

Valor, Deseo, y Batalla:
Mexican Immigrant Women Redefining Their Role in the U.S.

by

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ABSTRACT

By drawing from six oral histories of Mexican immigrant women living in Phoenix, Arizona, this thesis builds on the current literature on Mexican immigrant women living in the United States. Through an analysis of U.S. policies that spur Mexican migration to the U.S. and its simultaneous policies that dissuade and criminalize immigrant presence in the U.S., I highlight the increased level of migration through Arizona and the ensuing anti-immigrant politics in the state. By centering women in this context, I demonstrate the obstacle Mexican immigrant women face in the crossing and upon arrival in Phoenix, Arizona. In sharing the stories of Mexican immigrant women who overcome these obstacles, I challenge the portrayal of Mexican immigrant women as victims of violence and use the work of Chicana feminist theorists and oral history methodology to highlight the experiences of Mexican immigrant women adapting to life in the U.S. in order to expand literature of their unique lived experiences and to also contribute the stories of resiliency of Mexican immigrant women in the contentious anti-immigrant city of Phoenix, Arizona.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The ideas constructed around Mexican immigrants have involved words such as “cheap labor”, “unauthorized”, and “deportable” (to name a few). The Bracero Program of the 1940’s solidified in our psyche the image of Mexican immigrants as male and as laborers. Mexican immigrant women on the other hand have been depicted as being hyper-fertile, immigrating to the U.S. to have their children and exploit public services. This depiction was recently used as a motivation behind Arizona State Senator Russell Pearce’s efforts to change the 14th Amendment of the Constitution and not allow children of undocumented immigrants the right to U.S. citizenship. In a public statement Pearce stated, “Call it sexist, but that’s the way nature made it. Men don’t drop anchor babies, illegal alien mothers do” (Martinez, Garcia, and Arons, 2010). In attempts to break away from these stereotypes, research based on immigration has varied and transformed from the idea of immigrant as male to include the experiences of women in the migration process of moving from Mexico to the U.S., how immigration to the U.S. effects them differently from their male counterparts and how they challenge traditional gender and family roles in their new countries. In 2008 it was measured that over a quarter of the 18.9 million foreign born female immigrants living in the U.S. originated from Mexico, making Mexico the single largest country of origin for female immigrants in the U.S. (Immigration Policy Center). As the country’s largest population of female immigrants, expanding information on Mexican immigrant women and their immigration experiences

would create a unique insight to their immigration process, the networks of support that are created, the way they shape their lives in the U.S., and how they challenge traditional gender and family roles. As Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) suggests, a comprehensive, female gendered perspective should be implemented in research examining immigration rather than “simply ‘adding’ women to the picture” (p. 3). “Simply adding” women to the current research creates a great disservice to what these women have gained and accomplished and creates a silencing of a significant group in our society whose experiences can contribute to the expansion of literature based on the experiences of Mexican immigrant women in the U.S..

Efforts to expand literature on Mexican immigrant women has produced various foci. One is the focus on the violence experienced by Mexican immigrant women during their migratory process from Mexico to the U.S.. The expansion of *maquilas* in the northern Mexico border through the Border Industrial Program (BIP) and bilateral trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the U.S. and Mexico spurred migration from the interior of the country to *maquilas* in search of cheap of exploitable labor. Women working in these border *maquilas* not only challenged but also threatened traditional gender roles, spurring an “...assault by capital and the state on working-class women...,” contributed to the normalization of violence against women and the commodification of their bodies (Lugo, 2008, p. 235). The process of migrating north to the U.S. is also riddled with extortion, rape, and

male dominance. The volatile space along the U.S.-Mexico border and the process of border crossing has positioned Mexican immigrant women in an unfair power relationship with *coyotes*, government officials on both sides of the border, and anti-immigrant policies upon arrival. It is clear that women experience immigration differently than men. The attacks done against the bodies of Mexican immigrant women by patriarchal states need to be documented in order create awareness against these incidents and ameliorate the issue. Although literature explored by Lugo (2008), Falcón (2006), and Morales and Bejarano (2009) does not victimize Mexican women and instead analyses socio-political structures that contribute to the normalization of violence against Mexican immigrant women, violence suffered by women is the center of their analysis. Unfortunately, Mexican immigrant women are victims of violence committed against them by various actors in their immigration process. But their immigration processes also includes experiences other than those of victims of violence as shared by Anna Ochoa-O’Leary (2009) and her research of family reunification, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) and her ethnography of settlement, amongst others who are expanding current literature on the varied experiences of Mexican immigrant women in their process of immigration and transition into life in the U.S. This will be expanded upon in Chapter two.

Through this thesis, I build upon the research conducted by scholars such as Ochoa-O’Leary (2009), Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), Hrisch (2007), and González (1998) by compiling six oral histories of Mexican immigrant women

focusing on their stories of lived experiences to share stories of resiliency in Phoenix, Arizona. These oral histories will use a female gendered perspective to show how migration affects these women differently from their male counterparts, how they challenge traditional gender and family roles in their new countries, and how they have adapted to life in Phoenix, Arizona. I do not “simply add” women to the literature but create a space where they can share their unique experiences through their oral histories.

Based on my lived experiences growing up in an immigrant community on the U.S.-Mexico border in El Paso, Texas, and my participation in immigrant rights advocacy efforts in Phoenix, Arizona, the knowledge passed on to me by Mexican immigrant women was not focused on their experiences as victims of violence. Instead, my early exposure to the experiences of Mexican immigrant women was based on their resiliency while navigating their new lives.

Witnessing these acts spurred my curiosity and desire to collect their stories of adaptation and how they navigated systems foreign to them. I was again exposed to these experiences through my work in Phoenix. For these reasons I decided my research will expand the beauty of the knowledge and skills they created and shared with their community. Additionally, my research focus includes the voices of Mexican immigrant women challenging traditional gender and family roles, adapting, and their resiliency.

In my pursuit of expanding current literature on the experiences of Mexican immigrant women in the U.S., I use the oral histories of six Mexican immigrant women. These six oral histories will be at the center of my analysis to demonstrate how women adapt to life in Phoenix, challenge traditional gender and family roles, redefine themselves, and are resilient. As a methodology and a strategy of resistance, I will use oral history to not only expand current literature of Mexican immigrant women but also carve a space for the voices of these women in academic research and the production of knowledge based on their lived experiences. As Flores (2000) states, the use of narratives like oral history “contain in them a dimension of oppositionality, in that through stories, communities create discourses about themselves” (p. 691). The oral histories included in this thesis do just that. By determining the stories they share in their oral histories, the women interviewed for this thesis are challenging the ways in which they are viewed by determining the knowledge created of their lived experiences, identifying the differences on how society perceives them and how they would like to be perceived, therefore redefining their role in our society. These oral histories should be taken as more than accounts of individual women’s lives. These oral histories should be read as “subversive narrative [that] challenge the representations that render *Mexicanas* vulnerable and dismissed from US civic society” (González, 1998, p. 97).

In 2008, 18.9 million immigrant women and girls lived in the U.S. (Immigration Policy Center). With over a quarter originating from Mexico, my

research interests are directed to a community I identify with and whose further research can give great insight on the immigration experiences of the largest female immigrant population in the U.S. (Immigration Policy Center). My place in the research for this thesis should be explained. I was born on the U.S. side of the Juarez/El Paso border to Mexican immigrant parents in the Lower Valley of El Paso, Texas. The Lower Valley is a predominantly Mexican immigrant, working class area of the city where billboards and local businesses advertise in Spanish and not in English. Born in 1981, I grew up before the implementation of Operation Hold the Line in 1993 disrupted the steady flow of migrants that visited our homes asking for empty milk gallons filled with water and a small meal to help them continue their journeys. Our neighborhood consisted of newly arrived immigrants from Mexico who worked in what would be categorized as ‘blue collar’ jobs in factories or in construction. With the help of programs such as United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, also known as the HUD program, the young families that made up my neighborhood were able to purchase their new homes.

Our neighborhood was a mixture of Mexican immigrants who came from rural communities or cities from the interior of Mexico. Others had lived along the Juarez/El Paso border for years and decided to settle on the El Paso side. Few were first generation Mexican Americans from El Paso but all were young families starting their American Dream. I remember playing kickball in the middle of the street after school, my mom yelling out at us in Spanish to come in

for dinner, children yelling back in *Spanglish* that we were almost done with the game. Our neighbor Alicia, *la gringa*, yelling from her front yard to Isidra, the neighborhood nurse, who lived across the street if she had some *limónes* she could borrow. It never failed that one of us would be recruited as the delivery boy or girl. Tomás sitting outside in his lawn chair listening to music, his skin dark from years of working in the sun. And Luciano, the neighborhood mechanic, always working on a car and cursing out loud in Spanish. We all have that man to thank for our extensive vocabulary... The sounds of our block was a mixture of Spanish spoken by adults and *Spanglish* spoken by the children. It was a mixture of adults singing along to Mexican *rancheras* and children singing along to American pop songs. It was a time when the adults still sat outside talking until sunset resting after a long day of work in the local factories. The families on our block took care of each other, treating each other as members of an extended family. It was my experience growing up on this block that first exposed me to the strengths and abilities of Mexican immigrant women in the U.S. Each woman on my block had a skill set that was shared with the other mothers on the block. One woman was familiar with the school systems and helped with registration, another woman who had access to a car organized trips to the local WIC dispensary, another woman who worked as a pet groomer would lend small amounts of money to the others in times of need. My mother who learned English translated legal documents and correspondence to neighbors who were not fluent in English and all the women handed down their children's clothes from one family to the next.

This sharing of varied skill sets for the benefit of a community was not unique to our block, it is a network building that is common amongst immigrant communities unfamiliar with the local policies and systems of their new country. But for me it displayed the strength and resiliency of women in a foreign land working collectively to ensure the success of their families in spite of the obstacles they found along the way and sparked an interest in the specific way women experience immigration and adaption in comparison to their male spouses or partners.

Chapter 2

THINKING OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN BEYOND VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Transnational immigration as a whole is often discussed and analyzed from a non-gendered perspective; grouping all those who left their countries, whether male or female, into one general classification: immigrant. If a gendered perspective was used to analyze the migration process, it meant “examining men’s gender in isolation or simply ‘adding’ women to the picture” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, p. 3). The absence of this “gender-specific data hinders the understanding and appropriate assessment of women’s role and needs in the migration process” (International Organization for Migration). Researchers in both the development and academic fields have taken on the important task of examining and documenting women’s individual experiences with immigration from a female gendered perspective. Given the myriad of experiences faced in the migration and settlement process, the women in my study truly demonstrate resiliency and redefinition.

The broader socio-politico experience of immigration policy and history between the U.S. and Mexico contextualizes current anti-immigrant legislation and sentiment in the state of Arizona. The U.S.-Mexico border was established with the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848 that ended the Mexican-American War but also forced Mexico to surrender substantial territory to the U.S. that includes present day “California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, along with parts of

Colorado Nevada, and Utah,” essentially creating a group of Mexican Americans who “entered” the U.S. through this land acquisition (Massey, Durand, and Malone, 2002, p. 24). In the nineteenth-century, the movement between this border was fluid and local among communities that were still perceived as undivided (Massey et. al., 2002). It wasn’t until the twentieth century when towns and cities along the new U.S.-Mexico border established a “separation and self-definition” that the U.S.-Mexico border can be referred to as a specific zone (2002, p. 25). With the use of border cities as strategic routes or points of refuge during U.S. Civil War and the Mexican Revolution, these two historical events solidified the demarcation of this international border, setting the foundation for policies related to the control of this zone and the regulation of the flow of the people between it (2002). The need to control the import of alcohol during Prohibition in the U.S. along with the U.S. increase of its immigrant entry quota, the Border Patrol was officially established to control and regulate the area (U.S. Customs and Border Protection).

THE BRACERO PROGRAM

The U.S. Bracero Program began in 1942 as a “temporary emergency labor recruitment for farm workers and railroad workers” to alleviate labor shortages in the U.S. during World War II (Heisler, 2008, p. 68) that allowed legal entry to over 4.5 million Mexican nationals (National Museum of American History). These same highly coveted laborers would only later be rounded up and deported back to Mexico through numerous Border Patrol raids throughout the

life of the Bracero Program. The most notorious of these raids was Operation Wetback which would deport a total of 1.1 million Mexican nationals in 1954 alone “to control undocumented immigration” that became a growing issue partly due to Immigration and Naturalization Services officers and U.S. employers who were seeking to avoid the “red tape” of the Bracero Program (Heisler, 2008, p. 68). The Bracero Program, coupled with mass raids and deportations along with “Operation Wetback” “reinforced the premise that Mexicans were temporary workers, employed and tolerated at the behest of American employers and easily deported when economically and politically desirable” (2008, p. 70).

THE BORDER INDUSTRIAL PROGRAM

These mass deportations of Mexican workers and the end of the Bracero program in 1965 exacerbated unemployment issues in the Mexican borderlands (Fernandez, 1973). To address the increased levels of unemployment and the growing population of northern Mexico, the Mexican Government created the Border Industrial Program (BIP) in 1965, fully implemented in 1967 (1973). Created to solve high numbers of unemployment in northern Mexico, the Mexican government began processing applications of companies who were interested in setting up production in the borderlands (1973). This program opened Mexico’s border to foreign investment by companies who, from the American perspective were in search of cheap Mexican labor, becoming a “major source of employment and income” for Mexican workers, while contributing substantial funds to the Mexican government (Schwartz, 1987, p. 1). The BIP created the first *maquilas*

along the border and solidified the existence of border zones. It also began a trend still found today in the *maquila* labor force. *Maquilas* began preferential hiring of women that did little to address the high numbers of unemployment from those returning from the U.S. as part of the Bracero Program (Fernandez, 1973). The creation of “twin plants” on either side of the border, a process where production began in the U.S. plant, assembly done in the Mexican plant, and finalized in the U.S. plant solidified border commerce along the U.S-Mexico borderlands (Fernandez, 1973). Furthermore, the U.S. had found a new way to exploit cheap Mexican labor outside of its territory but did not quell the numbers of immigrants in search of better opportunities in the U.S.

THE IMMIGRATION AND REFORM ACT

Although BIP was created to ameliorate unemployment in Mexico, the wages earned in the *maquilas* created by BIP were far below those that could be earned in the U.S. Mexican immigration into the U.S. continued, with the U.S. discerning ways to address the issue. Although signed by President Reagan in 1986, presidential administrations before Reagan began laying the groundwork for the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 to address the numbers of Mexican immigrants living and working in the U.S. without authorization (Wyloge, 1986). President Nixon blamed the hiring of undocumented immigrants as the reason for unemployment in the U.S. in the 1970's (1986). President Ford signed the Immigration Act in 1976 to reduce “the number of Mexican who could

apply for legal immigration” but soon decided to increase the quota out of fear that a low limit would spur further illegal entry (1986).

In 1977 President Carter’s proposal to increase the quota for Mexican immigrants who could apply and be granted legalization spurred the creation of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy which issued a report describing the Mexican immigrant population had reached three to five million living in the U.S. and presenting information on immigrants as contributors to the U.S. economy through their participation in the U.S. workforce (1986). The report was finalized and delivered to then President Reagan who proposed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 based on the report’s findings of the Mexican immigrant population and its contributions to the U.S. workforce (1986).

IRCA allowed for the legalization of undocumented migrants who fulfilled specific requirements such as an application fee, proof they did not have a criminal record, and financial proof that they would not become a burden to the state (Cooper & O’Neil, 2005). In total, 2.7 million of the 3million who applied received amnesty via IRCA (2005). However, with amnesty came the creation of Employer Sanctions for those who knowingly hired undocumented migrants and increased border enforcement along the U.S.-Mexico border (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services). Through the implementation of IRCA, the U.S. took

determined steps to acknowledge and legalize Mexican immigrants as valuable members of the U.S. workforce and as members of U.S. society.

NAFTA AND THE MILITARIZATION OF THE BORDER

However, there still remained numbers of undocumented immigrants who did not receive amnesty through IRCA and immigration into the U.S. by Mexicans continued. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994 was proposed by the governments of the U.S., Mexico, and Canada as a solution to “fix the problem of undocumented Mexican migration” in the U.S. (Hing, 2010, p. 9). Much like BIP, NAFTA intended to spur economic development in Mexico and help unemployment, dissuading migration into the U.S. Not only did NAFTA not contribute to economic development in Mexico, it completely destabilized the Mexican local economy. Through this agreement, the U.S. was given free access to import U.S. subsidized corn into the Mexican market, where Mexican domestic prices were double that of international prices, threatening the livelihood of over 2 million peasants and their families (Appendini, 1994). Overall, NAFTA was “a bad deal for Mexico because it could not compete with U.S. subsidies to its own businesses, thus producing job loss and migration pressures in Mexico” (Hing, 2010, p. 10).

A series of border enforcement policies coincided with the implementation of NAFTA. The militarization of the border through Operation Hold the Line along the El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico border and Operation Gatekeeper

along the San Diego, California-Tijuana, Mexico Border were launched in 1994 by then President Clinton (Nevins, 2010). Both of these policies “closed off the easiest places to cross the border” (Hing, 2010, p. 9). Additionally, the militarization of key sections of the border created what Timothy Dunn (1995) refers to as a “low intensity conflict” zone to deter migration in this point of entry (p. 175). In quoting former Immigration and Naturalization Service Commissioner Doris Meissner, Wayne Cornelius (2005) writes, “The logic of immigration policymakers was that if they could effectively control these main gates, ‘geography would do the rest’...” referencing how the “formidable mountains and scorching deserts would deter crossings in more hazardous areas like the Arizona desert” (p. 779). Rather than a deterrence, these policies have served to “redistribute illegal entries along the south-western border, away from the larger border cities and towards more remote, undeveloped areas” such as the Arizona-Mexico border (p. 783).

The redistribution of “illegal entries” into the Arizona desert gave way to a human rights disaster faced by immigrants crossing this 500 mile wide stretch of land. The harsh temperatures and terrain have contributed to an increase in deaths of migrants embarking in this deadly crossing. Since 1994, “deaths of presumed migrants due to exposure to the elements increased dramatically” along the Tucson sector of the Arizona border (Ochoa-O’Leary, 2009, p. 89). The increase of deaths due to exposure directly coincided with the implementation of “harsher measures to enforce the border between the United States and Mexico” (2009, p.

89). These tragedies are directly linked to the “prevention through deterrence strategy” by the U.S. which contributed to “a horrendous rise in the number of deaths of border crossers” (Hing, 2010, p. 124). Additionally, the rising cost of migration has made border crossing a lucrative business. The growing demand for a *coyote*, or crossing guide, in this undeveloped stretch of land has left immigrants vulnerable to various border crossing crimes. *Bajadores*, or border bandits, are known to rob migrants of their belongings while in transit and *coyotes* have been known to abandon those who cannot keep up with the rest of the group, abandoning migrants in the middle of the desert, exposed to the elements (Ochoa-O’Leary, 2009). To date, it has been estimated “over 2000 bodies have been recovered in the desert since 1994” (Tellez, de la Fuente, Sanidad, 2011, p. 148).

For female Mexican immigrants, the increase in border crossing violence is experienced in the form of sexual violence at the hands of *coyotes*, gangs, or state authorities both on the Mexican and U.S. side of the border, with Arizona serving as the main stage for these violations. Finding themselves in a threatening power relationship with *coyotes* who “often gain access to the bodies of women migrants by default” will get a woman to “‘agree’ from the beginning of her negotiations with a coyote to have sex with him in exchange for his ‘help’ or ‘protection’ during the journey to and across the border (Ruiz Marrujo, 2009, p. 35). Once on U.S. territory, the assaults continue in the hands of U.S. authorities. Sexual violence has become so normalized in the female immigration process that “Many women who cross the border report that being rape[d] was the ‘price’ of

not being apprehended [by ICE], deported, or of having their documents returned” (Falcón, 2006, p. 120). The violence against Mexican immigrant women along the U.S.-Mexico border has been categorized by scholars as “border sexual conquest” (Morales and Bejarano, 2009, p. 420) and as “militarized *border* rapes because of the ‘power’ associated with the border itself” (Falcón, 2006, p. 120).

In 1996 the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act added Section 287(g) to the Immigration and Nationality Act, allowing “the secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to enter into agreements with state and local law enforcement agencies, permitting designated officers to perform immigration law enforcement functions” (Téllez, Sanidad, de la Fuente, 2011, p. 149). In 2003, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) introduced Operation Endgame as a plan to remove all deportable immigrants by 2012 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2003). The state of Arizona would enact Section 287(g) agreement in 2004 (Téllez, Sanidad, de la Fuente, 2011, p. 149). Arizona would show the country the effects of these combined policies on its immigrant and Latino population.

ARIZONA

The rapid increase of border crossings through Arizona created by federal policies coupled with media portrayals of an “invasion” of Mexican immigrants in the state resulting from this funneling effect has justified the proposal and implementation of a series of harsh, anti-immigrant policies in the state. In

November of 2004 the state of Arizona passed Proposition 200, a state initiative that requires “individuals to produce citizenship documents when voting or receiving government social services” (The Leadership Conference). Proposition 200 not only asked for proof of citizenship but also charged government employees with misdemeanors if they provided these services to anyone believed to be undocumented (The Leadership Conference). The proposition has affected voter registration of Latinos in the state and is currently being held on appeal in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (Arizona Proposition 200: (Gonzalez v. Brewer)).

The state of Arizona enacted Section 287(g) in 2007 and began its assault against undocumented immigrants (Télez et al., 2011). The 287(g) agreement with the state of Arizona, or *poli-migra* (police-immigration) as referred to by Spanish speaking Arizonans, was quick to create a culture of fear amongst the immigrant community in Arizona with workplace raids and roadblocks as a tactic used to verify a person’s documentation status (Tellez et al., 2011). The English as the Official Language Act, also known as the “English Only Law”, was passed in 2006 in the state, “making English the official state language in Arizona” requiring “that all ‘official state business’... be conducted in English” (Tellez et al., 2011, p. 149). The Legal Arizona Workers Act, also known as the “Employer Sanctions Law” went into effect May of 2008 prohibiting “businesses from knowingly or intentionally hiring an ‘unauthorized alien’ after December 31, 2007” (Legal Arizona Workers Act). The Act also required Arizona employers to

use the E-Verify system, that verifies an individual's employment authorization (Legal Arizona Workers Act). In late 2009 Arizona passed House Bill (HB) 2008 which requires individuals seeking public assistance, such as state sponsored medical care or food stamps, to prove their documentation status and also obligates federal employees to report the names of those who were "discovered" not to be U.S. citizens to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for further investigation.

In May of 2010, the state of Arizona would pass a law that would prove to be the culmination of the previously listed propositions and legislation targeted against undocumented immigrants in the state. The Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, also known as Senate Bill (SB) 1070, was signed into law by governor Jan Brewer and made it state law that state and local police officers assume federal immigration responsibilities by checking the immigration status of anyone they arrest or suspect is in the country illegally, enforcing an "attrition through enforcement" policy to apprehend and decrease the numbers of undocumented immigrants in the state (Senate Bill 1070). The law makes it a misdemeanor crime to reside in the U.S. without proper authorization, criminalizes those harboring or transporting undocumented immigrants, makes it unlawful to pick up and hire day laborers, and has spurred workplace raids throughout Arizona under the Employer Sanctions component of the law (Senate Bill 1070). The implementation of Section 287(g), also known as *poli-migra* referencing police being given federal immigration responsibilities, created a

culture of fear for immigrants and Latinos living in Arizona who fell victim to racial profiling with random police stops used to verify documentation status. Through the implementation of SB 1070, Latinos as well as undocumented Mexican immigrants were criminalized, were exposed to racial profiling, and found their daily lives restricted.

Although four provisions of the law were blocked by a temporary injunction by U.S. District Judge Susan Bolton on April 11, 2011, including the “reasonable suspicion” provision allowing law enforcement to stop or question anyone who appears to be an “illegal immigrant” which has been highly criticized for its racial profiling, other sections of the law are still in effect. The sections that are still in effect and being implemented continue to force undocumented (and at times documented Latino) citizens to live in a state of fear and insecurity in Arizona.

As recently as 2011, the state of Arizona silently passed Senate Bill (SB) 1465 prohibiting the use of a foreign issued consular identification cards as a form of identification in Arizona leaving many Mexican immigrants without a proof of identification. Coupled with House Bill (HB) 2102 which requires individuals to prove citizenship in order to apply and receive a food handlers card to work in the service industry, these laws continued to push Mexican immigrants into the shadows of society, forcing them to carry out their lives under a heavily

criminalized state, one year after the heavily criticized and much publicized SB 1070 was passed in the state.

This barrage of anti-immigrant legislation implemented in the span of eight years in the state of Arizona has not only created a culture of fear in which racial profiling and anti-immigrant sentiment has been codified into law enforcement policies but has also criminalized and constructed legal barriers around daily tasks that the newly arrived immigrant women I grew up with did not have to confront in the daily management of their lives. The women I grew up with did not have to fear driving their children to school in their car with a broken tail light, an offense serious enough in the state of Arizona to merit being stopped by a police officer who could legally question your documentation status. The women I grew up with did not have to worry about their documentation status being discovered when applying for state funded medical services for their children. The women I grew up with were able to apply for a state issued identification card and renew their food handlers license to continue providing for their family. Through its strategic construction of legal barriers that could rival the physical barriers constructed along the U.S.-Mexico border, Mexican immigrant women in the state of Arizona have to face a series of barriers to carry out their daily lives and ensure the success of their families and communities.

Through my work at the Arizona Worker Rights Center, a non-profit in downtown Phoenix that provides labor rights advocacy as well as community

development projects and direct health and social services, I was able to directly work with Mexican immigrant women who often shared stories of the many barriers they faced and had to overcome. The lightness with which they spoke of these barriers like a small stone obstructing their path rather than a gross violation of their basic human rights made me want to learn more about how Mexican immigrant women navigate the systems put in place to restrict their presence to adapt and carry out their lives in the U.S.

MEXICAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE U.S.

A review of current literature available that focuses on the experiences of Mexican immigrant women in the U.S. provides considerable information on how women adapt and navigate life in the U.S. Through her “ethnography of settlement” in Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration, Hondagneu-Sotelo acknowledges that women experience migration differently than their male counterparts and places the experiences of the women she interviews at the center of her research to better portray the uniqueness of their experiences. Beyond their positionality of victims of violence, Hondagneu-Sotelo focuses on the agency of women and their immigration process. Hondagneu-Sotelo challenges the pattern of “‘associational’ or ‘dependent’ migration [that] suggests that women become migrants only by association; [which] assumes patterns of dependence and subordination, which may or may not be warranted” (1994, p. 39). Through her research, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) challenges the “household model” of migration and gives immigrant women an active voice in

the decision to migrate and places migrant women as mediators and facilitators of settlement in the U.S.

In the book Doméstica: Immigrant Worker's Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence, Hondagneu-Sotelo's research of Latina domestic workers in Los Angeles, California, examines how growing demand for low cost domestic workers in the U.S., how this demand has shaped female migration from Central American and Mexico to the U.S., and how these two forces come together to "shape how paid domestic work occurs today" (2001, p. x). Hondagneu-Sotelo's focus on the lived experiences of immigrant women navigating job placement and interactions with employers places the women featured in the book at the center of her analysis. Through interviews of domestic workers, Hondagneu-Sotelo writes of how immigrant women determine their working conditions based on time of arrival, skill base, and social networks. This continues Hondagneu-Sotelo's research of Mexican immigrant women as determiners and not "dependents" of their migration processes and as workers in the U.S. economy and not victims of violence.

In her construction of Mexican immigrant women narratives and their experiences in crossing the border, Anna Ochoa O'Leary (2009) uses a "relational thinking approach that incorporates subjects and subjectivity into discussion about more abstract processes and concepts such as the state and markets (Marchand and Runyan 2000)" (p. 524). From these personal accounts, Ochoa-O'Leary

(2009) focuses “on the tension between family separation and family reunification as ... the most salient of the issues brought up by migrant women” (p. 524).

Ochoa-O’Leary cites the narratives as advancing the “understanding of the border as a place where opposite processes converge, not only theoretically but in concrete terms as well” in relation to family separation and unification (p. 524).

By placing women’s personal accounts at the center of her research, Ochoa-O’Leary is able to add a layer to the complexity of women’s migration experiences beyond that of violence and victim. Neither at the beginning or the end of their immigration process, Ochoa-O’Leary creates a space where Mexican immigrant women describe how they understand and interpret the border and the crossing. Ochoa-O’Leary’s point of analysis expands how women experience immigration in this ubiquitous point of reflection for many immigrants.

Although writing about violence experienced by Mexican women on the U.S.-Mexico border, Sylvia Falcón’s research on the militarization of the border in “Rape as a Weapon of War: Militarized Rape at the US Mexico Border” draws attention to the forces that have contributed to the increased violence against women along the U.S.-Mexico border and not women as vulnerable victims of this violence. Falcón explores how U.S. policies such as “transferring the INS from the Department of Labor to the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice in 1940” changed “the classification of immigration as an issue of labor to one of national security” (2006, p. 120). This shift in how the U.S. manages immigration along with the militarization of the border has created war-like conditions where

“militarized *border rapes*” have become common place. This normalization indicates the political and social conditions that have contributed to violence against women, and not women being violated simply because of their vulnerable state as women (Falcón, 2006, p. 120).

Much like Falcón, Maria Cristina Morales and Cynthia Bejarano (2009) step away from labeling Mexican women as victims of violence but instead look at the intentionality of the structural violence in neoliberal policies that contributes to the occurrence of violence against women along the U.S-Mexico border. In their analysis of “border sexual conquest”, Morales and Bejarano historically do not look at the dichotomy of capitalism and patriarchy versus vulnerable bodies of women (p. 420). Instead they trace “political-economic structures, the subjugation of local place, gender and class inequality, and women’s resistance” to examine all of the forces that have created “border sexual conquest” (p. 424). A true component that shows their departure from victimizing women to giving them agency within the structures that have contributed to this violence is including a “women’s resistance”. This component shows that although women experience violence during immigration to the U.S., women are also “active agents of resistance in their own self-empowerment and within their communities” instead of being victimized (p. 421).

Building upon the literature of women as “active agents of resistance”, F. González (1998) conducts a qualitative study of *Mexicana* students who create

their own identities, “claim a space of self-respect and fashion transnational identities with cultural meanings and feelings” in the U.S. educational system that had yet to acknowledge and adapt to their presence during the time of the writing of her article. The *Mexicana* students interviewed claim their space, voice their “feelings and meanings about language... identity and womanhood... [and] correct representations that render *Mexicanas* vulnerable and dismissed from U.S. civic life and public education” (p. 97). Through their narratives, the women interviewed for this research are not only resisting but recreating, reclaiming their identity and challenging stereotypes against them. By challenging and reclaiming, the *Mexicana* students in these narratives are not only resisting but displaying their resiliency in the face of these oppositional forces.

A recreation of identity is explored in Jennifer Hirsch’s (2007) essay on how Mexican immigrant women challenge their gender roles within the family and in relation to marriage. Although the women interviewed by Hirsch reference history rather than immigration to the U.S. as the reason for this challenge, Hirsch mentions “Mexican women have greater opportunities for realizing these companionate ideals [within their marriages] in the United States” (p. 438). “*En el norte la mujer manda*” (in the North, women give the orders)- is an apt representation of how Mexican women challenge their traditional gender roles in the U.S., how both men and women transform their relationships within the marriage, and how Mexican immigrant women redefine their place in a marriage in the U.S. (p. 438).

Mary Pardo's (1991) collection of Mexican American women's stories in East Los Angeles provides information on the interactions of newly arrived Mexican immigrant women and Mexican American women, how they define the differences between both groups, and how the women's community activism shapes their communities and their individual identities. In identifying their community's needs and organizing as a community to meet them, the women bridged the gaps between newly arrived immigrants and Mexican Americans and worked together to create additional community resources. Although their community activism reflected traditional female gender roles, such as the women raising funds for the parochial school and a children's education being a woman's responsibility, the women interviewed also challenged these traditional roles and redefined themselves through their work.

Beyond their role as mothers inquiring about their children's education, women "negotiated with priests to have input into the expenditure of resources, ... that affected their children's education" positioning themselves within the decision making process (Pardo, 1991, p. 66). Additionally in their creation of bridges between newly arrived Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans, the women carried out their community work as "members of a Mexican community", redefining the identity of not only their community but themselves as members of this new community in the U.S. (p. 66).

Much like Pardo (1991), Aidé Acosta (2009) focuses on how Mexican immigrant women navigate and overcome struggles in their process of settlement in east-central Illinois. Acosta looks at “the quotidian experiences of immigrant women” of two Mexican immigrant women to display the “strategies women create to alleviate difficult situations, -specifically situations within the legal and social realms as immigrants (2009, p. 59). In learning how to overcome discrimination in the work place and in the legal realm, the women featured in Acosta’s research apply acquired knowledge in Mexico to create alternative solutions in the U.S. when traditional modes such as social services such as insurance and legal structures such as Worker’s Compensation are lacking.

Sujey Vega (2008) explores this redefinition of identities and recreation of community in her ethnography of Mexican immigrants in Lafayette, Louisiana featured in her dissertation. Although not specifically looking at Mexican immigrant women, Vega did find that Mexican immigrants featured in her ethnography also redefine their identities in response to their new lives established in the U.S. “through civic participation and economic contributions” (p. 302). By creating and establishing new identities around nationalism, culture and community, the Mexican immigrant families featured in Vega’s research challenge homogenized stereotypes of Mexican immigrants living in the U.S.

The innovation, creation, and knowledge sharing carried out by the Mexican immigrant women featured in the research of Hodagneu-Sotelo (1994,

2001), González (1998), Hirsch (2007), Pardo (1991), Acosta (2009) and Vega (2008) in their settlement process in the U.S. has generated a collection of literature that portrays Mexican immigrant women beyond that of victim of violence. My research builds on this by pointing to the stories of resiliency in spite of anti-immigrant legislation and sentiment in Arizona.

Chapter 3

THE USE OF ORAL HISTORY TO TELL THEIR STORIES

“Many researchers, academics and projects workers may see the benefits of their particular research projects as serving a greater good ‘for mankind’, or serving a specific emancipatory goal for an oppressed community. But belief in the ideal that benefitting mankind is indeed a primary outcome of scientific research is as much a reflection of ideology as it is of academic training. It becomes so taken for granted that many researchers simply assume that they as individuals embody this ideal and are natural representatives of it when they work with other communities. ... [Communities] across the world have other stories to tell which not only question the assumed nature of those ideals and the practices that they generate, but also serve to tell an alternative story...” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p.2)

Learning the stories told by Mexican immigrant women on their experiences of adaptation to life in the U.S. is central to learning how Mexican immigrant women experience immigration in Phoenix, Arizona. By using oral history, the women featured in this thesis share unique examples of resiliency of Mexican immigrant women living in Phoenix in spite of its harsh anti-immigrant policies. Much like Maylei Blackwell (2003) used oral history to carve a space where Chicanas are acknowledged in the history of the Chicano movement, this thesis intends to use oral history as a tool to continue carving a space for Mexican immigrant women in research focused on their strength and resiliency in their adaptation to life in the U.S. All six women are Mexican immigrants of mixed documentation status who have lived in Phoenix for at least 5 years.¹ The women

¹ Since a section of my interview process addresses reflections on adaptation, I chose the minimum of five years because I felt this time period allowed for a sense of settlement in Phoenix.

interviewed range from 31 to 54 years of age and also range in the years they have lived in Phoenix from 8 to 21 years, respectively. All six women have attained a minimum of an elementary school education, with some having reached and completed high school. The women interviewed either migrated by themselves, as part of a family with parents and/or siblings, or with their partners.

Initially, I expected to interview five women for this project. The recruitment process consisted of using the snowball sampling method of women who I knew through my work at the Arizona Worker Rights Centers or from other community organizations. The number of interviewees grew to six when the fourth woman I interviewed informed me that two of her friends were also interested in sharing their stories for my project. Searching for women to interview was facilitated by my work at the Arizona Worker Rights Center (AZWRC). I began work at the AZWRC upon arriving in Phoenix, Arizona two years ago. My interactions with the female members of the AZWRC further enforced my desire to expand literature on the stories of resilience of Mexican immigrant women living in the U.S. upon learning of women's experiences in Phoenix. The AZWRC is a labor rights advocacy non-profit that helps individuals who have experienced rights violations in the workplace, spanning from non-payment of wages to gender discrimination. In addition to helping individuals file their cases at the Department of Labor or help individuals negotiate with fraudulent employers (to name of few of the services), the AZWRC also has a free political education leadership course, Anti-Wage Theft

Campaign, a member governing committee, along with other events that have successfully created a sense of strong community for all members. Because of the anti-immigrant policies passed in Arizona in the past 10 years, the majority of those seeking assistance from AZWRC have a Mexican immigrant background.

Through my participation in various community projects, I began to create strong personal bonds with members at the AZWRC, primarily with female members. We began to share personal histories, discovered points where our stories converged and learned how they differed. It was these shared stories that built upon existing literature of women being “active agents of resistance in their own self-empowerment and within their communities” (Morales and Bejarano, 2009, p. 421). I identified this trust in the sharing of personal histories as a personal advantage that came with my development of an “insider” status with female members. My having been born of Mexican parents and being fluent in Spanish did grant me a certain level of access to the women I interviewed, but our relationships developed over a longer period of time through our participation at community events and trust development through personal interactions earned me “insider” status. My work at the AZWRC allowed me to undergo “a period of outsider/insider reconciliation during which I earned a certain level of trust and credibility” with the women I later interviewed for this project (Innes, 2009, p. 454).

However, this gained “insider” status does not automatically rid me of my “outsider” status. As a graduate student conducting research for a thesis, I have to acknowledge that soliciting the participation of these women will help me achieve a Masters degree. This in itself can potentially place me in an exploitative position of the stories shared by the interviewees for my personal benefit. This admittedly is an issue I have yet to reconcile with in spite of the interviewees’ willingness to participate. However, by failing to question my “own identities and privileged positions” as a researcher, I run the risk of perpetuating the “othering” of a population (Villenas, 1996, p. 713). Much like other researchers who debate this insider/outsider status, I was not able to find a reconciliation of these two roles. Instead I faced the fact that I am neither an insider or an outsider exclusively, but both in its various situations and advantages. I am both the insider who understands the language and cultural nuances that allows me entry into the women’s lives to hear their stories. But I am also the outsider, who is a U.S. citizen pursuing a graduate degree and who is humbled when allowed to be given entry to their lives through their shared stories.

The decision to use the oral history method for this thesis builds upon the tradition of using *testimonios*, oral narratives and oral history that creates a space where the critical voices of individuals who would otherwise be overlooked by society and academic literature can speak for themselves. In the collection of Latina testimonios in Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios, the use of *testimonios* to shed light on the complex identities of Latinas, the *testimonio*

methodology is viewed as a “means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (Acevedo et. al, 2001, p. 2). Yúdice (1992) views the methodology of *testimonio* as a method that gives voice to those *sin voz* (without voice) and create “documents that deal with the lives of individuals of the popular classes immersed in important historical struggles” (p. 211). Researchers such as Ochoa-O’Leary (2009) and Russel y Rodríguez (2008) use oral narratives to challenge stereotypes of Chicana/Latina identities and provide insight on the lived experiences of either Mexican immigrant women, having the stories and voices of the women interviewed as the central data of their research.

Oral history is defined as as “the tradition in which the life and experiences of ‘everywoman/man’ [is] considered worthy of remembering...” (Gluck 1977, p. 4). Much like *testimonio* and oral narratives, oral history creates a space in our society or academic literature where the voices of “everywoman/man” is not only heard, but known, and given a place within our historical collective memory (p. 4). In her reflection of the use of oral history when researching the history of Chinese American Women, Yung (1998) views oral history as a research method that “allows ordinary people... to speak for themselves, fill historiographical gaps and challenge stereotypes as well as validate their lives” (p. 87). In her work reclaiming Chicana students’ place in the historical accounts of the 1968 student Blowouts, Delgado Bernal (1998) uses oral history to “provide an alternative perspective to the historical narratives” that

have focused solely on male student experiences (p. 114). Behar (1993) creates the oral history of *Esperanza*, a Mexican working class woman, to “question the studiously distant translations of women’s lives across borders” that for Behar have been standardized in anthropology (p. 299).

In my research of the resiliency of Mexican immigrant women in light of anti-immigrant policies in Phoenix, I use oral history through the lens of a “woman-centered subjectivity” to place the voices and lived experiences of Mexican immigrant women at the center of what will soon be a historical account of the effects of anti-immigrant policies in Arizona (Télez, 2008, p. 547). In her research of Mexican women’s social activism along the U.S.-Mexico border, Télez (2008) uses “woman-centered subjectivity” that “includes [narratives of] the lived experience and agency” of Mexican women in the Mexican border town Maclovio Rojas (p. 547). This use of a “woman-centered subjectivity” allowed Télez (2008) to “make evident the border as a transformative space that becomes a site where women come together to re-imagine and redefine gendered, class-based, and racialized social structures” (p. 549).

As Télez (2008) identified “the border as a transformative space” where the women she interviewed refined their subjectivities in relation gender, class and racialized social structures, the women interviewed for the oral histories created for this project identify borders in their lives where they redefined their

subjectivities of gender and family roles, racialized social structures, and ideas of class in spite of anti-immigrant policies in Arizona or because of them, to then share points of resiliency in their lives. The following oral histories will share a set of common themes that arose from the six interviews.

However, before acknowledging the three common themes that arose from interviews that were structured around the research focus for this project, the theme of violence experienced by these women in their lives cannot and should not be ignored. The inclusion of the accounts of lived violence in the stories is not done to victimize the women who shared these stories. Instead it is done to acknowledge that violence is a reality for many Mexican immigrant women, as with women throughout the world living in patriarchal systems including the U.S. “To ignore the pain that marks women’s narrative of crossing is to sanitize history and not fully understand the meaning of Mexican labor migration in the New World Order” (Ibarra, 2003, p. 277). Although speaking of the difficulties faced by Mexican immigrant women in the crossing of the border, Ibarra (2003) notes that by ignoring the violence experienced by women oversimplifies their life histories. Ignoring these accounts of violence also risks robbing women of owned points of strength, desires for something “different” or “better”, and points that have driven them to what they view as traditional gender roles in Mexico.

In responding to the question of their migration histories, the interviewees shared their stories of adaptation. These stories of adaptation vary from learning the local bus system, confronting language barriers, to comparing their new life in the U.S. to the one left behind in Mexico. The second theme that arose from the interviews is how women challenged traditional family and gender roles, class and racialized structures before migrating to the U.S. or upon arriving in Phoenix. The stories where they challenged these roles in Mexico and not in Phoenix because these situations defined a shift in subjectivity that continued to shape the lives of each woman and frames their perceptions of anti-immigrant policies in Phoenix. The third theme that arose from these interviews is resiliency. In their adaptation to life in Phoenix, the women featured in these oral histories have navigated various obstacles in the construction of their lives in the U.S.. The oral histories show how each woman has overcome the physical barrier of the U.S.-Mexico border, have overcome language barriers, and have overcome cultural barriers in their redefinition of gender and family roles. Above all, what is central to this thesis is how these women have overcome the socio-political barriers built against them by anti-immigrant policies in Arizona to create a life for themselves and for their families. By proving to be resilient in spite of these policies, the women who shared their stories for this project are establishing “an alternative perspective to the historical narratives” on Mexican immigrant women (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 114).

Chapter 4

SUS HISTORIAS/ THEIR HISTORIES

Lo siguiente son historias orales de valor, deseo, y batalla. Les presento a seis mujeres Mexicanas inmigrantes re-defininando su rol en los Estados Unidos.

The following are oral histories of strength, desires, struggle. I introduce you to six Mexican immigrant women redefining their role in the United States.

LAS MUJERES/THE WOMEN²

Alba is a 54 year old mother of four daughters. She arrived in Phoenix, Arizona twenty-one years ago with her three young daughters. Since her arrival, Alba has worked as a housekeeper and has also participated in community organizations for immigrant rights. Alba is a vigorous reader.

Esperanza is a 34 year old mother of two sons and one daughter. From the state of Veracruz, she arrived in Phoenix seventeen years ago with her mother, father, and siblings. Alba is an active member of the Arizona Worker Rights Centers, has a full-time job, and after learning nail design is developing her own nail design business.

Perla is a 53 year old mother of many and grandmother to many more. From the Ejido Model in the municipality of Tizapán el Alto, Jalisco, Mexico, Perla lived in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico before migrating to Phoenix eight years ago. Perla came to Phoenix with her husband, youngest son and granddaughter of whom she is the guardian. Perla is a trained chef and an active member of the Arizona Worker Rights Center.

Sofia is a 37 year old mother of three boys. She arrived in Phoenix ten years ago with her husband. Sofia currently leads a community organization that works to address the needs of the members of her community.

Joana is a 30 year old mother of two children. From the state of Oaxaca, she arrived in Phoenix eight years ago. Joana works in a restaurant and participates in community Catholic praying groups.

² The identities of women interviewed are anonymous and the pseudonyms were chosen by the author.

Dolores is a 31 year old mother of two children. From the state of Oaxaca, she arrived in Phoenix eight years ago and was reunited with her brother and sister who live here. Dolores also works in a restaurant and participates in community Catholic praying groups.

THEIR STORIES

Below is a collection of six oral histories shared by Mexican immigrant women living in Phoenix, Arizona. The stories have been grouped according to three similar themes that arose in every interview: Adaptation, Challenging Gender and Family Roles, and Resiliency. Although some may not reference specific Arizona policies as obstacles in their lives in Arizona, each account should be read taking into account laws such as SB 1070 that has criminalized these women's mere presence in the state, HB 2008 that has made it a risk to access social services such as medical care, and the racial profiling that continues in Phoenix. As a citizen, one would regard these policies as gross violations of one's human rights. However, through their accounts the reader will see how these women- have interpreted these policies as a singular or ongoing struggle rather than a violation that they need to overcome to achieve their personal and familial goals. And they do.

But before their resiliency is explored, the reality of violence in the lives of Mexican immigrant women should be addressed. Although not central to my thesis, violence did arise as a recurring theme in the oral histories of the women featured. As featured in the order women listed their life experiences, this analysis will begin with their stories of violence in order to construct their stories of resiliency.

VIOLENCE

The following are experiences with violence that women experienced in Mexico from their spouse or from their family as children. The presence of violence was central to the stories shared by women who did experience. However, the stories of violence were shared as a central catalyst to their decisions to immigrate to the U.S. or to seek out ways to improve their lives or search for a better future for their children.

Alba shares the story of her divorce from her husband of seventeen years in Mexico. In sharing why she decided to leave what she labels as an bad relationship, the story of abuse in her childhood emerges:

“I thought it was no longer a good relationship. The father of my daughters became an alcoholic, and back then for me it was very sad but I was living in a situation I didn’t want. I had already had an abusive childhood, very sad. So I left my home very young, before I was 15 years old, because of the the situation I was living at home. I had a step-father and all that. I met the father of my daughters and everything was going well and I had my four children. This story is a little difficult but at the same time it comforts me because I left that place to come here and have a new life because over there it was just too difficult.”

Although displaying a history of violence in her life, at the same time Alba tells how she redefined her role as a woman in reaction to the expectations passed on to her from her mother:

“In my case, I didn’t have a mom with whom I felt would support me as a mom, to tell what I was going through. When I would mention it to her, she would say ‘too bad, it’s your cross and you have to carry it,’ the classic line. The culture my mom comes from is one that says if you marry, you’re married for life and tend to your husband, to serve, to serve. But in my case I didn’t want to anymore.”

At this point in her life, by deciding she no longer wanted to live according to the standards imposed upon her as a woman by her mother, Alba decides to break the cycle of violence in her life. Additionally, Alba references this decision to leave an abusive situation as a motivation to migrate to the U.S. to pursue a new life.

Perla’s account of the violence she lived with her husband of ten years in Mexico shows her refusal to abide by traditional gender roles by making a point that she was the primary earner in the household:

“When I was married for 10 years, I lived the experience of domestic violence. I lived it in that time. He kicked my face, he wanted to cut my face. He said he wasn’t going to leave me until he was able to make my life impossible. So then I said, this is not going to hold me back. My dreams are different. I want to have a home for my children, I want to give my children something better, I don’t want them to live what I’m living. So then I said, let’s go. So what did I do? I left him completely. So I left, I left where I

paid the rent, where I paid everything. I was earning more than him, he never accepted that. Yes I struggled a lot, ... until I found a place I could rent and I could distance myself from him.”

Aware of her ability to create a better reality for herself and her children, Perla used this situation as a motivation to find a home for her children. In her search for a new home, Perla began participating in Infonavit³ meetings that helped her own her home:

“Thank God after three or four months of going to those meetings I went and spoke directly with the man that was in charge of distributing houses. ... they gave me a key and a paper with [information of] where I had to go with the construction company, and the construction company gave me a key to go see my house. And so that was my children’s inheritance. My children were young because the oldest was 8 years old. So I told them, from here we’re never going to be kicked out. Because they had seen when we lived with their father, well they had kicked us out of our home because the man wouldn’t pay rent. So what I did, I told him, look son, this house is for all of you. From this house they’ll never kick us out. Even if I die, this house is for all of you. You could see on their faces how happy they were, that they knew that from there they wouldn’t be kicked out.”

³ Infonavit is a Mexican government sponsored program that offers accessible, low-cost credit for to construct their own homes.

Perla used this point of violence in her life as a launching point to create a better life for herself and a sense of security for her children. Although she was not financially dependent on her husband, his inability to accept that she made more money than him and his physical abuse restricted Perla from achieving her dream of a home for her children. Her account of this lived violence and her ability to leave it displays a strength she brought with her to the U.S.

When asked about the difference of her life in Mexico and her life in the U.S., Dolores reveals a history of childhood abuse in her home:

“In Mexico, with my mom and dad, we’re raised in a harsh way. And sometimes I try to understand why, maybe because they were raised the same way. Mistreated, beat, for whatever, for insignificant things, they wanted to settle everything with beatings. In that sense I’ve tried not to make the same mistakes because it’s difficult to live like that. There are things that don’t make sense. My mom loved buying dishes. And if you broke a mug or a dish, she would hit you. And I think, just for something stupid? To the point where you would get slapped, smacked or [hit] with a belt, whatever she found. So going out to another city, a larger city you start to see that things are different.”

The abuse in her home spurred Dolores decision to leave her home at an early age, and her story will later reveal how this motivated her decision to migrate to the U.S. In spite of the abuse suffered at an early age, Dolores uses this

experience as motivation to seek a better life for herself in the U.S. and later as a motivation to stay in the U.S. in order to secure a better life for her children.

Reflecting on how she felt there were limited safeguards against child abuse as a child in Mexico, Dolores finds safety in the safeguards established in the U.S.

against physical abuse and is comforted that her children have those protections:

“... in spite of being illegal you have protection that no one can touch you, no one can hurt you, as a couple or however. They can’t do it, you can speak out and defend yourself or search for help. That I do like here, that they teach you another way of being. ... Like in the schools, here the children aren’t hit, in that aspect it’s different here. For that reason I stay here and I do want my kids to make their lives here. And that they have the opportunity to visit my family but not stay there. Here they, and me too, have more opportunities to get ahead.”

Alba, Perla and Dolores shared their histories of violence in various points of their interviews, as part of their reasons for migrating, as part of their personal background, or as reflection to the advantages of living in the U.S. The sharing of these violent pasts did not stand alone as accounts of self-victimization but instead shared as examples of motivations to search for a different or better life.

Although violence experienced by Mexican immigrant women is not the focus of the research for this project, it has proven to be a reality for some of the women interviewed and it has shaped their lives and how they define themselves and their

reality. Omitting these stories would omit experiences that have shaped how they carry out their lives in Phoenix which will be expanded in the exploration of the following themes.

ADAPTATION

The journeys towards adaptation to life in Phoenix give strong insight to the importance of having a strong social network upon arrival. Women who share that they had a solid network of friends or family in Phoenix that helped the adjust to life in Phoenix share stories of how easy it was to get around the city with the public bus system, how quickly they found jobs upon arrival, and how easy it was to adjust to their new lives because they were either met by friends or reunited with family.

Alba shares how she considered coming to the U.S. after speaking with her sister's sister-in-law who told her of the opportunities for work in the U.S. Having found work at a soft drink factory after her divorce in Mexico, Alba found the work physically demanding and draining. Armed with the courage of her recent divorce, at the age of 33 Alba decided to migrate to Phoenix with her three young daughters only months after her divorce. Upon arriving, Alba and her daughters were able to stay with her sister's sister-in-law who guided Alba to life in Phoenix:

“We came here and we had to learn ‘*los camiones*’, or how they say here ‘el bus’. It was another difficulty because I didn’t know

much. My sister's sister-in-law would say, 'Look, the buses run in one straight line. You go straight and if you get lost, that same bus is going to bring you back because they run straight. On one side or the other, but they run straight.'"

Additionally, through her interactions with other Mexican immigrant women, Alba joined a network of women who knew of housekeeping jobs in Phoenix and connected her with a woman who fulfilled the role of a job broker for this group of women. Once referred to her, Alba was able to find a series of steady jobs in housekeeping in spite of not knowing English:

"The woman [who found me my first job] noticed that I was efficient in housekeeping work. One time she called me and said, '... I have an interview for you. ... And then she told me, 'I am warning you. If they ask you if you speak English, you say yes.' I would say to myself, how am I going to say yes if I haven't even gone to school? 'Well you say yes because you need the job. You will say yes, figure out how. But when they ask you, you say yes. To everything they tell you, yes.'"

The presence of these two advocates eased Alba's transition to life in Phoenix. Dolores and Joana's arrival is also met with a smooth transition to adapting to managing life in Phoenix and finding a job because of the support of family members. Dolores shares:

"Here, thank God when I arrived I had the opportunity to have a job. The first day that I arrived, the second day I went to work.

When I arrived I was 23 years old and I started working at a restaurant cleaning tables.”

Joana also shares a similar story of being reunited with her family:

“Arriving in Phoenix I depended on the support of my siblings and thankfully I was soon able to find a job and start making a productive life. Since I arrived in Phoenix I’ve maintained a job where the majority of the positions are filled by men. I work in a restaurant in the kitchen. I’ve worked in that restaurant for the last 8 years...”

Although being received by family and easily transitioning into a job in Phoenix, Joana met a different challenge in the adaptation to her new life. Revisited in the analysis of the next theme of gender and family roles, Joana was met with an initial resistance of her spouse seeing her work outside of the home:

“My transition arriving in Phoenix was a different change because in Mexico you focus on the fact that the woman is for the home, the man takes on the expenses, or the woman is in charge of all the household chores. ... I came with my partner, we both arrived together in Phoenix. But the first stage was still difficult. It was difficult for him to see me unfold in work, an atmosphere that was for men. He also adapted to seeing his woman go out and work, that she earns as much as he. There were some fights, maybe because we came from [Mexico] and the custom that the woman is

for the home but we came here to work. But those differences faded away.”

In the reflection of her adaptation to life in Phoenix, Joana shares how her adaptation created initial problems in her relationship with her husband in the restructuring of their roles within the relationship.

Migrating as a family unit, Esperanza’s migration to the U.S. was determined by her parents when she was seventeen. She reflects how her initial adaptation to life in Phoenix was easy and positive and Esperanza was automatically enrolled in high school:

“Arriving here was a big change, a good one looking at it materialistically. Emotionally was what hurt the most because a lot of people stayed behind, you leave behind a lot of stuff... So then once we got here we began to adapt, or I started adapting to this new life, to this new world because everything was so different, everything was so beautiful... The first thing that I thought, obviously I was going to school. And I was able to enroll, they enrolled me...”

However for Esperanza, faced with a new culture and a new language at the age of seventeen made adaptation to life in Phoenix more difficult than initially perceived:

“After a while you become... you start realizing the differences that exist, or that make us feel the difference. Such as the language,

how they look at us, how they treat us. ... So the experience of staying here was good and bad because it was at an age, for those of us who get here as adolescents, where you don't adapt to the rhythm of life here because our rhythm is different. Maybe it can be worse, maybe better, but it's different and adapting is difficult at the age of an adolescent, or younger no? ... The shame of not being able to speak English, the shame of how the other girls your age looked at you... like, 'Why don't you talk?' And sometimes those same people that spoke Spanish like me would say, 'You'll learn soon.' But it's not the same kind of support that one might need. So at 17 years old you're a little embarrassed to say something that isn't right and such."

Esperanza found her difficulty with the new language and the new culture as the principal obstacle to her adaptation to life in Phoenix. Although having migrated as a part of a family unit that allowed for her to arrive in an apartment with her family, Esperanza's family was also unfamiliar with life in the U.S. Unlike the examples shared by Alba, Dolores, and Joana, Esperanza did not have a support network who was familiar with life in Phoenix who could help her navigate life in Phoenix and maybe alleviate the pressure placed by Esperanza on her language difficulties.

Esperanza's identification of the limited support available as a reason behind her difficulty adapting is an issue shared by both Sofia and Perla in sharing

the difficulties they faced adapting to life in Phoenix. In her story, Sofia shares how she and her husband considered migrating to the U.S. after friends told them about the job opportunities available in Phoenix. Sofia admits that she and her husband came to Phoenix in search of the “American Dream” with the plan to stay for a year to save enough money to build their home in Mexico. Upon arriving, Sofia and her husband were able to stay at their friend’s apartment for six months while her husband adapted to life and work in Phoenix. However, as Sofia shares, these friends did not provide support beyond that of temporary shelter:

“I didn’t know anyone, I didn’t know where to take my children to the doctor... it was actually a little difficult to confront such a drastic change such as the language and well a different country and not knowing anyone. ... [We arrived] in an apartment with a family. They invited us to stay in their home and we stayed there for six months. After that we moved to an apartment. Those two years that I tell you when my son was two years old when I arrived here and it was another two years for him to start school. Those two years were very difficult for me because my two kids and I were in an apartment... waiting for my husband to come home because I didn’t dare even go to the store to buy a gallon of milk. Now I do, but really, when you come here it’s tough because you don’t how to ask for a gallon of milk. And you get frustrated. Also, the people who said we would be better here, you can say

they turned their backs on us. So you can say we were along. Well, we were alone here. And it was tough for me and for my children because we would spend those stays locked up in the apartment.”

Through her story, Sofia paints the picture of how foreign arriving in a new country and not knowing the language can be. Unlike the accounts of the women who had the support of a social network who could have been consulted with questions of where to take your child to the doctor, how to ask for a gallon of milk in English, or simply knowing if you can get a ticket for jay walking, Sofia found herself alone without a reference of information to help in her adaptation to live in Phoenix.

However, Sofia’s story of adaptation improves when she enrolls her oldest son in the headstart program:

“When the oldest turned four years old that was when I went to the Headstart Program and it was the relief I found for not being in my country. Because they gave us so many resources to be able to go to the hospital, where there was a hospital, how to do the paperwork to go... how to simply take a bus... They started giving us basic English, and actually that’s where I found out that here you can do a lot of things being a volunteer. That’s where I began [as a volunteer] in this country. ... there are a lot of things you can do and they support those people who volunteer. And that’s where

I started and they sent me to a leadership course, a self-esteem course, self-improvement, and also a course for mothers.”

Sofia’s account gives insight to the importance of not only social networks but social resources in the adaptation of Mexican immigrant women in Phoenix.

Upon arrival, Sofia’s story was filled difficulty. However, upon gaining access to the resources provided by her son’s Headstart program Sofia began developing the skills she would later implement in her volunteer work in Phoenix.

Much like Sofia, Perla also found herself alone in the navigation of her new life in Phoenix without the support of family or friends. Perla and her husband migrated to the U.S. with her son and grand-daughter with the plan to stay for two years and work to save enough money to open a business in Mexico. Perla also decided to migrate to the U.S. to reunite with her son she had not seen for ten years who had been living in the U.S. Perla and her family arrived with her son and stayed with him upon arriving in Phoenix. Upon arrival, however, Perla tells the story of the limited support she received from her son living in the U.S.:

“... unfortunately I didn’t like what I experienced. I didn’t like it because they just set you loose in a place you don’t know, I got lost. I got lost here [on the street walking] without knowing the language. ... So I would be [on the street] and I would ask, Excuse me do you speak Spanish? And they would tell me, no, ‘nothing’. So then I said, ‘nothing’ must mean no, *nada*. So I ask and ask...

until I find a woman that was on a golf cart and I tell her, excuse me, do you happen to know [Spanish]? But I was terrified, I think she saw my face and noticed my anguish. And she tells me *perfectamente*. ... So she takes me to a high school, let's me into the office like if she knew me because she left me alone in the office. ... I called [my son], they agreed to go pick me up and it turns out that they never picked me up. It was getting dark. What did I have to do? Go back walking, following where I knew the bus had come. And there I go. Not because I didn't have money, but because they had changed the route [of the bus] because they were fixing the streets. So they were re-routed and I didn't know the way. I came back walking in plain heat. That was when I knew what heat was like here in Phoenix, 120 degrees fahrenheit. I was dying of heat... I had never been in such extreme heat like now. Once I saw the Wal Mart, I went straight in to get a soda, or water, whatever because I felt my lips were drying. And I then saw how I was going to get to my son's house and there I went... and when I get there I see that my son is laughing. ... They never told me, look mom you're going to get this bus to this place, you're going to get off at this place. Never. Just like that they set me loose, figure it out on your own."

Perla's story of how she got lost while learning how to use the public bus system is a stark contrast to the stories shared by Alba, Dolores and Joana. Like Sofia, Perla felt she was lost in a city where she did not know the language and where she had minimal support from her family. Like Perla and Sofia, Esperanza also identifies language as a primary obstacle in her difficulty adapting to life in Phoenix. In contrast to the stories shared by Alba, Dolores, and Joana, who in spite of not knowing the language still expressed that their adaptations were relatively easy because of the strong social or familial networks that helped them navigate their new lives in Phoenix. The information shared by these women on adaptation their adaptation experiences can serve to inform social service providers in Phoenix of the gaps that exist for Mexican immigrant women upon arrival in their attempts to navigate new systems for themselves and for their children. Although the English as the Official Language Act of 2006 along with HB 2008 has limited access to public services for non-English speaking, undocumented immigrants, lessons can be learned from Sofia's experience with her son's Headstart program on alternative ways to help Mexican immigrant women who do not have strong social networks upon arrival.

CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL GENDER AND FAMILY ROLE

Either in Mexico before their immigration to the U.S. or as a result of their immigration to the U.S., all six women shared stories of how they have challenged their traditional gender and family roles in the redefinition of their realities. For Alba, this redefinition came in response to her divorce and how she

defined her family. In her decision to face her fear of divorcing her husband and making a life of her own, Alba states:

“We would go back to the same things, he would ask for opportunities... but no, it didn’t work. For me, family is very important. My daughters and I make up our family. So as a single mother I decided to come here. I brought my daughters here.”

Releasing herself from the standard family structures of a mother, father, and children, Alba’s decision to put her family before this standard structure redefined for her what it meant to be a family. Alba accepted her new role as a single mother. For Perla, this challenge also occurred in Mexico in her decision to leave her abusive husband. In explaining why she left, Perla shares:

“My dreams are different. I want to have a home for my children, I want to give my children something better, I don’t want them to live what I’m living. ... I left where I paid the rent, where I paid everything. I was earning more than him, he never accepted that.”

Perla identifies her husband’s inability to accept that she was the primary wage earner in the household. Like Alba, Perla broke away from the traditional family structure to become a single mother and by doing so be able to provide a better life for herself and her children.

In her story, Dolores identifies:

“As a woman in the United States, regarding equality, it’s equal. In Mexico sometimes you’re more repressed by *machismo*.”

Joana expands on the *machismo* described by Dolores by sharing her story of how she perceives women's roles in Mexico based on her lived experience and how this differs from the role she has established for herself here in Phoenix:

“In Mexico I had my son at eighteen and for me it was like if everything ended. Your parents tell you, well that's as far as you'll go. You decided to have a child, now you have to dedicate yourself to your home and to take care of kids. Your husband will work, you will serve him. ... the man takes on the expenses, or the woman is in charge of all the household chores. ... Over there it's like that's as far as you'll go for your [personal] development. To continue studying and such. Because you focus... you have a child, you're at home. So for me arriving in Phoenix and seeing that it's not like that... Okay, maybe I don't have a degree but there is an economic security that makes you feel safe and say that maybe I didn't study but I can start a business. I can do a lot of things. My husband works and I work, that whole thing of 'I'll support you' or 'I'll pay for everything' doesn't exist. There are two entries of money for the family. Male dominance isn't there, where you're submitted to something because of the economic situation. For me here, this way of living is good for me. It makes me feel good.”

As previously mentioned in addressing her husband's unease with her working outside of the household, both her and her husband came to the U.S. to work and save money. By adhering to their original migration goal, Joana is able to

challenge the established roles where a wife stays at home to take care of the children and the husband and is financially dependent on the husband. Her migration to Phoenix has created the conditions where Joana can challenge traditional gender and family roles and be able to create for herself a financial security that she recognizes can build towards her future aspirations of starting a business.

In her pursuit of what she feels is a more constructive life, Esperanza chose to break away from the traditional family role of a housewife:

“After some time, the babies came, the children. So I dedicated myself to the children, but I began to feel that it couldn’t be just that there was more. For me as a woman I’d say, ‘Okay, I wake up late, I go to bed late, I take the kids to school, and what? Am I stuck here?’ I would say, no, this isn’t right.”

Her search for a job and her experience working lead Esperanza to further challenge her role but this time through the lens of a Mexican immigrant woman in the U.S. work force. Esperanza challenges the notion of Mexican immigrant women categorized as cleaners, housekeepers and babysitters:

“Because here they already perceive you as a Mexican woman so... well the Mexican woman is the one that cleans the store. And they don’t know that maybe I’m the one that’s up front [at the register]. And that’s where the difference is. We can do so much more and I think that there are a lot of us that are tied up by something. It’s a

string that you can't see but it's something that has us [tied up]. Because we can't advance much farther. We would like to, of course we would like to be in something different, doing something different. But our [documentation] situation, the language, how we look, how they perceive us Mexican women, [they tell us] you can't do this..."

In her challenge of the role of the Mexican woman who cleans, Esperanza is not diminishing the dignity of this work but instead challenging it in order to redefine how Mexican immigrant women are viewed in the U.S. In her critique, Esperanza shares that Mexican immigrant women aspire and can achieve roles outside of those assigned to them (cleaners, housekeepers, babysitters) but are judged by the limitations they face such as language and documentation status that often does not allow them to explore other employment options.

Through her exploration of volunteerism through her participation with her son's Headstart program, Sofia has become active in her community and has organized members of her neighborhood to create access to much needed resources. However, her community organizing has been met with a certain amount of hesitance from her husband. Sofia shares:

"... one of the things that has also been an obstacle to do volunteer work and be active in the community has been in part my husband, my partner. ... Maybe it sounds bad, but he has a lot of *machismo*. That the woman is in the house making food, doing chores. And

they're not good for more than that. So when he sees things growing, that I'm growing, it's like a lot of Hispanic or Mexican men say, 'I have to stop this one because she's getting out of the crate.' ... But I've learned how to manage those things, but at the beginning it was an huge obstacle to not be able to do it with the support of your partner. And on the contrary, that they your volunteer work seem less. He makes it seem like if it's something without value."

In spite this obstacle created by her husband and the belief that a woman's place is working in the home, Sofia has decided to step away from this role as housewife and redefine herself as a community organizer here in Phoenix. Simply said, Sofia shares what her reason for challenging her role as a housewife and pursuing her role as a community organizer:

"Because I'm not happy being a housewife and washing dishes. That's why."

In challenging their traditional gender and family roles, either in Mexico or in the U.S., these six women have decided to do away with the traditional gender and family roles imposed about them either by tradition or culture (as identified in their accounts) to redefine themselves in pursuit of a better life for themselves and their family.

RESILIENCY

In sharing their stories, Alba, Esperanza, Perla, Sofia, Joana and Dolores build upon existing literature on research of migration from a gendered perspective. Their stories share information on how Mexican immigrant women experience migration in Phoenix through “woman-centered subjectivity” lens that “includes [narratives of] the lived experience and agency” of each woman (Télliez, 2008, p. 547). From these “lived experiences and agency”, all six women describe how they have adapted to life in Phoenix and have challenged traditional roles in the construction of their new lives either in Mexico or upon arrival in Phoenix. But what should be addressed is how these women adapted to life in the U.S. and challenged traditional gender and family roles in such a contentious, anti-immigrant city like Phoenix, Arizona. In sharing their stories, women have also shared accounts of their resiliency in spite of these policies listed in Chapter 2 that have created barriers in the navigation of their daily lives.

Although all six women arrived in Phoenix in different times, the U.S and Arizona’s history of anti-immigrant policy began long before the arrival of SB 1070. U.S. immigration policy before and after the Bracero Program has restricted undocumented immigrants from working in the U.S. In Phoenix, this restriction was further enforced with Arizona’s “Employer Sanctions Law” of 2008 and components of SB 1070 passed in 2010. And yet all six women have found and maintained work in Phoenix in spite of these restrictions.

In Alba's story, as the woman who has been in Phoenix the longest with 21 years in Phoenix, her extended work trajectory as a housekeeper has given her an equal amount of work experience. Her story describes a process of working for a series of families, learning of the next job opportunity through word of mouth, and negotiating her pay in every new work situation. However in Alba's current place of employment, Alba was able to move beyond the standard negotiations of the informal market to be able to determine her own wages. She says:

“You know how a lot of time [they tell you] I'll pay you this much, I'll pay you that much,... they always set [your wage]. I was surprised that this person... Because they chose me, they were the ones that wanted me, because someone had spoken well of me. So then she tells me, ... you will show up to work on this date and now tell me how much you want to earn, how much is it that you want to earn? Like that. Wow! I said. I have never heard this!”

In spite of current Arizona laws that have cracked down and criminalized the employment of undocumented immigrants, Alba was not only able to find employment but has placed herself in a negotiating position where she can determine the worth of her work in her new place of employment.

As a trained chef and former food truck worker, Perla found herself in a difficult situation when House Bill 2102 which requires individuals to prove

citizenship in order to apply and receive a food handlers card to work in the service industry was passed in Arizona in 2011. Perla shares:

“Right now they’ve blocked you at every side. For example, since I handle food, I had heard only rumors of what you needed in order to get your [food handlers] card from the [Health Department]. You needed a Social Security number. I never stay in doubt and so I went and they tell me that they wanted an ID from Phoenix. Unfortunately it wasn’t possible.”

But in spite of these restrictions created by local policies, Perla has still found ways to earn money and help with family expenses:

“The little that I do work, wherever I go people ask how I pay for my expenses. Because the one that works is [my husband]. But he’s paying the rent, electricity, he’s paying all the bills. I’m in charge of the food because I don’t want a man to say he’s feeding my children. To feed them, what I do is if they give me four or five hours of work, I go and work them and I bring back a little money. So then I save all that and it’s the way that I’ve been able to pay for my expenses to get ahead.”

In light of the direct attack of HB 2102 on Perla’s primary source of income, Perla has created alternative sources of income that range from small catering jobs to cleaning houses. Not one to give up lightly, Perla states:

“You need to know how to succeed and you have to have a different mentality. To say: I have to be able, I have to be able and

I have to succeed because I can't fail here where it's not my country.”

Perla is also an active member of the Arizona Worker Rights Center where she has completed their leadership course and volunteer in their Anti-Wage Theft Campaign.

Dolores' story draws from her violent past to create a safe future for her children. Although her story shares a smooth transition to life in the U.S., her ability to secure a safe childhood for her children in Phoenix in light of Arizona's heavy criminalization of Latinos and racial profiling speaks to the strength and resiliency of her role as a mother to her children in the U.S.:

“... in spite of being illegal you have protection that no one can touch you, no one can hurt you, as a couple or however. They can't do it you can speak out and defend yourself or search for help. That I do like here, that they teach you another way of being.”

Although there are laws in place that protect children from abuse in the U.S., a huge factor in the safety of Dolores' children is Dolores herself by raising them with a mentality that differs from her parents in a city where she can provide for their financial and physical safety.

Joana shared of her entry into a job where only men were typically hired. Through her hard work and perseverance, Joana has kept this job for the 8 years

she has been in Phoenix. But beyond keeping her job, Joana has forged her place in this male dominated restaurant:

“In the first position they gave me, they gave me the opportunity to work with them and directly explained to me that this opportunity was not given to women because [according to them] men have the speed, they’re stronger to carry things. But thank God, I was able to do it and I did it and I believe that as a woman I’m opening paths for other women. And I’m still there. I’ve kept myself at that job. I think my wage is the same as that earned by a man there.”

Not just checking in and out at the beginning and end of the day, Joana has placed herself in a position of equality in her workplace but is also changing how women are perceived in this environment, forging a path for women who come after her.

Esperanza’s challenges of how Mexican immigrant women are perceived by U.S. society and her desire for opportunities beyond stereotypes display her desires for continued growth professionally and personally:

“We’re not only good at cleaning bathrooms, we’re not only good at cleaning houses. We’re not only good at cooking, we can do a lot more things. A lot of people say, ‘they take away our jobs.’ But in what way? We don’t take away anything. We work, not better than anyone else, we work just the same. We can, us women, get whichever job. Whichever we want. But they have to

give us the opportunity. Or we have to look for it. I don't know if it's looking for it or finding it or that they give it to us.”

These opportunities have been found in other activities carried out by Esperanza. With the passage of SB 1070, Esperanza and her husband began attending the Arizona Worker Rights Center. Esperanza like Perla is an active member of the Arizona Worker Rights Center where she has completed their leadership course and continues to volunteer in various outreach efforts:

“Now that we're members of the [Worker Rights Center], it's something that at first filled me because I felt useful to society. First for Hispanics because there are a lot of injustices. And then for my self-esteem I would say, 'I know what they said to me isn't right.' Maybe they didn't do it to me, but they did it to someone else. So then you say, we can do this. Imagine if all of us had the education we needed? *No hombre*, we'd have a Hispanic for president.”

Sofia began organizing her neighborhood community in reaction to Arizona's anti-immigrant laws. Drawing from her lived experience of finding herself in a new country without knowing the local language or local laws, using the resources given to her in the Headstart programs she participated in, Sofia began a community organization. Sofia and her neighbors come together to address issues that include neighborhood clean ups, access to medical care, civil rights information, or community get togethers, to name a few:

“A lot of women, our members, are like me too. We’re all from Mexico. We’ve made like an alliance, like a sisterhood where we have a lot of knowledge because we’ve gone to the same meetings, various workshops. So they come up to us and ask us, ‘How can I find a way for my dad to receive help? He just got here from Mexico and he got sick.’ And so... one of the women [from the organization] is the one who is in charge of taking her to the [hospital]. There are two hospitals that accept the elderly who have problems. And so my *compañera* helps her, walks her through it, all that. Sometimes it’s my turn, we rotate. Depends how we’re doing. So then that woman who received that help from us, she transmits that to ... people she knows. And that’s what we like, it satisfies us that our knowledge will benefit someone else.”

Through this community organization, Sofia along with her neighbors have created alternative structures to respond to Arizona’s restrictive, anti-immigrant policies that limit access to public services and create a sense of insecurity in communities throughout Phoenix. In addition to helping her community, Esperanza tells how her work as a community organizer directly helped her in her adaptation to life in Phoenix:

“In comparison to how I arrived, it was like I was in a jar and it was covered. And I could only be in that jar, in that space. In

comparison to how I am right now, it's like I'm in the entire world.”

DISCUSSION

The women featured in these oral histories are successfully carrying out their lives in a city that would otherwise be seen as inhospitable and threatening because of its anti-immigrant policies that have instituted a culture of fear and insecurity in the immigrant population of Phoenix. All six women maintain steady jobs, are raising children, and living normal day to day lives. It requires great strength and perseverance to carry out what would be considered a normal life in city like Phoenix. The stories shared by all six women share levels of resiliency that demand recognition for having been achieved in a city like Phoenix. The lived experiences of these women not only expand current literature by sharing how Mexican immigrant women are resilient in spite of anti-immigrant policies and sentiment in Phoenix, but should spur continued research on their lived experiences to continue understand the complex experiences that shape their lives and how these women have come to thrive.

Chapter 5

REDEFINICION/REDEFINITION

By sharing the stories of these six Mexican immigrant women of Phoenix, Arizona, this thesis adds depth to the literature on Mexican immigrant women in the United States. As with Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994, 2001), all the women except for Esperanza (who was brought to the U.S. as a minor) told stories of being active agents in the decision to immigrate to the U.S. Although a minor when she arrived in the U.S., Esperanza as an adult is key in the mediation of her family's success in the U.S. Additionally, much like the analysis carried out by Hodagneu-Sotelo (2001) of domestic workers in Los Angeles, each Mexican immigrant woman has shaped and negotiated her participation in the labor force in Phoenix, in spite of laws such as "Employer Sanctions" that prohibit this participation.

Similarly to González (1998) and Hirsch's (2007) study, all six women are correcting representations of what it means to be a Mexican immigrant women living in Phoenix and challenging gender and family roles in their daily lives in the U.S. Although some of the women began this challenge of roles and the process of redefinition in Mexico, as Hirsch (2007) posits, this challenge and redefinition was made easier in the U.S. where "En el norte la mujer manda..." (p. 438). By choosing to work outside of the home, participating in community organizations, or aspiring for future personal development, the women featured in these oral histories are challenging the idea of a woman's place as the home as well as her work. In the pursuit of their migration goal to save money, for added

financial stability for their homes, or for personal fulfillment, women have broken away from these traditional gender roles and have explored a life of their own by working outside of the home.

Furthermore, their adaptation to life in Phoenix in spite of anti-immigrant policies as well as their challenging of traditional gender and family roles, these oral histories teach us that the women who shared their stories are redefining what it means to be a Mexican immigrant woman in Phoenix through their resiliency. As Yung (1998) said in her oral history of Chinese American women, "... oral history allows ordinary people like my subjects to speak for themselves, fill historiographical gaps, and challenge stereotypes as well as validate their lives" (p. 7). By sharing their stories, these six Mexican immigrant women interviewed are filling in what Yung (1998) refers to as "historical gaps", but what can also be referred to as gaps in the immigration experiences of Mexican immigrant women: What decisions were made to overcome difficult situations? How important is it to have a social network when arriving? How do you feel you are perceived by others in this country? The women in these oral histories challenge the very stereotypes that are propagated by society:

"As a woman I feel that a woman is not the woman they always make us out to be. Mistreated, beaten, no. I feel that here women... there's equality." - Joana

and:

“Because here they already perceive you as a Mexican woman so... well the Mexican woman is the one that cleans the store. And they don’t know that maybe I’m the one that’s up front [at the register].” - Esperanza

As Delgado Bernal (1998) states in her oral history of young Chicanas in the 1968 student protests stated, “Oral histories, grounded in critical feminisms, provides a means of breaking through dominant ways of knowing and reclaiming an alternative history...” (p. 115). Through the use of oral history in this thesis (and in other academic research), Mexican immigrant women are not only breaking away from the dominant ways of knowing that are usually produced by academia, but they are claiming their life’s experiences as their own and determining the knowledge created based on these lived experiences, in turn creating histories beyond that of victim and towards that of strength and resiliency.

Additionally, in the sharing of their histories, the women interviewed for this thesis have redefined their roles here in the United States as Mexican immigrant women beyond how they feel they are perceived by society and beyond what I argue academia has focused on:

“If each woman was asked what is it that we would like most to do instead of cleaning or take care of kids or be serving. I bet you they would have different responses and you would say, ‘You would really like to do that? You can’t tell...’ Of course we do! Why wouldn’t we? I would also like to be in an office, sitting down, receiving phone calls. Or fighting in the court with the judge. Of course we would like that. With what little English we can speak, they only see half of us. So yes I would like to, well personally, I would have liked to have done something different.” - Esperanza

and:

“As a woman I feel that a woman is not the woman they always make us out to be. Mistreated, beaten, no. I feel that here for women... there’s equality. Here one as a woman has a lot of opportunities.” - Joana

By creating a space where the women interviewed could share their oral histories and by continuing to create spaces where communities such as these are free to give their perspectives, share their concerns and express their desires for change, academic research will best reflect the most salient issues concerning communities being researched. The oral histories included in this thesis have given us access to a wealth of knowledge created by Mexican Immigrant women. As previously cited in Russel y Rodríguez (2008) oral histories of U.S. born Mexican women and/or Chicanas who participated in the 1968 student protests states that the women, it was found that women “... exhibit feminist ideals and sensibilities, (re)define family, name terms of social justice, and pass on lessons of women’s power” (p. 308). These feminist ideals, redefinition of family, and definition of social justice can be seen in, but not limited to, the following excerpts:

“For me, family is very important. My daughters and I make up our family. So as a single mother I decided to come here. I brought my daughters here.”
- Alba

“We’re not only good at cleaning bathrooms, we’re not only good at cleaning houses. We’re not only good at cooking, we can do a lot more things.”
- Esperanza

“In the first position they gave me, they gave me the opportunity to work with them and directly explained to me that this opportunity was not given to women because [according to them] men have the speed, they’re stronger to carry things. But thank God, I was able

to do it and I did it and I believe that as a woman I'm opening paths for other women.” - Joana

But it is only in the creation of spaces like those created by oral history, where redefinition can occur. As Flores (2000) states, “Narratives become a common tactic of resistance partly because of their accessibility” (p. 691). This tactic of resistance to challenge the propagated notion of Mexican immigrant women and victims of violence and challenging academia and academic research through the use of oral history as a decolonizing methodology is made stronger by the fact that the women interviewed determined the information provided in the interviews, created the knowledge and therefore redefined themselves in academia and in our society by sharing their oral histories.

With redefinition comes reconstruction. Through these oral histories the reader learns how Mexican immigrant women are redefining their roles in the U.S. in order to assert their place in our society. By redefining their role in our society and carving a space for their lived experience in knowledge production, Mexican immigrant women show that they will not be ‘othered’ by society but instead placed at the center, as active agents in the production of knowledge and as contributing members of our society. As F. E. González (1998) writes in her pursuit of creating alternative subversive narratives and realities amongst *Mexicanas* and Chicanas, *Mexicanas* and Chicanas speaking their voice use their “agency to create subversive narrative to challenge the representations that render *Mexicanas* vulnerable and dismissed from US civic society” (p. 97).

The Mexican immigrant women interviewed share experiences of vulnerability but also share stories of strength and resiliency in the creation of their lives in Phoenix, Arizona, in spite of the political and societal issues they may confront. The women featured in these oral histories shape our communities with their presence, contribute to them with the knowledge drawn from their experiences and individual expertise, and improve our society in their challenge of these representations for the benefit of future generations. From a social justice standpoint, the society they live in and contribute to as mothers, grandmothers, members of the labor force, or community organizers, needs to begin acknowledging their contributions and create spaces for these women in our societies. Mexican immigrant women do not exist in the periphery or in the shadows of our society but are agents of change in the redefinition of the roles in the U.S. As Flores (2000) put it, “Survival is the ultimate resistance” (p. 701). The women who created these oral histories are surviving, are resisting, but they are going beyond survival and are thriving.

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APPENDIX

SUS HISTORIAS COMPLETAS/THEIR COMPLETE STORIES

The following are compilations of each woman's interview transcription. Based on each woman's interview transcript, minor edits were made to showcase each woman's story.

Although minor edits were made for flow, not a single part of their interview was omitted.

“So if they want to tell you ‘poor you’ or make you a victim, well with me that doesn’t work.”

Alba, 54 years old.

Single mother of four.

Has lived in Phoenix 21 years.

“The woman stays at home, the man is the one who goes out to work.”

“I arrived in Phoenix, Arizona 21 years ago and it was a little difficult for me to make that decision after going through a divorce, after having been married 17 years. The relationship unfortunately didn’t work and I decided to come here with my daughters, here to the United States because I wanted a better life for my daughters. It was a difficult reality for me because I was someone who dedicated herself to her home in Mexico. I had never worked, as is the custom for some Mexicans. The woman stays at home, the man is the one who goes out to work. When I divorced, I went out into the world, for me [it was] very difficult because I was always at home taking care of my family, my daughters. So I looked for work... And I remember that for me the work was tough, I worked when there was a high demand for soft drinks which was in the summer and there was high consumption of soft drinks. They required over time to work, to make more of the soft drink. So then the necessity influenced you, if they asked you to work more time than your regular hours, then sometimes we doubled the hours. So then when I would get home, my mother is the one who would prepare dinner and everything. And sometimes I would get home so tired that I didn’t know if I should rest or eat. Now that I’m counting I think I was 32 or 33, more or less. My sister’s sister-in-law that was here in the U.S., she was the one who told me to come here. That here there were other opportunities. And so then I came here, and I brought my daughters. I think it was a couple of months lapse between my divorce and making this decision.

“So as a single mother I decided to come here.”

“I am not going to speak for all men, I’m going to speak for him, the way he was acting, the friends, he drank too much, another woman in his life... So then that’s something that was very difficult, when you don’t want to tolerate that anymore. You make a decision. How I made it, I don’t know. How I literally said no more. But as they say, once your sack is filled with too many pebbles you realize it’s too much to carry. So that’s when you make that decision. In my case, I didn’t have a mom whom I felt would support me as a mom, to tell what I was going through. When I would mention it to her, she would say “too bad, it’s your cross and you have to carry it,” the classic line. The culture my mom comes from is one that says if you marry, you’re married for life and tend to your husband, to serve, to serve. But in my case I didn’t want to anymore.

“My mentality was different. Because while I was married I studied middle school and then finished middle school and started high school. I wanted to be a criminal law lawyer to defend the rights. So that was something that really interested me because in Mexico, well since I was there, I saw a lot of injustice. So I wanted to do that, be a lawyer. I had about three months left to finish what was high school. When I was almost done, and with good grades, is when my daughters’ father started with other women and things like that. Well I felt betrayed. In a 17

year relationship and for that to all of a sudden happen, you can't think about anything else. So then, in that moment of immaturity or I don't know what it was, I got my notebooks and I threw them away, I didn't want anything. I didn't want to go back. They called me from the school, talked to me, why was I going to leave if I only had a couple of months left to graduate. But I can't anymore, I can't. I felt humiliated by the father of my daughters. So then I said, "I don't have to anymore." We would go back to the same things, he would ask for opportunities... but no, it didn't work. For me, family is very important. My daughters and I make up our family. So as a single mother I decided to come here. I brought my daughters here.

"... I filled myself with courage, I don't know how."

"To cross a border, and another country, it was something really scary for me. There was a lot of fear because it meant me leaving my land, as they say. But at the same time I filled myself with courage, I don't know how. Just like I made the decision to get divorced. I thought it was no longer a good relationship. The father of my daughters became an alcoholic, and back then for me it was very sad but I was living in a situation I didn't want. I had already had an abusive childhood, very sad. So I left my home very young, before I was 15 years old, because of the situation I was living at home. I had a step-father and all that. I met the father of my daughters and everything was going well and I had my four children. This story is a little difficult but at the same time it comforts me because I left that place to come here and have a new life because over there it was just too difficult.

"... the buses run in one straight line."

"We came here and we had to learn 'los camiones', or how they say here 'el bus'. It was another difficulty because I didn't know much. My sister's sister-in-law would say, 'Look, the buses run in one straight line. You go straight and if you get lost, that same bus is going to bring you back because they run straight. On one side or the other, but they run straight.' And like that, I struggled, we would listen to the radio or in the newspaper that a certain place needing people to work. So we would get the address and there I go. Since she had more time here, she knew [things]. She would tell me, you're going to go this way on this bus and you better not get lost, and this one is going to take you over there and then you're going to get the other one going that way and then you'll get there. And the times riding on the bus, as they say, I met a young woman. And there all the Hispanas talked to each other when they got out of housekeeping and babysitting jobs. And so we started talking and I told her I didn't have a stable job, I had just gone to clean this one house... They told me, 'There's a woman that's been here for many years and she works as a housekeeper and she got me a job taking care of a handicapped woman. Call her, who knows maybe there's some that is hiring.' The woman had been here many years, so a lot of anglo-saxons knew her. So I called her and then I met her. I went to see her and she tells me, 'Let's see, where will you go? If something comes up I'll let you know.' What happened was there this young woman worked, she had to go. I don't know why she left, but the handicapped woman was left... she didn't have anyone to help her. But this other woman always found her people to go help her. So she told me, 'Let's see how strong you are. Because for this woman, you're going to have to pick her up from her wheel chair and everything.' I told her that

it didn't matter, I would try. And so there I was... She would pay me very little but I never complained because I would say, 'Thank God' because with what she gave me, I didn't think about how little she would give me but instead I would say that with this money I had enough to buy milk for my daughters, eggs, tortillas.

"... I would say I don't need English to take care of children, not even to clean."

"The woman [who found me my first job] noticed that I was efficient in housekeeping work. One time she called me and said, '... I have an interview for you. It's a married couple and they're coming from New York. The wife had a gallery and the husband is a doctor. The doctor is coming to work here and they have three daughters.' And then she told me, 'I am warning you. If they ask you if you speak English, you say yes.' I would say to myself, how am I going to say yes if I haven't even gone to school. 'Well you say yes because you need the job. You will say yes, figure out how. But when they ask you, you say yes. To everything they tell you, yes.' I went to the interview and the woman asked, Do you speak English? Yes, the other woman told her, she then asked me and I told her 'yes'. So they gave me the job even though I didn't know English. I would say, well I don't English to take care of children, not even to clean. I already had three children, because then I had three, the [fourth] was born here. I don't need it, to work here I need my hands and my eyes to know what I'm going to do. I don't need English. And to take care of children, well I had already taken care of three, I have experience.

"But before that, when I first arrived I worked with a French man and a Korean woman with whom I worked so that my friend could go to Mexico, but they didn't want just anybody there and asked who to find someone, that's why I went. I learned a lot from the kids, who are now big, I learned with them because they would tell me that they wanted something and I didn't understand them but I would tell them 'show me'. Donde? Where? Take me. With very short words. And they would tell me, I want a cookie, and I would say, Where? Where? And they would take me... they would point with their little fingers... and sometimes, since I took care of them, I would watch the TV with them and I would [learn] a little bit there. With them I learned a lot, these kids taught me a lot... And the wife would cook but I would help her chop things. She would tell me things but I didn't understand her but [I had] my intuition of what she was cooking, and she would tell me 'chop, chop, chop' and then give me the celery or something. And she would place them and then told me 'chop, chop, chop' but would do the movement. I would say to myself, well, so many years married, I obviously knew how to cook, she didn't get me too green, so to say. So then I would hurry, and I would chop everything and she then prepared the meal but I was also in the kitchen. So I would pay close attention to see how she was cooking, how she was going to make the soup, what she put in it. For example In Mexico we mainly use cilantro, here you use parsley. And other things like that. So then I watched. I was paying attention. So then by the time I arrived at the other job I had already learned a couple of words.

"... from bad to worse..."

"... de Guate-mala para irme a Guate-peor..."

“From there it was a little sad... the couple bought another house, well, they made the wife a house, very big, very beautiful. And well they lasted very little, I don't know why they didn't adapt, but all their family lived up in New York. And what was my surprise, sadly, is that they were selling their house and moving... Yes, it was really sad for me because I had grown to care a lot for the girls [I took care of]. I felt bad sometimes because I would see that they would go to take pictures of the house when the couple wasn't there and I would wonder, why are they coming to take photos? They're so weird. But it was me taking care of things like if it was my home. And they didn't want to tell me anything, I had already been working with them for a couple of years, I think it was about 7 years. They felt bad telling me, they didn't know how to tell me. And also when I was working there, my youngest daughter who now is 16 was born and they grew to love her too.

“That time I had met this other person [in Phoenix] who is the father of this daughter that was born here. But as they say, *sali de Gaute-mala para irme a Guate-peor* (I left a bad situation to get into a worse one). I've noticed that a lot of people have the mentality that we women who come here divorced are ruined because we've already divorced... But no, I came with very strong, reinforced values. There was a lot of verbal abuse and it was even physical abuse. Until I also made the decision to say, no more. No more. So I was alone when I found myself without a job.

“... they chose me, they were the ones that wanted me...”

“So then with the married couple that left, that did leave me with a strong depression. Because they were leaving, they were selling everything and I had to search, I had to search for a job for my daughters. ... That couple would have parties or dinners and a lot of people knew me. ... Someone calls me on the phone because in that house I answered the phone, there I think I understood English a bit more because I would say, ‘Hello?’ and I would answer. And so the phone rings and I answer... and I was sad then because the house was almost empty. And they say, ‘Usted es Alba (Are you Alba)?’ and I [said] *sí*. In Spanish! In Spanish! And then she said, ‘I know that those people are leaving, and there is a family that wants you to work for them.’ ‘What?’ I say, how do they know about me? And she tells me, ‘Would you like to work with them, they want someone exactly like you. They want someone responsible; they want someone with whom they can have privacy... And they interested in you.’ She didn't say, do you want to work? Want to go see the work? No. She said some people are interested in you. ... she gave me these people's telephone number who I would go to. ... Well I would call and no one answered, oh God, what am I going to do. I need to work because I need to support my daughters. And they wouldn't answer, it would go to the answering machine, and so I figured out how to leave a message [in English]. Well it turns out that these people travelled a lot. On one of those tries... the husband answered and told me that at the moment his wife wasn't home... and told me to call in a while. And I was desperately counting the minutes. So when I call, I spoke with her... she told me they were going out of town again but that she would call me on a certain date to work out when I was going to go see them. Well I was nervous... and I said, oh God, show me the way, guide me. Because I would say, before I would worry a lot, that I didn't have enough for the electricity, that I didn't have enough for other things... until I would say, God, guide me

down the correct path, you tell me... And then I would say, if this job is for me, God, you will decide. And like that, the ones that got away, okay God, you know where you're taking me.

“So when I went to see the woman I almost fall back when I saw this huge house! But this is a mansion! ... And she tells me, well this is the house... well I was scared. I said, oh God how am I going to clean this house! But I would say, I'll figure it out. My need is great. So I would take a deep breath and there... But the nicest thing, ... You know how a lot of time [they tell you] I'll pay you this much, I'll pay you that much,... they always set [your wage]. I was surprised that this person... Because they chose me, they were the ones that wanted me, because someone had spoken well of me. So then she tells me, ... you will show up to work on this date and now tell me how much you want to earn, how much is it that you want to earn? Like that. Wow! I said. I have never heard this! But since I'm also not stingy, well only what was fair, ... so I was calculating approximately how much I earned [at the other house] but this was a bigger house... so I think what I told them was too little, but for me it was a lot. But what a surprise that they agreed! So then I told them, in my broken English, I will charge you this much but see my work first. And if you like my work then you decide if I stay. And if you don't like it, well you also decide if I leave. And if you don't like my work, don't pay me. That is how transparent I am, honest, right? Well the woman was pleased, pleased. Soon enough they increased my wage by a lot. So you know what I struggled with before, that they're going to shut off my electricity. Pay the electricity or the rent or feed my daughters, and such. Until, thank God, I found this job that came to me, because I didn't go to it.

“... you decide...”

“You decide which path to take. I learned that there aren't more than two paths in this life. With so much experience, so much suffering, from my childhood, you only have two paths. One is negative and the other is positive. So you decided which one you want to take. You have the decision. We can't make ourselves out as victims because if you always live as a victim or they see you as 'poor you'... No, you decide. One time my daughter told me, Mom don't let no one, absolutely no one rob your spirit. And it's true. It's in you, you decide. As they say: for annoying words, deaf ears. So if they want to tell you 'poor you' or make you a victim, well with me that doesn't work.

“We can, us women, get whichever job. Whichever we want. But they have to give us the opportunity.”

Esperanza, 34 years old.

Married, mother of three.

Has lived in Phoenix for 17 years.

“There wasn’t a time frame, the plan was to stay here.”

“It’s been 17 years since I arrived in Phoenix, Arizona for reasons that weren’t my own. It was my parents’ decision because back then I was a minor. Family issues were what made us come the United States, to Phoenix. Arriving here was a big change, a good one looking at it materialistically. Emotionally was what hurt the most because a lot of people stayed behind, you leave behind a lot of stuff... you can say the comfort of living here in comparison to over there. But for emotional reasons and all of that, we could be okay over there. So then once we got here we began to adapt, or I started adapting to this new life, to this new world because everything was so different, everything was so beautiful and so... well apparently because you never really left your apartment where you arrived, different from what we came from or where I’m from. The experience of being here was very nice but you start noticing how everything is different when you’re adapting. It was nice for the material things but... maybe the people and their way of being and society was very different to ours.

“In the sense that, well, you have your traditions, your ways of carrying out your life, your weekends. And when you get here, you have to adapt to the laws, to life here, respect because you arrive to a place foreign to you. But you don’t stop wanting to be part of this society. After a while you become... you start realizing the differences that exist, or that make us feel the difference. Such as the language, how they look at us, how they treat us. So when you, personally when I say, ‘Okay, I’m in a place where I don’t belong but I want to belong.’ At the end of the day [that’s what it’s about] because I was going to make a life here. There wasn’t a timeframe, the plan was to stay here. So the experience of staying here was good and bad because it was at an age, for those of us who get here as adolescents, where you don’t adapt to the rhythm of life here because our rhythm is different. Maybe it can be worse, maybe better, but it’s different and adapting if difficult at the age of an adolescent, or younger no? I was 17.

“Personally, I would have preferred to continue studying...”

“The first thing that I thought, obviously I was going to go to school. And I was able to enroll, they enrolled me, but I couldn’t adapt. I was already 17 years old. The shame of not being able to speak English, the shame of how the other girls your age looked at you... like, ‘Why don’t you talk?’ And sometimes those same people that spoke Spanish like me would say, ‘You’ll learn soon.’ But it’s not the same kind of support that one might need. So at 17 years old you’re a little embarrassed to say something that isn’t right and such.

“So the second step here is to look for a job, because there isn’t another option. Personally, I would have preferred to continue studying, be something more than what I do now. Not that

humble jobs are bad, simply because I would have been a better example for my children, than what I have right now. It would be better... self-esteem wise one would feel a lot better. And they would look at you differently too. So sometimes it depends on your own situation and also depends on you. But you also have to realize that you find a way. Why? Because you find a way to adapt, to speak the way they do here, they way they act, to also want the same things. For good reasons, no? Not go for just the easy way out... of just for what you can get quickly. But working for it or doing something that will get you a better job, things like that.

“... the same life but now more constructive.”

“... after being here a while I married my husband who is also from Mexico, we were both young, experiencing something new, no? With him we didn't even have an apartment to live in or anything. But we risked it and got married. And it was all very pretty, what was for us a Mexican wedding to later realize we didn't even have a bed or a cup, nothing, we didn't even have a car! The party ended, everyone went home and the bride and groom were standing there, 'Now where are we going to go?' It was really funny and difficult because we couldn't go and get unemployment because we couldn't. We were young. So we ran to our parents', and then we ran with the sister to see if she would let us stay. So that forced us to mature. So my husband started working, and me, well I stayed at home waiting for the husband.

“After some time, the babies came, the children. So I dedicated myself to the children, but I began to feel that it couldn't be just that there was more. For me as a woman I'd say, 'Okay, I wake up late, i go to bed late, I take the kids to school, and what? Am I stuck here?' I was say, no, this isn't right. I'm not advancing and it's the same thing every day, 365 days in the year it's the same thing, not advancing, in the same thing, not going backwards or forwards. So then I decided to start working. Okay, there's the difficult part. Find somewhere to work, find someone who will take care of the children. Because, it may seem like nothing, but basically it's the mother's moral responsibility to leave your children in a place where we know that they will care for them the way we would care for them. And its difficult because first its the desire to do something for the family so that they'll be better, economically speaking. And also feel more constructive. So then the first point, the children. That's our first difficulty. Okay, fine, they're going to start going to school. They'll stay there all day... Okay, that's already a point that helps because they'll be in school. Okay. Find somewhere they'll employ you. Because if you've never worked before, you don't have that... well you don't know anything. And the third and biggest point, speaking the language. Because how are you going to communicate with people? So then it's something, well yeah, difficult. Yes, it's difficult. But after you see that you've found a job where they gave it to you. And then when you start realizing that they've kept you working in that job because they've trusted you. Because you think, 'Okay, they've kept me. I have more than a month, three months, now I have five months, now a year. Two, three years.' Okay, so then I'm doing a good job. So then you realize that, it's not just about getting up and working. It's getting up, look after the kids, where are they going to go, how are they going to be. The husband, if he's going to go to work. Go to work, put on a smiling face even if you feel bad. And from there go back and do the same life but now more constructive.

“... we had to go a lot further, a lot further.”

“When my husband and I got married, the first thing I told him was that I would not like to put my kids in front and say ‘Tell the manager that I don’t have enough to pay for rent... Go tell the manager that I need something fixed... Tell the doctor that this hurts...’ or ‘Son, turn around to the doctor can check me but tell the doctor that this hurts or is bothering me, or that I’m sick.’ No. Why? Because as a women, that is something that we have to improve upon. And thank God that up until now, I have not put my children in a position where they would feel bad or where they would be finding out that, maybe, we don’t have enough to pay for something one day. And for them to be seeing that we’re there asking for food stamps or something like that. No, they can’t see that. We like to work. Maybe we can’t earn the same. Because sometimes we can’t find work for the same reason, we don’t have the education or a good job where we could earn more money. But at the same time our work isn’t worth less. That was the point between my husband and me, that we had to go a lot further, a lot further. So that the kids, now that they’re older, can feel, ‘My dad has his small company, little by little’ or ‘My mom does this in addition to her job’. That was one of the things, that we could at least say something or that when someone speaks to us, we can respond at least something. And that we could improve ourselves. That if today I have this job, tomorrow I can get another one and better.

“Personally what I’ve decided to do is learn English. Because there are a lot of injustices happening against people that sometimes unfortunately can’t say or do something in their defense. You don’t necessarily need to be fighting with people to make them change. Maybe a good response, a good word that doesn’t bother or offend...

“... the poor man or the poor woman who just cleans.”

“The plate that we have, or the meat that is on that plate is something we worked for. That we hurt for, that we sweat for, or what we fought to have. That it’s difficult, yes, that they look at us badly, that’s the worst part. Because a lot of people, or women, of our same age but from different races sometimes don’t understand why I may have, let’s say, a ring. Because I’m Hispanic, Mexican, or whatever. But it cost me the same as it would cost her, and we also pay with the same dollars. Maybe from those same dollars she paid today and I received that money in return. Because we want to be like them. We want to be, well live the same, no? Be adapted here, and accepted. And for them not to look at us with the same way they’ve looked at us all this time, as far as women. We’re not only good at cleaning bathrooms, we’re not only good at cleaning houses. We’re not only good at cooking, we can do a lot more things. A lot of people say, ‘they take away our jobs.’ But in what way? We don’t take away anything. We work, not better than anyone else, we work just the same. We can, us women, get whichever job. Whichever we want. But they have to give us the opportunity. Or we have to look for it. I don’t know if it’s looking for it or finding it or that they give it to us. But I personally would like more opportunities to do more things to improve myself... something. But sometimes a lot of things hold you back. The way they look at you, how they talk about you. They way they perceive you. But at the same time that should give me more strength, right? To do something different.

“Yes, I’m happy here in Phoenix and I love it, I feel good here now. But it’s not how I would like to feel. Why? Because we want to live something normal, on a Sunday maybe go to church

and go back home. Or go to the park normally without them looking at us like ‘the Mexican woman’ or ‘the Hispanic man’ or the one that always working or the poor man or the poor woman who just cleans. No, we want to be something good and different and be able to get along with people that may not be of the same race but that we can get along with and so that they see what we do to have what we have.

“It’s a string that you can’t see but it’s something that has us [tied up].”

“Yes, life is very different here than in Mexico as a woman. It’s really good in a certain point here because we’re given the liberty to do a job that might be for me. But by being a Mexican woman, no. Because here they already perceive you as a Mexican woman so... well the Mexican woman is the one that cleans the store. And they don’t know that maybe I’m the one that’s up front [at the register]. And that’s where the difference is. We can do so much more and I think that there are a lot of us that are tied up to something. It’s a string that you can’t see but it’s something that has us [tied up]. Because we can’t advance much farther. We would like to, of course we would like to be in something different, doing something different. But our [documentation] situation, the language, how we look, how they perceive us Mexican women, [they tell us] you can’t do this... If they gave us the opportunity the way they give it to so many other people, we’d be advancing, advancing a lot. Because there are a lot of us with that desire, that hunger to do more and more. And say, okay, my aunt did this, but now I’m in charge of this... Okay, my mom did this for many years but now I own the restaurant and they come to eat here. Because we can do that but unfortunately there aren’t ways, we don’t have those resources, we don’t have that help so we can’t. If each woman was asked what is it that we would like most to do instead of cleaning or take care of kids or be serving. I bet you they would have different responses and you would say, ‘You would really like to do that? You can’t tell...’ Of course we do! Why wouldn’t we? I would also like to be in an office, sitting down, receiving phone calls. Or fighting in the court with the judge. Of course we would like that. With what little English we can speak, they only see half of us. So yes I would like to, well personally, I would have liked to have done something different.

“Race doesn’t matter. But we need to keep improving, and improving a lot more.”

“Now that we’re members of the [Worker Rights Center], it’s something that at first filled me because I felt useful to society. First for Hispanics because there are a lot of injustices. And then for my self-esteem I would say, ‘I know what they said to me isn’t right.’ Maybe they didn’t do it to me, but they did it to someone else. So then you say, we can do this. Imagine if all of us had the education we needed? *No hombre*, we’d have a Hispanic for president. I think we’d do a lot of things because we like to work, we like to go further than we can. And the previous generation would like our generation to do more things, and for the one the generation to come I would like them to do more. A lot more. Maybe now they’ll be the ones who instead of getting off of the van to clean, now they’ll be the ones driving and waiting to bring more people. Race doesn’t matter. But we need to keep improving, and improving a lot more.

“Since I arrived in Phoenix I’ve maintained a job where the majority of the positions are filled by men.”

Joana, 30 years old.

Married with two children.

Has lived in Phoenix for 8 years.

“... you see how life is here, and you as a woman see it differently.”

“Currently I’m 30 years old, I came to the United States at the age of 23. I have one son, I brought him here to give him a better life. For him, for me, and give him things that one doesn’t have over there. In Mexico I have my son at 18 and for me it was like if everything ended. Your parents tell you, well that’s as far as you’ll go. You decided to have a child, now you have to dedicate yourself to your home and to take care of kids. Your husband will work, you will serve him. But the economic situation made us emigrate. The option was to save some money and go back. But you get here, you see how life is here, and you as a woman see it differently. Because sometimes I think, why do they give all the credit to men saying he can do things? Why for a woman, because of the fact she’s a woman, no? I’ve always said that I don’t like a person who is *machista*, but I also don’t like a person who is a feminist. But instead an equality. The man doesn’t have to be walking all over the woman, but the woman doesn’t have to be [walking all over the man] either. So for me, I adapted to the way of life here, I liked it. Because we work, at a lot of things. Things that in Mexico wouldn’t have been possible because there the money you earn is different. So then possibly you do have to stay at home taking care of the family, and the husband is the one who has to work. That’s why I’m okay here and for my kids to give them a better education. For me it was a good transition.

“... I believe that as a woman I’m opening paths for other women.”

“I’m from the city of Oaxaca, above all the economic situation that one lives over there is different. Arriving in Phoenix I depended on the support of my siblings and thankfully I was soon able to find a job and start making a productive life. Since I arrived in Phoenix I’ve maintained a job where the majority of the positions are filled by men. I work in a restaurant in the kitchen. I’ve worked in that restaurant for the last 8 years and I’m the only woman that kept herself there. In the first position they gave me, they gave me the opportunity to work with them and directly explained to me that this opportunity was not given to women because [according to them] men have the speed, they’re stronger to carry things. But thank God, I was able to do it and I did it and I believe that as a woman I’m opening paths for other women. And I’m still there. I’ve kept myself at that job. I think my wage is the same as that earned by a man there.

“Okay, maybe I don’t have a degree but there is an economic security that makes you feel safe...”

“My transition arriving in Phoenix was a different change because in Mexico you focus on the fact that the woman if for the home, the man takes on the expenses, or the woman is in charge of all the household chores. The woman who studies over there has some economic security to continue her studies but normally 70% of women are focused on their homes and 30% of women

are able to continue their studies, to finish their degree. The fact that you reach the stage of being a mother, you lose a lot of [opportunities]. Over there it's like that's as far as you'll go for your [personal] development. To continue studying and such. Because you focus... you have a child, you're at home. So for me arriving in Phoenix and seeing that it's not like that... Okay, maybe I don't have a degree but there is an economic security that makes you feel safe and say that maybe I didn't study but I can start a business. I can do a lot of things. My husband works and I work, that whole thing of 'I'll support you' or 'I'll pay for everything' doesn't exist. There are two entries of money for the family. Male dominance isn't there, where you're submitted to something because of the economic situation. For me here, this way of living is good for me. It makes me feel good.

"... but we came here to work here."

"I came with my partner, we both arrived together in Phoenix. But the first stage was still difficult. It was difficult for him to see me unfold in work, an atmosphere that was for men. He also adapted to seeing his woman go out and work, that she earns as much as he. There were some fights, maybe because we came from [Mexico] and the custom that the woman is for the home but we came here to work. But those differences faded away.

"As a woman I feel that a woman is not the woman they always make us out to be."

"As a woman I feel that a woman is not the woman they always make us out to be. Mistreated, beaten, no. I feel that here women... there's equality. Here one as a woman has a lot of opportunities. Opportunities in all aspects, at work, at home too because the husband adjusts to you. Here it's not a world like in Mexico that you get here and you have to make dinner for the husband. Like in my personal relationship, we both get home from work and make something. Or he calls me and we stop to buy something. Different things that don't happen in Mexico where the husband comes home and sits down and you serve him. Apart from work, at home, friends... I like it here because there is equality. Like at my job, I am equal with the men. I work at the same station as they do. I can cover any one of them if someone doesn't go. It's not like, because she's a woman she can't come in a cover for a man. It's an equality that has always been given to me.

"But as far as my future, I'm waiting."

"My future isn't very clear because of the fact that there isn't a legalization. For me my future are my children. My vision is that I have a son who will in very little time not be able to continue studying. I have a daughter who is from here but I have a son who isn't. So I have to make the decision... because now it's his future. So my vision for the future right now is if there isn't [immigration] reform so that they can continue studying after high school, then it would be a span of four years where I would take him to where I'm from so that he can continue studying and adapt to the system over there. Just like I brought him here and he adapted to the system here, I also have to take a step back so that he can adapt to the system over there. I see my future protecting my family, my children, their education. As far as personally, I have to adapt to the place where they are. If I invest in something here, it's like something that dances, something

that swims and that at any moment it can drown because they can pull you over, they can deport you. So then I can't make the decision to buy a house for and then it be lost. As far as my future here, it's unsure until there is a legalization so that obstacle won't be here. But as far as my future, I'm waiting."

“Why if in my own town I can’t give myself the luxury to fail, why am I going to come and leave my skin here?”

Perla, 53 years old.

Married, mother and grandmother.

Has lived in Phoenix 8 years.

“I wanted to see my brothers with socks and shoes.”

“I belong to a small town called Ejido Modelo and it’s a municipality of Tizapán el Alto, Jalisco, Mexico. I come from the family of the Garcias, you can say. From there I went to Guadalajara and I practically arrived in Guadalajara at 11 years old. From 11 on and you can say until I was 45. Now, from 45 on you can say that I’ve lived in Phoenix. It’s the only place since I arrived from Guadalajara, this is where I’ve been. I arrived in Guadalajara to work at the age of 11, With those 11 years I lived many negative experiences where I witnessed reality with a woman who gave me a tough time. I would say, how is it possible that they do so many things to a girl who coming from a ranch where you completely roam free. Where you can eat so much tortilla, milk... With its limitations. I remember that they would give us animal crackers in a paper wrapping and they would give us a bunch and I would take them and eat them with goat’s milk. I get to Guadalajara and I arrive to take care of children with a woman and that woman controlled everything. For example in the morning it was a glass of milk and a small banana. IN the afternoon it was two spoons of rice, a little piece of meat, and two or three potatoes in pieces and two tortillas. In comparison to a ranch where we would make the tortillas. And unfortunately you live through a lot of things in places that is not your place of origin but that ends up being your same people. For me that’s what was difficult with this woman. I felt I was dying of hunger. So when she paid me, I would go and buy pastries or whatever. But I would see so much need at home that what I would do was I would not touch the money [I earned] to give it to my mom so that she could buy my brothers shoes. I wanted to see my brothers with socks and shoes. Well they were always in *guaraches*, very humble. So that was my reality. I tell this to my brothers and I tell them that I went to Guadalajara to see them in shoes, socks and white underwear that I would see. So that was my dream, I wanted to see my brothers dressed well.

“I want to have a home for my children, I want to give my children something better...”

“I come to Guadalajara, I got married there, I have all my children there and my grandchildren. I struggled for my house and I now have my house, thank God. I didn’t have to have a husband because I was also beat by him. When I was married for 10 years, I lived the experience of domestic violence. I lived it in that time. He kicked my face, he wanted to cut my face. He said he wasn’t going to leave me until he was able to make my life impossible. So then I said, this is not going to hold me back. My dreams are different. I want to have a home for my children, I want to give my children something better, I don’t want them to lie what I’m living. So then I said, let’s go. So what did I do? I left him completely. So I left, I left where I paid the rent, where I paid everything. I was earning more than him, he never accepted that. Yes I struggled a lot, ... until I found a place I could rent and I could distance myself from him. Time passed, I started to go to [community] meetings... where I had to collect points so that they would see that

I was constantly going to that meeting [to get credit for a house]. Thank God after three or four months of going to those meetings I went and spoke directly with the man that was in charge of distributing houses. And he said, how many children do you have? At that time I had 6 children. so what did I do? I started to look for the way and went to ask until thank God I managed to have my house. They sent me with an engineer, with his business card. I didn't go to the presentation that the engineer gave, I just gave him the business card and he knew where I had come from. They told me you have to show up and this date in these offices, so there I went and what was my surprise that when I go, they give me a key and a paper with where I had to go to the construction company, and the construction company gave me a key to go see my house. And so that was my children's inheritance. My children were young because the oldest was 8 years old. So I told them, from here we're never going to be kicked out. Because they had seen when we lived with their father, well they had kicked us out of our home because the man wouldn't pay rent. So what I did, I told him, look son, this house is for all of you. From this house they're never kick us out. Even if I die, this house is for all of you. You could see on their faces how happy they were, that they knew that from there they wouldn't be kicked out.

"Just like that they set me loose, figure it out on your own."

"Time passed, my children grew up and now you can say I came here in 2005... to Phoenix, Arizona. And that's where a new stage in my life began where I was with my son, it had been 10 years that I hadn't seen him. We came to Phoenix because supposedly I want to open a business [in Mexico]. So that was the idea, that it we were only coming for two years. But it took us two years to pay back the coyote. That's why we've waited but now unfortunately the [economy] has been tough. But for me the main thing was to see my son, meet my grandchildren, meet my daughter-in-law, see my brothers who are here and live with them. But unfortunately what I didn't like what I experienced. I didn't like it because they just set you loose in a place you don't know, I got lost. I got lost here [on the street walking] without knowing the language. So I had to make myself understood with signals. So I would be [on the street] and I would ask, Excuse me do you speak Spanish? And they would tell me, no, 'nothing'. So then I said, 'nothing' must mean no, *nada*. So I ask and ask... until I find a woman that was on a golf cart and I tell her, excuse me, do you happen to know [Spanish]? But I was terrified, I think she saw my face and noticed my anguish. And she tells me *perfectamente*. I felt the clouds had parted. I tell her, excuse me, is there a phone nearby, I need to make a phone call. I'm lost. And she then says, of course. So she takes me to a high school, let's me into the office like if she knew me because she left me alone in the office. She didn't know if I was trustworthy. Just like there are racist people, I see how there are good people. For me she was an angel that appeared in my path. I called [my son], they agreed to go pick me up and it turns out that they never picked me up. It was getting dark. What did I have to do? Go back walking, following where I knew the bus had come. And there I go. Not because I didn't have money, but because they had change the route [of the bus] because they were fixing the streets. So they were re-routed and I didn't know the way. I came back walking in plain heat. That was when I knew what heat was like here in Phoenix, 120 degrees Fahrenheit. I was dying of heat... I had never been in such extreme heat like now. Once I saw the Wal Mart, I went straight in to get a soda, or water, whatever because I felt my lips were drying. And I then saw how I was going to get to my son's house and there I went... and when I get there I see that my son is laughing. 'What happened mom?'

How that bothered me. The Mexican came out of me and we started [arguing]... and I start telling him everything. I kept living there with them. They never told me, look mom you're going to get this bus to this place, you're going to get off at this place. Never. Just like that they set me loose, figure it out on your own.

"... we didn't bring anything other than a suitcase and each with a backpack..."

"When we arrived here and I had to enroll [my granddaughter] in school and we were dependent on my [oldest] son, she would come out crying [from school]. That she didn't want to go back, that all her friends spoke English and she didn't understand anything. I got lucky, well she got lucky because the teacher she had told her not to get frustrated, I'll show you, ... she spoke Spanish. I think the woman was from Oaxaca but didn't look like she was from Oaxaca. So the teacher was who helped her a lot. So then the girl quickly [learned English] in 6 months. But the first months she cried a lot. But apart from that, actually, ... we were in my son's house for 3 months. After those three months we moved with a friend I met at the restaurant. There we lasted 8 days because we didn't bring anything other than a suitcase and each with a backpack and a black bag where we carried the clothes we have bought here. We moved from her house to a trailer, ... we were with her for about a week. Quickly [my husband] started mobilizing himself and we moved to a trailer [on our own]. We lived there 6 months in the trailer. I left the restaurant and started [working] in the food trucks. In the food trucks I lasted 10 months working... I worked 15 days for free until they gave me the opportunity to work on a food truck. ... I noticed that I could make some money there so I put up with it. The two weeks I was training, they didn't give me anything. Later the driver, seeing that I worked hard to give them what they needed, started giving me \$50 from time to time on the weekends. So then with that I would buy tortillas for my children. After the trailer, we moved [again to apartments]... We lived there for a year. From there after that year we came here, and [have lived] in these apartments [for five years]. So it has been difficult for us because there came a point where we were going to leave. Supposedly we were on our way out, all packed up... Thank God [my husband] was able to find a job and that's why we're still here.

"Right now they've blocked you at every side."

"In the magazines is where I saw that they were looking for a cook [in a restaurant]. So I went. In all honesty they treated me really well in that restaurant. I've been working in restaurants and everywhere I've worked they've treated me well. Unfortunately right now how the situation has become, it's become very difficult. But we're still here anyway. When we first got here the situation didn't look as bad as how it is now. Right now they've blocked you at every side. For example, since I handle food, I had heard only rumors of what you needed in order to get your [food handlers] card from the [Health Department]. You needed a Social Security number. I never stay in doubt and so I went and they tell me that they wanted and ID from Phoenix. Unfortunately it wasn't possible. They're blocking you. Apparently they say they don't want racism. But there is a lot of racism and a lot of discrimination. Because for example, if you go somewhere, for first thing they do is look at you from head to toe and tell you: We're full. You go somewhere else and even though they need people, and if you don't have a Social Security number, a valid one, there's no work for you. This is why I have more than a year and a half

without working full time. I'm only working the hours they give me, if they need me to clean a house then I'll go and help them even if I come back all twisted up. But I do go and work 5 or 6 hours in a house. But they're giving you [pennies]. They can really like your work but they don't want to pay you. Right now with so many people unemployed, that's the problem. That there are so many of us unemployed that people now are giving away their work.

"The little that I do work, wherever I go people ask how I pay for my expenses. Because the one that works is [my husband]. But he's paying the rent, electricity, he's paying all the bills. I'm in charge of the food because I don't want a man to say he's feeding my children. To feed them, what I do is if they give me four or five hours of work, I go and work them and I bring back a little money. So then I save all that and it's the way that I've been able to pay for my expenses to get ahead.

"... now I'm waiting for her."

"[My granddaughter] is the reason I'm holding back a bit. Thank God, I feel the sacrifice that we made to come here is paying off because [my granddaughter] is doing very well in school. She's learned English well. In Mexico all that is very expensive. If you're going to study middle school, English is separate. If you're going to study computers, it's very expensive because over there if you're going take and English class or a computer class, that's \$300 pesos a week. Which end up being \$30 dollars here. So \$300 pesos a week, how much do you end up paying for a class a month? You can say we're talking about \$1,200 pesos that end up being \$100 dollars. When everything here is free. So then that's why I've opted to not lose my patience. Yes I get melancholic and I want to go [to Mexico] and see my children. At first I would wait because of [my youngest son and my granddaughter]. But now [my youngest son] has graduated from high school and now I wait for her. She's why I'm trying to carry on a bit because she's doing really well in school.

"... I'm not the kind of person that likes to get stuck just like that."

"My plans are if I'm not going to find a job right now, I'm going to try to take some English classes. Because before I would come home too tired... and where we would go to English class, [my husband] learned a little more than I did. With regards to [words about] food, that I do understand a bit more. But he did go [to the classes] until he finished them, I didn't. I would get home tired [from work] and then get home to do household chores, and food, and leave everything ready for them for the next day and then go to work again in the morning. The little time we stay here still, I want to see if I can learn a little more English. Try to better myself a bit because I'm not the kind of person that likes to get stuck just like that. Oh, did a door close on you? Then that where you stay? No. I have to figure out a way because my work is cooking, I love that work. If you tell me about cooking, all day I want to learn more. And it's what I'm most passionate about. My dreams, a reason for coming to the United States, was to learn fine pastry. But unfortunately I've never gotten information on that. Like with the Health Department, I went to find out. They told me where the best chefs study, but it's apparently very expensive. Some people say, go and find out. But if I don't know English, how am I going to get information? That's the problem. It's an error is you come to another country where you

don't speak the language, what you should do [is learn English]. That what's missing. If everyone would come to the United States and say the very first thing [is learn English]. But unfortunately you don't do it because your need is great.

"You need to know how to succeed and you have to have a different mentality."

"So it has its advantages and its disadvantages. Like everything else. Unfortunately we're already here, you have to take advantage of the time we're here. I feel that here, when people from here go to Mexico, you're tricked. I would see that family member or people we knew would come from Mexico to the United States. In two years they would return in their trucks... And you see how people are well dressed and you say, how is it possible that in two years they return with a huge truck? But that's not the reality because that's just what you see over there. But when you are here, then you realize things and say, all that isn't true. I think they need to say what the reality is here. That people over there don't see the racism, discrimination that is seen here. In Mexico you don't see it as much as you do here. So people come here completely tricked because you come here blindly because you're not told that here you have to create your own path. If you [arrive] with a family member, they should tell you... that from the first moment you arrive you have to pay rent, electricity, water, telephone, your clothes, your food... No, they don't tell you all that. I think they should show you the reality you live here the moment you arrive in the United States. Your own family, instead of supporting you wants to charge you for the favor they gave you. What do you have to do? You need to know how to succeed and you have to have a different mentality. To say: I have to be able, I have to be able and I have to succeed because I can't fail here where it's not my country. Why if in my own town I can't give myself the luxury to fail, why am I going to come and leave my skin here?"

“Because I’m not happy being a housewife and washing dishes. That’s why.”

Sofia, 37 years old.

Married with 3 children.

Has lived in Phoenix for 10 years.

“You can say we went with the American dream, as they say.”

“I’m 37 years old, I have four children and I’ve been in Phoenix, Arizona for 10 years. The reason why I came here was to improve, so that my children could have a better future. I was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, and I have some experiences of when I arrived in Phoenix. I didn’t know anyone, I didn’t know where to take my children to the doctor... it was actually a little difficult to confront such a drastic change such as the language and well a different country and not knowing anyone.

“I have friends and family who told me how life was here. Although they told me a a very nice story, but in reality when you arrive here, well, no, that’s not how it is... at the beginning it’s not like that, not as easy... I had a good job in Guadalajara where I’m from and my husband did too and they gave us a visa and we travelled with out 6 month visa, that was our plan. ... I worked [at] Fabricas de Francia, I worked in the offices and my husband work in, it was called, an industry where they make machines... Like those little cars where that you put coins in, he did that.

“You can say we went with the American dream, as they say. They told my husband a lot of nice things like ‘what you save here in a year there you’re going to save it in 6 months’... you’ll build your house faster... a lot of nice things but once we were here those 6 months we saw that everything wasn’t like that and well we decided to stay.

“Those two years...”

“[We arrived] in an apartment with a family. They invited us to stay in their home and we stayed there for six months. After that we moved to an apartment. Those two years that I tell you when my son was two years old when I arrived here and it was another two years for him to start school. Those two years were very difficult for me because my two kids and I we were in an apartment... waiting for my husband to come home because I didn’t dare even go to the store to buy a gallon of milk. Now I do, but really, when you come here it’s tough because you don’t how to ask for a gallon of milk. And you get frustrated. Also, the people who said we would be better here, you can say they turned their backs on us. So you can say we were along. Well, we were alone here. And it was tough for me and for my children because we would spend those stays locked up in the apartment. We would just go out when my husband would get home and we would go bring food and we’d come back inside. It was a one bedroom apartment with a kitchen and a bathroom. It was really small. So then... when I was in that period there was some depression. Personally, I had some depression.

“My frustration was that I felt deceived. That I left my roots, my parents, my brothers and sisters, my family, where I grew up, where I was born. All to come here for a promise that you

can say was taken by the wind. That was a huge frustration for me. The other was the language. And another was not knowing anything about how the laws are managed here, the politics. That if I did something, maybe... it was wrong. Maybe that's why I stayed locked up, right? So it was various frustrations.

“When they started showing me all the nice things that were here.”

“When the oldest turned four years old, that was when I went to the Head start Program and it was the relief I found for not being in my country. Because they gave us so many resources to be able to go to the hospital, where there was a hospital, how to do the paperwork to go... how to simply take a bus... They started giving us basic English, and actually that's where I found out that here you can do a lot of things being a volunteer. That's where I began [as a volunteer] in this country. ... there are a lot of things you can do and they support those people who volunteer. And that's where I started and they sent me to a leadership course, a self-esteem course, self-improvement, and also a course for mothers. And so there, at the Head start, is where I started to do a lot of volunteer hours at school with my children like at events.

“I imagine that they, the teacher and the social worker, noticed that I had something like depression because when I enrolled my son I still had it. So they asked me if I needed to speak to someone. I asked them why? ‘No, we just noticed you don't look well.’ They focus a lot on if the mother is well, the children are well. If the mothers look really bad, the children will not be well. So then I said to myself, I don't have anyone who can help me so I'll trust in them. So I trusted them and I told them what I had and how I felt and they sent me to a [therapist]. At that time, nine years ago, there was a lot of help regardless of our migration status. So they sent me to a ... therapist. And there I lasted seven months with the therapist going every 15 days a month. Two times a month. That was the first things. And the second was the courses. They would send a couple of parents to their free classes on leadership, self-esteem, and self-improvement. And when I went there, I felt that the sun came out for me. When they started showing me all the nice things that were here. And what's more, for nothing in return. To this day I am thankful to them... for having placed a light in my path, as you would say. ... That healing process, thank God, was from when my son was four until he turned five... because at five he went to Kinder, it was a really nice process. And I had that year to recover, as you would say, and from there continue with volunteering.

“I learned how to live doing things for the community.”

“In the Headstart program a lot of the things are voluntary. So they explained to us that the more volunteer hours you do in your child's school year, the Head start program has more benefits ... now that's really your social work. And well I was happy, even if I can't give the Head start program anything I would always do it from the heart. And more so because that's how I learned how to live here. I learned how to live doing things for the community. For the children, for the parents. When I was there that year of preschool for my son, the mothers named me representative of the class. So then I took them everywhere... we learned about the Women's Center... which is the center for women that's close by. We went there and they told us, ‘Wow, we've never had such a large group of Hispanic women. Women from other countries always

come. So that's really good for the center because there are no classes in Spanish but with you constant visits, we're going to make classes in Spanish for your comfort.' But we specifically went to an English class, they were also giving it there. So all that kept us very active that year.

"And then I got pregnant..."

"We then moved... When my [oldest] son went into Kinder, we [enrolled him] here in the Alhambra [school] district. So I kept helping, but primarily with the teachers with what I could. It wasn't at large scale because I had just changed districts. Things were done differently in this district, I was just learning how it worked. And then I got pregnant... I got pregnant with my two boys, of the two little ones I have right now. So I stopped, really, I stopped for about four years. Because my pregnancies are require care. The first months ... of my pregnancies are very careful because I don't have very much energy. I have a lot of nauseas at the beginning. ... right about the time I moved to the district in the avenues was when I got pregnant. So I was pregnant, [and] I was at home because of the care that I had to have. And when I give birth I get some depression, like if I'm a little vulnerable... postpartum. So I gave birth to my son and I was still at home six months after I had delivered. And when my son was eight months old, I got pregnant again. And again I went through the process of nauseas and all that. ... But in the hospital with my third son, [I learned about an] organization called Southwest Center that worked with children from zero to five years. When I delivered in the hospital they asked me, 'Would you like to receive the zero to five years program? We'll visit you home every two weeks.' So forty days after I had delivered, they showed up to help my son with his development and help me with what they could. So that kept me from falling 100% in depression.

"... So then [with] my fourth son, the last one, I go through the same thing when I give birth. But with all that I... the therapies they had given me and with all everything else and knew a little more... With my last son, it didn't happen the same.

"Each woman puts a little of her intelligence."

"That was when I started to think what I was going to do because I had stopped for some time. ... I would do volunteer work with my second son, because at that time he would go to the Head start. Not completely like with the first one, but I did do various things with my son. I was carrying one in my stomach and the other I tool along as a baby. So when the third one turned four, that was when I got involved again, this time completely to the community which was when we made a Block Watch.

"Actually there were a couple of us women from the same program. And it was seven of us who decided to do the program. Because they told us if we do a neighbor block watch, we had more opportunities and the communities would grow... so that there would be less delinquency, a lot of benefits. So we said, good, let's try it. The funny thing is that... the members of the community have been mainly women that have a lot of aptitudes. Each woman puts a little of her intelligence. ... Like if we're going to do a project, it one puts their opinion. And that's how you create a more beneficial project for the community. Because right now we're working for the

community. A lot of women, our members, are like me too. We're all from Mexico. We've made like an alliance, like a sisterhood where we have a lot of knowledge because we've gone to the same meetings, various workshops. So they come up to us and ask us, 'How can I find a way for my dad to receive help? He just got here from Mexico and he got sick.' And so... one of the women is the one who is in charge of taking her to the [hospital]. There are two hospitals that accept the elderly who have problems. And so my *compañera* helps her, walks her through it, all that. Sometimes it's my turn, we rotate. Depends how we're doing. So then that woman that received that help from us, she transmits that to ... people she knows. And that's what we like, it satisfies us that our knowledge will benefit someone else. And they at the same time... if they're asked for help, she can then also take them to the place [they need]. And we tell them the requirements that they'll ask for and everything. There are a lot of people that we know that just got here and we identify with them because they're in a place in life where they don't know... 'We have little babies and what are we going to do here?' 'Don't worry. Here you don't have to worry about those things.' And we give them the information. And to do a community project, we invite various members... I mean various neighbors. We get their opinion to know if they agree and then we figure out everything that needs to be done.

"Search within you and do what satisfies you..."

"One piece of advice that the therapist gave me was, 'So that you feel useful and so you won't feel frustrated and sad because you're not near your family... and so that you feel useful... Even though you're a housewife and you're not working, but you want to feel useful. You want to have something you'll feel proud of doing, ... think. Search within you and do what satisfies you and makes you happy with what you're doing.' Actually when I was fifteen years old I wanted to study to be a nurse... I have that attitude to serve people. I would see the nurses who would help those who were suffering, and I said, 'I want to be a nurse, I want to help all of them.' But no, my calling to be a nurse didn't work... the blood... when I started studying, blood is not my forté. Where I worked it was the collections department. But instead of charging them, I would help them. Of course, within the guidelines of the company. I would feel very happy when I saw the people happy. So when I get here and I see the possibility to ... help my friends... Well, we weren't friends then. There are a lot of people, women, that we weren't more than... we would just look at each other crossing the street and now we're friends. And they say, 'I didn't have a single family member here in Phoenix. But when I come to the meetings... like if we celebrate something... it's like I'm with family.' So that is why I do it, for my internal satisfaction. I feel accomplished and I feel happy.

"... no one is going to thank you for what you're doing. You're wasting your time."

"I wanted to add that one of the things that has also been an obstacle to do volunteer work and be active in the community has been in part my husband, my partner. All of a sudden he tells me, '... no one is going to thank you for what you're doing. You're wasting your time. ... You should be like that.' I've talked to him a lot and I tell him, 'You told me you would support me. You see that I'm happy and that it's good for me.' But all of a sudden he says, 'It looks like you're wasting your time. You're not getting anything in exchange.' My husband focuses a lot on the fact that I'm not getting anything in return. So I tell him, 'No, but I'm not doing it to receive

something in exchange. I'm doing it so that there's a change.' ... One of my greatest obstacles has been my relationship with my husband. He says, '... I don't think you have to be there. ... either way, you're not a lawyer, you don't have a degree...' Like if he wants to make me feel bad for not have a lot of schooling. So I respond, 'If you're my partner, why are you creating obstacles for what I'm doing if I want to teach my children to do things for their community without receiving anything in exchange.' ... Sometimes we reach an agreement, sometimes we don't.

"Maybe it sounds bad, but he has a lot of *machismo*. That the women is in the house making food, doing chores. And they're not good for more than that. So when he sees things growing, that I'm growing, it's like a lot of Hispanic or Mexican men say, 'I have to stop this one because she's getting out of the crate.' So I tell him, '... I have a lot of people that are directly supporting the project... and this project is going to succeed.' But I've learned how to manage those things, but at the beginning it was a huge obstacle to not be able to do it with the support of your partner. And on the contrary, that they your volunteer work seem less. He makes it seem like if it's something without value.

"... it's like I'm in the entire world."

"In comparison to how I arrived, it was like I was in a jar and it was covered. And I could only be in that jar, in that space. In comparison to how I am right now, it's like I'm in the entire world. That I can be all over... so it's a great satisfaction. You're fulfilled as a person and as a woman. And to have that recognition that you're doing things right, voluntarily. A woman, even though she's had so many obstacles and missteps, a woman who fights... how I and my *compañeras* describe ourselves... together we grow more. That's how I describe myself... very different to how we arrived, to how I arrived. Because I'm not happy being a housewife and washing dishes. That's why. [laughs]"

“... in spite of being illegal you have protection that no one can touch you, no one can hurt you, as a couple or however.”

Dolores, 31 years old.

Married with two children.

Has lived in Phoenix 8 years.

“But life isn’t easy, not here nor in Mexico.”

“I’m from the city of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico. Right now I’m 31. I came here to try to help the family in Mexico a bit but also because of some family problems. The relationship between my dad and I wasn’t good. Now I understand that it was all my fault, as in things that I did that at a time when you’re at a certain age, when you’re younger, you think differently, you want to have the freedom to go out, enjoy your youth. And my mom would tell me, ‘You don’t want freedom, you want debauchery. And well that’s not alright and if that bothers you, then I’m sorry, but go find a job, make your own money.’ At the beginning you feel courageous, after you realize that yes, it’s difficult to separate yourself from them, to stop seeing them. But you also try to be strong. Maybe out of pride I endured it because I thought if I went back, my dad would laugh and say, ‘See? I told you. Things aren’t so easy, life isn’t easy.’ Like when you’re at home, they humbly try to give you the most basic to succeed.

“Here, thank God when I arrived I had the opportunity to have a job. The first day that I arrived, the second day I went to work. When I arrived I was 23 years old and I started working at a restaurant cleaning table. As an illegal immigrant, thank God I didn’t struggle because my sister was already here. My brother was going to come, a younger brother, he was 20 years old and I was about 23. When he was coming, he was going to come back to the [United States] and I told him that I wanted to come with him. That I didn’t want to be at home. And my sister that was there said it was okay. And luckily for transport, I went flew from Oaxaca to Hermosillo, Sonora. And from there well we paid someone to walk us in the desert of Sonora. And we arrived here with my sister and my brother-in-law. And there we didn’t struggle either like those that arrive and don’t have where to stay or walk for a long time. Maybe because of the price, no? That the price they charge you means how much you’re going to walk and such. But in that way we were lucky and my sister fronted the cost and we started working to pay for what they had fronted to get us here. I started working in a restaurant, and well, we’ve change but that’s it. Right now we still work in a restaurant. In the morning I take my oldest son that’s six years old at school and I walk to take the bus to go to work. I leave the baby with a woman who takes care of him. And so that’s how we’ve been here, sometimes good, sometimes not so good. But life isn’t easy, not here nor in Mexico. Even more with the situation we have here. Things get complicated.

“But there’s the need to pay your bills and not depend totally on your husband to cover your living costs.”

“It’s difficult because of the fact that you leave your family, like your dad, mom. In that way it has been, but at the same time I don’t feel alone because I have my sister. Before, my brother was here. And I arrived here [single]. Here I met the father of my children. There are things

that one doesn't expect, I didn't think I would come here and marry but it happened. And well, you struggle with the kids here in comparison to Mexico where you have family and they can take care of them. Here you sometimes have to find a stranger and pay them to take care of your kids. And it's difficult to leave them and go to work. But there's the need to pay your bills and not depend totally on your husband to cover your living costs.

"In the sense that here you have to pay rent, the economic issues, that's a little difficult at times. But in the rest I feel it a routine life. Here life goes by really fast. You get up, work, kids. And well, they don't have as much liberty to go out freely. As with the family [in Mexico]. When we weren't out in the streets, you could go anywhere for a get together. In Mexico we lived in a centric area, there was a *zócalo*, parks, very free. Everything was very different in comparison to here where you practically live closed up. If you don't have a car, you can't move.

"... in spite of being illegal you have protection that no one can touch you, no one can hurt you, as a couple or however."

As a woman in the United States, regarding equality, it's equal. In Mexico sometimes you're more repressed by *machismo*. You see it more in Mexico, here some [too] but thank God I haven't had that bad luck. As in I didn't have the bad luck to find a dominant person that puts limits on me. In that way I like the liberty that you have here. How in spite of being illegal you have protection that no one can touch you, no one can hurt you, as a couple or however. They can't do it and you can speak out and defend yourself or search for help. That I do like here, that they teach you another way of being. In Mexico, with my mom and dad, we're raised in a harsh way. And sometimes I try to understand why, maybe because they were raised the same way. Mistreated, beat, for whatever, for insignificant things, they wanted to settle everything with beatings. In that sense I've tried not to make the same mistakes because it's difficult to live like that. There are things that don't make sense. My mom loved buying dishes. And if you broke a mug or a dish, she would hit you. And I think, just for something stupid? To the point where you would get slapped, smacked or [hit] with a belt, whatever she found. So going out to another city, a larger city you start to see that things are different. Like in the schools, here the children aren't hit, in that aspect it's different here. For that reason I stay here and I do want my kids to make their lives here. And that they have the opportunity to visit my family but not stay there. Here they, and me too, have more opportunities to get ahead.