mi mamá. [Ir a vivir con ella] fue un cambio frustrante para mí porque no sabía yo adonde estar. Mi mamá vivía cerca de allí pero tenía que salir [muy temprano] a otro pueblo a vender. [Mi mamá] empezó vendiendo horchata. [Después] iba a vender más que todo fruta [como] sandía [o] melón. Tenía ella que buscar la manera de sobrevivir porque no tenía un trabajo [para] ganarse la vida. [Nada más] veía [a mi mamá] por las noches porque ella salía desde las 4:00 de la mañana y llegaba a las 8:00 de la noche. Al siguiente día era la misma historia, incluso [en] fines de semana. Y pues en realidad no teníamos papá. Era solo mi mamá. [Por eso ella] buscó alguien que nos cuidara. Mi mamá salía [temprano] y nos quedábamos con diferente persona. Yo me sentía siempre sola porque no estaba con mi mamá ni tenía apoyo de mi papá.

[Mi mamá], mi hermana, la señora que nos cuidaba, [y yo vivíamos en] el mismo lugar donde yo había vivido anteriormente que era rodeado por una finca. Nomás habían dos casas y una callecita [de] tierra. Había un caserío como a unas 2 o 3 millas fuera pero no teníamos acceso. Todas las personas que vivimos en ese lugar éramos como [colonos]. Las tierras eran de un patrón [para quien] uno trabajaba y él le daba donde vivir. Era un lugar decimos muy solemne, [deshabitado]. Era un lugar fresco porque habían árboles alrededor. Casi era como un bosque porque habían árboles, maizales, [y] cafetales. Entonces por eso era que nos daba miedo a nosotros ir a otro lado.

*Asistiendo a cinco escuelas diferentes.* Como a la edad de 8 años empezamos a ir a una escuela que estaba allí cerca. Pero directamente no íbamos porque mi mamá se iba a trabajar y no teníamos quién dijera “Tienen que ir a la escuela.” No, no había. Si nosotros queríamos, íbamos. Si no [queríamos], no íbamos.

Era una escuela rural ... y mixta, [para niños y niñas]. [La escuela] era para todos. El [dueño de la finca] era muy buena gente y podían llegar [niños] de otros cantones. Porque donde nosotros vivimos se llaman cantones. Un cantón es como un caserío, [una división dentro] de un departamento [del país].

Era una escuela muy chica. Habríamos aproximadamente unos sesenta a setenta alumnos. Éramos bastantes porque apenas si había espacio. Había nomás unos dos salones [y daban hasta] un tercer grado. Era todo. [Cada uno recibía educación de acuerdo] a su grado pero [estábamos] todos juntos en un mismo salón.

Era una escuela muy pobre. No habían ni baños con agua. Daba miedo ir a esos baños porque eran como unas fosas sépticas. Y donde hubiese había que ir a tomar agua porque había un chorrillo cerca pero no era adecuado para la escuela. Los maestros tenían que andar



comprando comida ahí en alguna casa donde hubiese para almorzar porque habían dos turnos. De 7:00 a 12:00 [de la mañana] entraba el primer turno y el segundo turno por la tarde. [Yo iba] con mi hermana por la mañana ¡cuando yo quería!

En esa escuela estuve como dos [años] repasando primer grado. Mi mamá decía, “¿Qué pasa? ¿Por qué no pasan a otro nivel?” Pero el problema era que como ella se iba y nunca nos prestaba atención, nosotros nunca pusimos interés en la escuela. A mí me daba igual ir [que] no ir. No le presté nunca importancia a la escuela.

En esa época ... mi mamá cambió su casa con otra persona y nos fuimos a vivir a un pueblo más grande donde ella vendía. [Allí] fue la vida diferente ... porque mi mamá trabajaba para que nosotros tuviéramos, decía ella, todo. En realidad no teníamos todo porque el cariño de ella era lo más importante para nosotros. Pero yo en ningún momento la culpo. Ahora que soy adulta entiendo que ella tenía que luchar para que nosotros comiéramos. Pero sí yo definitivamente casi me crié sin amor de madre y padre. Era bien poco lo que yo veía a mi mamá.

Cuando nos cambiamos ... mi mamá sí puso interés en que nosotros fuéramos a la escuela. Era una escuela diferente. Era más grande [y] habían más alumnos. [Mi hermana y yo] pusimos las cosas en serio para tratar de aprender y pasamos a otro nivel. Nomás pasamos un año en esa escuela. Cuando ya fuimos a tercer grado tuvimos que movernos a otra escuela ... [porque] mi mamá pensaba que [allí] había mejor enseñanza. Yo pienso que en todas las escuelas enseñan casi de las mismas maneras. Es uno de alumno que no es aplicado y por eso es que no aprende.

[La nueva escuela] también era una escuela pública, rural, [y] mixta. Mi hermana [y yo íbamos] por la mañana [pero] teníamos que viajar en bus. Teníamos que levantarnos a las

5:00 de la mañana para bañarnos y luego irnos a las 6:00 de la mañana porque caminábamos una hora todos los días para agarrar el bus. Estudiamos del tercero [al séptimo] grado en esa escuela. [Habían] diferentes maestros [y] cambiaba uno de maestro cada año. [En sexto grado] ya teníamos dos materias con un maestro y otras dos materias con otro maestro. Lo iban preparando a uno porque en el séptimo cada maestro le daba diferente materia a uno.

Había un maestro que recuerdo. A [él] lo mataron allí en esa escuela. Era un maestro que motivaba al alumno para que aprendiera. Era muy estricto. Uno sentía miedo y hasta pánico creo yo porque él castigaba muy feo. Era más estricto con los niños. Con las hembras era más considerado. Se dejaba crecer su uña bien larga y algunas veces casi se la incrustaba a uno en la oreja. O si no, le pegaba a uno como dicen allá coscorriones en la cabeza. Con los varones él ponía a uno a cargarlos en la espalda y les pegaba en el trasero con una regla muy gruesa que él tenía. Se portaba así con los que eran demasiado inquietos pero sí era buen maestro. Ese maestro me tocó a mí en el seis y sí empecé a tener miedo y a poner por primera vez interés en los estudios.

No recuerdo alguna materia [que me gustara] en especial pero la materia que no me gustaba era Matemáticas. Pienso que no me gustó porque nunca le ponía atención a las clases [y] nunca aprendía las reglas. A lo principal nosotros le llamamos las tablas de multiplicar. Allí incluye la división, la resta, y la suma. Yo creo que me sentía deprimida porque no sabía que hacer, no sabía las reglas [ni] cómo hacer ningún problema. Allá en nuestro país, si usted va mal los maestros [no le prestan atención]. Yo aquí he visto que si un niño está mal en las clases, le dan tiempo extra para que se ponga al día. Y allá no. Los maestros a veces explican. Si el niño aprendió, bueno. Si no aprendió, pues allí ya no pasa más. Y yo pienso que ese era el problema.

[Cuando pasé a] séptimo [grado], tuve que cambiarme a diferente escuela pero allí ya fue en una ciudad. Viajábamos siempre. Teníamos que caminar todos los días y agarrar un autobús para ir a la escuela. Hacíamos una hora caminando y luego como unos 20 a 25 minutos en el bus. [De regreso] algunas veces habían camiones que pasaban y nos daban ride de donde caminábamos para nuestras casas. Pero si uno se quedaba esperando ride, la mamá lo castigaba porque llegaba uno muy tarde. Así es que a veces no esperábamos porque sabíamos que nos castigaban. [Para mí] fue un cambio muy [grande]. Yo casi siempre fui una niña seria por mi niñez. Yo siempre estaba sola. Nunca hice amigos. Nomás hasta que tuve dos novios. El segundo novio que tuve es el padre de mis primeros dos hijos. A él lo conocí [porque] éramos del mismo lugar [y] viajábamos todos los días a la escuela. Él era más grande que yo. Él iba a otra escuela pero las escuelas estaban casi juntas. Así fue como nos conocimos.

Empecé [el octavo grado] en otra escuela. Mi mamá pagaba por que yo estuviera en una escuela privada [donde] tenía que quedarme a dormir. Vivía más que todo allí. Era un pensionado religioso y nomás de niñas. Mi hermana ya no estaba conmigo [porque] se fue con su novio a la edad de trece años. Yo creo que por ese motivo mi mamá me puso en ese pensionado. Porque sabía que yo tenía novio y que al rato menos [pensado] yo también iba a hacer lo mismo. Pero definitivamente cuando ella lo pensó ya era demasiado tarde.

[En el pensionado] pasé casi un año. Me gustaba a mí esa escuela porque allí fue que yo empecé a sentir entusiasmo por [los estudios]. [Hasta entonces, a mí] la escuela o no me gustaba o no sé si nadie me motivó para que estudiara. No sé qué pasaría pero yo sentía como que no servía para la escuela definitivamente.

En ese pensionado teníamos un horario de comer, de bañarnos, de estudiar, y diferentes horarios para todo. Las monjas le ponían mucha atención a uno. Se le acercaban [y] le dedicaban tiempo a uno. Y me gustó. Yo sí me sentí bien en esa época. Nunca en mi vida había sacado un porcentaje alto en algún examen y allí sí fue la primera vez. Fue en Inglés, me recuerdo. [Saqué] un 10 en un examen. [Eso] es perfecto. Es como una “A” acá creo yo. Es excelente. Fue mi único 10 en la vida.

*Estudiando el idioma inglés.* [Inglés] me gustó desde cuando estaba en séptimo. En el séptimo es que le empiezan a enseñar a uno palabras básicas. Pero ya en el octavo hace uno oraciones. Sí, esa materia sí me gustaba. Pero a veces decía yo, “¿Para qué quiero yo el inglés, si esto nunca me va a servir?” Sí, pero la vida da vueltas.

[El inglés] a mí se me hacía un poco fácil porque a lo mejor allá le enseñan lo más sencillo a uno que es vocabulario. Me gustaba y me ponía a estudiar la clase que habíamos visto y quizás por eso se me hacía fácil. Me gustaba escribirlo [y pronunciarlo], las dos cosas. Pero como allá la pronunciación es diferente, cuando uno viene acá trae una noción pero no sabe. Lo dice incorrecto porque le enseñan la manera incorrecta.

[En octavo], la maestra de Inglés era estricta también pero lo motivaba a uno a aprender. En la clase de Inglés, si estaba haciendo alguna tarea de Matemáticas, lo sacaba de la clase a uno y tenía que arreglarse uno para copiar lo que había hecho ella en esa clase. O si tenía un borrador en la mano, donde usted estuviera allí le caía en la cabeza o algo. Era la manera de [hacerle] a uno reaccionar.

Ella motivaba mucho a los alumnos [para] que aprendiéramos todos. Siempre nos decía que si una persona podía, todos podíamos. Y me recuerdo que esa vez que yo me saqué el 10, se acercó y me felicitó. Me dijo, “¿Ves que si podías?” Porque yo siempre le decía,

“Maestra yo no puedo. Nadie nunca se dedicó a mí. Yo por eso pienso que no puedo.” Y ella me recuerdo que sí me motivó y hasta me felicitó.

Yo pienso que si yo no hubiera tomado la decisión de enamorarme e irme, sí a lo mejor hubiera salido adelante. Porque el deseo de mi mamá era ese. Decía que ella trabajaba duro y daba lo que fuese pero ella deseaba que nosotros fuéramos unas profesionales. Desgraciadamente, nosotros no pudimos ser eso que ella quería.

### ***Primeros Años de la Edad Adulta***

Ya casi terminando [el octavo] año, yo tenía novio. Él me dijo que si yo me iba con él y yo me fui a vivir donde mis suegros. Allí viví con él. Tenía ya como 17 años [cuando pasé a hacer vida] de compañera, de familia. Fue un cambio brusco porque era una familia muy grande donde yo llegué. Eran once. Eran nueve hijos de mis suegros y ellos dos. Once personas y yo doce. Era muy diferente [de como yo había crecido]. Siempre caí en un lugar solemne donde no habían casas. No había electricidad, no había agua. Era muy alejado porque allí no había ni una tienda cerca. Era frustrante para mí porque fue peor de como yo vivía con mi mamá.

[Después] salí embarazada. Como en mi casa nunca me enseñaron los quehaceres, en esa casa tuve que aprender los quehaceres de un hogar que es en el campo. Es hacer tortillas y lo básico que se hace en una casa de gente pobre. Ellos tenían unas vacas. No vendían la leche sino que había que hacer queso. Allí aprendí yo a hacer queso. Aprendí de mi suegra. Mi suegro y ella me apoyaban mucho porque el papá de mis hijos se iba y yo me quedaba con ellos. Mi suegro era un señor muy buena gente, muy considerado. O sería que yo vi como un amor de padre en él porque cuando yo estaba embarazada, por la pobreza que fuese,

él trataba de cuidarme. Él me decía que tomara leche [y conseguía] yerbas que se comen [allá] para que yo comiera. Iba al pueblo y, aunque sea una vez por semana, él traía carne.

No estaba en mis planes venirme para Estados Unidos pero el papá de mis hijos era un señor que le gustaba tomar [y] andar con mujeres. Cuando tuve a mi primer hijo, yo tenía 18 años. Yo veía que mi situación lejos de superar se empeoraba porque él no me dedicaba tiempo. Él trabajaba y decía “Aquí está el dinero. Es para la quincena. Aquí está. Si tú completas para la leche del niño, para lo necesario de un hogar, para la comida.” Allá no se paga renta pero sí la comida es cara. Él sentía que allí terminaba su responsabilidad dándome el dinero. Luego, él se iba los fines de semana. Él decía que estaba con sus amigos tomando pero yo pienso que él tenía otras mujeres. Nunca lo comprobé por mí misma pero él nunca me prestó atención.

Peleábamos y discutíamos. Me ofendía a veces porque cuando llegaba borracho y me intentaba abrazar le decía yo, “No, no me abrases. Yo no sé de donde vienes.” [Entonces] él me insultaba y me decía, “No, si yo para estar contigo estoy mejor con un perro. Yo a ti no te veo como mujer. Yo tengo mujeres mejores que tú.” Y me describía las acciones que él hacía con ellas. Me decía, “Yo sé que tú sin mí nunca vas a salir adelante. A ti tu mamá nunca te enseñó a trabajar. No te sabes valer por ti misma. Tú sin mí nunca vas a salir adelante.” Nunca me golpeó pero sí me insultaba y de ahí yo fui tomando decisiones. Fui agarrando valor y dije yo, “Un día te voy a dejar.” Y sí, un día lo hice. Lo dejé sin pelear. Nomás me salí yo.

Dejé a mis hijos con mi mamá y me fui para la capital. Allí me fui con la suegra de mi hermana y una hija de la cuñada de mi hermana. Mi hermana ya vivía acá pero yo nunca me comuniqué con [ella]. Nunca ella me explicó cómo era Estados Unidos. Yo oía

comentarios [pero] no tenía ninguna idea de qué era Estados Unidos. Y pues ellas tomaron la decisión de venirse y yo le dije a mi mamá, “¿Usted me da dinero mamá si yo me voy y que le queden mis hijos?” Y dijo ella, “Sí, yo se lo doy.” Así fue como en una semana decidí venirme [a Estados Unidos].

***Inmigración, Retorno, y Estadía Final en los Estados Unidos***

El suegro de mi hermana sacó visas para las tres personas que veníamos y nos venimos en avión para México, DF. De allí compramos ilegalmente un boleto para Tijuana. Luego en Tijuana nos pasaron unos señores por la línea. Por la línea le llaman a pasarlo por carro a uno. Le sacan una tarjeta falsa como si fuera su identificación. Así fue como pasé yo la primera vez. Pagamos como \$1000 nomás por la pasada de allí en Tijuana. Día y medio me tardé esa primera vez que yo llegué a California con mi hermana. Tenía 23 años [y llegué a] Los Ángeles.

***Primera estadía en los Estados Unidos.*** Lo que me impresionó [en Estados Unidos] era que yo pensaba que aquí iba a encontrar un trabajo pronto. Que la vida aquí era fácil. Pero definitivamente no [era así]. Vivíamos en un apartamento muy chico [y] yo no tenía espacio donde estar. Yo tenía que dormir en la sala. Cuando mi cuñado se emborrachaba yo tenía que despertarme a la hora que fuese e irme para una cocina. Porque él llegaba con otro amigo y yo tenía miedo que me hicieran algo. Mi hermana vivía bien pobre porque solo trabajaba su esposo. En esos días ella agarró trabajo pero California es mal pagado y definitivamente no podíamos rentar otra cosa más grande porque es muy cara la renta.

Fue la primera vez [que viajé fuera de mi país]. Fue una depresión. Me puse deprimida porque siendo uno madre, dejar a sus hijos es lo más difícil que puede haber. Pareciera que la vida para uno no tiene sentido. Yo llegando a este país era ver el reloj y

llorar a diario por pensar en mis hijos. A tal punto que no estuve por mucho tiempo y tuve que regresarme.

Lo más difícil para mí fue llegar a este país y no saber qué hacer. No saber cómo buscar un trabajo, quién me ayudara para buscar un trabajo. Para mí fue eso lo más difícil. Primero consiguió trabajo la suegra de mi hermana. Ya ella me consiguió trabajo a mí en casa, cuidando dos niñas. Yo dormía toda la semana en la casa donde trabajaba. Nomás llegaba los fines de semana [a la casa de mi hermana].

[Yo trabajaba para] personas que ni creo llegaban a ser clase media porque la señora era separada de su esposo, tenía cuatro hijos, y solo ella llevaba los gastos de su casa. [Eran] cuatro niñas, dos más o menos de 10 y 14 años y dos chiquitas. [Yo cuidaba] a las dos pequeñas. Pero era para mí un desastre porque en esa casa no había que comer. Nomás un paquete de pan, un paquete de jamón, y leche. Era cuando había porque las niñas llegaban con hambre de la escuela, las chiquitas, y se comían todo y ya no había que comer. Yo creo que como ellos comen afuera su hamburguesa, ya es esa su cena. También como la señora vivía pobre, pienso que a lo mejor no tenía ni para la comida. Y yo decía, “Dios mío, yo aquí estoy aguantando más hambre que en mi casa porque siquiera en mi casa hay que comer. Y aquí no hay que comer.” Y uno sin saber qué hacer porque uno no maneja. No podía caminar con las niñas a la tienda porque era mi responsabilidad cuidar esas niñas. Si pasaba algo y yo andaba afuera era responsabilidad mía. Entonces yo a veces incluso aguantaba hambre. Nomás me tomaba un vaso de leche al dormirme y tal vez una galleta de lo que yo llevaba de mi casa y era todo. Por necesidad tenía que estar en ese trabajo porque yo no sabía inglés. No sabía que hacer. Nadie me ayudaba para buscar un trabajo.



Afortunadamente la señora hablaba un poquito de español y así era como yo me comunicaba con ella. [Yo había estudiado inglés] pero siempre yo he sido tímida para el inglés. Soy tímida todavía porque no siento el suficiente valor para enfrentarme y conversar con alguna persona. Más si es gente bilingüe que sabe, yo pienso que lo estoy diciendo mal. Y ese yo creo es mi error porque si así pienso, nunca voy a aprender. Siempre tengo miedo a que lo estoy hablando imperfecto. Es lo que tengo en mi mente. Y tengo que decir “Tengo que aprender como lo hice una vez,” y tengo que ser positiva.

Trabajé por largo tiempo con esa señora. Ya casi [cuando] iba a [regresar a mi país] trabajé como mes y medio con otra persona, siempre encerrada. Tenía cuatro niños también, porque dos iban a la escuela y otros dos chiquitos [se quedaban] en la casa. [Ella] hablaba un poco de español pero era una judía. Y los judíos no son tan buenos que se diga. Quieren tratar a las muchachas como lo tratan a uno en su país hasta que lave el carro, que bañe el perro ... y eso no me gustó. Yo dije, “No, hasta ese punto si ya no” y fue que mejor decidí dejar ese trabajo e irme para mi país.

[La primera vez que vine a Estados Unidos, conocí cosas nuevas] porque uno allá en su país no conoce una aspiradora, una máquina de lavar trastes, un microondas. Hoy sí ya hay en nuestro país pero yo estoy hablando de hace años atrás. Definitivamente era algo nuevo para uno porque en realidad no conocía como manejar una máquina de esas. Son cosas nuevas para uno. El ir a una tienda y a veces uno no sabe ni qué comprar. No sabe ni por donde empezar. Dice uno, ¿Qué en realidad estoy comprando? Porque aquí hay personas que han comido hasta comida de perro por no saber qué en realidad están comiendo. [Además], en los hogares Americanos lo que hay es un galón de leche, un paquete de pan, jamón, un tomate, una lechuga, chocolates, papitas ... Ese es el almuerzo para ellos. Y uno viene

[acostumbrado] a comer comida formal le llamamos nosotros: las tortillas, carne, pescado y otras cosas. Son diferentes costumbres.

Y otra cosa impresionante es el inglés. No es fácil. Uno no sabe a qué viene acá, cómo lo ven a uno las personas, los patrones, el idioma. Y sin conocer este país, yo decía “¿Cómo?” Donde yo trabajaba, hacía dos horas en bus. La primera vez yo me acuerdo que le dije a mi hermana y a mi cuñado, “Llévenme porque yo me voy a perder.” Y ya el fin de semana tuve que aprender a andar en un autobús porque yo no sabía cómo hacerlo. Uno ahí va preguntando, con las demás personas, cuánto dinero se le pone al bus y eso. Porque aquí por un penny que no tenga, lo bajan de un bus a uno. Y a veces le dicen en inglés, “Es tanto.” Y lo más difícil es no saber uno ni qué le están diciendo.

[Esa primera vez, aprendí] con mi hermana porque a ella le preguntaba, “¿Qué puedo hacer?” Porque si no, ¿qué hace uno? Si no pregunta, no sabe adonde ir. [También aprendí] de la suegra de mi hermana. Ella le decía a uno una palabra [en inglés] como para hacer ya una oración. [Me decía], “Usted trate de ir escuchando lo que ellas le van diciendo y agarre un libro y allí vea qué es lo que quiere decir. Y ya pues es otra manera de comunicación. A lo mejor ya se va a ir entendiendo con su patrona.” Porque a veces las patronas de uno no hablan un español bueno que se diga. Yo me recuerdo que una señora me escribía en español lo que yo tenía que darle al niño y de esa forma yo me dirigía. No era buen español el que ella sabía [pero] fue la forma de comunicarme con ella.

En este país yo aprendí a trabajar porque en mi casa mi mamá nunca nos enseñó a trabajar. Ella pensaba que estaba haciendo el bien pero era lo contrario. Siempre había alguien quien nos hiciera la comida y como dicen allá siempre nos tenía de niña bonita a mi hermana y a mí. Por eso nunca aprendimos a ser responsables. Nunca trabajamos ni en el

campo ni en ningún lado. A no ser cuando nos dejaba ir a alguna fiesta, el compromiso era que teníamos que ayudarlo a vender. Nunca tuvimos un trabajo [pagado] pero sí ayudábamos en casa de esa forma. Aquí vine a aprender a trabajar porque hay responsabilidades. Hay que agarrar un apartamento, pagar su casa uno. Eso es lo primero que yo aprendí acá, a trabajar.

[Esa primera vez], lo que definitivamente yo aprendí es que no todo es fácil en este país. A veces uno escuchaba pláticas de personas que llegaban allá y decían, “En Estados Unidos no se comen tortillas, no se comen frijoles. La ropa nomás se pone una vez.” Pero la realidad es otra definitivamente. Es lo que uno viene a aprender. Se viene a dar cuenta por si mismo lo diferente que es aquí en este país.

***Retornando al país de origen.*** [Yo] regresé [a mi país] por mis hijos. El papá de mis primeros dos hijos se los quitó a mi mamá y yo regresé con el anhelo de recuperarlos. Al principio, [cuando] yo llegué de Estados Unidos, mi mamá me estaba esperando con el papá de mis hijos [y] mis hijos. Pero él me dijo, “Es un trato que vamos a hacer. Tú regresas conmigo, vas a tener tus hijos. Si no, pues no.” Yo traté la primera semana de estar junto a él por mis hijos. Pero me di cuenta que yo no podía estar ya con él. Y fue cuando él dijo, “Pues me [los] llevo y te quedas sin tus hijos.”

Fue un sufrimiento muy duro que viví porque mis hijos ya no pudieron regresar conmigo. Mis hijos tendrían ya como unos 8 o 9 años ... [y vivían] con la familia del que fue mi esposo. Sus abuelos y tíos les habían dicho que yo los había abandonado y muchas cosas malas de mí. Vivíamos como a unas 2 o 3 millas de distancia pero ellos tenían que pasar enfrente de mi casa porque no había otro lugar donde pasar. Para mí era muy difícil verlos y no poderlos tener a mi lado. Si yo los encontraba, ellos se corrían de mí. No dejaban ni siquiera que yo me les acercara.

Yo intenté hasta quitarme la vida una vez porque dije yo, “¿Qué hago si ya no tengo a mis hijos?” Una vez tomé muchas pastillas, nomás que mi mamá no se dio cuenta. Y no sé que me pasó. Lloré por mucho tiempo. Fue un calvario duro para mí esa época cuando yo regresé. Y me fui enflacando, enflacando, y mi mamá se preocupó tanto que me dijo, “Hija, tiene que irse de aquí porque sus hijos ya no están con usted. Tiene que irse de acá.”

Estuve en [mi país] como 2 o 3 años para ver si recuperaba a mis hijos pero nunca los pude recuperar. En ese término, como al año y medio de estar yo allá fue que conocí al que es mi esposo. Yo a él lo conocía nomás de “Adiós, Buenas tardes” pero nunca habíamos entablado conversación. Él me ayudó mucho. Él me decía, “Sus hijos van a regresar con usted. No se preocupe.” [Él] me devolvió la confianza. Pasamos como dos años de novios. Yo no quería saber nada de nadie por lo que había vivido pero él es completamente diferente porque él no tiene ninguna clase de vicios y es un buen muchacho. Hasta la vez es buen esposo. Durante [el tiempo que] fuimos novios, casi no estuvimos juntos porque él obtuvo una beca y fue a estudiar a [otro país centroamericano]. Y él nomás llegaba una o dos veces por año. Era todo lo que lo veía. Incluso cuando él regresó ya definitivamente yo le dije, “No, sabe que, lo de nosotros no puede ser porque usted está viajando y yo pienso que esto nunca va a ser nada serio.” Pero ya lo que conviene.

Nos casamos en [nuestro país]. Las condiciones que yo le puse a él [fueron] que si yo era su novia nos casábamos [y] nos teníamos que mover [del país]. Le dije, “Si usted acepta, yo me caso con usted. Si no, yo me voy a ir y hagamos de caso que solo habíamos sido novios.” Yo pienso que a lo mejor sí él me quería para aceptar eso.

***Segunda inmigración y estadía final en los Estados Unidos.*** [La iniciativa para inmigrar a Estados Unidos fue] mía. Yo quería regresar porque en el pueblo donde nosotros

vivimos es bien difícil vivir. Las mujeres se le entrometen a los hombres a cada rato. Yo no sé a qué se deberá. ¿Será la pobreza? En realidad ni me explico por qué son las muchachas así [pero] definitivamente uno no puede mantener un hogar. Yo me vine adelante. Salí un 5 de febrero del '89 ... y a los tres meses [mi esposo] se vino con mi mamá. [Esa segunda vez, también] llegamos a Los Ángeles donde mi hermana.

[En California] siempre trabajé en casa [porque] era mejor pagado que el trabajo en fábrica. Nunca tuve otra experiencia. Cuando [mi esposo] vino yo le dije a la señora que si me daba de entrar y salir. Entraba a las 7:30 a.m. y salía a las 6:30 p.m. Ya mi esposo manejaba y él trabajaba casi para el mismo rumbo. Él me llevaba en la mañana y me recogía.

Siempre vivimos con mi hermana porque la renta en California es muy cara. Vivíamos en un garaje [donde antes] metían cosas inservibles. Yo lo limpié, lo pinté y lo arreglamos con mi esposo. Aguantábamos frío [en] la época de frío. Pero no era frío comparado con acá. Allí vivimos por mucho tiempo con ella. Le pagábamos renta [aunque] llegábamos más que todo a dormir. Ya llegábamos noche por el tráfico de California. A veces llegábamos a las 8:00 p.m. nomás a cenar, a dormir y otra vez a las 6:00 de la mañana para el trabajo. Así era la rutina de California.

Luego de vivir con mi hermana, nos movimos a vivir con una pareja [de compatriotas]. Ellos nos iban a rentar la sala para dormir pero tenían un closet donde cabía una camita pequeña. No era ni una twin sino una camita más pequeña como de niño. Y allí fue que metimos nuestra cama. Allí dormíamos en ese closet. Teníamos que dormir de lado porque no podíamos [dormir] boca arriba, no cabíamos. Allí teníamos nuestra ropa, pues no teníamos más cosas. Nomás una cama y una televisión pero las habíamos dejado con mi hermana.

Allí pasamos con ellos mucho tiempo. Esa pareja sufría porque ellos cuando vinieron a California nadie los apoyó. Tuvieron que ir a dormir por la línea del tren. Pusieron unos cartones. [Después] agarraron apartamento pero por pagar [renta] a veces ellos no tenían para comer. Allí solo trabajaba el esposo. La muchacha no trabajaba; tenía un niño. Nosotros nos dimos cuenta de la situación ... y platicando con mi esposo [pensamos irnos] con ellos para ayudarles. Y allí pues compartíamos renta y a veces nosotros comprábamos comida para que ellos comieran.

Luego llegó un amigo de ellos [desde este estado] y les empezó a decir cómo era la situación de acá. Que aquí había mucho trabajo [y] que aquí se metía mucho tiempo extra, overtime. En esa época, mi esposo ganaba allá \$8.50 [por hora] y yo ganaba \$220 a la semana. Nosotros sí gracias a Dios sobrevivíamos porque no teníamos niños. Y ya pues el amigo de esta persona con quien vivíamos nos comentó, “Allá se sacan buenos cheques. Cheques más de \$400.” Y yo le dije a mi esposo, “Pues vaya a probar usted. Yo me quedo aquí con mi hermana. Si está bien, yo me voy.”

***Migrando hacia el Medio Oeste.*** El amigo de [mi esposo] rentó un troque para traerse sus cosas y mi esposo se vino en un carro ayudándole a manejar. Él se vino en enero para [el Medio Oeste]. Rentaron un apartamento y ya en abril vine yo. Me quedé ese tiempo mientras él hacía un dinero aquí para sobrevivir porque no traíamos dinero. Vivimos [en California] desde el '89 hasta el '94. Luego, desde el '94 nos movimos para [el Medio Oeste].

Mi impresión de [acá] fue que llegando vi un estado muy pequeño. Vine en el mes de abril en que los árboles no tienen ni hojas. Yo me sentía como que estaba en una isla. Lloré mucho ... porque me sentía sola. Más cuando agarramos apartamento y vivíamos solos. Fue

frustrante para mí porque yo no manejaba, yo no conocía a nadie acá. Pasamos la primera Navidad solitos los dos. No conocíamos a nadie. Esa Navidad trabajamos y llegamos los dos solos a la casa. Yo lloraba mucho porque me sentía deprimida. Hasta ahora digo yo “¿Porqué en ese tiempo no reaccioné y le dije a mi esposo regresémonos?” Creo que no nos regresábamos porque aquí hacíamos mucho overtime y los cheques sí nos salían bien. Y pues ya aquí nos fuimos quedando.

Aquí trabajé en fábrica. En esa época era muy fácil encontrar trabajo [en este estado]. Aquí viniendo y al siguiente día ya trabajaba uno. Se iba a una agencia, llegaba a la fábrica [y decía] “Vengo de tal agencia” y ya lo ponían a uno a trabajar. Ya firmaba que había trabajado ese día, ellos mandaban el informe a la agencia, y la agencia le mandaba su cheque a uno a la casa.

Al principio para mí aquí no fue difícil porque trabajé en la misma fábrica donde trabajaba mi esposo. Si necesitaban algo yo lo ponía a él a que me llenara las aplicaciones; hasta la vez él hace muchas cosas por mí. [Además,] ya había un poco de gente Latina y le enseñaban a uno la manera de cómo hacer el trabajo. En ese aspecto para mí no fue difícil aquí.

[En la] fábrica se hacían gabinetes de lámina. [Mi esposo] trabajaba de pintor en una planta y yo haciendo diferentes clases de trabajo en la otra planta. Yo nunca había hecho ese tipo de trabajo. Al principio sí se me hacía difícil porque era un trabajo desconocido para mí. Y más que todo se me hacía difícil porque yo en mi país no estuve acostumbrada [a trabajar]. Sí trabajaba ayudándole a mi mamá [pero nunca fue] un trabajo [donde] alguien me [dijera] lo que yo tenía que hacer.

[Ya en el Medio Oeste] nomás tuve ese [empleo] y trabajos de uno o dos días por [medio de la] agencia. Fui a una empacadora de carne por unos días mientras no había trabajo. Porque trabajé como un poquito más de un año ... y luego me descansaron y me quedé recibiendo desempleo. Ya cuando se me terminó el desempleo fue que salí embarazada y me quedé un tiempo en casa descansando. Luego encontré el trabajo que tengo actualmente. Allí ya llevo como 7 años. Empacamos tomate. Para mí es un trabajo fácil. Lo que me gusta es que no hay muchas reglas [como que si pierde] un día de trabajo lo despidan a uno. Es lo bueno de allí para uno que tiene niños.

Es una gran diferencia trabajar en fábrica. Viene a relacionarse uno con más personas. Más que son de diferente país, por ejemplo, de México. [En mi trabajo] hay un señor de rancho que dice, “No. Que las mujeres aquí de 40 años son ya un desecho y ya son inservibles.” Yo a veces me molesto ... pero digo, “Hay que tener paciencia. Son personas que a veces o no entienden o no saben la manera en que están ofendiendo.” Mi hermana me acuerdo que me decía, “Uh, va a ser una gran diferencia cuando vas a trabajar en fábrica porque uno no es monedita de oro para caerle bien a todo mundo.” Pero gracias a Dios yo no he tenido problemas.

[En este estado me ha gustado] el aspecto del trabajo y también el ambiente para criar uno sus hijos. Aquí es diferente. Es más tranquilo que California. La vida de California es más agitada.

### ***Experiencias Recientes de Aprendizaje***

Hoy en el 2003 fui a un taller que se llama Childnet .... para [aprender el] cuidado de niños en casa. Enseñan cómo tener uno su casa: el espacio según cuántos niños tenga, tener salidas de emergencia, que los niños se laven sus manos para que no se enfermen, también



uno lavarse sus manos [y] muchas prevenciones de cómo cuidar niños. [Además], tiene uno que [haber aprendido] Primeros Auxilios.

Yo había visto [el curso anunciado] en unos boletines que ponen donde cuidan a mi niño pero no tenía idea de qué era Childnet. Más que todo [vi el anuncio] en la Cruz Roja. Llamé por teléfono y ya me dieron información. Antes de eso yo [había decidido] sacar los primeros auxilios porque uno tiene niños y necesita saber qué hacer en caso de emergencia. Cuando yo llegué [para el curso de Childnet] allí dijeron, “Tienen que ir a tomar la clase de Primeros Auxilios porque es un requisito.” Yo ya lo tenía.

***Aprendiendo en Childnet.*** [Para el curso de Childnet] fueron como 12 clases.

Íbamos una vez a la semana, de 6:30 a 8:30 p.m., a un centro [Latino]. Habíamos como unas 12 o 14 personas, puras mujeres. Una [maestra] nos daba las clases ... en español y [cada clase tenía] diferente tema. [También] llegaban de otras organizaciones ... [por ejemplo], una nutricionista [llegó] a impartir las clases de nutrición. El día que llegó la nutricionista [tuvimos que] llevar una ensalada [y ella habló de] cómo comer uno lo más nutritivo como ensalada de fruta, ensalada de vegetales ... Hicimos [las ensaladas] en casa. Al terminar la clase compartimos lo que habíamos llevado cada quien.

A veces nos ponían video. [Después de ver el video] nos hacían preguntas acerca de lo que habíamos visto. Por ejemplo, de abuso infantil fue video. Un policía nos llegó a dar [la clase]. Nos enseñó el riesgo de [tener] una mascota. A veces uno piensa que una mascota es inofensiva. Pero en el video nos [mostraron] que [en este estado] un mapache mató a un niño y era su mascota. En verdad uno tiene que tener muchas precauciones. [También] hablaron de otras clases de abuso infantil, [por ejemplo], cómo golpea uno a su niño. [Generalmente,

impartían la clase] en español pero ese día no. Ese día el señor [que] nos iba a dar la clase no pudo llegar y llegó un Americano pero hubo una persona que nos estuvo traduciendo.

Otras clases eran verbales. Eran diferentes clases. [Una vez] hicimos grupos de cuatro personas y nos preguntaban. No [necesitábamos escribir]. Nos daban folletos de las clases y para la siguiente clase ya más o menos uno llevaba una noción de lo que era. Las primeras clases uno dice, “Oh ¿sabrá qué me irán a preguntar?” Lo ve imposible. Uno piensa negativo. Dice uno, “No. No voy a aprender. No voy a pasar tal vez estas clases.” Yo pienso que por mi edad ya no estoy capacitada. Ya tengo más de 40 años y no voy a aprender. Pero ya estando allí agarra uno confianza y ya uno piensa positivo y sí aprende. Mi hermana es la que siempre piensa positivo. Yo soy la que pienso a veces negativo. Pero ella me dice “No. Tú puedes, tú puedes.” Siempre ella está dándole ánimo a uno de que sí puede y tiene que hacerlo.

[Al finalizar el curso] hay que mandar [una forma] al estado para que revisen su record. Investigan primero ... que nunca haya abusado a algún niño o algo. Porque si [es así], no obtiene uno la licencia. Luego, le envían un certificado; es como la licencia. Yo pienso que si un día me retiro de trabajar a lo mejor trabajo con niños. Ya que esté más grande, unos dos o tres niños y ya tengo al menos [una posibilidad] de empleo.

***Aprendiendo en la iglesia.*** [En la actualidad, también aprendo asistiendo] a una iglesia. [Un consejero] me acuerdo que me decía, “Usted en una iglesia puede encontrar personas para comunicarse.” Porque yo cuando vine a este estado me sentía frustrada. Yo decía, “Dios mío, aquí nunca voy a tener amigos.” Lloraba también porque no tenía mis hijos cuando yo llegué acá. Y decía “No, aquí no.” Fue cuando [el consejero] me dijo que visitara una iglesia. Porque no hay muchas personas en quien confiar definitivamente. A veces usted

le cuenta algo personal a una amiga, [ella] le cuenta a otra amiga y las cosas así se van. Más en un trabajo. Ya no es algo privado, ya se supo. Y entonces por eso yo pienso que en una iglesia se aprende a convivir con las demás personas, a compartir.

Uno aprende cosas. La iglesia le ayuda mucho a uno porque antes uno es como más egoísta. Ahora siento que si hay manera de ayudar a los demás, yo trato de ayudarles. Hay personas aquí que vienen y no hacen algo como obtener un permiso de trabajo porque no tienen información. Yo a veces en el trabajo les digo, “Miren aquí va a venir el consulado... Va a estar en ésta área. Tienen que llevar esto.” [Mi esposo y yo] tratamos de impartir información a las demás personas. Si hay boletines para pegar en tiendas, pedimos permiso y ponemos boletines para que la gente esté informada. Antes no lo hacíamos pero ya yendo a la iglesia aprendemos eso.

Nosotros hoy que vamos a la iglesia vivimos más tranquilos. Hemos conocido más personas y sí la relación de nosotros va bien. [Además, ] les vamos inculcando buenas costumbres a nuestros hijos, que tienen que compartir con los demás. Tratamos que nuestros hijos vayan aprendiendo cómo relacionarse con las demás personas. Mi hermana es otra que va [a la iglesia]. [También ahora que vino a visitar] mi mamá la llevamos a la iglesia y a ella le gustó. [Dijo], “Yo voy a visitar más la iglesia ahora. Veo que sí tenemos que estar más cerca a las cosas de Dios.”

***Aprendiendo a través de la maternidad.*** Otra cosa [que he aprendido] es a ser madre porque yo en mi país ... nunca me dediqué exactamente a mis hijos. Sí estaba junto a ellos pero casi siempre [les hacían] la comida y los bañaban. [Aquí] ha sido distinto. Yo tengo que hacer las cosas de mi hogar [y] estoy más cerca de mis hijos. Yo me siento bien.

Es hermoso ser madre [acá]. Uno sabe lo que es ser madre porque en realidad uno cuida a sus hijos. Al estar uno más cerca de sus hijos aprende lo que es el amor de un hijo. Uno a veces sufre por [ellos cuando] se enferman y los cuida. Pero es hermoso porque uno sabe que está cuidando algo que vino de uno. Es hermoso ser mamá.

[Mis dos hijos pequeños] nacieron en [este estado]. En los años que yo vine era bien difícil encontrar intérpretes para ir uno a cuidados prenatales y yo no manejaba. [Por] ellos aprendí a manejar. Tuve que aprender porque hay que llevarlos a las vacunas [y] a las citas de doctores. Si va al doctor hay que aprender aunque sea un poquito de inglés. Tiene uno que aprender a sobresalir uno mismo. Hoy mi esposo trabaja en diferente trabajo y yo a veces tengo que valerme por mí misma para ver cómo me desenvuelvo para llevarlos a una clínica o al menos hacer una cita. Es lo que uno [aprende].

[Con mis dos hijos mayores] fue difícil porque no es lo mismo uno criar sus hijos desde pequeños. Yo estuve con ellos [desde que] nacieron hasta una edad como de 6, 7 años. Pero luego porque uno tiene que venirse a este país, tuve que dejarlos. Reunirse de nuevo con ellos [fue] difícil. Ellos vinieron como a la edad de 16 años. Mi mamá los crió pero a veces las abuelas los malcriaban en vez de criarlos porque los consienten. Cuando vinieron mis hijos aquí no querían tender su cama, no querían levantar el plato cuando comían. En nuestros países les inculcan que el hombre no tiene que lavar un plato, que el hombre no tiene que acercarse a la cocina. [En cambio] aquí un hombre tiene que ayudarle a la esposa. La familia tiene que ayudarse porque no hay tiempo como para que la madre [haga] las cosas para sus hijos.

[Mis hijos pensaban] que la vida era como en el país de uno. No, aquí hay que pagar una casa [y] hay que pagar billes. Ellos tuvieron que trabajar un tiempo para comprarse su

ropa [y otras] cosas ... porque yo no alcanzaba para comprarles lo que ellos querían.

[Además], la educación de los hijos es bien difícil porque aquí van a la escuela y les inculcan que uno no les puede pegar [ni] regañar. Me recuerdo que mi hijo me dijo una vez en inglés, “¿Sabe qué mamá? Yo soy libre. Yo soy libre de hacer lo que yo quiera. Usted no tiene por que decirme nada. No tiene nada que intervenir ya en mí.” Le dije yo, “Pues si usted es libre, yo creo que usted está capacitado para rentar su apartamento [y] para tener sus gastos.” Ellos dicen que son libres pero no ven ... los gastos que sobrevienen. Al principio tuvimos problemas porque mi esposo no era el papá de ellos. Tuve muchos problemas que ya casi nos separábamos con mi esposo por ellos pero gracias a Dios encontré [a un consejero que] me ayudó mucho. Tuvimos que buscar ayuda para sobrevivir pero gracias a Dios sobrevivimos.

#### *Aspiraciones en Estilo de Vida, Aprendizaje, y Trabajo*

Uno tiene que irse preparando porque vamos más para viejos. Yo a veces pienso irme a mi país y vivir mis días más tranquilos allá. Pero [me doy cuenta que] ya las cosas no son como uno dejó su país hace años. Pienso [que es importante] hacer un plan de ahorro para que si uno se accidenta o algo y no puede trabajar, tener de qué vivir. En unos 5 años primero Dios ya hemos terminado de pagar la casa. Ya no tendríamos esa presión de estar pagando renta. Nuestros hijos ya estarían más grandes y yo pienso que ya viviríamos un poquito mejor. Ya pagando esta casa, estamos pensando agarrarnos algunos apartamentos. Los apartamentos se pagarían de la renta que las personas nos pagarían. Mi marido me dice, “Ya usted no trabaja. Se dedica a cuidar a los niños.” Son los planes que tenemos pero la vida puede cambiar, ser diferente. No se sabe.

A mí me gustaría que mi esposo estudiara porque yo no sé si [yo] sería capaz. Bueno, tendría que estar en el lugar y ver porque como soy de las que veo las cosas difícil ... Pero si

yo no trabajaría, sí me pondría a estudiar. Aunque sea inglés. Mi meta es hacerme ciudadana [de los Estados Unidos]. Por eso sí estudiaría. Aunque trabaje, si dieran las clases para hacerse ciudadano, sí iría a las clases. Con sacrificios pero sí iría.

### *Ana's Life Story in English*

What follows is the English translation of Ana's life story of learning. The original version of her story in Spanish can be found on page 207.

#### *Childhood and Adolescence*

I grew up with an elderly couple. They weren't my grandparents. My mother knew them as her parents-in-law, but they weren't. My mother got together with my father and they later separated, due to circumstances. My father agreed to separate on condition my mother left me in that house because the elderly couple was childless. I don't know why my mother left me there, but I had to grow up in that house until I was seven years old.

It was the only house in the countryside. There were no other houses around. The old man and woman were poor. They had enough to eat but they were stingy, *tacaños* as we say, and they didn't like to spend on food. Maybe because I wasn't their daughter, they never paid any attention to me and I was always filthy.

It was only the three of us. The old man, the old woman, and I. My father visited now and then because he had another family. There were no children. It was very sad for me because I had no one to play with. I felt lonely. It was depressing for me because I felt as if nobody cared for me.

I don't remember exactly whether I saw my mother or not; I think not. I only knew that she was my mother. My mother didn't have the time, or maybe it was her inexperience, or I don't know why but we didn't have a mother-daughter relationship. I also had a sister

whom I knew very little. I saw her occasionally, and I was told she was my sister. I had two half-brothers on my father's side but I didn't know them either. I got to know them later, when I went to live with my mother. I am older than my sister. Of my half-brothers, one is older than I am and the other one is younger.

My parents had made something like a contract that when one of the two elderly people died, I was to go back to my mother. Going to live with her was frustrating for me because I didn't know where to be. My mother lived relatively close, but she had to leave very early to sell in another town. My mother started out selling *horchata* [a cold beverage made from ground rice or tiger nuts, water, and sugar]. Afterwards, she sold various kinds of melon. She had to figure out a way to survive because she didn't have a job. I only saw my mother nights because she left the house at 4:00 a.m. and came back at 8:00 p.m. The next day was the same, even on weekends. We didn't really have a father. It was only my mother. For that reason, she found someone to look after us. When my mother left home, we stayed with another person. I still felt lonely because I wasn't with my mother and I didn't have my father's support either.

My mother, my sister, the lady who looked after us, and I lived in the same place I had lived before. It was surrounded by farmland. There were only two houses and a small dirt road. There was a small village two or three miles away, but we didn't have access to it. Every one of us living there was a settler. One man owned the land, we worked for him, and he gave us a place to live. It was a quiet, uninhabited place. It was moderately cool, because there were many trees. It was almost like a forest because trees, coffee, and corn surrounded the place. That's why we were afraid of going elsewhere.

*Moving through five different schools.* We started attending a nearby school when I was eight years old. However, we didn't really go, because my mother left for work and we didn't have anybody say, "You have to go to school." No, there wasn't anybody. If we felt like going, we went to school. If we didn't feel like going, we just didn't.

It was a rural school... mixed [for both boys and girls]. The school was for everybody. The landowner was kind and he allowed children from other districts to attend the school. We call the districts we live in *cantones*. A canton is like a township, a division within a county.

The school was very small. We were approximately 60 to 70 students. That was many because it was cramped. There were two rooms, and the school only offered up to third grade. That was all. Each student learned according to his or her grade, but we all had class together in the same room.

It was a poor school. There weren't even toilets with running water. The toilets were more like outhouses. It was scary to go there. On top of that, you had to drink water wherever you could because there was a small faucet nearby but it was insufficient for the school. The teachers had to buy lunch from one of the nearby homes because they taught morning and afternoon schedules. One group of students went from 7:00 a.m. to noon and the other group went in the afternoon. I attended the morning schedule with my sister, whenever I felt like it!

It took me two years to do first grade in that school. My mother asked, "What is going on? Why are you not passing to another grade?" The problem was that she left and never paid attention to us, so we didn't put any interest in school. Going and not going was the same for me. I never gave school much thought.



Then, my mother exchanged her house with someone and we moved to a larger town where my mother did street vending. Life was different there... because my mother worked for us to have everything, so she said. We didn't really have everything because her love was more important for us. I don't blame her. Now that I am an adult, I realize that she had to struggle to put bread on the table. However, I grew up without knowing fatherly or motherly love. I saw my mother very little.

When we moved...my mother took more interest in us going to school. It was a different school. It was larger, with more students. My sister and I took learning seriously and we passed to the next grade. We only attended that school for one year. When we reached third grade, we changed schools... because my mother thought they taught better at the new school. I think they teach almost the same in all schools. The students are lazy and therefore don't learn.

The new school was also public, rural, and mixed. My sister and I attended school in the morning, but we had to take a bus. Every day, we got up at 5:00 a.m. in order to shower and leave home by 6:00 a.m. because we had to walk one hour to the bus stop. We studied from third to seventh grades in that school. We had a different teacher every year. In sixth grade, we took two subjects with the same teacher and two other subjects with another. They prepared you because when you reached seventh grade, a different teacher taught each subject.

I remember a teacher. He was killed in that school. He stimulated students to learn. He was very strict. You felt fear, almost panic, because his punishments were awful. He was harder on the boys. He was more considerate with the girls. He grew one of his nails very long and he would almost jab it into your ear. He also bumped you on the head. He would

make one of the boys carry another boy on his back. Then, he would hit the second boy on the rear with a wide ruler. He did it only with those kids who were extremely restless, but he was a good teacher. I had him when I was in sixth grade, and I started to experience fear. It was the first time I put some interest in my studies.

I don't remember especially enjoying any subject in school, but I do remember disliking math. I think it was because I never paid attention in class and I never learned the rules. The main issue for us is learning the multiplication tables. That includes learning how to divide, add, and subtract. I think I felt depressed because I didn't know what to do. I didn't know the rules or how to solve any of the math problems. In our country, if a student is not doing well, the teachers don't do anything about it. I have noticed here that if a student is falling behind, the teachers help her catch up. That doesn't happen in my country. Teachers explain. If the child understood, fine. If the child didn't understand, nothing else happens. I think that was my problem.

When I reached seventh grade, I had to move to a school in the city. We still traveled. We had to walk for an hour every day to catch a bus that took us to school. We spent one hour walking and then 20 to 25 minutes on the bus. On our way home from the bus stop, we sometimes got rides on trucks. However, if we waited for a ride my mother punished us because we got home late. Therefore, we seldom waited for rides because we knew we would be punished. It was a big change for me. I was usually gloomy because of my childhood. I was always alone. I never made friends. I only had two boyfriends. My second boyfriend is the father of my first two sons. I met him because we were from the same town and we traveled together to school everyday. He was older than I was. He attended a different school but our schools were close by. That is how we met.

I started eighth grade in a different school. My mother paid a private school where I had to stay overnight. I mostly lived there. It was a religious boarding school for girls. My sister was no longer with me because she had eloped with her boyfriend at the age of 13. I think that's why my mother put me in that school. She knew I had a boyfriend and that I could do the same as my sister. However, when she thought of it, it was definitely too late.

I spent almost a full year in boarding school. I liked that school because I began to feel enthusiastic about learning. Until then, I hadn't liked school; perhaps nobody had motivated me to study. I don't know what had happened, but I used to feel like I was definitely not good for school.

At the boarding school, we had a specific time for eating, bathing, studying, and different schedules for everything. The nuns paid attention to us. They were close to us and they spent time with us. I liked that. I felt good during that time. Never in my life had I scored a high percentage on a test, and I did for the first time. It was in English. I got a 10 on a test. That is perfect. It's like an "A" here, I think. It's excellent. That was the only 10 that I ever got in my life.

***Studying English.*** I liked learning English ever since I was in seventh grade. That's when they teach you basic words. In eighth, you move up to making sentences. Yes, I liked that subject although I would sometimes ask myself, "Why would I want to know English, when I'm never going to use it?" However, life surprises you.

Learning English seemed easy to me, perhaps because we were taught basic vocabulary. I liked it, and I reviewed what we had learned in class; perhaps that's why I found it easy. I liked writing as well as pronouncing it. Nevertheless, because it's pronounced

differently in my country, when you get here you may have an idea but you don't know. You speak incorrectly because you were taught incorrectly.

In eighth grade, the English teacher was strict, but she motivated you to learn. If you were doing math homework in her class, she would take you out of room and it was up to you to get a copy of the day's lesson. Or if she had an eraser in her hand, the eraser would hit you in the head no matter where you were. That was her way of making you react.

She motivated all students to learn. She always told us that if one could do it, we all could. I remember that when I got the 10, she approached me and congratulated me. She said, "Do you see now that you can do it?" Because I used to tell her, "Teacher, I can't do it. Nobody ever paid attention to me. That is why I think I can't." I remember that she did motivate me, and she even congratulated me.

I think if I hadn't decided to fall in love and leave school, I could have accomplished something. That was my mother's wish. She used to say that she worked hard and would do anything for us to become professionals. Unfortunately, we were unable to fulfill her wish.

### ***Early Adulthood***

Almost at the end of eighth grade, I had a boyfriend. He asked me to move in with him and I went to live at his parents' home. I lived there with him. I was 17 years old when I began a joint life, a family life. It was a big change for me because it was a large family of 11. They were nine children and the two parents. They were 11 plus me, 12. It was very different from how I had grown up. I ended up again in an uninhabited place, with no other houses around. There was no electricity and no water. It was a very remote place; there wasn't even a store nearby. It was frustrating for me because it was worse than where I had lived with my mother.

Then, I became pregnant. Since I had not been taught to do housework at home, I had to learn how to do the chores of a countryside home. It was making *tortillas* [thin maize pancakes], and doing the basics of a poor household. They owned some cows, but they didn't sell milk. Instead, they made cheese. I learned how to make cheese from my mother-in-law. My father-in-law and she supported me because the father of my children used to leave the house and I stayed with them. My father-in-law was a very kind man and very considerate. Perhaps I found in him the fatherly love I had never had. When I was pregnant, he tried to take care of me despite their poverty. He told me to drink milk and he brought vegetables home. He went into town and he bought meat at least once a week.

It was not in my plans to immigrate to the United States, but the father of my children liked women and drinking. When I had my first child, I was 18 years old. I noticed that my situation was deteriorating instead of improving, because my partner didn't spend time with me. He worked and came home saying, "Here is the money. This is for two weeks. Here it is. See if you can use it for the baby's milk, what's necessary for the house, and food." We didn't have to pay rent, but food was expensive. He thought his responsibility ended once he gave me the money. Then, he would leave on weekends. He used to say he was going drinking with friends, but I think he had other women. I never knew that for sure, but he never paid any attention to me.

We argued. Sometimes he was offensive. When he got home drunk and he tried to hug me I would say, "No, don't hug me. I don't know where you've been." Then, he insulted me by saying, "No, I'm better off with a dog than I am with you. I don't see you as a woman. I have better women than you." He used to describe what he did with the women. He said, "I know that you will never accomplish anything without me. Your mother never taught you to

work. You don't know how to be on your own. You will never survive without me." He never hit me, but he did insult me and I started making decisions on my own. I started building courage and I told myself, "One day, I will leave him." And that's what I did. I left him without arguing. I just left.

I left my sons with my mother and I moved to the capital city. I stayed with my sister's mother-in-law and her granddaughter. My sister was already living here but I was not in communication with her. She never explained to me anything about the United States. I did hear comments about the country, but I had no idea what it was like. The two women decided to immigrate and I told my mother, "If I go with them, will you lend me money and stay with my children?" She responded, "Yes, I will give you the money." That is how I decided, in one week, to immigrate to the United States.

### ***Immigration, Return, and Final Stay in the United States***

My sister's father-in-law got visas for us three to go to Mexico City by plane. Once there, we bought a ticket to Tijuana. In Tijuana, some men helped us cross the border through the line. Passing through the line is when you cross the border in cars. They get you a false identification card. That's how I crossed the first time. We paid \$1000 only for crossing the Tijuana border. It took me 1½ days to get to my sister's in California. I was 23 and I arrived in Los Angeles.

***First stay in the United States.*** What impressed me about the United States was that I thought I would quickly find a job. I thought life was easy here. It was definitively not so. We lived in a very small apartment, where there was no room for me. I had to sleep in the living room. When my brother-in-law got drunk, I had to get up, no matter how late, and go to the kitchen. He usually came home with a friend and I was afraid they might harm me. My

sister lived very poorly because only her husband worked. In those days, she started working but California pays badly and we couldn't afford to rent anything larger because rents are costly.

That was the first time I traveled outside of my country of origin. It was depressing. I got depressed because it's very difficult for a mother to leave her children behind. You feel as though life has no meaning. When I arrived in this country, I cried every day when I saw my watch; [I would look at the time] and think about my children. It was so bad that I didn't stay too long and returned to my country.

For me the hardest thing was to arrive in this country not knowing what to do. I didn't know how to look for a job or who could help me find work. That was the biggest difficulty for me. My sister's mother-in-law was the first to find a job. Then, she found me a live-in domestic job taking care of two girls. During the week, I slept at my workplace. I only stayed at my sister's over the weekend.

I worked for people who I think were barely middle-class. The lady of the house was separated from her husband, she had four children, and she was the sole provider for the family. There were four girls; two girls were 10 and 14, and the other two were younger. I took care of the two youngest. For me it was a disaster because there was no food in that house. There was only a loaf of bread, a pack of ham, and milk. That was when there was food, because when the two youngest children got back from school they ate everything. I think when [Americans] eat a hamburger outside the home, that's their dinner. Besides, the lady lived poorly; perhaps she didn't have enough for food. I used to say, "Oh, God, here I am hungrier than I was at home because at least we had some food at home. There is nothing to eat here." One doesn't know what to do because one can't drive. I couldn't walk to the

store with the girls because they were my responsibility. If anything were to happen while I was out, it would be my responsibility. Therefore, I often stayed hungry. Sometimes, I only had a glass of milk at night and maybe a cookie I had brought from home. That was all. I had to stay in that job out of need, because I didn't know how to speak English. I didn't know what to do. Nobody would help me find another job.

Fortunately, the lady spoke some Spanish and we could communicate. I had studied English, but I have always been shy about speaking it. I am still shy because I don't have the courage to engage in a conversation. It's worse if the person is bilingual; I feel I'm saying it wrongly. I think that's my mistake, because if I continue thinking that way I will never learn. I'm always afraid I'm not speaking well. It's in my mind. I need to say, "I have to learn like I once did," and I need to stay positive.

I worked a long time for that lady. A little before returning to my country, I worked about 1½ months for a different person, also as a live-in domestic. I had four children under my care. Two went to school and two young ones stayed at home. The lady spoke some Spanish, but she was Jewish. Jewish people aren't too good. They want to treat you like they treat domestic workers back in my country. They will ask you to wash the car, bathe the dog... and I didn't like that. I said to myself, "No, I'm not going that low," and I decided to quit the job and return to my country.

The first time I came to the United States, I got to know new things because back in my country you don't see a vacuum cleaner, a dishwasher, or a microwave oven. It's different now, but I am talking about many years ago. It was definitely something new because I didn't know how to work any of those machines. You experience new things like going to the store and not knowing what to buy. You don't even know where to start. You



ask yourself, “What am I really buying?” Some people have eaten dog food because they didn’t know what they were eating. Because in American homes all you find is some bread, ham, tomato, lettuce, chocolates, and potato chips.... That is all they have for lunch. We are used to having a formal meal: tortillas, meat, fish, and other things. Our customs are different.

Another strong impression is the English language. It isn’t easy. You don’t know what you’re here for, how people look at you, the bosses, the language, and you don’t know the country. I thought, “How?” To get to work, I rode two hours on the bus. The first time, I asked my sister and her husband, “Please take me to work because otherwise I will get lost.” That weekend, I had to learn how to ride the bus. You have to ask people how much it costs and all that. Here, if you are missing one penny, they will ask you to get off the bus. Sometimes, they will tell you in English “It’s this much.” It’s hard when you don’t understand what they’re saying.

The first time I came, I learned from my sister because I would ask her, “What can I do?” Otherwise, what can you do? If you don’t ask, you don’t know where to go. I also learned from her mother-in-law. She used to tell me words that could help me form sentences in English. She said, “You must try to listen to what they say. Then, pick up a book and try to find out what it means. That is another way of communication. Perhaps you and your boss will be able to understand each other better.” Sometimes bosses don’t speak Spanish well. I had a boss who wrote down what I had to give her son. That is how I knew what to do. Her Spanish wasn’t good but that’s how we communicated.

In this country, I learned to work. My mother never taught us to work back home. She thought she was doing well, but she wasn’t. There was always someone to cook our food,

and she treated my sister and I as if we were well-to-do girls. That's how we never learned to be responsible. We never worked in the fields or anywhere else. The only exception was when we got permission for going to a party. In exchange, we had to help my mother at work. We never did paid work, but we helped her in that way. I learned to work in this country because there are so many financial responsibilities. You have to pay for housing, rent an apartment. That's the first thing I learned here: to work.

That first time I came, I learned that not everything is easy in this country. In my country, I had heard people say, "In the United States nobody eats tortillas, nobody eats beans. Clothes are worn only once." However, the reality is otherwise. That is what you learn here. You realize how different this country is from what you've heard.

***Returning to the country of origin.*** I went back to my country because of my children. Their father had taken them away from my mother, and I returned to get them back. When I arrived, my mother was at the airport with my children and their father. He said, "This is the deal. If you come back to me, you will have your sons with you. If you don't, you can't have them." During the first week, I tried living with him for my children. However, I soon realized that I could no longer be with him. Then he said, "I am taking my sons with me. You have lost them."

I experienced much suffering when I couldn't get my children back. They must have been eight and nine years old...and they lived with their father's family. Their grandparents and uncles had told my sons that I had abandoned them and many bad things about me. We lived two or three miles away from each other, but my sons had to pass in front of my house because there was no other path. It was difficult for me to see them, knowing that I could not

be with them. When I ran into them, they fled from me. They didn't even let me get near them.

I tried to commit suicide once because I thought, "What will I do without my children?" I took some pills, but my mother never knew about it. I don't know what happened to me. I cried for a long time. It was an ordeal, when I returned to my country. I lost weight and my mother was so worried that she said to me, "Daughter, you have to go away from here because your children are no longer with you. You must leave."

I spent two or three years in my country trying to get my children back, but I never got them back. I had been in the country for 1½ years when I met my current husband. I only knew him by "Good-bye, Good afternoon," but I had never had a conversation with him. He helped me very much. He would tell me, "Your children will go back to you. Don't worry." He helped me regain a sense of trust. We dated for two years. I didn't want anything to do with relationships after what I had lived through with my children's father, but my husband is completely different. He has no vices and he is a good man. To this day, he is a good husband. While we were dating, we were seldom together because he got a scholarship to study in another Central American country. He visited me only twice a year. That's all I saw him. When he returned for good, I told him, "I don't think we should continue dating. You are traveling and our relationship will never get serious." Nevertheless, it was meant to be.

We got married in our country. My conditions were that if I continued being his girlfriend, we would get married and we would move out of the country. I said, "If you agree, I will marry you. If you don't agree, I will leave and we can think we were only girlfriend and boyfriend." I think he must have loved me to accept such conditions.

*Second immigration and final stay in the United States.* I took the initiative for immigrating to this country. I wanted to come back because our hometown is hard to live in. Women insinuate themselves to men all the time. I don't know why that is. Could it be poverty? I don't know why young women behave like that, but it makes it very difficult to keep a family together. I immigrated first. I left our country on February 5, 1989. My husband and my mother came three months later. That second time, we also arrived in Los Angeles. We stayed with my sister.

In California, I always did domestic work because it was better paid than factory work. I never had a different experience. When my husband arrived, I asked the lady if I could do day-to-day work. I started at 7:30 a.m., got out at 6:30 p.m. My husband already drove a car, and he worked in the same area. He took me to work every morning and picked me up at night.

We lived with my sister for a long time because rents are high in California. We lived in a garage that had been used as storage. I cleaned and painted it, and we arranged it to meet our needs. We endured cold in the winter. However, it wasn't cold compared to here. We paid rent, although we were only there at night. We returned home late because of California traffic. Sometimes, we got back at 8:00 p.m. only to have dinner and go to sleep. Next day, we left for work at 6:00 a.m. That was our routine in California.

After living with my sister, we moved in with a married couple of fellow nationals. They were going to rent us their living room, but they had a closet that was large enough for a small bed. The bed was smaller than a twin-size bed, suitable for a child. We slept in that closet. We had to sleep on our sides. We couldn't sleep on our backs because we just didn't

fit. We kept our clothes in there, since we had nothing else of our own. We owned a bed and a TV set, but we had left it at my sister's.

We lived with them for a long time. The couple suffered because when they arrived in California, nobody helped them. They had to sleep by the railroad tracks. They sheltered themselves with cardboard. Later, they found an apartment but after paying the rent, they often didn't have any money for food. Only the husband worked. The young woman didn't work; she had a child. We became aware of their situation, we talked it over, and we decided to move in with them to help. We shared the rent, and sometimes we bought food for them to eat.

Then, a friend of theirs arrived from the Midwest. He told them there were many jobs and a lot of paid overtime here. At the time, my husband earned \$8.50 hourly and I earned \$220 weekly. Thank God, we did okay because we didn't have children. However, this friend of theirs said, "In the Midwest, you will earn big checks, \$400 checks." I told my husband, "You go try it out and I will stay with my sister. If it works out, I will follow."

***Moving to the Midwest.*** My husband's friend rented a moving truck and my husband drove his car. He came to the Midwest in January. They rented an apartment, and I arrived in April. I stayed in California while my husband earned some money because we didn't have any savings. We lived in California from 1989 to 1994. We have lived in the Midwest ever since.

When I arrived, I saw a very small state. I came in April, when the trees have no leaves. I felt like I was on an island. I cried much... because I was lonely. It was worse when we got our own apartment. It was frustrating for me because I didn't drive and I knew nobody here. We spent Christmas by ourselves, only the two of us. We didn't know anybody.

We worked on Christmas and went home by ourselves. I cried because I was depressed. Now I think, “Why didn’t I react and tell my husband I wanted to return to California?” I think we didn’t go back because we did a lot of overtime and we earned big checks. That’s how we ended up staying.

I worked in a factory. It was easy to find employment in this state. You started working on the very next day after you arrived. You went to an agency. Then, at the factory you said “I was sent by X agency,” and they put you to work. At the end of the day, you signed and they reported it to the agency. Later, the agency sent you a check home.

At first, it wasn’t hard for me because I worked in the same factory as my husband. If they needed anything, I asked him to fill in the application forms; he still does many of those things for me. In addition, there were already some Latinos, and they taught me the job. In that sense, it wasn’t difficult for me.

The factory made aluminum cabinets. My husband worked as a painter in one of the plants and I did a different type of work in another plant. I had never done that type of work. In the beginning, the job seemed difficult because I wasn’t familiar with it. It seemed more difficult because I had never worked in my country. I had helped my mother, but it was never the kind of work where somebody tells you what to do.

[In the Midwest], I did that job and some temporary work through the agency. I worked at a meat packing plant for a few days, when there wasn’t enough work in the factory. I worked in the factory for a little over one year... then, they downsized and I received unemployment. When the unemployment period expired, I was pregnant, so I stayed home. Then, I found my current job, where I have worked for seven years. We pack

tomatoes. For me it's easy work. I like not having rules that can get you fired for missing one day of work. That's good when one has children.

Working in a factory is different. You interact with more people, especially when they come from other countries such as Mexico. At work, there's a peasant man who says, "Women who are past the 40s are finished in this country. They are useless." I am bothered by his comment... but I tell myself, "You must be patient. Some people don't know better or they are unaware that they're being offensive." My sister used to tell me, "Uh! It will be very different for you to work in a factory. One is no golden coin to be liked by everyone." However, thanks to God, I haven't had any problems.

In this state, I have appreciated the employment aspect as well as the environment for raising children. It is different here. It's calmer than California. Life is more agitated in California.

### ***Recent Learning Experiences***

Recently, in 2003, I attended a Childnet workshop... for providing childcare at home. They teach how to arrange the home: how much space you need per child and having emergency exits. You need to make sure the children wash their hands so they don't get ill. You also have to wash your hands and take other preventive measures. In addition, you must know First Aid.

I had seen the workshop announced on the bulletin board at my son's childcare, but I had no idea what it was. I mostly saw the announcement at the Red Cross. I called and they gave me information. Before doing the workshop, I had taken First Aid because having children at home it seemed wise to know what to do in case of an emergency. When I went to Childnet, they said, "You must take First Aid because it's required." I had already taken it.

*Learning in Childnet.* We did about 12 sessions. We attended class once a week, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at a Latino community center. There were 12 or 14 of us, only women. An instructor taught the classes... in Spanish, and each class addressed a different topic. We also had guests from other organizations... for instance, a nutritionist came to teach the lessons on nutrition. On the day she came, we had to bring a salad and they talked about becoming better nourished by eating fruit salads, vegetable salads... We made the salads at home. After class, each one of us shared her salad with the group.

Sometimes they showed a video. After watching the video, we were asked questions about the topic. For instance, the class on child abuse was based on a video. A police agent led the session. He taught us about risks associated with pets. You might think a pet is harmless, but the video showed the case of a child who had been killed by a pet raccoon. You really must take many precautions. They also talked about child abuse, for instance, how you might hit your child. They usually taught in Spanish, but on that day, an American had to lead the session and we had a translator.

Other sessions were verbal. It was all different classes. Once we did small groups of four and we were asked questions. We didn't do any writing. We were given pamphlets in advance so that we would have some idea of the following topic.

On the first sessions you think, "Oh, what will they ask me?" You think it's impossible. You think negatively. You think, "No, I am not going to learn. Perhaps I will not pass these classes." I think that at my age, I am not capable of learning; I am over 40 years old and I am not going to learn. However, once you're there you develop confidence, you begin to think positively, and you learn. My sister always thinks positively. I'm the one who



sometimes thinks negatively. However, she tells me, "You can do it, you can do it." She's always encouraging me by saying I can and must do something.

When the workshop ends, you must file a form for the state to check your record. They first investigate... if you have abused a child or something. If that's the case, you don't get the license. Then, they send you a certificate, something like a license. I think that if I someday retire, I might work with children. When I get older, I could take care of two or three children and it could be a source of income.

***Learning in church.*** Currently, I also learn in church. I remember a counselor once told me, "In church, you will find people to communicate with." That was because when I came to this state I was frustrated. I used to think, "Oh God, I will never make friends here." I also cried because my children were not with me. I used to think, "No, not here." That was when the counselor suggested I could visit a church. Besides, you can trust few people. Sometimes you tell something personal to a friend, she tells another friend, and so it goes. It's worse at work. Then, the matter is not private anymore. Everyone knows about it. That's why I think that in church you learn how to interact and share with other people.

You learn things. Visiting church helps you because before attending you are more selfish. Now, I think there are ways of helping others and I try to help. Some people come and do nothing about getting a work permit because they don't have enough information. Sometimes at work, I say, "Look, consulate staff will be in the area. You need to take this paperwork." My husband and I try to disseminate information. If there are flyers, we ask permission to post them in stores so that people are better informed. We didn't do that before, but we have learned in church that it's good to do so.

We live more peacefully now that we go to church. We have met other people and our marital relationship is good. In addition, we teach our children good habits; that it's good to share. We try to teach our children to interact with others. My sister also goes to church. When my mother came to visit us, we took her to church and she liked it. She said, "From now on, I will go to church. I see that we need to be closer to God."

***Learning through motherhood.*** Another thing I have learned is to be a mother because back in my country... I never devoted myself to my children. I was near them but they often had someone to feed them and bathe them. It has been different here. I have to do house chores and I am closer to my children. It makes me feel good.

Motherhood is wonderful here. You know what it means to be a mother because you take care of your children. By being closer to your children, you learn to appreciate the love of a son or daughter. You sometimes suffer for your children when they get ill, and you take care of them. It's beautiful because you know that you are caring for something that came from you. It's wonderful to be a mother.

My two youngest children were born in this state. When I came here, it was difficult to attend prenatal care because there were few translators and I couldn't drive. I learned to drive because of my children. I had to learn in order to take them to doctor's appointments and vaccination clinics. Going to the doctor also required learning a little bit of English. You have to learn how to do things on your own. Now that my husband and I work in different places, I need to make doctor's appointments for my children and take them myself. That's what I've learned.

It was harder with my older sons because it's not the same when you raise your children since they are young. I was beside my sons until they were six and seven years old.

When I immigrated to this country, I had to leave them behind. Becoming reunited with them was difficult. They came to the United States when they were 16. My mother had partly raised them, but sometimes grandmothers spoil children. When they arrived, they didn't want to do their bed or wash a dish because they thought it wasn't manly to do so. Here, a man has to help the spouse. The family has to help because there is not enough time for the mother to do everything for the children.

My sons thought that life in the United States was the same as in our country. No, here you pay for housing and you have other bills. Therefore, they had to work to buy clothes and other things they wanted...because I couldn't afford to buy it for them. Disciplining your children here is also difficult because they are told in school that parents can't scold or hit them. Once, my son told me in English, "You know what Mom? I am free. I am free to do as I please. You are not entitled to say anything to me. You can no longer intervene on what I do." I said, "Well, if you are free, I think you are capable of renting your own apartment and paying for your expenses." They think they are free, but they don't realize the expenses you have to make. At first, we had many problems because my husband is not their father. My husband and I almost got separated. Thank God, I found a counselor who helped me very much. We had to seek help in order to survive but we survived, thanks to God.

### ***Life, Learning, and Work Aspirations***

As we age, we need to prepare. I sometimes think about returning to my country. I think of spending my days more quietly there. However, I realize that things aren't the same as when I left years ago. I think it's important to have a savings plan in case of an accident or something that could keep you from working. You must have something to live on. In five years, with God's will, we will have finished paying for the house. We won't have the

pressure of making house payments. Our children will be older and I think we could be living better. Once the house is paid for, we are thinking about buying some apartments. We could pay for them from the rent we would be receiving from the tenants. My husband tells me, “You will no longer work. You will dedicate yourself to the children.” Those are our plans but life could change. It could be different. You never know.

I would like my husband to study because I’m not sure I would be capable of doing so myself. Well, I would need to be at that place and see, because I’m one of those who perceives things as being difficult... However, if I wouldn’t work, I would study even if it were English. My goal is to become a naturalized U.S. citizen. For that, I would study. Even if I were working, if U.S. citizenship classes were offered, I would attend. I would have to make some sacrifices, but I would go.

### ***Postscript***

In a follow up visit, two months after our last interview Ana asked me to add this postscript to her story. An opportunity to engage in both English and U.S. citizenship lessons had arisen at work. The tomato-packing firm was not only funding the program, but it was also allowing employees to take class during working hours. Ana was very happy that she was able to invest time in learning more English. She was especially excited about participating in the U.S. citizenship program.

### **Dulce**

At the time of the interviews, Dulce was 30 years old. She had recently immigrated to the United States with her 10-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter. Although she had only been in the country for eight months, she was determined to stay. Dulce lived in a large old house with her children, her mother, four of her siblings, and other relatives. Her mother and

brother owned the house, but she was responsible for paying for her and her children's expenses.

Dulce had completed 15 years of formal education in her native country and had extensive work experience in accounting and general office work. In the United States, she worked an irregular number of hours at a packing plant. Her knowledge of English was minimal, but she was making an effort to learn the language rapidly.

### ***Dulce's Life Story in Spanish***

What follows is Dulce's life story of learning in her native language, Spanish. The English translation of her story begins on page 276.

#### ***Niñez y Adolescencia***

Yo crecí en un cantón [que] se llama Paraje del Chí. Está en el oriente de un país centroamericano. Chí es el pueblo y pertenece al departamento de San Gabriel. Es muy bonito. Es muy fresco. Es un ambiente agradable [y] hay una población muy unida. [Allí] hay muchas personas que con sacrificios fueron a la escuela [y] se educaron. Hay muchas personas profesionales. Tal vez no se tiene todo pero sí lo necesario. Es un lugar donde uno siempre quisiera estar. Tenemos nuestras familias allá y es lo que más uno extraña: su tierra, su gente, su casa... [El cantón donde yo crecí] es muy grande. Diría que vivirán unas 3,000 familias. Es muy grande. Toda mi familia es de allá. Siempre viví allí, en ese mismo lugar, hasta la edad de 15 años. [Cuando] saqué mi bachillerato y ya comencé a trabajar, tuve que irme a vivir a la ciudad de San José.

***Disfrutando la escuela primaria.*** [Mi papá] influyó mucho [en mis experiencias de aprendizaje]. Para mi papá era importante. También para mi mamá pero él siempre me decía, "Aprender, estudiar. Tenés que ser alguien en la vida." Él me enseñó a escribir mi nombre

antes de ir a la escuela. De 5 años yo aprendí. Cuando yo llegué a primer grado, ya sabía escribir mi nombre. Incluso cuando [yo] llegaba de la escuela, me enseñaba a hacer óvalos, a mejorar la letra. Me hablaba de los países. [Mi papá no era maestro] pero como él estudió y le gustaba, pues él quería enseñarme que a mí me gustara también. Entonces él si me ayudó mucho. A muy temprana edad yo captaba las cosas. Era una niña a quien le gustaba la escuela y rápido captaba las ideas. Y pues para vivir en un cantón es bien difícil porque no le enseñan igual a uno en las escuelas de los cantones como en la ciudad.

[En el cantón] habían dos [escuelas]. Las dos eran parte del Ministerio de Educación. [Yo estudiaba en] la escuela más grande y sí enseñaban un poco más porque habían más maestros. La otra escuela era más chica ... y habían menos maestros. En mi país [la escuela] es general, [es mixta] desde la primaria. Somos seis [hermanos] por todos y yo soy la mayor. Todos fuimos a la misma escuela.

A mí me gustaba ir a la escuela y yo siempre pensé en estudiar. Le dedicaba tiempo a todas [las materias]. Me gustaba mucho la matemática. Es la que siempre me gustaba más. [De] pequeña nos enseñaban a contar con los dedos, con granitos de frijoles [o] de maíz. El maestro se ingeniaba como enseñarnos algo nuevo a modo de no [hacernos sentir] aburridos. Y bueno, cuando a uno le gusta pues uno luego aprende.

En ese tiempo [teníamos] un maestro de grado para todo el año. [Recuerdo en especial a] una maestra. Yo siempre estuve muy cerca de ella. Siempre me vio bien. Siempre fue cariñosa conmigo. Incluso una vez me invitó a su casa. Yo estaba como en segundo grado. Me llevó a su casa y siempre sentí que yo era especial para ella y ella para mí. Casi siempre fue [mi] maestra de [grado porque] le dejaban la misma sección. Entonces hubo más acercamiento, más confianza. Hasta que llegamos a sexto grado ya cambiaron.

Siempre tuve buenas relaciones con mis compañeros. [Estuve con los mismos compañeros] casi toda la primaria y éramos muy unidos. Siempre fui una persona apartada, una persona sencilla, humilde y quizás por eso nunca tuve problemas con ningún alumno. [Yo] no [era] apartada, en si aislada, sino como reservada. Yo sabía cuando algo era bien o cuando algo no estaba bien. Si yo veía que alguien estaba aquí y allá y eso, pues mejor no participaba. Cuando yo veía que era algo que no me convenía, no lo hacía. Si era algo que sí me convenía, entonces sí yo participaba y era muy unida.

En la primaria entrábamos de 7:00 de la mañana a 12:00 del medio día. Cuando salía de la escuela llegaba a mi casa a ayudar a hacer algo a mi mamá, pues ya estaba grandecita, o a hacer mis deberes. Casi siempre [llegaba] a hacer mis deberes porque siempre pensaba en [completar las tareas] o en aprender las tablas. Muchas veces después de la escuela [también] salía a vender algo. Le ayudaba a una mi tía. Ella hacía venta y yo le ayudaba.

Siempre aprende uno algo fuera de la escuela porque siempre uno conoce algo nuevo. Fuera de la escuela, aprendí a hacer cosas manuales. Aprendí a bordar, a hacer flores, y a hacer pulseras de cintas. Tenía una compañera que sabía hacer artesanías. Ella era bien creativa y me enseñaba por diversión.

***Destacando en la secundaria.*** [La escuela secundaria] ya fue bien diferente. [Fue] una etapa diferente porque tuve que dejar esa escuela. Bueno, de séptimo a noveno grado no dejé la escuela sino que tuve que cambiar de maestro. De séptimo grado en adelante teníamos una clase por maestro. [También] fue diferente porque ya uno ve las cosas de otra forma. Deja de ser un niño para pasar a ser un adolescente.

En ese tiempo me gustaba aprender, saber. Yo siempre quería saber algo y decía, “Tengo que hacerlo. Tengo que estudiar.” Me gustaba participar en los actos que la escuela

tenía. Siempre anduve en las directivas de la sección de estudiantes. Aportábamos ideas sobre cómo recaudar fondos para la institución. Pensábamos en el fin de año, en la despedida. Siempre andaba ahí con los demás compañeros aportando ideas. Así es que sí fue una etapa bien bonita. [Me llevaba] bien [con mis compañeros] y gracias a Dios nunca tuve problemas [con los maestros].

[En la secundaria] me gustó darme a conocer ... que me elogiaron por decirlo así. Me gustó no ser tímida. Ser una persona abierta y tal vez no que me elogiaron de la forma materialista sino me gustó sobresalir. Porque a veces lo buscan a uno para algo [y uno dice], “No, que me da pena, que no se qué, que no quiero.” Más sin embargo, como podía yo lo hacía. Me gustaba participar. Me ponían de ejemplo en las reuniones de los alumnos porque [yo] siempre prácticamente anduve en todo.

También [me gustaba] ayudar porque después que estuve en la directiva de alumnos fui la secretaria de la directiva de los padres de familia de la institución. Mis hermanos menores ya iban [a la escuela]. Yo desempeñaba el papel de madre a muy temprana edad porque ... mi mamá tuvo que emigrar para este país. Tuvo que dejarnos. No porque nos quiso abandonar sino porque la situación lo permitió y tuvo que venirse. Yo quedé a cargo de mis hermanos y siempre yo los representaba. El director me ponía de ejemplo en las reuniones de padres de familia ... porque yo ayudaba a la escuela en las actividades que hacíamos. Siempre estaba en todo. Él sabía que yo apoyaba mucho a mis hermanos [y que lo que yo hacía] se reflejaba en [ellos]. Esos fueron los buenos principios que en mis hermanos yo enseñé.

[En la secundaria], hubo un maestro muy especial que siempre me ayudó mucho. Él siempre estuvo pendiente de mí. Él era el maestro guía que teníamos [y] nos daba



matemática. Era una persona muy culta [y] un excelente maestro. Él era bien humanitario. Se interesaba por los demás, por los alumnos, por que nosotros aprendiéramos. Siempre nos hizo sentir importantes, en la clase y fuera de la clase. Se prestó a ayudarnos, incluso en su casa. Él era así. Él ayudaba a quien más necesitaba y era una persona muy especial para mí. Siempre sentí como un apoyo más en él.

Él era así con todos [los alumnos] pero era más allegado a mi familia. Visitaba la casa de mi mamá. Pienso que las dos cosas influyeron, [su interés por enseñar y su acercamiento con mi familia]. Porque yo no me creo que fui una excelente alumna pero fui una de las alumnas que nunca causé problemas y que siempre me interesé por aprender. Hay maestros que le dan importancia a eso y lo saben valorar. A veces es la forma como ellos se acercan más a uno y tratan de ayudarlo moralmente o intelectualmente un poco más.

[Yo] siempre valoré a los maestros cuando veía que ellos se interesaban por que uno aprendiera. No iban a dar la clase nada más por ganar su salario sino que sí se interesaban por el aprendizaje de los alumnos. Pienso que esa es una cualidad muy importante porque a veces hay maestros que lo hacen por ganar su salario o porque tienen una carrera y tienen que explotar su título, su profesión. [Dan clases] por ellos mismos, no por los demás. Pero hay personas que sí dan todo lo de ellos. Siempre las personas necesitan ganar dinero para sobrevivir pero además de eso hay muchas personas que sí ayudan ... a cambio de nada.

[Algo que me disgustaba de algunos maestros es que] a veces preferían a unos alumnos porque su nivel social era más alto o porque tenían [más] económicamente. A veces hay personas que son así. Casi siempre hay preferencia. No en todos los maestros pero sí se dan casos [cuando] al que es hijo de Don Fulanito o de alguien importante, pues lo ven mejor. Sin embargo, cuando uno es humilde, sencillo, o es pobre pues lo ven, tal vez no de

menos, pero uno nota la diferencia. Y eso influye en el aprendizaje de un alumno. Porque uno se siente como aislado, se siente que no es importante. A veces eso crea un trauma en uno y uno dice, “ No, pues no estoy bien aquí.” Uno siempre ve a los demás y observa lo que está a su alrededor.

Lamentablemente en mi país eso se da mucho. En la primaria no [y en la secundaria un poco]. Es más que todo en la universidad que se ven esos casos. [Se da] más en la universidad porque ahí uno se encuentra con todo tipo de personas. El que estudia en la universidad es porque a lo mejor económicamente no está bien pero sí tiene posibilidades de hacerlo. Sin embargo, hay quienes van a la universidad porque sí tienen como hacerlo. Y pues a veces uno va a como uno puede. O sea se esfuerza, hace sacrificios. Hace muchos sacrificios por sacar una carrera.

*Completando el bachillerato con énfasis en secretariado comercial.* Me alegré mucho al sacar mi secundaria porque a veces uno no lo logra. Era el primer reto que tenía de sacar el noveno grado [y] fue bonito para mí terminarlo. Iba a ser mi primer graduación. Es algo que uno siempre espera, finalizar el año ... [para] comenzar una nueva etapa de educación.

Cuando yo saqué el noveno grado y continué ya al bachillerato, decidí sacar el secretariado comercial porque ¡siempre me gustó ver a las secretarias! Cuando iba al banco, yo veía a las muchachas. Las veía bien bonitas, bien presentables, y bien arregladas. Sus escritorios bien limpios [y ellas] personas importantes. Yo veía todo bien. Que ellas se relacionaban con diferentes personas y que ellas eran unas personas que tenían una educación diferente. Yo decía, “Algún día voy a ser así.” Eso fue lo que me llevó a sacar el secretariado. Pensé que era lo mejor para mí.

***Primeros Años de la Edad Adulta***

No me había graduado de bachiller cuando comencé a trabajar en una tienda. Fue bonito porque era mi primera experiencia y necesitaba trabajar. [Mi trabajo consistía en] atender a las personas, si necesitaban algo, o colocar los productos en sus lugares. Solo trabajé [allí] como dos meses porque luego me salió [una posición] como cajera en otro lugar.

Trabajé de cajera como 2 ½ años. Esto ya fue en la ciudad de San José. Fue saliendo de bachiller, comencé a trabajar, y me fui a San Gabriel. Como ya trabajaba allá, decidí ... buscar donde vivir allá. Se me hacía más difícil viajar porque salía tarde y ya no había transporte. Desde el año 1990 yo viví en San Gabriel. Al principio viví con mi primo y su esposa [porque] ellos trabajaban allá. Luego, salí embarazada y dejé de trabajar cuando ya tuve mi niño.

Después, busqué otro trabajo como auxiliar de contabilidad y trabajé como 2 años más en una oficina contable. Estando [allí], me cambié de trabajo porque me iban a pagar mejor. Siempre [veía] la forma de buscar otro trabajo por mejorar. Y así fue porque el primer trabajo de auxiliar de contabilidad todo lo hacíamos manual. Llevaba el cardex; todo lo hacía manual o en máquinas manuales. Sin embargo, después [trabajé] en un supermercado grande, que fue el primer supermercado que llegó a San Gabriel. Llené solicitud y por mi experiencia me tomaron como auxiliar de contabilidad de todo lo que a diario se hacía en la tienda. [Allí] ya me enseñaron. Prepararon a una persona para las tiendas de oriente [y] esa persona fui yo. Estuve en [la capital] por tres meses en las oficinas centrales para aprender. [Manejábamos] toda la información a través de la computadora. [Por] cada ticket que a uno le dan cuando

compra en la tienda, va otro quedando en la cinta. Pues cada cantidad, cada producto se digitaba, se grababa, y se hacía un balance general.

Todo esto era nuevo para mí [y] yo era la única persona que lo hacía. Muchas personas compran con tarjetas de crédito. Yo hacía las notas de remisiones. Las mandaba a cobrar a los bancos o a las oficinas de las tarjetas. Contabilizaba lo que a diario se vendía. Y ya al fin del mes, se hacía el balance general. A diario también yo tenía que ver que no hubieran pérdidas en dinero. Prácticamente yo llevaba lo administrativo. Era bastante responsabilidad.

*Cumpliendo con responsabilidades familiares, laborales, y académicas.* Estando allí comencé a estudiar. [En el] supermercado se trabajaba todos los días pero como yo estaba en lo administrativo, yo trabajaba solo hasta el viernes. Tenía la oportunidad de estudiar sábado y domingo. Entonces fue cuando decidí ingresar a la universidad. Comencé a estudiar y trabajar.

Yo siempre quería estudiar pero económicamente no podía. Y ni modo, no pude hacerlo [antes]. Comencé a estudiar cuando ya era mamá. [Era] ya un poco más difícil porque ya [eran] tres papeles diferentes. [Significaba] más responsabilidad estudiar, cuidar el bebé, y trabajar. Sin embargo, como pude lo hice. Logré entrar a la universidad. [Estudiaba] en fines de semana porque no podía en días laborales por mi trabajo. Iba bien. A veces llevaba cuatro materias por ciclo. A veces llevaba las cinco.

Es algo muy bonito cuando uno estudia y a la vez trabaja porque uno lleva a práctica lo que estudia. En la universidad casi siempre es solo teoría. Al menos en [mi país] es [así]. Pero cuando uno está trabajando en la misma rama de su estudio, ya uno siente el estudio

más fácil porque comprende mejor. Es mejor llevar las dos cosas al mismo tiempo [porque] la mente se desarrolla más y [se] obtiene mejor conocimiento.

Luego, estando en la universidad estudiando ingresé a otro trabajo que ya fue en el banco. ¡Fue donde yo siempre quise estar! Mi sueño de cuando era niña. Porque siempre donde estuve, a excepción de mi primer trabajo que estuve de dependiente, ya mi función era de secretaria. Pero no era el lugar adecuado [adonde] yo quería estar.

Ingresé al banco y a la vez seguí estudiando. El banco es una institución muy bonita ... pero sí hay más presión. Hay más responsabilidad. Es muy diferente. Las personas tienen que dar todo [su] tiempo al banco. Es una institución más abierta porque hay más experiencia. Hay más aprendizaje. Siempre hay algo nuevo. [En un banco] la actividad única es obtener lucro. Para eso ellos tienen proyectos [y] productos nuevos. Cuando un producto nuevo iba a salir, ellos siempre nos capacitaban. [Teníamos que] aprender [para] poder atender al público. Casi siempre daban [seminarios] los fines de semana. Entonces, ya así me fue más difícil seguir estudiando ... porque ya le dedicaba más tiempo a los seminarios.

Impartían muchos seminarios. Salía una tarjeta nueva, pues teníamos que estar allí. Había un sistema nuevo, pues habíamos que estar allí. Siempre se preocuparon por capacitarnos. Muchas veces allá en San Gabriel, muchas veces en [la capital]. En eso llegamos al 2000 y fue la dolarización. Fue un caos prácticamente porque tuvimos muchas pruebas. Atendíamos al público en el día [y] en la noche nos quedábamos haciendo las pruebas. Después que cuadraba la sucursal normal, comenzábamos a procesar la misma documentación. Lo mismo, como que si el cliente estuviera allí. Y hasta que cuadraba nuevamente. Lo que ellos querían, era ver si iba a funcionar el sistema. Porque así ellos detectaban donde estaban fallando para no tener problemas a la hora que iba a salir ya en lo

real. Los días de semana salíamos a la una, dos, o tres de la mañana. El fin de semana nos veníamos a [la capital] a hacer lo mismo a otra institución. Fue algo bien tensional. Fue un stress grandísimo que tuvimos.

Éramos todos en el banco. Todo el personal a nivel nacional. El salario era igual. Nunca nos pagaron horas extras, nada. Lo único que nos daban era la cena. Y el fin de semana, nos traían a [la capital]. Tampoco nos pagaban. Nada más nos daban el transporte. Venía un bus grande [porque] éramos como 35 empleados [y] viajábamos todos juntos.

Entonces, era bien difícil [para mí estudiar]. No tenía tiempo disponible para dedicarme a estudiar y a la vez necesitaba el trabajo. Así es que ya no me fue posible continuar con mis estudios. Cuando trabajaba y estudiaba fue el tiempo [el obstáculo]. Llegó un momento que [uno] tiene que decidirse por una opción, o estudiar o trabajar. No podía solo estudiar porque no podría hacerlo. No tenía quien me ayudara. Tuve que dedicarme a trabajar. Y pues realmente eso fue lo que impidió que yo terminara mi carrera: el tiempo y el dinero.

Estuve 3 años completitos [en la universidad]. Cuando trabajaba de lunes a viernes hice 2½ años. Un semestre continué en el banco. Ya de ahí, pues ya no pude. [Hubiera terminado] la licenciatura en Ciencias Jurídicas en máximo 3 años más porque tenía que sacar 50 materias y apenas cursé 20. Si hubiera estudiado en tiempo completo, [sin] trabajar, pues sí me hubiera sido más fácil. En 5 años uno sale.

***Manteniendo una actitud positiva.*** Sí aprendí mucho en el banco, [por ejemplo,] lo que es el sistema bancario, los créditos, tarjetas de crédito y muchas cosas. Nos capacitaron siempre. A un principio yo llegué de secretaria y lo que hacía era atender al público, aperturar cuentas, aperturar depósitos a plazo, las remisiones, hacer cheques de viajeros y

cheques de caja. Pasé como 2 años de secretaria. Ya después fui Secretaria de Gerencia. Ya era algo muy distinto. Yo ya no atendía público. [Hacía] nada más las cosas administrativas de la sucursal o las cosas del gerente y del supervisor. Más que todo me entendía con lo del supervisor. En [esa] sucursal estaba la oficina del supervisor, [quien] es el jefe de los gerentes de la zona oriental. En la zona oriental habían 15 sucursales y él andaba en todas las sucursales. Yo era su secretaria y solo yo sabía donde él estaba.

A veces atendía los clientes especiales para el banco. Los bancos tienen clientes especiales que manejan cuentas muy grandes y el gerente les da preferencia. Entonces ya me buscaban a mí y yo iba donde un compañero a que le procesaran sus depósitos. Me entendía con los gerentes a nivel de la zona oriental o el gerente general [cuando] no estaba el supervisor. Y bueno, esa era ya mi función, además de ser la recepcionista [porque] también tenía yo el teléfono [de toda la sucursal]. Eran ocho líneas. Cómo hacía no sé. Gracias a Dios siempre contesté las llamadas y los clientes nunca se quejaron. Además de eso, yo recibía los correos electrónicos y yo los mandaba. La sucursal donde yo estaba tenía la tesorería [y] le repartía dinero a las demás sucursales de oriente. Yo pedía el dinero al banco central. Hacía envío de los correos. Bueno era una serie de cosas que se hacía. Era muy grande ... [pero] cuando algún trabajo a uno le gusta pues por mucho que sea uno siempre se ubica, ordena su tiempo [y] se organiza bien. Pasé allí mucho tiempo. [Trabajé en el banco hasta] el año pasado que renuncié para venirme [a Estados Unidos].

[Lo que me ayudó a aprender] en el trabajo pienso que fue mi interés. Cuando a uno le interesa, uno rápido aprende. Y sí siempre influye que le enseñan. Siempre hay alguien que le enseña algo nuevo a uno. También es la forma cómo uno hace las cosas o cómo uno las pide. Por ejemplo, entre los compañeros si uno necesita algo de ellos y uno está nuevo,

siempre tiene que pedirlo de buena manera, por lo menos por favor o [decir] necesito ayuda. Eso influye bastante, la forma de ser de uno para que los demás le ayuden. Porque también si uno siempre está pendiente de ayudar a los demás, ellos nunca se van a negar a ayudarlo a uno. Igual [es] con los jefes. [Si] ellos ven que uno se interesa por hacer su trabajo bien, le dan prioridad a uno. Tratan la forma de enseñarle algo nuevo a uno.

La familia también [contribuyó]. En mi caso, mi familia siempre se preocupó porque yo trabajara pero prácticamente fue algo personal. Todo lo que yo he hecho, lo he hecho por mi propia decisión. Salí a buscar trabajo yo sola y gracias a Dios tuve la suerte que siempre encontré. Siempre he sido así. Siempre yo busco. Siempre veo donde se me pueden abrir las puertas, por supuesto que sea en bien. Hoy que he venido acá y que he andado en esto y en lo otro, mi mamá me dice que aquí que allá pero yo le digo si yo no salgo, si yo no busco, nadie me ayuda. Y tengo que hacerlo. Entonces, por eso soy así.

Siempre he colaborado mucho. Cuando he podido y he tenido tiempo siempre lo he hecho y con gusto. Yo le decía a [una pastora de la iglesia] que lo que más me gusta acá es que he encontrado muchas personas buenas. Y ella me dice, “Tú has encontrado personas buenas porque tú eres buena.” Yo realmente no digo que soy buena. Bueno, el lugar no se lo da uno sino que siempre se lo da otra persona pero la verdad siempre trato la forma de poder hacer lo mejor.

[Mi sueño de joven fue] sacar una carrera. Ser alguien en la vida. Tener un futuro diferente. Ser alguien, alguien importante. Porque yo siempre dije que cuando uno es profesional, donde quiera se le abren las puertas y tiene mayor oportunidad para poder lograrlo. Y era lo que más deseaba, tener una carrera. Lamentablemente no pude concluir mi carrera por muchos factores, económicos más que todo. Más sin embargo lo intenté.



***Inmigrando a los Estados Unidos***

Cuando uno no ha venido [a Estados Unidos] su único sueño de venir acá es por superarse y obtener tal vez lo que nunca ha tenido allá. Todo mundo viene... con la ilusión [de] ayudar a su familia [y] vivir una vida diferente a la que hemos vivido. Prácticamente toda persona piensa en venirse por eso, por superarse.

Al principio cuando no conocía [Estados Unidos] ¡me imaginaba un paraíso! Que todo era bien, que uno vivía una vida tranquila, que no habían problemas, que uno todo lo solucionaba. [Que uno vivía tranquilo principalmente en lo] económico. [Que] no había [intranquilidad] como en nuestro país. Acuérdesse que [mi país] fue un país de guerra, un país de violencia, un país destructivo. Ha sido un país que ha destruido a las personas moralmente [y] físicamente. Muchas personas en aquel tiempo de la guerra se vinieron huyendo a todos los conflictos que allá habían, a la violencia. Además de la pobreza que uno vivía, eso hizo a muchas personas emigrar para este país. Uno sabía que al venirse para acá ya no le iba a andar huyendo a nadie. Sabía que si salía a media noche, nadie le iba a hacer nada. Allá en la noche uno no salía porque solo el peligro estaba en la calle. Se sabía que aquí no era así. Son muchos los factores realmente los que influyen para que uno emigre a este país.

***Visitando los Estados Unidos por primera vez.*** La primera vez que yo vine fue por avión. Vine a [una ciudad grande del sureste de Estados Unidos]. Fue lo más emocionante porque era mi primera vez. Siempre desee poder venir para ver a mi mamá. También quería ver a mi hermana pues ya tenía mucho tiempo de no verla. Gracias a Dios se me concedieron mis deseos. Me sentí a la vez bien y mal porque mi mamá llegó de aquí [y] nos reunimos nada más cuatro. Yo siempre he querido que toda la familia [esté reunida porque] casi nunca estuvimos todos juntos.

Mi viaje fue algo bonito. No me lo imaginaba. Para mí era un sueño. Había soñado muchas veces que había venido y esa vez sí se me concedió. Saber que yo estaba aquí en los Estados Unidos [fue] algo que ni me lo creía yo misma. Es muy bonito. No sé ni como explicarlo porque muchas personas desean venir y no pueden. Fue la primera vez. [Estuve en Estados Unidos] veintidós días [y] me fui encantada en ese tiempo.

*Volviendo a los Estados Unidos para quedarse.* [A] mí se me ha sido fácil adaptarme a cualquier situación, tal vez por lo que he vivido. He tenido que dejar de repente algo y luego adaptarme a otra cosa. [Esta segunda vez que vine] sí he sentido los cambios, por ejemplo el clima [y] el ambiente, pero me he adaptado. Venimos de un país muy diferente y al venir acá pues uno se siente raro. Ya es otra vida. [También] las personas. Es más que todo el idioma. Uno quisiera poder aprender el idioma. Al menos yo estoy haciendo lo posible. Eso [la] primera vez es lo más extraño para uno. Necesitar decir algo y no poder es bien difícil. Es lo más difícil que uno siente en este país. El idioma y también [que] uno necesita trabajar y no encuentra [donde].

Realmente [en el trabajo] me he sentido rara. Me he sentido, tal vez no mal pero sí [ha influido] mucho [en mi experiencia]. Yo recuerdo que allá yo tenía mi oficina, era otro ambiente. Aquí he venido a hacer de lo que sea pero a la vez me resigno porque ... tengo mis hijos y tengo que mantenerlos. Eso hace que uno siga adelante ... para ver de tener el pan de cada día como dicen. Es bien diferente porque uno está acostumbrado a otro tipo de trabajo, a otro ambiente. Pero, ni modo, tenemos que adaptarnos a lo que sea. Por eso digo que me adapto a donde sea. Porque es muy importante. A uno de nada le sirve que esté trabajando y pensando “Que mejor estuviera allá. Que aquí, que esto y lo otro” [porque] entonces nunca

llega a nada. Lo importante es que uno tenga trabajo, que lo haga y que a las personas para quienes uno trabaja se sientan bien con lo que uno les hace.

[Mi familia] ha influido mucho [en mis experiencias de aprendizaje en este país] porque me ha apoyado. Por ejemplo, en mi casa siempre que voy a hacer algo nuevo ... se lo hago saber a mi mamá. Y ella me dice, “Está bien. Andá. Hacelo. Alguien te puede ayudar. Buscá alguien que te ayude.” Al principio a ella no le gustaba. Incluso me decía que no buscara trabajo. Me decía, “Aquí vas a hacer cosas que allá nunca las has hecho. Y no te va a gustar o te van a ver mal.” Pero ella siempre ha estado pendiente. Mis hermanos también. [Cuando] tengo que salir, tienen que prestarme el carro ... o tienen que irme a dejar o a recoger. Entonces, sí ha influido mucho mi familia. Me han apoyado mucho, gracias a Dios.

Ya estando en el lugar, ya que yo he salido y he buscado, [me han apoyado otras personas]. Antes no porque no me conocían. Pero he llegado a lugares, por ejemplo, aquí a la iglesia yo vine. Aquí he encontrado mucha ayuda. [En] otro grupo de [un] muchacho [centroamericano] también. Él me ha ayudado mucho. Y [en otra] iglesia [donde] yo siempre he ido ... me [di] cuenta de sus actividades, me ofrecí de voluntaria y sí me han ayudado mucho. Me he dado a conocer y a lo mejor por eso me han ayudado y porque saben que necesito ayuda. Siento que sí han influido otras personas que ... ahora conozco y [a quienes] estoy muy agradecida por brindarme su apoyo.

### ***Experiencias Recientes de Aprendizaje***

En la actualidad aprendo [el idioma inglés] de varias formas [y] en varias partes. Primero, estoy asistiendo a clases de inglés en la iglesia. Es un programa que tienen y venimos dos días a la semana. La segunda parte es en el trabajo porque me relaciono con personas americanas y tengo que estar pendiente de lo que me dicen ellos, de lo que yo digo,

[y] de lo que se hace. También [aprendo] en la casa con mi hermano. Él me habla en inglés y [yo] trato la forma de contestarle.

*Aprendiendo inglés en un programa auspiciado por la iglesia.* La prioritaria es la iglesia donde vengo a las clases. Es una iglesia americana muy grande y muy voluntaria. Se presta a ayudarnos a [los] Latinos. Somos un grupo de personas que venimos a las clases. [El] lugar donde venimos es muy cómodo. Nos dan la información y la papelería suficiente para nosotros poder aprender. [Algunos] maestros nos hablan en español y en inglés y otros solo en inglés. Tal vez no haya suficientes maestros ... pero pienso que al menos nos toman en cuenta y nos ayudan de esa forma. Asistimos a las clases los martes y jueves de 6:00 a 8:00 de la noche. Recibimos una hora de clase. Luego nos dan un break de 15 minutos [y] hay un refrigerio. [Después], iniciamos nuevamente las clases [por una] hora más para ya finalizar el día.

Los martes y los jueves [arreglo a] mis niños y me vengo a las clases con ellos. Nos reunimos todos primero para [cantar] una alabanza ... a veces en inglés, a veces en español. Luego nos dividen dependiendo de lo que ya uno sabe. No estamos todos juntos porque no nos enseñan lo mismo. Estamos en varias salas. Ya luego uno con sus libros busca el salón de clase [para] escuchar la maestra a ver de qué tema se va [a tratar]. Nos dan el material del cual vamos a estudiar y cuando tengo dudas pregunto.

Aprendemos pronunciando, escuchando, poniendo atención, practicando, [y] repitiendo las palabras que nos enseñan. También escribimos. Al menos yo cuando dicen algo (como sé que en inglés se pronuncia de una forma y se escribe de otra) pues escribo para darle la forma de cómo yo entenderlo mejor. Lo escribo en inglés [y] escribo cómo se pronuncia según como lo escucho. También escribo el significado en español, si no lo sé,

para después yo practicarlo [y] memorizarme las palabras. Más que todo trabajamos con el diccionario, el libro que acá nos han proporcionado. Cuando están repitiendo algo que está en el libro pues lo que hago es eso: escribir a la par cómo se pronuncia.

La iglesia tiene sus salas donde nos enseñan. Ya están acomodadas las mesas [y] las sillas. [Es cómodo] porque estamos en un lugar como más privado. No somos muchos [y] no hay mucha interferencia. [La sala donde yo estudio] es chica. Han elaborado como un tipo pizarra de papel bond donde escriben [y] nos explican. Para las personas que estamos pienso que sería mejor estar cada quien con su mesa. Lamentablemente no tenemos escritorio, solamente nos sentamos. Unimos las sillas, la maestra nos explica, y nosotros estamos ahí escuchando. Escribimos ¡a como podemos! Con los cuadernos ... sobre las piernas de uno o sobre las manos. Por esa parte es bastante incómodo porque para empezar no se escribe bien. No es lo mismo como tener fijo el cuaderno en algo. Pero de todas maneras es importante porque algo nos enseñan y nosotros algo aprendemos.

No tenemos la misma profesora siempre. Hay una encargada en la iglesia [que] elige la persona que va a estar con determinado grupo [cada] día y no siempre es la misma persona. Siempre son diferentes maestras. A unas entendemos más y a otras menos. En el caso de las americanas, hay unas que no saben hablar español, solo inglés. Y así a nosotros se nos hace más difícil porque si no entendemos, no podemos preguntarle “ ¿Eso qué significa en español?” Yo siento que es más difícil aprender así. No es como una persona que hable los dos idiomas. Porque se comprende mejor.

La cultura de los americanos es diferente a la de uno de Latino y siempre se nota la diferencia. Se aprende más cuando [la maestra] es alguien que conoce la cultura Latina, o sea que tiene las dos culturas. Uno aprende mejor porque le da más confianza. Uno puede

preguntar muy bien las cosas. Uno puede decirle esto no lo entiendo o esto es así. Es más fácil para uno de Latino poder captar las cosas que cuando [la maestra] habla solo el inglés que es su primera lengua. Es muy diferente porque se puede comunicar menos uno. No existe esa confianza. Aunque ellos quieran brindarla, difícilmente puede uno captar la idea que ellos quieren decirle. Porque a veces no nos entendemos.

A muchas de [las maestras] no las conozco muy a fondo. No sé si ellas son personas profesionales en la materia porque tengo poco tiempo de asistir y no hay la suficiente confianza para poder preguntarle, “¿Y usted qué es? ¿Trabaja aquí?” Sin embargo sé de dos [personas] que están involucradas en la iglesia. [Una] es la pastora de la iglesia [y otra es la encargada del programa]. Pero de las demás no sé. Incluso la vez pasada vinieron unas señoritas porque querían aprender español. Entonces, en el caso de las americanas, a veces lo hacen también por venir a aprender el español.

Acá con las compañeras casi siempre hay alguna que le dice a uno, “Es así,” pero yo siento que no hay mucha unión. A lo mejor no hay mucha disposición entre nosotras [para] ponernos de acuerdo y decir “Mirá, una tarde, un fin de semana, estudiemos, vamos a aprender.” Preguntarnos una con otra o repasar lo que el jueves estudiamos. No existe eso porque todas las personas tienen mucho que hacer. Y pues a veces vienen unas, a veces venimos otras. No hay suficiente confianza. No hay suficiente amistad por decirlo así. [Para mí es importante que el grupo] sea más unido. Que participemos juntas todas. Que se aporten ideas. Que se elija una [maestra] y cuál es la mejor para aprender. Pienso que sería lo más conveniente. Nos ayudaría a todos. Pero realmente es algo que no existe por el momento.

Para mí es importante todo. Tener personas [a quienes] uno puede captarle mejor las cosas [y] que puedan enseñarle mejor. Que tengan una manera más activa de [enseñar].

Porque a veces hemos tenido maestras que son aburridas y pues, imagínese saber que no puede ni preguntarle algo. Sí, yo siento que la clase se vuelve aburrida. No es siempre pero sí se da. No es como alguien que sabe cómo enseñar. La clase incluso se vuelve dinámica y es una forma de las que uno aprende.

[En clase] a veces me siento mal porque quisiera hablar bien el idioma y no puedo. Me he sentido triste. Me he sentido desesperada porque a veces uno quiere aprenderlo y no puede... Uno se siente de una forma tal vez no frustrado pero [desanimado al] saber que uno no puede hacer algo que uno desea. Y sí, a veces uno no deja de sentirse triste de saber que andamos en un país [donde] si no hablamos esta lengua todo es bien difícil. Nada más eso pero a la vez yo digo, “Tengo que aprender” y por eso trato la forma de no faltar y venir. Porque sé que, si me quedo en la casa, va a ser más difícil aprender.

Me siento bien cuando sé que me están enseñando algo que yo no sé y que me va a servir en un futuro para mí misma, para mi vida diaria. Me siento feliz porque estoy logrando algo que quiero y porque estoy luchando por un día lograr esa meta que me he propuesto. Es lo que más deseo: aprender el idioma. Y sí me siento muy contenta al saber que algún día, si Dios lo permite, voy a dejar de ser lo que ahorita soy y poder identificarme como una persona bilingüe.

***Aprendiendo inglés en el trabajo.*** [También] aprendo [inglés] en el trabajo. Trabajo en una fábrica donde se hacen diferentes [tipos] de empaque como de juguetes, sopas, especies, y pastas. Además de hacer el trabajo, también [aprendo] el idioma porque me relaciono con el manager y la manager que son americanos. Y como quiera uno aprende de ellos. Ellos se acercan a uno y le dicen las cosas. Tengo que entenderlos y sí aprendo más

porque en ese momento tiene que saber [uno] qué es lo que le están diciendo. Así es cómo también uno aprende, relacionándose con ellos.

Trato la forma de decir las cosas como puedo. Lo hago porque sé que me van a entender. Antes de [hablar], pienso qué es lo que les voy a decir para que me entiendan mejor. Y la verdad no siento ningún nerviosismo o algo. Al contrario, me alegra cuando sé que he dicho algo y me han entendido. Siento que sí puedo y que lo estoy logrando; que me puedo defender o decir algo. Cuando digo algo yo [pienso], “¡Lo dije!;Lo dije en inglés y me entendió!” Sí me alegro porque he aprendido algo.... Me siento bien. Sé que ya puedo hacerlo y que en un futuro lo voy a hacer mejor. Me da mucha satisfacción. Me da fuerzas para seguir adelante.

Sin embargo, si no puedo decir nada yo me siento mal. Cuando me dicen algo y no puedo entender nada de lo que me dicen, me siento mal. Me siento triste ... de no poder corresponder a lo que me están diciendo por no saber el idioma. Sí, me siento mal la verdad. Me siento frustrada, o mejor dicho fracasada, porque en [lo que respecta al] idioma en este país sí me he sentido muchas veces muy mal. Hace dos años tuve una experiencia muy triste que yo hasta lloré por no saber el idioma. Iba de aquí al Salvador en el aeropuerto con mis niños. Llegué al aeropuerto de [una ciudad grande del Medio Oeste] y no había ni una persona Latina. Y bueno, fue algo trágico para mí. No saber el idioma. Y por eso hoy digo, “Tengo que aprenderlo.”

Lo que pasó fue que yendo de aquí para [esa ciudad] me dejó el vuelo. No llegué a tiempo y tuve que tomar otro vuelo acá. Cuando llegué allá, pues tuve que ir a la caseta a pedir un cupo y no podía hacerlo. Veían mis boletos y que el avión ya se había ido. Y bueno, fue un caos completo. Gracias a Dios como a la hora de estar allí sin hacer nada, sin poder



decir nada, y las personas queriéndome ayudar ... me encontré con una muchacha y ella me ayudó. Me escribió en un papel qué era lo que yo quería y se los presentó. Ese día fue terrible para mí por no saber el idioma. Ya después sí me dieron el cupo y lo que hicieron fue llamar un traductor para que me tradujera lo que me decían. Pero sí ¡fue un día inolvidable! Ese día yo deseaba quizás no haber venido a este país porque iba con mi niña tiernita de dos meses y medio, con mi otro niño. [Me sentí] desesperada de estar en un lugar [donde] no conocía a nadie. No conocía el lugar, no sabía qué hacer y no sabía ni adonde ir a buscar el avión. ¿Cómo le iba a hacer? ¿Cómo pedir ayuda? Fue bien difícil.

Por el momento [en el trabajo no he sentido esa desesperación] porque si me dicen algo, se relaciona con el trabajo. Y como ya tengo un poco de conocimiento de lo que se hace, pues yo siento que les entiendo. Ya no es así como antes porque ahora tengo un poco de más ventaja. En aquel tiempo nunca había asistido a una clase de inglés. Sin embargo, ya llevo varias clases y pues ya algo he aprendido. Y yo pienso que ya es diferente.

***Aprendiendo inglés en la familia.*** [También aprendo inglés] con mi hermano en la casa. [Es mi hermano] menor, el que está estudiando. [Tiene] 18 años, va al décimo [grado, y] habla bastante bien el inglés. [Él] no trabaja. Después de llegar de la escuela se va al gimnasio ...y no tiene otro entretenimiento. Él me habla en inglés. Me dice, “Vamos a hablar inglés porque así vas a aprender más.” Nos ponemos a platicar más que todo en la noche. Cuando llego de las clases, siempre me pregunta, “¿Qué hicieron ahora?” y le enseño los libros. Ya entonces es cuando él comienza. Me ayuda a repasar o me dice, “Mirá, esto se pronuncia así o esto se dice así.” [Algunas] veces me ha sacado varias listas de preguntas que él [mismo utiliza] en la vida diaria.

¡También a veces [aprendo] con mi niño! Como también él va a su escuela a veces él me dice, “Necesito hacer esto. Venga, me dejaron tarea. Venga a ayudarme para que aprenda.” Y sí él me ayuda. Está comenzando [a aprender inglés] pero sí ¡digamos que sabe más que yo! Siempre me dice “Yo sé más que usted.” Se siente él orgulloso. Le digo yo, “Pero tú vas todo el día y todos los días a la escuela y yo no. Además a ti no te preocupa nada y a mí sí.” Y me dice él, “Es que en ese momento usted no piense en nada. Yo eso hago para aprender.” Pero bueno, de una u otra forma le ayudo [y] él me ayuda también.

### ***Reflexiones Personales***

Yo siento que he aprendido mucho [en este país]. En donde trabajo ahorita he aprendido a manejar máquinas que yo no conocía. He aprendido un poco también el idioma, poquito pero estoy aprendiéndolo. He aprendido a sentirme prácticamente independiente en este país, yo con mis hijos. [Además], siempre he sabido valorar a las demás personas pero hoy ... me he encontrado con personas diferentes, de otros países. [Personas] que hablan diferentes idiomas. He aprendido a valorarlas a ellas, aunque no sean del mismo país. Porque todos somos seres humanos, todos merecemos respeto, y todos tenemos derechos. Es importante aprender de las demás personas. Uno aprende porque ... siempre hay algo diferente y todas las personas somos capaces de enseñar algo bueno.

Pienso que la forma que yo aprendo es fijándome. Siendo una persona observadora, poniendo atención, interesándome por lo que las demás personas hacen o por lo que yo quiero aprender. Cuando uno necesita saber y ser alguien, uno se preocupa por hacerlo. También porque uno tiene [hijos]. Por ejemplo en mi caso, yo tengo mis dos niños y yo digo, los hijos siempre siguen los ejemplos de sus padres. Algún día si yo soy alguien mi hijo va a decir, “Mi mamá es una profesional. Yo tengo que hacerlo.” O mi niña también. Por eso

siempre me he preocupado y he querido ser alguien. Porque quiero darle un buen ejemplo a mis hijos. Que ellos se sientan también importantes. Que sean unos niños de bien y puedan ayudar a la sociedad en un futuro. Entonces, por eso siempre mi forma de aprender es observando, asistiendo, viendo, preguntando, o interesándome por todo lo bueno.

Yo le digo a mi mamá que si en [mi país] nunca fui nadie, que yo aquí quiero ser alguien. Quiero sentirme importante para poder ayudar a las demás personas porque yo siempre necesité que me ayudaran. Así como yo [lo] necesité, yo sé que hay muchas personas que necesitan que uno les ayude. Y ya que estoy en un país de oportunidades, es mi mayor deseo poder servirle a las demás personas. También [deseo] poderme superar en todos los aspectos, yo misma y mi familia. Ese es mi mayor deseo. Dios quiera que se cumpla.

### ***Dulce's Life Story in English***

What follows is the English translation of Dulce's life story of learning. The original version of her story in Spanish can be found on page 254.

#### ***Childhood and Adolescence***

I grew up in a *cantón* [a county district], called Paraje del Chí. It's in the western region of a Central American country. Chí is the town, and it belongs to San Gabriel County. It's very pretty. It's moderately cool. It has a pleasant atmosphere and there's unity among residents. Many of the residents made sacrifices to go to school and become educated. Many are professionals. Perhaps we don't have everything, but we have what's necessary for living. It's where one would always like to stay. We have our families there. It's what we miss the most: our land, our people, our home... The district is very large. I would say 3,000 families live there today. It's very large. My whole family is from Paraje del Chí. I always lived there

until I turned 15 years old. When I graduated from high school and started working, I had to move to the city of San Gabriel.

*Enjoying elementary school.* My father was influential to my learning. Learning was important for him. It was also important for my mother, but he was the one who always said, “You have to learn. You have to study. You have to be somebody in life.” He taught me to write my name before I started school. I was only five years old. When I started first grade, I already knew how to write my name. When I came home from school, he taught me how to draw oval shapes so I could improve my handwriting. He told me about foreign countries. My father wasn’t a teacher, but he liked learning and he wanted me to like it as well. He helped me a lot.

I understood things easily at a young age. I was a child who liked going to school and was quick at grasping ideas. That was unusual because in district schools one is not taught as well as children who go to city schools. There were two schools in the district. Both belonged to the Department of Education. I studied in the largest school, where we were taught better because it had more teachers. The other school was smaller with fewer teachers. In my country of origin, school is for everyone; it’s mixed from the start. In my family, I am the eldest of six children. We all attended the same school.

I liked going to school and I always thought about studying. I spent time on all subjects. I liked Math very much. It was my favorite subject. When I was young, we were taught to count with our fingers. We also used maize and bean kernels. The teacher was ingenious in teaching us new things so we wouldn’t get bored. When you like being taught, you learn.

At the time, we were assigned one teacher for the whole year. I especially remember one of my teachers. I was always close to her. She held me in high regard. She was affectionate with me. Once, she even invited me to her home. I was in second grade. She took me to her home, and I always felt that I was as special to her as she was to me. She was my grade teacher for a long time because she was assigned to my group for several years. Therefore, we developed a sense of familiarity. When my group reached sixth grade, we were assigned a different grade teacher.

I always got along with my peers. I had the same group of peers throughout elementary school; there was unity among us. I was always a withdrawn person, a simple, humble person. Perhaps that's why I never had trouble with other students. I was not withdrawn in the sense of being isolated, but I was reserved. I knew when something was good or bad. If I saw someone starting to make trouble, I held back from participating. When it was something that could be bad for me, I didn't do it. If it was good for me, then I participated and went along with everybody.

In elementary, we went to school from 7:00 a.m. to noon. After school, I helped my mother at home because I was old enough to do so, or I did my homework. Most of the time I did homework because I was always thinking about completing assignments or memorizing the multiplication tables. Sometimes, I did some street vending after school. I helped my aunt. She was a peddler, and I helped her.

You always learn outside of school because there's always something new to learn. Outside of school, I learned handicrafts. I learned to do embroidery and to make artificial flowers as well as yarn bracelets. I had a classmate who knew handicrafts. She was very creative and she taught me for fun.

*Excelling in junior high school.* Junior high school was very different. It was a different phase for me because I had to change schools. Well, from seventh to ninth grade, I didn't change schools, but I did change teachers. Starting in seventh grade, we had a different teacher for every subject. It was also different because you have a different perspective. You go from being a child to becoming an adolescent.

During that time I loved learning, knowing. I always wanted to learn something and I thought, "I have to do it. I have to study." I liked being involved in school activities. I was always part of the student board. We came up with ideas for raising funds for our school. We thought about the end of the year and having good-bye parties. It was a nice time for me. I got along with my peers and I never had any problems with the teachers, thanks to God.

In junior high, I enjoyed making myself known ... I liked to be complimented. I liked not being shy, but being open. It wasn't that I enjoyed getting compliments in a materialistic manner, but I liked standing out. Sometimes people will ask you to do something and you say, "No, I'm embarrassed. I'm not sure. I don't want to." I always made an effort to collaborate. I liked being involved. At student meetings, I set an example because I was always involved in everything.

I liked helping, because after being on the student board I became the secretary for the parents' association. My younger siblings were already going to school. I took on the maternal role in my family at an early age because ... my mother had to immigrate to this country. She had to leave us behind. It wasn't that she abandoned us. An opportunity opened up for her and she had to take it. Therefore, I was in charge of my siblings and I represented them at parents' meetings. At those meetings, the principal used me as an example... because I helped in many of the school's activities. I was always involved. He knew that I was a

support to my siblings and that anything I did would be reflected on them. Those were the good principles I instilled in my siblings.

In junior high, I had a special teacher who helped me very much. He always showed concern for me. He was our grade teacher and he taught us math. He was a cultured person and an excellent teacher. He was humanitarian. He took interest in others, in students, in our learning. He always made us feel important, both inside and outside of class. He helped us, even in his home. It was like him to help those who were most in need, and he was a very special person for me. I always felt supported by him.

He was like that with all students, but he was closer to my family. He visited my mother's home. I think both factors were influential, his interest in teaching and his closeness to my family. I don't think I was an excellent student, but I never caused trouble and I was always interested in learning. Some teachers consider that important and know how to appreciate it in a student. Sometimes, it's their way of getting closer and trying to help the student morally or intellectually.

I always appreciated teachers who were interested in their students' learning. They didn't teach only for the salary; they wanted us to learn. I think that's an important quality in an educator because there are those who teach only for the salary or because it's their profession and they need to exploit their degree. They teach to benefit themselves, not others. On the other hand, there are those who give everything of themselves. Everyone needs to earn money to survive, but some people help... in exchange for nothing.

I didn't like it when teachers favored students who had a higher social or economic status. Some teachers are like that. There's usually favoritism. It's not all teachers, but there are instances when a teacher shows preference for Mister so-and-so's son. When you're

humble, simple, or poor you notice a difference in the teacher's attitude. That impacts your learning because you feel isolated, as if you're unimportant. Sometimes the impact is longstanding and you think, "No, this is not the place for me." You're always aware of others, and you observe what goes on around you.

Unfortunately, in my country of origin, favoritism is commonplace. It's not as common in elementary or secondary school. It occurs most often at the university level. Favoritism is commonplace in the university because you find all kinds of people. Students attending a university may not necessarily be rich, but they have the means to do it. Some students are well off. In contrast, some of us have to make extraordinary efforts. Some of us make many sacrifices to pursue a career.

***Completing high school with a major in commercial secretarial skills.*** I was very happy when I graduated from junior high school, because some students don't make it. Graduating from ninth grade was my first challenge, and it was a nice accomplishment. It was my first graduation. I was eager to end the year... so I could start a new educational phase.

Upon graduating from ninth grade, I went on to high school. I decided to major in commercial secretarial skills, because I always liked watching the secretaries! Every time I went to the bank, I saw the young women. They looked so pretty and well groomed. Their desks were very clean, and they looked important. I thought everything was good. They interacted with a different kind of people and they had a different kind of education. I used to think, "Someday, I will be like them." That's why I majored in commercial secretarial skills. I thought it was the best option for me.



### *Early Adulthood*

I hadn't yet graduated from high school when I started working in a store. It was a nice first experience, and I needed to work. My job entailed attending to clients and shelving products. I only worked in the store for two months because I got another job as a cashier elsewhere.

I worked as a cashier for 2 ½ years. This was in the city of San Gabriel. As soon as I finished high school, I started working and I moved to San Gabriel. Commuting was difficult for me because I got out of work late and there were no more buses. I lived in San Gabriel since 1990. At first, I lived with a cousin and his wife; they worked in the city. Then, I got pregnant and I stopped working when I had the baby.

Later, I looked for a job as accounting assistant and I worked for two more years in an accounting firm. I left that job because I was offered a higher-paying position elsewhere. I always sought out jobs that could help me improve. At my first job, we did everything manually. I handled the cardex; everything was done either manually or using mechanical equipment. Then, I worked at a large supermarket. It was the first supermarket that came to San Gabriel. I put in an application and, based on my experience, they gave me a job as assistant accountant of daily transactions. They taught me. They trained one person from all stores in the western region. That was me. I spent three months learning at the central offices in the capital city. We handled everything by computer. For every ticket a person gets at the store, another is recorded. Every amount, every product was digitized and recorded for processing the balance sheet.

All this was new for me, and I was the only person doing it at the store. Many people used credit cards. I made the charge notes and sent them to banks and credit card agencies. I

kept an accounting of daily sales and did a financial statement at the end of the month. Every day, I also had to make sure the store wasn't losing money. I was practically in charge of all administrative work. It entailed a lot of responsibility.

*Keeping up with family, work, and college.* I went back to school while working at the supermarket. The store was open seven days a week. However, since I had an administrative role, I only worked Monday through Friday. I had Saturday and Sunday for studying. That was when I decided to start college.

I had always wanted to continue my studies, but it had been beyond my financial means. I wasn't able to do it before. I was already a Mom when I went back to school. It was harder because I had three different roles to fulfill. Being in college, taking care of the baby, and working meant a lot more responsibilities for me. But I managed. I was able to start college. I studied on weekends because it was impossible for me to do it during the week. I was doing well. Sometimes, I carried four courses per semester. Other times, I carried five.

It's very nice when you work and go to school, because you're able to apply what you learn. At the university, the emphasis is on theory. At least in my country, theory is emphasized. However, when you work in the field you're preparing for, your studies become much easier because you understand better. It's better to work and study at the same time because it helps to develop the mind and you learn better.

I was attending the university when I started a new job at a bank. That was where I had always wanted to work! It was my childhood dream come true. With the exception of my very first job, I had always done secretarial work. But it hadn't been in places appropriate to my aspirations.

I continued studying while working at the bank. The bank is a nice institution... but there's more pressure. It entails more responsibility. It's different. Employees are expected to dedicate all of their time to the bank. It's an open institution because it provides you with more experience. There's more learning. There's always something new. Making profit is the only purpose in a bank, so they create projects and new products. Every time a new product was coming out, we were trained. We had to learn in order to assist clients. Training was often done on weekends. So, it became harder for me to continue studying...because I devoted more time to those workshops.

The bank offered many workshops. A new card came out; we had to be there. A new system was installed; we had to be there. They always trained us. Many workshops were offered in San Gabriel; many were offered in the capital city. Then, we arrived in 2000 and the economy switched to a U.S. dollar system. It was chaos because we had to do trial runs. Everything we processed during the day, we repeated in trial runs during the night. Once the agency's financial statement was done, we started processing the same documentation. We processed everything as if the clients were there with us, until the statement was done for a second time. They wanted to test if the system would work. They wanted to avoid running into an unexpected system flaw. During the week, we finished working at around 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 in the morning. On weekends, we had to do trial runs at a different institution in the capital city. It was a tense situation. It caused us a lot of stress.

Everyone working for the bank at the national level had to do the same. Salaries stayed the same. They never paid us overtime. They only provided dinner for us. On weekends, we were taken to the capital city. We weren't paid either. They only provided transportation. They sent a large bus because there were 35 of us and we all traveled together.

Studying became very difficult for me. I didn't have the time to study, and I needed my job. It was just impossible for me to continue studying. When I worked and studied, time became a barrier. You reach a point when you have to decide. It's either work or school. I couldn't only go to school. I didn't have anyone to help me. I had to work. What kept me from completing my degree was time and money.

I completed three full years of studies at the university. While working Monday to Friday, I did the first 2½ years. While working at the bank, I did one more semester. After that, I couldn't study anymore. In three more years, I could have earned a Law degree. The degree required taking 50 courses, and I only did 20. If I could have studied full time, without having to work, I could have graduated in five years.

***Maintaining a positive attitude.*** I learned much working at the bank; for instance, I learned about the banking system, bank credits, credit cards, and other things. They always trained us. At first, I was a secretary who assisted clients with bank accounts, CD's, money transfers, traveler's checks, and cashier checks. I did that kind of work for two years. Afterwards, I became the secretary for management. That was different. I was in charge of administrative matters, and I assisted the agency's manager as well as the bank's supervisor. I worked mostly for the supervisor [because his] office was part of our agency. He supervised all agency managers in the western zone. Fifteen agencies operated in the western zone and he visited them all. I was his secretary and I was the only one who knew how to get hold of him.

I sometimes assisted special clients. Banks have special clients who handle large accounts and the manager shows them preferential treatment. Those clients came to me, and I requested a colleague to process their deposits. When the supervisor was out of the office, I

communicated with the western zone managers or with the general manager at my agency. Those were my duties, besides acting as the receptionist, because I was also in charge of answering the phone. The agency had eight telephone lines. I don't know how I did it. Thank God, I always answered the calls and there were no complaints from clients. In addition, I received and sent electronic mail. My agency also had the treasurer's office and we distributed money to other agencies in the western region. I requested money from the central bank, and I distributed the money. There were so many things done at that agency! It was very large... but when you like the job, you adapt yourself, you schedule your time, and you get organized.

My own interest in learning helped me to learn at work. When you're interested, you learn fast. It does help when people teach you. There's always someone to teach you something new. How you do things and how you ask for things is also helpful. For instance, if you are a new employee and you need something from a co-worker, you must ask in a polite manner. At least, you must say please and admit you need help. Your way of asking influences how much help you get. If you are attentive to the needs of others, they will never refuse to help you. It's the same with the bosses. If they see that you are interested in doing a good job, they support you. They try to teach you new skills.

Family also contributes. In my case, my family was always supportive of my work. However, mine was a personal endeavor. Everything I've done has stemmed from my own decisions. I searched for work on my own. Thanks to God, I was always lucky to find a job. It's always been like that. I always search. I always look for open doors, in a good sense, of course. Now that I've come here and I've been searching, my mother doesn't like it. I tell her that unless I go out to search, nobody will help me. I have to do it. That's why I'm this way.

I've always collaborated. Whenever I've had the time, I've been happy to help. I was telling a minister in church the other day that what I've liked most during my stay is that I've found good people. She said, "You've found good people, because you're a good person." I don't think I'm good. Well, that's not for me to say, but I always try to find a way of giving my best.

My dream as a young woman was to pursue a career. To be somebody in life. To have a better future. To be somebody, somebody important. I've always thought that professionals find open doors everywhere and they have a better opportunity of making it. Having a career was my biggest desire. Unfortunately, I couldn't finish my studies due to many factors, most of all financial factors. But I tried.

### ***Immigrating to the United States***

Before coming to the United States, you dream of immigrating to better yourself and to have the things you've never had. Everyone comes wishing to help their family and wanting to experience a life different from what they left behind. Almost everyone thinks that way. You come to better yourself.

At first, when I hadn't been to the United States, I imagined a paradise! I thought everything was good, that you could lead a serene life, that there would be no troubles, that everything had a solution. I thought you could have a peaceful life without financial struggles. I thought you could live without the worries prevalent in my country. Remember that my home country was a country of war, a country of violence, a destructive country. It destroyed people both morally and physically. During the war, many people fled from the violence. Besides poverty, that was the reason people immigrated to the United States. People knew they would no longer have to hide from anybody. They knew they could walk

out at night without being in harm's way. Back in my country, you could not go out at night because only danger awaited you in the streets. People knew it was different here. Many factors have influenced our immigration to this country.

*Visiting the United States for the first time.* On my first trip, I came by plane. I traveled to a large city in the Southeastern United States. It was exciting because it was my first time here. I had always wanted to come to see my mother. I also wanted to see my sister, whom I hadn't seen in a long time. Thanks to God, my wishes were granted. I felt good and bad at the same time, because my mother met us there but we were only four. I've always wanted my whole family to reunite because we've seldom been all together.

My trip was nice. I couldn't have imagined it. It was like a dream. I had dreamed so many times that I would be here, and it finally happened. It was hard for me to believe I was in the United States. It's a very nice feeling. I don't even know how to explain it. So many people want to come and can't do so. It was my first time. I visited for 22 days, and I was delighted about my trip.

*Coming back to stay.* For me it has been easy to adapt to new situations, perhaps because of what I've experienced. I've had to suddenly leave behind something and adapt to new conditions. Now that I've come to the United States a second time, I've perceived differences, for instance, the climate and the environment. But I've adapted myself. We come from a very different country. It feels strange to live here. It's a different life. It's also the people. It's mostly the language. You wish you could learn the language. At least, I'm making an effort to do so. That's what feels most strange the first time you immigrate. It's difficult when you need to say something and you can't. It's the biggest difficulty you

experience in this country: the language. Needing a job, not knowing where to find one, is also very hard.

At work, I've felt strange. I can't say that I've felt badly, but it has certainly influenced my overall experience. I had an office in my country; it was a different environment. Here, I've come to do whatever I can. I resign myself because... I have two children and I have to provide for them. That keeps me going... knowing that I have to put bread on the table, as people say. The experience is very different because you're used to another line of work and to a different environment. There's no choice; you have to adapt to whatever is available. That's why I say that I adapt to anything. It's very important. It doesn't help to be working and thinking, "I would be better off back home. If this, that, or the other." That doesn't take you anywhere. It's important to have a job, to do it well, and to have the people you work for be satisfied with the work you do for them.

My family has influenced my learning experiences in this country. For instance, whenever I am about to start something new... I tell my mother about it. She says, "It's okay. Do it. Someone can help you. Look for someone who can help you." At first, she didn't like it. She even told me not to look for work. She said, "In this country you will do things you have never done before. You will not like it. Perhaps they will not see you in a kindly manner." However, she has always been attentive to my needs. I can say the same of my siblings. When I need to go out, they lend me the car... or they take me where I need to go. Therefore, my family has been a great influence. They have supported me, thanks to God.

Once I'm in a place, once I have gone out to find it, other people have helped me. It hasn't happened before, because they didn't know me. I have found places like this church, where I came on my own. I've found much help here. There's another group led by a young



man from Central America. He has helped me a lot. I've always attended another church... I took notice of the church's activities, I offered to do volunteer work, and they've helped me. I've made myself known. Perhaps that's why they've helped me; also because they know I need help. Yes, I think other people have influenced my experiences here, people I've met and to whom I'm grateful for their support.

### ***Recent Learning Experiences***

Currently, I learn English in different ways and in different places. First, I attend ESL lessons at the church. The program meets twice a week. The second place is at work because I interact with Americans and I have to be aware of what they tell me, how I respond, and what is done there. I also learn English at home with my brother. He speaks to me in English and I try to respond.

***Learning English at an ESL church program.*** The main place where I learn is at church, where I take lessons. It is a large generous American church. It tries to help us Latinos. A group of us comes to class. The building is comfortable. We are provided enough materials for our learning to take place. Some teachers speak both English and Spanish; others speak only English. Perhaps the number of teachers is insufficient... but at least they are considering us and trying to help us in that way. We come to class on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. We have one hour of class, and a 15-minute break. Snacks are provided. Then, we take class for another hour to finish up the day.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, I prepare my children and come with them to church. The whole group meets to sing hymns... sometimes in English, sometimes in Spanish. Then, we are split into smaller groups depending on how much we know. We don't all take class together because we aren't taught the same material. We occupy different rooms. Therefore,

we each take our books into the assigned classroom to learn about the day's topic. We are given materials and when I have any questions, I ask.

We learn by pronouncing, listening, practicing, and repeating the words we are taught. We also write. At least I do. When they say something in English, I write it down in a way I can understand it because I know that English is pronounced differently from its written form. Therefore, I write the phrase in English and I write how it's pronounced according to what I hear. I also write the meaning in Spanish, so I can later practice and memorize the words. We mostly work with the dictionary, which is a textbook used in the program. When we review the book, that's what I do. I write, on the side, how to pronounce the words.

The church has several rooms that are used as classrooms. The rooms have tables and chairs. They're comfortable because the rooms are private. There aren't many of us and there are few interruptions. The room where I learn is small. It has a portable paperboard that is used in place of a blackboard. In my group, it would be better if we had a desk or table surface for each student. Unfortunately, we don't have any desks; we only have seats. We bring together the chairs, the teacher explains, and we listen. We write however we can! Over the notebooks... on our lap, or using our hands for support. In that sense, it's rather uncomfortable because it's hard to write. It isn't the same as having the notebook set over a stable surface. However, the class is important because we're being taught and we at least learn something.

We don't always have the same teacher. A staff member assigns a teacher to each group, but it isn't always the same teacher. It's always different teachers. We understand some better than others. Among the Americans, some don't know how to speak Spanish,

only English. That makes it harder for us because we're unable to ask, "What does it mean in Spanish?" I think it makes learning more difficult. It's better when the teacher speaks both languages. We understand better.

The American culture is different from our Latino culture, and we can tell the difference. We learn better when the teacher knows the Latino culture, when she knows both cultures. You learn better because you feel at ease. You can ask questions. You can say you don't understand. It makes it easier for us to grasp new material than having a teacher whose first and only language is English. Then, it's very different because you can't communicate as well. The level of trust is different. Even when the teachers try to develop a sense of familiarity, it's hard for us to understand what they mean. Sometimes, we just don't understand each other.

I don't know many of the teachers well. I don't know if they are professional educators or not because I haven't been long in the program. I don't have enough familiarity to ask, "What is your profession? Do you work here?" However, I do know that two of them are involved with the church. One is a minister at the church and the other is the coordinator for the ESL program. I don't know any of the others. Not long ago, some young women came because they wanted to learn Spanish. Therefore, in the case of the Americans, they're sometimes involved in the program because they want to learn Spanish.

In my peer group, there's always someone who tells you, "It's this way," but I feel there isn't much unity among us. Perhaps we aren't ready to say, "Let's get together some afternoon or over the weekend. Let's study. Let's learn together." We could ask each other and practice what we learned in class. We don't do that because everyone is very busy. Some

of us attend class one day, and a different group comes the next day. There isn't enough familiarity. There isn't enough friendship among us.

For me, it's important for the group to be united. We should all participate together. We should offer ideas. We should select one teacher who is the best for our group's learning. I think that would be most appropriate. It would help us all. But it doesn't exist for the time being.

For me, everything is important: having teachers you understand and who can teach you better, teachers who are more stimulating. On occasion, we've had boring teachers. Can you imagine not being able to ask anything? I think class becomes boring. It isn't always like that, but it happens. It's much different when someone knows how to teach. The class becomes dynamic and we learn.

I sometimes feel bad in class because I wish I could speak the language and I can't. I've felt sad. I've felt desperate because sometimes you want to learn and you can't... You feel, perhaps not frustrated, but discouraged when you know you can't accomplish what you wish. You feel sad because you know that you're in a country where not knowing the language makes everything much more difficult. At the same time I tell myself, "I have to learn." That's why I try to come to class regularly. Because I know that if I stay home, it will be much harder for me to learn.

I feel good when I know I'm being taught something new that will help me in the future, in my everyday life. I feel happy because I'm accomplishing something and I'm striving after my goal. It's what I wish the most: to learn the language. I feel happy knowing that someday, if God permits it, I will stop being what I am today and I will be able to call myself a bilingual person.

*Learning English at work.* I also learn English at work. I work in a factory where we pack products such as toys, soups, spices, and pasta. Besides working, I learn the language because I interact with the managers, who are American. You learn from them. They come and speak to you. You have to understand. You learn because in that very moment, you have to know what they're saying. That's how you learn, by interacting with them.

I try to communicate the best I can. I try because I know they will understand me. Before speaking, I think what I'm going to say so they can understand me better. I don't feel nervous. On the contrary, I feel happy when I realize that I've said something and they've understood me. I feel that I can do it, that I'm accomplishing something, and that I can defend myself or say something. When I speak, I think, "I said it! I said it in English and she understood me!" I feel happy that I've learned... I feel good. I know that I can speak and that I'll get better at it. I feel a lot of satisfaction. It gives me strength to go on.

On the other hand, when I can't say anything I feel bad. If someone speaks to me and I can't understand what he or she is saying, I feel bad. I feel sad... about not being able to respond because I don't know the language. I feel frustrated or rather defeated because when it comes to the language I've had many drawbacks in this country. Two years ago, I had a sad experience. I cried for not knowing the language. I was at the airport with my children. We were on our way back to my country of origin. I arrived in an airport of a very large Midwestern city and there were no Latinos. It was tragic for me not to speak the language. That's why I now say, "I have to learn it."

I was departing from this state, and I lost the flight. I had to take another flight out of here. When I arrived at the next airport, I went to the counter to ask for another ticket but I couldn't communicate. They saw my original tickets and they could tell my flight had

already left. It was total chaos. Thanks to God, after spending an hour at the counter without making any progress... I found a young woman who helped me. She wrote down what I needed and gave it to the staff. Finally, they arranged my ticket and called a translator who explained everything to me. That was a terrible day for me because I couldn't speak the language. It was unforgettable! On that day, I wished I'd never come to this country. I was traveling with my 2 ½-month-old baby and my son. I felt desperate being in a place where I didn't know anybody. I didn't know the place, I didn't know what to do, where to go, where to get on the plane. What could I do? How could I ask for help? It was very difficult.

Up until now, I haven't experienced that sense of desperation at work because when they speak to me it's in relation to the job. Since I am already familiar with the work, I feel that I understand. It's no longer like it was before, because now I have an advantage. At the time of my sad experience, I had never taken an English lesson. Now that I've taken a few lessons, I've learned. Now, I think it's different.

***Learning English at home.*** I also learn English at home with my brother. He's my youngest brother, the one who goes to school. He's 18 years old, goes to tenth grade, and speaks English well. He doesn't work. After school, he goes to the gym... and he has no other entertainment. He speaks to me in English. He says, "Let's speak English so you can learn." We talk at night. When I get back from class, he always asks, "What did you do today?" and I show him the books. Then, he begins. He helps me review or he says, "This is how you pronounce this phrase." Sometimes, he takes out a list of questions he uses to help himself on a daily basis.

I also learn from my son! Since he also goes to school he sometimes says, "I have to do this. Come, it's my homework. Come help me so you can also learn." He helps me. He's

only now learning to speak English, but he knows more than I do! He always tells me, “I know more than you do.” He feels proud. Then, I tell him, “You go to school all day, every day of the week. I don’t. On top of that, you don’t have any worries but I do.” He responds, “At that moment you need to think of nothing else. That’s what I do to learn.” Well, in one way or another, I help him and he helps me.

### *Personal Reflections*

I’ve learned much in this country. At work, I’ve learned to use machines that were unknown to me. I’ve also learned a little bit of the language. I’ve learned to feel independent in this country, being on my own with my children. I’ve always known how to appreciate people, but here I have found people from other countries who speak different languages. I’ve learned to value what I learn from them, although they are from a different country. We are all human beings and I think we all deserve respect. We all have rights. It’s important to learn from other people. You learn because... there’s always something different and we are all capable of teaching something good.

I think I learn by noticing things; by observing, by paying attention to what others do and to what I wish to learn. When you are in need of knowledge and you wish to become somebody in life, you are compelled to learn. I have two children. I believe that children emulate their parents. If someday I am somebody, my son and daughter will say, “My mother is a professional. I have to accomplish the same.” I want my children to feel important. I want them to be good and to contribute to society in the future. That’s why I observe, ask, pay attention, and show interest in everything that is good and is conducive to learning.

I tell my mother that if I was never somebody in my home country, I want to become somebody here. I want to feel important so I can help others because I always needed

someone to help me. Just like I needed it before, I know there are many people who need assistance. Now that I'm in a country of opportunities, my biggest wish is to help others. I would also like to better myself in every way. I think of my family and myself. That's my biggest wish. May God grant it.

### ***Postscript***

I spoke with Dulce seven months after our last member-checks meeting. She had quit the packing factory job and had worked at a fast food restaurant for several months. She was now babysitting the daughter of a female physician from Monday to Thursday. On Fridays, she did domestic work for three of the physician's relatives.

Dulce had taken a leadership role in a Spanish-speaking congregation. Her involvement with the church had enabled her to learn and apply community-building skills. In addition, the church had helped her to temporarily prolong her visa for staying in the country. However, Dulce had stopped taking English lessons. Her daughter had been ill with the flu for several months and needed care in the evenings. Dulce was looking for alternatives to continue learning English. She was hoping to enroll soon in an everyday program so she could learn the language faster.

### **Domi**

At the time of the interviews, Domi was 32 years old. She had lived four years in the United States as an undocumented immigrant. She had immigrated to join her husband, who had traveled one year before her. In the United States, Domi had become the mother of a 3-year-old son and a 9-month-old daughter. She lived with her husband and their two children in a modest family house.



Domi had completed 19 years of formal education in her native country. She had earned two teaching degrees and had taught at both the elementary and secondary school levels. As a member of the Mormon Church, Domi had done religious studies and missionary work in Central America. Her decision to immigrate interrupted her studies for earning a licentiate degree in Education. At the time of the interviews, Domi was a stay-at-home mother with few opportunities for interacting with people outside her home. Her knowledge of the English language was limited.

### *Domi's Life Story in Spanish*

What follows is Domi's life story of learning in her native language, Spanish. The English translation of her story begins on page 329.

#### *Niñez y Adolescencia*

Yo soy de un departamento del occidente de [un país centroamericano]. Es muy tranquilo. Es muy bonito. Soy de San Mateo, la mera cabecera [del departamento]. Mi papá es originario de [otro departamento]. Mi mamá y mis abuelos maternos son de San Mateo, y yo crecí en San Mateo. Viví siempre con mis papás [en] un hogar como todos, tranquilo, sin problemas. Somos cuatro hijos. Yo soy la mayor. Somos tres mujeres y un varón. Y luego mi mamá y mi papá. Vivimos en un área muy tranquila [de la ciudad].

[La ciudad] es grande y tiene cosas muy bonitas. Uno de los llamativos que tiene es su parque. Supuestamente es un parque histórico. Es uno de los parques en [el país] que tiene un kiosco. Todos los jueves y domingos era tradición que se ponía la banda departamental a dar concierto. Cuando yo me vine, el parque estaba destruido porque lo estaban renovando. [También] están las famosas callecitas de San Mateo que ... son tipo españolas. Son calles pequeñas [con] casas [estilo colonial]. Últimamente el comercio [en San Mateo] ... se ha

levantado. Han hecho varios centros comerciales [y han modernizado] el mercado municipal. No había antes una terminal [de transporte] pero ahora ya hay una terminal grande.

*Destacando en la escuela primaria.* Yo estudié en una escuela nacional para niñas. Toda mi primaria la hice allí, de primero a sexto. ¡Vienen tantas cosas bonitas a mi mente! Tuve dos maestras. Mi primera maestra se llamó Marta del Campo. Ella me dio de primero a tercero. Luego, de cuarto a sexto mi maestra se llamó Carolina Soto de Molina. [Ella] ya murió. Yo [la] recuerdo mucho [porque] me gustaba la forma en que enseñaba. Era muy creativa. Cada vez que teníamos que sacar algún acto, ella era bien coqueta para bailar y para declamar. Yo decía, “Cuando yo sea grande, yo quiero ser maestra así como ella.” Siempre decía eso. Y cuando fui maestra, yo enseñaba como ella enseñó. Yo siempre la admiré. Me gustaba porque cuando movía las manos y declamaba, yo me iba con lo que ella decía. Yo creía lo que ella decía.

Ella y yo nos llevábamos muy bien, aún cuando era muy enojada. Ella siempre vivía elogiándome. Una vez ella estaba dando clase de historia y preguntó dónde quedaba El Vaticano ... y quién vivía allí. Yo levanté la mano y [respondí]. Entonces, ella dijo, “Ah, ¡mírenla! La única que no es católica sabe quien vive allí y quien no vive allí.” Porque yo era la única que no era católica. [Además], ella me elogiaba porque cuando yo participaba en concursos de lectura y ganaba, yo levantaba el grado.

La directora de la escuela se llamaba Teresa. Era una señora muy enojada. Todas [las alumnas] le tenían miedo porque cada vez que mandaban a alguien a la dirección y la señora Tere estaba de malas era porque primero nos regañaba y luego nos preguntaba qué queríamos. [Las maestras también eran estrictas]. Yo pienso que era parte de la reglamentación de la escuela. [La directora] tenía que dar el ejemplo y las demás todas eran

señoras. No había una maestra joven. Todas eran ya adultas y eran muy estrictas. Por ejemplo, mi maestra, Carolina Soto, fue muy estricta. En ese tiempo, teníamos que sabernos las tablas de memoria. Era todo memorizado. Entonces, la que no se sabía las tablas de memoria, tenía un castigo. Cuando no llevaba uno la tarea, era un castigo. Quizás lo más ridículo era que lo pararan a uno en el escritorio. Yo siento ahora algo ridículo [eso] ... o que lo saquen a uno [de clase]. Pienso que es antipedagógico.

A mí nunca me castigaron porque siempre trataba de llevar mi tarea y yo fui abanderada todo mi tiempo. Entonces, no había motivo para que me castigaran. Solo recuerdo una vez que nos pintamos las uñas, uno de travieso y de curioso. En la escuela era prohibido que nos pintáramos las uñas. Estábamos entre los 9 y 10 años y éramos como seis. Empezábamos a pintarnos las uñas cuando nuestra maestra, la señora Carol, nos descubrió. Nos puso en fila a las seis, nos lavó las manos, y luego nos mandó a un fregadero. Nada que con acetona o algo. [Nos puso] en el puro piso a quitarnos lo que quedaba del esmalte.

Toda la primaria fui abanderada. Yo pienso que [ser abanderada] es algo que uno se gana. [Cada año] seleccionan al mejor alumno, el que tiene los mejores promedios de los grados más [altos], de cuarto a sexto. Luego, la directora se encarga de... [decidir] quién va a llevar la bandera. Por varios años la llevé yo. Solamente en un septiembre me tocó la bandera de San Mateo y una compañera de otro [departamento] se llevó la [bandera nacional]. La mamá quería que ella fuera abanderada y ella era muy inteligente. Ella y yo teníamos casi los mismos promedios. Esa vez me dolió bastante porque yo siempre había tenido la [bandera nacional].

[Asistir a una escuela para niñas] es muy bonito... porque crece uno entre niñas. El ambiente es muy femenino. Uno juega lo que juega una niña: muñecas, trastecitos ... hace

cosas delicadas. Mientras que si uno juega al lado de los varones, ya incluye jugar fútbol con ellos y otras cosas. En ese ambiente me crié yo y fue bonito. Aquí es un poco difícil pero si mis hijos tuvieran la oportunidad, me gustaría que estudiaran en escuelas solo para niñas o solo para varones.

Me gustaba mucho cuando hacían concursos de lectura porque siempre me gustó leer. Mi papá siempre nos compraba libros de cuentos. Yo me llevaba los míos y los de mis hermanas a la escuela y me ponía a leerlos. O si no en la biblioteca de la escuela había unas enciclopedias de pasta amarilla que se llaman *Mi Libro Encantado*, *Mi Libro* y *Yo*, algo así. Es un tomo de doce libros. Me gustaba mucho la que tenía cuentos, la que tenía fábulas, y la que tenía mitologías. Todo eso. Entonces, cuando había concursos de lectura y ortografía, me gustaba. Caligrafía no porque nunca tuve buena letra. Pero ortografía y lectura siempre me gustaron.

Prefería estar leyendo a estar haciendo educación física. No me gustaba la educación física. Tenía que hacerlo porque era obligación. [Yo] era como un poquito haragana. Prefería estar haciendo otras cosas como estar leyendo o jugando ajedrez. [Cuando] estaba en sexto de primaria, participé en un campeonato de ajedrez a nivel departamental.

Todos los días, mi mamá estaba pendiente [que yo hiciera] la tarea. Yo tenía muy mala letra en la primaria. Al principio la hacía yo pura hormiguita. La hacía toda chiquitita y mi maestra le decía a mi mamá que mi letra era exageradamente pequeña, que ni ella con lentes la miraba. Entonces, mi mamá me ponía [a practicar]. Había un bendito libro *Mi País*. Si yo no hice ese libro como diez veces en la primaria, no lo hice. Todos los días hacía mi tarea y después mi mamá me sacaba ese libro y decía, “Bueno. Hay que hacer una lección.” Todos los benditos días [lo hacía] para practicar la letra. Me aburrí tanto, que empecé a hacer

la letra bien grande. Entonces, mi maestra decía que mi letra era exageradamente grande. Y me quedé así. Me acostumbré hasta que llegué al punto en que mi mamá me enseñó a que tenía que moldearla y quedó en un término medio.

Mi mamá siempre estuvo pendiente que nosotros hiciéramos las tareas [porque] mi papá siempre estaba viajando por su trabajo. Mi papá trabajaba en la Guardia de Hacienda [y] llegaba cada ocho días a la casa. Entonces, la que estaba pendiente de nosotros era mi mamá. Recuerdo que me caía mal cuando nos iba a despertar de madrugada porque ya teníamos que ir a la escuela o porque teníamos que estudiar [para los] exámenes. Pero si no hubiera hecho eso, no hubiera logrado los frutos. Ella era muy disciplinada en eso. Si no habíamos hecho los trabajos que teníamos que hacer de parte de la escuela, no habían permisos para jugar, no había televisión, no había nada.

*Adaptándose en los estudios básicos.* Cuando uno sale de la primaria uno lleva en la mente que todo es igual. Pero no, [la secundaria] es completamente diferente. [Para mí] la primera diferencia fue que me tocó un instituto mixto, para hombres y mujeres. Yo estaba acostumbrada a solo ambiente de mujeres. Sentí brusco el ambiente el primer año. Incluso no me gustaba. Quería que me pusieran en un instituto ... solo de mujeres pero en San Mateo no había. Ya todo básico y diversificado era mixto. Segundo, yo iba de [ser] abanderada y siempre [había llevado] buenos promedios. Fui bien en primero básico pero ... como que bajé un poco. Luego, en el segundo año ya me adapté [y] empecé a subir [mis notas].

Siempre me gustó Historia [e] Idioma Español. Me gustaba [escuchar] ... los relatos de todo lo que pasó [en el país]. Me gustaba leer [y] analizar las obras. Me gustaba también Idioma Español, [lo] relacionado con los verbos y todo eso. Pienso que si algún día yo sacara una especialización, [lo haría] en Historia y en Idioma Español.

En básicos teníamos [varios maestros]: maestro de Historia, maestro de Idioma, maestro de Matemáticas, maestro de Física. [Pero] nadie me llamaba la atención. Había muchas clases que no me gustaban. Me caía mal Inglés y Artes Plásticas. Me caía más mal el maestro que me daba Artes Plásticas porque él tenía un su famoso dicho. Él hacía una pregunta, “¿Hizo la tarea?” Y usted decía, “Sí, la hice” Y él, “¿Segurolas?” decía en una forma muy burlona. Y no me gustaba el curso. Era cátedra. [El maestro] hacía trazos en el pizarrón... y no sé, quizás era como muy metódico. Cuando yo llegué a ser maestra pude comprender como él era. Era de aquellos que van, apuntan en la pizarra, y son muy metódicos. Yo no sé a cuántos [alumnos] les gustaba pero a mí no me gustaba. De hecho en tercero básico yo dejé Artes Plásticas y dejé Inglés.

¡El inglés me caía tan mal! La maestra que nos daba Inglés ... no nos motivaba o quizás a mi no me importaba. La cosa fue que yo dejé Inglés. Dejé Inglés y esa vez me dieron un castigo [fuerte]. En la iglesia siempre hacen actividades muy bonitas. Nosotros bailamos en unas convenciones para jóvenes de 12 a 17 años. Yo estaba en esa etapa y mi mamá me castigó en lo que más me dolía.... No hubo baile en ese tiempo. Y no hubo nada. Eso me dolió pero aprendí que no tenía que dejar materias.

El básico fue lo peor. Si me pusieran a repetir entre mi vida estudiantil de primaria a diversificado, haría con gusto la primaria y me saltaría al diversificado. No pasaría al básico. Le soy honesta, el básico no me gustó. [En] primero básico [tuve que] adaptarme, ya [en] segundo básico estaba bien, [y en] tercero básico ¡que [dejo] dos cátedras!

***Disfrutando el diversificado.*** Después, [inicié] mi diversificado [para graduarme como] maestra de primaria. [Lo hice] en el mismo instituto solo que ya en jornada vespertina.

[También] era mixto [pero] allí ya iba un poco más madura. Después de lo que me había pasado en tercero básico, yo iba un poco más [preparada para dedicarme] a lo que iba.

En diversificado me propuse molestar y darme gusto. Me hice amiga de dos muchachas de un municipio de San Mateo. Eran gemelas. Ellas eran muy buenas muchachas. Eran muy católicas. Una se llamaba María de Lourdes y la otra se llamaba María Concepción. Una de ellas era becada [y] tenía que mantener siempre su promedio para no perder la beca. La otra no era becada pero era buena estudiante. A mí [también] me gustaba estudiar. [Las tres] éramos tremendas para molestar. Nos burlábamos de quien se nos ponía enfrente. Había un muchacho que nos gustaba y allí andábamos las tres solo por molestar. Y aunque quizás honestamente a alguna, a mí o a ellas les hubiera gustado, erramos tres. Ahí sí que las tres amigas. [En clase], nos sentábamos [juntas] hasta el frente. Pero a la hora de los exámenes, no nos conocíamos. Ellas por su lado y yo por mi lado. Entonces, siempre sacábamos buenas calificaciones. Un catedrático que nos daba Literatura Infantil siempre decía, “A estas tres patojas me gusta darles clase porque son fregonazas pero estudian.” Porque cada vez que había alguna actividad nos poníamos hasta adelante y era de silbar y era de hacer relajo. Nos escapábamos. Cuando no queríamos estudiar, uníamos a toda la clase. Éramos líderes. Nunca fui presidenta de clase pero fuimos líderes las tres. Llamábamos a los muchachos y a las patojas, “Hey, salgamos. ¿Alguien se quiere quedar o no?” Y nos salíamos. Convencíamos al conserje y él a escondidas nos sacaba. Cuando no queríamos estar en el recreo ahí le dábamos algo a él, nos dejaba [salir,] y nos íbamos al parque. Una vez mi mamá nos encontró en pleno recreo en el parque. No me dijo nada en la calle pero [después] me regañó.

Esa fue la etapa más bonita de mi estudio. Yo puedo decir las cosas más bonitas del diversificado porque fue lo que más disfruté. Lo disfruté en estudiar [y] lo disfruté en molestar. Mis amigas tenían novio y yo tenía novio. [Tener novio no afectó mis estudios] para nada [porque] nunca le di mucha importancia. En ese sentido maduré. Mi estudio tenía su lugar, mi novio tenía su lugar, mis amigas tenían su lugar. Cada cosa tenía su lugar.

Nunca [me gustó estudiar en grupo]. Estudié sola. Cuando estudiábamos en grupo primero empezábamos a molestar, a hacer chiste, y a hacer todo menos estudiar. Entonces yo perdía tiempo. Hasta la fecha no me gusta estudiar acompañada porque mi sistema de estudiar es: agarro lo que tengo que estudiar, lo hablo, lo digo fuerte (como que estoy hablando con alguien), lo leo una vez, y si necesito un poquito más lo vuelvo a leer y ya ahí estuvo. Ya no necesito más porque esa es mi manera de estudiar. [Además], nunca me gustó estudiar de noche. Siempre me levantaba a estudiar a las 5:00 de la mañana. En cuarto y quinto [asistíamos a clases] por la mañana. Ya en sexto magisterio yo daba mi práctica de las 8:00 de la mañana al medio día [e] iba al instituto a la 1:30 p.m. Aún así, siempre me gustó levantarme temprano a estudiar.

Cuando me iba a graduar, daban [el fallo de] pasó o no pasó. Estábamos todos los sextos, todas las secciones, nerviosos [esperando saber] ¿quién aprobó? ¿quién no aprobó? Yo iba tranquila [porque] sabía que yo había aprobado. Mi mamá ya tenía el anillo [de graduación] y dije, “Bueno, ya tengo un compromiso.” Salí muy contenta porque había yo aprobado. Fue muy bonito.

[Durante mi época de estudiante] fuimos muy amigas con mi hermana, [la que es] dos años menor que yo. Siempre nos vivíamos apoyando y ayudando. Eso nos ayudó mucho a las



dos, tanto para nuestro apoyo moral como para nuestro apoyo intelectual. Siempre fuimos muy unidas y eso nos ayudó para poder progresar en la educación.

[A la vez, ser la hermana mayor] ha sido como una gran carga que hay en mí. Mis hermanos siempre están pendientes de lo que yo hago. Tengo un hermano que está estudiando en [Europa] y una vez él me dijo, “Bueno, si el problema viene de usted, no tengo por que preocuparme. De todas maneras con usted se espera siempre la mejor solución.” Yo me puse a pensar y le contesté, “No crea. No soy perfecta. Confíe siempre en Jesucristo que él es el único perfecto. Yo no lo soy.” Sí, muchas veces tiene una gran responsabilidad [porque] lo miran a uno como [ejemplo].

***Aprendiendo en la iglesia.*** Toda la vida he sido Mormona, como nos llaman comúnmente. Mi otro mundo fue la iglesia. [Allí] aprendí muchas cosas aparte de lo espiritual. Al mismo tiempo que yo estaba formándome académicamente, estaba también teniendo una escuela en la iglesia. [En la iglesia] la clase se llama Seminario y la reciben los jóvenes de 14 a 17 años. Son clases en que uno [estudia] la Biblia, el Libro de Mormón, y otros libros. Recibía Seminario todos los días, de lunes a viernes, de 5:00 a 6:00 de la mañana. El propósito de Seminario es que los jóvenes se gradúen en el mismo año que se están graduando académicamente. Entonces, yo obtuve mi título de maestra y obtuve mi diploma de seminarista.

Luego de Seminario, a los 18 años, ya la clase es Instituto de Religión. Es para jóvenes adultos que ya están en la universidad, están estudiando en nocturno, o ya están trabajando. Son tres años. También me gradué del Instituto de Religión. [Allí] aprendí [participando en] actividades para jóvenes como hombres jóvenes, mujeres jóvenes. Yo pertenecía al grupo de las mujeres jóvenes. Hay actividades como la mutual. La mutual es

una reunión que se hace un día de la semana en la cual hay una parte espiritual y luego hay juegos. Planificábamos ir al cine, ir a algún baile juntos, o ver algún video. [En ese tiempo], las mutuales se hacían los miércoles. Teníamos la parte espiritual y luego todos nos íbamos a la cancha de basketball a jugar papi-fútbol. [También] se hacían campeonatos de fútbol. Muchachos que no eran miembros de la iglesia llevaban su equipo a jugar con el equipo de nosotros. Yo no jugaba fútbol pero los patojos lo hacían y nuestro chiste era apoyar. Era muy alegre. Éramos muy unidos y éramos jóvenes sanos. Siempre fuimos jóvenes muy sanos.

Seminario es mixto. Instituto es mixto. Pero cuando es hombres jóvenes, solo hombres. Mujeres jóvenes, solo mujeres. Y allí pues a cada [género] le van enseñando diferente. A nosotras nos van enseñando aspectos muy importantes sobre la moralidad. Cómo cuidarnos, cómo prepararnos, sobre ser castas, sobre cómo tratar cuando uno tiene un novio, cómo vestirse, cómo comportarse. Son modales que uno va aprendiendo [y] que también le enseñan en la escuela. Aprendemos a cocinar. Hay muchas cosas manuales que yo aprendí de la iglesia que no las aprendí en la escuela. Cuando yo estaba triste, me animaba mucho cuando estábamos con las mujeres jóvenes. [En la iglesia] tuve muchas amigas. Fue muy bonito. Ese fue mi ambiente. Siempre fue mi mundo.

Mis amigos siempre fueron de la iglesia. Las únicas amigas que tuve que no eran Mormonas eran las [gemelas]. En ese tiempo, nuestro grupo [de la iglesia] era grande. Éramos de 18 a 20 jóvenes. Estudiábamos en diferentes establecimientos. Yo estaba en un instituto nacional. Había unos estudiando en colegio, otros en [un instituto militar], [y algunos] estudiaban en otros departamentos. Yo recuerdo mucho a un mi amigo que ya murió. Lo mataron. Era un muchacho muy, muy, muy especial, muy buena gente. Era muy

dedicado a la iglesia también. Crecimos juntos [y] nos hicimos buenos amigos. Él se graduó de ingeniero y luego lo mataron.

[Otro aspecto importante dentro de la iglesia es la misión]. Nosotros como miembros de la iglesia salimos a una misión cuando estamos solteros. Los varones van de 19 años y las mujeres van de 21. Para los varones es un mandamiento. Ellos deben ir a una misión por dos años. Mi hermano estuvo por dos años en [un país vecino]. Mi esposo estuvo dos años por el occidente de [nuestro país]. Por eso fue que nos conocimos. Las mujeres van año y medio [pero] es opcional.

Yo ya había cerrado cursos de profesorado [en la universidad] cuando fui a la misión. Estuve como misionera en [otro país centroamericano]. Iba para los 22 años. La misión es una experiencia muy especial. Es un año y medio que uno recuerda toda una eternidad. Es tan bonito todo. Uno va a servirle a personas que uno no conoce. Uno sirve, uno se olvida de uno mismo, uno le enseña a la gente, y uno les invita a que puedan conocer el evangelio que nosotros estamos predicando.... Para nosotros es algo muy especial y estamos preparando a nuestros hijos para que ellos también en un tiempo futuro puedan hacerlo.

### ***Primeros Años de la Edad Adulta***

[Después de completar] tres años [en el Instituto de Religión, ingresé] a la universidad [para cursar el profesorado en segunda enseñanza]. En la universidad el ambiente es muy diferente. Uno va y conoce diferente gente. Cada quien va viendo su propio interés y cada uno se esfuerza por estudiar. En el primer año me fue muy bien. No dejé ninguna materia. En el segundo año también. En el tercer año dejé una materia ... [porque] sentía [al catedrático] un poco aburrido. Él toda la vida estaba con las manos en la bolsa, hablando y escribiendo en la pizarra. Él hablaba y hablaba con las manos en la bolsa y eso era todo. Yo

apuntaba lo que tenía que apuntar [pero] eran 2 horas juntas. Ay, ¡qué aburrido! Entonces lo que hacía era que me salía. [Por eso] dejé el curso [y tuve] que examinarme [de nuevo].

***Estilos de enseñanza preferidos.*** A mí me gusta un catedrático que llame la atención, un catedrático que sea muy bien preparado.... Me gusta alguien que sea un orador, que usted diga, “Wow, ¡que clase tan bonita!” En pocas palabras, a mí no me gusta que me den una clase aburrida. No es cuestión de vanidad ni de jactancia. [Como maestra] a mí no me gusta dar una clase aburrida. Por ejemplo, si yo voy a hablar de los niños, yo tengo que llevar láminas y si puedo llevo un niño. Me gusta una clase bien motivada, una clase bien dada. Me gusta hablar y expresarme bien. Incluso ... siento que muevo las manos como las movía mi maestra. Cuando estoy hablando, me gusta que me pongan atención y que la gente entienda.

[En la universidad] había una licenciada que todos decían [con desdén], “Ah, esa viejita vos.” [A mí] me gustaba ... [su] clase porque era muy coqueta para hablar. Ella nos daba Psicología Infantil. Cuando hablaba de los niños, ella movía las manos, expresaba lo [que estaba enseñando]. A veces pienso que soy como muy soñadora. Yo me voy imaginando lo que me van diciendo y esa es la forma en que a mí se me va quedando. Entonces, a mí me gustaba como era ella. Otra licenciada ... era joven...[y] me encantaba como iba arreglada. Yo nunca he fumado pero [ella] tenía un estilo tan coqueto para usar el cigarro, que me encantaba verla. Me gustaba escuchar la clase porque ... me llamaban la atención [sus gestos].

[Asistir a la universidad para mí] ya fue como otro tiempo. Fue algo que hice yo. Yo [pagué] todos mis gastos. Me ayudó mucho mi mamá con eso que ella siempre estaba pendiente [y] fue un logro más para mí. Sabía que al tener mi profesorado [tendría], aparte de mi preparación académica, más opción a conseguir un mejor trabajo. Había como una

entrada más en cualquier lado por el hecho que había un título universitario. Y aprendí bastante.

*Ejerciendo el magisterio.* [Cuando me gradué del magisterio], trabajé dos años dando segundo grado de primaria en un colegio evangélico. Luego, cuando ya saqué el profesorado trabajé en un instituto tecnológico. Allí di cátedras de Relaciones Humanas, Historia, Idioma Español y [otro curso] relacionado con el lenguaje. Di esas cuatro materias y fue una experiencia muy bonita porque miraba yo a muchachos y muchachas de 12 y 13 años haciendo las mismas travesuras que uno hizo. A veces me causaba risa cuando hacían cosas. De estudiante yo nunca fui deshonesto en mis exámenes, porque entonces, ¿a qué iba a la iglesia? Nunca fui deshonesto, nunca usé acordeón. Una vez los muchachos estaban en los exámenes finales y yo estaba cuidando a sexto grado de Bachillerato en Electricidad. Eran puros hombres y cabal controlé cuando estaban pasándose un acordeón y se los fui a quitar. No le anulé el test al muchacho porque hubiera sido algo incómodo. Me hubiera sentido mal. No se lo anulé pero le quité el papel y después ellos me molestaban. Decían que de plano yo era experta en hacer acordeones porque pude quitárselos. Pero es muy bonito. A mí me gustó haber dado clases. Me gustó mi profesorado.

Luego, mi esposo se vino [a Estados Unidos] un año antes que yo. Estaba yo inscrita en el primer año [para completar la licenciatura en educación pero] ya eran otras mis inquietudes. Ya estaba mi matrimonio en juego. Iba [a estudiar] pero mi mente ya estaba en otro lado. Y así, a tiras y a jalones fui [llevando el año]. Y luego me vine. Eso fue todo lo de allí.

*Emigrando hacia los Estados Unidos*

Yo nunca quise venir a los Estados Unidos. Ahora que yo estoy aquí, tengo otra manera de pensar. Me preparé allá, estudié allá ... y siempre pensé que en cualquier país del mundo donde nacemos uno puede progresar. Sabemos como es la situación de nuestros países; yo estoy consciente de eso. Pero yo tenía esa idea... Decía yo, "Tanto estudiar, tanto prepararme, tanto portarme bien, y cuando llegue a los Estados Unidos me va a pasar las del grillo ... que cuando llegó ¡pum! un sapo se lo tragó." Yo dije, "A mí me va a pasar eso. Estudiando, haciendo otras cosas, estando con libertad aquí. Allá es diferente: a lavar trastos, a hacer hamburguesas, a hacer cosas..." No, no quería venir.

[Pero] me casé y [mi esposo] siempre tuvo en la mente desde pequeño que se quería venir [a Estados Unidos]. Al fin se vino, ya casados. Entonces, él me dijo que yo me tenía que venir... Yo le decía a él que se regresara, que los dos teníamos una preparación [y] que teníamos que ir trabajando en cualquier cosa. Pero él no se hizo para atrás. Entonces me puse yo a [analizar] entre mi forma de pensar, mi matrimonio, ... las cosas por las que yo había luchado y lo importante que él era para mí. Allá las mamás le aconsejan a uno que adonde va el marido, va uno. Mi mamá siempre me decía eso y mis suegros también me [lo] decían. Y yo lo quería. Entonces dije, "Bueno, si me tengo que ir con él, pues me voy."

Mi hermano estaba de misión... y le mandé [una carta donde] le decía, "Una de las razones por las cuales yo no me quiero ir es porque yo ya fui a la embajada. Tantas cosas que hacen y le niegan a uno la visa. Irme de mojada es algo en lo que yo no estoy de acuerdo por mis principios." Él me contestó algo que nunca se me ha olvidado y me ayudó mucho. Él dijo, "Las fronteras las ponen los hombres pero Dios no pone fronteras. Un matrimonio eterno no lo destruye nadie, solo Dios. Entonces, vaya por su esposo y no se preocupe por

fronteras. No se preocupe por nada de eso.” Y dije yo, “Sí es cierto. Tiene razón.” Y automáticamente mi forma de pensar cambió. Entonces, me metí en la cabeza que yo iba a venir aquí a este país a lavar trastos, a hacer hamburguesas, a hacer cosas que nunca en mi vida había hecho. [Había] trabajado [tanto] mi mente, que yo llegué tranquila. Por esa razón es que yo estoy aquí.

*Iniciando el viaje.* [Antes de viajar], sabe uno muchas cosas de este país. Sabe uno cosas buenas y muchas cosas malas de todo lo que le puede pasar a uno. Uno empieza a averiguar cómo está esto, cómo está lo otro... Como que uno quiere cuidarse las espaldas porque sabe uno a lo que viene. [Emigrar hacia] los Estados Unidos es como venir a querer pasar por un gran dragón y uno es un animalito [pequeño].

Nosotros con [mi esposo] estuvimos preparando el camino. Si yo me iba a venir ilegal, no me iba a venir con cualquier persona porque era peligroso. Teníamos que tener mucho cuidado, tener todo fríamente calculado para hacer las cosas bien. Empezamos a buscar a alguien y varias personas [ofrecieron acompañarme en el viaje]. Pero no. [Mi esposo] quería que me viniera a dejar una mujer. ¿Y cómo una mujer? Siempre me ponía algo imposible. Primero, a los Estados Unidos y ahora una mujer. “Bueno,” dije “entonces tengo que buscar una mujer que esté dispuesta a llevarme, que sea aventada y que me lleve.” Nos recordamos que mi abuela tiene familiares por México, una prima hermana de ella, y pensamos en una de las hijas.

Hablamos con mi abuelita y fuimos a visitar [a sus familiares]. Mi abuelita les [explicó]... que no me querían dejar ir sola por seguridad. La prima [respondió], “Pero mis hijas ¿cómo se van a arriesgar?” Pero había una señora que dijo, “Yo te llevo. ¿Cuánto me pagás?” Le dije, “Pues tanto. Usted va con sus gastos pagados y aparte de eso se le va a

pagar. Eso sí, me tiene que llevar bien. Me tiene que cuidar bien. Me tiene que proteger. No me tiene que pasar nada.” Entonces hicimos el trato.

Llegó el momento y fue algo muy duro, algo muy difícil. Cuando yo me vine, yo no me despedí de mi mamá. Yo no me despedí de mi papá. Estaba mi mamá y mi papá. Lo único que hice fue que los miré y les dije que no me dijeran nada. Era mejor así porque iba a ser más duro para los dos. Y me fui. No llevaba nada. Uno cuando viene no trae nada. Mi abuelita me fue a dejar. Y cuando mi abuelita se fue, me fui a encerrar al baño. Tampoco quise despedirme de ella.

Es algo muy duro. Antes, ... yo pensaba que era algo tonto. ¡Ah, la gente tonta! ¿Cómo se venía así y arriesgaba su vida? Hasta que uno no vive eso, uno no comprende a las personas. Es algo muy duro, algo muy difícil. Pero hay cosas que son mucho más importantes para uno. Mi hermano me lo enseñó. Una frontera no es más importante que la familia. Yo no venía aquí por ganar dinero. Yo venía por mi esposo. Eso era más importante para mí. Ahora que yo hice eso yo puedo decir “¿Qué más me toca por hacer?” Si hay más cosas que hacer por estar con él, ahora por él y por mis hijos, yo voy y lo vuelvo a hacer. Porque he aprendido, y como miembro de la iglesia [tengo la convicción], que lo más importante es mi familia.

[Una vez planeado el viaje], nos fuimos por tierra. [La señora que me acompañaba] tenía un hijo que se iba a casar en Veracruz. Entonces ella dijo, “Vamos a la boda de mi hijo. Y luego de la boda ya nosotros empezamos nuestro viaje.” Fui a conocer Veracruz. Estuve en la boda, bailé, y estuvo alegre. Vi un ambiente completamente diferente al de nosotros. Nosotros somos como más calmados. Todo estaba bien. Luego, nos fuimos para el Distrito Federal. Siempre nos fuimos en buses de primera. Ella decía, “Vámonos en tal bus.” “No,”



decía yo. “No. Por mi seguridad vamos a irnos en buses de primera.” Y así fue. Era mucho más caro pero íbamos en buses de primera. Pasaba migración. Me había dicho [mi esposo] que en esos buses no subían [a chequear] pero sí suben. En los otros buses bajan a toda la gente y piden la visa. En esos buses no. Son buses muy bonitos y muy lujosos. Siempre me senté en los lugares de hasta adelante. Venía yo como que era señorita de aquellas tipo azafata. Pasaban [los agentes] y ni siquiera me miraban.

Llegamos al Distrito Federal a las 5:00 de la mañana. Ella conocía muy bien México porque había trabajado en el DF. Luego, fuimos al aeropuerto y compramos los boletos para irnos a Tijuana en avión. Teníamos nuestro vuelo a las 9:00 de la mañana. Ella era una señora muy católica ... y me dijo que fuéramos a la Basílica de [la Virgen de Guadalupe]. Eran las 5:00 de la mañana cuando estábamos en el aeropuerto, compramos de 5:00 a 6:00 y estábamos a las 7:00 de la mañana en la basílica. ¡Qué bonita es! Ella entró a rezar [y] yo me senté en la última banca. Me gustó haber visitado allí.

Cuando estábamos [de vuelta] en el aeropuerto ... yo iba pidiéndole al Señor que me cuidara y me ayudara. Yo llevaba un propósito. [La señora] iba un poquito nerviosa ya porque Tijuana es una de las fronteras más peligrosas. Entonces, me puso nerviosa. Pero dije “No. Yo voy bien. Yo sé que no me va a pasar nada.” [Pero ella] me empezó a contar casos dramáticos y puras cosas negativas. Así se fue en el avión y yo dije, “Voy a hacer de cuenta que no le estoy escuchando, que no la conozco, que me va hablando alguien que quien sabe que locuras me va hablando.”

Cuando ya llegamos a Tijuana tiene uno que pasar a que le revisen su equipaje. No llevaba mucho, una maletita pequeña. [Cerca] de mí había dos agentes de migración. [La señora] venía atrás de mí [y] me alcanzó para decirme que [los agentes] estaban allí. ¿Sabe

que hice? Me molesté. Me molesté por la actitud de ella porque no pudo disimular. La ignoré. Hice como que no la conocía. Me adelanté. Pasé al frente de ellos, pasé mis cosas, me las revisaron y yo muy tranquila como que todos los días iba por ese aeropuerto. Cuando ella pasó, yo estaba al otro lado esperándola. Luego, yo tenía que llamar a un tío de [mi esposo] para informarle que estaba ya en Tijuana. Cuando yo llamé, él me regañó y me dijo que me saliera rápido de ese aeropuerto porque era peligroso.

Ahora que estoy aquí yo digo “Si yo no me hubiera portado indiferente o no hubiera tomado [iniciativa] quizás me hubiera agarrado migración” porque pasan allí como que son hormigas. Pasan a cada ratito, tres, cuatro pasan. Esperamos a un amigo de [la señora] porque nos iba a dar donde vivir ... [pero] no llegó. Tomamos un taxi y nos fuimos a un hotel muy feo. No me sentía segura allí. Decidimos que nos íbamos a cambiar de hotel pero en eso llegó allí la persona que estábamos esperando.

Fuimos a dar con una familia muy linda. [Eran] primos en segundo o en tercer grado de mi mamá. Se portaron un amor de gente. La señora [que me acompañó en el viaje] estuvo conmigo por 15 o 20 días más. Ya después ... me tuve que quedar con ellos. El señor me estuvo ayudando a buscar [quien me acompañara a cruzar la frontera]. [Mi esposo] me llamaba como tres veces al día. Estábamos pendientes.

*Cruzando la frontera entre México y los Estados Unidos.* Yo tenía como propósito estar en Tijuana si mucho tres días, nada más. Pero estuve en Tijuana un mes. Un mes que fue un poco difícil porque allí ya dependía de que alguien me pudiera ayudar. La persona que me iba a ayudar [inicialmente], ya a la mera hora no me ayudó. Entonces tenía yo que [buscar] quien me ayudaba.

La primera vez que [traté de cruzar la frontera] me fui con un hombre que quien sabe como lo conocí ... porque ya uno desesperado. Esa vez fui a dar a Mexicali. Quería yo pasar y que me agarra migración. Ay, fue lo peor que me pudo haber pasado en mi vida. ¡Me agarró migración! Ahora me río, pero fue tan horrible. Yo iba con una muchacha y dizque su novio. No me llamaba como me llamo. Llevaba papeles de una sobrina de [la familia]. Porque ellos me prestaron credenciales, me prestaron todo. Yo era netamente mexicana [y] había vivido en Tijuana.

Cuando me agarraron yo no lloré. Yo me hice la valientona. Es increíble. Puedo decir que yo venía cuidada de el Señor; yo venía con toda mi confianza en él. A la muchacha la trataron muy mal los gringos. El agente de migración que le tocó a ella era una mujer Chicana, era Latina. La trató mal. No la trató con respeto. Cuando yo estaba viendo ese caso dije, “Ay Dios mío, ¿Qué me espera?” Pero bueno, yo iba a lo que me tocara. Pero no. A mí me entrevistó un hombre muy educado. Me recuerdo bien. Yo puedo cerrar mis ojos y tengo en mi mente al hombre. Un hombre alto, moreno. Un moreno. Era un hombre altón, bien dado. Nada más me puso la mano [en el hombro]. No me registró ni me hizo nada. Me dijo, “¿Porqué lo haces de esa manera?” Y allí no aguanté ... y me puse a llorar. Me sequé las lágrimas y entonces me pidieron mis datos. Les dije el nombre. Yo me sabía de memoria todos los [datos familiares]. Me trataban de confundir, que abuelito, que papás, que bisabuelos ... Me preguntaron qué hacía en Tijuana. “Pues trabajo,” dije yo. “¿En qué trabajas?” “Pues trabajo en una fábrica de plásticos.” “¿Qué haces?” “Pues hago tal.” “¿A qué hora entras?” “A tal.” Todo lo que hacía la otra señora. Y requete juré y rejuré que yo era esa persona. Pero pasó algo chistoso. Le tomaron las huellas a la muchacha... y pasaron conmigo. Cinco veces me tomaron las huellas y ninguna vez salió. Todas las veces salía

como cuando usted pone algo [y] resbala. ¿Porqué? Yo estaba demasiado nerviosa y mi mano es demasiado [lisa]. La agente de migración ya estaba enojada y le dijo a su jefe que las mirara. Y entonces él dijo, “Tienes suerte. Déjelas así.”

Me esposaron. ¡Me dolió tanto que me hubieran esposado! Fue lo más horrible. En una silla le ponen a uno con una esposa por si uno se quiere ir. La muchacha estaba allí al lado mío. Ni le hablé ni nada. Yo estaba llorando. A ella la sacaron y le metieron un empujón. La metieron a un cuartito en donde lo encierran a uno mientras deciden qué van a hacer. “Ay” pensé yo, “ahorita me van a meter a mí el empujón.” [Pero] llegó el mismo agente de migración y me dijo, “¿Quieres agua?” “No,” le dije. “¿Quieres galleta?” No. “¿Quieres algo para comer?” No. A mí me estaba ofreciendo comida. “No,” le dije. “No quiero nada.” Y entonces me dice, “Ahorita vamos a venir por ti.” Pero con una paciencia y un amor que dije si todos fueran así ... No se portaron abusivos conmigo.

[El agente] me llevó como todo un caballero. Me tomó del brazo. Yo esperaba que me metieran el empujón igual que a la muchacha y no. Estuve allí como unas cuatro horas y después nos sacaron. Le pregunté yo al señor, “¿Bueno, y para dónde nos van a regresar?” “Pues a ti a Tijuana porque tú eres de Tijuana.” Me regresé a Tijuana sola. La muchacha se me pegó. Eran las 12 de la noche y necesita una compañera. Nos subimos a un bus y luego yo me quedé allí esa noche [porque] no tenía dinero. Me faltaba como 20 pesos para ajustar mi pasaje. Entonces la muchacha me los prestó. Me los regaló [porque] ¿cuándo se los iba a pagar?

Llegamos a la estación de buses de Tijuana como a las 6:00 de la mañana. Vaya que ya me sabía el camino. Cada vez que [la familia] iba a algún lado, a alguna fiesta, a comprar o algo, yo les decía, “Me voy con ustedes” y me iba grabando el camino. Para esto [mi

esposo] ya sabía todo. Yo [le] llamé a la 1:00 de la mañana, cuando me sacaron de [Mexicali] y ya él llamó a los señores para informarles... que yo iba a regresar. [Estando en la estación de buses de Tijuana], un hombre se me acercó y me dijo que él me llevaba. Me porté insolente con él. Le dije que yo vivía allí y que iba a llegar mi esposo a recogerme. Tomé un taxi y me fui para la casa.

[La segunda vez que traté de cruzar] volví a caer en las trampas de otro. Me fui con él confiada que me iba a llevar y me llevó a conocer. ¡Vaya que no me pasó nada! Que no me violó, que no me hizo nada, porque yo me subí sola con él. Solo porque yo sabía y 100% puedo decir que el Señor me iba cuidando no me pasó nada. ¡Porque qué loca! Él iba explicándome todo y yo paseando con él. Y luego ya no me pasó porque dijo “Tú eres centroamericana.” “No,” le decía yo, “No soy centroamericana.” “Sí, eres centroamericana.” Y yo que no y que no. Al fin, que no sé cómo con una palabra ¡pum! caí que era de Centro América. Y me dijo, “Te voy a cobrar lo doble.” “Ah no, pues entonces no.” “Ah, pues entonces no te llevo.” Me fue a dejar al mero centro de Tijuana. También había yo caminado por ahí. Me tomé un taxi y me regresé. Ya después yo decepcionada, ya a la última, el señor me dijo “No sea desesperada. Yo le voy a ayudar. Deme un poquito más de tiempo.”

[La tercera vez, me ayudaron] una señora y su hijo. Se miraban de buena familia allí en Tijuana. ¿Quién iba a decir que ellos [hacían eso]? La señora me recibió en su casa, estuve una noche allí, y al otro día me fueron a recoger. Todavía esperé como tres días encerrada en un sótano, [siempre] en Tijuana pero ya para salir. Yo no quería caminar. Yo tenía que pasar por carro. Era lo que [mi esposo] me había dicho.

No [era yo la única esperando en ese lugar]. Arriba estaban los hombres y abajo estaban las mujeres. Estar con las mujeres fue lo más horrible que pude haber pasado. Nunca

en mi vida he estado con mujeres vulgares, con mujeres asquerosas. Vulgar le puede decir usted a alguien que dice palabrotas. No, eso es lo peor de lo peor. Hablaban vulgaridades. Hablaban obscenidades, cosas que hacían y no hacían con hombres. Fue lo peor. Yo estaba allí porque había tres literas y seis mujeres, dos en cada litera.

Frente a mí había una mujerona, una morena ella. Cuando [las demás] comenzaban a hablar, yo empezaba a hablar con ella. Me la halaba para hablar de muchas cosas. Entonces nos hicimos amigas. Ella había estado aquí [en Estados Unidos] y había ido a chequearse los dientes [en México]. Era una mujerona alta, bien ponchada, y yo chiquita dije, “Si me pasa algo me voy a hacer amiga de ella y ella me puede defender.” Y así andaba yo con ella como que era yo su llaverito. Andaba atrás de ella. Y sí, nos hicimos amigas. Me decía “¿Tienes hambre? Yo voy a salir.” Porque nos permitían salir. Había una tienda cerca. Ella iba y compraba algo. Ya no se nos acercaban a nosotros. Cuando había que bañarnos siempre me decía ella que me bañara y ella cuidaba la puerta, yo cuidaba la de ella.

Yo a todo mundo le cuento de mi religión. Cuando ya nos iban a pasar, nos metieron en la cajuela de un carro. Entonces yo le dije que si [ella] no sabía orar, lo hacía yo para las dos. Me acuerdo que nos agarramos las dos de las manos como que habíamos sido amigas de toda una vida y yo lo hice. Y pasamos. El carro se estacionó un momento. Cuando sentimos ¡pum! nos abrió el muchacho. Era un muchacho muy bien arreglado como aquellos que van a la escuela. Ya estábamos del otro lado y me dio mi valijita. Llegué a [Estados Unidos] con el tío de [mi esposo]... y luego el señor me compró mi boleto para venirme [al Medio Oeste] por avión. Llegué aquí [para reunirme con mi esposo] el 22 de septiembre.

[En el viaje] aprendí muchas cosas. Aprendí a madurar. Aprendí a convivir con diferentes personas. Aprendí y se quitó de mi mente la idea tonta que tenía antes de la pobre

gente que venía para acá porque estuve en la misma situación. Me da mucha tristeza cuando oigo casos de gente que pasa cosas que yo nunca pasé. Yo no aguanté hambre. Yo no aguanté abusivoses. No, yo puedo decir que a mí no me pasó nada.

*Viviendo en el Medio Oeste de Estados Unidos.* [Llegando aquí al Medio Oeste] empecé a conocer la ciudad. Me recordaba del otoño en [mi país]. Los primeros meses decía “Ah, se parece... al vientecito de otoño.” Eso me ponía muy melancólica. Sí me gustó aquí. Me gustó [la ciudad] porque decía yo, “Esto sí parece los Estados Unidos.” Cuando llegué a Los Ángeles no me gustó. Haga de cuenta que yo estaba otra vez en Tijuana. [Luego, me impresionó] el frío porque es demasiado fuerte el frío. La nieve. Parecía yo niña cuando vi la nieve por primera vez en mi vida.

A la semana, [mi esposo] ya me tenía trabajo. Trabajábamos los dos en McDonald's. Vivíamos cerca del trabajo, como a tres cuadras. Me iba caminando. Cuando yo entré, lo primero que hice fue preguntarle a las personas “¿Cuánto tiempo tiene de trabajar aquí?” Había mucha gente que me decía “Tengo tanto tiempo trabajando aquí en la cocina. Tengo ocho meses. Tengo tanto.” No encontré a nadie que me dijera tengo un mes. Había una [muchacha] de Bosnia que tenía como tres meses de estar allí. Nos caímos bien y comenzamos a platicar. ¿Cómo platicábamos? Quien sabe porque yo no sabía nada de inglés. Ni ella español, ni tampoco inglés. Creo que ella también tenía poco tiempo aquí. Ya habíamos aprendido nuestras palabritas y nos hicimos amigas. A puras señas chismeábamos ¿va a creer?

[Yo me dije], “Yo no voy a estar mucho tiempo en la cocina. Luego voy a trabajar adelante.” Me lo propuse y así fue. Aprendí las cosas que tenía que aprender. Ya después me pusieron halando las órdenes. Rápido me aprendí todas las cosas. Lo miraba, lo apuntaba, y

en la caja casi no hablaba. Después venía y lo practicaba. Al mes ya estaba trabajando al frente. No quise trabajar mucho tiempo [en la cocina]. Yo no.

[Si me pedían algo en inglés], entendía. ¿Sabe qué es mi problema? Yo puedo hablar inglés con un chino, puedo hablar inglés con alguien de Bosnia, porque estoy aprendiendo igual que ellos. Pero ¡con un gringo no! Con alguien que lo puede hablar, siento como que se van a burlar. [Aunque] me he dado cuenta que no [es así]. Entonces, ponía atención y a veces le decía a [mi esposo] “Fijate que me dijeron tal palabra [y] no la entendí.” Él me decía qué era o si no yo buscaba en el diccionario.

[Mi esposo] me estuvo ayudando porque él cerraba en la noche y yo estaba en la mañana. Entonces él me decía, “Mirá, para que aprendás luego, te traje los papeles de las hamburguesas.” Entonces ya sabía los papeles. Sabía los nombres. Siempre me preguntaba como iba. [También] yo le preguntaba a él o él me decía “Fijate que yo tengo duda,” alguna cosa de la computadora. “Oh, en la mañana voy a aprovechar para darme cuenta y te digo.” Él me ayudó bastante. Yo puedo decir que [me ayudó] él y poner de mi parte. Porque si uno no pone de su parte puede pasarse cinco años trabajando [en la cocina]. Aquí se vuelve uno muy agresivo. Algo que uno no tiene allá. ¿Sabe porqué? Porque usted tiene que defenderse usted, usted, y usted. Y tiene que defender a su familia.

[Recientemente] estaba escuchando a un hombre por la televisión que dijo, “Mucha gente va a los Estados Unidos por necesidad económica. Porque en nuestros países no se encuentra lo que hay allá. Mucha gente sin educación y mucha gente con mucha educación va a los Estados Unidos. En los Estados Unidos eso no vale. Todos somos iguales.” Estaba yo pensando en eso. Es cierto. Conozco a una señora de Colombia que es licenciada en Administración de Empresas y trabajó conmigo en McDonald's. Una señora muy buena



gente. Y conozco a una muchacha del Ecuador que no sacó ni el sexto de primaria. [En El Ecuador, ella] trabajaba en una tiendita y [aquí] era nuestra jefa. Era una persona muy abusiva con nosotros. Es el inglés [y] estar legal, ser residente. Esos son dos factores muy importantes: que esté legal y que hable inglés. Si usted habla inglés aunque no tenga ninguna educación ni nada, ya tiene entrada. Aquí si usted no habla inglés, si no es residente, trabaja en limpieza, en McDonald's o en cualquier cosa con gente que no sabe ni leer. Usted puede ser licenciada, doctora o lo que sea. Son iguales. Están en el mismo nivel.

Aquí nosotros con educación o sin educación, somos inmigrantes. Somos inmigrantes, al menos que nosotros mismos nos pongamos metas. [Yo] trabajé mucho tiempo en McDonald's pero [después] trabajé como unos ocho meses en limpieza de edificios. Nos íbamos los dos juntos [con mi esposo]. También nos pusimos metas que no íbamos solo a estar limpiando y limpiando. Teníamos que aprender, teníamos que progresar, y así fue. Nosotros siempre trabajamos con metas. Porque si usted no trabaja con metas, ¿qué propósito, verdad? Entonces decidió él buscar un mejor empleo que fuera como un poquito más honorable, por decirlo así. Trabajó en una compañía [de fabricación de ventanas]. Trabajó muy bien. Lo que él iba a aprender a la escuela, él lo ponía en práctica allí. Después ya no le dio tiempo ir a la escuela pero [estudiaba] el inglés. Inglés, inglés hasta que él lo habla bien. Progresó bastante allí. Tuvo un buen empleo y yo le ayudaba. Ya no necesitaba andar en McDonald's. Ahorita él está trabajando de noche porque tiene su propio trabajo. Él es su jefe, él dispone de su tiempo. Él [es quien] trabaja pero nos ponemos las metas juntos. Nos propusimos que tampoco iba a quedarse solo así. El propósito era ascender y se ha logrado. Vamos progresando los dos. Él se vino para acá. Yo me vine para acá. Entonces aquí hay que luchar [para salir] adelante.

### ***Experiencias Recientes de Aprendizaje***

Aquí [en Estados Unidos] aprendí [a manejar automóvil]. Los primeros años, yo no [manejaba]. Cuando iba a McDonald's me iba a pie. Ya cuando decidimos trabajar los dos juntos, [iba en el carro] con [mi esposo]. Embarazada de [mi hijo] empecé a aprender ... pero [mi esposo] no me dejó manejar para nada porque [era riesgoso]. Ya después, poco a poco, yo empecé otra vez. Yo había dicho, “No. ¿Y para qué voy a manejar? Él siempre está conmigo. Él me lleva, él aquí, él allá.” Muchas hermanas en la iglesia me decían, “Es necesario que usted aprenda. Los niños se le enferman...” Yo [pensaba], “Tal vez sí tienen razón.” Pasó un buen tiempo y yo no quería. Así de simple, yo no quería. Cuando llegó el momento de ponerme mis metas me dije, “Yo tengo que aprender y voy a aprender.” Entonces le dije a [mi esposo], “Vamos a empezar a practicar tal día, a tal hora.” Fue iniciativa mía porque ya había dejado mucho tiempo de no hacerlo. Y él sorprendido me dijo, “¿Estás segura? Porque recordá que empezas, empezas ... Ya podés. Lo que pasa es que tenés que aventarte a salir sola.” “Esta vez sí,” le dije. Me metí en la cabeza que yo tenía que aprender a hacerlo y así fue. Uno tiene que poner mucho de su parte y como decirle a su cabeza que usted tiene que hacer eso.

***Aprendiendo a manejar automóvil.*** [Mi esposo] me enseñó cada parte: estas son las luces, este es el pide vías izquierdo, derecho ... y cada cosita. [También] me estuvo enseñando [las vías y las reglas para conducir]. Sin necesidad de manejar, él me decía, “Cuando ya tomes la decisión de manejar, recuerda: ésta es para la derecha. En ésta no tienes vía. Apréndete las calles.... [La velocidad en esta zona es] 35. En el freeway tienes que aumentar tu velocidad. Tienes que tener mucho cuidado. Si te llega a parar la policía, el

espejo se pone así, miras así.” Y en fin que él me fue entrenando. Me dio las hojas [en español] para que yo me aprendiera [las reglas]. Fui leyendo y fui aprendiendo.

A veces no me tenía paciencia. A veces me regañaba porque él aprendió a manejar desde pequeño y quería que yo manejara exactamente como él. Era una situación que me ponía nerviosa. Al principio me daba miedo cuando él era mi compañero y yo llevaba el carro. ¡Cuando uno está aprendiendo comete tantos errores! Me recuerdo que cuando teníamos otro carro, veníamos contentos porque yo traía el carro cuando ¡pum! me fui a embanquetar. Ay, me asusté tanto ... y no hallaba como salirme. [Mi esposo] me ayudó a salir. Salí y de todas maneras me regañó. Eso me hizo sentir incómoda y dije, “Bueno, ya no vuelvo a [manejar] porque no me tiene paciencia.” Pero pasó. Seguimos y ya después me dio un carro grande.... Siempre le dan a uno sus regañaditas pero ya aprendí.

Al principio me ponía muy nerviosa [y] me sudaban las manos. De tanto que me sudaban las manos en el timón, yo sentía que se me resbalaba. Ah, y el estómago. Sentía que era mejor para mí no comer cuando yo iba a practicar. Porque me levantaba todas las mañanas a practicar. Cuando teníamos oportunidad los domingos si él no estaba trabajando, a practicar. Luego que ya habíamos practicado suficiente me decía, “Aquí están las llaves. Ve sola.” Tenía que ir porque ya me había dado las llaves y tenía que irme sola.

La primera vez que me fui sola, fue chistoso porque yo iba con los nervios de punta. Yo salí de la casa y no me podía regresar. Porque es como cuando a un niño le dan una orden y usted regresa a su casa y lo que le mandó la mamá no lo hizo. Yo iba con los nervios de punta y cabal en esa esquina pasó la policía y me [saludó de lejos]. [Era] un señor grande, viejito. Yo le contesté el saludo pero en mi mente iba diciendo, “Voy a practicar.” Me subí y [pensé], “Ya mero que no voy y como él está durmiendo, yo le puedo decir que fui.” Pero

dije, “Bueno, a él no lo engaño. La que se engaña soy yo. Me voy a demostrar a mí misma que yo puedo hacerlo. ¿Y si me equivoco?” Entonces me bajé del carro y me regresé. Cuando toqué la puerta me dice [mi esposo], “¿No fuiste a practicar?” “Bien,” le digo, “pero dame el celular por si me pasa algo.” Pero era pretexto porque quizás yo hubiera querido que los niños se despertaran o cualquier cosa pero no pasó nada de eso. Me llevé el teléfono y fui. Recuerdo que tardé como una hora porque me fui bastante lejos. Cuando volví, él estaba afuera. “¿Y qué pasa?” le digo yo. “Es que no venías. ¡Me asusté!” me dice. Esa fue una experiencia chistosa pero prácticamente me estaba examinando.

Pero me ponía demasiado nerviosa. Entonces decidí que cada vez que iba a practicar, iba a cantar. Me ponía a cantar cualquier cosa que se me viniera a la mente, ya sea una canción popular, un himno, o cualquier cosa. Después de cantar yo decía, “Yo puedo, yo puedo, yo puedo.” Era como una terapia para mí ir cantando. Hasta la fecha yo canto cuando manejo. Otra cosa era que cuando yo iba manejando y miraba un policía, hacía de cuenta que ellos no estaban a mi lado, que no existían.

[Ya] salía sola, practicaba, y todo. Pero llegó el momento en que tenía que salir con los niños. Y yo dije, “Si voy sola yo y puedo hacerlo bien, entonces puedo con los niños.” Mi primera vez con mis hijos yo estaba tan nerviosa que dije, “Ay, ay, ay Señor ¿y si me pasa algo? los niños.” Aseguré bien a [mi hijo], aseguré bien a [mi hija] y me fui. Mis hijos se portaron bien.

Yo hasta el momento no tengo [licencia]. No puedo sacar licencia. Y sólo pues [manejo] con prudencia. Yo no me pierdo aquí. Yo no me sé los nombres de las calles pero me conozco las calles. [Ahora] ya me siento cómoda manejando.

*Aprendiendo a través de la maternidad.* [Ser madre aquí ha sido] una experiencia muy bonita. Disfruté mucho de mi primer embarazo. Todas las muchachas en McDonald's siempre me cuidaron. Mis jefas me tenían mucha consideración. La verdad no hacía nada porque estaba al frente parada. Si hay gente atiende y si no pues uno limpia o se pone a ordenar. Entonces cuando no había [clientes], había una silla para mí y mucha consideración.

Disfruté mucho mi primer embarazo. Me acuerdo cuando decidimos cambiar de carro. Teníamos un carrito todo viejito. Entonces dijimos “Pues vamos a trabajar duro. Nos vamos a sacar un carro de agencia.” Y así fue. Dimos nuestra cuota y entonces ya teníamos nuestro carro. Entonces dijimos “Pues ahora necesitamos alguien que lo pueda disfrutar.” “Un hijo,” dije yo. Sí. Cabal al mes estaba yo embarazada de [mi hijo]. Ay, ¡estábamos tan felices! Al principio tenía miedo de como le iba a hacer con los doctores. Siempre [mi esposo] fue conmigo [al doctor]. Íbamos los dos. Lo disfrutamos. Fue muy bonito también con la nena. Con ella ya tenía yo más experiencia de ir con el doctor, a los hospitales y ya sabía yo a lo que iba. Cada uno de nuestros hijos lo hemos deseado mucho. Hemos estado aprendiendo los dos aquí a ser papás.

Yo tengo algo que cuando me equivoco en algo y luego rectifico, ya no se me olvida. De mis mismos errores yo voy aprendiendo. Eso me ha ayudado bastante para poder ir mejorando cada día. [Yo observo y evalúo mi propia conducta]. Eso me ayuda a corregirme. Cada vez que me equivoco digo, “Sí. Cierto, me equivoqué en esto. Pues la próxima vez lo hago mejor.” De cada situación yo tengo la oportunidad de ir aprendiendo. Cuando voy al médico con los niños y digo mal alguna palabra y ellos la repiten yo [pienso], “Ah, ya sé, eso se dice así. O esto es esto.” Cuando a veces yo regaño a los niños y de repente se me sale un grito fuerte, yo digo, “No, no es correcto. Tengo que mejorar.” [Si] a mi hijo no le gustó el

panqueque como se lo di hoy yo digo, “El otro día sí le gustó. ¿Por qué no le gustó si otras veces se lo ha comido?” Le pongo otra cosa diferente y miro que si le gustó. Entonces digo, “Ah, le faltó esto.” De cada situación uno va aprendiendo.

Yo me preocupo en aprender muchas cosas para poder enseñarles [a mis hijos]. Yo medito cada noche. ¿Que hice mal en este día? Hice tal cosa mala con [mi hijo]. Él se sintió incómodo. Se sintió como abochornado. No es correcto. Con [mi hija] también. Y así cada día digo, “Mañana voy a hacer esto” y me pongo a pensar cómo tengo que enseñarles.

Cuando [mi hija] nació fue difícil para mí. Yo estaba acostumbrada solo a [mi hijo]. Y fue bien, bien difícil. Yo no creía que las mujeres sufrieran de la depresión después de tener un hijo porque con [mi hijo] no me pasó nada de eso. Pero con [mi hija] me pasó tan horrible. Yo no hallaba cómo hacer con ella. Me volví tonta. Yo no podía. No sabía cómo hacerlo. Hasta la fecha yo voy aprendiendo porque cada niño es diferente. [Mi hija] es pequeña pero es demasiado exigente. [Mi hijo] es muy tranquilo. Me acostumbré a la tranquilidad de [mi hijo] y me estoy adaptando todavía a la exigencia de [mi hija]. Es algo que voy aprendiendo con el tiempo.

### ***Reflexiones Personales***

La escuela más grande que uno tiene es la escuela de la vida. Usted puede ir a la escuela, puede aprender cosas teóricas [y] tantas cosas de libros. Pero cuando usted está pasando por una situación crítica que incluye gente, usted aprende porque ahí ya no tiene que ver teoría, no tiene que ver libros, sino tiene que ver sus sentimientos, su manera de pensar, y su manera de actuar.

Para mí es muy importante aprender aquí. Aquí, yo voy aprendiendo cada día. ¡Tantas cosas que he aprendido! He aprendido porque he tenido el interés [y] porque me he visto

obligada a hacerlo. Sé de que manera tengo que comportarme en tal lado y [cómo] tengo que actuar. En mis primeros años [en los Estados Unidos] he aprendido a desenvolverme con los extranjeros, más que todo con los gringos. Al principio cuando vine les tenía como miedo a los gringos. Ahora no.

Otra cosa importante es que según la manera que [uno] aprenda y la manera que [uno] viva, es lo que uno le va a enseñar a [sus hijos]. Yo me doy cuenta con [mi hijo]. Ahorita él está en la etapa en que todo lo asimila y todo lo repite. Él se pone los zapatos de mi esposo [y] trata de caminar igual que el papá. Él está imitando a su papá. A veces cuando yo lo regaño, agarra al muñeco que tiene y entre sus juegos él regaña [al muñeco] como yo lo regaño a él. Yo me doy cuenta que ... si uno como papá no se cuida, ellos todo lo aprenden. Yo hago muchas cosas como mi mamá. Yo aprendí todo eso de mi mamá. Es lo mismo que va a pasar con mis hijos. Entonces yo tengo que cuidarme mucho.

[Mis hijos] están chiquitos y ahorita es el momento en que uno tiene que enseñarles. Mientras estén niños yo voy a tratar de esforzarme en dar lo mejor. Porque cuando lleguen a adolescentes, mis hijos se van a poner rebeldes. Eso es real porque es una etapa que todo adolescente pasa. Me da miedo que lleguen a adolescentes y tanta cosa que pasa aquí. Le digo [a mi esposo], “¿Sabes que? Si yo les enseño a ellos buenos principios desde pequeños, cuando sean adolescentes, quizás yo ya voy a estar más tranquila.”

Ser madre es uno de los papeles más importantes y de mucha responsabilidad que uno tiene. Le digo a mi esposo, “Cuando yo me muera, yo no voy a ir a rendir cuentas por todo lo que yo hice aquí en la tierra, sino voy a ir a rendir cuentas por [mi hijo], por [mi hija], y por ti. Es lo único por lo que voy a ir a rendir cuentas. [Por] lo demás no.”

### *Aspiraciones Académicas y Profesionales*

[Si pienso en un futuro próximo, me imagino] con mis hijos ya grandes. Viendo ya el resultado de como van a ser de aquí a cinco años. [Me imagino] con más experiencia en las cosas que estoy empezando a aprender. Quizás ya con un status [migratorio] diferente. También [me veo] como más segura en muchas cosas. [Sin embargo], en mi forma de pensar, en mi forma de ser, en mis principios ... pienso que seguiré siendo la misma.

Estando ya mis hijos en la escuela, yo quiero estudiar y dedicar tiempo para mí. Quiero estudiar inglés porque no quiero quedarme toda la vida tarareando unas cuantas palabras. Después, quiero sacar el High School. Quiero empezar de nuevo en ese sentido [porque] me gustaría trabajar en una escuela [como] maestra de español. Aquí [me gustaría trabajar] con niños. Quizás son más dóciles. Porque los adultos no. Ni mucho menos adolescentes ... aquí son muy diferentes. [En mi país] no me gustaba trabajar con los niños. Por eso yo hice todo lo posible rápido de sacar mi profesorado. [Prefería trabajar con] los adolescentes o con gente madura. Pero aquí no. Aquí no.

### *Domi's Life Story in English*

What follows is the English translation of Domi's life story of learning. The original version of her story in Spanish can be found on page 298.

### *Childhood and Adolescence*

I am from a western county in a Central American country. It's very calm. It's beautiful. I am from San Mateo, the main city in the county. My father was born in a different county, but both my mother and my maternal grandparents were born in San Mateo. I always lived there with my parents in a home like any other, without troubles. I am the



eldest of four children. Three of us are female and one is male. Then, there's my mother and my father. We lived in a quiet area of the city.

San Mateo is a large city with many beautiful things. One of its features is the central square. It's supposed to be a historic site, because it's one of few central squares in the country with a kiosk. On Thursdays and Sundays, the local band used to give concerts. When I left, the square was undergoing reconstruction. Also famous are the narrow Spanish-styled streets of San Mateo, which are surrounded by colonial houses. Recently, business has picked up in San Mateo. Modern malls have been built and the city's general market was recently renovated. The city never had a bus terminal, but now there is one.

*Excelling in elementary school.* I studied in an all-girls elementary school. I did from first to sixth grades in that school. Many fond memories come to mind! I had two teachers. My first teacher was Marta del Campo. She was my grade teacher from first to third grade. Then, from fourth to sixth grades, my teacher was Carolina Soto de Molina. She already has passed away. I remember her clearly, because I liked how she taught. She was very creative. She was charming when she recited or danced in school plays. In class, her gestures and words transported me to other places. I believed what she was saying. I used to say, "When I grow up, I want to be a teacher just like her." I always said that. When I became a teacher, I taught like her. I always admired her.

She and I got along well, despite her firm character. She was always paying me compliments. On one occasion, she was teaching a history lesson and she asked if anybody knew where the Vatican was and who lived there. I raised my hand and answered. She said, "Well, look at her! She's the only one in class who isn't Catholic. Yet she know who lives

there.” She also paid me compliments when I won in reading contests, because I made the whole class look good.

The school principal was called Teresa. She was a very stern lady. All the students were afraid of her, because when you were sent to the principal’s office and she was in a bad mood, she would scold you before asking what took you there. The teachers were also strict. I think it was part of school policy. The principal had to set an example, and the teachers were all adult women. There were no young teachers. All of the teachers were mature and very strict. My teacher, Carolina Soto, was very strict. At the time, we had to memorize the multiplication tables. We had to learn everything by heart. If somebody didn’t know the tables, she was punished. If you hadn’t done your homework, you were punished. Perhaps the most absurd was to have you stand on your desk. I now consider it absurd ... the same as pulling a student out of class. I think it’s anti-pedagogical.

I was never punished, because I always tried to have my homework done and I was a standard-bearer throughout elementary. There was no reason for them to punish me. I only remember that once we painted our fingernails. It was forbidden for us to paint our nails, but we were mischievous and curious. We were about 10 years old, and there were six of us. We were starting to put on the nail polish when our teacher, Miss Carol, saw us. She made us line up, she washed our hands, and then she sent us to a scrubbing sink. She had us scrub out what was left of the nail polish, without using a varnish remover.

I was a standard-bearer throughout elementary. I think being the standard-bearer is something you earn. Every year the best students in the upper grades, from fourth to sixth, are selected. Then, it’s up to the principal to decide who will be the standard-bearer that year. I carried the national flag for several years. Once, I carried the San Mateo flag and a peer

from another county was selected to carry the national flag. Her mother wanted her to be the standard-bearer and she was very smart. She and I had almost the same grade averages. That was painful for me because I had always carried the national flag.

Attending an only-girls school is very nice ... because you grow up among girls. It's a feminine environment. You play what girls play: dolls, toy dishes ... you do delicate activities. In contrast, playing with the boys includes football matches and other things. I grew up in that environment, and I liked it. It's a little difficult here, but if it were possible, I would like my children to attend only-girls and only-boys schools.

I liked participating in reading contests because I always liked reading. My father bought us storybooks. I used to take my sisters' and mine to school. In school, I also read some yellow-cover encyclopedias titled *Mi Libro Encantado* [My Enchanted Book], *Mi Libro y Yo* [My Book and I], something like that. It's a 12-volume encyclopedia. I liked reading stories, fables, and mythology. Therefore, I enjoyed participating in reading and spelling contests. I didn't like handwriting contests because my handwriting was never good.

I preferred reading to gym class. I didn't like gym class at all. I only did it because it was required. I was a little lazy. I preferred activities such as reading or playing chess. When I was in sixth grade, I participated in a countywide chess contest.

Every day my mother made sure I did my homework. My handwriting was really bad in elementary. At first, my handwriting was tiny, the size of a small ant. It was so tiny that my teacher told my mother she couldn't read it, even with her glasses on. Therefore, my mother made me practice. There was a book titled *Mi País* [My Country]. I reviewed that book over 10 times throughout elementary. Every day after I was done with homework, my mother would take out the book and say, "You must do one lesson." I got so fed up with

practicing, that I started writing very large. Then, my teacher said my handwriting was extraordinarily large. My handwriting stayed large for a while, until my mother helped me to bring it down to a moderate size.

My mother always made sure we did our homework because my father's job required him to travel. He worked for the Treasury and he came home every eight days. I remember disliking my mother waking us up at dawn to study for finals or to prepare for school. However, if she hadn't done so, she wouldn't have reaped the benefits. She was very disciplined in helping us develop accountability. She never gave us permission to play or watch TV before our school projects were done.

***Adjusting to junior high school.*** When you finish elementary, you think that school is all the same. But it isn't so. Junior high school is very different. For me, the first difference was attending a mixed school, for both girls and boys. I was used to an only-girls environment. I found the environment brusque. I didn't like it. I wanted to transfer to an only-girls junior high, but there was none in San Mateo. Secondly, I was used to earning good grade averages. Although I did okay, my grades dropped in the first year. In the second year, I adapted and my grades improved.

I always liked History and Spanish Language. I enjoyed historical narratives. I liked reading and analyzing the manuscripts. I also liked Spanish Language and everything related to the correct use of verb tenses. If I could someday pursue a specialized degree, I would do so in History and Spanish Language.

In junior high, we had different teachers--History teacher, Language teacher, Math teacher, and Physics teacher—but I didn't especially care for any of them. I didn't like many of the courses. In particular, I disliked English and Visual Arts. I didn't like the Visual Arts

teacher because he repeatedly used a phrase. He would ask you, “Did you do your homework?” When you answered, “Yes, I did,” he would mockingly say, “*Seguro las?* [Are you suuure?]” I just didn’t like the course. It was mostly lecturing. The teacher would draw on the blackboard and ... I don’t know, perhaps he was too methodic. Only when I started teaching, did I understand his teaching style. I don’t know how many students liked the class, but I didn’t. In my third year, I failed both Visual Arts and English.

I disliked English so much! The teacher ... didn’t motivate us or maybe I didn’t care. The fact is that I failed English, and I received a hard punishment. My church sponsored many nice activities. We danced at youth conferences for ages 12 to 17. I was within that age range and my mother punished me where it hurt the most. I wasn’t allowed to dance or participate in anything else. It was painful for me, but I learned not to fail courses.

Junior high was the worst for me. If I had to repeat my schooling from elementary to high school, I would gladly do elementary and skip on to high school. I would not do junior high. I’m being honest. I didn’t like junior high. The first year, I had to adapt. The second year, I was doing well. In the third year, I flunked two courses!

***Enjoying high school and majoring in teaching.*** I started high school with the purpose of graduating as an elementary school teacher. I attended the same institution, except I took classes in the afternoon. The program was also mixed, but I had matured and I was better prepared to accomplish my goal.

I decided to enjoy high school. I made friends with a pair of twin sisters from another county district. They were good girls and very Catholic. One was called María de Lourdes and the other María Concepción. One of them was on scholarship, so she had to keep a competitive grade average. Her twin sister wasn’t on scholarship, but she was a good student.

I also liked to study. The three of us were outrageous together. We teased everybody. If we liked a boy, the three of us followed him around. Even if one of us really liked him, it was the three of us teasing him. In class, we always sat next to each other on the front row. However, when it was time for finals, we acted as if we didn't know each other. We each concentrated on studying, and we always got good grades. Our teacher for Children's Literature used to say, "I like teaching these three girls because they are *fregonazas* [teasers], but they are good students." In school events we were always up front whistling and cheering. We skipped classes. When we didn't feel like being in school, we gathered the whole class. We were leaders. I was never class president, but the three of us exercised leadership. We called everyone, "Hey, would you like to skip class? Who wants to stay?" and we left the school. We convinced the porter and he let us out. If we didn't want to be in school during recess time, we gave the porter something to let us out and we went out to the central square. On one occasion, my mother saw me in the square during recess time. She didn't say anything to me then, but she reprimanded me when I got home.

That was the best time in my education. I can say the most wonderful things about high school because I enjoyed it. I enjoyed studying and having fun. My friends had their boyfriends and I had a boyfriend. However, having a boyfriend didn't affect my grades because I never gave it much importance. My studies had their place, my boyfriend had his place, and my friends had their place. Everything had a separate place in my life.

I studied by myself. I never liked studying in a group because we teased each other, made jokes, and did everything except study. It was a waste of my time. To this day, I don't like studying with others because my way of studying is as follows: I take the material I need to learn, and I read it out loud (as if I were speaking to somebody). I read it once. If I need to

review, I read it again, and that's it. I don't need to do any more because that's how I learn. Besides, I never liked studying in the evening. I always studied at 5:00 a.m. During the first two years of high school, we had morning classes. In the third year, I did my practicum from 8:00 to noon and started school at 1:30 p.m. Even then, I preferred studying early in the morning.

When I was about to graduate, we were all waiting to learn the pass-fail results. All of the third year students were waiting nervously to know who had passed and who had failed. I was calm because I knew I had passed. My mother had already bought my graduation ring and I thought, "Well, I have a commitment now." I was very happy when I learned I had passed. It was very nice.

During my school days, my sister (the one who is two years younger than I) and I were very good friends. We supported and helped each other. Our friendship helped us morally and intellectually. We were very close, and it helped us advance in our education.

At the same time, being the eldest has been a heavy burden for me. My siblings are always attentive to what I do. I have a brother who is studying in Europe. Once, he told me, "If the problem comes from you, I have no concern. I can always be sure that you will find the best solution." I stopped to think and I replied, "Don't be so sure. I am not perfect. You must always trust in Jesus Christ because he is the only one who is perfect. I am not." Yes, you often carry a great responsibility because your siblings see you as an example.

***Learning in church.*** I've always been Mormon, as they commonly refer to us. My other world was the church, where I received more than spiritual guidance. While I was developing intellectually in school, I was also learning in church. In church, the class was called *Seminario* [Seminar] and it was for youth 14 to 17 years old. We studied the Bible, the

Book of Mormon, and other books. I had Seminar every day, from Monday to Friday, from 5:00 to 6:00 a.m. The idea was for you to graduate from Seminar in the same year you graduated from high school. Therefore, I obtained my Seminar degree at the same time I obtained my high school degree.

After Seminar, when you reach 18 years old, the class is called *Instituto de Religión* [Religious Institute]. The class is for young adults who may be already working or attending night school or university classes. It takes three years to complete. I graduated from Religious Institute. I learned by participating in youth activities such as Young Men, Young Women. I belonged to the Young Women's group. We had activities like the Mutual, which is a weekly meeting that involves both religious studies and leisure activities. We used to plan going to the movies, going to a dance, or simply watching a video. In my time, the Mutual took place on Wednesdays. Following the religious part of the meeting, we would all go to the basketball court to play *papi-football*. We also had soccer matches where youth groups outside of the church brought their teams to play with ours. I didn't play soccer, but the men did and we had fun cheering for them. We were a very united group and we were prudent. We were always good kids.

Seminar was mixed. Religious Institute was mixed. However, when it was Young Men, it was only for men. When it was Young Women, it was only for women. The guidance we received varied according to gender. As women, we were taught important moral aspects such as staying chaste, wearing modest attire, and behaving appropriately during courtship and engagement. Those manners were also reinforced in school. We learned how to cook. I learned many handicrafts in church that I didn't learn in school. When I was sad, spending



time with the young women helped me cheer up. I had many girlfriends in church. It was nice. That was my environment. It was always my world.

My friends were always members of the church. The only friends I had outside of church were the twins. In my time, we were a large group of 18 to 20 youths. We studied in different institutions. I attended a national institute. Some of my friends studied in private schools, some attended a military academy, and others studied in other counties. I often remember a friend of mine. He was killed. He was a very, very, very special person, a good person. He was very dedicated in church. We grew up together and we became good friends. He earned a degree in Engineering and was later killed.

An important aspect in our church is the mission. When we are single, we do missionary work. Men do it when they are 19 years old and women do it when they are 21. For the men, it's a command; they must go out on mission for two years. My brother spent two years in a neighboring country. My husband traveled around the western region of our country for two years. That is how we met. Women only go for 1½ years and it's optional.

I had already finished my coursework at the university when I went away on mission. I was about 22 years old, and I went to another Central American country. It's a very special experience. You remember those 1½ years forever. Everything is so nice. You put yourself at the service of people you don't know. You serve, you forget about yourself, you teach people, and you invite them to learn the gospel.... It's something very special for us and we prepare our children for doing the same in the future.

### ***Early Adulthood***

Upon completion of my three years in Religious Institute, I enrolled in college to earn a degree in teaching at the secondary level. The college environment was different. You go

and meet new people. Everyone looks after his or her own interest, and each person makes an effort to study. I did well in the first year. I didn't fail any classes. I also did well in the second year. In the third year, I failed a class ... because I found the teacher somewhat boring. He was always talking with his hands inside his pockets or writing on the blackboard. He talked and talked with his hands in his pockets and that was all. I took notes but it was a two-hour period. How boring! Therefore, I often skipped class. For that reason, I failed the course and I had to retake the final exam.

*Preferred teaching styles.* I like a teacher who engages your attention, a teacher who is very well prepared. .... I like somebody who is good in the art of speaking so you can say, "Wow! What a nice class that was." In other words, I don't like taking a boring class. It's not a matter of vanity. I'm not being boastful. When I teach, I don't like giving boring lessons. For instance, if I am talking about children, I will have pictures and if I can, I will bring a child to class. I like giving stimulating lessons, well-prepared lessons. I like talking and expressing myself well. I even think that I use hand gestures like my elementary teacher did. When I speak, I want the students to pay attention and understand the material.

I had a teacher in college of whom students said with disdain, "Oh, that granny..." I liked her class ... because she lectured in a very charming way. She taught Child Psychology. When she talked about the children, she gestured to emphasize what she was saying. Sometimes, I think that I'm a dreamer. I imagine what I hear and that's how I learn. Therefore, I liked how she taught. Another teacher I liked was young. I liked that she dressed up for class. I've never smoked, but she had a charming style of smoking and I loved watching her. I liked listening to her class because ... her gestures were appealing to me.

Attending college was like another phase. It was something I did on my own. I paid for all my college expenses. My mother helped me by showing concern and it was a new accomplishment. I knew that, besides advancing my education, earning a college degree could lead to better employment opportunities. A college degree could open doors for me anywhere. Moreover, I learned.

***Embracing the teaching profession.*** When I graduated from High School with a major in elementary teaching, I taught second grade at an evangelical school for two years. Then, when I earned my college degree for teaching at the secondary level, I taught at a technological institute. I taught Human Relations, History, Spanish Language, and another course related to Spanish Language. I taught those four courses, and I liked the experience because I saw 12- and 13-year-olds doing the same mischief I had done at their age. I often laughed about it. I never was a dishonest student; I never used hidden notes to score well on a test. Once, I was in charge of a group of students studying to become electricians. They were all males and they were taking a final exam. I saw a student passing hidden notes on to another student, and I took the notes away. I didn't take away their tests because I would've felt badly. Afterwards, the students teased me. They said I must have been an expert cheater myself to catch them cheating. Overall, I had a nice experience. I enjoyed teaching at the secondary level.

Then, my husband immigrated to the United States one year before me. I was enrolled in college to earn a licentiate degree in Education, but I had other concerns. My marriage was in play. I attended class, but my mind was elsewhere. Therefore, it took a lot of effort for me to complete the school year. Then, I came to the United States.

*Immigrating to the United States*

I never wanted to come to the United States. Now that I'm here, I think differently. I studied in my home country ... and I always thought that you could prosper wherever you were born. I'm aware of the situations in our countries, but I had that idea ... I thought, "I've put so much effort into studying, preparing myself professionally, and behaving well. When I get to the United States I will be like the grasshopper ... who, upon arriving to its destiny, was swallowed by a frog." I thought, "That will happen to me. I have been studying and moving about with some freedom here. It will be different there. I will be washing dishes, making hamburgers and doing other things..." No, I didn't want to come.

Nevertheless, I got married and my husband had thought of immigrating to the United States since he was very young. He finally did so after we got married. Once here, he asked me to join him ... I asked him to return home arguing that we were both educated and we could make a living in our country. But he didn't change his mind. Then, I started to analyze my way of thinking. I weighed my aspirations and beliefs against my marriage and my love for him. In my country, mothers say you must follow your husband wherever he goes. My mother and my parents-in-law always told me that. And I loved him. I finally decided, "If I have to live with him in the United States, I will go."

At the time, my brother was away on mission ... and I wrote him saying, "I don't want to leave, because I've already been to the U.S. embassy. They ask for too many things and they end up denying the visa. Entering the country illegally is against my principles." My brother gave me a helpful response that I've never forgotten. He wrote, "Territorial borders are set by human beings. God sees no borders. Other than God, no being can destroy an eternal marriage. Go to your husband and don't worry about those territorial borders." I then

thought, “Yes, he’s right,” and I automatically changed my way of thinking. I reconciled with the idea that I was going to wash dishes, make hamburgers, and do other things in this country that I had never done before. I was calm when I arrived. That is the reason I am here today.

***Initiating the journey.*** Before traveling, you know many things about the United States. You know some good things and you know many bad things that could happen to you. You begin to ask people about what could happen... You’re trying to cover your back because you know that many things could go wrong. Immigrating to the United States is like trying to go past a huge dragon knowing that you’re a very tiny animal.

My husband and I carefully planned my trip. If I was traveling illegally, I was not going to be accompanied by just any person because it could be dangerous. We needed to be careful and think things through. We started looking for a travel companion and several people offered to take me. However, my husband wanted me to have a woman companion. How would I find such a woman? My husband was always asking for the impossible. First, he wanted me to come to the United States. Now, it was finding a woman as my travel companion. I thought, “Well, I have to find a woman who is courageous and willing to take me.” We remembered that my grandmother had relatives in Mexico and we thought of asking one of her cousin’s daughters.

We talked with my grandmother, and she and I went to visit her relatives. My grandmother explained the situation ... that I needed a travel companion for security reasons. Her cousin said, “But my daughters, how can they take such risk?” However, one of the daughters said, “I will take you. How much will you pay me?” I responded, “I will pay you

this much and all of your traveling expenses will be covered. But you must take good care of me. You must protect me. Nothing can happen to me.” We closed the deal.

Leaving home was very difficult. It was very hard for me. I didn't say good-bye to my mother. I didn't say good-bye to my father. Both of them were there. I only looked at them, and I asked them not to say anything. It would have been harder for us. I left. I took nothing with me. You bring nothing when you travel here. My grandmother took me to her relatives' house. When she was about to leave, I locked myself in the bathroom. I didn't want to say good-bye to her either.

It's very difficult. I used to think it was foolish. Oh, those foolish people! Why do they risk their lives? You can't understand those people until you experience the same. It's very hard; it's very difficult. But some things are more important. I learned that from my brother. No territorial border is more important than your family. I was not immigrating to make money. I was immigrating to join my husband. That was more important for me. Now that I've done it, I can say, “What else is there to do?” If I needed to overcome other challenges to be by his side, now for my children as well as for my husband, I would do it all over again. I have learned (and as a member of our church I am convinced) that my family is what is most important.

We traveled by land. My travel companion's son was getting married in Veracruz [Mexico]. She said, “Let's go first to the wedding, and we can start our trip from there.” I visited Veracruz. I went to the wedding, I danced, and it was fun. I saw an atmosphere that was very different from ours. We're calmer than they were. Everything was okay. We traveled to Mexico City. We always rode on first class buses. She sometimes suggested taking a regular bus, but I was adamant about traveling on first class buses although it was

much more expensive. Immigration agents regularly stopped first class buses, but they didn't ask everyone to get down or check visas like they did on other buses. The buses we took were luxurious. I always sat in front as if I were a bus line attendant. The immigration agents passed me by without even looking.

We arrived in Mexico City at 5:00 a.m. My travel companion knew her way around because she had worked in the city. We went to the airport to buy our tickets for a 9:00 a.m. flight to Tijuana. She was very Catholic ... and she wanted to visit the Basílica de la Virgen de Guadalupe. We arrived at the airport at 5:00, bought the tickets from 5:00 to 6:00, and were at the basilica by 7:00 a.m. What a beautiful church! While she prayed, I sat in the last pew. I liked visiting the basilica.

Back at the airport ... I was asking God to watch over me. I had a purpose to fulfill. My companion was a little nervous, because Tijuana is one of the most dangerous border towns. Although she made me nervous, I kept telling myself, "I'm alright. I know that nothing will happen to me." But she started telling me about negative situations and dramatic cases. She kept on that way until I decided, "I'm going to act as if I'm not listening, as if I don't know her. I will do as if I don't know this person who happens to be saying crazy things."

Once in Tijuana, we had our bags searched. I didn't have much with me, only a small suitcase. [We were waiting in line.] Close to me were two immigration agents. My travel companion was behind me. She caught up with me and warned me about the agents. Do you know what I did? I got angry. I was bothered by her indiscretion. I ignored her, and I moved up the line. I passed right in front of the agents, my suitcase was searched, and I stayed calm as if I had been through the airport many times. When her bags were searched, I was already

on the other side waiting for her. Then, I needed to let my husband's uncle know that I was already in Tijuana. When I called, he said I should leave the airport as soon as possible because it could be dangerous.

Now that I'm here I think, "If I hadn't taken the initiative or acted calmly, perhaps the immigration agents would have detained me" because they march through like ants. Every minute, three or four agents walked by. We were waiting for the person who was going to find us a place to stay ... but he didn't show up. We took a taxi to a shabby hotel. I didn't feel safe there. We decided to find another hotel, when the person we were expecting found us.

We stayed with a very nice family. They were my mother's second cousins, and they treated us very well. My travel companion stayed with me for 15 to 20 more days. Afterwards, I stayed with the family. The man tried to help me find somebody who could take me across the border. My husband called me three times a day. We were attentive for an opportunity to arise.

***Crossing the Mexican-U.S. Border.*** I had anticipated staying in Tijuana for only three days, but I ended up staying for one month. It was difficult because my stay depended on finding somebody to help me go across the border. The person who was supposed to help me didn't do so. Therefore, it was up to me to find somebody else.

The first time I tried crossing the border, I went off with a man I didn't know anything about ... I acted upon desperation. I ended up in Mexicali. I was trying to go across, when U.S. immigration agents detained me. It was the worst that could've happened to me. Immigration officials detained me! I laugh now, but it was a horrible experience. I was with a young woman and her so-called boyfriend. I wasn't using my name. I was carrying the



identification documents from a niece of the family I had stayed with. They had loaned me all of her papers. I was purely Mexican, and I had always lived in Tijuana.

I didn't cry when they detained me. I tried to be courageous. It's incredible. I can say that the Lord was watching over me. I had put all my confidence in him. The *gringos* [Americans] treated the young woman badly. The agent interviewing her was Chicana; she was a Latina agent. She didn't treat the young woman with respect. When I saw that, I thought, "Oh, God! What's in store for me?" I was prepared for enduring whatever came. But my experience was different. A well-mannered man interviewed me. I remember well. If I close my eyes, I can still see his image in my mind. He was a tall man, a Black man. He was a tall, muscular Black man. All he did was put his hand on my shoulder. He neither searched me nor did anything else to me. He only said, "Why do you do it this way?" I broke down crying. I wiped away the tears and they asked for my personal information. I told them the name I was using. I knew details on the family's background by heart. The agents tried to get me confused by asking about the grandparents and great-grandparents. They asked me what I did in Tijuana. I told them I worked in a plastic product factory. I described my job and my work schedule. I told them everything the other woman did, and I swore many times that I was she. But something funny happened. They had taken the young woman's fingerprints... and it was my turn. They tried taking mine, but they couldn't. Five times they tried, but the fingerprints always came out blurry. Why? I think I was too nervous and my hands tend to be smooth. The lady taking the fingerprints became frustrated. She asked her boss to look at them. He gazed at me and said, "You are lucky. Leave them like that."

They handcuffed me. I felt so hurt when they handcuffed me! It was the worst. They also handcuffed me onto a chair. The young woman was beside me, but I didn't speak to her.

I was crying. They took her out and pushed her into a small room where they keep detainees before deciding where to send them next. I thought, "Oh, I will also be pushed into that room." However, the same agent who had interviewed me asked, "Would you like some water?" "No," I said. "Would you like a cookie or something to eat?" He was offering me food. I said, "No, I don't want anything." Then he told me, "We will come back for you in a little while." He said it with such patience and care that I hoped all agents could be like him... They didn't treat me badly.

The same agent took me by the arm, like a gentleman, into the small room. I was in there four more hours before they released me. I asked, "Where will you send me now?" They said, "We will send you back to Tijuana, your hometown." I went back by myself to Tijuana. The young woman wanted to come with me. It was midnight and it was good to have a companion. We got on the bus, but I had to stay in Mexicali overnight because I was missing 20 pesos for the fare. The young woman loaned me the money. She actually gave me the money, because when was I ever going to pay her back?

We arrived at the Tijuana bus station at 6:00 a.m. I knew my way back to the family's house, because I had deliberately learned my way around the city every time we went out on errands. The family was expecting me. I had called my husband at 1:00 a.m. from Mexicali, and he had let them know I was on my way back. When I was still at the bus station, a man offered to take me across the border. I was rude to him. I said my husband was picking me up and I lived in Tijuana. Then, I took a taxi back to the family's house.

The second time, I fell into the trap of another man. I got in his car and he showed me to the border. It's a wonder nothing happened to me! He could have raped or abused me because I was alone with him. The only reason nothing happened to me was because I am

100% sure the Lord was watching over me. The man explained to me how to go across that border point. Nevertheless, he ended up not taking me because he discovered I was from Central America. He kept asking if I was from Central America and I kept denying it. At one point, I pronounced a word that gave me away and he said, "I will charge you double." I said, "If that's the case, I don't want your services." He said, "Fine. I won't take you" and he dropped me off in downtown Tijuana. Again, I took a taxi and found my way back to the house. When the head of the family saw my disappointment he said, "Don't be so impatient. I will help you but you must give me a little more time."

The third time I tried crossing the border, a woman and her son helped me. They seemed to be from a good family in Tijuana. Who would've thought they were involved in that? I stayed in their home for one night. The next day, somebody came to pick me up and I waited three more days in a basement. That was still in Tijuana, but closer to the border. I didn't want to walk my way across. I had to go by car. That's what my husband had advised me to do.

I was not the only person waiting there. The men remained upstairs and the women went down to the basement. Staying with the women was the most horrible experience for me. I had never been among coarse, disgusting women. You might think of someone being coarse when they speak foul language. No, that was the worst of the worst. The women talked vulgarities. They talked obscenities, what they did and didn't do with men. It was the worst experience. I was there because the room had three bunk beds and there were six of us, two in each bed.

A tall woman slept in front of me. She was Black. When the rest of the women started chatting, I would pull her aside and we would talk about other things. We became friends.

She had come to Mexico for a dental check up and was returning to the United States. She was a tall strong woman and I am so small that I thought, "I will make friends with her. If anything happens to me, she can defend me." Therefore, I followed her around as if I was a little key chain of hers. We became friends. She would say, "Are you hungry? I'm going out." They allowed us to go out. There was a store nearby, and she used to bring back food for both of us. The other women didn't approach us anymore. When we took showers, she watched the door for me and I watched it for her.

I tell everyone about my religion. When we were about to be taken across the border, I told her that if she didn't know how to pray I would do it for both of us. I remember we held hands as if we had always been the best of friends. I prayed and we went across. The car stopped for a moment and a young man opened up our hiding place. He was a well-groomed young man who looked like a typical student. He gave me my suitcase and I proceeded to look for my husband's uncle. Then, my husband's uncle bought me a plane ticket to come to the Midwest. I was reunited with my husband on September 22.

I learned much during the journey. I learned to mature. I learned to live with different people. I was able to overcome my attitude towards immigrants, because I experienced it myself. I am saddened when I hear about people who endured difficulties I never experienced. I didn't go hungry. I wasn't abused. No. I can say nothing happened to me.

*Living in the Midwestern United States.* Upon my arrival in the Midwest, I began to get acquainted with the city. It reminded me of the fall back home. During the first few months, I thought, "Oh, it feels like ... our cool fall winds." It made me feel melancholic. I did like the city. I thought, "This does look like the United States." I hadn't liked visiting Los Angeles [because] it wasn't any different from Tijuana. Then, I was impressed by the cold

because it's too strong. The snow. It was the first time in my life that I saw the snow falling, and I felt like a child.

One week after I arrived, my husband found me a job. We both worked at McDonald's. We lived only three blocks away, so I walked to work. The first thing I did at work was to ask everyone how long he or she had been in the kitchen. Some people said eight months, several months. I couldn't find anyone who had been there only for one month. There was a young woman from Bosnia who had been working there for three months. We liked each other and we started talking. How did we communicate? Who knows, because I didn't speak English and she spoke neither English nor Spanish. I think she was also new there. Once we had learned a few words, we became friends. We gossiped using gestures, would you believe?

I told myself, "I am not going to be working in the kitchen too much longer. I will soon be working up front." I made up my mind and I made it happen. I learned whatever I needed to learn and the manager moved me up to passing orders. I learned quickly. I observed, I took notes, and I needed to speak very little. Afterwards, I practiced on my own. One month later, I was working up front. I didn't want to stay working in the kitchen, not I.

I took the orders in English. Do you know what my problem is? I can speak English with somebody from China or Bosnia, because I am learning just like they are. But I can't speak with a gringo! If it's somebody who can speak English well, I feel they will laugh at me. Although I have realized it doesn't happen. So I paid attention and later I told my husband, "I couldn't understand this word." Then he would explain it or I would look it up in the dictionary.

My husband was able to help me because he closed at night and I worked mornings. When he came home he said, "So you can learn faster, I brought you samples of the hamburgers' wrapping papers." Therefore, I learned to recognize the wrappings and I learned the names for different hamburgers. My husband always asked me how I was doing at work. I also asked him. Sometimes he had doubts about using the computer and I said, "Let me pay attention tomorrow morning and I'll tell you." He helped me very much. I can say it was his and my willingness to learn that helped. If you don't make an effort to learn, you could spend five years working in the kitchen. You become aggressive here. That is something we don't have back home. Do you know why? Here you concentrate on you, you, and only you. Here you have to look only after yourself and your family.

I recently watched a man on TV who stated, "Many people come to the United States out of economic need. Many of our countries lack what you can find here. People with and without formal education immigrate here. In the United States, our educational levels don't count. We are all the same." I was reflecting on that. It's true. I know a woman from Colombia who has a licentiate degree in Business Administration. She is a very nice woman and she worked next to me in McDonald's. I also know a young woman from Ecuador who didn't even finish elementary school. In Ecuador, she was an employee in a small store, but here she was our boss. She was very unkind to us. It was because of the English and the immigration status. Those two factors are very important: having a legal immigration status and knowing English. If you know how to speak English, even if you have very little formal education, you have one foot in. However, if you don't know how to speak English and you are undocumented, you'll work in cleaning or at McDonald's next to people who don't know

how to read or write. You can have a licentiate or a doctorate degree, but you will be the same as everyone else. We all are at one level.

In the United States, with or without education we are immigrants. We are immigrants unless we set goals for ourselves. I worked in McDonald's for a long time, but I later worked cleaning buildings for about eight months. My husband and I worked together. We set a goal: we were not going to stay cleaning forever. We were going to learn. We were going to advance. And we accomplished it. We always set goals for ourselves. Otherwise, what's the purpose? My husband decided to look for a job that could be a little more honorable. He worked in a window factory. He worked well. Everything he was learning in school, he applied at work. Afterwards, he had no time for school, but he kept studying English. He kept studying the language and now he speaks English well. He made a lot of progress; he had a good job and I helped him out with my earnings. He didn't have to work in McDonald's anymore. Now, he works nights because he is self-employed. He's his own boss, and he can schedule his time. He's the one who works, but we set our goals together. We set out to better our situation and we have accomplished it. Together we're making progress. He came here. I came here. Therefore, we have to strive to get ahead in this country.

### ***Recent Learning Experiences***

I learned how to drive in this country. In the first years of my stay, I didn't drive. When I worked at McDonald's, I walked to work. Later, when my husband and I worked together, he drove the car. I started learning how to drive when I was expecting my first child...but my husband didn't let me drive because he thought it was an unnecessary risk to my health. Later, I started again, little by little. I initially had thought, "Why would I want to

drive? My husband is always with me. He takes me here and there.” The sisters at church kept telling me, “You need to learn how to drive. Your children could get ill...” I thought, “Maybe they’re right.” A long time went by and I didn’t want to learn. It was that simple. I didn’t want to learn. When it was time for me to set my goals, I decided, “I have to learn and I am going to learn.” I told my husband we were going to start practicing on a certain date and hour. It was my own initiative because I had let too much time pass by. My husband was surprised. He said, “Are you sure you want to do this? You know that you start and then... You can drive. What you still need to do is to drive without anybody at your side.” I said, “This time I’ll do it.” I made up my mind that I was going to learn, and I did. You have to make an effort and tell your mind that you must accomplish it.

*Learning to drive a car.* My husband taught me about different parts in the car: the light switches, the signals to turn right and left ... and every detail. He also taught me about the roads and driving rules. Before I started driving, he used to give me advice. He said, “When you decide to drive, remember: on this street, you can only turn right. On this stop, you must yield. You must learn the streets... In this area, the speed limit is 35. As you enter the freeway, you must increase your speed. You need to be very careful. If you are stopped by the police, this is how you place the mirror, and this is how you look at them.” Little by little, he trained me. He also gave me a driving manual in Spanish. I read it, and I learned the rules.

He was sometimes impatient with me. He would tell me off because he learned to drive at a young age and he wanted me to drive exactly like him. The situation made me nervous. At first, I was fearful when I practiced with him by my side. You make so many mistakes when you’re learning! On one occasion, we were both happy because I was driving



well. Suddenly, I drove the car onto the sidewalk. I was very scared ... and I didn't know how to get the car down. My husband helped me. I managed to get the car down, but he still told me off. I felt so uncomfortable that I thought, "I will never take the car again because he isn't patient with me." Nevertheless, as time went on, we continued practicing. Then, he gave me a larger car.... He still called my attention now and then, but I learned.

In the very beginning, I was so nervous that my hands would sweat. It was so bad that I felt the wheel slipping under my hands. Oh, and my stomach. It was better for me not to eat before practicing. I practiced every morning. Even on Sundays, if my husband was available, we practiced. After some time, my husband said, "Here are the keys. You can go on your own." I had to take the car, because he had already given me the keys.

The first time I took the car by myself was somewhat funny. I was extremely nervous. I left the house and I couldn't turn back. It was as if a mother sends a child to do something and he comes back without doing as he was told. I was very nervous. A police car approached the street corner. The driver was an old policeman and he waved at me. I waved back while thinking, "I'm only going to practice." I got into the car and started thinking, "My husband is still sleeping. I could tell him that I practiced without actually doing it." Then I thought, "I'm not going to fool him. If I don't practice, I'm only fooling myself. I will demonstrate to myself that I can do this. But what if I make a mistake?" I got out of the car and went back to the house. He asked, "Weren't you going to practice?" I said, "Yes, I'm going. I only came back for the cell phone in case something happens." However, that was an excuse. I would've liked one of the children to wake up so I wouldn't have to go driving. Eventually, I took the cell phone and left. I was gone for over an hour because I drove very far. When I returned home, my husband was waiting outside. I casually said, "What's

wrong?” He said, “I was very worried! I thought something had happened to you.” That was a funny experience, but I had practically passed a driving test.

Because I got so nervous, I decided to sing every time I went driving. I sang anything that came to mind: a pop song, a hymn, or anything. After singing I would tell myself, “I can do this, I can do this, I can do this.” Singing was therapeutic for me. To this day, I sing when I’m driving. Another thing I did was to act indifferently when I saw a police car approaching. I made believe it was not there.

I practiced and went out on my own. Then, the time came for me to drive with my children in the car. I thought, “If I can do it by myself, I can do it with them in the car.” The first time I was so nervous, I asked the Lord to protect them. I secured my son in his chair. I secured my daughter in her chair, and we left. My children behaved well.

I don’t have a driving license yet. I can’t get a license. I can only drive with prudence. I don’t get lost in the city. I don’t know the names of the streets, but I know the streets. I feel comfortable driving.

***Learning through motherhood.*** Motherhood has been a beautiful experience for me. I enjoyed my first pregnancy. All the girls at McDonald’s took good care of me, and my bosses were very considerate. I actually did very little because I worked up front. When there were no clients to attend, I would only put things in order. There was a chair for me to rest, and my co-workers were considerate.

I really enjoyed my first pregnancy. We had recently gotten a new car. My husband and I had a very old car, but we said, “We will work hard, and we will buy a good car straight from an agency.” We gave our first payment, and we got the car. Then, we said, “Now we need somebody to enjoy the car.” I said, “A child!” I was pregnant a month later.

We were so happy! In the beginning, I was afraid I wouldn't be able to go to a doctor. My husband always accompanied me. We went together and we enjoyed it. It was also nice when I was expecting my second child. I was more experienced in visiting doctors and going to hospitals. I knew what to expect. Both of our children were very much wanted by us. My husband and I have learned to become parents in this country.

When I make mistakes and I correct them, I usually don't forget. Therefore, I learn from my own mistakes. That has helped me to better myself. I observe my actions and I evaluate my own behaviors. It helps me to correct myself. Every time I make a mistake, I think, "It's true. I made a mistake. Next time, I'll do better." Different situations provide me with new opportunities for learning. When I go to the doctor with the children, I sometimes pronounce words incorrectly. When the nurse or doctor repeats it, I take notice. I think, "Oh, so that's how you say it." When I tell off my children, I sometimes yell at them and I immediately think, "No. That's not right. I need to do better." If my son doesn't like his breakfast, I wonder, "The other day he liked his pancake. Why didn't he eat it this time?" I add something different to the batter and he likes it. Then I think, "Now I know what was missing." You learn from different situations.

I make an effort to learn many things because I need to teach my children. I meditate every night, "Where did I fail today? I interacted incorrectly with my son. He was uncomfortable. He felt embarrassed. It's not right." I also think about my daughter. Every night I say, "Tomorrow, I will do this." I think how I can do better in teaching them.

When my daughter was born, it was difficult for me. I was used to taking care of only my son. It was very, very hard. I didn't believe women could experience depression following childbirth, because I had not experienced it myself. Nevertheless, it happened to

me after my daughter was born. I didn't know how to take care of her. I turned dumb. I couldn't look after her. I just didn't know how. To this day, I'm learning because every child is different. My daughter is very young, but she's very demanding. My son is easygoing. I was used to my son's calm temperament, and I'm still adapting to my daughter's demand for attention. It's something I'm learning with time.

### ***Personal Reflections***

The most important school you can have is life itself. You may attend an educational institution, you may learn much theory, and you may learn from books. However, when you face a situation involving people, you learn. You learn because it doesn't necessarily require theory or knowledge learned from books. It involves your feelings, your way of thinking, and your way of acting.

For me, learning in this country is very important. I learn every day that I'm here. I've learned so much! I've learned because I've been interested and because I've had to. I know how I need to conduct myself in certain places, and I know what I need to do in general. During the first years of my stay in the United States, I've learned to interact with people from other nations, especially with gringos. In the beginning, I was somewhat afraid of gringos but not anymore.

Another thing very important is to keep in mind that how you learn and live will reflect on what you can teach your children. I realize it with my son. He's now at a stage where he notices and imitates everything. He puts on his father's shoes and he tries to walk like his father. He's trying to imitate his father. When I sometimes tell him off, he picks up his toy doll and begins telling off the toy in the same way. I realize that if you're not careful, they pick up on everything you do. I do many things in the same way my mother did them. I

learned from my mother. The same is going to happen to my children. Therefore, I need to be very careful as a parent.

My children are very young. Now is the time to teach them. While they're still young, I will try to give the best of me. I know that once they reach adolescence, they will become rebellious. Everybody goes through that stage. The thought of my children as adolescents in this country frightens me. So much happens among adolescents here. I tell my husband, "Do you know what? If I teach good principles to our children while they're growing up, I might feel less apprehensive when they reach adolescence."

Motherhood is one of the most critical roles you can fulfill. I tell my husband, "When I die, I'm not going to be held accountable for everything I did on this earth. I will be held accountable for my son, my daughter, and you. Nothing else will count."

#### ***Academic and Professional Aspirations***

If I think of the future, I imagine my children a bit more grown up. In five years, I could be seeing some results of their upbringing. I imagine myself more experienced in everything I'm starting to learn now. I see myself perhaps holding a different immigration status. I see myself being more confident about many things. However, with respect to my way of thinking, my way of being, and my principles... I think I will be the same.

Once my children go to school, I would like to study and dedicate more time to myself. I would like to study English because I don't want to go through life uttering only a few words. Afterwards, I would like to get another high school degree. I would like to start again in a sense, because I would like to work as a Spanish teacher at a school. In this country, I would like to teach children. Perhaps children are more obedient. I know that adults aren't easygoing, and adolescents are... very different here. In my native country, I

didn't like teaching children. That's why I made an effort to rapidly complete my degree for teaching at the secondary level. I preferred teaching adolescents and adults. That is not the case here. Not here.

### *Postscript*

I visited Domi six weeks after completing our interviews. Her now 11-month-old daughter was receiving in-home therapeutic care to normalize a slow psychomotor development. Once a week, the therapists taught Domi how to assist and document her daughter's progress. Domi was beginning to consider physical therapy as a possible career option.

### **Azucena**

At the time of the interviews, Azucena was 38 years old. She had come to the United States on a student visa when she was 18. Over the last 20 years, she had moved back and forth between her country of origin and the United States. She had stayed in the United States since 1989 and had become a naturalized U.S. citizen. She lived with her 15-year-old daughter and her 13-year-old son. She had been divorced for several years and had recently become engaged to a foreign national.

Azucena had completed 14 years of formal education in her native country and 1½ years in the United States. Her bilingual skills and her understanding of cultural pluralism had earned her a professional full-time job that often required her to work beyond regular hours and on weekends. She was the single provider in her home.

*Azucena's Life Story in English*

What follows is Azucena's life story of learning. Her story is presented in English because, although she is proficient in both Spanish and English, she preferred doing the interviews in English.

*Childhood and Adolescence*

I was born in the capital city of [a Central American country] in 1965. Growing up, I remember it being a beautiful place to live ... the weather was always nice. As a child, [I was] not aware [of it,] but it was a large city. Downtown was very busy, and in order to go sometimes to Grandma's it was kind of a trip. We had a nice home. It was a middle-class home ... close to ... a poor section of the city. You [could] see the whole downtown from our house. It was a nice home [with] a beautiful view, and I can't say that I lacked anything.

I had a very nice family unit where I had my father and my mother. I was surrounded by my whole family. I [was] the eldest ... of three [children]. I had a younger sister, [we were] one year and a half apart. My brother was my cousin, [but he] was adopted by my father.

My father was in the construction business and my Mom was a merchant. My Mom was a very active and very vivacious woman. She'd sell ice anywhere, in Alaska if that was where you lived. My Mom finished junior high school and then took some courses in office equipment. When she wasn't traveling, she was the one who was home to make sure we had our homework done, ... our uniforms, [and] everything we needed for school. My father was not a very well educated man ... [but] he self-taught himself a lot of things about politics and economy. He read a lot. He was very adamant, "You have to go to school and you have to do better than we did."

*Learning in school.* My Mom loved the States [and] she wanted us to learn English. So we went to ... a private kindergarten school. [Later], my uncle on my Dad's side of the family married a U.S. citizen and she would teach us English every once in a while.

[After kindergarten] my father, who was raised as a Catholic and then changed his way of thinking, sent us to private Protestant schools. [These schools] were [for both boys and girls,] always mixed. We went to *Escuela Adventista El Camino* for our elementary education, [where] we had religious education as well. It was a nice little school. It wasn't one of the fanciest schools in town, but it was a private school.

I was an outstanding student throughout elementary. I would always get the long band instead of the short band at the end of the year. The band was blue and white because my grades were always five, which was the highest [possible] grade. My Mom was on top of me all the time. She was persistent. She would look at my homework and she would say, "That doesn't look right." She would cut it up and she would say, "Okay. You need to do it on this page and I'm gonna tape it back on, because you have to do quality work." My father taught me not to cheat, so I never cheated in elementary school.

I loved my teachers. My first grade [teacher] was ... Ana Lilian Mejía. My second grade teacher, Nora, was mean. Over there, corporal punishment was allowed in school. I was really rambunctious. I was a tomboy, so sometimes I would get out of hand. [My second grade teacher] would hit me in the hands with the ruler, so I didn't like her a lot. But my third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade teachers, especially [those in] fifth and sixth, I adored. [One was] a male, which was kind of unusual: Profesor Rómulo Contreras. [He was a] really great guy, who kind of got you out there. I was noisy with him, too. He would sit me in a corner, I would be a clown, and he'd get mad. I used to fight with the boys all the time. I



loved fighting with boys and [would] defend my sister 'cause she was real weak. My sister was more feminine than I was. I was less feminine. I always wanted to do things that boys would do, and I wanted to beat them at the game. Even if it scraped all my knees, it didn't matter. My Dad always wanted to have a boy, so I kind of was "the boy" of the two.

In elementary I loved everything. I loved what they used to teach. Some of the ways they taught were very traditional, but Profesor Rómulo Contreras was more innovative and he did different things. I loved debating. Social studies and any social classes were my favorite.

When I graduated from sixth grade, I went to... an evangelical school where my cousin [also] went. For our family it was... somewhat of a prestige to go to that school [although] it wasn't among [the most] expensive. The more expensive private schools were Catholic, [but] my father did not want us to be in a Catholic school.

There were some things that I didn't like [in middle school]. If I didn't pay attention to religious class and I didn't pass, I couldn't pass my grade. [At the time, I thought], "I'm a good person, I don't need to learn all this stuff," [although] I appreciated it ... when I got older. There were [also] some teachers that I did not like. I hated my civics teacher. He would go in front of the class and recite the book. I failed that class once. Later, at least in my *plan básico*, which is like junior high, I liked pretty much everything.

I did high school in the same school. I was still a good student until I turned 15 and I [started liking] boys. I was thinking more about boys than I was thinking about school, so I started failing in my grades. My strengths were in *Desarrollo Económico*, Economic Development. We started looking at economic development in under-developed countries, and that was very interesting to me. That was in the late 70s. I didn't realize this at the time,

but we were the second poorest country in the continent, and there was no development. There [were only] certain monopolies. I liked debating and talking about current events while I was studying them. We talked about how the past affected us, and how the present would affect our future. I loved anything that had to do with politics. I [also] liked everything that had to do with literature. [I] had an excellent literature teacher. I started reading a lot of poetry books and novels. I read some of my favorite books during that time. My most favorite [author] is Gabriel García Márquez. I started reading *100 Years of Solitude* very young. It was confusing, but it was a really exciting book. Then, I hated all the math stuff. I loved Chemistry, but I did fail [other math-based classes] towards what you call here high school.

[Overall], I loved the way school was back home, because you would be with one teacher most of the time, all throughout the year. Not as much [in junior high or high school], but you would stay in the same room with the same students and the teachers would come and go. [We] were in one place and had at least a teacher for more than one class. My Chemistry and my Biology teacher was the same person. My Physics and Algebra teacher was the same person. [The teachers] got to know you, unlike here where kids don't have someone that gets to know them well enough [and who] they can go to. I do appreciate that about my education.

When I was 15, one of my good friends committed suicide. That must have been in ninth grade. It was really a sad occasion, but that didn't happen very often. Suicide rate was not as high as it is here. I think it had something to do with the teachers [knowing] you well enough. Because they saw you often enough throughout the year, they knew whether something was wrong with you, and they could [communicate] that with your family. It was

a little different [than it is currently here]. Here, I think there are no relationships among teachers and students because you move them around all the time.

I loved that we had uniforms. I had uniforms in elementary, ... junior high, and high school. I liked it ... because it was less expensive. It also gave you some sort of pride. It was kind of nice to walk around [in uniform]; you identified people. It wasn't like a gang ... kind of thing. It was more like pride. Sometimes the colors were ugly, but sometimes they weren't. There were like big bad names [associated with the uniforms]. Our uniform in junior high was brown shirts with pleated beige skirts and white belt, so they used to call us cockroaches because of the color. I can't remember what we called [others,] but it wasn't [based on] the violence that I see in this country.

[Wearing uniforms gave us] a sense of belonging. In a way, maybe it wasn't good because you knew who were the least fortunate, [for example,] people who were in the *Instituto Nacional*, which was ... an overpopulated public school [where] you didn't have to pay. At the same time, some of those least fortunate were great students, the best students in the city. You wouldn't know that, and you couldn't really judge. But you could tell [apart] the kids whose parents could afford what schools. That may be a down side to it, but ... I think it was a good thing to have uniforms and I liked it a lot.

***Developing relationships in school.*** [In elementary school] I loved the *portera*, the porter. You had to [become friends] with the *portera* if you wanted to get out of school and buy a Popsicle or something next door, if it wasn't your recess. My parents always taught me to be humble, that you have to talk to anybody and everybody no matter what level or position they have within an organization, in this case my school. So I was careful to greet

everyone with respect. That's the way I was raised. I talked to the cleaning ladies, but the porter was probably my best relationship because there was a benefit added to that.

I normally hung out [with] my classmates. Unlike my daughter today, I had good friends and we had no violence. We were good to each other. We played games. When I moved, I had to take two buses to go to school and come back. We would walk [downtown] to the bus station [instead of] taking the bus because that was an added expense. There's a place called *Peatonal* where only pedestrians could go. We would walk ... from the Church, which was the center of the city, to the end of the commercial district, which was all source retail stores, and then turn around. There was an ice-cream shop, and if we had money, we would buy ice cream and come back. Then, everybody would split to their bus stops. Very young, I remember a few [of my peers]. I remember Carlos because I liked him in fourth grade and then he left. Angela was a good friend for many, many years. She was shorter than me and we were always together because we would get in line before we went to class. We were always next to each other. I [also] remember Sergio Medina because he was after me and I hated him and I would try to beat him up. [This was all] in elementary.

A lot of the kids that ... went to elementary school [with me,] went on to the same school that I [attended] for junior high and high school. These were people that I knew for a very long time, unlike here where people move more often and you don't have the same strength in relationships. Then, at the end in high school I had a lot of very close friends. We had nicknames for everybody, like aliases. Mine was *Churra* because of my hair. There was a snack called *churritos*. Because my hair is curly, that was my name. We had *el Tono*, and we had the guy from Nicaragua whose name was ... something like Cannon. We used to call him *Konan the Barbarian* because that's when the movie came out. He was very tall for most

Latins and he looked like Schwarzeneger. Then we had *Petróleo*, Marta, because she was really dark, *Cejitas* because she had a unibrow, beautiful girl. I can't remember how we called Elena, but she was from a pretty well to do family. We had a pretty close-knit [group]. We had our first parties together because [for] *quinceañeras* [the equivalent to sweet sixteen celebrations] you were allowed to go to a party. Most of the parties were at home parties. We would go to the Disco later, but that was different. [Since] it was a Christian school ... some of these kids didn't dance. They were not allowed to do this because of their religion. [Still], they were close friends.

We did a lot of things together. We didn't only see each other at school, but we saw each other outside school, in our homes. We studied together. That was very important especially in high school when I had subjects like Physics that I didn't like. They came to my house to study. I went to their house to study. We [also] did [other] activities. We did one big event that was a music contest. I did the stage with my friends. It was a blast! I have very fond memories. Comparing my daughter's school life to mine, I'm sad for her because she didn't have the same experience that I did.

Our school days ran ... different than here because we would have ... two *jornadas*. We would go in the morning, come home [for] lunch, go back to school, and get off at 4:00 p.m. [Later], it changed so [school] would be consecutive. I liked that about [going] to school in [my native country] because everything was compacted in one place and I was familiar with that territory.

My father and my Mom were very demanding as far as my homework. I was kind of a procrastinator, but I always got it done and got it done right. When I came home it was about having dinner [and] doing homework. We had a maid, so we didn't really have a lot of

chores to do. At one point when I was 12, I was dancing ballet at the National Ballet Theatre. I did it for a year or so. I [also] did basketball and soccer in high school. There were a lot of practices after school. I was very short, so I was doing it for fun. It wasn't a big deal to me, but my parents approved and they were content that I did that. I really didn't want to study any foreign language. [However,] my sister wanted to learn English and French so she went to other schools to get that education.

### *Early Adulthood*

On my vacation, I usually hung out with a guy that I really admired. [He] was one of the top journalists at one of the most liberal newspapers in [the country]. I really liked the profession [and I dreamed] of becoming a journalist. My father was totally against it because it was in the early 80s when the revolution in Nicaragua was heated, and so was the civil war in El Salvador. He said, "First of all, only prostitutes become journalists. And you know they're gonna kill you [because] you have a big mouth." So I said, "Okay Papi, I'm gonna study engineering." He would have given me the money to enroll anyway, but I thought, "If I work and I enroll myself ... he will never know what I'm studying. He will just ask how my grades are. The first semester or two ... are general classes, so he will never know." So I did that. I worked for six months, and I enrolled in some classes.

[However,] I was starting to think, "Okay, maybe my Dad is right and I'm gonna get shot. Maybe I should study architecture, but I don't want to study here. I want to go to Monterrey, Mexico." When [my parents] heard this, I'm thinking they said, "This girl is determined!" My parents would have paid for everything, but they didn't want me to go by myself to a city that I didn't know.

[During that time], the host family that brought me here was in [my native country]. [They] wanted to adopt a child. [My parents] knew their credentials through my uncle, [who] was their attorney. That's when they decided to send me here. They [told me], "You need to go to the U.S. and study English." I think they were afraid that I would study a career that might end up putting me in harm's way. That was their way of getting me out of harm's way.

### *Immigration, Return, and Final Stay in the United States*

Unfortunately, [the United States] was not a place that I wanted to come to. My sense at the time, because of the conflicts in Central America, was [that] the U.S. was an imperialist country. I read books that I wasn't allowed to read back home. If you got caught with some of the books that I read, you would've probably gotten killed. I had formed my opinion about this country [as one] that goes to another country and takes over everything. [It] rules the economy, rules the politics, and buys presidents, so I had somewhat of an animosity. I only came because I really didn't have much of a choice. I agreed with my parents, but the only things I knew [about this country] were ... in the realm of foreign policy. Everything else was just the music and the trends that youth [abroad] get to know.

I would have been 18, in 1983, [when the American host] family invited me [to come]. I got a student visa, and I came here thinking I was going to [attend a private college]. Well, [college] was \$11,000 a year and my host father, who was a very frugal man, said "No way! You know what? Go to High School. You'll learn English anyway." So they switched my papers for the educational institution to be the high school in [their residential area].

[They] lived in a pretty affluent suburban area. I never expected [to find] so much wealth in one place. I was shocked to see the difference in wealth. Wealth meaning how big is your home, how many things you have, and the comforts you have within your home [and]

within school. [The high school] had a very modern facility and I was shocked to see the comfort and the wealth. The kids had their own cars, when I used to take two buses to go to school. I thought, “How can people have so much in the world and other people have nothing?” It was a controversy for me because [moving to the U.S.] was not necessarily my choice. It was my mother’s, [and] my father [had] agreed. That’s what a lot of wealthy kids [in my country] did; they came to the States. I was middle, middle-lower class. It was a big effort for my parents, so I made sure that I did right by my parents.

It was really sad at the beginning because I missed being home, but I gained courage as things went along. It was really hard because ... I came here knowing very little [English]. [I had taken English as a child] but I never cared. I didn’t like it that much, so when I got here I was in deep trouble. The first phrase my host father taught me was “I don’t speak English very well yet.”

I did [speak some English], since there was no one else to talk to. I couldn’t drive to [the city because] I didn’t have a license right away. I was in [a suburban area] that was small at the time. There was no Spanish TV, no Spanish radio, no Spanish newspaper, no Spanish neighbors, nothing. I would watch Johnny Carson. That was my favorite show. I didn’t know anything they were saying, but I laughed at everything. I learned a lot just by watching ... the body language of Johnny Carson. I never watched soap operas, but I learned a lot from watching *Sesame Street* with the kids. I [also] read quite a bit with my dictionary.

I spent one year in the [suburban] high school, even though I had already graduated from high school. [It] was really tough because I was the only Latina there. Another Latino came afterwards who was an adopted child from Puerto Rico but [at the beginning] there



were only two Blacks and one Latina. There were several Laotian and Vietnamese, but I was the only Latina and that was really tough.

I only had to take [courses] like Government and History, and then I could take whatever else I wanted. A lot of what I did was: I would come home, since I didn't have any friends, and I would just sit and translate my homework with a dictionary so that I could turn [it] in [next day]. [The process] was painstaking. [I took the classes in English.] Then, I would bring the papers home, I would translate the instructions, and then do it. I would translate the book by hand so that I could understand what it was, and then I would answer the questions according to my translation. At the beginning that was [how] I actually got by, but in three months I was somewhat fluent. In six months, I was fluent but I wasn't speaking proper English. I was able to pass my required classes and I graduated. It wasn't the language I wanted to learn. I did it because my parents sent me.

[My host parents] were hippies and I hung out with a lot of their friends because they had that hippie mentality: peace and war, flower children, and all that. So I identified more with people in their forties than I identified with people my age. Most of my friends in high school here were foreigners and the nerds and the geeks, which I didn't know they were called that at the time.

The family was very supportive, especially Barry, my host father. He's an Algebra teacher. He was a big influence in my learning process because he had that innate thing in him that he was a teacher. He would put me in situations like he'd drop me off downtown. [Once], our class had a field trip. I was taking ESL ... and my English was still limited. He just said, "Here is money for the phone. When you're about ready, you give me a call and I'll come and pick you up." He just dropped me off. I was scared, but it was the best thing he

could have ever done for me. He [also] taught me how to drive. [My relationship with my host father] was ... the closest. I could sit with him and say anything. My host mother ... [was] a nurse at [a state hospital] for the mentally retarded, but we never really had the same connection.

***First return to the country of origin.*** [Once] I graduated from high school [in 1984], [I] went back to [my native country]. I went back to school, [and] I still did what I wanted to do: journalism. I went to school, I studied, and I had good grades. I took my education seriously. I liked school, especially when I had no other responsibilities. Then, I wanted to come back [to the U.S. because] I had a boyfriend [here.]

***Second stay in the United States.*** I came back [to the United States] in 1985. I went to [a community college] for a semester to improve my English because I was not conjugating right. I took four classes ... I had a 3.0 average. It wasn't bad for someone who was working [as a nanny] all day and went to school at night. Then, I got married in 1986 [to an American] who had a B.A. in Criminal Justice, [but] marriage didn't turn out that good.

***Second return to the country of origin.*** I went back to my country [accompanied by my husband in] 1987. I got pregnant and my daughter was born [the following year]. I had two jobs. I was teaching English to first graders at a bilingual school ... [and] ESL for adults at another school. Then, my ex-husband left, and I decided to go back to school. I was thinking, "What should I do that would be beneficial? The best job I can have is as a [foreign language] teacher because you don't pay taxes and I'm not required to have a degree yet. ... I already know English, [and] I would like to study French [so] I can get all my credits."

My sister and I were going to school together. [We attended] an independent university. We studied Pedagogy and Didactics, Psychology, [and] French Grammar and

Phonics. [Later], I took ... TESOL, Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages courses. I [also] studied Spanish. My Spanish II was an awesome professor who [had] studied at [a Midwestern American university]. I loved class with him. I loved my Pedagogy and Didactics teacher too, because she was ... challenging. She said, "Sixty of you here. I'd say half of you will pass this class, and only a small percentage of you will pass with excellent grades." I loved French because [the professor] was from Belgium and he spoke eight languages. He ... would get on a bus downtown and he would learn the lingo from ... the lower, non-educated so he knew everything about the language, not only the proper way of speaking [it]. He was a great professor, too.

It was tough, but I had fun because I went to school with my sister. We never got along, but we had two [French] classes together. [Since] she was already somewhat fluent in French and English ... she helped me [practice]. We would go home and she would speak to me in French. If I didn't understand, I would ask her. My Mom would laugh because she said, "Just when I had figured out your English and I knew what you were saying, now you speak in French. Now I don't know your secrets!"

I loved university life because I went to school ... when all the working people went. In the evening [the age of the students] was, I would say mid-twenties, thirties and up. [Those] people really had a desire to be there. They were working full time ... in some professional level, but they really wanted to better themselves by going back to school. I loved it because I saw the spirit of wanting to learn more.

I loved it! It was some of the best time of my life. I worked full time in the morning at the bilingual school teaching first grade. Then I went to school every night from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m., and I had a newborn at the time. [I also] took some weekend classes, and had study

group at my house. So I was juggling, but I loved school and my average was 95 out of 100. Being back and having a 95% average for me was like a big boost to my ego.

I was very busy, [but staying] with my parents [helped]. My child was lucky because ... I was the first one to have a child and she was the princess. She had Great Grandma, Grandma, Auntie, Grandpa, Uncle, and a maid. My aunt was always there [too] because of her. So it was nice.

Then, my ex-husband asked me to come back [to the United States] and I came back with him. That's how I never really finished anything, because ... I was sort of divided. I finished the classes and I got my grades, but I never did get my [degree] ... nor anything that would verify that indeed I took those classes and those were my grades. Over here [my GPA] would be close to 4.0 for the university classes that I took ... Now I'm thinking maybe [my brother] should go [request my transcripts.] Now that I can afford it, I can pay him to go and do it for me.

***Final stay in the United States.*** I came back to the States in June of 1989. That was the beginning of my last [stay]. Altogether between coming in and out of the country, I've been here about 20 years, but the longest stay has been since 1989.

### ***Recent Learning Experiences***

[Currently], I'm being mentored by a director in my office [in the area of international commerce], which is completely new to me. He's highly educated, [and] he's very knowledgeable about the subject. [Working with him] has become [part of my job]; it wasn't before. I spend a lot of time with him ... going to lunch or after work. I'm very honest with him. When I don't know something, I tell him and he'll explain it to me. Sometimes he's lengthy, but I appreciate it. He gives me literature ... to review [such as] trade

magazines and special articles on whatever country we're working on. I make it a point to read everything that he gives me. I read almost every morning. If I don't have time, I put it aside and I read it at night, if I'm not tired.

I think it's the first time in my adult life that I find someone that does that for me, so I'm very grateful. I consider it mentorship because no one ever really took the time to [do this before] and [because] he's not like holding my hand. I think he has discovered ... that he can tell me to do something and if I don't know, I'll figure it out and I'll have it done. He will tell me something like "I'd like to do this." Sometimes I ask questions, and sometimes I don't. Sometimes I just go and research in the internet or call someone that I know and then I take it from there. Because I know exactly ... what he wants ultimately. How I get there? I don't care, as long as I get there.

[I participate in] some occasional formal training but ...most of the time I have to do things myself. If I don't understand something, I will read either a book related to it, or articles. I rather read things that are not too technical. I like things that are broader, that talk about the idea. Not necessarily step-by-step how to make something, but more like we mix it because we want to do this. I [also] subscribe to certain web sites to maintain myself current.

I am currently trying to learn INCO terms. That's the terminology for trade and shipment and negotiation. I've never been schooled on it ever, so I started [to do some] research ... and I ... arrived on a web site from a Caribbean country that has ... a graphic with definitions at the bottom instead of this long text kind of thing. I went into that site and, even though I haven't learned them, I am more familiar with the terminology now. That was really easy for me because [I'm] very visual; I have to see.

[My learning is] mostly experience-based, I think. Because I will go to someone and say, "My name is so and so. I'm looking for this. I have not a clue, and I desperately need your help." I'm honest. If I don't know something, I'll say it right away. People will [then] tell me and I will keep that in mind. Recently, we applied for a travel license for [a Caribbean country]. The first time ... there was a lot of bureaucracy. I had to go experience it myself. I went through it, and now I can advise our producers on how to go through it the smart way.

[Learning this way] is more stimulating because it awakens something in me that says, "Okay. I don't know that, but it's a challenge." I go and figure out exactly what it is, and then I become comfortable. It's more exciting and challenging than anything else. Like a situation in an Expo ... where I was an interpreter ... for a subject matter that I had absolutely no knowledge of: the processing of soy beans. The producer was able to explain it to me first, and then for five days, we had to explain this to people. So I learned it... and [once] I recognized the process I started [explaining] to people ... why we did things a certain way, without having to interpret for him.

[I learn] mostly by experience. I think 50% to 60% [of my learning] is by experiencing things by myself and the [rest is through] formal training. Not too long ago, I learned how to complete a certificate of origin for the NAFTA agreement. The book for the products that are eligible for NAFTA is about two or three inches thick. We had like a six-hour training and I messed up a couple times in questions because ... I was more flexible when we were classifying a product. I had to kind of see ... [many aspects of the product] in my head in order to come to the right conclusion on criteria.

Another thing [is that] I want to reach this level where I'm one of the boys. Most of the time, my experience has been [that] there's a lot of boy's clubs. [As] a female ... you

have to be highly educated and highly respected in that field to be let in, or you have to be this “happy go lucky, I want to be one of you guys,” .... or be honest and just be yourself. Sometimes as women, whether you’re immigrant or not, you’re not comfortable with certain things. [I think] the worst thing that could happen is death, so everything else to me is game. So I like that I can hang out with the boys and they’re comfortable with me and I’m comfortable with them. There’s never an issue about me being a woman or anyone making a move on me. That’s great, because I’m not seen that way.

I like that because then they take me more under their wing. [My mentor] makes me a part of all the decision making. With time, I’ve learned that some of the decisions I can make by myself and he doesn’t mind. I know my limits, too. He takes me to a lot of high-level meetings where sometimes I just sit and listen. If I don’t have anything smart to say, ... I rather just sit and listen because then I take it all in and when the time comes I can use it. Sometimes I take notes. When I take notes, normally I don’t have to review them because if I write it down it kind of sticks with me, especially the main points that I’m interested in.

I’ve worked with different types of male bosses. I’ve always been more comfortable working for men. Maybe because I’m more daring and I am more willing to tell a man, “You are wrong, or you are right” or to say “Thank-you” to a man .... But most recently, I had a boss from a different part of the country, who is older ... and treated me as a female probably would have been treated in the early part of the century. So more recently, I’ve made it a point that I want to be one of the boys, meaning that I want to be included in all the ... crude conversations without them feeling that I’m going to sue them for harassment.... When [I’m] at that level when the “boys,” meaning the decision-makers, include [me] in those meetings where ... they talk the raw reality ... and I’m the only woman present, [it] makes me feel that

... I'm being treated as an equal. They are treating me more like the person who knows and not the female who knows. I realize that it shouldn't be that way, [but] it feels good.

I had a meeting with a high level official. It was just she and I, and then there were three men. She is older than I am, probably more experienced, and to a certain extent, she's a person that makes decisions. We got along real well and we sort of dominated the action end of the meeting. I feel comfortable with her because she moves herself around those circles, [which] are most of the time dominated by men.

*Becoming a mentor to others.* It would be [good] to take [the idea of mentoring] to the leadership or to people who are knowledgeable and say, "You know, you can actually do magic, and you don't have to be afraid about your job." I think that a lot of people don't mentor because they're concerned; they're insecure about their positions. I don't know if it's that, or lack of time. [For instance,] there's this great friend of mine, who is a Latina immigrant, and she's awesome! She is like spark. I wanted to mentor her, not in the knowledge that I have, but in moving around this town. It's so hard because the schedules don't match. She calls me, and sometimes it takes me two weeks to return her call because I'm getting caught up with my personal and professional life. But it would be so good! I've been saying this for quite some time, "One of us needs to take a Latina, teach her how to dress, teach her how to sometimes remain quiet (and that's not [meant] in a demeaning way), [and] take [her] around town. Take her to your meetings. Show her how to move in town, because this [town] is small enough."

*Personality as an asset for learning.* I think that ...being friendly [and]... being able to relate to anyone in any level is an asset. Personality can do a lot of things .... You can have all the knowledge in the world. If you don't have personality, you might as well kiss it



good-bye. And since it's my one big asset, I take advantage of it. When I was very little, my father ... taught me to treat everybody with respect and dignity, no matter what level in society economically or intellectually those people [were]. I enjoy treating everybody with respect and dignity [and] when I am in certain circles, I practice the same thing. In some cases it may [mean] being humble to an extent and yet being a little proud [to think], "If I treat people with respect and dignity, I will receive the same treatment." I think people like not to be treated equally, but to be treated as they like. So I'm friendly and I try to acquaint myself with anyone from the cleaning person to the big boss that is sitting next to me. Just a couple of weeks ago, I went to a luncheon, and all the people serving were waiters and waitresses from another place that I frequent. I greeted them just as I greeted congressmen that were there and people that are considered the movers and shakers of this town. I think that's a good quality to have.

I think that [being] approachable ... has allowed me to learn more. I've been a very black and white, extreme kind of person. I believe one thing and for a long time, in my youth, maybe I wasn't willing to listen to other points of view. [Now], I think other people's experiences are knowledge as well. As [I've gotten] older, ...people come to me and tell me things. I may not agree with them, but my personality allows me to absorb what they say to me, not give any criticism, just feedback and feel-good kind of statements, and take that inside me. I think I have a little storage place with all these other people's experiences because I am open and flexible to listen more now than I was in my youth. I store all that and some of [it] I pick and choose for my own learning.

[Because] I'm approachable, people do come to me and tell me things. If I demonstrate interest, people lend me literature [and] they lend me their time. They will take

me places so that I can learn more, because I know ... I never embarrass them. They'll take me places or take me under their wing because I'm approachable and [because] I can approach people without any fear.

There is one thing that I fear ... and it's being in public and saying something detrimental to myself or to the objective that I'm trying to reach. Right now, I'm a baby at [what I'm learning]. So, I want to take it in, because the day I open my mouth I want it to be significant. That is the one part of me that is very mature .... I used to be very impulsive. I would hear something, maybe in a meeting, about an approach to change something and I would say something immediately. Now ... I walk away, and I brew on it until I come up with something smart to refute [it]. Sometimes it takes me a while. [I've learned this] with age, with maturity. It's still hard!

[I feel] satisfaction [when] something that didn't make sense before clicks and ...does make sense. I'm always excited now that I learn something new or that I know that I know something that someone else doesn't know. It's kind of exciting. I lost [that] for a period of time when I wasn't actively learning. Sometimes [I experience] a slightly bit of anger or dissatisfaction with other people's ignorance, [especially]... in those ... black and white parts of my knowledge or my beliefs, but it's [only] momentary.

### ***Personal Reflections on Immigrating and Learning***

[Moving to the United States] was the first time that I did something that I think was probably against my will. It was kind of starting to break down some of my black and white and becoming a little gray in accepting things that I didn't [before]. It was hard because I had to learn another language. Part of it was writing when I had to translate my homework, [but another challenge] was learning how other people think. A lot of people where I lived, when

I first moved here, were very sheltered and didn't know beyond their boundaries. I thought, "God, they don't know there's all this other world." It was hard for me to try to relate to them my experience as a child ... and [I had] to understand that I [could not] change the way they think. It was hard.

I think, [migrating] didn't change the way I learned.... [However], there was just so much more to learn at one time. [It] was not only the language and the culture, but it was also immigration because I had to go through that [legal process] and that's very complicated.

I was more of an action person in my own comfort zone [back home] than I was when I came here. Even today, when I go places, not so much when I go overseas, but [when I'm in a new situation] I observe. I'm coming back, I think, to when I was in my comfort zone and I'm more action [oriented] than [not]. I definitely feel more confident than I did when I first got here.

### ***Postscript***

Azucena and I had a telephone conversation five months after our last interview. Azucena was as busy as ever. She was working on several projects related to stimulating economic development and fostering cross-cultural relations at the state level. She was also preparing to go abroad on a business trip. Since our last meeting, she had learned of a potential job position that would require formal education in international trade. She was beginning to consider engaging in continuing education. However, her priority was to provide for her children and to nurture their development through adolescence.

### **Overview of the Patterns Identified in the Five Life Stories of Learning**

As I stated in Chapter 1, Elder's (1995) life course paradigm influenced my approach to this inquiry. Specifically, Elder's paradigm led me to consider examining the participants'

individual perceptions of adult learning within the context of their development over the life course. Therefore, in interpreting the participants' life stories, I considered four elements from Elder's (1995) life course paradigm—historical change, timing, linked lives, and human agency. In addition, I paid attention to factors that seemed influential to the participants' development of a learner identity.

In this section, I present an overview of six patterns that run across the five life stories of learning. While helping to underscore the similarities and differences in the participants' backgrounds and learning experiences, the identified patterns provide a glimpse into factors that contributed to influencing the participants' understanding of two important concepts: 1) self as learner, and 2) learning as a phenomenon that may include formal, non-formal, and informal types of experiences. Acknowledging the partial and fluid nature of environmental influences, I present the patterns according to two major contexts—Country of Origin and Receiving Country.

### ***Country of Origin***

According to the five life stories of learning presented in this chapter, four sets of factors seemed particularly influential to the participants' development in the country of origin: 1) historical change and timing; 2) socioeconomic status, rural or urban location, and family composition; 3) gender socialization; and 4) linked lives.

***Historical change and timing.*** In Elder's (1995) paradigm, historical time and place influence how a person establishes her or his life course. In other words, the impact of social forces on a person's life course has developmental consequences. However, those consequences may vary depending upon the person's life stage at the time of social change.

In 2003, the ages of the five women interviewed ranged from 30 to 42 years old. Accordingly, the participants' childhood and adolescent experiences were historically located within a 30-year period from 1961 to 1991. However, the participants' K-12 formal education experiences occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, two decades that were especially trying for Central Americans. The 1970s were harsh years of economic struggle that afflicted people in both urban centers and rural areas (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1997). The 1980s were years of political conflict and violence during which psychological distress, economic hardship, and political uncertainty pervaded the region (Schwantes, 1990). Of the three participants who pursued post-secondary education, only Azucena attended college in the mid-1980s. Domi and Dulce enrolled during the early 1990s, when peace treaties improved social and political conditions in their respective countries of origin.

Although the participants' life stories reflected circumstances particular to a period of historical change (e.g., economic uncertainty, violence, insecurity, internal migration, fragmented families), only Azucena disclosed an awareness of how the trying times existing in the region influenced her life. For example, Evelyn never spoke of the political violence in her country, even though her hometown was located in a zone of conflict and became the center of warfare only a few years after her departure. Ana indirectly referred to the assassination of a sixth grade teacher in one of the five schools she attended. Yet, she only mentioned that he had been targeted because of his activism in the labor union movement. Domi recalled losing a dear childhood friend to violence. She briefly stated that shortly after graduating as an engineer, her friend had been robbed and killed while paying salaries at a farm under his management. Dulce acknowledged the devastating consequences of civil war

in her native country as one factor leading to U.S. immigration. However, she spoke of the war as a phenomenon that had primarily affected her parents' generation.

In contrast, Azucena described how historical change had influenced her interest in learning, as well as her life course. For instance, Azucena recalled developing a new understanding of her native country as a result of taking a course on economic development and participating in student debates in high school. Later, she tried pursuing a career in journalism hoping to denounce the social and economic wrong doings that were the source of political conflicts in the Central American region. Finally, her parents arranged for her to immigrate to the United States in an effort to protect her from imminent danger.

I interpreted Azucena's awareness as a possible outcome of her middle-class and urban upbringing, the progressive K-12 educational institutions she attended, and her enrollment in an autonomous university during the 1980s. At the same time, it seems important to point out that Azucena was the only participant who did not grow up in a Central American country engaged in civil war. From this perspective, it is also possible that the other four participants in this inquiry deliberately avoided speaking of their life and learning experiences in relation to those historically changing events in their countries.

***Socioeconomic status, rural or urban location, and family composition.*** In my view, these three interacting factors had a strong influence on the participants' early formal learning experiences, which, in turn, shaped their understandings of self as learner and of formal education. During childhood and adolescence, Ana, Evelyn, and Dulce were exposed to circumstances derived from a low socioeconomic status, rural setting, and fragmented family structure. In particular, living in poor rural settings translated into limited access to formal education opportunities. For instance, Ana started school at the age of 8. She repeated

first grade in a two-room schoolhouse that was poorly equipped to fulfill the needs of 60 to 70 children of different ages and grade levels. Over a nine-year period, Ana attended five different schools. For most of those years, Ana and her sister walked several miles before taking a 25-minute bus ride to school. Recalling less extreme conditions, Evelyn described her elementary school as being the only one in her small rural town. In her hometown, girls used the school facilities in the mornings and boys in the afternoons. Although Dulce attended one of the two schools in a large township, she pointed out that her fast learning abilities were considered unusual, given that rural children were not taught as well as children attending city schools.

The limited number of schools, as well as the scarce resources allocated to rural schools in the region, likely determined not only the accessibility and effectiveness of the schools, but also the teachers' capacity to provide students with individual attention. The detrimental effects of attending school under such conditions were most evident in Ana, who lacked the continuity and personalized attention necessary to foster her interest in learning. I would argue that the negative impact of low socioeconomic status and rural location was much less severe for Evelyn and Dulce not only because they had access to better opportunities than Ana did, but also because of their individual responses to a third interacting factor: family composition.

Although the three participants—Ana, Evelyn, and Dulce—experienced a fragmented nuclear family structure, it variously impacted their individual perceptions of self as learner and of formal education. Ana's childhood with an absent father and a hard-working mother translated into lax discipline and truancy. Natural outcomes were Ana's low academic performance, poor self-concept as learner, and lack of professional aspirations. Evelyn grew

up away from her mother and father; however, she learned accountability from her grandmother. Besides attending school, Evelyn did household chores and helped her grandmother sell flowers. Nonetheless, Evelyn lacked the support of an adult relative necessary to do well in school. Although she enjoyed spending time with her girlfriends in elementary school, formal education was not central to her life. Consequently, she performed badly in junior high school and quit school at the age of 16. Like Ana, Evelyn developed a poor self-concept as learner and did not incorporate formal education into her life aspirations. In both cases, the lack of encouragement and support from an adult relative had a negative impact on the participants' self-concept as learner and on their understanding of formal education.

Dulce, on the other hand, was taught to value formal education from an early age. During elementary and junior high school, both her mother and father fostered her interest in school. Her father, in particular, instilled in her a desire for learning and for pursuing a career. When Dulce's mother immigrated to the United States, Dulce had to take on the maternal role in the family. Instead of relegating her studies to the new responsibilities, Dulce decided to increase her involvement in school and to guide her siblings by example. Consequently, she performed well in school, developed a positive self-concept as learner, and embraced formal education as a means of getting ahead in life.

Domi's and Azucena's understanding of self as learner and of formal education was also influenced by these three interacting factors—socioeconomic status, rural or urban location, and family composition. In both cases, growing up in an urban setting and a lower-middle-class, two-parent family led to developing positive self-concepts as learners and high academic aspirations. Living in urban settings and having the necessary financial resources



provided Domi and Azucena with access to better schools where students were both challenged and nurtured to learn. Equally important was that the parents held high academic and professional expectations for their daughters and supported their efforts towards academic achievement. Therefore, as Domi and Azucena entered early adulthood, formal education continued to be central in their lives.

***Gender socialization.*** According to McCormick (1994), in Western cultures the development of a gender identity is largely based upon the “polarization of the sexes into rigid sex roles” (p. 37). Since childhood, different social institutions such as family, school, and church, contribute to fostering distinct gender-based attitudes that determine a person’s future life choices.

According to the life stories presented earlier, the participants in this inquiry grew up in societies that fostered the development of traditionally defined gender identities. As young girls, all of the participants learned that the societies in which they lived had different expectations for persons of different sexes. One indication was that, whether they had been raised by their mothers or by other women, the five participants shared a strong sense of identification with their mothers.

At the same time, the participants’ life stories suggested individual differences in the women’s formation of traditionally-defined gender identities. Specifically, Evelyn, Domi and Ana seemed to have developed more traditionally-defined gender identities than Dulce and Azucena. Despite their individual differences, however, growing up in societies that fostered the formation of traditional gender identities influenced how the participants developed learning and work expectations.

To illustrate, in the cases of Evelyn, Domi, and Ana, different social institutions contributed to their formation of traditionally-defined gender identities. For example, Evelyn and Domi attended girls-only elementary schools. In those schools, the participants learned to interact most comfortably with persons of their same gender. Not surprisingly, both women recalled having a favorite woman teacher. Domi, in particular, elaborated on her admiration for one of her grade-school teachers. Her admiration was such that, later, Domi modeled her own teaching style after her teacher's.

At the same time, Evelyn's and Domi's traditionally-defined gender identities were reinforced at home. Evelyn's grandmother taught her the skills necessary to take care of a home. Wishing the best for her granddaughter, her advice to Evelyn was to "earn the people's good will by doing housework." Therefore, it was natural for Evelyn to decide as a teenager to quit school and join her mother as a domestic worker abroad. On the other hand, according to Evelyn's life story, her life choice was also driven by her desire to alleviate her family's economic situation.

Although in a different manner, Domi's traditionally-defined gender identity was also fostered in the family. At home, Domi identified very closely with both her mother and her sister. In addition, Domi attended gender-segregated church activities that contributed to cultivating her gender identity in conventional terms. Later, as a young adult, Domi chose to pursue a professional career in teaching. Nonetheless, the life choices she made thereafter were ultimately guided by her primary roles of wife and mother.

Although family and school influences were not as apparent in Ana's formation of a traditionally-defined gender identity during childhood, she experienced comparable influences in adolescence and early adulthood. For example, Ana stated that the first time she

felt appreciated and nurtured in school was when she attended eighth grade at a girls-only Catholic boarding school. Being in a nurturing environment and receiving the academic support of a woman teacher stimulated her to study and to perform well in class.

Nonetheless, Ana decided to drop out of school and start a family at the age of 17. In order to fulfill her role of wife and mother, Ana had to learn from other women. For instance, her mother-in-law taught her to make *tortillas* [thin maize pancakes] and cheese, as well as the basic “chores of a countryside home.” Thereafter, Ana’s life choices were primarily guided by her traditionally-defined gender roles of mother and wife.

As stated earlier, Dulce and Azucena seemed to have developed less traditionally-defined gender identities than Evelyn, Domi, and Ana. Their learning experiences both in school and at home encouraged them to have equally comfortable interactions with persons of different genders. For example, Dulce and Azucena’s favorite teachers included both women and men. Nevertheless, despite forming less traditionally-defined gender identities, Dulce and Azucena also developed learning and work expectations that conformed to conventional gender roles.

Dulce, for example, developed into a determined student with an outgoing personality in high school. She exhibited an aptitude for leadership, and she interacted comfortably with both male and female peers. Then her mother’s immigration to the United States led her to take on the maternal role in her family. Still, Dulce continued to perform at a high academic level in school. However, when it came to deciding on a professional career, Dulce chose to become a secretary. During her visits to the bank, Dulce had formed an ideal of women secretaries who “looked pretty and well groomed... [and who] interacted with a different kind of people and had a different kind of education.” According to Dulce’s life story,

becoming a secretary was also the best option for her as a young woman who would need to work upon graduating from high school. Later, Dulce began to pursue university studies in order to become a lawyer, but her priorities as a single mother forced her to quit school in the third year of her studies.

Finally, Azucena's formation of a gender identity was also influenced by her early experiences in school and at home. Azucena attended a mixed elementary school for both girls and boys. Although she had a clear concept of the differences between the behaviors expected from girls and boys, she enjoyed interacting with the boys in a defiant manner. According to her life story, she used to "fight with the boys all the time." At home, her father considered Azucena "the boy of the two" of his daughters, because he had always wanted a son. In addition, Azucena seemed to act less feminine than her sister. However, when Azucena graduated from high school and expressed her desire to pursue a career in journalism, her father strongly disapproved. He stated, "First of all, only prostitutes become journalists. And you know they're gonna kill you [because] you have a big mouth." Eventually, despite Azucena's interest in journalism, she ended up pursuing a career as a teacher of foreign languages like her sister. Another indication of Azucena's gender socialization was that her mother was a strong role model in her life. Accordingly, when Azucena's daughter was born, her mother, sister, and aunt became her main network of support in the country of origin.

It seems important to point out that the participants' gender socialization in the country of origin, as well as the gender-based social system in the receiving country, influenced the women's adult learning experiences. A discussion of gender as a factor that

influenced the participants' adult learning experiences in the United States is presented in Chapter 5.

*Linked lives.* From a life course perspective, the concept of linked lives suggests that “personal actions have consequences for others, and the actions of others impinge on the self” (Elder, 1995, p. 14). This is a recurring concept in the five life stories of learning and one that can be appreciated by examining the participants' decisions to immigrate to the United States. All five women described their decisions as being linked to actions taken by significant people in their lives. For instance, without knowing anything about immigration or the United States, Evelyn decided to quit school and join her mother to search for employment abroad. Evelyn's life course was evidently altered by an action taken by her mother. Ana initially solved a bad marriage situation by moving to the capital city in her native country. Her subsequent decision to immigrate to the United States, however, was influenced by actions taken by her sister's mother-in-law. In a similar way, family ties influenced Dulce's immigration to the United States. Her mother and siblings had previously immigrated and she dreamed of being reunited with them. In an analogous manner, Domi's life was dramatically transformed by her husband's decision to immigrate. Before making her own decision, Domi was forced to examine her deeply-held principles. Only her commitment to marriage combined with her affective ties to her husband enabled her to take actions that would have been otherwise unthinkable. Finally, Azucena's life course was transformed by an action taken by her parents. Her mother had always admired the United States and wanted her children to learn English. When Azucena was in danger of getting into trouble as a young adult, her mother decided to send her away to learn English. Although it was not her choice, Azucena willingly stepped into her mother's dream.

It is worth noting that the concept of linked lives was also apparent in the women's approaches to adapting and learning as adults in the receiving country. Further discussion of linked lives as related to the participants' experiences of adult learning in the United States is presented in Chapter 5.

### ***Receiving Country***

In the receiving country, two other factors seemed particularly influential: 5) Context of reception, and 6) Human agency.

***Context of reception.*** The U.S. context of reception played a critical role in the women's immigration experiences. Geographical location in the United States, as well as time of arrival, variously affected the participants' economic, social, cultural, and political experiences. For instance, from an economic standpoint, the context of reception produced challenging financial responsibilities, such as inflated housing payments, for women who were also obliged to send remittances to relatives in their countries of origin. From an economic, social, and political perspective, the context of reception influenced the kinds of immigrant social networks and the types of jobs available to immigrant women. However, in my view, an outstanding example of how the context of reception variously influenced the lives of the five participants lies in their cultural adaptation experiences relative to the English language.

Two participants, Evelyn and Ana, arrived in traditional Latino immigrant magnet cities in the Southeast and on the West Coast, respectively. In both cases, their perceptions of English as a language barrier increased as they migrated to the Midwestern United States. Upon arriving in a large Southeastern city with an established Latino immigrant community, Evelyn believed that learning English was unnecessary. Working as a live-in domestic for a

Spanish-speaking family and receiving advice from her mother and fellow nationals facilitated her cross-cultural experiences. Evelyn began to learn English later, when she moved to a metropolitan area in the Midwest. Factory-type jobs enabled Evelyn to interact with native residents and gave her free time to enjoy local forms of entertainment, such as American TV shows and soap operas. However, the presence of a large Latino immigrant community still kept her from perceiving English as a language barrier. Only when she moved to another Midwestern state with a smaller Latino presence did she experience the need for speaking English on a daily basis. Evidently, context of reception determined Evelyn's cultural-adaptation needs while also influencing her perception of the English language.

Like Evelyn, Ana was able to work as a live-in domestic for Spanish-speaking employers upon her arrival in a city on the West Coast. Ana was challenged by her lack of English proficiency, but she was able to adapt. Although she experienced cultural dissonance concerning meal times and food preferences, gaining advice from her sister and living in a city with a large Latino immigrant community eased her discomfort with cross-cultural experiences. But when Ana moved to the Midwest, adjustment became more challenging. Despite finding better employment opportunities, she felt socially isolated and prone to depression. In a state where English was the predominant language, she was forced to overcome this cultural barrier. For instance, when Ana became pregnant, it was difficult for her to find Spanish-speaking translators at prenatal care clinics. Indeed, after giving birth to two children in the Midwestern United States, Ana increased her knowledge of English because the context of reception forced her to interact with English-speaking health care providers.

The other three participants, Azucena, Domi, and Dulce arrived directly in a non-traditional Latino magnet state within the Midwest. While their times of arrival varied, the three participants experienced a pressing need for learning English in order to adapt to their new lives in the Midwestern United States. Azucena first arrived in 1983. She lived with an English-speaking family in an affluent suburban area and attended a high school where she was the only Latina. Although she had been sent by her mother to learn English, being immersed in an English-speaking social environment transformed her mother's goal into a pressing need. Domi arrived in the Midwestern United States in 1999. Her initial working experiences made her acutely aware of two factors influencing immigrants' experiences: immigrant status and knowledge of English. Nevertheless, like Ana, Domi began to learn English primarily because she needed to interact with her children's English-speaking health care providers. Later, Domi became increasingly aware that English proficiency as well as an American-earned college degree would be necessary for working as a professional in the United States. Dulce arrived in 2002 in the same Midwestern state as Azucena and Domi. Her life story emphasized the centrality of language upon arriving in a predominantly English-speaking state: "It's difficult when you need to say something and you can't. It's the biggest difficulty you experience in this country: the language." Indeed, learning English was such a priority for Dulce that her narrative of frustration and hope spiraled around her desire to someday call herself a bilingual person.

***Human agency.*** From a life course perspective, Elder (1995) suggested that, within the limitations of their social worlds, individuals make choices about their lives that are based on their perceptions and assessments of situations. The choices people make are related to the person's "life history of experiences and dispositions" (p.110).



In the five life stories of learning, the women described their first impressions, attitudes and behaviors upon immigrating to the United States. In my view, the women's perceptions and assessments of new situations were closely related to their learning skills and self-concepts as learners. Not surprisingly, the women's dispositions and adaptation strategies seemed to vary according to years of formal education. For instance, the three participants who had completed more than 12 years of formal education—Dulce, Domi, and Azucena—seemed to show more initiative and resourcefulness as compared to Ana and Evelyn, who had fewer than eight years of formal education. The women's dispositions and adaptation strategies upon arriving in the United States are particularly telling.

Upon their arrival in the United States, Evelyn and Ana seemed to depend on others for finding jobs and determining how to approach life in the receiving country. To illustrate, Evelyn's mother found a job for her in a Spanish-speaking home. Fellow nationals showed Evelyn how to use washers, dryers, and vacuum cleaners. They also taught her how to behave with employers and their children in the United States. Therefore, Evelyn's initial disposition was to avoid getting into trouble by doing as she was told. In a similar way, Ana found a job through her sister's mother-in-law. In order to learn her way around work, she constantly asked her sister and the mother-in-law for advice. In my view, Ana's strategy was to follow what had worked for people who had been willing to take risks that she was unprepared to take.

In contrast, upon arriving in the United States, Azucena, Domi, and Dulce acted independently and proactively. They seemed more confident in relying on their ability to learn and adapt to the new context. For instance, Azucena used her learning skills to overcome the language barrier in school. She used a dictionary to translate textbooks and

other course materials in order to complete her homework. Although she referred to the process as painstaking and extremely time-consuming, she didn't wait for anybody to help her or tell her what steps to take. In a similar way, Domi immediately decided she did not want to work in a fast food restaurant's kitchen. Therefore, she used her learning skills to master what was necessary for being promoted. Without knowing English, she observed the cashiers, made notes, and memorized the hamburger wrappings. Within only one month, she was working at the restaurant's counter. From the beginning, Dulce was also proactive in improving her situation in the receiving country. Her strategy was to make herself known in churches and other institutions providing services to recent immigrants. She used her secretarial and accounting skills to help at church events and rapidly earned the trust of pastors and community leaders. As the postscript to her life story noted, such networking enabled her to secure a babysitting job with a female physician and to take on a leadership role within a Spanish-speaking congregation. From my perspective, then, Azucena, Domi, and Dulce acted more independently and proactively than Ana or Evelyn did, because the learning skills they had developed throughout many years of formal education, as well as their self-concepts as learners, provided them with more resources to adapt in the receiving country.

Finally, it seems important to point out that, despite the similarities and differences in the participants' backgrounds prior to immigration, their experiences in the receiving country seemed more similar than different. For instance, upon arriving in a Midwestern state with a small Latino presence, the five participants experienced language as a barrier. In an analogous manner, at some point in their journeys, the five participants engaged in cleaning, domestic, or fast food service jobs, which were low-paying and gender-based. Therefore, it is

likely that the participants' situations were homogenized in the U.S. immigration context by factors such as English proficiency, immigration status, and gender. As Domi noted, "We are all at one level. In the United States, with or without education we are immigrants. We are immigrants unless we set goals for ourselves."

## CHAPTER 5. THEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In Chapter 4, I presented five stories of learning that reconstructed the participants' learning experiences from childhood to adulthood, while also portraying a shift between two major contexts: Country of Origin and Receiving Country. In this chapter, I provide a thematic representation of findings that specifically concern the participants' experiences and understanding of the phenomenon of *adult learning* in the receiving country, the United States. I interpret these findings in light of my earlier observations on the participants' self-concepts as learners and their relationships to formal education prior to immigration. I also note how these findings agree or disagree with relevant literature.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to provide a thematic representation of findings based on an inductive analysis of the data concerning the participants' experiences, thoughts, feelings, expectations, and aspirations of adult learning upon immigrating to the United States. This chapter presents 11 related themes, which are organized into three domains: Concept, Process, and Outcome. The chapter ends with a summary of the thematic representation of findings.

### ***Concept: How Did the Participants Think and Feel About Learning?***

When asked what learning meant for them, the participants shared empirical conceptualizations of learning that were rooted in their experiences as lifelong learners, adults, immigrants, and women.

***Lifelong learning.*** The participants' understanding of learning was broad and positive. The five women perceived learning as an ongoing, albeit fluid, human experience. They associated learning with change and conceptualized it as a process that assisted individuals in fulfilling social roles, approaching new situations, and moving forward in life.

Evelyn, for example, defined learning as something that occurred since birth, on a daily basis, and in various areas of a person's life.

Well (long pause) [learning] means very much [to me], very much (softly)... I think we learn something new every day... whether it's related to work or to life... because you aren't born knowing. You must learn from being a daughter to being a parent. You must learn a lot, everywhere.

*Pues (pausa) este (pausa larga) significa mucho, mucho (voz tenue)... Yo creo que cada día aprendemos algo nuevo... ya sea de trabajo o de la vida... Porque uno no nace sabiendo todo. Tiene que aprender hasta de ser hijo a ser padre. En todos lados tiene que aprender muchísimo.*

Domi also viewed learning as part of everyday life. However, she explicitly described learning as a mental process resulting from the interaction between a person and her surrounding environment. Domi perceived learning as a series of sensory and mental activities serving a practical purpose. From her perspective, learning entailed assimilating, discerning, and deciding how to best interact with a given social or physical environment.

For me, learning is assimilating everything in your environment. Everything that surrounds you. You take what is useful and you leave out what is not useful. For instance, you interact with many different types of people... then, you notice what is good and what is not good. This is what I want. This is what I learn. I am looking at that, but I'm not interested because it will not help me. Therefore, you are taking what is positive and leaving out the negative.

*Para mí aprender es asimilar todo lo que está en su ambiente. Todo lo que está a su alrededor. Usted toma lo que le va a servir y lo que no, si no lo quiere tocar, está*

*bien. [Por ejemplo], usted se relaciona con muchos tipos de gente diferente... entonces, usted ve que ésto es bueno, ésto es malo. Ésto es lo que quiero. Ésto aprendo. Estoy viendo ésto pero no me interesa porque no me va ayudar.... Entonces, está tomando lo positivo y está dejando lo negativo.*

In general, the five participants held positive views of how learning contributed to shaping a person's life course. To illustrate, Evelyn associated learning with bettering herself and moving forward in life. She viewed learning as a means for overcoming stagnating life situations.

*[Learning] is a nice experience (pause) because you are trying to better yourself... You will not remain stuck in the same place.*

*[Aprender] es una experiencia bonita (pausa) porque está tratando de superarse un poco más... Que no se va a quedar allí uno estancado donde mismo.*

A similar perspective was shared by Dulce, who conceptualized learning as a personal resource that could help improve a person's attitude and preparedness for life.

*Learning is the best thing a person can have because when you know something, you are sure about your own life... You can project yourself towards moving forward.*

*You no longer think of the past... you are a different person who is capable of performing in any field, regardless of the country you live in. You are a different person... with an open mind (pause) nothing seems difficult. For me, that is learning. Being sure of what you do and moving steadily into the future.*

*Aprender es lo mejor que una persona puede tener porque cuando uno sabe algo, uno está seguro hasta de su misma vida.... Ya uno se proyecta a algo mejor. Ya uno no piensa en lo de atrás... ya es una persona capaz de poderse desenvolver en*

*cualquier campo, independientemente en que país sea. Ya es una persona diferente... es una mente abierta (pausa) que nada se le hace difícil. Para mí eso es aprender. Estar seguro de lo que uno hace y seguir adelante con paso firme.*

Taken together, these perceptions suggest that, as a group, the participants conceptualized learning as a recurring and cumulative, lifelong phenomenon capable of producing positive changes in how a person approaches her life's circumstances. Although the participants never used the term lifelong learning, I use this term because the women's perceptions are consistent with contemporary perspectives of lifelong learning. For instance, Field (2000) argued that "people learn throughout their lives" (p. vii), that the effects of lifelong learning are positive, and that such learning is influenced not only by economic, but also by social and cultural forces. From a contemporary standpoint, Field emphasized the central role of lifelong learning in assisting individuals to adjust to rapidly changing societies: "The ability to learn continually throughout the lifespan is now virtually a precondition for exercising reasoned choices about our lives" (p. ix). Similarly, Harrison, Reeve, Hanson and Clarke (2002) stated,

In contemporary conditions learning becomes not only 'lifelong', suggesting learning as relevant throughout the life course, but also 'life-wide', suggesting learning as an essential aspect of our whole life experience, not just that which we think of as 'education'. (p. 1)

**Adult learning.** When asked to share their views on adult learning, the participants referred to advantages, obstacles, and successful attitudes. Interestingly, without any intention on my part to elicit views on a specific type of learning, the women's perceptions focused primarily on formal and non-formal types of learning.

First, all participants elaborated on how adult learning differed from children's learning in formal education settings. Ana and Domi noted that adults' dispositions were more conducive to formal learning than those of children, because adults approached their learning with a greater sense of purpose and accountability. In their view, most adults were well aware of the benefits of developing specific skills; therefore, they took their participation in educational programs seriously. Azucena described adults as having more desire, better-defined learning goals, and a clearer sense of their aptitudes for learning specific subjects than children did. She supported this assertion by observing that, despite having many financial responsibilities, adults were willing to allocate resources towards learning they considered meaningful. Furthermore, Azucena emphasized that adults were better at connecting learned content and skills to their lives than youth. She considered the ability to link life experience and learning as an asset common to adult learners.

I think as an adult you have more desire to learn because you're gonna make that extra effort. You're gonna pay the extra money.... Your energy and your commitment will probably be higher than when you were younger.... I think it's very exciting as an adult because you can tie things together. "Oh, I did my taxes and this is why it's calculated like this".... When you are a youth, you don't care. "How does that relate to my real life?" And so that makes a big difference.

It is worth noting that the participants' aforementioned perceptions are consistent with the andragogical tradition, which emphasizes the goals and interests of individual learners and considers the adult learner's experience "the foundation and most important resource for learning" (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 2002, p. 80). Indeed, in the andragogical tradition such is the basis for differentiating between adult learning and children's learning.



Second, despite considering experience, accountability, and purpose as assets for learning, the participants identified external and internal factors that had made formal adult learning challenging for them. External factors included work and family responsibilities that limited the time and energy the women could spend on attending educational programs. Evelyn, for instance, felt that her full schedule left her with almost no personal time. Her mornings were spent at work and her afternoons were dedicated to driving her children to after-school activities. In a similar way, Ana found that holding a full-time job and raising young children left her with very little time and energy to engage in educational activities. Dulce underscored her need as a single mother to invest most of her time and energy on finding better earning opportunities. Domi decided to postpone her academic and professional aspirations until her children no longer required her constant supervision at home. Referring specifically to the demands of adult learning, Azucena concluded, "I don't think it's harder. I just think you have less time and you have to juggle more than you did in your youth." On the whole, the participants' perceptions of external impediments were consistent with previous findings on institutional and situational barriers to immigrant women's participation in literacy programs (Cumming as cited in National Institute for Literacy (NIL), 1994).

Internal factors that made adult learning challenging for the participants included preconceived notions of aging and negative feelings. Three of the women—Azucena, Evelyn and Ana—talked about needing to overcome a commonly held belief that aging and ability to learn were inversely related. Azucena stated, "I've been prejudiced for a long time thinking that the older I am, the less I can learn. But it is really not true because life experience has allowed me to assimilate things differently." Evelyn was hesitant about pursuing a technical

degree in hairdressing because she was afraid that, at the age of 40, completing the required courses could take much longer than usual. Nonetheless, the notion of mature age as a hindrance for learning was most detrimental for Ana, who stated,

I think it's because of my age. I think I am no longer capable. I am over 40 years old and I will not learn.

*Yo pienso por mi edad. Pienso, yo digo ya no estoy capacitada. Ya tengo más de 40 años y no voy a aprender.*

With respect to negative feelings, two participants, Ana and Evelyn, described experiencing fear and insecurity before engaging in formal and non-formal learning situations. Ana, who had quit junior high school, suggested her fear of failure as an adult could be linked to her negative childhood experiences in school.

I sometimes think it's my insecurity... that I am not positive. I ask myself, "Will I be able to face this situation?" Sometimes I have dreams about it. I don't know whether it stems from my difficulty learning in elementary school.... I remember when I attended the course on First Aid... I was so afraid. I am always afraid that I will not learn. I think I'm a pessimist.

*Yo pienso a veces es la inseguridad de uno mismo... que uno no es positivo. Digo yo, '¿Iré a sobrepasar esto?' Me da a veces de soñar cosas. Yo no sé si viene desde cuando yo estaba en la escuela que yo no aprendía con facilidad.... Me acuerdo cuando fui a las clases de Primeros Auxilios... yo estaba con aquel temor. Siempre soy así como con temor que no voy a aprender. Soy pesimista pienso yo.*

As noted in Chapter 4, both Ana and Evelyn experienced childhood conditions that prevented them from developing positive self-concepts as learners and incorporating formal

education into their life aspirations. Therefore, Evelyn's feelings of fear as an adult could have also been linked to her negative experience of failing seventh grade in junior high and quitting school at the age of 16. It is important to point out, however, that at the time of the interviews Evelyn's apprehensive feelings towards learning may have been partially due to her personal situation. Evelyn's imminent divorce following 15 years of marriage was compelling her to move beyond the traditional gender role of stay-at-home mother and wife. Entertaining the idea of going back to school was both exciting and frightening for her.

Right now, it's somewhat difficult because (long pause) I feel afraid. I think I will not learn the material.... that those problems occupying my mind will not let me retain anything. What I experience is fear (softly).

*Ahorita es un poco dificil porque (pausa larga) me da miedo. Pienso que no voy a aprender las cosas.... Que con los problemas que tengo ahorita en la cabeza no se me va a quedar. Es miedo lo que me da (voz tenue).*

From a different standpoint, Dulce spoke of having to overcome emergent feelings of depression. As a single mother starting a new life in a foreign country, she sometimes felt overwhelmed by economic need and uncertainty about the future. When those feelings emerged, her mind was occupied with worries and it was much harder for her to concentrate in class.

Sometimes it's depression. You feel down, without motivation. Sometimes it's being concerned about personal matters what affects your learning... It's difficult to leave those worries behind in order to keep going. It's very difficult to control your mind... to lack the necessary calm for concentrating on what you are learning.

*A veces [es] depresión. Uno se siente decaída, sin ánimos. A veces lo que afecta para aprender [son] las preocupaciones personales que uno tiene.... Es difícil poder dejar aquello ahí estable y continuar con los demás. A veces es muy difícil dominar la mente...el no estar uno tranquilo serenamente en lo que quiere hacer, en lo que está aprendiendo.*

The participants' descriptions of internal factors that made formal adult learning challenging for them have been partially documented in previous literature. For instance, Ana and Evelyn's perceptions would agree with Hayes's (1989) findings on deterrents to the participation of Hispanic immigrant women in ESL literacy. Upon developing a learner typology according to learners' scores in four deterrent factors—self/school incongruence, low self-confidence, lack of access to classes, and situational constraints—Hayes concluded that the most deterred learners included persons who perceived self/school incongruence as a significant deterrent, whose age was higher than the average age of the total sample, and who exhibited the lowest levels of both unemployment and past educational attainment. Based on these learners' educational histories and their success in securing jobs, Hayes described them as “noneducationally oriented workers” (p. 60). However, the impact of feelings of fear, uncertainty, and depression as described by the participants in this inquiry has not been addressed in literature concerned with immigrant women and adult learning.

Third, the participants perceived that pursuing formal and non-formal education as adults required initiative and determination. In varying degrees, the five women shared successful instances where they had sought out learning opportunities, exercised will power, and made extraordinary efforts to learn what they needed. I interpreted those recounts as an outward sign of the women's awareness of their own agency in realizing educational

pursuits. In this respect, the participants' perceptions would coincide with Sparks's (2002) findings about U.S.-born Latino adult learners who, despite experiencing cultural exclusion in mainstream educational settings, gain a sense of externally imposed limitations and of the effort they must put forth for creating learning opportunities for themselves. Evelyn's rendition provides a good example of this attitude.

To make an effort. Yes, to make an extra effort. You have to do something and not wait (pause) for it to come...to your home. Rather, you must go out to find what you desire...what you need. If you want to learn, you must have will power. If you don't, you will stay the same (laughter).

*Echarle ganas. Sí, esforzarse más. Poner uno de su parte y no quedarse ahí esperando (pausa) a que le llegue...todo a la casa. Más bien salir a buscar lo que uno desee...lo que necesita....Si quiere aprender, tiene que tener fuerza de voluntad. Si no pues ahí se queda (risa).*

In summary, the participants' perceptions of adult learning included advantages, obstacles, and successful attitudes for engaging in formal and non-formal types of learning. Whereas all participants considered experience, purpose, and accountability as advantages, some also recognized the need to overcome negative feelings of insecurity and preconceived notions of aging and learning. External factors hindering adult learning included work and family responsibilities that limited the time and energy the women could spend on attending educational programs. All five participants underscored the importance of approaching adult learning with initiative and determination. The women's attitudes suggested that they were aware of their own agency in realizing educational pursuits.

***Immigrant learning.*** From their perspectives as immigrants, the participants emphasized that their lives were permeated by a continuous need for learning as they adapted to life in the United States. All participants pointed out that most of the Central American immigrants they knew had arrived with no intentions of learning in this country. Most came prepared to dedicate themselves to working. However, once in the United States, these immigrants found that they needed to learn in order to fulfill their social roles not only as workers, but also as parents, neighbors, customers, and city residents. Therefore, learning for them was not an option; it was rather a necessity. Domi observed,

[In this country] we learn out of necessity... there are many things we learn because we have to. We learn things, whether we wish to do so or not.

*Aquí la necesidad nos mueve a aprender.... hay muchas cosas que aprendemos por necesidad. Querramos o no querramos, lo aprendemos.*

According to the five women, their learning experiences in the United States had primarily centered on work and cultural issues. With respect to work, Evelyn made an especially interesting observation. In her experience, the context of reception as well as her immigrant status had influenced the types of jobs available to her. In many cases, these were low-wage and short-term jobs. As she had moved from job to job, she had needed to learn different skills. As a result, in her perception, working and learning were linked, and both were integral to the immigrant experience.

Well (pause) many of us come here to work... It is less common to find a person who is in this country to better him or herself, because we all come to learn at work. We work on whatever is available... in different types of jobs. As you change from one job to another, you need to learn how to do the new jobs. Last year, I worked at a

local printer's. I didn't know anything about handling paper or using [printing] machines; therefore, I had to learn everything. Now that I started working at a school kitchen, I had to learn certain culinary tasks and how to maintain hygienic standards. The work may seem similar to what you do at home, but it isn't. You always have to learn... Even if the job seems easy, we need to learn how to do it.

*Bueno, aquí muchos a lo que venimos es a trabajar... Raro es la persona que quiere superarse en este país porque todos venimos a aprender al trabajo. Hacemos trabajo de lo que sea... [Son] diferentes clases de trabajos. Si uno cambia de trabajo tiene que aprender una cosa y si cambia a otro, otra cosa, así. Yo el año pasado trabajaba en una imprenta. Pues no sabía nada de papeles ni de usar las máquinas. Entonces tuve que aprender todo eso. Ahora comencé en la escuela y tuve que aprender [tareas culinarias], especialmente a tener medidas higiénicas. Se mira como que fuera el trabajo de la casa pero no es igual. Siempre tiene que aprender uno... Sea el trabajo más fácil pero tenemos que aprender como se hace.*

With respect to culture, many of the participants' learning experiences were triggered by cultural variability. For instance, whereas learning how to use public transportation may have been sufficient in their countries of origin, the participants found that learning how to drive a car became a necessity in the United States. In a similar way, in order to do domestic work in the United States, the women had to familiarize themselves with using electronic equipment such as vacuum cleaners, washers, and dryers. Azucena pointed out that as basic as these cultural adaptation demands seemed, the context of reception played an important role in either facilitating or hindering the immigrants' learning processes. In her view, arriving in Midwestern cities with relatively small immigrant populations and limited

institutional support was challenging. For most Central Americans who arrived without knowing English, the experience was particularly difficult.

Coming to this country is a cultural shock especially if you don't know the language. If there's no structure, you're gonna fall over and over again until you find someone, an organization or what have you that will help you through the process. Or a support system, which is difficult to find.

Speaking of her own cultural adaptation process, Azucena described how local perceptions, which included ethnocentric views and racism, had played an important role in shaping her learning experiences. After almost 20 years of living in the same Midwestern city her biggest challenge had been to learn what she needed in order to survive, without losing her own ethnic identity.

When I first moved here, a lot of people where I lived... were very sheltered and didn't know beyond their boundaries. I thought, "God, they don't know there's all this other world.".... I can't say that everybody here is prejudiced. I think a lot of people just don't understand. Sometimes if you have an accent, whether you are Latin or you are from a dark-skinned part of the world, people think you are ignorant. They think it's harder for you to learn ... Since you can't speak as they do, therefore, you can't learn as they do.... Being an immigrant itself is going to a university for a lifetime.... [One of the biggest challenges is] not to lose your identity [while making] sure you don't get into trouble because you don't learn what you need to live here.

To summarize, from their perspectives as immigrants the participants perceived learning as integral to their lives in the United States. While learning permeated various areas of their lives, many of their learning experiences centered around work and cultural issues.



Being in low-wage and short-term jobs triggered continuous learning at work. Living in a Midwestern city with a relatively small immigrant population and insufficient insitutional support made their cultural adaptation and learning processes especially challenging. One participant emphasized the impact of local perceptions, which included attitudes of ethnocentrism and racism, on the experiences of Spanish-speaking, dark-skinned immigrants.

Because few studies have addressed the experiences of Latino immigrants from a holistic perspective (Ashcraft, 2003), the participants' outlook on immigrant learning offers a comprehensive perspective rarely found in the literature. At the same time, the participants' perception of immigrant learning as a complex experience permeating many areas of their lives is congruent with Ashcraft's earlier observation of the immigrant experience as "a combination of many life transitions occurring simultaneously" (p. 21), which may stimulate the participation of Latino immigrants in various types of adult learning.

***Women's learning.*** As noted in chapter 4, growing up in societies that fostered traditional gender identities influenced how the participants constructed learning and work expectations. In addition, an emphasis on family values and on maintaining close interpersonal relationships influenced how participants made life-changing decisions, such as immigrating to the United States. Consistently with these earlier observations, the participants' views on immigrant women's learning were framed in terms of changing gender role expectations and gender relations.

First, the women noted that gender roles seemed to be more flexible in the United States than in their countries of origin. Domi pointed out that, in the United States, she had done the same jobs as her husband. She also observed that women held positions that required high levels of responsibility and the supervision of both men and women employees.

I did the same things as my husband when we worked at McDonald's. It was the same when we worked cleaning [buildings]. [In our country] the woman is different... she stays in the home.... Today women do work outside the home, but the concept is still maintained.... In this country there are women bosses. A woman may be in charge of a group of men.... Sometimes it's a group of only women.

*Las cosas que mi esposo hizo en McDonald's fueron las mismas cosas que yo hice.*

*Cuando trabajé en limpieza [de edificios], fue las mismas cosas que yo hice. Allá la mujer es diferente... tiene que estar en la casa.... Hoy en día la mujer [trabaja fuera de la casa] un poco más pero aún el concepto sigue.... [Aquí] hay mujeres jefas. Una mujer tiene a cargo un grupo quizás solo de hombres.... A veces hay un lugar donde solo hay mujeres [trabajando].*

All five participants highlighted that the U.S. context had provided them with learning opportunities that contributed to transcending traditional female gender roles. The basis for this perception was twofold. On the one hand, the American life style required immigrant women and men to behave more independently. For instance, dissimilar work schedules required parents to independently take charge of family responsibilities, such as taking a child to a doctor, as they arose. Consequently, immigrant women who did not know how to drive were stimulated to learn how to do so. In addition, lacking the support of an extended family, which was characteristic in their countries of origin, also compelled the women to develop greater self-reliance. In doing so, the women had to learn beyond previous expectations. It may be worth noting that three of the five women interviewed were raising children without the assistance of a marital or cohabiting partner. Nonetheless, the value of

learning as a means for developing self-reliance was a perception shared by all five participants. Ana, who was in a stable marital relationship stated,

You need to learn how to do everyday tasks...because a woman can't always know if her husband will be by her side.... Sometimes you just have to learn because we are in a country that is different from ours. [In our country] we can count on having more family around to help.

*Lo de la vida diaria tiene que aprenderlo porque...[una mujer] no siempre va a saber si su esposo va a estar junto a uno....Algunas veces obligadamente tiene que aprender uno porque estamos en un país que no es como el nuestro [donde podemos contar con] más familia [para ayudarnos].*

Second, all participants emphasized the influence of gender relations on a woman's likelihood to engage in learning opportunities. The participants considered that, among Central American immigrants, a woman's attitude towards learning was not only influenced by her own beliefs of what was fitting for a woman to learn, but also by the gender relations within her family. However, the degree to which participants made men's attitudes responsible for hindering or facilitating immigrant women's learning varied. To illustrate, Evelyn strongly disapproved of men who refused to support their spouse's learning efforts.

As women, we are more considerate towards each other, because men are sometimes way too selfish. They don't want women to better themselves. For instance, my husband was well educated. I would always ask him, "Teach me how to use a computer...or teach me English at home." He never did. Why? Because he didn't want me to better myself. He always wanted to keep me down, but other people helped me. They taught me... No, a man always wants to hold you down.

*Entre mujeres nos consideramos porque los hombres entre veces son un poco muy egoístas. No quieren que la mujer se supere. Por ejemplo, mi esposo estudió. Yo siempre le decía, "Enseñame a la computadora...o enseñame más inglés aquí en la casa." Nunca lo hizo. ¿Porqué? Porque no quería que yo me superara. Siempre quería tenerme abajo pero otra gente [se esmeró] para que yo aprendiera. Me enseñaron.... No, un hombre siempre quiere verlo a uno en el suelo.*

Ana thought that while the attitudes of some men contributed to hindering their wives' learning, the outcome ultimately depended on the relationship of the marital couple.

Sometimes the partner's machismo can be an obstacle.... Some women are still living as if they were back in our country; they are subject to what the man says they can do. That is why they can't learn. Whether a woman can learn or not depends on the family.... It depends on the type of relationship she has with her partner.

*Un obstáculo [es] a veces el machismo del hombre.... Algunas mujeres todavía están como a las costumbres de allá, a lo que el esposo dice. Por eso uno no lo puede hacer. Depende del hogar que sea si uno puede aprender.... Depende de la relación que haya en la pareja.*

Still, Azucena emphasized immigrant women's agency in weighing alternatives and acting upon traditional gender relations. She pointed out that immigrant women respond to similar marital conditions in ways that are far too varied and complex to simplify.

There are all types of [immigrant] women.... I've seen women who have left their marriages against their cultural beliefs [that] marriage is one time only. They've gone on to study and to learn more and decided that that's how they would get ahead in this country. I have [also] seen women that have taken the passive route. They are more

comfortable having the husband take care of them. They [might] not learn a lot of things and still depend on a relative to do things for them. [Other women] are more fearful of being in a learning situation because that may put them above their husbands or their mates.

In summary, the participants associated immigrant women's learning with changes in gender role expectations and gender relations. In their view, the U.S. context had provided them with learning opportunities that contributed to transcending traditional female gender roles. At the same time, they believed that, among Central American immigrants, a woman's attitude towards learning was not only influenced by her own beliefs of what was fitting for a woman to learn, but also by the gender relations within her family. However, the degree to which participants made men's attitudes responsible for hindering or facilitating immigrant women's learning varied. One participant emphasized immigrant women's agency, pointing out that women respond to similar marital conditions in ways that are far too varied and complex to simplify.

The perception that gender role expectations and gender relations variously influence the learning experiences of immigrant women coincides with the findings of Lamphere (1986) and Menjivar (1999). Upon examining the effects of women's employment on gender relations within immigrant families, both researchers underscored the impact of changing gender roles and gender relations in defining immigrant women's diverse situations. Lamphere (1986) noted that immigrant women conducted their lives in ways that were limited by the structure of the local economy and shaped by the women's roles within the family and the family's stage in a developmental cycle. Menjivar (1999) emphasized that interacting factors, such as ethnicity, social class, and type of employment, contributed to

developing dissimilar perceptions of gender roles among immigrant women and men. According to Menjivar, dissimilar perceptions of gender roles altered family and gender relations in such varied ways that it would be inappropriate to portray "these women's experiences in simple or unidirectional terms" (p. 601).

***Process: How Did the Participants Experience Adult Learning?***

An inductive analysis of the interview data concerning the participants' learning experiences in the United States revealed that the five women had engaged in adult learning processes that were continuous, informal and incidental, experiential, and relational.

***Learning is continuous.*** Pursuing adult learning in a continuous manner was intimately bound to the participants' immigrant experiences. On the one hand, immigrating to the United States affected all areas of the participants' lives. Living and working in the United States exposed the women to social, cultural, economic, and political conditions that were new to them and different from those they might have expected to experience in their countries of origin. From a social standpoint, the women found themselves forming part of an immigrant working class largely comprised of people with diverse educational backgrounds. Thus, they learned to accept their social status and to adapt their interpersonal communication skills accordingly. Domi reflected on factors that contributed to leveling working conditions for immigrants of diverse backgrounds.

If you don't know English and you are undocumented, you'll work in cleaning or at McDonald's next to people who don't know how to read or write. You can have a licenciante or a doctorate degree, but you will be the same as everyone else. We are all at one level.

*Aquí si usted no habla inglés, si no es residente, trabaja en limpieza, en McDonalds o en cualquier cosa con gente que no sabe ni leer. Usted puede ser licenciada, doctora o lo que sea. Son iguales. Están en el mismo nivel.*

Dulce commented on the emotional cost of adapting to social environments typical of low-wage employment in the United States.

At work, I've felt strange. I can't say that I've felt badly, but it has certainly influenced my overall experience. I had an office in my country; it was a different environment. Here, I've come to do whatever I can.... The experience is very different because you're used to another line of work and to a different [social] environment. There's no choice; you have to adapt to whatever is available.

*Realmente en el trabajo me he sentido rara. Me he sentido, tal vez no mal pero sí [ha influido] mucho [en mi experiencia]. Yo recuerdo que allá yo tenía mi oficina, era otro ambiente. Aquí he venido a hacer de lo que sea.... Es bien diferente porque uno está acostumbrado a otro tipo de trabajo, a otro ambiente. Pero, ni modo, tenemos que adaptarnos a lo que sea.*

From a cultural standpoint, upon leaving their countries of origin, all participants found themselves interacting with persons who observed cultural norms that were unfamiliar to them. Therefore, the women learned to interact not only with Americans of diverse cultural backgrounds, but also with persons of diverse national origins. Azucena expressed an ongoing concern for maintaining her ethnic identity while culturally adapting to life in the United States.

I think just coming to this country is a whole learning experience. Learning about how to fit in without losing your identity. It's a hard thing to do. Also, learning to live

with other immigrants who may not think the same way you do.... Being here and learning how to adjust and respect the rules yet not lose myself and who I am and where I come from in the process is difficult, because I have to play the game [and] at the same time keep my identity intact.

From an economic standpoint, the participants found that meeting living expenses in the United States and sending remittances to relatives in their countries of origin created new financial responsibilities. Therefore, they learned to be competent at work in order to meet those economic demands. For example, Evelyn considered that learning to be competent at work in the United States was primarily triggered by her family's economic need.

I learned much in that first year. At least, I learned to be responsible. Above all, I learned from my mother because we both had the responsibility to look after my siblings. For her it was her children, for me it was my siblings. We both had that responsibility. I helped her with my earnings from work.

*[Ese primer año] aprendí mucho. Por lo menos a ser responsable. [Sobre todo, aprendí] de mi mamá porque teníamos la responsabilidad de mantener a nuestros [familiares]... ella a sus hijos y yo a mis hermanos. Era la responsabilidad que teníamos. [Yo] le ayudaba a ella [con el ingreso de mi trabajo].*

Finally, from a political standpoint, the participants were aware of the disadvantages of holding an undocumented immigrant status in the United States. Hence, they were proactive in improving their U.S. immigration status. Ana, for example, learned to legalize her situation by changing her immigrant status several times. Over a period of 14 years, her immigration status changed from undocumented, to temporary protected status (TPS), to



resident alien. Still, when I spoke with her last, Ana was looking forward to improving her knowledge of English and taking citizenship courses in order to apply for U.S. citizenship.

My goal is to become a naturalized U.S. citizen. For that, I would study. Even if I were working, if U.S. citizenship classes were offered, I would attend. I would have to make some sacrifices, but I would go.

*Mi meta es hacerme ciudadana [de los Estados Unidos]. Por eso sí estudiaría.*

*Aunque trabaje, si dieran las clases para hacerse ciudadano, sí iría a las clases. Con sacrificios pero sí iría.*

Indeed, immigration produced change in many areas of the women's lives; hence, it compelled them to learn continuously from the start. Azucena described the overwhelming feeling she experienced from trying to meet diverse learning demands upon arriving in the United States.

I think [immigrating] didn't change the way I learned.... However, there was just so much more to learn at one time. [It] was not only the language and the culture, but it was also immigration because I had to go through that [legal process] and that's very complicated.

In addition, immigrant employment conditions made the participants move through different kinds of jobs within relatively short periods, which in turn, required them to continuously learn new skills. As stated earlier, the participants' immigrant status, gender, and knowledge of English, as well as the U.S. context of reception, conditioned the employment opportunities available to them. For instance, at some point in their journeys, the five participants were employed in cleaning, domestic, or fast food service jobs, which were low paying, short-term, and gender-based. Although employment opportunities varied by

region (e.g., Midwest, Southeast, West Coast), the women experienced similar conditions in other jobs such as assembling furniture and electronics; packing fruit, meat, and dry goods; and printing. Therefore, as they moved through different kinds of jobs, the participants continuously learned new skills in order to meet job-specific demands.

Evelyn's journey through different kinds of jobs illustrates how she continuously learned at work. Upon arriving in the United States, Evelyn began working for a Spanish-speaking family as a live-in domestic. Performing this job in the United States required her to learn how to use electronic equipment such as vacuum cleaners, washers, and dryers. Then, she worked at a clothing factory where her job was to prepare the material for making pleated skirts. At this factory, Evelyn learned to place the cloth over patterns and to fold it tightly before passing it through a steamer. Next, Evelyn worked at a speaker-assembling factory. Besides learning to place wires on the speakers, Evelyn learned how division of labor and time management defined assembly-line productivity. Later, Evelyn worked at a coffee processing plant where she became familiar with the process of grinding and sifting coffee. Afterwards, Evelyn went back to doing domestic work, but she did it on a day-to-day basis. Although the work was the same as when she had been a live-in domestic, doing day-to-day work forced her to learn how to use the public transportation system in order to move from one place to another within a large city. After getting married, Evelyn stopped working outside the home; therefore, learning for her centered on fulfilling her role as homemaker. Twelve years later, Evelyn went back to working outside the home. One of her first jobs was at a local printer's where she learned how to handle paper and use the printing machines. Then, she worked as a maintenance employee for the public school system. Eventually, Evelyn started working in the food services area at an elementary school. At first, she learned

how to use commercial cooking equipment and the specifics of measuring and serving children's food portions. Later, her diligence at work earned her a temporary position as the Food Services Coordinator. In this position, Evelyn had to make decisions about food supplies and carefully manage time in order to provide efficient services. She was also required to learn how to use a computer for filing daily, weekly, and monthly reports. Overall, as the Food Services Coordinator, Evelyn learned not only to maintain hygienic and measuring standards, use commercial cooking equipment, and develop computer skills, but she also learned to exercise leadership on a level she had not experienced before. As noted in the postscript to her life story, when I last spoke with Evelyn, she was working as the Food Services Coordinator for a larger elementary school and she continued to embrace learning in order to meet the challenges posed by the new job.

In summary, pursuing adult learning in a continuous manner was intimately bound to the participants' immigrant experiences. On the one hand, living and working in the United States exposed the women to social, cultural, economic, and political conditions that were new to them and different from those they might have expected to experience in their countries of origin. On the other hand, immigrant employment conditions made the participants move through different kinds of jobs within relatively short periods, which in turn, required them to continuously meet new learning demands.

From a lifelong learning perspective, learning in a continuous manner is not an unusual characteristic ascribed to adult learners (Harrison et al., 2002). However, the findings yielded by this inquiry are unique in revealing an intimate relationship between immigration and continuous adult learning, as experienced by working women who arrive in the United

States from non-English speaking Central American countries and who may often hold an undocumented status.

*Learning is informal and incidental.* The participants' learning was primarily informal and incidental. Although one participant briefly attended a community college and four participants engaged in non-formal education, most of the women's learning experiences occurred either informally in daily life situations or incidentally as a consequence of other activities. As Domi noted, learning in daily life, outside the established educational system, seemed commonplace among immigrants.

For all of us immigrants, learning occurs outside formal school settings. Our school is in our daily lives. We learn every day. We all learn in this country. We learn even the most insignificant things.

*Porque [para] todos los inmigrantes nuestra asimilación está afuera, no en una escuela. La escuela de nosotros es nuestro diario vivir. Cada día aprendemos. Aquí todos aprendemos. Aún la cosa más insignificante aprendemos.*

Informal learning occurred as the participants made deliberate efforts to resolve everyday situations that required knowledge, skills, or attitudes that were new to them. In particular, the women described situations related to: 1) interacting with the material conditions of the new environment, 2) pursuing English proficiency, 3) understanding American values and behaviors, and 4) developing competence at work.

First, the participants learned informally to interact with material conditions such as public transportation, food marketing, and health-care services. For example, in order to move from one place to another in a U.S. metropolitan area, Evelyn learned to use the public transportation system. She did so by asking local residents and familiarizing herself with the

different bus routes and train lines. As she became more familiar with the city, she learned how to drive a car with the assistance of her husband. Evelyn was deliberate in learning how to interact with the material conditions particular to a large U.S. city. She learned informally through interpersonal interaction, trial-and-error experimentation, and coaching.

I had to learn how to ride on buses and trains, all of that. You get there without knowing anything. It takes a lot of asking around. Later, I had to learn how to drive a car; I had to know the streets well.

*Tuve que aprender a andar en el bus, en los trenes, todo eso. Uno llega y no sabe Nada. [Hay que] estar preguntándole a la gente. Ya después tuve que aprender a manejar, a conocer las calles.*

Second, as the participants felt a pressing need to learn English, they embraced informal learning situations for improving their language skills. To illustrate, Azucena sought to improve her understanding of English by reading fiction books with the assistance of a Spanish-English dictionary. Dulce practiced conversational English at home with her 18-year-old brother and her 10-year-old son. Domi increased her English vocabulary by paying close attention to the correct pronunciation of words used by her children's health-care providers. During her regular visits to these doctors, she took mental notes of specific words, which she later practiced at home.

Third, daily life situations compelled the participants to understand and sometimes adopt American values and behaviors. For instance, Domi stated that her learning experiences had ranged from identifying how to ask for food at an American restaurant to understanding how individualism influenced interpersonal interactions in American society. In many of these instances, her learning had taken place informally. Along the same lines,

Azucena underscored that, in order to avoid negative consequences, immigrants needed to adopt socially expected behaviors that could only be learned informally.

[In some countries] people litter all the time. Here you get a fine if you litter. Or I haven't cut my grass. If it grows anymore, I'm gonna be in trouble. [These are] things that are cultural adaptations that you don't learn in the classroom.

Fourth, developing competence at work required the participants to learn job-specific skills in informal situations. Domi's work experience at a fast food restaurant provides a good illustration. Upon arriving in the United States, Domi started to work in the kitchen of a McDonald's restaurant. Although she had no knowledge of English, she decided to learn what was necessary for developing competence and earning a promotion. She observed other workers, took notes, memorized the labels on the hamburger wrappings, and consulted a dictionary to learn basic English words. Her narrative clearly describes how engaging in an informal learning process contributed to accomplishing her goal.

I told myself, "I am not going to be working in the kitchen too much longer. I will soon be working up front." I made up my mind and I made it happen. I learned whatever I needed to learn and the manager moved me up to passing orders. I learned quickly. I observed, I took notes, and I needed to speak very little. Afterwards, I practiced on my own. One month later, I was working up front. I didn't want to stay working in the kitchen, not I.

*[Yo me dije], "Yo no voy a estar mucho tiempo en la cocina. Luego voy a trabajar adelante." Me lo propuse y así fue. Aprendí las cosas que tenía que aprender. Ya después me pusieron halando órdenes. Rápido me aprendí todas las cosas. Lo miraba, lo apuntaba, y en la caja casi no hablaba. Después venía y lo practicaba. Al*

*mes ya estaba trabajando al frente. No quise trabajar mucho tiempo [en la cocina].*

*Yo no.*

Finally, the participants described many examples of incidental learning; in particular, with respect to English language acquisition and intercultural understanding. In terms of English language acquisition, Evelyn and Azucena stated that their understanding of English had improved as a consequence of watching television for entertainment purposes. Dulce provided a different example whereby interacting with American managers at work had contributed to improving her English language comprehension. In terms of intercultural understanding, the participants observed that their daily interactions at work and in other social settings had helped them understand not only American cultural values, but also the cultural values of immigrants from different regions of the world. For instance, Ana learned about American customs and eating habits while working as a live-in domestic. However, when she began working in factories she became familiar with the cultural values of other foreign-born workers. Furthermore, Ana's familiarity with the beliefs and values of people of diverse national origins increased as a result of attending an ecumenical Bible study. Therefore, much of Ana's development in the area of intercultural understanding occurred as a result of incidental learning.

In summary, the participants' adult learning experiences were primarily informal and incidental. Informal learning occurred as the participants made deliberate efforts to resolve everyday situations that required knowledge, skills, or attitudes that were new to them. In particular, the women described situations related to: 1) interacting with the material conditions of the new environment, 2) pursuing English proficiency, 3) understanding American values and behaviors, and 4) developing competence at work. Incidental learning

occurred as a consequence of the participants' interactions in various social settings and centered on cultural issues such as English language acquisition and intercultural understanding.

I identified many of the participants' learning experiences as informal and incidental learning because their descriptions were congruent with definitions found in the literature. In particular, the examples provided by the participants fit Marsick and Watkins's (2001) concepts of informal and incidental adult learning. The researchers distinguished informal learning from formal learning because it often takes place outside educational institutions, it is "usually intentional but not highly structured" (p.25), and it is primarily controlled by the learner. Marsick and Watkins classified incidental learning as a subcategory of informal learning and defined it as the tacit or unconscious byproduct of other activities.

Marsick and Watkins (2001) developed a model for understanding informal and incidental learning that "depicts a progression of meaning making" (p. 29) whereby people make sense of new situations. The model consists of eight elements or steps forming a circle, although the researchers suggested the process could be non-linear. In comparing the learning experiences described by the participants in this inquiry to Marsick and Watkins's model, I found that the women's descriptions fit best the first four elements of the circle: having a disconcerting new experience, interpreting the experience, examining alternative solutions, and developing learning strategies. However, the participants' experiences differed from the second half of the circle. In my view, this difference emerged because the elements forming the second half of Marsick and Watkins's model entail an assessment process that presumes the previous establishment of clear and explicit goals on the part of learners, as well as learners' disposition to critically reflect on lessons learned. As immigrants, the



participants in this inquiry were constantly exposed to new situations. For that reason, although each of the women had a clear sense of her purpose for engaging in informal learning, collectively their learning processes were not as centered on critical reflection as Marsick and Watkins's model would suggest. My observation, however, is not intended as a critique of the model, since the researchers clearly proposed it as a tool for developing educational interventions that could enhance informal and incidental adult learning.

*Learning is experiential.* Considering that the participants, as a group, underwent adult learning processes that were primarily informal and incidental, I was not surprised to find that their learning was also largely experience-based. Indeed, experience was central to the participants' learning processes in four distinct ways: 1) experience was a basis for learning, 2) experience was a strategy for learning, 3) experience was a resource for learning, and 4) experience was a medium for learning.

Experience was the basis for learning when the participants gained insights and developed attitudes as a result of making meaning of whole experiences. In other words, a participant's whole experience of a situation became a starting point for developing new ideas, beliefs, values, attitudes, and skills. To illustrate, Domi's journey as an undocumented immigrant was the basis for changing her belief of international migration as unnecessary and her attitude towards illegal immigrants whom she considered foolish. Domi developed new beliefs and attitudes upon making meaning of her whole immigration experience—making the decision to immigrate, planning and arranging the trip, leaving her parents without knowing if or when she might see them again, depending on smugglers for crossing the Mexican-U.S. border, being detained by U.S. immigration agents, and becoming reunited with her husband. Not only did Domi gain a new understanding of factors influencing

international migration, but she also developed an affective response to the plight of undocumented immigrants.

I always thought that you could prosper wherever you were born. I'm aware of the situations in our countries, but I had that idea.... I used to think [immigrating] was foolish. Oh, those foolish people! Why do they risk their lives? You can't understand those people until you experience the same.... I learned much during the journey. I learned to mature. I learned to live with different people. I was able to overcome my attitude towards immigrants, because I experienced it myself. I am saddened when I hear about people who endured difficulties I never experienced.

*Siempre pensé que en cualquier país donde nacemos uno puede progresar....*

*Sabemos como es la situación en nuestros países; yo estoy consciente de eso. Pero yo tenía esa idea.... Yo pensaba que era algo tonto. ¡Ah, la gente tonta! ¿Cómo se venía así y arriesgaba su vida? Hasta que uno no vive eso, uno no comprende a las personas.... [En el viaje] aprendí muchas cosas. Aprendí a madurar. Aprendí a convivir con diferentes personas. Aprendí y se quitó de mi mente la idea tonta que tenía antes de la pobre gente que venía para acá porque estuve en la misma situación. Me da mucha tristeza cuando oigo casos de gente que pasa cosas que yo nunca pasé.*

Ana shared another instance where a whole experience became the basis for learning. During her first stay in the United States, which lasted only 1½ years, Ana experienced the daily realities of living and working in a foreign country. As a result of reflecting upon her overall experience, Ana demystified unfounded beliefs about the life style accessible to working-class Central American immigrants in the United States.

The first time I came, I learned that not everything is easy in this country. In my country, I had heard people say, “In the United States nobody eats tortillas, nobody eats beans. Clothes are worn only once.” However, the reality is otherwise. That is what you learn here. You realize how different this country is from what you’ve heard.

*[Esa primera vez], lo que definitivamente yo aprendí es que no todo es fácil en este país. A veces uno escuchaba pláticas de personas que llegaban allá y decían, “En Estados Unidos no se comen tortillas, no se comen frijoles. La ropa nomás se pone una vez.” Pero la realidad es otra definitivamente. Es lo que uno viene a aprender. Se viene a dar cuenta por si mismo lo diferente que es aquí en este país.*

Experience was a strategy for learning when the participants purposefully relied on doing or experiencing something as a means for learning. For example, three of the women—Ana, Evelyn, and Domi—learned to drive by practicing on a regular basis. Although their husbands provided preliminary instruction and coaching, the women ultimately relied on learning by doing to accomplish their goal. In this case, the nature of the learning goal helped the women identify experiencing as the most appropriate strategy. This was also the case when the women learned to perform work-related tasks such as using electronic household equipment.

In other instances, the participants used experiencing as a preferred strategy over equally appropriate alternatives. Azucena, in particular, considered that she learned best through experiencing things herself. She provided numerous examples of her experiential learning approach while working in the area of international commerce. On one occasion, Azucena needed to learn how to submit a visa application for traveling and doing business in

a Latin American country. She was responsible for providing a group of business persons with the appropriate paperwork and instructions for requesting individual travel visas. Suspecting that the process could be unusually complex, Azucena underwent the entire application process to obtain a visa for herself before preparing materials for the traveling group. She used her own experience as a strategy for learning how to submit an application in the most effective manner. Azucena concluded her rendition of the process as follows.

I went through it and now I can advise our producers on how to go through it the smart way. So I had to experience it myself.... [My learning is] mostly based on my experience, I guess. If I don't go through it, I don't want anybody to tell me how... afterwards.

Experience was a resource for learning when the participants used the experience of others as a source of knowledge. All participants mentioned instances in which they had relied on the experience of others to guide their actions. This was especially evident shortly after the women arrived in the United States. Evelyn, for example, followed the advice of immigrant women who were experienced in doing domestic work in this country. Ana asked her sister, a long time immigrant, for guidance on how to approach daily life situations in the United States. Dulce consulted her mother, who was more experienced in immigrant matters, about major decisions. Domi heeded the advice of her husband concerning work and daily life situations in the receiving country. Although from a different perspective, Azucena also embraced learning from the experience of others. She described her approach as follows.

I think others' experiences are knowledge as well. As [I've gotten] older... people come to me and tell me things. I may not agree with them, but my personality allows me to absorb what they say to me, not give any criticism... and take that inside me. I

think I have a little storage place with all these other people's experiences.... I store all that and some of [it] I pick and choose for my own learning.

Finally, experience was a medium for learning when the participants learned while acting upon and responding to complex situations within unfamiliar sociocultural contexts in the receiving country. These learning experiences were characterized by: 1) sociocultural contexts that required behaving or operating on a level that was unfamiliar to the participants; 2) situations that required the participants to adapt their behavior in light of not only the conditions of the activity, but also the actions taken by other people; and 3) an immediacy of knowing and learning.

Two participants in particular, Evelyn and Azucena, shared instances where experience was a medium for learning. Both participants described sociocultural contexts and situations that stimulated them to act and learn outside their comfort zones. Evelyn experienced this type of learning when she was unexpectedly promoted to Food Services Coordinator. In the new position, Evelyn found herself interacting within an unfamiliar sociocultural context and operating on a level that was unknown to her. Evelyn engaged in activities, such as writing reports, which required interacting with the school cashier and the manager while learning to use a computer. Furthermore, Evelyn learned to make immediate decisions based on changing situations, such as the number of students eating in school on a particular day, the number of employees available, the quantity of food supplies, and the type of menu offered. Evelyn believed that her new role at work had provided her with opportunities for knowing and learning in a way she had not experienced before.

At work, I'm learning to use the computer. That's something new for me. Two months ago, they suddenly came and told me, "You are going to learn the job

responsibilities of the coordinator, and you'll have to use the computer. Come, sit down, and we will teach you." My manager taught me.... Every afternoon, I am in charge of doing reports.... The cashier counts, gives me the amount, and I have to type it into the computer.... I like using the computer! At work, people have placed their trust in me. At the same time, they have not left me on my own. If I have a problem, I ask them.... In the beginning, I was nervous about not being able to do the job. Now, I experience some stress because I have a lot of responsibility.... I have learned the most at work. Now, I feel proud because I have bettered myself a little.

*[En mi trabajo] ahorita estoy aprendiendo el uso de la computadora. Eso par mí es nuevo. [Hace] dos meses que de repente llegaron y me dijeron, "Tú vas a aprender lo de la coordinadora y tienes que usar la computadora. Ven siéntate y te vamos a enseñar." Mi manager me enseñó.... Yo me encargo en la tarde de sacar todos los reportes.... [La cajera] cuenta... me da el dato y yo lo tengo que poner en la computadora. ¡Me gusta [usar la computadora]! [En el trabajo] han tenido confianza en mí y a la vez no me dejan sola. Yo les pregunto si tengo algún problema.... [Al principio me daba] nervios que no me fuera a salir el trabajo como tenía que hacerlo. [Ahora me da] a lo mejor un poco de stress porque es una responsabilidad muy grande la que tengo allí.... [En el trabajo es donde] más he aprendido. Ahorita me siento orgullosa porque he estado superándome un poquito.*

Azucena experienced this type of learning while being mentored in the field of international commerce. Her mentor not only introduced her to a field that was unfamiliar to her, but also exposed her to professional social settings that required interacting on a level

that was new for her. In the following excerpt, Azucena described how she learned in situations that took her outside her comfort zone.

My mentor makes me part of all the decision making. With time, I've learned that some decisions I can make by myself and he doesn't mind. I know my limits, too. He takes me to a lot of high-level meetings where sometimes I just sit and listen. If I don't have anything smart to say... I rather just sit and listen, because then I take it all in and when the time comes I can use it.... Right now, I'm a baby at [what I'm learning]. So, I want to take it in, because the day I open my mouth I want it to be significant.

Azucena also learned to approach gender relations in the workplace, as described in the following example. Although Azucena was personally invested in preventing all types of discrimination, she experienced knowing and acting upon gender-based discrimination while interacting in specific situations at work.

I've always been more comfortable working with men.... Maybe because I'm more daring and I am more willing to tell a man, "You are wrong" or "You are right" or say "Thank you" to a man... But most recently, I had a boss from a different part of the country, who is older... and treated me as a female probably would have been treated in the early part of the century. So more recently, I've made it a point to want to be one of the boys, meaning that I want to be included in all the... crude conversations.... I had a meeting with a high level official. It was just she and I, and there were three men. She is older than I am, probably more experienced, and to a certain extent, she's a person that makes decisions. We got along real well and we sort of dominated the action end of the meeting. I feel more comfortable with her

because she moves herself around those circles, [which] are most of the time dominated by men.

In summary, experience was integral to the participants' learning processes in four distinct ways; experience was a basis, strategy, resource, and medium for learning. First, experience was a basis for learning when the participants gained insights and developed attitudes as a result of making meaning of whole experiences. Second, experience was a strategy for learning when the participants purposefully relied on doing or experiencing something as a means for learning. Third, experience was a resource for learning when the participants used the experience of others as a source of knowledge. Fourth, experience was a medium for learning when the participants learned while acting upon and responding to complex situations in the new environment.

For the most part, the findings coincide with traditional concepts of experiential learning found in adult education literature. For instance, the first three approaches described by the participants—using experience as basis, strategy, and resource—coincide with Jarvis's (1999) definition of experiential learning as "Learning that begins with experience and transforms it into knowledge, skill, attitude, emotions, values, beliefs, senses" (p. 65). However, the fourth approach, in which experience was described as a medium for learning, seems more congruent with Wilson's (1993) understanding of the relationship between learning and experience from a situated cognition perspective. Wilson noted that adult education theorists, such as Dewey, Lindeman, Knowles, Kolb, and Jarvis, who considered experience essential to adult learning, also viewed learning primarily as "a process occurring in the individual" (p. 75). Building on principles of situated cognition theory, Wilson argued for adopting a situated view of adult learning whereby "experience becomes activity and



takes on a much more dynamic relation to learning. Adults no longer learn from experience, they learn in it, as they act in situations and are acted upon by situations” (p. 75).

From my perspective, while many of the participants’ learning experiences support traditional views that emphasize reflection and the transformation of life experience as a means for knowing, some of their experiences also suggest an interactive, social, and contextual nature of learning that could be better interpreted from a situated perspective. Therefore, the findings of this inquiry may also support Usher et al.’s (2002) call “to stop seeing experiential learning in purely logocentric terms, as a natural characteristic of the individual learner or as a pedagogical technique and more in terms of contexts, sociocultural and institutional, in which it functions and from which it derives its significations” (p. 89).

***Learning is relational.*** The participants’ learning processes were relational in manner and purpose. In manner, the participants’ learning was relational because it often occurred within social situations. For instance, the participants learned through their interpersonal interactions with relatives, fellow immigrants, schoolteachers, health-care providers, co-workers and supervisors, colleagues, church leaders, and social service volunteers. In purpose, the participants’ learning was relational because the women were often motivated by their desire to benefit others; for example, their own children, extended families, fellow nationals, immigrants from other countries of origin, local communities, and the American society at large.

Although the U.S. context of reception played an important role in determining the social nature of the participants’ learning experiences, internal factors were more influential than external factors in making learning relational. Specifically, two aspects of the women’s

social identities—gender and ethnicity—contributed to making learning relational in manner and purpose.

However, gender and ethnicity were not equally influential across participants. Whereas gender seemed to be more influential than ethnicity in making learning relational for some participants, the opposite was true for others. The intervening factor, in my view, was the degree to which each woman adhered or not to a traditionally-defined female gender identity. Therefore, the extent to which either gender or ethnicity was more strongly influential in making learning relational for each participant varied depending on the woman's degree of adherence to a traditionally-defined gender identity. For example, for Evelyn, Ana, and Domi, who adhered to traditionally-defined female gender identities, gender was more influential than ethnicity. Conversely, for Dulce and Azucena, who did not adhere to traditionally-defined female gender identities, ethnicity seemed more influential. To illustrate, I describe how ethnicity and gender variously influenced the relational quality of the women's learning in manner and purpose.

In manner, all participants sought to enhance their learning through interpersonal interaction in various social settings. Ethnicity was an important factor that facilitated a relational approach for all participants. For instance, the Latino cultural emphasis on close family relationships facilitated learning with relatives. On a broader social level, the participants' Latina cultural disposition for promoting smooth and pleasant social relationships was an asset for building relationships outside the family; in turn, these relationships contributed to enhancing the women's learning opportunities. Dulce and Azucena, in particular, benefited from establishing relationships in various social settings. For instance, Dulce established social relationships and made herself known in churches and

other institutions providing services to recent immigrants. Her regular participation in church and other community events rapidly earned her the trust of pastors and community leaders. Consequently, people working in different institutions helped to improve her situation. In this manner, Dulce increased not only her knowledge of the U.S. context of reception, but also her access to different social settings. Hence, she expanded and diversified her opportunities for learning.

Once I'm in a place, once I have gone out to find it, other people have helped me.... I have found places like this church, where I came on my own. I've found much help here. There's another group led by a young man from Central America. He has helped me a lot. I've always attended another church... I took notice of the church's activities, I offered to do volunteer work, and they've helped me. I've made myself known. Perhaps that's why they've helped me.

*Ya estando en el lugar, ya que yo he salido y he buscado, [me han apoyado otras personas].... He llegado a lugares, por ejemplo, aquí a la iglesia yo vine. Aquí he encontrado mucha ayuda. [En] otro grupo de [un] muchacho [centroamericano] también. Él me ha ayudado mucho. Y [en otra] iglesia [donde] yo siempre he ido... me [dí] cuenta de sus actividades, me ofrecí de voluntaria y sí me han ayudado mucho. Me he dado a conocer y a lo mejor por eso me han ayudado.*

Dulce's preference for a relational approach to learning is conveyed in the following example. While attending a church-sponsored ESL program, Dulce was unhappy about the lack of mutual support among learners. She believed that developing group cohesion and increasing interpersonal interaction among learners could produce better learning outcomes.

In my peer group, there's always someone who tells you, "It's this way," but I feel there isn't much unity among us. Perhaps we aren't ready to say, "Let's get together some afternoon or over the weekend. Let's study. Let's learn together." We could ask each other and practice what we have learned in class. We don't do that because everyone is so busy. Some of us attend class one day, and a different group comes the next day. There isn't enough familiarity. There isn't enough friendship. For me, it's important for the group to be united. We should all participate together. We should offer ideas. We should select one teacher who is the best for our group's learning. I think that would be most appropriate. It would help us all.

*Acá con las compañeras casi siempre hay alguna que le dice a uno, "Es así" pero yo siento que no hay mucha unión. A lo mejor no hay mucha disposición entre nosotras [para] ponernos de acuerdo y decir "Mirá, una tarde, un fin de semana, estudiemos, vamos a aprender." Preguntarnos una con otra o repasar lo que el jueves estudiamos. No existe eso porque todas las personas tienen mucho que hacer. Y pues a veces vienen unas, a veces venimos otras. No hay suficiente confianza. No hay suficiente amistad por decirlo así. [Para mí es importante que el grupo] sea más unido. Que participemos juntas todas. Que se aporten ideas. Que se elija una [maestra] y cuál es la mejor para aprender. Pienso que sería lo más conveniente. Nos ayudaría a todos.*

Azucena also embraced a relational approach to learning that was facilitated by her Latina cultural disposition. Although she often engaged in self-directed learning, Azucena

cultivated relationships with people who could help her learn. One example was her relationship with a mentor at work.

[Currently], I'm being mentored by a director in my office [in the area of international commerce], which is completely new to me.... I spend a lot of time with him. I invest and he invests time like going for lunch or after work. I'm very honest with him. When I don't know something, I tell him and he'll explain it to me. Sometimes he's lengthy, but I appreciate it.... I think it's the first time in my adult life that I find someone that does that for me, so I'm very grateful.

In addition, while working in the area of international commerce, Azucena relied on her ease in establishing social relationships to learn from people she did not know. She believed that her friendly personality as well as her Latina cultural disposition contributed to facilitating positive relational learning experiences.

I will go to someone and say, "My name is so and so. I'm looking for this. I have no clue, and I desperately need your help." I'm honest. If I don't know something, I'll say it right away. People will [then] tell me and I will keep that in mind.

I think that being friendly [and] being able to relate to anyone in any [socioeconomic] level, is an asset.... I enjoy treating everybody with dignity and respect.... I think [it]... has allowed me to learn more.

Gender was also influential in facilitating the participants' relational approaches to learning. As stated earlier, this was especially so for Evelyn, Ana, and Domi. Because these three women adhered to traditionally-defined gender identities, they were prone to engaging social contexts dominated by women. Hence, they often learned through their interpersonal

interactions with other women. For example, Evelyn's interaction with three American women helped her adapt to living in a Midwestern city with a small Latino population.

I've had many people who have helped me and my children survive. I've learned above all, the value of friendship... In particular, I've known three kind persons, who have always shown concern for me. First is the lady who helped me when my baby was born.... The second person is a teacher who helped me tremendously. She's my neighbor... She was an early childhood specialist and taught [my son] for three years until he started pre-school.... The third person is another teacher, who's still at my children's elementary school.

*He tenido mucha gente que me ha ayudado a sobrevivir con mis hijos. He aprendido, más que todo, el valor de las amistades... [En especial, conocí a] tres personas bien buena gente. Son tres personas que han estado siempre al pendiente de lo que me pasa y todo eso. [Primero] está la señora que me ayudó mucho cuando tuve al bebé... [La segunda persona es] la maestra que me ayudó mucho. Ella es mi vecina... Era maestra de early childhood [y] fue la maestra del niño por tres años hasta que él entró al preschool. [La tercera persona es] otra maestra que.... allí está todavía en la escuela.*

Undoubtedly, Evelyn's relational learning experiences were facilitated by her efforts to position herself in social contexts that were congruent with her maternal role.

When my children were young, I visited their school often. When I wasn't working, I enjoyed helping at their school. That helped me observe how the children attended classes, and it led to my involvement in the type of work I do today. I like children. Above all, I like working for them, knowing that I'm doing

something for their well being. Yes, I currently work for them. I like preparing food and serving the children.

*[Cuando mis niños estaban pequeños] yo iba mucho a la escuela a ayudar.*

*Cuando no trabajaba, me gustaba ir a ayudar a la escuela. [Eso] me ayudó mucho a ver como los niños llegaban a clases y ya pues me envolví en el trabajo que estoy ahorita. Porque me gustan los niños. Y más pues trabajar para ellos.*

*Saber que estoy haciendo algo para los niños. Sí, ahorita trabajo para ellos. [Me gusta] prepararles la comida y servirles.*

Ana followed a similar approach. She enrolled in non-formal education programs, such as Childnet and First Aid workshops, where she interacted primarily with women learners and teachers. Furthermore, 16 years after her first arrival to the United States, Ana continued to rely on her sister's moral support to follow through with learning pursuits.

My sister always thinks positively. I'm the one who sometimes thinks negatively.

However, she tells me, "You can do it. You can do it." She's always encouraging me by saying I can and must do something. She stimulates me to keep learning.

*Mi hermana es la que piensa positivo. Yo soy la que pienso a veces negativo.*

*Pero ella me dice "No. Tú puedes, tú puedes" Siempre ella está dándole ánimo a uno de que sí puede y tiene que hacerlo. Sí, [ella] me motiva [para seguir aprendiendo].*

Finally, Domi's relational learning experiences were also strongly influenced by gender, as she interacted regularly with women either in church or at work. At the time of the interviews, Domi was no longer working outside the home. However, regular home-based visits from her daughter's female physical therapists provided her with continuous learning

opportunities. Overall, like the other participants in this inquiry, Domi had a special appreciation for learning in social situations.

The best school one can have is life itself. Because you learn. You can go to school... and you can learn from theory and books. But when you are facing a critical situation that involves people, you learn. Theory and books are no longer relevant. Instead, what matters are your feelings, your attitudes, and your actions. *La escuela más grande que uno tiene es la escuela de la vida. Porque son cosas que usted aprende. Usted puede ir a la escuela... y puede aprende tantas cosas teóricas de libros. Pero cuando usted está pasando por una situación crítica que incluye gente, usted aprende. Porque allí ya no tiene que ver teoría, no tiene que ver libros, sino tiene que ver sus sentimientos, su manera de pensar, su manera de actuar.*

In purpose, the participants' learning was relational because the women were often motivated by their desire to benefit others. In this respect, gender identity was an important factor in making learning relational for the five participants because they all associated learning with fulfilling maternal roles. Despite holding different views of motherhood, the women thought of their own learning as a means for benefiting their children. On the one hand, Evelyn, Ana, and Domi sought to provide their children with much personal care and family time. Hence, they learned in order to better assist their children's development within the home. On the other hand, Dulce and Azucena sought to protect their children from experiencing economic limitations. Hence, they learned in order to improve their earnings and become better providers for their families.



In terms of purpose, gender was especially influential on Evelyn, Ana, and Domi's relational learning experiences. For 12 years, Evelyn dedicated herself to looking after her husband and children's well being. She learned in order to fulfill her roles of mother and wife. At the time of the interviews, Evelyn was beginning to think of learning as a means for bettering herself. Her new role at work and her imminent divorce provided her with an opportunity for viewing herself under a new light. Still, Evelyn's main concern was to survive as a divorced mother with children. As she apprehensively considered going back to school, she was stimulated by the thought of being a good example to her children.

If you want to learn as an adult, you must have will power. You must tell yourself, "I want to learn because this is something that will help me." Also to show my children that one can better oneself as an adult. No matter how old you are, if you have the will power you can achieve it.

*Si quiere aprender [como adulto], tiene que tener fuerza de voluntad [y decir] "No, pues quiero aprender porque ésto me va a servir o me sirve." También para enseñarle a mis hijos que todavía cuando uno es adulto puede superarse. No importa la edad que uno tenga, si uno quiere puede.*

Ana's enrollment in non-formal education programs, such as First Aid and Childnet, was consistent with her interest in assisting the development of her two young children. Equally purposeful were her informal learning efforts to acquire practical skills, such as driving a car and speaking English.

I learned to drive because of my children. I had to learn in order to take them to doctor appointments and vaccination clinics. Going to the doctor also required learning a little bit of English. You have to learn how to do things on your own.

*Para empezar yo no manejaba y con [mis hijos] tuve que aprender porque hay que llevarlos a las vacunas ... [y] citas de doctores.... Si va al doctor hay que aunque sea aprender un su poquito de inglés. Tiene uno que aprender a sobresalir uno mismo.*

Domi's learning was also intimately bound to her traditionally-conceptualized gender roles of wife and mother. Her perception of learning as a means for benefiting her children is captured in the following statement.

How you learn and live will reflect on what you can teach your children.... I make an effort to learn things because I need to teach my children.... Motherhood is one of the most critical roles you can fulfill. I tell my husband, "When I die, I'm not going to be held accountable for everything I did on this earth. I will be held accountable for my son, my daughter, and you. Nothing else will count."

*Según la manera que [uno] aprenda y la manera que [uno] viva, es lo que uno le va a enseñar a [sus hijos].... Yo me preocupo en aprender muchas cosas para poder enseñarles [a mis hijos]. Ser madre es uno de los papeles más importantes y de mucha responsabilidad que uno tiene. Le digo a mi esposo, "Cuando yo me muera, yo no voy a ir a rendir cuentas por todo lo que yo hice aquí en la tierra, sino voy a ir a rendir cuentas por [mi hijo], por [mi hija], y por tí. Es lo único por lo que voy a rendir cuentas. Por lo demás no."*

In terms of purpose, ethnicity was also an important factor in making learning relational for the participants. Since promoting group well being over individual gains is valued in Latino cultures, it undoubtedly contributed to stimulating the participants' interest in improving the situations of different social groups. Azucena and Dulce, in particular, wanted to better themselves in order to benefit not only their families, but also broader

segments of society. They both wanted to reach social positions that could enable them to make meaningful contributions towards social change. Present in their minds was a concern for helping those who needed it most, including recent immigrants from Central America. Azucena, for example, was frustrated about her limitations to assist newcomers, especially women.

As an immigrant it breaks my heart not being able to do more and see people struggle and go through things that they really shouldn't, if they had the opportunity to have a center where they learned the basic stuff.... I've thought about mentoring someone, even though I don't think I've reached the plateau that I want to reach. I have a good friend who is very smart. She has a great entrepreneurial mind. She's learning the [English] language and now she is learning how to use the computer.... She just needs to get into certain places where she can develop herself.

Azucena's desire to improve her social position was not only guided by her interest in helping immigrants. She was also preoccupied about helping to solve social problems afflicting her U.S. city of residence.

I want [my contributions] to cause change.... I wish I could do more... The racial tensions have become greater with more immigrants coming into the state and to the city. There's always the struggle: How can you help the community and teach them to become like a mosaic? Now, I speak my language sometimes in front of people and I don't care. I'm not being offensive, but I'm trying to help people hear something different so they get used to the idea that we're here to stay.

Although at the time of the interviews Dulce had only been in the United States for eight months, her learning aspirations were also linked to benefiting people in general.

I tell my mother that if I was never somebody in my home country, I want to become somebody here. I want to feel important so I can help others, because I always needed someone to help me.... Now that I am in a country of opportunities, my biggest wish is to help others.... I've always thought that if I learn something and if I am in a leadership position, I must share what I learn. A leader must always share knowledge with others and not be selfish about it.

*Yo le digo a mi mamá que si en [mi país] nunca fui nadie, que yo aquí quiero ser alguien. Quiero sentirme importante para poder ayudar a las demás personas porque yo siempre necesité que me ayudaran.... Y ya que estoy en un país de oportunidades, es mi mayor deseo poder servirle a las demás personas.... Yo siempre he pensado que si yo aprendo algo y estoy como líder de un equipo de personas tengo que darlo a saber. [Un líder] tiene que dar a saber, que enseñar lo que sabe, sin egoísmo, sin nada. [El aprendizaje] hay que diseminarlo y hay que compartirlo.*

In summary, the participants' learning processes were relational in manner and purpose. In manner, the participants' learning was relational because it often occurred through interpersonal interaction. In purpose, the participants' learning was relational because the women were often motivated by their desire to benefit others. Internal factors were more influential than external factors in making learning relational. Specifically, two aspects of the women's social identities—ethnicity and gender—contributed to making learning relational in manner and purpose. In terms of ethnicity, the participants' Latina cultural disposition for promoting smooth and pleasant social relationships facilitated the women's relational approaches to learning. Likewise, prioritizing group well being over individual gains, which is valued in Latino cultures, contributed to perceiving their own

learning as helpful to others. In terms of gender, some participants were prone to engaging social contexts dominated by women; therefore, they often learned through their interpersonal interaction with other women. In addition, despite holding different perspectives on motherhood, all participants thought of their own learning as a means for benefiting their children. Finally, ethnicity and gender were not equally influential across participants. Gender was most influential among participants who adhered to traditionally-defined gender identities. Ethnicity was most influential among participants who did not adhere to traditionally-defined gender identities.

These findings are congruent with relevant literature on ethnicity and gender. From an ethnicity standpoint, the participants' cultural disposition to establish smooth social relationships and rely on interpersonal interaction for learning is congruent with Jacob's (1992) findings. Jacob used a life-history approach to study the adaptation of 22 Salvadoran women and men refugees in Montreal. Noticing the centrality of social relationships in the immigrants' lives, Jacob observed, "Salvadoran refugees are much more concerned about the quality of interactions at work than about their qualifications for the job or about receiving recognition for their competence" (p. 23). Jacob concluded that social relationships played an important role in satisfying the communication needs of these refugees.

Also from an ethnicity standpoint, the findings of this inquiry support Sparks's (2002) call for understanding and respecting cultural differences in order to facilitate positive adult learning experiences among Latinos in the United States. In this regard, Sparks noted that participants in her study observed an ethic of care and assistance, which was in conflict with dominant educational ideology. Sparks suggested that adult educators could honor this cultural value by satisfying "the felt need for cooperative learning and sharing resources"

(p. 120). Overall, Sparks argued that various types of sociocultural conflicts manifested into exclusionary practices that limited the participation of Latino men and women in formalized adult education programs. Although the national origin of the population studied by Sparks—Mexican Americans in the Southwest—differed from that of the participants in this inquiry, the present findings are congruent with Sparks’s observation that Latinos seek out “learning environments that support their cultural norms” (p. 109).

From the point of view of gender, the findings support scholarship that recognizes diversity among women and the influence of intersecting social dimensions on women’s learning. For instance, finding that relational learning was influenced by both ethnicity and gender (and that these influences were variously experienced by the participants) supports Hayes’s (2001) call for reexamining generalizations made about women learners such as an orientation toward relationship or connection. Hayes pointed out that such conceptualizations were rooted in theories that emphasized viewing gender from a psychological perspective. Instead, Hayes proposed exploring alternative perspectives that could incorporate social dimensions of learning and a more complex view of gender that “suggests that attributes of women’s learning are not innate, fixed, and uniform across situations (“essential” attributes of women), but are integrally connected to a particular set of situational, social, and historical circumstances, and thus changeable as those circumstances change” (p. 39).

Finally, the findings on relational learning coincide with Cohen’s (1980) observation of the interrelation of gender, work, social relationships, learning, and immigrant adaptation. While studying “cultural influences on patterns of stress and illness among Central and South American immigrants” (p. 346), Cohen found that most Latinas worked full time. Despite experiencing difficult conditions at work, these immigrant women found that quality

relationships with supervisors and employers helped them to learn about the host society. Cohen noted that Latinas held an ideal of the employer-employee relationship based on culture-specific concepts of dignity, respect, and good manners. Acknowledging the centrality of workplace social relationships and learning in the adaptation processes of these immigrant women, Cohen recommended to “increasingly examine the dynamics of learning which shape the lives of immigrants as they draw heavily on their experiences in the workplace to orient themselves to the new society” (p. 169).

***Outcome: What Were the Consequences of the Participants’ Learning?***

Learning as adults in the United States had an empowering effect on the participants’ personal development. Nevertheless, in the process of learning the participants experienced a wide range of feelings. For instance, Evelyn, Ana, Dulce, and Domi experienced unpleasant feelings of insecurity, anxiety, frustration, and sadness while engaging in challenging or unfamiliar learning situations. Azucena, on the other hand, was rather enthusiastic about meeting new learning demands. Then, upon succeeding in learning situations, all participants enjoyed pleasant feelings of security, courage, excitement, happiness, satisfaction, and pride. Dulce’s rendition of her changes in affect while taking English lessons provides a good illustration.

I sometimes feel bad because I wish I could speak the language and I can’t. I’ve felt sad. I’ve felt desperate because sometimes you want to learn and you can’t... You feel, perhaps not frustrated, but discouraged when you know you can’t accomplish what you wish.... I feel good when I know I’m being taught something new that will help me in the future, in my everyday life. I feel happy because I’m accomplishing something and I’m striving after my goal. It’s what I wish the most: to learn the

language. I feel happy knowing that someday, if God permits, I will stop being what I am today and I will be able to call myself a bilingual person.

*A veces me siento mal porque quisiera hablar bien el idioma y no puedo. Me he sentido triste. Me he sentido desesperada porque a veces uno quiere aprenderlo y no puede.... Uno se siente tal vez no frustrado pero [desanimado al] saber que uno no puede hacer lo que desea.... Me siento bien cuando sé que me están enseñando algo que yo no sé y que me va a servir en un futuro para mí misma, para mi vida diaria. Me siento feliz porque estoy logrando algo que quiero y porque estoy luchando por un día lograr la meta que me he propuesto. Es lo que más deseo: aprender el idioma. Y sí me siento muy contenta de saber que algún día, si Dios lo permite, voy a dejar de ser lo que ahorita soy y poder identificarme como una persona bilingüe.*

While learning recurrently generated unpleasant and pleasant feelings in the participants, their preparedness for acting upon new situations increased over time. In other words, the participants became better at learning how to learn; this was especially the case with Evelyn and Ana, whose childhood experiences had led them to develop poor self-concepts as learners. A natural consequence of the participants' accomplishments in the United States was that their learning aspirations also evolved over time. On the whole, developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for interacting successfully in the new environment increased the women's self-reliance, strengthened their self-confidence, and led to new personal aspirations.

***Developing self-reliance.*** As a result of their adult learning experiences in the United States, the women became increasingly comfortable with relying on their own efforts and abilities to succeed in the new context. The participants were particularly appreciative of



learning that had contributed to their development of self-reliance in two areas: intercultural communication and motherhood.

With respect to intercultural communication, increasing their ability to understand and communicate in English contributed to developing a sense of self-reliance in all of the participants. Learning to communicate in English was especially meaningful for these immigrant women, since they lived in a Midwestern city with a small Latino population and limited institutional support for non-English speakers. Although at the time of the interviews the women differed widely in their knowledge of English, they all valued their accomplishments and associated these with an increased sense of self-reliance. To illustrate, both Dulce and Azucena, who were at opposite ends of the beginner-to-proficient learning continuum, linked English ability with personal independence. At the time of the interviews, Dulce had only been in the country for eight months. Although her knowledge of English was minimal, she was already experiencing some positive consequences of her learning accomplishments.

One learns out of necessity in this country, especially the language. When you learn the language, you have better employment opportunities. And you don't need to be searching for an interpreter for everything. You can take care of things yourself. That is why it is so important for immigrants to learn [English].... Now, I have some advantages.... I have taken some English lessons and I have learned.... I feel happy when I realize that I've said something, and that I can defend myself or say something. When I speak, I think, "I said it! I said it in English and she understood me!" I feel happy that I've learned... I feel good. I know that I can speak, and that I'll get better at it. I feel a lot of satisfaction. It gives me strength to go on.

*Uno aprende por necesidad en este país, más que todo el idioma. Cuando uno aprende el idioma, tiene más oportunidades de trabajo. Y no tiene que estar buscando intérprete para todo. Puede defenderse por si mismo. Por eso es importante aprender para un inmigrante.... Ahora tengo un poco más de ventaja.... Ya llevo varias clases y pues ya algo he aprendido.... Me alegra cuando se que he dicho algo y me han entendido. Yo siento que sí puedo y que lo estoy logrando. Cuando yo digo algo yo digo, “¡Lo dije! ¡Lo dije en inglés y me entendió!” Sí, me alegro porque he aprendido algo.... Me siento bien. Sé que puedo hacerlo y que en un futuro lo voy a hacer mejor. Me da mucha satisfacción. Me da fuerzas para seguir adelante.*

For Azucena, who had been in the United States for 20 years, the consequences of developing proficiency in English were far-reaching. Becoming proficient in English had not only increased her ability to communicate without the assistance of others, but it had also provided her with opportunities for improving her life in the United States. In her view, improving her command of English had influenced how she was perceived by employers, supervisors, and colleagues. Consequently, English proficiency had increased her access to better jobs, which in turn, had provided her with greater financial independence and more learning opportunities.

Some of the jobs I've had, I think had to do a lot with ... people's perceptions [about] people from my part of the world. It is common knowledge that sometimes if you have an accent, whether you are Latin or from a dark-skinned part of the world, people do think you are more ignorant. They think it's harder for you to learn because since you can't speak as they do, therefore, you can't learn as they do.... I'm getting to the point where people listen to me. But there was a [time when] I think, because

of my accent [and the] grammatical mistakes [I made], people might have thought that I was ignorant, that I wasn't educated.... It made me mad. I was upset that no one would put me in a position to learn beyond...what they understood as learning. For me, learning was being given the opportunity to be in a different field or do something different than the paper-pushing job that I had.

With respect to motherhood, the five participants considered that learning had increased their capability for fulfilling their parental roles in an independent manner. For instance, learning how to drive a car had increased the women's ability to take charge of family situations on their own. Developing self-reliance as a consequence of learning was particularly meaningful for the three participants who were raising children without the assistance of a husband or partner. Dulce, Evelyn, and Azucena considered that learning had helped them make informed decisions. More importantly, learning had increased their capability for either providing the financial means or utilizing social services to ensure the well being of their children. For example, Dulce believed that her learning accomplishments had contributed to making her a better decision maker and an independent parent.

I have learned to feel practically independent in this country, my children and I....

When you are sure of what you know, you are more pragmatic, perhaps more active and confident about the actions you take. However, when you are uninformed or doubtful, you waver, "Should I do it or not?" It is very different. Knowing increases your self-reliance. You are sure about your actions....you make decisions. I do believe you can ask for an opinion, but you will not wait for someone to tell you what to do.

*He aprendido a sentirme prácticamente independiente en este país, yo con mis hijos.... Cuando uno está seguro de lo que sabe, uno es más práctico. Es tal vez más activo, más seguro de lo que hace. Sin embargo cuando uno no sabe o está dudoso, está como dicen tambaleando, “¿Lo hago o no lo hago?” Entonces es bien diferente. El saber le da a uno seguridad, o sea uno actúa con seguridad.... ya toma la decisión. Si pienso que puede pedir una opinión pero.... uno no se va a sentar a esperar que le digan ésto haga o no.*

Evelyn recounted how learning to use social services helped her to ensure the well being of her children, upon moving to a new state.

In this state, I have learned to be on my own. I've had many people help me and my children survive.... When I arrived, my husband was still [abroad] and I stayed with his family. But we had a problem and I had to leave the house. I was pregnant and only one month away from delivering my baby. Fortunately, the hospital I went to had an Outreach program that assisted with housing.... A young man... took me to the YMCA. I had my baby and went back to live there. My children and I lived at the YMCA for seven months.

*Aquí he aprendido a salir adelante sola. He tenido mucha gente que me ha ayudado a sobrevivir con mis hijos.... Cuando yo vine acá, mi esposo estaba [fuera del país] y yo me quedé con la familia de él. Pero tuvimos un problema y ya me tuve que salir. [Estaba embarazada] y me faltaba un mes para aliviarme. [Afortunadamente, en] el hospital donde yo iba había un programa que se llamaba Outreach. Lo ayudaban a uno a buscar vivienda y hubo un muchacho que.... me llevó a la YMCA. [Luego], tuve a mi bebé y regresamos allí a vivir. Allí viví como siete meses con mis hijos.*

Finally, Azucena was proud that her learning accomplishments had helped her become the single provider for her children. As stated earlier, developing English proficiency had increased Azucena's access to better jobs, which in turn, had provided her with greater financial independence and more learning opportunities. At the same time, Azucena was aware that her investment in learning could have both positive and negative consequences for her children. Therefore, she tried to spend quality time with the children and to instill in them an excitement for learning.

[My learning] has affected [my children] in different ways. Some of them are sad because the more time I take to learn and try to get ahead, the less time I spend with them. At the same time, though, every time I learn something .... I try to explain it to them so that they can understand why I'm so excited. I think part of it has rubbed on to them. My son is now more interested in politics, more interested in my trips overseas and the people I've met overseas who are legends in history.... I think I've planted a seed in their minds. That means the world to me because I know, even though I've told them that I'm not the best Mom but I'm a hell of a provider, they will remember some of those seeds that I've left in them.

***Generating self-confidence.*** Despite individual differences in the participants' educational histories prior to immigration, learning in the United States generated self-confidence in all participants. As stated in chapter 4, earlier experiences in their respective countries of origin contributed to shaping the participants' self-concepts as learners and their understanding of formal education differently. On the one hand, Dulce, Domi, and Azucena developed positive self-concepts and pursued postsecondary education in order to fulfill academic and professional aspirations. On the other hand, Evelyn and Ana developed poor

self-concepts as learners that prevented them from completing high school and kept them from incorporating formal education into their life aspirations. Upon arriving in the United States, these differences seemed to influence how the participants approached the new context. Specifically, Dulce, Domi, and Azucena seemed more confident about relying in their own ability to learn and were more proactive about improving their immigrant situations than Evelyn and Ana. However, upon reflecting on their whole immigrant experiences, the five participants expressed that immigrating had at some point undermined their self-confidence. Afterwards, learning had contributed to generating self-confidence in them. Whereas learning helped some participants to regain self-confidence, it led others to develop trust in themselves. Therefore, despite their individual differences, learning generated self-confidence in all of the participants. In particular, the women's self-confidence was strengthened by learning outcomes that contributed to improving their performance in three areas: intellectual ability, interpersonal relations, and work competence.

With respect to intellectual ability, being aware of their skills helped the participants become assertive about approaching situations related to learning, everyday life, and work. For instance, Ana's self-confidence as a learner increased as a result of participating in several non-formal education programs such as First Aid and Childnet. Despite her initial reluctance to participate in any kind of structured learning, Ana found that overcoming feelings of insecurity and fear became easier after attending the first few sessions. Over time, then, learning helped Ana to slowly build self-confidence about her own ability to learn.

On the first sessions you think, "Oh, what will they ask me?" You think it's impossible. You think negatively. You think, "No, I am not going to learn. Perhaps I will not pass these classes." I think that my age, I am not capable of learning; I am

over 40 years old and I am not going to learn. However, once you're there you develop confidence, you begin to think positively, and you learn.

*Las primeras clases uno dice, "Oh, ¿sabrá qué me irán a preguntar?" Lo ve imposible. Uno piensa negativo. Dice uno, "No. No voy a aprender. No voy a pasar tal vez estas clases." Yo pienso que por mi edad ya no estoy capacitada. Ya tengo más de 40 años y no voy a aprender. Pero ya estando allí agarra uno confianza y ya piensa uno positivo y sí aprende.*

Dulce believed that developing intellectual skills strengthened her self-confidence and improved her preparedness for approaching daily life situations.

Learning makes me happy, because it makes me feel more fulfilled, more secure, more capable... It has enabled me to handle things differently, to think differently, to act differently.... When one knows, one thinks differently... Knowledge helps one to guide oneself better in life.

*Me alegra mucho aprender porque me siento un poco más realizada, más segura, más capaz.... He sabido manejar las cosas diferente, pensar diferente, actuar diferente.... Uno piensa diferente porque uno tiene más conocimiento.... El saber le ayuda a uno a dirigirse mejor. A guiarse mejor por uno mismo.*

In a similar way, Azucena was aware of the relationship among learning, intellectual ability, work competence, and self-confidence. Azucena believed that learning helped her to develop intellectual abilities that made her competent at work. In turn, being competent at work strengthened her self-confidence.

Now, I can [use] the pros and cons of what I've learned to help me in my job.... I can discern better. It just gives you the sense of, "You know, I know what I'm talking

about. It happened in this manner, and these are the reasons why we should do A, or should do B, or should do C. Because the history on the subject tells us that either this works or it doesn't work.”

With respect to interpersonal relations, the women observed that immigration had produced changes in how they interacted with others, especially with Americans. Some participants described becoming unusually quiet, cautious, and reserved. According to these participants, however, learning had provided them with skills that strengthened their self-confidence and improved their attitude. Ultimately, learning had helped them approach interpersonal relations in a way that facilitated their adaptation in the United States. Following are three examples of the women's experiences.

Building self-confidence as a consequence of learning had important implications for Ana's adaptation to immigrant life in the United States. Upon arriving in the Midwest, Ana suffered feelings of depression, which she attributed to the social isolation typically experienced by newcomers. As Ana began to attend an ecumenical Bible study, she learned the importance of being well informed in immigrant matters. She also discovered that she could help disseminate what she learned among fellow immigrants. Ultimately, learning at church generated self-confidence in Ana and helped her to develop a sense of belonging that made her adaptation less difficult.

In church you learn how to interact and share with other people.... Visiting church helps you, because before attending you are more selfish. Now, I think there are ways of helping others and I try to help.... My husband and I try to disseminate information [among fellow immigrants]. If there are flyers, we ask permission to post them in stores so that people are better informed. We didn't do that before, but we have



learned in church that it's good to do so. We live more peacefully now that we go to church. We have met other people and our marital relationship is good.

*En una iglesia se aprende a convivir con las demás personas, a compartir.... La iglesia le ayuda a uno porque antes uno es como más egoísta. Ahora siento que si hay una manera de ayudar a los demás, yo trato de ayudarles....[Mi esposo y yo] tratamos de impartir información a las demás personas. Si hay boletines para pegar en tiendas, pedimos permiso y ponemos boletines para que la gente esté informada. Antes no lo hacíamos pero ya yendo a la iglesia aprendemos eso. Nosotros hoy que vamos a la iglesia vivimos más tranquilos. Hemos conocido más personas y sí la relación de nosotros va bien.*

Upon immigrating to the United States, Domi found that she was uncomfortable about her interpersonal relations with Americans. Although learning some English was an important factor in her experience, her narrative also suggested that becoming familiar with the new social context and regaining self-confidence were critical for facilitating her adaptation.

During the first years of my stay in the United States, I've learned to interact with people from other nations, especially with *Gringos* [Americans]. I was somewhat afraid of Gringos, but not anymore.... I can speak English with somebody from China or Bosnia, because I am learning just like they are. But I can't speak with a Gringo. If it's someone who can speak English well, I feel they will laugh at me, although I have realized it doesn't happen.

*En mis primeros años [en los Estados Unidos] he aprendido a desenvolverme con los extranjeros, más que todo con los gringos. Al principio cuando vine les tenía como*

*miedo a los gringos. Ahora no.... Yo puedo hablar inglés con un chino, puedo hablar inglés con alguien de Bosnia, porque estoy aprendiendo igual que ellos. ¡Pero con un gringo no! Con alguien que lo puede hablar, siento como que se van a burlar, aunque me he dado cuenta que no [es así].*

Finally, Azucena described that, despite having an outgoing personality, she became cautious and observant shortly after immigrating. In her view, learning helped her to approach interpersonal relations with self-confidence and spontaneity in the new context. Still, after 20 years of living in the United States, Azucena stated that she continued to be cautious and observant when engaging unfamiliar sociocultural contexts.

My father always taught me to be respectful and observant. He said, “As long as you are honest, you have honor, you have decency and dignity, and you have a work ethic, you’ll be okay. If you go beyond that, you’ll be in trouble.” So my learning to live here was a lot of what he said. I would watch, and if I’d see people doing the same thing several times, I’d know that’s the way it’s done.... I was more of an observer. Things have changed where now I take over, but back then it was a process where I would observe. I wasn’t myself for a while because I’m really kind of spontaneous. I was more of an action person in my own comfort zone [in my country of origin].... I’m coming back, I think, to when I was in my comfort zone and I’m more action [oriented]. I feel more confident than I did when I first got here.

With respect to competence at work, two participants—Evelyn and Azucena—stated that recognition of their performance at work had strengthened their self-confidence. Not only did they feel appreciated and valued by their employers and fellow workers, but they also felt satisfied about the financial rewards derived from their learning efforts. Evelyn

considered that her new job as coordinator of food services at an elementary school had helped her to project herself differently.

I have learned the most at work. Now, I feel proud because I have bettered myself a little.... I feel satisfaction because people have recognized my work.... It's nice when people are happy with one's work and they tell you so. I am happy with myself. For instance, a lady I know came to work yesterday. I used to work for her when I was a general employee. I went to several schools, and she was the coordinator at one of those schools. Yesterday, she came to work and I was the coordinator this time. I feel strange because I worked for them and now they come to work for me. They tell me, "You are the boss." I say, "No. I'm not the boss," but I do feel now like I am in a more desirable position.... Yes, I am happy at work.

*En el trabajo es donde más he aprendido. Ahorita me siento orgullosa porque he estado superándome un poquito.... Me siento satisfecha porque la gente ha reconocido mi trabajo.... Es bonito cuando están a gusto con lo que usted está haciendo y le dicen. Me siento contenta conmigo misma. Por ejemplo, ayer llegó una señora a trabajar allí conmigo. Yo trabajé para ella porque yo antes era trabajadora general. Iba a diferentes escuelas y ella era la coordinadora en la otra escuela. Ayer llegó conmigo y yo allí soy la coordinadora. Me siento rara porque yo trabajé para ellas y ahora ellas trabajan para mí. Me dicen, "Tú eres la boss." "No," les digo, "Yo no soy la boss" pero sí me siento ahorita como que estoy un poquito más en el puesto.... Sí estoy contenta con mi trabajo.*

Azucena stated that recognition at work was making her a happier and more confident person. She was satisfied that her experience in intercultural issues was being appreciated.

She was also proud that her continuing efforts to learn were being recognized and economically rewarded. Learning had certainly generated self-confidence in her.

[Learning] increases my self-confidence.... Emotionally, it just gives me that sense that whatever I have learned has given me some sort of recognition, which I've been looking for, for many years. Because I knew I had certain knowledge that was valuable, but I hadn't reached the place... where that could be acknowledged... So emotionally, [learning has] made me a happier person, a more confident person....

[Learning] makes me own my destiny more, even though I think I did before. It gives me more financial stability. It gives me a lot more security and it makes me feel sometimes a little big in the head, but not too much. [The] last time I got a promotion, I went and tried to buy a new car, and then I remembered who I am. And I'm like, "I'm not that kind of a person." So it was kind of a rush, and then I left the rush behind (laughter). But that's making me a lot happier, I think.

***Projecting new learning and work aspirations.*** Developing self-reliance and self-confidence, through learning, facilitated the participants' adaptation in the new context. A natural consequence of the women's accomplishments was that their personal aspirations evolved over time. Indeed, as a result of their adult learning experiences in the United States, the women developed new learning and work aspirations. One aspect that remained constant in the women's aspirations, however, was their interest in bettering themselves as a means to benefit others. Following are examples of the women's evolving aspirations.

At the time of the interviews, Evelyn wanted to return to school in order to pursue a technical career in hairdressing and cosmetology. Her learning experiences and her recent promotion at work had contributed to increasing her self-confidence as learner. However, her

priority was to make sure she had the financial means to survive as a divorced mother with three children.

I would like to study, providing my brain still enables me to do so. I've always liked beauty, hairdressing. I'm interested in pursuing Hairdressing and Cosmetology as a career. I would like to go back to school for that. I've made some inquiries, but it's a full-time commitment. I don't think it's within my reach to do it right now.

*Ahorita quisiera [estudiar] a ver si todavía me da la cabeza. Siempre me ha gustado la belleza, el pelo. Estoy interesada en sacar la carrera de cosmetología y corte de cabello. Quiero ver si puedo seguir estudiando eso. Ya he averiguado pero es un full time y ahorita... creo que no está dentro de mis [posibilidades].*

As stated earlier, despite Ana's initial reluctance to participate in any kind of structured learning, her self-confidence as a learner increased as a result of participating in several non-formal education programs. Over time, non-formal and informal learning experiences helped Ana to slowly build self-confidence about her own ability to learn. At the time of the interviews, Ana's aspirations included learning English and obtaining U.S. citizenship.

My goal is to become a naturalized U.S. citizen. For that, I would study. Even if I were working, if U.S. citizenship classes were offered, I would attend. I would have to make some sacrifices, but I would go.

*Mi meta es hacerme ciudadana [de los Estados Unidos]. Por eso sí estudiaría.*

*Aunque trabaje, si dieran las clases para hacerse ciudadano, sí iría a las clases. Con sacrificios pero sí iría.*

Although Dulce had only been in the country for eight months, she aspired to become a professional in the United States. Her goal was to become bilingual and to be in a position where she could be of service to society.

I would like to develop my intellectual abilities... to have a clear mind instead of a confused mind. I would like to increase my self-confidence. I would like to know that whatever actions I take, I will approach with certainty and rectitude; that I am not going to make mistakes. I would like to become an important person... to know the English language... to study a career at the university. I would like to be a woman with leadership and to know that I can help. I would like to feel useful in this country. Not because we come from a poor country, are we going to let our own development come to a standstill.

*Quisiera ser una mujer intelectualmente muy bien... tener una mente más despejada, ya no una mente confusa. Ser una mujer más segura de si misma. Saber que lo que hago lo voy a hacer con seguridad, con rectitud, que no me voy a equivocar. Quisiera ser una persona importante... saber el idioma... estudiar una carrera en la universidad. Ser una mujer con liderazgo. Saber que sí puedo ayudar. Sentirme útil en este país. No porque venimos de un país pobre nos vamos a estancar.*

At the time of the interviews, Domi's goal was to learn English and pursue studies that would help her get a teaching job in the United States. Despite having two teaching degrees from her country of origin, she was determined to pursue the secondary and postsecondary studies required for holding a professional job in this country. However, as stated in the postscript to her life story, a condition in her daughter's psychomotor development was leading her to consider physical therapy as a new career option.

Once my children go to school, I would like to study and dedicate more time to myself. I would like to study English because I don't want to go through life uttering only a few words. Afterwards, I would like to get another high school degree. I would like to start again in a sense, because I would like to work as a Spanish teacher at a school.

*Estando ya mis hijos en la escuela, yo quiero estudiar y dedicar tiempo para mí.*

*Quiero estudiar inglés porque no quiero quedarme toda la vida tarareando unas cuantas palabras. Después quiero sacar el high school. Quiero empezar de nuevo en ese sentido [porque] me gustaría trabajar en una escuela [como] maestra de español.*

Finally, at the time of the interviews, Azucena was already performing on a professional level. Her bilingual skills and her understanding of cultural pluralism had earned her a professional full-time job. She was also beginning to work in the field of international commerce, under the guidance of a mentor. As stated in the postscript to her life story, Azucena was beginning to consider engaging in continuing education. However, her priority was to provide for her children and to nurture their development through adolescence.

[Currently], I'm being mentored by a director in my office [in the area of international commerce], which is completely new to me.... I think it's the first time in my adult life that I find someone that does that for me, so I'm very grateful.... To me it's like a Cinderella story because, even though I had most of my education in my country of origin, I am still a peon and a cat, *una gata*. But I'm determined and if it takes me 1, 2, or 3 years, I'm gonna get there. So I diplomatically and discretely get myself involved in things that eventually will take me where I want to go.

In summary, learning as adults in the United States had an empowering effect on the participants' personal development. Developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for interacting successfully in the new environment increased the women's self-reliance, strengthened their self-confidence, and led to new personal aspirations. Learning as adults in the United States changed not only how the participants interacted with the material and sociocultural conditions within the U.S. context of reception, but it also changed how they viewed and projected themselves. One aspect that remained constant in the women's aspirations, however, was their interest in bettering themselves as a means to benefit others.

### ***Summary of the Thematic Representation of Findings***

This section provides a summary of the findings presented in this chapter; it is organized according to the three domains uncovered—Concept, Process, and Outcome.

***Concept.*** The participants held empirical conceptualizations of learning that were rooted in their experiences as lifelong learners, adults, immigrants, and women.

From their perspective as lifelong learners, the participants perceived learning as an ongoing, albeit fluid, human experience. They conceptualized learning as a recurring and cumulative lifelong phenomenon capable of producing positive changes in a person's approaches to her life's circumstances. Specifically, they viewed learning as a series of processes that assisted them in fulfilling social roles, approaching new situations, and moving forward in life.

From their perspective as adults, the participants' perceptions focused on advantages, obstacles, and successful attitudes for engaging in formal and non-formal types of adult learning. While all participants considered experience, purpose, and accountability as advantages for learning in adulthood, some also identified external and internal factors that



had made adult learning challenging for them. External factors included work and family responsibilities that limited the time and energy the women could spend on attending educational programs. Internal factors included preconceived notions of aging and learning (as inversely correlated) and negative feelings of fear and insecurity. All participants underscored the importance of approaching adult learning with initiative and determination, which suggested they were aware of their own agency in realizing educational pursuits.

From their perspective as immigrants, the participants emphasized that their lives were permeated by a continuous need for learning as they adapted to life in the United States. While learning permeated various areas of their lives, the women's learning experiences centered on work and cultural issues. With respect to work, low-wage and short-term jobs triggered the women's continuous learning of job-specific skills. With respect to culture, cultural variability (e.g., using household electronic devices vs. doing domestic work by hand) originated many of the women's learning experiences. In addition, living in a Midwestern city with a relatively small Latino population and insufficient institutional support for newcomers made the participants' cultural adaptation and learning processes especially challenging.

From their perspective as women, the participants associated immigrant women's learning with changes in gender role expectations and gender relations. In their view, the U.S. context of reception had provided them with learning opportunities that contributed to transcending traditional female gender roles. At the same time, they believed that, among Central American immigrants, a woman's attitude towards learning was not only influenced by her own beliefs of what was fitting for a woman to learn, but also by the gender relations within her family.

**Process.** Upon immigrating to the United States, the participants engaged in adult learning processes that were primarily continuous, informal and incidental, experiential, and relational.

Pursuing adult learning in a continuous manner was intimately bound to the participants' immigrant experiences. On the one hand, living and working in the United States required the participants to adapt to social, cultural, economic, and political conditions that were different from those they might have expected in their countries of origin. On the other hand, immigrant employment conditions made the participants move through different kinds of jobs within relatively short periods, which in turn required them to continuously meet new learning demands.

Upon immigrating to the United States, the participants' adult learning experiences were primarily informal and incidental. Informal learning occurred as the participants made deliberate efforts to resolve everyday situations that required knowledge, skills, or attitudes that were new to them. In particular, the women described situations related to: 1) interacting with the material conditions of the new environment, 2) pursuing English proficiency, 3) understanding American values and behaviors, and 4) developing competence at work. Incidental learning occurred as a consequence of the participants' interactions in various social settings and centered on cultural issues such as English language acquisition and intercultural understanding.

Experience was integral to the participants' learning processes in four distinct ways; experience was a basis, strategy, resource, and medium for learning. Experience was a basis for learning when the participants gained insights and developed attitudes as a result of making meaning of whole experiences. Experience was a strategy for learning when the

participants purposefully relied on doing or experiencing something as a means for learning. Experience was a resource for learning when the participants used the experience of others as a source of knowledge. Experience was a medium for learning when the participants learned while acting upon and responding to complex situations in the new environment.

The participants' learning processes were relational in manner and purpose. In manner, the participants' learning was relational because it often occurred through interpersonal interaction. In purpose, the participants' learning was relational because the women were often motivated by their desire to benefit others. Internal factors were more influential than external factors in making learning relational. Specifically, two aspects of the women's social identities—ethnicity and gender—contributed to making learning relational in manner and purpose. In terms of ethnicity, the participants' Latina cultural disposition for promoting smooth and pleasant social relationships facilitated the women's relational approaches to learning. Likewise, prioritizing group well-being over individual gains, which is valued in Latino cultures, contributed to perceiving one's own learning as helpful to others. In terms of gender, some participants were prone to engaging in social contexts dominated by women; therefore, they often learned through their interpersonal interaction with other women. In addition, despite holding different perspectives on motherhood, all participants thought of their own learning as a means for benefiting their children. Finally, ethnicity and gender were not equally influential across participants. Gender was most influential among participants who adhered to traditionally-defined gender identities. Ethnicity was most influential among participants who did not adhere to traditionally-defined gender identities.

**Outcome.** Learning as adults in the United States had an empowering effect on the participants' personal development. Developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes

necessary for interacting successfully in the new environment increased the women's self-reliance, strengthened their self-confidence, and led to new personal aspirations.

As a result of their adult learning experiences in the United States, the women became increasingly comfortable with relying on their own efforts and abilities in order to succeed in the new context. The participants were particularly appreciative of learning that had contributed to their development of self-reliance in two areas: intercultural communication and motherhood.

Despite their individual differences, learning generated self-confidence in all of the participants. Despite differences in their personal and educational histories, immigration undermined the self-confidence of all the participants. Over time, learning contributed to generating self-confidence in them. Whereas learning helped some participants to regain self-confidence, it led others to develop trust in themselves. The women's self-confidence was particularly strengthened by learning outcomes that contributed to improving their performance in three areas: intellectual ability, interpersonal relations, and work competence.

Learning as adults in the United States changed not only how the participants interacted with the material and sociocultural conditions within the U.S. context of reception, but it also changed how they viewed and projected themselves. A natural consequence of this was that their learning aspirations evolved over time.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I articulate my conclusions on relevant aspects of the inquiry. The chapter is comprised of six sections as follows: 1) Summary, 2) Interpretation of Findings, 3) Methodological Considerations, 4) Implications, 5) Recommendations, and 6) Personal Reflection.

### Summary

The purpose of this inquiry was to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of adult learning among Central American immigrant women in the United States. Drawing on two qualitative research methodologies, life story and phenomenology, this inquiry specifically sought to examine the meanings that five Central American immigrant women gave to their adult learning experiences in the Midwestern United States. In order to gain a deeper understanding, the participants' perceptions were examined within the context of the women's lives before and after immigrating to the United States. Considering the employment challenges faced by Central American immigrant women, the inquiry also explored how these women related their roles as adult learners to work expectations.

In this inquiry, a qualitative research approach was appropriate for understanding the meaning of *adult learning* as a human experience by eliciting first-person accounts and by focusing on the whole of the participants' experiences (Merriam, 1998). A qualitative research approach was also congruent with my views on the construction of knowledge and the influence of multiple dimensions of identity on learners' interpretations of their social worlds.

Five research questions guided this inquiry: 1) How do Central American immigrant women describe their experiences of learning in the United States? 2) How do Central American immigrant women perceive their experiences of learning in the United States? 3) What specific meanings do Central American immigrant women give to adult learning? 4) How do Central American immigrant women relate their roles as adult learners to work expectations? and 5) To what extent do earlier experiences in the country of origin contribute to the women's understanding of adult learning and self-concepts?

A purposeful sample of five Central American immigrant women living in a metropolitan area of the Midwestern United States was selected for this inquiry. A maximal variation sampling strategy was used to elicit a multiplicity of perspectives on adult learning from participants who differed in characteristics identified in the literature as potentially influential: age, length of residency in the United States, marital status, motherhood, educational attainment, knowledge of English, employment, and immigration status.

Data collection followed Seidman's (1998) model for in-depth phenomenological interviewing, which combined two types of interviews informed by assumptions underlying the methodologies of life story and phenomenology. A series of three 90-minute interviews was conducted with each participant. With one exception, all interviews were conducted and inductively analyzed in Spanish. Upon completion of each series of interviews, the data were reduced and crafted into a first-person narrative that captured each participant's life story of learning. Subsequently, each interview series was inductively analyzed through a process that included naming topics, developing categories, and identifying themes. Once the preliminary analysis of all interview series was accomplished, data analysis led to identifying common

themes and major domains. Findings were represented in two ways: 1) Five life stories of learning in the form of first-person narratives in Spanish with full English translations, and 2) Themes supported by quotations in Spanish with corresponding English translations.

The life stories of learning conveyed the voices of five Central American immigrant women: Evelyn, Ana, Dulce, Domi, and Azucena. While the stories reconstructed the women's learning experiences from childhood to adulthood, they also illustrated a shift between two major contexts: country of origin and receiving country. Key concepts in Elder's (1995) life course paradigm proved useful for interpreting similarities and differences among the participants' life stories. Six patterns revealed interacting factors that contributed to shaping the participants' self-concepts as learners and perceptions of learning: 1) historical change and timing; 2) socioeconomic status, rural or urban setting, and family composition; 3) gender socialization; 4) linked lives; 5) context of reception; and 6) human agency.

Eleven related themes uncovered three domains in the participants' experiences and understanding of the phenomenon of adult learning in the receiving country: Concept, Process, and Outcome. In terms of Concept, the participants offered empirical conceptualizations of learning that were rooted in their experiences as lifelong learners, adults, immigrants, and women. In terms of Process, the participants' experiences in the United States revealed adult learning processes that were continuous, informal and incidental, experiential, and relational. In terms of Outcome, learning as adults in the United States had an empowering effect on the participants' personal development; developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for interacting successfully in the new environment increased the women's self-reliance, strengthened their self-confidence, and led to new personal aspirations.

## Interpretation of Findings

In this section, I integrate the insights gained in Chapters 4 and 5 to provide a schematic interpretation of the inquiry findings. As shown in Figure 4, this schematic interpretation suggests that, among the participants in this inquiry, the phenomenon of adult learning was shaped by the interplay of four basic elements—the Learner Identity, the U.S. Context of Reception, the Learning Process, and the Learning Outcomes.

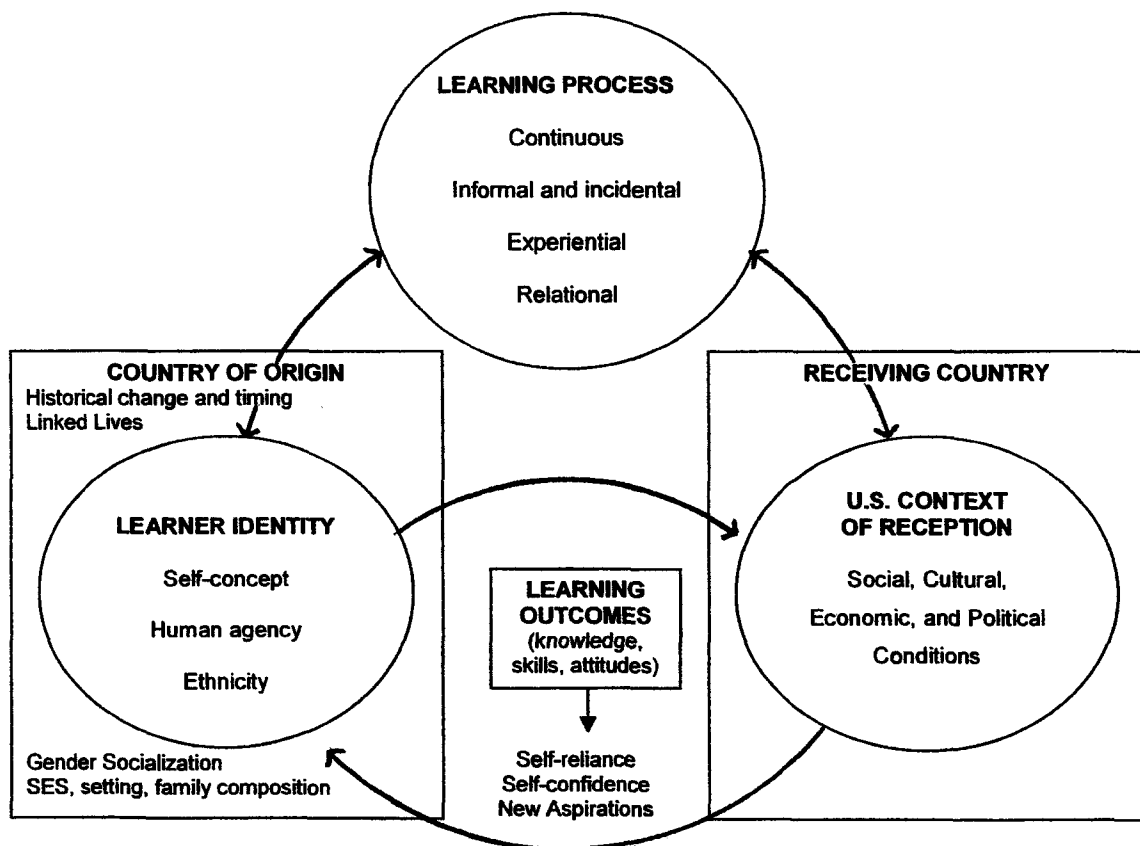


Figure 4. Schematic interpretation of the findings.



The background for this interplay is the learner's shift between two major cultural contexts: Country of Origin and Receiving Country. Consequently, the phenomenon of adult learning is intimately bound to the participants' experience of immigration.

The interplay of the four elements—Learner Identity, U.S. Context of Reception, Learning Process, and Learning Outcomes—begins when learning is triggered by the interaction between an immigrant woman's Learner Identity and the U.S. Context of Reception. In this interaction, the material and socio-cultural conditions particular to the U.S. Context of Reception trigger in the immigrant woman the need to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for adapting to life in the Receiving Country. At the same time, the immigrant woman's Learner Identity, which has been shaped by earlier experiences in the Country of Origin, influences how the woman approaches the new context.

The Learning Process, then, becomes a bridging element that facilitates the immigrant woman's interactions with the material and socio-cultural conditions particular to the U.S. Context of Reception. As such, the Learning Process is shaped by both internal factors rooted in the woman's Learner Identity and external factors rooted in the U.S. Context of Reception. It is important to point out, however, that among the Central American immigrant women who participated in this inquiry, the influence of internal and external factors on the Learning Process was hardly balanced. External factors were predominant in making learning continuous, informal, and incidental. Internal and external factors were equally influential in making learning experiential. Internal factors were clearly more influential in making learning relational. I believe that, among these participants, external factors were overall more influential than internal factors in shaping the Learning Process.

The Learning Process produces Learning Outcomes (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that have an empowering effect on the personal development of the immigrant woman (self-reliance, self-confidence, new aspirations). Therefore, the Learning Process changes not only how the immigrant woman interacts with the material and socio-cultural conditions in the U.S. Context of Reception, but it also changes her Learner Identity. The interactive process continues as the immigrant woman approaches the U.S. Context of Reception, which is in itself a changing environment, with a Learner Identity that is influenced by both earlier experiences in the Country of Origin and new experiences in the Receiving Country.

### **Methodological Considerations**

In this section, I discuss some strengths and shortcomings of Seidman's (1998) model for conducting data collection and data analysis. In addition, I consider how participant selection may have influenced the inquiry findings.

#### ***Data Collection***

One benefit and three shortcomings arose in data collection. One main benefit of using Seidman's (1998) model was that it combined two types of interviews informed by life story and phenomenology. Drawing on both life story and phenomenology was ideal for addressing my interest in understanding the participants' perceptions within the context of their lives before and after immigrating to the United States. The life story interviews, for instance, provided a context for understanding how the participants had developed a sense of themselves as learners and an understanding of learning as a phenomenon in the country of origin. The phenomenological interviews, on the other hand, elicited the participants' detailed reconstructions of recent adult learning experiences in the receiving country.

Together, these interviews formed the basis for eliciting the participants' reflections on the meanings of their adult learning experiences in the United States.

Three shortcomings linked to "time" arose from using Seidman's (1998) model for data collection in this inquiry. First, it was difficult to find participants who were both able and interested in participating in lengthy interviews, over a period of several weeks, in order to explore their perceptions of learning. On the one hand, work and family responsibilities limited the time availability of those potential participants interested in the project. On the other hand, a few potential participants for whom time constraints were not such an issue were either not interested in this inquiry or were engaged in situations that I felt could make them extremely vulnerable to emotional discomfort if they participated in the investigation. Had it not been for my prolonged engagement with two churches and one immigrant rights group providing services to Latino immigrants, as well as my longstanding relationships with some Latina immigrants, it would have been extremely difficult to find participants for this inquiry. To illustrate, I was fortunate to have the collaboration of one participant with whom I had established a researcher-participant relationship for a different project, one year prior to initiating data collection for this inquiry.

Second, expecting to complete data collection with each participant within a period of four to six weeks was unrealistic. The period of four to six weeks was a disadvantage for developing the kind of researcher-participant relationships optimal for fulfilling this inquiry. In this inquiry, as well as in past interviews with immigrants from Central America, I noticed that the disposition of individuals to participating in interviews varied depending on the degree to which they perceived they had established a "social relationship" with the person conducting the interviews. Although I knew ahead of time that I would do more than one

preliminary visit with each participant before she decided how, when, and where she would be available for the interviews, developing optimal researcher-participant relationships required a longer period than I had anticipated. Similarly, expecting to complete each interview within a single 90-minute session was unrealistic. This was especially the case with the interview dedicated to eliciting a focused life story. In one instance, the participant and I dedicated 160 minutes to doing the focused life story interview, and it didn't happen on a single day. Consequently, completing the three-interview series with each participant required from five to nine weeks, almost double the time I had anticipated.

Third, considering the influence of time and present situation on meaning-making became a disadvantage for me as an interviewer. This inquiry was based on the stories that women told about their past and present learning experiences. From a phenomenological standpoint, "narrative constitutes reality: It is in the telling that we make real phenomena in the stream of consciousness" (Riessman, 1993, p. 22). While conducting the interviews, I considered how the participants' present situations could influence how they reconstructed the past. I saw this as a potential limitation following Bertaux-Wiame's (1981) insight into life story research:

To tell one's life story is not only to talk or to remember; it is an act, an *encounter* with reality. If this encounter seems to limit itself to an account of the past, it is oriented in fact by the present, in two ways: first it reconstructs the meaning of the past from the present point of view; second, and more deeply, it gives meaning to the past *in order* to give meaning to the present life of a person. And this last meaning cannot be the same for all social groups. (p. 258)

While interviewing retired bakers, Bertaux-Wiame (1981) found that all of her informants “had had an almost identical experience of severe exploitation as apprentices” (p. 258). However, the retired bakers had distinct ways of reconstructing and ascribing meaning to their experiences. Whereas those who had remained workmen all their lives reconstructed and emphasized the pressures inflicted by their masters, those who had become independent bakers did not. Instead, independent bakers connected “every oppressive aspect of apprenticeship to the *technical* demands of bread-making” (p. 258). Therefore, the stories told by the bakers differed depending on how much they had distanced themselves from the experience of oppression.

In the case of Central American immigrant women, I initially thought I might find a comparable situation. Given the challenges faced by working-class women in Central American societies and the challenges of immigrating to the United States, I thought some participants might be prone to emphasizing only negative or only positive experiences. Instead, I found that the participants provided candid reconstructions of both positive and negative experiences.

However, in the process of interviewing, I discovered that my awareness of the influence of time and present situation on meaning-making became a disadvantage for me as an interviewer. Considering that the participants might be reconstructing their past experiences in a way that was useful to them at the time of the interviews, led me to be cautious about not disrupting their stories. Specifically, my own concern for being sensitive to the participants’ present situations prevented me from following up on potentially troubling issues. In hindsight, I believe that, were it not for this concern, I would have

pursued issues such as the indirect mention of events linked to political violence in Central America that could have contributed to illustrating important aspects of the women's lives.

### *Data Analysis*

In my view, using Seidman's (1998) strategy for analyzing and representing in-depth phenomenological interview data carried one benefit and two shortcomings in this inquiry. A benefit of following Seidman's strategy was that it led to representing the life stories of the participants in their own words. In this sense, Seidman's strategy was a valuable tool for fulfilling an important research goal.

On the other hand, Seidman's (1998) idea of constructing brief profiles of the participants was inappropriate for this inquiry. As stated in Chapter 3, the participants offered rich accounts of their lives in their countries of origin and their subsequent experiences of immigration. Therefore, I found it necessary to modify Seidman's data analysis strategy in ways that seemed congruent with the emergence of data and with my personal process for making sense of that data. My methodological decision was to engage in two separate processes of data analysis: one for constructing the life stories and one for uncovering themes. This increased the time and work required to complete data analysis. Added to the extra time required to complete two separate processes was the complexity of working in two languages. Since most of the interviews were in Spanish, I had to analyze the data in Spanish. Then, I translated the outcomes into English. Although I cannot say that I am dissatisfied with the end product, data analysis certainly took a longer time and more work than I had anticipated.

Another shortcoming of using Seidman's (1998) strategy in this inquiry was that in-depth data analysis had to be deferred until all of the interviews were completed. Although I

kept a journal with emerging theoretical insights throughout data collection, it was very difficult for me to determine whether I had reached saturation or not. Indeed, when I finally engaged in in-depth data analysis, I found that some categories were not sufficiently saturated. At this point, it was too late for me to go back and do more data collection. My methodological decision was to let go of that data and to concentrate only on those categories that had been saturated.

### ***Participant Selection***

Upon completing this inquiry I have considered how participant selection may have influenced the inquiry findings. In my view, it is important to point out that, albeit not by design, the participants in this inquiry shared important characteristics. First, all of the participants were *ladinas*, of mixed Spanish and Indian heritage. I believe the findings may have differed if the group of participants had included Central American immigrant women of Indian heritage. Second, each of the women was the first-born child in her family. This could be indicative of their shared sense of initiative and of responsibility to their families, which could be greater than that of other Central American women. Third, at some point during their stays in the United States, four of the five participants held undocumented immigration status. I believe the findings would have differed if a smaller proportion of the participants had been exposed to the experience of being undocumented in the United States. Fourth, none of the participants in this inquiry knew English when they arrived in the United States. In my view, the findings would have undoubtedly been different if the participants had arrived with a fair command of the English language. Fifth, all of the women had children. A significant finding was that, although the participants held different views of motherhood, they all gave meaning to their learning experiences in relation to their roles as

mothers. I cannot help but wonder how the findings of this inquiry would have differed if motherhood had not been a factor. Finally, three of the women were raising children as single parents. I believe this could have also influenced the women's emphasis on self-reliance as an important outcome of learning.

### **Implications**

Historically, ignoring immigrants' perceptions of learning as well as their socio-cultural characteristics has contributed to making immigrant adult education programs unsuccessful in the United States (Jeria, 1999). Instead of building on immigrants' strengths and interests, such programs have emphasized a deficit viewpoint and equated immigrant adult education with assimilation. These approaches to immigrant adult education are part of a larger scenario in which the prevalent lack of understanding and respect for the language and culture of ethnic minorities has manifested into exclusionary practices that have limited the participation of these adult learners in formalized adult education (Sparks, 2002). On the other hand, some scholars have argued that community-based programs, in particular those guided by a popular education orientation, have provided viable alternatives for addressing the needs and interests of ethnic minority adult learners, such as foreign- and U.S.-born Latino men and women (Jeria, 1999). Yet, these efforts have often been weakened by the lack of precise knowledge of learners' perceptions on the part of educators and program leaders (Jeria, 1990).

This inquiry has contributed to addressing this problem by providing a more specific understanding of the experiences and perceptions of adult learning that Central American immigrant women in the Midwestern United States have. Not only has it provided insights into factors that influenced the Central American women's construction of a Learner Identity



in the country of origin, but it has also underscored the role of the U.S. Context of Reception in shaping their adult learning experiences in the receiving country. In addition, the participants' context-specific experiences have illustrated broader social conditions, such as the interrelation of gender, immigration status, and employment, which have important implications for our understanding of the phenomenon of adult learning as experienced by contemporary U.S. immigrants. This is an important contribution because analogous conditions may very well be affecting immigrant women of other national origins in the United States.

Three major findings of this inquiry have important implications for adult education theory and practice. First, adult learning was intimately bound to the participants' experience of immigration. Among the five Central American women I interviewed, immigrating produced an immediate need for learning that emerged daily, as they sought to fulfill distinct social roles in the receiving country (e.g., parent, neighbor, customer, and employee). For them, learning was not a choice; it was rather a necessity. Although initially the participants' approaches to interacting with the new context differed depending on their individual educational histories, the U.S. Context of Reception was overall more influential in stimulating and shaping their experiences of adult learning than Learner Identity.

One implication for adult education theorists is the need for building theory that is congruent with the experiences of contemporary U.S. immigrants, whose participation in adult learning may be more strongly influenced by external factors particular to the U.S. Context of Reception than by internal factors rooted in the Learner Identity. I am not suggesting that theory should neglect the influence of Learner Identity, but that it should consider how the interaction between Learner Identity and U.S. Context of Reception shapes

how third-wave immigrants experience the phenomenon of adult learning. An implication for adult education practice is that practitioners must take into account how conditions particular to the U.S. Context of Reception stimulate and shape immigrant learners' experiences of adult learning in everyday life in order to develop and implement curricula that appropriately supports their learners' needs and interests.

Second, experience was central to the participants' adult learning in four distinct ways: basis, strategy, resource, and medium. Particularly interesting to me was the fact that experience was a medium for learning. In those instances, the women described acting upon and responding to complex situations within unfamiliar socio-cultural contexts in the receiving country. The participants described learning experiences that were characterized by: 1) socio-cultural contexts that required them to behave on a level that was unfamiliar to them, 2) situations that required them to adapt their behavior in light of not only the conditions of the activity, but also the actions taken by other people; and 3) an immediate need for knowing and learning. These descriptions were congruent with Wilson's (1993) understanding of the relationship between experience and adult learning from a situated cognition perspective whereby "experience becomes activity and takes on a much more dynamic relation to learning. Adults no longer learn from experience, they learn in it, as they act in situations and are acted upon by situations" (p. 75).

Situated cognition is based on the idea that "knowledge is situated, being in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used" (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1996). Therefore, at the heart of situated cognition is the notion that "learning is inherently social in nature" (Hansman, 2001). In this inquiry, the situated nature of the participants' experiential learning experiences was also evident in their descriptions of

learning as continuous, informal, and incidental. Indeed, among the Central American immigrant women I interviewed, adult learning was more about interacting with people, tools, and activities (within a particular U.S. context of reception with specific socio-cultural, political, and economic conditions) than it was about applying previously learned skills or constructing knowledge through the act of reflection.

An implication for adult education theory is the increasing relevance of theoretical perspectives that take into account the social dimensions of adult learning. With respect to immigrant adult learning, in particular, my findings suggest that situated learning perspectives are more appropriate for understanding the phenomenon of adult learning among these immigrants than traditional perspectives that view learning as “a process occurring in the individual” (Wilson, 1993, p. 433). One implication for adult education practice is that practitioners should acknowledge that there is more to experiential learning than the individual acts of “learning by doing” and “reflecting to transform experience into knowledge” that guide conventional pedagogical techniques. In working with Central American immigrant women, in particular, practitioners should embrace every opportunity they have to build bridges between everyday learning and classroom learning. For example, practitioners could incorporate concepts for planning and facilitating learning situations from a situated cognition perspective, such as cognitive apprenticeships and communities of practice (Hansman, 2001).

Third, the participants’ adult learning was relational in manner and purpose. The participants’ approaches to adult learning, as well as the social meanings they ascribed to learning in the receiving country, were strongly influenced by their gender and their ethnic identities. Among these Central American immigrant women, relational learning was

congruent with the worldview they had constructed while growing up in cultures that fostered the formation of traditionally defined gender identities, encouraged behaviors that promoted pleasant social relationships, and emphasized collectivism over individualism.

An implication for adult education theory is that, as the arrival of immigrants from non-traditional sending regions such as Central America increasingly diversifies the ethnic composition of the population of adult learners in the United States, developing theory that is rooted in socio-cultural rather than psychological perspectives will become increasingly necessary. In contrast to psychological perspectives that emphasize the concerns, issues, and characteristics of individual adults (Merriam, 1993), socio-cultural perspectives incorporate the individual, social, and cultural dimensions of learning (Alfred, 2002). Hence, theory that is rooted in socio-cultural perspectives will be more appropriate for supporting diverse immigrant adult learners because of its potential for “opening up a discursive space for acknowledging and supporting multiple ways of knowing” (p. 12). An implication for adult education practice is that, in designing and implementing curricula that is appropriate for addressing the learning needs and interests of contemporary adult immigrant learners, practitioners must take into account how learners’ social identities, such as gender and ethnicity, influence not only their learning style preferences, but also the meanings that these adults give to their learning.

### **Recommendations**

Based on my previous discussions of methodological considerations and implications, I offer some recommendations to policy makers, researchers, and practitioners interested in learning how this inquiry could inform their practices.

To policy makers interested in addressing the need for sound educational interventions to improve the situations of Central American immigrant women, I would make two recommendations. First, I recommend paying close attention to the socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions particular to the U.S. Context of Reception in which the policy will be implemented. This is important because of the impact of external factors on the adult learning experiences of Central American immigrant women. Second, I recommend developing policy that stimulates and supports the implementation of workplace educational interventions that consider the needs and interests of contemporary U.S. immigrant adults, especially those of women. This is important because the workplace is one of the main contexts in which Central American immigrant women learn in the receiving country.

To researchers interested in advancing an understanding of adult learning among Central American immigrant women, I would make five key recommendations. First, researchers must recognize that establishing a prolonged engagement with potential participants is critical for doing research with this population. Second, researchers should be mindful that, in doing research with immigrant women, the gender of the investigator becomes a factor in facilitating the collaboration of participants. I recommend that either a woman investigator or a couple including a man and a woman conduct interviews. I would not recommend that only a man interview a Central American immigrant woman, given the potential for conflict derived from traditional norms and changing gender relations within immigrant families. Third, I recommend that researchers take into account the strength of Seidman's (1998) model for eliciting the active reconstruction of immigrant women's experiences before and after immigrating to the receiving country. In addition to offering a useful framework for data collection, the model enables researchers to present the

participants' stories in their own words. I believe Seidman's model is particularly useful for researchers interested in helping readers feel more intimately connected to the voices of their participants. Fourth, I recommend that researchers consider a shortcoming of Seidman's data analysis strategy. As I stated earlier, Seidman's strategy suggested deferring in-depth data analysis until all of the interviews were completed. In my experience, deferring in-depth data analysis limits researchers from using recursiveness to ensure the saturation of emergent categories. Therefore, I would recommend doing data collection and data analysis concurrently with each participant and extending the number of interviews as necessary until saturation is reached. Finally, I recommend that researchers plan to set aside enough time for establishing mutually satisfying researcher-participant relationships, as well as for completing the multiple tasks required by research that involves the use of two languages.

To practitioners interested in providing Central American immigrant women with opportunities for learning as adults in the United States, I make three major recommendations. My first recommendation would be to consider how conditions particular to the U.S. Context of Reception stimulate and shape immigrant learners' experiences of adult learning in everyday life in order for the practitioner to develop and implement curricula that appropriately supports his or her learners' needs and interests. For example, if the U.S. Context of Reception were a rural area in the Midwest, the learners might not be interested in learning English vocabulary for naming places, things, and activities in a metropolitan area on the East coast. My second recommendation would be that, given the interactive nature of the learning processes experienced by Central American immigrant women, practitioners incorporate educational interventions rooted in situated cognition perspectives such as learning within a community of practice. Practitioners should embrace

every opportunity they have for bridging the gaps between everyday learning and classroom learning. Finally, my third recommendation would be that practitioners design and implement curricula from a gendered perspective that reflects an understanding and respect of learners' multiple identities. In working with Central American immigrant women in particular, I recommend that practitioners consider how social identities, such as gender and ethnicity, influence not only the students' learning approaches, but also the meanings these students give to their learning.

### **Personal Reflection**

I conclude this dissertation with a reflection on how this inquiry has influenced my views on adult learning, women's learning and migration, and social science research.

With respect to adult learning, this inquiry has provided me with three important insights. First, it has helped me gain a new understanding of the social dimensions of adult learning. Although I undertook this inquiry knowing that adult learning was a process linked to and affected by the social world surrounding the learner (Merriam, 1993), I still considered the characteristics of the individual learner to be central to the process. This inquiry has shown me that the social world surrounding the learner can be as influential, if not more influential, than the characteristics of the individual learner in stimulating and shaping adult learning processes. Indeed, I was surprised to find that, despite their marked differences in educational attainment, the participants in this study experienced similar learning processes in the receiving country because they were exposed to similar contextual conditions.

Second, my tentative presupposition on the influence of marginality on Central American immigrant women's experiences and perceptions of adult learning has been reinforced. Specifically, this inquiry has revealed to me how interrelated factors, such as

gender, ethnicity, immigration status, and knowledge of English, create segregated experiences for these contemporary U.S. immigrants. Given the centrality of interpersonal interaction in the learning processes of the women interviewed, I have begun to consider the need to facilitate “bridging opportunities” so that Central American immigrant women can experience interpersonal interactions in social milieus outside those delimited by their gender, ethnicity, immigration status, and knowledge of English.

Third, prior to undertaking this inquiry, I asked myself how Freire’s (1970/2000) concepts of external and internal oppression might be useful for understanding the adult learning experiences of Central American immigrant women of low- and middle-class backgrounds. As a result of this study, I have realized that, regardless of their previous educational attainment or social class backgrounds, immigrant women who arrive without knowing English and are undocumented become part of a disadvantaged immigrant working class in the United States. As part of this immigrant working class, the women’s relationships with Americans are asymmetrical. In other words, foreign-born women who immigrate under such conditions soon realize that they will have to take a submissive attitude in their relationships with Americans, especially with those who belong to the dominant culture. In this sense, these immigrants go from experiencing external oppression in their countries of origin to experiencing external oppression in the receiving country.

Additionally, this inquiry has shown me that while some Central American immigrant women may arrive with a high degree of critical consciousness, some may not. More importantly, among those who may not have arrived with a high degree of critical consciousness, the need to survive can override feelings of internalized oppression when it comes to learning. In this inquiry, the five women were compelled to learn in order to survive



in the receiving country, regardless of their degree of critical consciousness. Therefore, this study has led me to think that while immigration might put immigrant women of low- and middle-class backgrounds in a disadvantaged social position, it might also provide an opportunity for some immigrant women to overcome internalized oppression.

With respect to women's learning and migration, this inquiry has helped me to gain a deeper understanding of how adult learning can be influenced not only by gender-segregated educational practices or by the gender identity of an individual, but also by the types of everyday experiences available to persons of different genders in various socio-cultural contexts. Specifically, this inquiry has helped me to understand that immigrating has the potential to heighten the fluid nature of a person's gender identity, thereby influencing the person's learning experiences. For example, immigrating to the United States provided the participants in this study with opportunities to experience gender role expectations and gender relations that were new to them. In turn, these experiences influenced their learning as adults in the receiving country.

With respect to social science research, this inquiry has reinforced my views on the value of qualitative research for understanding human experience from a perspective that considers the whole of people's experiences, as well as the meaning people give to their experiences. While I believe that quantitative studies can make important contributions to the study of adult learning, I am convinced that qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate approach for understanding how adults experience and give meaning to their learning.

Finally, on a more personal level, listening to and representing the voices of Evelyn, Ana, Dulce, Domi, and Azucena in this inquiry has provided me with the invaluable opportunity to find and use my own voice as a Central American immigrant woman in the

United States. Receiving the precious gift of these women's life stories has stimulated me to continue striving towards developing an understanding of the phenomenon of adult learning as it is experienced by diverse groups of learners in this country.

## **APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM**

### **INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

**Title of Study:** A qualitative inquiry into Central American immigrant women's perceptions of adult learning

**Investigator:** Ana Guisela Chupina, B.A., M.F.A.  
Graduate Student (Ph.D. Candidate)  
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
Iowa State University

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study is to contribute to developing an understanding of the phenomenon of adult learning among Central American immigrant women in the United States. You are being invited to participate in this study because you were born in Central America and you have been referred to as someone who may be interested in exploring and sharing the meaning of adult learning in your life as an immigrant woman in the United States.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed three times, for 1.5 hours each time, within a period of one month. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: a) you will be informed about the specific purpose for conducting each of the three interviews before you decide to participate in the study, b) each interview will be scheduled and held at a time and place that is convenient for you, c) each interview will be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed.

#### **RISKS**

There are no foreseeable risks to you as a participant in this study other than a mild discomfort resulting from personal disclosure. In case of extreme discomfort, you will have the option of stopping the interview at any time.

#### **BENEFITS**

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by contributing to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of adult learning among immigrant women in the United States. Such information will be valuable for developing curriculum and programming in the adult education field.

#### **COSTS AND COMPENSATION**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**PARTICIPANT RIGHTS**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken. The researcher will use pseudonyms instead of participants' real names in all written and oral presentations of the interview data. The researcher will also delete personal information from transcripts, field notes, and research reports to the public that could lead to identification of any participant. In addition, all data will be filed in a locked filing cabinet accessible only to the researcher. The collected data will be retained for a period of one year before erasure or destruction. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

**QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact Ana Guisela Chupina at (515) 296-1133, [agui@iastate.edu](mailto:agui@iastate.edu). If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Research Office, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-4566; [meldrem@iastate.edu](mailto:meldrem@iastate.edu) or the Research Compliance Officer, Office of Research Compliance, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-3115; [dament@iastate.edu](mailto:dament@iastate.edu)

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**SUBJECT SIGNATURE**

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Subject's Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

**INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT**

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

---

(Signature of Person Obtaining  
Informed Consent)

---

(Date)

## **APPENDIX B: FORMA DE CONSENTIMIENTO**

### **FORMA DE CONSENTIMIENTO**

**Título del Estudio:** Estudio cualitativo sobre percepciones de aprendizaje entre mujeres adultas inmigrantes Centroamericanas

**Investigadora:** Ana Guisela Chupina, B.A., M.F.A.  
Estudiante Graduada (Candidata a Ph.D.)  
Departamento de Estudios en Liderazgo y Políticas Educativas  
Iowa State University

Este es un estudio de investigación. Por favor tome el tiempo necesario para decidir si usted desea participar. Siéntase con la libertad de hacer preguntas cuando lo considere necesario.

#### **INTRODUCCIÓN**

El propósito de este estudio es contribuir a desarrollar una mejor comprensión acerca del fenómeno de aprendizaje entre mujeres adultas inmigrantes Centroamericanas en Estados Unidos. Usted ha sido invitada a participar en este estudio porque nació en la región de Centro America y fue referida como alguien a quien podría interesarle explorar y compartir el significado de sus experiencias de aprendizaje como mujer inmigrante en Estados Unidos.

#### **DESCRIPCIÓN DE LOS PROCEDIMIENTOS**

Si decide participar en el estudio, usted será entrevistada tres veces, por 1 ½ hora cada vez, dentro de un período de un mes. Los procedimientos a seguir serán los siguientes: a) usted será informada del propósito específico de cada entrevista antes que decida participar en el estudio, b) cada entrevista será programada a su conveniencia (fecha, hora, lugar), c) cada entrevista será audio-grabada y transcrita.

#### **RIESGOS**

En este estudio no se prevén riesgos para las participantes, excepto ligera incomodidad en caso de revelaciones personales. En caso de extrema incomodidad, usted tendrá la opción de parar la entrevista en cualquier momento.

#### **BENEFICIOS**

Su participación en este estudio no conlleva ningún beneficio personal directo. Sin embargo, se espera que la información obtenida en el estudio beneficie a la sociedad al contribuir a desarrollar una mejor comprensión acerca del aprendizaje de adultos entre mujeres inmigrantes en Estados Unidos. Dicha información será valiosa para desarrollar programas y curricula en el campo de la educación de adultos.

#### **COSTOS Y COMPENSACIÓN**

El estudio no conlleva ningún costo para las participantes. Por lo tanto, usted no recibirá compensación alguna por su participación en el estudio.

## **DERECHOS DE LAS PARTICIPANTES**

Su participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria. Usted está en libertad de negarse a participar o de abandonar el estudio en cualquier momento. Si usted decidiera no participar o abandonar el estudio antes de completar el proceso, esto no conllevará ninguna clase de penalización para usted.

## **CONFIDENCIALIDAD**

Los records que identifican a las participantes en este estudio serán confidenciales de acuerdo a los límites permitidos por regulaciones legales y no estarán a la disposición del público. Sin embargo, las agencias federales gubernamentales y el Institutional Review Board (un comité encargado de revisar y aprobar estudios que requieren la participación de personas) podría revisar o copiar records para asegurar la calidad de la investigación. Dichos records podrían contener información privada.

Para asegurar la confidencialidad dentro de los límites permitidos por la ley, las siguientes medidas serán tomadas. La investigadora usará pseudónimos personales en lugar de nombres verdaderos para organizar la información escrita así como para efectuar presentaciones orales de la misma. La investigadora eliminará toda información que pueda identificarle personalmente en las transcripciones de entrevistas, notas de campo, y reportes de investigación. Además, toda información será archivada en un gabinete con llave, accesible únicamente a la investigadora. La información de base obtenida a través de este estudio será guardada por un período de un año antes de ser destruida. Si los resultados del estudio son publicados, su identidad permanecerá confidencial.

## **PREGUNTAS O PROBLEMAS**

Por favor siéntase en libertad de hacer preguntas durante el transcurso de la investigación.

Para más información sobre el estudio por favor comuníquese conmigo:

Ana Guisela Chupina, teléfono (515) 296-1133, correo electrónico [agui@iastate.edu](mailto:agui@iastate.edu) .

Si usted tuviera preguntas acerca de los derechos de personas que participan en investigaciones, por favor diríjase a Human Subjects Research Office, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-4566; [meldrem@iastate.edu](mailto:meldrem@iastate.edu) o a Research Compliance Officer, Office of Research Compliance, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-3115; [dament@iastate.edu](mailto:dament@iastate.edu) .

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## **FIRMA DE LA PARTICIPANTE**

Su firma indica que usted ha decidido participar en este estudio voluntariamente, que el estudio le ha sido debidamente explicado, que usted ha tenido tiempo para leer este documento, y que sus preguntas han sido respondidas a su satisfacción. Usted recibirá una copia firmada y fechada de la forma de consentimiento antes de iniciar su participación en el estudio.

Nombre de la participante (letra molde) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Firma de la participante)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Fecha)

**DECLARACIÓN DE LA INVESTIGADORA**

Yo certifico que la participante ha tenido el tiempo adecuado para leer e informarse acerca del estudio y que sus preguntas han sido respondidas. En mi opinión, la participante comprende el propósito así como los riesgos, beneficios y procedimientos del estudio y ha aceptado participar voluntariamente en el mismo.

---

(Firma de la persona administrando  
la forma de consentimiento)

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(Fecha)



**APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**Participant Demographic Information**

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant (initials): \_\_\_\_\_ Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Age Category: 18-25\_\_\_\_ 25-32\_\_\_\_ 32-39\_\_\_\_ 40 and older\_\_\_\_

2. Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ Country of origin: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Years of Residence in the U.S.: \_\_\_\_\_ 1-3\_\_\_\_ 3-6\_\_\_\_ 6-9\_\_\_\_ 10 or more\_\_\_\_

4. Marital Status: Single\_\_ Married\_\_ Cohabiting\_\_ Separated\_\_ Divorced\_\_ Widowed\_\_

5. Children (ages): None \_\_\_\_ Living in U.S. \_\_\_\_\_ Outside U.S. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Years of formal education: \_\_\_\_\_

Fewer than 8 \_\_\_\_ 9-11 \_\_\_\_ 12 or HS equiv. \_\_\_\_ 12-16 \_\_\_\_ 16 or more \_\_\_\_

7. Knowledge of English: None \_\_\_\_ Speaking only \_\_\_\_ Speaking and writing \_\_\_\_

8. Employment (occupation/time): \_\_\_\_\_

Unemployed \_\_\_\_ Working 10-20 hrs./week \_\_\_\_ 21-40 hrs./week \_\_\_\_

More than 40 hrs./week \_\_\_\_

9. Immigration status: Documented \_\_\_\_ Undocumented \_\_\_\_

Observations: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**General Interview Guides***Interview One: Focused Life Story  
(Conversational Semi-structured)**Growing-up*

1. What can you tell me about your learning experiences as you were growing up?
2. How was it like for you to learn in school?
3. Was there a class or activity in school that you enjoyed or disliked in particular? Tell me about it.
4. What can you tell me about your relationships with peers, teachers, administrators, or family members that might have influenced your learning experiences in school?
5. What other aspects of your life were linked to your learning in school?
6. What can you tell me about learning at home?
7. What other kinds of learning did you experience outside of school?
8. How were particular persons or family members influential to your learning outside of school?

*Early Adulthood*

9. What kinds of learning did you experience when you left school?
10. How did family members or other persons influence your learning at this time?
11. What other factors influenced your learning experiences? Can you recall any specific situations or circumstances that may have contributed to either your participation or lack of involvement in learning as a young adult?

*Migration*

12. What can you tell me about your experience of learning as it relates to migration?
13. What kinds of things did you learn while migrating to this country?

14. Can you tell me about people, places, situations, or behaviors that you encountered and learned from?
15. Can you tell me about the first 6 months after your arrival in the United States? How did you adjust to situations that were new to you? Do you think you were learning while this was happening? If so, who or what were you learning from?
16. Can you tell me about other kinds of learning that you have experienced as an immigrant in the past years?
17. What situations or events have hindered or contributed to your learning as an adult in this country?
18. How have family members or other persons in this country influenced your learning as an adult up until the present time?
19. Are there other aspects about your past learning experiences that you think are significant but that we have not talked about?

*Interview Two: The Details of Experience  
(Conversational Semi-structured)*

1. Could you describe for me a situation in which you are currently engaged as a learner? What is the situation? When does it take place? What is the setting like?
2. What persons are associated with your learning in this situation? How?
3. What do you actually do as you participate in this learning situation? Please describe in detail what a typical experience is like for you from beginning to end.
4. What bodily changes or states are you aware of?
5. What feelings do you experience?

6. In what other situations are you currently experiencing learning? Please describe your experiences in detail.
7. Is there anything else about your present involvement in learning that we have not talked about, but that you would like to share?

*Interview Three: Reflection on Meaning  
(Conversational Semi-structured)*

1. Could you tell me how learning affects you? What changes (e.g., physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, social, etc.) do you associate with experiencing learning?
2. How do you think that your learning has affected significant people in your life?
3. What feelings has learning generated in you?
4. Based upon what you have shared about your past and present experiences, what thoughts have stood out for you about learning?
5. What are your thoughts and feelings about learning as an adult?
6. What are your thoughts and feelings about learning as an immigrant?
7. What are your thoughts and feelings about learning as a woman?
8. How do you see yourself five years from now?
9. How do you relate your role as an adult learner to your work expectations?

**APPENDIX D: PROTOCOLO DE LA ENTREVISTA**

**Información Demográfica de la Participante**

Investigadora: \_\_\_\_\_ Institución: \_\_\_\_\_

Participante (iniciales): \_\_\_\_\_ Seudónimo: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Edad: \_\_\_\_\_ 18-25 años \_\_\_\_\_ 25-32 años \_\_\_\_\_ 32-39 años \_\_\_\_\_ 40 años o más \_\_\_\_\_

2. Etnicidad: \_\_\_\_\_ País of origen: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Años de residencia en in E.U.: \_\_\_\_\_ 1-3 \_\_\_\_\_ 3-6 \_\_\_\_\_ 6-9 \_\_\_\_\_ 10 o más \_\_\_\_\_

4. Status Marital: Soltera \_\_\_\_\_ Casada \_\_\_\_\_ Unida \_\_\_\_\_ Separada \_\_\_\_\_ Divorciada \_\_\_\_\_ Viuda \_\_\_\_\_

5. Hijos (edades): Ninguno \_\_\_\_\_ Residentes en E.U. \_\_\_\_\_ Fuera de E.U. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Años de educación formal: \_\_\_\_\_

Menos de 8 \_\_\_\_\_ 9-11 \_\_\_\_\_ 12 o equiv. \_\_\_\_\_ 12-16 \_\_\_\_\_ 16 o más \_\_\_\_\_

7. Conocimiento de inglés: Ninguno \_\_\_\_\_  
Solamente lo habla \_\_\_\_\_ Lo habla y lo escribe \_\_\_\_\_

8. Empleo (ocupación/tiempo): \_\_\_\_\_

Desempleada \_\_\_\_\_

Trabajando 10-20 hrs./semana \_\_\_\_\_ Trabajando 21-40 hrs./semana \_\_\_\_\_

Más de 40 hrs./semana \_\_\_\_\_

9. Status de Inmigración: Documentada \_\_\_\_\_ Indocumentada \_\_\_\_\_

Observaciones: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**Guías Generales de las Entrevistas***Entrevista Uno: Historia de Vida  
(Conversación Semi-Estructurada)**Niñez y Adolescencia*

1. ¿Qué me podría usted relatar acerca de sus experiencias de aprendizaje cuando era niña?
2. ¿Cómo fue para usted aprender en la escuela?
3. ¿Había alguna materia o actividad en la escuela que usted disfrutaba bastante?  
Hábleme acerca de lo que disfrutaba.
4. ¿Había alguna materia o actividad que le desagradaba en lo particular? Hábleme acerca de lo que le desagradaba.
5. ¿Me podría describir cómo eran sus relaciones en la escuela con alumnos, maestros, personal administrativo o de apoyo?
6. ¿Recuerda si su relación con algún familiar o con alguna otra persona (niño o adulto) influyó en sus experiencias de aprendizaje en la escuela?
7. ¿Qué otros aspectos de su vida cuando era niña cree usted que podrían haber influido en cómo usted aprendía en la escuela?
8. ¿Qué me puede usted decir acerca de sus experiencias de aprendizaje en la casa cuando era niña?
9. ¿Qué otras experiencias de aprendizaje recuerda haber tenido fuera de la escuela?
10. ¿De qué manera influyeron familiares u otras personas en sus experiencias de aprendizaje fuera de la escuela?



*Primeros Años de la Edad Adulta*

11. ¿Qué tipo de experiencias de aprendizaje tuvo usted cuando dejó la escuela?
12. ¿De qué manera influyeron familiares u otras personas en sus experiencias de aprendizaje durante esta época de su vida?
13. ¿Qué otros factores considera usted que podrían haber influido en sus experiencias?  
¿Recuerda usted alguna situación específica que podría haber contribuido para que usted se dedicara o no a estudiar o aprender nuevas cosas de joven?

*Migración*

Quisiera que conversáramos sobre sus experiencias de aprendizaje durante la trayectoria de inmigración a este país.

14. ¿Qué tipo de cosas aprendió usted antes de viajar a Estados Unidos?
15. Quisiera que me hablara acerca de lugares, personas, conductas, o situaciones que usted encontró durante el viaje a Estados Unidos.
  - a) ¿Qué lugares conoció? ¿Qué aprendió en estos lugares?
  - b) ¿Qué personas encontró? ¿Qué aprendió usted de estas personas?
  - c) ¿Qué conductas observó? ¿Qué aprendió usted al observar estas conductas?
  - d) ¿Qué situaciones vivió? ¿Qué aprendió al vivir este tipo de situaciones?
16. Quisiera que conversáramos acerca de los primeros seis meses después de su llegada a Estados Unidos.
  - a) ¿Cómo se adaptó usted a nuevas situaciones?
  - b) ¿Cree usted que estaba aprendiendo durante este tiempo?
  - c) ¿De qué o de quién aprendía usted?

17. ¿Podría usted relatar algunas experiencias de aprendizaje que haya tenido en años recientes como inmigrante en este país?
18. ¿Qué situaciones o incidentes han contribuido a que usted aprenda nuevas cosas como persona adulta en este país?
19. ¿De qué manera han influenciado familiares u otras personas sus experiencias de aprendizaje en este país?
20. ¿Hay algo más acerca de sus experiencias de aprendizaje que usted considera importante y sobre lo cual no hemos conversado?

*Entrevista Dos: Los Detalles de la Experiencia*  
(Conversación Semi-Estructurada)

Me gustaría que hoy conversáramos sobre sus experiencias actuales de aprendizaje. Le voy a pedir por favor que describa en detalle cada experiencia.

1. ¿Podría usted describir alguna situación en la cual usted aprende en la actualidad?
  - a) ¿Cuál es la situación?
  - b) ¿Qué es lo que usted aprende?
  - c) ¿Cuándo es que usted aprende? (día, hora)
  - d) ¿Adónde aprende? Por favor describa el sitio.
  - e) ¿Qué personas están asociadas con su aprendizaje y de qué manera?
  - f) ¿Qué es lo que usted hace, paso por paso, mientras participa en esta experiencia de aprendizaje? Por favor describa en detalle una experiencia común desde principio a fin.
  - g) ¿Qué cambios fisiológicos nota en su persona mientras aprende?
  - h) ¿Qué sentimientos o emociones tiene usted mientras aprende?

2. ¿En qué otra situación aprende usted actualmente? Por favor describa sus experiencias con el mismo grado de detalle que describió la primera situación (a-h).
3. ¿Existe alguna otra fuente de aprendizaje en su vida en la actualidad? Por favor describa en detalle su experiencia (a-h).
4. ¿Existe alguna otra cosa que usted desearía compartir acerca de sus experiencias actuales de aprendizaje que no hemos mencionado en esta conversación?

*Entrevista Tres: Reflexión sobre el Significado  
(Conversación Semi-Estructurada)*

En esta entrevista me gustaría que tomáramos en cuenta lo que hemos conversado en las dos entrevistas anteriores para reflexionar sobre los significados que usted le da a aprender, específicamente en lo que se refiere a aprender como una persona adulta.

1. ¿Me podría decir de qué manera le afecta a usted aprender? Por ejemplo, qué cambios fisiológicos, emocionales, intelectuales, espirituales, o en sus relaciones con otras personas asocia usted con aprender?
  - a) ¿Qué cambios fisiológicos asocia usted con aprender?
  - b) ¿Qué cambios emocionales asocia usted con aprender?
  - c) ¿Qué cambios intelectuales asocia usted con aprender?
  - d) ¿Qué cambios espirituales asocia usted con aprender?
  - e) ¿Qué cambios en sus relaciones con otras personas asocia usted con aprender?
2. ¿De qué manera piensa usted que sus experiencias de aprendizaje han afectado a personas cercanas a usted o a personas importantes en su vida?
3. ¿Qué sentimientos ha provocado en usted el aprender?

4. Basado en lo que ha compartido conmigo acerca de sus experiencias pasadas y actuales, ¿qué pensamientos sobresalen en cuanto a lo que significa aprender para usted?
5. ¿Qué sentimientos tiene usted acerca de lo que significa aprender para una persona adulta?
6. ¿Qué ideas tiene usted acerca de lo que significa aprender para una persona adulta?
7. ¿Qué sentimientos tiene usted acerca de lo que significa aprender para una persona inmigrante?
8. ¿Qué ideas tiene usted acerca de lo que significa aprender para una persona inmigrante?
9. ¿Qué sentimientos tiene usted acerca de lo que significa aprender para una mujer?
10. ¿Qué ideas tiene usted acerca de lo que significa aprender para una mujer?
11. ¿Cómo se ve a usted misma en 5 años?
12. ¿Cómo relaciona usted aprender con sus expectativas de trabajo?
13. ¿Podría usted decirme en pocas palabras lo que significa aprender para usted como mujer inmigrante adulta en Estados Unidos?
14. ¿Hay algo más que usted quiera agregar antes de concluir la entrevista?

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