A CHICANA’S TESTIMONIO OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE:
AN INTERSECTIONAL AND STANDPOINT ANALYSIS

A Thesis

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Department of Sociology
Abstract
of
A CHICANA’S TESTIMONIO OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE:
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The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how Chicanas experience graduate school, given their historical underrepresentation in higher education. Chicanas’ educational experiences in academia can provide a qualitative glimpse of the larger trends on college campuses across the United States. I explore the question: How have race, class, and gender inequalities shaped my experience as a Chicana graduate student? I use the method of testimonio to analyze my own experiences in graduate school while attending California State University, Sacramento.

This narrative approach can inform and contribute to quantitative and qualitative research on Chicanas’ graduate school experiences that analyze the effects of race, gender, and class inequities in higher education. Although testimonio is not a common research method in sociology, testimonio is a critical Latin American oral tradition that is a source of knowledge, empowerment, and political truth. This study employs the qualitative approach of testimonio to explain my graduate school experiences, and the data collected comes from documented and undocumented memories.
I relate my primary data with empirical studies and theoretical frameworks to analyze my graduate school experiences.

________________________, Committee Chair
Dr. Manuel Barajas

________________________
Date
This research study developed, during Dr. Ramirez’s “La Mujer Chicana” ethnic studies class. One of the requirements for her class was to write an educational testamento, which was our educational narrative or story of our journey through the institutional educational pipeline. While working on this project, I noticed the absence of research on graduate school experiences, especially relating to Chicana/Latinas. Most of the research focused on K-12 or undergraduate schooling, but very little analyzed the graduate school experiences of Chicanas. I realized that testamento was not a methodology used in the discipline of sociology and only used in education and ethnic studies. Sociology uses the methods of ethnography, autobiography and auto-narratives as qualitative research. I felt that testamento would bring a better reflective, personal, intimate, and detailed understanding of the struggles of Chicanas experiencing graduate school. Since I am an “insider within” (Collins 2004) the graduate program, my testamento would bring valuable knowledge on how race, class, and gender inequalities have shaped my graduate school experiences as a Chicana.
DEDICATION

For my daughters, my love, my life:

Violet Maria,

Tiffany Camille,

Andreana Jasmine,

For my husband, my love, my life:

Andres V. Nevarez

For my Parents, my love, my life:

Maria Yolanda and Jose Y. Barron
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To my daughters, Violet, Tiffany, and Andreana: Thank you for your patience, your understanding of what I wanted in life, and allowing me to attain my goal of seeking higher education. You are my motivation to finish the graduate program. Thank you, and I love you with my heart & soul.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Chicanas have written narratives, testimonios, and autohistorias (autobiographies) that document their experiential knowledge, which has been omitted or distorted by imperial, colonial, and hegemonic feminist discourses (Huber and Cueva 2012). Chicanas’ research has increasingly adopted narratives and testimonios to understand the struggles they face while advancing in academia. After the 1960s, this scholarship has become more comprehensive and has integrated the analytical categories of class, gender, and race that impact Chicanas’ everyday life (Huber and Cueva 2012).

Chicanas’ educational experiences in academia provide a qualitative glimpse of the larger trends on college campuses across the United States, where women of color are underrepresented at the graduate school level. In this study, I examine my graduate educational experiences and provide my testimonio of the struggles of acquiring higher education with the goal of attaining a deeper understanding of the personal factors and institutional context shaping academic success (Medina and Luna 2000). Situating the self in a structural context, what Mills (1959) describes as the “sociological imagination,” is important because in addition, this reflective study considers the institutional power at the disposal of decision makers or gatekeepers, which has become enormous and more elaborate in securing hegemonic dominance (Mills 1959). Mills proposed that “the sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals”
Mills 1959:5). Mills argues that “the first fruit of this imagination and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experiences and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within this period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances” (1959:5). Along Mills’ advice of contextualizing the self in the broader sociological context, this study expands the “sociological imagination” to consider the power of race, class, and gender inequalities that shape everyone’s life, and considers the perspective of someone at the intersections of the disadvantage or not of privilege in terms of race, class, and gender.

Statement of Problem

Between 1970 and 1980, Chicana feminist scholars addressed specific issues that affected Chicanas as women of color (García 1989). Other researchers have also studied the underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minorities in education, but most scholarship focuses on K-12 and undergraduate students. Few scholars have examined the graduate school experiences of Chicanas in Masters or PhD programs (Achor and Morales 1990; Cuadraz 2006; Gonzales 2006; Ramirez 2011).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the graduate school experience of a Chicana/Latina and how race, class, and gender inequalities have shaped these experiences. One of the main problems is the lack of or a small collection of scholarly literature on the Chicana/Latina graduate school experience. The statistics show that the low percentage of graduate degrees is sadly disturbing for this particular minority group.
According to The Chronicle of Higher Education (2012), the percentage of doctorates awarded to minority group members has grown. From 1989 to 2009, doctoral degrees obtained by Hispanics in the social sciences increased from 3.3 to 7.3% (TCHE 2013). In Sociology in 2009, 507 doctorates were awarded, and women made up 60% of those recipients: Latinos/as, on the other hand, earned just 6.3 % (TCHE 2013). Therefore, an intimate and reflective testimonio (testimonial) of a Chicana from a working-class background could provide especially valuable insights into the personal and contextual factors that shape academic success in graduate school.

According to Barajas (2011), in California, Chicanas/os have the lowest freshman college enrollment rates and the smallest percentage of bachelor’s or graduate degrees earned (i.e., they earned 13% compared to 53% for Asian Americans, 20% for blacks, and 30% for Whites). Barajas (2011) examined the population of Latinas/os, and that of the Mexican-origin. In particular, these groups are the most disadvantaged, with only 9 percent holding a bachelors or graduate degree, compared to 16 percent for Puerto Ricans, 28 percent for Cubans and 20 percent for Central/South Americans (Barajas 2011). This condition is particularly acute in California, which is home to the largest number of Chicanas/os in the nation. They constitute close to 40 percent of the state population (Barajas 2011).

Therefore, the importance of this research is to bring to light how little is known of the graduate school experience for Chicana/Latinas. In order to create solutions or policy, we must first understand these lower levels of higher education degrees among
Chicana/Latinas in graduate school and what is shaping their experience of success and failure.

Research Question

I will explore the following question using the methodology of testimonio and the theoretical frameworks of Intersectionality and Standpoint analysis: How have race, class, and gender inequalities shaped my experience as a Chicana graduate student?

Significance of Study

The significance of this study is to explore and to advance understanding on how Chicanas experience graduate school, given their historical underrepresentation in higher education. Furthermore, I examine the method of testimonio to analyze my own experiences in graduate school while attending California State University, Sacramento. I am using the method of testimonio in sociology, which is not common to the discipline, and thus am introducing a new approach to researching Chicanas’ experiences in graduate school. This approach can inform and contribute to quantitative and qualitative research on Chicanas’ graduate school experiences that analyze the effects of race, gender, and class inequities in higher education. A testimonio reflects my own experiences in higher education, and it does not pretend to generalize them to all Chicanas in graduate school but rather produce in-depth insights that could illuminate issues and questions that can guide future sociological research on the topic of social inequalities in higher education.
This study is guided by intersectionality and standpoint theory frameworks. The theory of intersectionality will analyze how race, class, and gender intersect in the lives of Chicanas in higher education. Covarrubias (2011) utilizes the intersectional framework to examine the educational experiences and trends of those who are of Mexican-origin ancestry. In his words, “Intersectionality refers to the ways in which interconnected systems of domination based on race, class, gender, sexuality and other social constructions simultaneously impact the lives of all people as they engage in socially mediated relationships and in their interaction with society and its institutions” (Covarrubias 2011:89).

The second conceptual framework I utilize is standpoint theory. Standpoint theory is a very useful theory for my testimonio, because the theory prescribes a reflective perspective of both the researcher and the object of research. The testimonio adheres to this principle. Furthermore, this methodology fits my exploratory question: How have race, class, and gender inequalities shaped my experience as a Chicana graduate student? Prince (2010:6) states that “standpoint theory challenges: 1) the notions human beings having the ability to be neutral given that we all have life experiences, and 2) the sources of knowledge which is labeled as ‘truth’ and subsequently used as social standards (Consider that truth is defined by those with the power to create it and resources to impose it as a standard.)”. Prince acknowledges that “Standpoint theory posits that knowledge should begin with situated experiences of those within marginal positions” (Prince 2010:6). Thus, being a non-traditional graduate student and at the intersections of disadvantage in terms of race, gender, and class, I am in a position to reflect and learn
from lived experience that has affected my will to pursue higher education and what factors discouraged me and almost pushed me out. I place my educational experiences in the larger institutional context because “power structures are best understood by those who have been affected by them” (Prince 2010:6). I expand on these theories further in my literature review.

This chapter introduced the overview of the statement of problem, research question, and significance and theoretical frameworks. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature on Chicanas’ graduate school experiences and the discussion of theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and standpoint theory. Chapter 3 explains the research design, definition of terms, and methodological approach in using testimonio. Chapter 4 is my testimonio (my story) of experiencing graduate school. Chapter 5 presents the discussion of the findings, limitations and recommendations for further research.
Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a chronological review and analysis of literature documenting Chicana/Latina experiences in higher education. The chronological review of the literature is done in two sections: 1) literature and research on higher education done before the year 2000, which shows the earlier works done on Chicana/Latinas, and 2) research on higher education literature after the year 2000 to the present day on Chicanas’/Latinas’ graduate school experience. I chose this chronological method to determine if the literature review showed any differences, similarities, or connections between these research articles on the graduate school experience for Chicana/Latinas.

Research on Higher Education Experience Literature before 2000

Patricia Gandara (1982, 1999), in “Telling Stories of Success: Cultural Capital and the Educational Mobility of Chicano Students”, uses a storytelling method to study academic success of Chicano students. In doing so, testimonio, story-telling, and narratives have been effective in challenging stereotypical and deficit-based perspectives, by giving voice to those at margins of higher education and by illuminating the unfair and discriminatory practices of hegemonic institutions. While some of these students successfully navigate hurdles of higher education to complete PhD degrees, many more are pushed out as evidenced by the high attrition rates of Chicanas/os in higher education.
Research of Chicanas in higher education becomes the focal point of many scholars. In early years, research focused on high school and community colleges; however, there is an ever-growing interest in Chicanas in undergraduate and graduate schools. Achor and Morales (1990) discuss theories and the assumptions of Chicanas in higher education, and how theorists only look at the failure and underachievement of stigmatized minorities. Achor and Morales (1990) challenged this preoccupation on failure and underachievement of minorities and suggest that they should look at a more significant question: How and why do they sometimes succeed? Achor and Morales methodology utilized a convenient sampling technique. They used the snowball method to find Chicana participants in higher education and to examine social reproduction and cultural ecology. Their study yielded 200 Hispanic women from various universities, professional organizations, and governmental agencies. From 1984 to 1985, Achor and Morales (1990) mailed out an extensive questionnaire resulting in 100 participants providing the data for their study. Their findings showed a significant generational mobility for some Chicana women, with determining factors contributing to students’ success, but the numbers remained low for levels of achievement. They also contend that both reproduction theory and the cultural ecology model have failed because of the limited views of potential possibilities of success for minority students (Achor & Morales 1990). Their respondents came largely from low-income, traditionally oriented families who socialized their daughters in ways that neither the conventional ethnographic literature nor the cultural ecology model and reproduction theory would predict (Achor & Morales 1990). Sixty-five percent of respondents reported being subjected to some form
of racial or gender discrimination during their graduate school career, and 34% saw racism/sexism and other institutionally related factors as constituting major barriers in pursuit of their goals (Achor & Morales 1990). Many of their respondents explained having difficulties in meeting requirements such as acceptable GRE scores, but few mentioned pressures of a more informal nature. Respondents also reported they encountered prejudicial attitudes on the part of faculty, students, and other university personnel. Achor and Morales (1990) also noted that institutional, structural, or attitudinal barriers were not the only problems faced by the Chicanas in their study. Many respondents described family responsibilities, financial hardships, and a variety of institutional factors as presenting serious difficulties during their graduate studies. Achor and Morales (1990) state they cannot know how many similar women of academic potential were pressured by institutional constraints, pervasive discrimination, family obligations, and financial hardship to drop out permanently. Achor and Morales’ (1990) major findings show what seemed to be the most influential factors in the success of these high-achieving Chicanas: (1) they are from families who aspire, motivate, encourage education, and self-worth, and support their daughters’ will to succeed, (2) they attended school with the support of financial aid, (3) the significance of resistance to institutional barriers. Achor and Morales revealed significant generational mobility improvement for some Mexican American women; however, low-level numbers still represent challenges and barriers for Chicanas to overcome to achieve academic success (Achor & Morales 1990:282).
Gandara’s (1995:11) study on the educational mobility of low-income Chicanos focuses on Mexican Americans and explores “achievement behavior as a complex phenomenon located at the nexus of the person, the group, and the macro-society; that is, academic achievement as an expression of social self-consciousness”. Gandara’s study was on a small group of Chicanos/as who broke through formidable barriers to high-status educations to create part of a new educationally elite class. Gandara’s participants included 50 individuals from the “baby boom” era of men and women who received their college and graduate educations during the 1960’s and 1970’s (1982, 1995:19).

Gandara’s findings reveal several themes that determine the likelihood of Mexican Americans succeeding in higher education: (1) home influences, (2) family stories as cultural capital, (3) schools and neighborhoods, (4) peers, (5) personal attributes and individual differences, and (6) educational mobility of women. Home influences reveal the importance of familial support and the role older siblings play in the experiences of younger siblings while in graduate school. They serve as role models and counselors and encourage aspirations to succeed. Gandara also states the value of parental influences to learn and enforce normative standards by encouraging specific behaviors which contribute to their success (1995:49). Family stories as cultural capital are very important to “Provide the family with esteem because they often show family members in an alternative light or define the family in a faltering way” (Gandara 1995:51). Gandara (1995) also found that the schools and neighborhoods influence achievement and success for these students’ future academic experience. There is also substantial evidence that minority students who attend primarily radically and ethnically isolated schools do not
perform as well as those minority students who attended integrated schools. Peer relations are important to the success of students and influence achievement behavior. The educational mobility of women’s success is due in part of families’ supportive behaviors, even with limited resources and the families’ lack of experience with education. Gandara states that in spite of serious economic disadvantages, most of her respondent’s parents did exactly the things needed to instill achievement motivation in their children (1995:111).

Lango (1995) examined factors that could contribute to the enrollment of Mexican-origin women in graduate studies. Lango noted that research has only focused on Mexican American women who gained admissions to a graduate school. The author explored the factors that relate to enrollment in a graduate program, and sampled Mexican American women at California State University, Sacramento in 1991. Her exploratory study consisted of 240 senior students and 151 graduate students. Both groups were used as comparative samples. Using a structured questionnaire and phone interviews, Lango analyzed her participants’ 1) social background, 2) parental and familial characteristics, and 3) educational experience. Lango then organized her findings into: (a) social characteristics, (b) parental and familial characteristics, and (c) educational experience. Lango found that this group of Mexican American females enrolled in a graduate program maintained a religious affiliation with traditional Mexican faith. They also had the added responsibility of sharing their life with a partner and contributing significantly to the household income of that partnership, and graduates felt comfortable in their interactions with Caucasians in the university environment (Lango
Lango found that parental and familial characteristic variables produced statistical significance, which included mothers’ level of education, mother’s birth place, degree taught to be self-reliant, and the dominant language spoken in the home as a child. Respondents were from middle-income families, and the results show obvious differences between students and graduates (Lango 1995:43). Lango showed that the Mexican American graduate women tended to follow a college preparatory curriculum in a public high school where Caucasians were predominantly represented, and data suggests that female graduate students make an effort to earn good to excellent grades. Lango’s (1995) research aimed to determine the characteristics that contribute to Mexican American women’s experiences in graduate studies, and her data indicates that Mexican American female students appear to be older, more mature students who are committed to an education, are from a traditional family, and have gained access in the dominant society (Lango 1995). Lango’s research is limited to Mexican Americans at California State University, Sacramento; therefore, her findings cannot be generalized to all Mexican American women graduate students in graduate programs across campuses of higher education. Lango (1995) hopes her research will be a contributing factor in creating new policies that will address the lack of representation of all minority groups on campuses of higher education.

Even though there is still mobility for some Chicanas, the fact remains they are still grossly underrepresented (Zambrana, Dorrington, & Bell 1997). Zambrana, Dorrington, and Bell’s (1997) comparative study of Mexican American women in higher education explore family and individual factors among Mexican American women and
two comparison groups of African American and non-Hispanic white women who completed at least a four-year college degree. A secondary goal of the study was to examine the relative importance of selected variables predicting completion of graduate degrees (Masters and PhD). Central questions the authors explored were: 1) Are their differences in selected familial characteristics, such as parental educational expectations and social support, between college-educated Mexican American, African American, and non-Hispanic white women? 2) Are there differences in selected individual’s characteristics pertaining to marriage and childbearing decisions between college-educated Mexican American, African American, and non-Hispanic white women? and 3) To what extent do these familial and individual characteristic predict completion of graduate degrees (Masters and/or PhD) within each racial/ethnic group? The authors’ cross-sectional study was based on a survey administered to 500 women from 1987 to 1990. Their sample consisted of 300 Mexican American women, 100 African American women, and 100 non-Hispanic white women from the Los Angeles area who finished their undergraduate degree or graduate degree (Zambrana et al. 1997). Their non-probability sample was not representative of all women with higher education degrees from the three ethnic groups. The author’s finding reveals a significant difference in family origin characteristics and educational expectations between Mexican American, African Americans, and non-Hispanic white women. The authors contend that Mexican American women and African American women continue to remain underrepresented, and note the presence of excessive barriers to achieving higher education (Zambrana et al. 1997). Approximately 65 percent of all respondents had completed masters or doctoral
degrees (the majority in California): 66 percent of the Mexican American women compared to 71 percent of the African American and 62 percent of the non-Hispanic white women. Their findings for selected familial factors showed there was a significant difference in the family of origin characteristics between Mexican American respondents and the comparison groups. The Mexican American women were more likely to have grown up in families at lower socioeconomic levels, as measured by the Hollingshead scale, than African American and non-Hispanic white women. The majority of the women stated they felt their parents have equal educational expectations for both sons and daughters. However, a larger number of Mexican American women perceived their parents, mainly their fathers, as expecting higher academic achievement from their sons, which suggests gender biases in Mexican American families. Zambrana and associates (1997) stated that the majority reported both parents were helpful or very helpful in assisting them in pursuing college education through providing encouragement and financial and emotional support. In general, family members (mothers, fathers and other family members) were reported as very important by all respondents in attaining their educational goals. Zambrana and associates’ (1997) research revealed significant differences in family of origin characteristics and educational expectations between Mexican American respondents reflect a group whose parents were less likely to have a high school education, more likely to be of lower socioeconomic status, and more likely to have a lower educational expectation and less involvement in grade school than the parents of the African American or non-Hispanic white women. Zambrana and associates’ (1997) study explored familial and individual factors among Mexican
American women and the paths of influence of parental education, and expectations and involvement on completion of higher education. Their data suggest important and significant differences within a socioeconomic racial and ethnic context. For Mexican American women, the strong support networks of families of origin, limited family financial resources, potential gender-specific expectations within families, and the role of family responsibilities must also be examined (Zambrana et al 1997:145).

Solórzano (1998) uses critical race theory as a framework to examine racial and gender microaggressions effects on career paths of Chicana/o scholars. Solórzano (1998) used an open-ended survey and interview data of a purposive sample of six Chicana and six Chicano Ford Foundation predoctoral, dissertation, and postdoctoral minority fellows. He had three objectives for his study: (1) to extend and apply a critical race theory to the field of education, (2) to recognize, document, and analyze racial and gender microaggressions of Chicana and Chicano scholars, and (3) to hear the voice of discrimination’s victims by examining the effect of race and gender microaggressions on the lives of Chicana and Chicano scholars (Solórzano 1998:121). Solórzano found three thematic patterns of racial and gender microaggressions: (1) scholars who felt out of place in the academy because of their race and/or gender, (2) scholars who felt their teachers/professors had lower expectations for them, and (3) scholars accounts of subtle and not so subtle racial and gender incidents (Solórzano 1998). In Solórzano’s methodology section, he explains and expands on the three objectives and on gender and racial microaggressions in the lives of Chicana and Chicano scholars while in graduate school. During this process, examples from the written responses were identified,
compared across subjects, and explained in his findings. He explains that many of his participants felt out of place because of their racial/ethnic backgrounds, which are marginalized in U.S. society. One respondent explains how he felt:

I felt out of place, not fitting in or a sense of belonging and I felt alienated from other students and faculty.

Another respondent stated that you can feel out of place in different ways.

For example, she states:

Having equal access is not only sitting in the same classroom with whites, hearing the same lectures as whites, reading same books as whites, or performing the same experiments as whites. This is not equal opportunity because the content of these varied experiences validates the experiences of white men and ignores or validates the experiences of women and men of color and to a lesser extent white woman (Solórzano 1998:128).

Solórzano (1998) explains clearly that these lived experiences provide evidence, from scholars who have felt not part of the undergraduate and graduate school environment was a discreet form of the racial/ethnic and gender discrimination. The way students are viewed or stigmatized as a minority result in of lowered expectations for the students. Expectations are also lowered due to the focus on the lower social status of undergraduate institutions that these students attended before entering graduate school and how the behaviors of the graduate faculty affected these graduate students. Primary focus was on the language and accents of these scholars, and gender was also an issue. Solórzano’s (1998) form of “lower expectations” revealed evidence of microaggressions that resulted in stigmatization and differential treatment. This differential treatment has its origins in the racial/ethnic and gender background experiences of these scholars.
Solórzano’s final thematic pattern is of racist/sexist attitudes and behaviors that emerged from his data, which focused primarily on the racist/sexist attitudes and behaviors of faculty and fellow students. The experiences that these students had with racist/sexist attitudes and behaviors were due to gender and racial discrimination towards these students. The transformative elements of Solórzano’s research were that the stories of these scholar’s experiences in graduate school revealed the thematic patterns of “feeling out of place”, encountering “lower expectations” and being exposed to “racist and sexist attitudes and behaviors”.

Solórzano explains:

In that space or moment when one connects with these experiences, these stories can be the catalyst for one’s own coming to voice, of not feeling alone and knowing that someone has gone before them, and had these similar experiences, and succeeded on to the doctoral program (Solórzano 1998:131).

In other words, Solórzano suggests that many students in graduate and doctoral programs have had similar experiences that others can relate to them. Solórzano explains that critical race theory and these stories of scholars can reinforce the notion that the traditional black/white paradigm in examining race and race relations is too narrow and that the experiences of others’ race/ethnic groups is very critical in understanding the lives of scholars of color. Solórzano states:

Although, the racial, gender, and class experiences of African American and Chicanas/os are similar in some areas, but there are very important differences in the historical and contemporary lives of these groups, cannot be ignored. Therefore, in order for critical race theory to advance, it must recognize, utilize, and analyze the multiple voices and experiences with racism and sexism (Solórzano 1998: 132).
These earlier works of scholars showed the foundation of Chicana/Latina research in higher education. These earlier studies explored the success of Chicanas/Latinas in higher education and the factors that lead to their achievement. Gandara (1995), Achor and Morales (1990), and Lango (1995) all ask similar questions; they ask what the factors associated with the success for Chicanas/Latinas in graduate school are. Zambrana, Dorrington, and Bell (1997) examine and explore factors of the individual and the family to determine the completion of graduate degrees. Solórzano (1998) examines racial and gender microaggressions using critical race theory as a framework to analyze Chicanas/Latinas in higher education. All these articles are the foundation or building blocks to further the research in higher education and graduate school. However, they do not expand on the factors or patterns of the experiences of graduate school.

Research on Higher Education Experience after 2000

Social interactions between students of color and faculty offer an important window into the everyday practices and rituals that shape race relations in graduate programs. Romero and Margolis (2000) underscore that race relations in sociology departments are inseparable from curricula issues on race and the racial composition of the faculty and student body. Neglect of race issues throughout the curriculum results in students of color questioning their departments’ commitment to racial/ethnic diversity and equity (Romero and Margolis 2000). Romero and Margolis found the absence of scholars of color was not only apparent in perspectives, curriculum, and assigned
readings, but also in the demographics of faculty. They found that one-third of all PhD programs surveyed advertising race and ethnicity as a specialty had one or fewer faculty members of color. Although there is more faculty of color today than 25 years ago, the situation is far from equitable (Romero and Margolis 2000), and in some cases worse (Barajas 2011).

Solórzano and Yosso (2001) discuss the thematic patterns of “self doubt,” “survivor guilt,” “impostor syndrome,” and “invisibly” that his minority students experience in graduate school. Solórzano and Yosso’s (2001) research illuminates the multiple forms of racism in graduate education for Chicana and Chicano students, and answers the following questions: (1) How do the structures, processes, and discourses of graduate education and the professorate reinforce racial, gender, and class inequality? and, (2) how do Chicana/o graduate students and professors respond to race, gender, and class inequality? Solórzano and Yosso state that counter-stories can serve at least four objectives: (1) they build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice; (2) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at societies’ center by providing a context to understand and transform establish belief systems; (3) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society, and demonstrate that they are not alone in their position; and (4) they can teach others by combining elements from both the story and the current reality (Solórzano and Yosso 2001:474). Solórzano and Yosso examined the data gathered from focus groups of Chicana/o undergraduates, graduates, fellows, and faculty to identify patterns, themes, and examples of the concepts were seeking to illuminate.
Several themes developed while analyzing the data: (1) self-doubt, (2) survivor guilt, (3) imposter syndrome, and (4) invisibility. Utilizing the narratives of their two characters, Professor Garcia and Esperanza, a critical race, and Latcrit methodology offers a way to understand students’ experiences. Using these methods can “generate knowledge by looking to those who have been epistemologically marginalized, silenced and disempowered” (Solórzano and Yosso 2001:488).

One pattern remains absolutely clear: “Chicanas are severely underrepresented in institutions of higher education at the undergraduate, masters and doctoral levels. Despite three decades of research on barriers to access, retention, and graduation, the progress is minimal at best” (Cuadraz 2005). One of the challenges faced by Chicana/Latina graduate students has been the lack of academic preparation and skills due to unequal resources and school segregation for K-12 students. One major factor faced by Chicanas/Latinas is the financial challenges encountered while attending graduate school. The two most important factors are the lack of financial support from academic institutions and financial struggles due to low socioeconomic origins.

Garcia (2005) shared her counter stories of Latina faculty, showing that the factors of race, gender, and class, stratify educational and professional opportunities in higher education. Garcia (2005) weaves their testimonios (testimonies) to reveal the complex experiences and identities of Latinas. Garcia observes that:

The key to the power of their counter stories is both understanding and unpacking the differential meaning of silence. It is crucial to interrogate emotions and pain in the face of racial and gender oppression that may underlie counter stories and the silences that surround them (2005:261).
These marginalized voices can illuminate directions for action and justice in various societal institutions. Minority graduate students may feel marginalized by faculty and their peers, particularly the more distant they are from the hegemonic norm along the dimensions of race, gender, and class. Some feel that other European-American students consider them to be affirmative action or charity cases. The lack of diversity in university graduate programs leaves Chicana graduates students isolated or frustrated with the graduate programs, particularly when the faculty and curriculum do not represent their experiences (Garcia 2005).

Gonzalez’ (2006) research examines the experiences of academic socialization of Latina doctoral students attending U.S. research institutions, who were in the program for three or more years. His study focuses on how academic socialization contributes to the success or failure of Latina doctoral students. Gonzalez’ specific interest is on how Latina doctoral students conceptualize the institutions and how ethnicity, gender, and class affect their lives and survival at institutions of higher education. Gonzalez (2006:349) mainly studies what the educational experiences of Latina doctoral students at predominately white institutions are and how they responded to academic socialization. The author tries to further explain opportunities and challenges that nurture and inhibit Latinas education goals and aspirations in light of doctoral academic socialization at predominately white institutions. Gonzalez’s (2006) methodology consisted of qualitative interviews that were conducted over a two-hour time frame, where thirteen participants could be asked open-ended questions related to their experiences and interpretations of the academic environment. Gonzalez (2006) found two major implications in his
research: 1) problems with academic socialization of Latina doctoral students and 2) institutional climate concerns need to be addressed. Gonzalez observes:

> It is of great interest to institutional leaders that whereas many methods of retention, success, attrition and challenges outlined are part of the experience of all doctoral students. When underscoring the advances that come about through women’s rights and civil rights movements it is important to remember that Latina academic advancement continues to move at a snail’s pace in part because institutional discrimination has become less overt and more covert (2006:363).

The most disturbing factor for Chicana/Latina doctoral students was the discrimination they faced based on their class, gender, race, and ethnicity. The hope was that all women, minorities, and those interested in learning about improving Latina doctoral education could take something of value from the study (Gonzalez 2006). Gonzalez’ findings show a detailed support structure and challenge systems which are more extensive than those documented in past and present literature. These support systems and challenges are similar to the experiences of the general population of doctoral students, mainly those of color, and specific to the Latina/o community. These support systems and challenges are: (1) positive experiences and support systems, (2) negative experience and challenges. Also, Gonzalez (2006) mentions that in addition to these academic challenges, students mostly remember the difficulties of having to juggle the demands of doctoral education with the added family responsibilities. Gonzalez’s positive experiences and support systems show first and foremost that academic preparation prior to graduate school led Latinas developing confidence early and positive doctoral experiences. Secondly, Latinas had specific support systems that had a positive effect on their doctoral experiences, which included financial opportunities in the form of
scholarships and fellowships. Thirdly, they also had department wide support and belonged to departments with a diverse population of students, peers, and faculty. In general, the students who built communities with similar students and faculty of color across their institutions had the most positive doctoral experiences because they felt less conflicted between their institutions and cultural identities. Negative experiences and challenges that some Latinas faced during their doctoral experience included poor K-12 academic preparation, leading to undesired cultural assimilation and overt and covert racism setting the tone for educational challenges as undergraduates and through their graduate school experience (Gonzalez 2006:357). These women also mentioned a particular set of challenges at the institution level: they had no financial support; they experienced of discrimination based on race, gender, and class; they had a feeling of stigmatization and tokenism; and were expected to be experts on minority affairs (Gonzalez 2006). Gonzalez states that when confronted with academic socialization, whose sole purpose was to convert them, these women found it very problematic. The stronger and more aware they were of their ethnic identities, the more resistant they became to academic socialization. Gonzalez found that when Latinas resisted academic socialization, they either found or lost their academic voice. When Latinas had a strong academic voice and purpose, they discounted objections and criticisms to doing Latino-based research (Gonzalez 2006:361). Gonzalez also found that although Latina doctoral students experienced immense challenges and oppressive academic socialization, these women found support to survive, to seek achievement, and sometimes advance into the faculty. Nevertheless, Latinas and women continue to challenge long-standing
assumptions about their ability for academic success, and the hope is that institutions will learn from and become interested in addressing these challenges (Gonzalez 2006:362).

Banuelos’ (2006) study explores another dimension of educational inequality in relation to Chicana students. Banuelos’ interest is in examining gendered experiences of exclusion and institutional marginalization as well as Chicana agency and resistance. Her main question is: How does an examination of Chicana experiences at the graduate level illuminate the process of institutional exclusion and Chicana oppositional consciousness? Banuelos (2006) calls attention to the simultaneity of the axis of oppression. Banuelos (2006) interviews five self-identified Chicana students who are enrolled in an M.A./PhD program at two University of California campuses between fall 2000 and spring 2001. The women ranged in age from twenty-five to thirty-one, and were in various stages of their programs. Banuelos grounded her research in the “situated knowledge” of the women who were participants and allowed a complex understanding of multiple subjectivities, exclusion, and resistances and how these intersect in the realm of academia. Banuelos (2006) found overlapping themes: (1) cultural citizenship, (2) spaces of belonging, and (3) identity. The themes emerged as being critical to women to navigate the graduate school process. Banuelos (2006) uses third-space feminism perspective to examine marginalized experiences and struggles for resistances. As an example, she examines the experiences of Chicanas in graduate school. Banuelos conceptualizes cultural citizenship, but only in the negative (i.e., academia as a space of dominant cultural citizenship in which students of color are excluded) and leaves out Chicana agency and resistance. While the women perceived exclusion, they often
challenged the exclusion by collectively creating counter-spaces of cultural citizenship.

Banuelos (2006) states that the very notion of “outsider-within” termed by Collins (2004) is useful for understanding the position of Chicanas in institutions of higher education. The importance to race as a marker of exclusion and for creating spaces of cultural citizenship is evident in her discussion about identity, which was intertwined with the discussion about the struggle to create a space of belonging (Banuelos 2006). The narratives represented in Banuelos’ study were spaces of cultural citizenship, which were critical to how they characterized their experiences in graduate school. These women found supportive space that allowed a sense of belonging in the university, whether through mentorship or peer networks which are important to the women’s academic success. Banuelos’ research demonstrates how Chicana identities were critically shaped by their experiences with exclusion and, further, how the experiences of Chicanas she interviewed resonated with third-space feminism, and that the challenges of exclusion represent counter discourses with the potential to transform higher education.

Gildersleeve et al.’s (2011) social narrative analysis of doctoral education, illustrates a marginalizing and dehumanizing cultural experience for Black and Latina/o students. The author’s research question is: How do Black and Latina/o students’ experience the culture of doctoral education? The author’s methodology used ethnographic interviews of twenty-two doctoral students from three major research universities. Participants were interviewed for 45-90 minutes and sought to define elements from their narratives. Gildersleeve et al. (2011:99) used a concept-mapping method to generate conceptual understandings of social narratives, and used their
definition of “am I going crazy?!” to illustrate their arguments. Gildersleeve and associates state that the “socialization practices and racialized aggressions constitute a social narrative that consequently dehumanizes students in their journey through their doctoral education” (2011:110).

The “Am I going Crazy?!” narrative represents the tentative, insecurity, and doubt that can be projected onto doctoral students of color. Gildersleeve and associates (2011) expand on their definition of the “Am I going Crazy?!” narrative, which consists of specific practices within the graduate education and effects that the narrative had on students. The narrative becomes instantiated with two primary modes: (1) constitution of the narrative and, (2) consequences of the narrative. Under the mode of constitution of the narrative, the themes of socialization and racial aggressions occurred. Similarly, for the same for consequences of the narrative, the themes were: self-censorship, questioning ability or worth, adopting the rules and norms, stifling scholarly endeavors, and peer-support networks. Gildersleeve and associates’ (2011) “Am I going Crazy?!” narrative studies graduate socialization practices and racialized aggressions in students’ everyday experiences. Gildersleeve and associates’ state that, consequently, the narrative assists in producing Black and Latina/o students who self-censor, question their self-efficacy, adopt or refute rules and norms of their discipline, feel stifled in their scholarly endeavors, and rely on peer support networks to make sense of the contradictory constituencies that define their own experiences with this narrative (Gildersleeve et al. 2011:108). Therefore, their process of reimagining doctoral education is a socially cultural experience for all students, and it must recognize the everyday instantiations of race, radicalization,
and racism that their extended definition of the “Am I going Crazy?!?” narrative documents. Ramirez (2014) expands on navigating challenges and inequalities during the first year of graduate school in the section below.

Ramirez’s (2014) research uses in-depth qualitative interviews and she analyzed the challenges and structural inequalities that Chicanos/Latinos(as) encountered and resisted during their first year of graduate school. Ramirez (2014) addresses the following research questions: (1) What challenges and structural inequalities do Chicano/Latino(a) graduate students encounter during their first year of graduate school?, and (2) What resistance strategies do first year Chicano/Latino(a) doctoral students employ to overcome these challenges and structural inequities? Ramirez (2014) used in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with Chicano/Latino(a) doctoral students that were completing or had finished their doctorate, and consisted of a total of 24 Chicano/Latino(a) (12 men and 12 women) respondents that were recruited for her study using a purposive and snowball technique. The majority of the participants came from an ethnically diverse group which included Mexican Americans, biracial, and Latin American descendants who were, and are first-generation college students coming from a working-class background. The qualitative data was analyzed using an inductive analytic process and open axial coding technique to reveal patterns, themes, and interrelationships in the data from the respondents. Ramirez’s (2014) findings showed that the first year of graduate school was very overwhelming, and identified several themes concerning challenges and barriers. These challenges and barriers revolved around: (1) academic transitions (n=12), (2) Isolation and alienation (n=9), (3) clashes with traditional
academic culture and the graduate school curriculum (n=8), and (4) microaggressions (n=7). Ramirez explains academic transition challenges and those students had expectations of graduate school, feelings of self-doubt, and a lack of self-confidence because of the lack of feeling inadequate or fully prepared for academic PhD programs. The second challenge and barrier is isolation and alienation; many respondents felt that the lack of race/ethnic, and class, and/or gender-based diversity among students and faculty in their graduate program were very challenging. Ramirez’s (2014) study showed that the respondents felt alienated and isolated, stemming from the lack of substantive racial/ethnic, class, and gender diversity in academia. They also felt estrangement from fellow Chicano/Latino(a) graduate students posing significant challenges for interviewees as they transitioned into graduate studies (Ramirez 2014). With regards to academic culture and the graduate school curriculum, many respondents felt that these clashes reflected perpetuated positivist, Eurocentric/racial, sexist, and/or heterosexist biases. One respondent stated:

The first year was really hard…There’s all these ideologies telling us not to study race or gender because we would be “ghettoizing” ourselves. (Ramirez 2014)

Ramirez (2014) stated that some respondents were dissuaded form studying or specializing in racial-ethnic/gender/sexuality studies, while others felt pressured or coerced by faculty into studying these topics. Ramirez’s final challenge and barrier of first year graduate students is that of racist, sexist, and classist microaggressions. Respondents reported that their transition into graduate school was marred by experiences with racist, sexist, and classist microaggressions, particularly “micro-insults”
and “micro-assaults” (Ramirez 2014). Ramirez states in her study that these racist, sexist and classist microaggressions complicated and marred respondents’ transitions into graduate school. Her study also revealed that the respondents had to find a way to survive by enacting transformative resistance strategies. Ramirez’s study showed that respondents enacted various transformative resistance strategies as a way to challenge the effects of alienation, isolation, and exclusionary practices and culture in their graduate programs (Ramirez 2014).

The recent research on graduate school experiences shows how the factors of race, class, and gender inequalities have affected the representation of Chicanas/Latina in graduate school. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) explore the thematic patterns that affect minority students’ experiences in graduate school. Gonzalez (2006) examined the experiences of academic socialization of Latina doctoral students at U.S. research institutions. Banuelos (2006) examined different dimensions of educational inequality and gender, exclusion, and the institutional marginalization of the Chicana/Latina graduate school experience. Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) examined and explored the social narratives of doctoral education students and how higher education illustrates a marginalizing and dehumanizing cultural experience for Black and Latino students. Ramirez (2014) examined and explored the challenges and structural inequalities that Chicanos/Latinos(as) experienced in their first year of graduate school. However, even with these current research studies on the graduate school experience a gap still remains, and there is plenty of room for further research on using qualitative narratives, testimonios (testimonies), and storytelling on the graduate school experience.
Theoretical Framework (Intersectionality and Standpoint)

Intersectionality theory

Intersectionality theory is used to analyze different methods of research for education, ethnographies, and testimonios. Kimberle Crenshaw coined Intersectionality in the 1980’s. Crenshaw (1993:1244) uses the concept of intersectionality to argue the different ways in which race and gender intersect to shape multiple dimensions of Black women’s experiences. Crenshaw’s (1993) objectives were to map out the experiences of Black women and how they are not comprehensive categories from the normalized boundaries of that of race or gender discrimination, as these boundaries are currently understood. The intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives in ways that cannot be supported wholly by only looking at race or gender dimensions of their experiences separately. Crenshaw (1993:1244) builds on the observations by exploring the many different dimensions in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color in her study.

Choo and Ferree (2010:129) argue about the implications of practicing intersectionality in sociological research and what it means for sociologists to practice intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological approach of inequality. Choo and Ferree (2010:129) discuss and distinguish three styles of understanding intersectionality in practice: group-centered, process-centered, and system-centered. Choo and Ferree (2011:129) explain these styles of understanding intersectionality. The grouped-centered
approach places multiply-marginalized groups and their perspectives at the center of the research. The process-centered approach argues that intersectionality is a process which highlights power as relational, seeing the interactions among variables as multiplying oppressions at differenced points of intersection and illustrating attention to untargeted groups. The system-centered group sees intersectionality as shaping the entire social system and pushing analyses away from associating specific inequalities with unique institutions instead of looking for processes that are fully interactive, historically co-determining, and complex.

Choo and Ferree (2010:132) have built on their comprehensive reviews to highlight three theories as to what intersectionality signifies: the importance of including the perspectives of multiply-marginalized people, especially women of color; an analytic shift from addition of multiply independent strands of inequality toward a multiplicity, thus transforming the main effects into interactions; and focus on seeing multiple institutions as overlapping into their co-determination of inequalities to produce complex configurations from the start, rather than “extra” interactive processes that are added onto main effects. Choo and Ferree (2010:132) state that the utility of an intersectional analysis is to give voice to the perspectives and needs of women of color who often remained invisible as women, even though they were organizing on different paths to express feminist demands. Choo and Ferree explain that women of color argued their oppression was experienced in a qualitative way and their experiences required different attention in order to see “how race, gender, and class, as categories of difference, do not parallel but instead intersect and confirm each other” (Choo and Ferree 2010:132).
Therefore, these qualitative differences make achieving their “voice” as a significant political and also a intellectual demand, since only by inclusion of this perspective from these groups could the political issues emerge from their experience and be addressed by movements, law, or policy-relevant scholarship. In other words, using intersectionality to analyze Chicanas/Latinas in graduate school and how race, class, and gender inequalities provide a voice to their stories, narratives and testimonios of the experience will lead to a better understanding of the oppression, discrimination, and the marginalization faced in universities around the nation.

Intersectionality theory problematizes single-axis theories and additive frameworks (Ramirez 2013). Intersectionality examines multiple forms of oppression: racism/colonialism, sexism/patriarchy, class oppression, and homophobia/heterosexism. Intersectionality scholars challenge the notion that we live in a postcolonial society in which these socially constructed divisions no longer impact or are impacted by power (Covarrubias 2011). Said (1978) argues:

What I do argue also is that there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the hand knowledge—if that is what it is –that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency, and outright war. There is, after all, a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of coexistence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion (1978:xix).

In other words, Said (1978) means that writing and learning from the different perspectives of the experiences from others gives us a greater knowledge. Therefore, writing on the experience of a Chicana/Latina graduate school experience will provide
scholarship in the social science academia and bring validation to their humanistic existence.

Gordon also “conceptualizes the complicate workings of race, class, and gender, she says that the names we give to the ensemble of social relations that create inequalities, situated interpretive codes particular kinds of subjects and the possible and impossible themselves” (1997:4). In other words, she states that the social construction of labels enhances the discrimination, injustice, and the oppression of the marginalized. The intersection of race, gender, and class is very important to the study of Chicanas/Latinas in education and how these variables impact their experience. However, Gordon believes that our haunted past of the sociological “systematic exclusions produced by the assumptions and practices of a normalized social research, narratives, ethnographies and autoethnography or what Gordon (1997) states as science, “these normal methods foreclose the recognition of the exclusions and the sacrifices required to tell a story as the singularly real one” (1997:42). In other words, Gordon argues how the marginalized and the oppressed are excluded from the mainstream core, and without these stories and new knowledge we cannot grasp the alternate academic world. Gordon’s book, Ghostly Matters asks, “What are the alternative stories we ought to and can write about the relationship of power, knowledge and experience?” (1997:23). Gordon questions what are we allowed to write, in what form, we write, how we write, and who should write. Gordon (1997) implies that we should write about the marginalized and oppressed and the stories of everyday life that would bring a new perspective. Therefore, writing about Chicanas/Latinas and the “other” and not just the mainstream core of western academia
and writing about Chicanas/Latinas can bring a better understanding of the graduate school experiences using *testimonio* to enhance our sociological perspective.

Anzaldúa (1987) speaks of the veil and navigating between worlds, she explains the consciousness of the mestiza. Her *testimonio* / poetic storytelling of her life struggles with race, class, gender, sexual identity, and the mestizaje complexity of a new consciousness. As a Chicana, I can understand the complexity of the mestiza consciousness; we struggle with the three identities of being American, Mexican, and indigenous. Anzaldúa (1987) claims that:

The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity; she learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures, she has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else, a triple consciousness (Anzaldúa 1987:101).

Anzaldúa articulates the importance of intersectionality when she states:

> What does being, a thinking subject, and an intellectual, mean for women of color from working-class origins? It means being concerned about the ways knowledge’s are invented. It means continuously challenging institutionalized discourse. It means being suspicious of the dominant culture’s interpretation of “our” experience, of the way they ‘read’ us…What is considered theory in the dominant academic community is not necessarily what counts as theory for women of color. “*Necesitamos theories* (we need theories) that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries” ----new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods (Anzaldúa 1990:xxv).

In other words Anzaldúa (1990) believes that we need to create new theories that embody our experiences as women of color using race, class, gender, and ethnicity to
bring a wealth of cultural knowledge to institutional intellect. Anzaldua (1990:xxvi) states it very clearly in her book *Making Face, Making Soul*:

In our literature social issues such as race, class, and sexual difference is intertwined with the narrative and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded. In our mestizaje theories we create new categories’ for those of us left out or pushed out of the existing ones. We recover and examine non-Western aesthetics while critiquing western aesthetic: recover and examine non-rational modes and “blanked-out” realities while critiquing rational, consensual reality: recover and examine indigenous languages while critiquing the “languages: of the dominant culture. As we simultaneously combat the tokenization and appropriation of our literatures and our writers/artists (Anzaldua 1990:xxvi).

Gordon (1997) and Connell (2007) also recommend the need for different theories other than mainstream ones. Connell (2007:46) argues:

When that empirical knowledge derives wholly or mainly from the metropole, and where the theorists concerns arise from the problems of metropolitan society, the effect is erasure of the experience of the majority of human kind from the foundations of social thought (2007:46).

Connell (2007) believes that we can use different theories to bring better understanding to perspectives from the southern part of the world and not just the northern part; by learning from others we can truly expand our knowledge. Chicana scholars use intersectionality theory and standpoint theory to develop theoretical perspectives of Chicanas in higher education. Chicanas bring a valuable knowledge to academia. Using standpoint theory as a perspective to the understanding of the Chicana graduate school experience, I will expand on standpoint theory to conceptualize the methodology of testimonio.
Du Bois explains how the curse of the veil has segregated him from the world:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,---a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (Du Bois 1903:5).

Du Bois tells of the experiences of discrimination or the awaking of what is happening around him: the differences and how others see him. The veil is the segregation or barrier that Black Americans face in their everyday lives. Du Bois also explains the double-consciousness when “one feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro: the two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warnings ideals in one dark body” (Du Bois 1903:5). In other words, dual consciousness refers to the ability to see oneself from both one’s reference group and the dominant group. As a Chicana/Latina it always seems I have to navigate between “veils” of two worlds. It seems I have to ensure that I am American enough to fit in, but also not forget who I am and keep my Chicana/Latina heritage alive. In theory, we should not have to change who we are to fit in, but be treated as equals in the same world. Chicanas/Latinas face the same veil of dual consciousness that Du Bois speaks about in his academic writings; Chicanas/Latinas face the same barriers of race, class, and gender inequalities, and the sense of belonging in a world that affects their achievement.
Standpoint theory emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power. Standpoint theory challenged the assumption that politics can only obstruct and damage. Harding (2004) describes the origins of feminist standpoint theory, which has been controversial because standpoint theory had an earlier history in Marxist thought, upon which most of the early feminist theorists explicitly drew. Race, ethnicity-based, anti-imperial, and queer social justice movements routinely produce standpoint themes. This phenomenon suggests that standpoint theory is a kind of organic epistemology, methodology, philosophy of science, and social theory that can arise whenever oppressed peoples gain public voice, or better, seek justice (Harding 2004; Wylie 2004). Standpoint theory was presented as a way of empowering oppressed groups, of valuing their experiences, and of pointing toward a way to develop the “opposition consciousness” (Collins 2004). Standpoint theory is very important because I will use testimonio as a reflective analysis of my life experiences in graduate school, which enables social-situated knowledge (Harding 2004).

I will use this “insider” relationship in my testimonio, where from my vantage point, I bring in an understanding of Chicanas experiencing graduate school and still maintain the “outsider within” status that Collins (2004) explains in her theoretical article.

Collins (2004:103) argues that black female intellectuals have made creative use of their marginality by using their “outsider within” status to produce black feminist
thought that reflects a different kind of standpoint on self, family, and society. Collins also explores the sociological significance of the three characteristic themes: black women’s self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of Afro-American women’s culture. Collins (2004:103) suggests that other sociologists could benefit by placing a greater trust in the creative potential of their own personal and cultural biographies. Collins (2004) and Anzaldua (1987; 1990) are saying that women of color bring a great value of information to scholarship and should not be ignored. Blea (1992:117) states:

Chicanas are affected on many levels of social interaction by the U.S. value systems. Chicana’s bring in a multidimensional perspective that can only enhance scholarship to the social sciences. Scholarship in the social sciences must accept the fact that racial and ethnic minorities and women have something of value to teach.

Harding (2004) argues that it is possible and desirable to have apparent and socially-situated knowledge. Therefore, Harding contends that standpoint epistemologists and feminists who have fully articulated this kind of knowledge have claimed to provide a fundamental map or logic on how to do it, and that we should begin by studying form marginalized lives or perspectives. By stepping into the shoes of the marginalized or underrepresented, we can gain a better picture of what is really happening in graduate school programs and the department of sociology.

Wylie (2004) states that those who are subject to structures of domination that systematically marginalized and oppressed them may, in fact be epistemically privileged in some crucial respects. Wylie (2004) contends that feminist standpoint theorists argue
that gender is one dimension of social differentiation that may make such a difference epistemically. Wylie states that:

Feminist standpoint theory of the 70’s and 80’s is often assumed to be a theory about the epistemic properties of distinctively gendered standpoint: that of women in general, or that defined by feminists who theorize the standpoint of women, where this gendered social location is a biological or psychoanalytic given, as close to an indifferent natural kind as a putatively social, “interactive kind can be. The claim attributed to this “women’s way of knowing” genre of feminist standpoint the theory is that, by virtue of their gender identity, women(or those who critically integrate this identity) have distinctive forms of knowledge that should be valorized (Wylie 2004:341).

Hooks (2004) states that for many of us, movement requires pushing against the oppressive boundaries set by race, sex, and class domination. Initially, feminism is a defiant political gesture and confronts the realities of choice and social location. Hooks clearly states:

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that of marginality one chooses as site of resistance---as location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfills desire, We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location form which to articulate our sense of the world (Hooks 2004:159).

Hooks (2004) argues that understanding marginality as a position and a place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people and if we only view the margin as a sign of marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates the very core of our being in a destructive way.
Scholz (2007) argues that standpoint theory also draws on women’s personal experiences to develop claims. She states that feminist scholars from different disciplines, including communication, use standpoint theory to frame their research precisely because it is an alternative theoretical framework that rejects the assumptions advanced from modernity, privileging scientific objectivity, reliability, transferability, and validity. Scholz (2007) explains that the standpoint is unmistakably different from other theories because it draws on many different kinds of knowledge, including those produced by feminist scholars and marginalized women of color. The benefit of standpoint theory, which provides a conceptual framework for academic scholars, is to unearth alternate spaces from where oppressed women give voice to their lived experiences, which in turn can expand existing feminist theories. Scholz (2007) describes how standpoint theory assumes that all social interactions contribute to knowledge and that the subject’s “objective” knowledge can provide a stronger location from which to draw knowledge. She explains that although the analyses of women’s personal testimonies and experience have produced theories that privilege the voices of marginalized women, feminist theories have not gone without criticism (Scholz 2007:12). In chapter three, I explain the methodology of testimonio.
Chapter Three

METHODS (TESTIMONIO)

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how educational experiences in graduate school have been shaped by race, class, and gender inequalities. Testimonio is a critical Latin American oral tradition practice that links “the spoken work to social action and privileges the oral narrative of personal experience as a source of knowledge, empowerment, and political strategy for claiming rights and bringing about social change” (Carmona 2010:40). Carmona states that “Chicanas and Latinas have used testimonio as a methodology to transgress and as a venue to speak against the brutalization against women of color and to disrupt the silence that women of color have experienced in White patriarchal societies”. In this chapter, I will first explain how past scholars have used the method of testimonio. Second, I explain how I will use testimonio as a methodology to analyze my graduate school experiences and how race, gender, and class have shaped graduate school experiences within the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and standpoint theories. Third, I describe the data collection, research design, definitions of terms, and historical background of testimonio and other research studies using testimonio as a new approach.

Data Collection

Data was collected through documents I gathered while in graduate school such as, schoolwork assignments, documented and undocumented memories, notebook entries, and correspondence with family members while I was at Sacramento State. This
university is approximately a one hour and thirty minute drive from the central valley city of Modesto, California where I currently reside. For the past five years, I have commuted back and forth to acquire my higher education in the masters program of sociology.

**Research Design**

I relate my primary data with empirical studies and theoretical frameworks to analyze my graduate school experiences. Using *testimonio* as a methodology for my research is a reflective, personal, and intimate analysis of my experiences of graduate school. Creswell explains:

> Alternatively, a qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives or advocacy/participatory perspectives or both. It also uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies. The researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data (2003:18)

**Definitions of Terms and Testimonio**

To understand why I am using *testimonio* for this research, I had to decide whether *testimonio* was the best choice for my research analysis and for contributing to the research of Chicanas in graduate school. It was one of the hardest decisions I had to make, since many scholars are unfamiliar with the methodology of *testimonio* and its usage, especially in the discipline of sociology. In this section, I define key terms in understanding the methodology of *testimonio*.

*Testimonio* is defined as testimony: showing proof or evidence and witnessing the truth. I relate *testimonio* to the term testimonial as a better translation. A testimonial is
defined as a statement in support of a particular proof, truth, or fact, a written affirmation
to one’s character or worth (Beverley 2004). According to Beverley (2004:3), “testimonio
in Spanish carries the connotation of an act of truth telling in a religious or legal sense—
dar testimonio which means to testify, to bear truthful witness.” Beverly goes on to
describe how:

Testimonio’s ethical and epistemological authority derives from the fact
that we are meant to presume that its narrator is someone who has lived in
his or her person, or indirectly through the experiences of friends, family,
neighbors, or significant others, the events and experiences that he or she
narrates. What gives form and meaning to those events, what makes them
history, is the relation between the temporal sequence of those events and
the sequence of the life of the narrator or narrators, articulated in the
verbal structure of the testimonial text (Beverley 2004:3).

I chose not to use the methodologies or any form of ethnography (institutional
ethnography, autobiography, or auto-narratives) for two reasons: 1) I argue that
testimonio would give a better reflective, personal, intimate, and detailed understanding
of the struggles of Chicanas experiencing graduate school and 2) that the collected data is
only on my personal experiences and not an ethnography of Chicanas in higher
education.

According to Babbie (2007), ethnography is a “report on social life that focuses
on detailed and accurate description rather than explanation”. Smith (2005:225) argues
that institutional ethnography “explores the social relations of organizing institutions as
people participate in them and from their own perspectives”. Institutional ethnography is
a research technique in which the personal experiences of individuals is used to reveal
power relationships and other characteristics of the institution within which they operate.
(Babbie 2007:300). Creswell (2003) defines ethnographies in which the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting, primarily, observational data. The research process is flexible and typically evolves contextually in response to the lived realities encountered in the field setting of the observation.

An example of an ethnographic study is *Sidewalk* by Mitchell Duneier (1999), which is a portrayal of people on the extreme margins of urban society. Duneier’s study looks at the lives of poor black men who work and/or live on the sidewalks of an upper/middle-class neighborhood of Greenwich Village selling secondhand goods. His research explores a set of questions: 1) How do these persons live in a moral order? 2) How do they have the ingenuity to do so in the face of exclusion and stigmatization on the basis of race and class? 3) How does the way they do so affront the sensibilities of the working and middle classes? and 4) How do their acts intersect with a city’s mechanisms to regulate its public spaces? Duneier’s (1999) methodology is the storytelling of the people of the sidewalk; he uses participant observation, conducts interviews with the vendors, and he works among them on the sidewalk. Duneier gained access into this unexplored social world of poor Black sidewalk vendors immersing himself into the world of unhoused and housed vendors of books, magazines, and other merchandise (Duneier 1999).

The distinction between institutional ethnography and *testimonio* is that ethnography is the collected data from the researcher who has written about the
experiences of others, while *testimonio* is a reflection if the researcher’s story, a narrative told through the researcher’s own lens of knowledge. Creswell (2003) defines narrative research as a form of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is then retold or restored by the researcher into a narrative. In the end, the narrative combines views form the participant’s life with those of the researcher’s life in a collaborative narrative (Creswell 2003:15).

**Definitions from Academic Scholars on Testimonio**

I explain and expand on different variations of definitions from scholars who used or wrote on the subject of *testimonio*. The Latina Feminist group (2001) explains the understanding of *testimonio*:

Testimonio is often seen as a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere. Thus, scholars often see testimonios as dependent products, an effort by the disenfranchised to assert themselves as political subjects through others, often outsiders, and in the process to emphasize particular aspects of their collective identity (Latina Feminist Group 2001:13).

Scholz (2007) expands on the group’s usage of *testimonio*. She argues that the Latina Feminist Group has created a discursive space they call home in their anthology *Telling to Live*, where they employ *testimonio* methodologically, being the first feminist group writing within a Western academic context to do so. She also explains how the Latina Feminist Group utilizes *testimonio* methodologically as a response to and toward an opposition to masculinist and white-feminist frameworks. Scholz (2007) explains:
Testimonio has enabled the group to create and co-construct a Latina centered space and where they discovered their group’s histories and lived experiences which are intertwined with the global legacies of resistance to colonialism, imperialism, racism, sexism and religious fundamentalism. An array of feminist scholars also asserts that women’s personal testimonies and personal experiences produce valid knowledgeable claims. These knowledgeable claims are important because they come directly from the voices of those who have been marginalized and who have been consistently devalued” (Scholz 2007:14).

Scholz (2007:212) argues that a “testimonio is more than just a reconstruction of personal and collective experiences. These experiences convey the power to constitute a social world so readers can become witnesses to these different lived experiences by the marginalized and the oppressed.” I began with a historical background of testimonio, its origins and usage. In the following section, I discuss testimonio and those who argue on its methodology.

Origins of Testimonio

In the article “Testimonio: Origins, Terms, and Resources” Reyes and Curry-Rodriguez (2012) discuss the beginnings of testimonio in Latin America and its transformation into a qualitative research approach, oral history, and memoir in education. The major objectives of their article were to provide guidance, resources, and references to the research scholar. Their essay identifies a selected list of Latin American testimonios, focuses on Chicana/o scholars using narrative/testimonio as a methodology, and describes testimonio as a methodology in educational research. The research of Reyes and Rodriguez (2012) found that the term testimonio in current scholarship as a keyword has experienced a growth in usage. The authors found testimonio appears in 36 dissertations from 1990-1999 and 835 in 2000-2009 “Testimonio as an important,
multifaceted approach to educational research is perhaps the most important affirmation” (2012:532). The roots and origins of Testimonio are explained by Reyes and Curry-Rodriguez (2012): the Latin American testimonio is comparable to the North American memoir and the main feature of the testimonial text is the construction of a discourse of solidarity.

Even as it is difficult to date the historical moment of its birth, the testimonio has been inscribed and sanctioned as a literary mode since the 1970s, in large part was the result of the liberation efforts and the geopolitical resistance movements to imperialism in third World nations (Reyes and Curry-Rodriguez 2012:526)

Using testimonio means “speaking the truth” and exposing and challenging the oppression experienced by Chicanas in academia. Reyes and Curry-Rodriguez(2012:527) state that the use of personal narratives in U.S.-based scholarship in the areas of critical race theory, Chicana and Chicano Studies, and other critical studies is informed by the practice of testimonio as a legacy of reflexive narratives of liberation used by people throughout the world. “This type of writing entails a first person oral or written account drawing on experiential, self-conscious, narrative practice to articulate an urgent voicing of something to which one bears witness” (Reyes and Curry-Rodriguez 2012:525).

During the 1980s and1990s, as cultural studies and postmodern methodologies began to frame critical scholarship as subjective and political, Chicanas in particular drew on the reflexive form of testimonio, using such concepts as agency, subaltern, and native. “Feminist epistemology influenced Chicanas and empowered them to develop the narrative format as redemption as takers of the stories, as readers of the narratives, and as creators of the analysis” (Reyes and Curry-Rodriguez 2012:527). The objective of the
testimonio is to bring to light the racism, discrimination, and inequalities Chicanas/Latinas faced, and is an urgent call for action against oppression. Thus, in this manner, the testimonio is different from the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing, ethnography, and autoethnography; the testimonio is intentional and political (Reyes and Curry-Rodriquez 2012:525).

Burciaga (2007) explains that testimonio is a qualitative method developed in Latin America that incorporates the political, social, and cultural histories that accompany one’s life experiences. She says that testimonio is similar to the method of oral history and it attempts to gain insight and information on a person’s development and how they make sense of their lives. Burciaga (2007) states it is important to note that the method of testimonio has traditionally been used to convey the experiences of people who have experienced persecution by governments and other social-political forces in Latin American countries (2007:66). Recently, there has been an emergence of testimonio in research on Chicanas and Latina experiences in the United States.

The Approach and Usage of Testimonio

Flores’ (1999) research is a prime example of how she used Chicana testimonio and autobiography as an analysis of the Chicana feminist writers Lucas, Ruiz, Moraga and Anzaldua. Flores’ comparative analysis of testimonio and autobiography are vital contributions to the understanding of self-representation through authentic experiences for Chicanas. Flores (1999) states:
In an effort to recollect their past, Chicanas are going through a process of self discovery based on memories. By chronicling their album of memories of lived experiences, these writers are able to understand who they are today and witness to a self-fashioning process that takes a lifetime, through this process of renewed transformation as they live their childhood, adolescences and finally adulthood, Chicana authors recollect the stages of their identity and the factors involved in its shaping. The interpretation of each testimonial and autobiographical text represents much more than an individual’s truth; it promotes reflexivity these narrative projects call reader’s attention to the pluralities of the collective group while giving them vessels to redefine a discursive space and social justice.

Flores’ (1999) research, which is a comparative interdisciplinary study that examines, struggles for identity and representation by Chicanas, marginalized subjects against discourse and practices of colonization and neo-colonization. Her research has a twofold purpose: first, to heighten an awareness of Chicana literary production, specifically testimonio and autobiography as vessels of self-representations and self-creation; the second purpose is to examine how they create theories and ideologies which encase their realities in a society which repeatedly challenges their politicizations.

Samano’s (2007) research uses narrative testemonios to capture (through full understanding and consent on their part) the experiences of faculty of color working in predominantly white community colleges. Samano states:

That the testimonio has developed, in large part, not from Western Europe or the United States, but form Latin America. Unlike in oral history, the narrator bears witness to a social urgency; the text frequently falls within (a loosely defined) ‘resistance literature.’ The roots of testimonio go back to colonial cronicas (chronicles) and the war diaries of Simon Bolivar or Jose Marti. Over the past generation the focal points of the testimonio have been of those who have been silenced, excluded, and marginalized by their societies (2007:5).
Perez Huber (2010) uses testimonio in her research of undocumented and U.S. born Chicana college students on discourses of racist nativist. She says that racist nativism allows her to see how race, gender, class, and immigration status affect the experiences of undocumented Chicana college students in higher education. Perez Huber used testimonio as a methodology in a LatCrit study, positioned within a Chicana Feminist epistemological framework. Perez Huber (2010:67) defines or theorizes the understanding of testimonio. She explains, “testimonio is a verbal journey of a witness who reflects and speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more human present and future”. Perez Huber (2010) used testimonio in educational research and acknowledges strategies for documenting life experiences such as life histories, autobiographies, documentaries, and counter stories. Perez Huber (2010:68) uses testimonio to shape methodology which departs from the Eurocentric traditional research, and to guide an anti-racist and anti-hierarchical agenda. Perez Huber (2010) realizes that testimonio is a powerful tool that can stand alone.

However, testimonio is not limited to Chicanas as a research method and most of the growth in testimonio scholarship has been in the field of education being produced by Latina/o and Chicana/o scholars (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012).

Delgado Bernal and associates (2012) state testimonio has been a recent addition to scholarship and that testimonio serves as a pathway to our experiences as a tool and process in methodological analysis. Delgado Bernal and associates state:
While the methodological strategy of *testimonio* is by no means limited to the research conducted by or with Chicanas/Latinas, the ways in which it has been articulated and enacted by these scholars mirror a sensibility that allows the mind, body, and spirit to be equally valuable sources of knowledge and embrace the engagement of social transformation. The methodological concerns of *testimonio* are often around giving voice to silence, representing the other, reclaiming authority to narrate, and disentangling questions surrounding legitimate truth (2012:365).

*Testimonio* differs from oral history or autobiography in that it involves Chicanas/Latinas in a critical reflection of their personal experience within particular sociopolitical realities.

*Testimonio* transcends descriptive discourse to one that is more performative in that the narrative simultaneously engages the personal and collective aspects creating identity while decoding choices, silences, and ultimately identities. As such, *testimonio* is pragmatic in that it engages the reader to understand and establish a sense of solidarity as a first step toward social change (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012:364).

**Criticism, Contention and Justification on the Method of Testimonio**

In this next section, I examine and explain how other academic scholars judge the method of *testimonio*, and discuss the criticism, contention, and justification made by various scholars. Some scholars have brought a discussion on the criticism and contention on the methodology of testimonio and the formal usage of its validity and reliability in the western academic scholarship. The first critique has been on the validity between the academic interlocutor and the bearer of witness to the story-telling narrative. The second contention has been the actual usage of *testimonio* in different disciplines of research. One of the most controversial critiques has been David Stoll, as stated in Scholz’ (2007) research on the rhetorical power of *testimonio*. Scholz (2009) argues that these critiques and contentions have limited the more complex understandings of...
testimonio as a cultural practice and a cultural discourse that can be clarified through a rhetorical-cultural framework. She also states that these limitations are rooted in an inaccurate Western paradigmatic framing of testimonio and holds testimonios and testimonialistas to Western standards of what are considered acceptable research methods (2007:6). Similarly, Beverly (2004) argues on the criticisms and contentions that some scholars have brought to light on the method of testimonio. For example, Beverly (2004) states the approach and usage of testimonio is the controversy between David Stoll and Rigoberta Menchu, not the verification of Rigoberta Menchu’s testimonio(I, Rigoberta Menchu An Indian Woman in Guatemala). Beverly (2004) critiques what he calls the “native informant” and explains:

To grant a narrator such as Rigoberta Menchu only the possibility of being a witness, but not the power to create his or her own narrative authority and negotiate its conditions of truth and representatively. This means that the subaltern can, of course, speak, but only through us, through our institutionally sanctioned authority and pretended objectivity as social scientists, which gives us the power to decide what counts as relevant and true in the narrator’s “raw material” (2004:92).

In other words, because she is not an academic, she cannot possibly write her own story because she is not trained in the western paradigmatic framework. However, this leads us to the conclusion that racism exists within the scholarship of academic institutions and that only academics scholars can write the stories of others. However, other scholars argue that they can write their own stories or use alternate methods to bear witness. I chose to write my own testimonio as the informant, witness, and academic authority to tell the knowledge of truth.
Justification for this study can provide a wider scope of how Chicanas experience graduate school. Using *testimonio* as my methodology brings a more reflective narrative on how race, class, and gender inequalities have shaped my graduate school experience. The absence of research on Chicanas experiencing graduate school was the deciding force behind this *testimonio*. Interest in this subject has gained little attention in sociology; I’m hoping this thesis can provide a better and deeper understanding of Chicanas’ in higher education and the barriers they face. Chapter four is my *testimonio* of experiencing graduate school.
Chapter Four

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

In this chapter I express my experiences through the written voice of my 
testimonio to examine how race, class, and gender inequalities shaped my educational 
advancement as a Chicana in graduate school. I begin with my history, primary and 
secondary education, and finally end with my graduate school education and how, race, 
class, and gender inequalities shaped my graduate school experience.

Family History

Historically, my family has been in the U.S. for many generations on both sides of 
my parent’s family. I was born in Modesto, California in 1967 and I am Maria Consuelo 
Portugal Barron (my married last name is Nevarez). I grew up in Modesto and still reside 
there today with my family. I am married and have three daughters (Violet, Tiffany, and 
Andreana) who are currently attending a local Junior College. My father is 3rd generation 
born in the U.S. and my mother’s family has been here in the U.S. for many generations.

My father, Jose Ybarra Barron, was born in Harlingen, Texas in 1948 and raised by a single mother, Tiburcia Ybarra, and by his maternal grandfather, Nicolas Ybarra. 
My great-grandfather Nicolas Ybarra came from San Luis Potosi or Cuernavaca, Mexico 
and arrived in the U.S. in 1917 with the first wave of guest workers and settled in Texas. 
My father only went to school until the 8th grade and then he went to work in the 
agriculture fields in the Rio Grande Valley.
My mother, Maria Yolanda Cuellar Portugal, was born in Brownsville, Texas in 1947 to Willester J. Portugal (1925 Texas) and Consuelo Redon Cuellar (1920 La Feria, Texas). My great-grandmother Guadalupe Redon (Consuelo’s mother) was also born in Texas (1893) and she was half Apache Indian with Spanish ancestry. My grandfather Willester J. Portugal’s family traced their lineage to Italy and France. My mother graduated from high school and attended college, but she left before she could complete her studies, though she earned a cosmetology license in Texas. In 1966 my parents migrated to California for work in the agriculture industry. When they first arrived, they lived in a migrant camp in Ceres, California. They moved to Modesto in 1972 and they eventually worked in the ranches as field workers or in canneries; my mother retired from Stanislaus Foods (cannery) and my father retired from Cal-Pine Containers (a lumber mill) due to health issues.

*Education K-12/ Undergraduate*

The lack of educational attainment among Latinas/os affects their political and socioeconomic status in the United States. Education is the primary means of upward mobility, particularly for those who are socially and economically disadvantaged (Castellanos & Jones 2003). My educational experiences were through the Ceres and Modesto City school districts in Ceres and Modesto, California. In the 1970s, I attended Walter White (Ceres, California), Bret Hart, and Tuolumne Elementary schools, which were predominantly white at that time. I remember two Hispanic teachers, but the faculty was largely white. My nickname, Connie, came about because of attendance at a
predominantly white elementary school. The teachers could not pronounce my Spanish
given name Maria Consuelo. My mother’s frustration became apparent when she decided
that the teachers could call me Connie; it seems that even my Hispanic identity
experienced forced assimilation into American society. Covarrubias (2011) explains how
when he was younger, his second-grade teacher had also changed or anglicized his name
from Alejandro to Alex. She said, “I will call you Alex”. Covarrubias (2011) explains
how she robbed him of his identity until he had the courage to reclaim it in his
undergraduate years. I currently use my birth given name for all documents, school, and
legal purposes, but family and close personal friends call me by my nickname “Connie”.

The area we lived in was low-income housing, until my parents were able to
afford to build our house 1972 in Modesto, California. After elementary school, I
attended La Loma Junior High and Thomas Downey High School, both of which are in
Modesto City school districts. I graduated in 1985 from Thomas Downey high school. In
the 1980s, the high school placed minority students into vocational or general education
curricula. If you were very lucky, you were placed in the academic plan, but very few
Chicanos/Latinos were placed on the academic track. I remember going to my counselor
and asking how could I attend college. She said that college was not for me and I was
better off learning how to learn sewing, cooking, and economics, so that I could learn to
“keep house”. I remember that in my senior year of high school, I put myself in college
preparatory or gate (advanced placement) classes to better my opportunities at a local
community college, since I was not prepared to attend a bigger four-year university.
I was accepted to Modesto Junior College and attended for a while, but after a year and a half as a full-time student and working full-time, I had to discontinue my education. After my three daughters were born, I was working full time at Frank Pattern & Manufacturing (making iron parts for showers drains and earning $5.25 an hour). I had to leave my position at the company due to child care expenses for three kids, and I made the decision to stay home with my daughters and provide care. When my youngest daughter was old enough to attend school full-time, I returned to school with the aspiration of finishing my education not only for myself, but for my family. I earned two A.A. degrees from Modesto Junior College in 2003. In that same year, I transferred to California State University, Stanislaus and graduated in 2005 with a B.A. degree in sociology. I had no idea that I could further my education in a graduate program. Dr. Agnes Riedmann was the only professor who asked if I was planning on attending graduate school. She told me to consider it and find a sociology graduate program, but that was as far as she went; she did not go into detail about the process of actually getting into a program of graduate studies. At CSU Stanislaus there is no sociology graduate program; they only offered a masters degree in social work, so I had to look elsewhere (CSU Stanislaus still does not have a graduate program for sociology).

Graduate School Experience

The graduate school experience for students of color has been described as oppressive and dehumanizing. Scholars have struggled to document how students of color navigate and negotiate conditions in their daily experiences of graduate school.
education (Gildersleeve et al. 2011), When the time came to decide if I should attend a graduate school program, I discussed it with my family to ensure that it did not interfere with my family obligations. In 2006, I researched the programs at UC Berkeley, UC Davis, San Jose State, and Sacramento State, and the best educational fit was Sacramento State, because the distance from the university to my hometown of Modesto was manageable. Since I am married and with a family, I could not live in the city of Sacramento, and it was not fair to uproot my family to another city, where they would be unfamiliar with the area and the city culture. My husband has a stable and established job, the children had their friends at school, and I had my parents living in the same neighborhood, across from my home. The sacrifice to drive an hour and a half was well worth the reward of earning a Master’s degree. It also was the best choice for financial reasons. I currently do not work and my husband is the only financial provider at this time. Ramirez’ (2012) study documents many factors that played a role in the participants graduate school choice process in her research. These factors included but are not limited to 1) a desire to stay close to home, 2) financial considerations, and 3) campus climate concerns. Ramirez (2012) found that some of the participants from her study, especially women, desired to stay close to home or in the region in order to help and support their parents and family.

School Process Choice and Sense of Belonging

My husband and my mother helped financially during my undergraduate studies and for my graduate work. I also had to take out student loans to finance the rest of the
graduate school experience, approximately $40,000 in loans. In 2006, when I was accepted in the graduate program, it was a great accomplishment. It was the only graduate program I had actually applied to and I was accepted on the very first try. The process of applying to graduate school was a learning experience; it was all done online through the university web-sites. I looked at CSU Sacramento’s web page to see the information on the steps of applying to graduate school. Since no one had explained how to do it, I learned as I went through the process.

Ramirez (2011) documents and expands on the process of applying to graduate school and how the choice process is developed. She documents that Latinos are among the most educationally marginalized groups in U.S. society, have the highest high school dropout rates, and are less likely to earn bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate degrees than any other racial/ethnic group in the country. Ramirez (2011) examines the graduate school choice process of Latinos and analyzes the barriers and support structures Latinos face in the graduate school application process. Ramirez examined how public and institutional policies and race, class, and gender inequalities affect Latinos experiencing graduate school and how they approach the process of schooling. Ramirez’ (2011) indicates that higher education institutions can implement areas of policies and practices that can help underrepresented students move smoothly through the graduate school application process. When the day came and I was told that I would be notified by Sac Ct, a school web-site, if I would be accepted or denied, I was very anxious. I was so very proud and excited when I was accepted to the graduate program at CSU Sacramento.
In 2006, I began with the courses of data analysis, race and ethnic relations, research methods, and orientation to graduate studies. It was very overwhelming. When I first started the program, I had no idea what to expect and had the overwhelming feeling of “Do I really belong here?” I had to navigate this different world and find my self-definition and self-valuation of becoming a graduate student (Collins 2004).

Collins (2004) argues that Black female intellectuals have made creative use of their marginality, using their “outsider within” status to produce black feminists thought that reflects a different standpoint on self, family, and society. Collins (2004) explains that as “outsider within” black women are able to challenge mainstream notions of what is universal and normal, and to offer new insights from their own experiences and perspectives. Collins (2004) also suggests that other sociologists would highly benefit by placing a greater trust in the creative potential of their own personal and cultural biographies. Therefore, I had to self-define and self-valuate who I really was by challenging the normalized stereotypical images of Chicanas/Latinas in graduate school. The sense of belonging in the graduate program is a major factor for the success of Chicanas/Latinas in higher education (Ramirez 2014).

My graduate experience was very isolating. It was very hard to join student peer groups because of family responsibilities, and the long commute home made it harder to make friends. The interaction with peers was difficult because of the distance to and from CSU Sacramento. The gas prices did not help my social interaction or my attendance at social functions provided by the sociology department or CSU Sacramento. As soon as
when the night classes were over at 9pm I just wanted to head home. I usually arrived at eleven at night at my house and was so exhausted I just wanted to go to sleep. I never did join any groups or organizations at school I never had the time or the opportunity to interact with or join someone for coffee or lunch unless I was on campus during the day. I was only on campus for classes, important dates, meetings with professors, deadlines, and the library.

Familial responsibilities kept me from most of the socializing or interaction at the university and I went straight to class and from there straight home. Class time was the only time I could actually interact with the students, but even then it was hard. I always felt tension in class with the other graduate students because everyone knew each other and some had been in the undergraduate program together or the same cohort coming into the graduate program. Most of my interactions were with Dr. Barajas and Dr. Ramirez. I have known them for a long time, and I knew Dr. Barajas before I entered the program. Dr. Carlos Nevarez in the education department had introduced me to Dr. Manuel Barajas when I was looking at the sociology program at CSU Sacramento; I was encouraged to contact Dr. Barajas to learn about the sociology department at Sacramento State. I made some friendships during my graduate school experience, during class meetings I interacted as best I could, and I participated in class as much as possible.

Another struggle with my experience in graduate school was the inadequate feeling I felt during the writing of this thesis and attending my classes. I felt unprepared, not intelligent enough, and out of place in graduate school. The experience was
overwhelming; no one tells you the work it will take, the time involved, and the commitment before you enter the program. Especially with the responsibility of family and health issues, it was a lot harder for me. Even though others finished faster, I could not. The writing process was draining and time consuming because of the drafts I had to write, over and over, and I never felt not good enough to complete the work. The sense of doubt in me and in my work was terrible; I would fall into a deep depression because of this stress. I understand that in order to succeed, I needed harsh criticism and feedback to enhance my thesis.

Familial and Economic Stressors

My three daughters, at the time I was beginning my graduate school experience, were in their teenage years. I had a 17, 16, and an 11 year old to care for. These are very important years of their childhood, when they need their parents the most. It was a very hard and trying time, due to the fact that my oldest daughter was struggling with her sexual orientation, and finding her identity throughout high school was very difficult. She was dealing with identity issues, it is hard enough being a teenager, let alone a Hispanic female who is gay, while living in a mainstream society who demonizes and dehumanizes homosexuality and then is culturally stigmatized by her Latino and religious community. Having children and going to graduate school is hard work, but manageable at the same time, even though at times it felt impossible to accomplish both family and graduate school. I have many family obligations which include housework, laundry, cooking and the responsibilities of everyday life as a domestic housewife. Besides being
a homemaker, I also play other roles, child-care provider, gardener, chauffer, and manager. When doing homework assignments, they were completed when everyone was in bed or at school because that was the only available time I had to focus on my studies. I would stay up until one or two in the morning doing homework and would get up early to prepare breakfast, take children to school, pick them up, and then prepare dinner. It is a lot harder when you have family obligations. Even though my children are grown, I still feel the gendered obligation to my family and husband. According to Ramirez (2012:28), the importance of staying close to home is to help family and parents, “This sense of obligation and familial responsibility undoubtedly stems from their familialistic orientation.” Ramirez also states that familism is an ingrained Latino/a cultural trait that entails “a strong identification and attachment to the family, both nuclear and extended, and requires members to prioritize family over individual interests” (Ramirez 2012:28). In other words the importance of family to Chicanas is always a priority over our goals, dreams, and aspirations.

My family has been very supportive of my education, especially my husband, my mother, and my children. My husband has been my greatest supporter of all; I would not have been in school without him. My husband helped to keep our daughters entertained and cared for them when I was attending night classes, so they would not feel my absence as much when I was in the early stages of the graduate program. I believe gender highly impacts family experiences with family support and obligations. As a Hispanic female, I am highly impacted by the double shift, double standards, and patriarchy ideology. Which suggest that family and home are the most important parts of our lives and that
education should be last on our minds and only second to our family’s. My daughters are very proud of me for having the courage to further my education and I have inspired them to seek higher education as Chicanas. However, my daughters feel they have more pressure to succeed because I have accomplished so much.

During the recession, I faced many hardships while in graduate school. My husband and I had to file for bankruptcy, and this was a very long process. My husband was reluctant to file for bankruptcy because of the stigma attached to it and the shame, guilt, and failure to our families we both felt during this process. In the beginning, we were undecided if we should proceed with the bankruptcy process; we acquired a bankruptcy attorney and we borrowed the money for the bankruptcy process from a family member to stabilize our finances. We were heading down a financial spiral because of financial instability that hit us very hard in the past couple of years. We were struggling with huge debts and were on the verge of losing our home. We had also taken out money in refinancing (2nd mortgage) to pay other debts and to continue my educational attainment. We were struggling to save our home, but in the end of the bankruptcy process, we did keep our home, but with tough financial penalties.

We did lose one of our vehicles during this process and returned it to the bank, and it was hard to struggle with one car. I would take my husband to work and then my daughters to school in one car. It was very difficult. I would ask my parents to help sometimes if they could take or pick up my daughters when I could not. This went on until we could purchase a used car so I could do my daily rounds and complete family
obligations. The bankruptcy process took an emotional toll as well; the stress on us was so detrimental that it played a part in my health, marriage, family obligations, and my educational experience.

I am currently out of work, and in Modesto the jobs are very limited. According to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of July 2013, Modesto’s unemployment rate is 11.2% compared to Sacramento’s which is 10.9%, and 8.7% in California (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013).

Health and Institutional Barriers

At one point during the program, I had to reapply to the sociology graduate program after health issues (surgeries in the past couple of years) kept me from finishing, and everyday life got in the way. The surgeries I speak about dealt with a thyroid problem and with the resultant depression and hormonal imbalance, which was interfering with my life. With that surgery, I suffered complications and ended up in the intensive care unit. The other surgery was a full hysterectomy and that came with some minor complications as well. Both surgeries were necessary, due to tumors found in my thyroid gland and my ovaries. These surgeries had a long recovery time period, and the medications (Norco, Hydrocodon) interfered with attendance while in the sociology graduate program. Because it took longer to complete the masters program, I faced many problems with the sociology graduate department and the office of graduate studies. I went over the seven year time frame and I had to repeat courses to comply with the currency polices of the university. These policies state that you must stay current. If not
then you must petition for course currency, which means that students have a reasonable current knowledge in the courses which comprise of the graduate program for the degree, credential, or certificate which is to be awarded. In 2013 I had to repeat sociological theory and research methods in order to advance to candidacy to complete the program in 2014.

*Departmental Racial Climate and Absence of Faculty Diversity*

During my graduate school experience, I was affected by the departmental racial climate and the absence of faculty diversity. Yosso and associates (2009) define campus racial climate as the overall racial environment of the university that could potentially foster outstanding academic outcomes and graduation rates. A positive campus racial climate promotes the 1) inclusion of students, faculty, and administrators of color, 2) a curriculum reflecting the historical and contemporary experiences of people of color, 3) programs to support the recruitment, retention, and graduation of students of color, and 4) a mission that reinforces the institution’s commitment to diversity (Yosso et al., 2009).

The microaggressions we all struggle with during our educational experiences only make us stronger. We feel the pain, and build calluses to help us to continue our cause of educating our selves. According to Yosso and associates, the most grievous of offensive mechanisms spewed at victims of racism and sexism are called microaggressions. “These are subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal and/or kinetic” (Yosso et al., 2009).
I felt that when I would converse or interact with the professors who are not of my ethnic group, they were not so welcoming during their office hours. It seems that they felt forced to help or interact with me as a student who is not from the dominate group. The professors might not have noticed that they made me feel out of place, and inferior from their standpoint, but I felt their indifference when I would visit during their office hours. During class sessions, I also felt a perception of indifference from the faculty. Some faculty members had or showed favoritism to certain students, particularly those approximating the hegemonic norm along race, class, and gender, while at the same time marginalizing those most distant from it. I truly believe that race, class, and gender inequalities highly impact how others view our capabilities to succeed in graduate school. I understand that it is impossible to read the minds of the professors; however, I feel that their mannerism, attitudes, and the perceptions of the students of color in graduate school have impacted how we have felt the racism, classism, and gender inequalities.

Yosso (2009) explains how graduate programs could enhance social climate, and yet we still see that the graduate program does not have faculty diversity. While attending CSU Stanislaus, I did not have mentorship of any kind. Even though some professors did try to help us during class or office hours to encourage us in furthering our education, it was not with an understanding of the process of getting into a graduate program. I had to help myself just to get through my B.A. I would talk to one professor, and she would help as much as she could, but I did not have any Hispanic or Chicana female professors to model after during my undergraduate years who could relate to my background experience. Faculty diversity can bring in valuable knowledge to graduate programs and
enhance the experience and success of students. The universities failure to hire professors to teach more available classes and the absences of ethnic professors in the graduate programs is very damaging to all students. I believe the university has failed the students of color because of its failure to diversify the faculty even though the university promotes diversity on the school website.

In the graduate program, my accessible mentors have been Manuel Barajas, professor of sociology and Elvia Ramirez professor of ethnic studies, who believed in me to succeed, even when I did not believe in myself. They gave me hope and inspired me to keep going and not give up on the opportunity of getting a higher education. If it weren’t for them, I would have left the graduate program a long time ago. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (2011: 2013), out of the 289 full-time faculty members at CSU Stanislaus, there are 21 Hispanics, 8 African-Americans, and 208 White, compared to CSU Sacramento, which has 778 full-time faculty members, 64 are Hispanic, 39 are African-American and 539 are White (TCHE 2013). How is it possible that universities fail to meet the needs of students of color by not hiring faculty of color? Students are missing out on this valuable knowledge. It is unfair to the undergraduate and graduate students of all backgrounds when the university does not reflect or value a broader universe of knowledge and experiences that a diversified faculty would offer. Barajas (2011) states that the California State University (CSU) system, plays a critical role in this solution as the largest institution in the nation, and this system has graduated the most racial minorities with a bachelor’s degree.
Faculty diversity has changed over the years since I began in the sociology graduate program at CSU Sacramento. In 2006, the faculty was made up of a couple of ethnic professors and the rest were white professors in the sociology department. I remember one professor (African American) who taught race & ethnic relations in the beginning of my graduate school experience in the spring of 2006, but he is no longer a professor at Sacramento State. Barajas (2011) states that although diversity is a stated core value in many universities’ mission statements, strategic and affirmative action plans have yet to become a practiced value and goal of higher education. Barajas (2011) argues that hiring full-time faculty of color is important not only to the production of knowledge, but also to the success of all students, who will benefit from a university culture that reflects a broader universe of experiences and knowledge. Barajas (2011) also notes that recruiting a diverse faculty must be actively pursued by the university’s administration, human resources, affirmative action office, colleges, and departments. Currently, there is one Hispanic, two Asian, and no black full-time professors to mentor current students. Even though on the web site of CSU Sacramento they promote ethnic diversity of faculty and students, not all departments within the university are equally ethnically diverse. Professors have come and gone in the sociology program since I began at CSU Sacramento. This has highly impacted my graduate school experience, since there is no female Latina in my graduate program who can relate to my experience as a female student, mother, and a Latina.

Finally, I am currently at the end of the program and my advancement to candidacy has been approved, but not without problems. The closer you get to the end of
the program, the more paperwork students need to process: the thesis hearings, thesis workshops, and finally, the infamous sociology 500 culminating experience classes. The accomplishment of finally reaching the end of the program has truly been a challenging journey, because of the racism, classism, and gendered inequalities.

*Interpretations/Analysis*

Two major themes emerged from my *testimonio* of graduate school experiences: class environment and familial commitment. The class environment theme is the experience of a classroom setting and how I was affected by race, class, and gender inequalities. The subcategories in class environment are: 1) negative perception, 2) mentorship, 3) absence of faculty of color, and 4) sense of belonging/isolation. The theme of familial commitment is the importance of family support during the process of experiencing graduate school. Familial commitment has four subcategories that make up the process: 1) family obligation, 2) choice process, 3) family support, and 4) financial challenges.

*Class environment*

The findings revealed how class environment affects Chicanas in higher education and is highlighted by the negative perceptions that I faced during the years at CSU Sacramento while in the sociology program. Negative perceptions include the racism, classism, and the gendered biases of how professors of the program view students of color with the imagery of inferiority.
I always felt that when I would converse or interact with the professors who are not of my ethnic group, they were not so welcoming during their office hours. It seems that they felt forced to interact with me or assist me by answering any questions. The professors might not have noticed that they made me feel out of place, and inferior from their standpoint, but I certainly felt the indifference and tension.

These negative perceptions truly affect how we manage our graduate school experience and academic achievement. According to Achor and Morales (1995), they found that their respondents reported negative perceptions of prejudicial attitudes from the faculty, students, and other university personnel. Respondents reported patronizing or condescending behaviors from faculty or withheld support; they stated that the narratives of respondents told the story of racism, discrimination, and of the subtle indicators. For example, one respondent explained:

One professor was very outspoken about her biases; her statement to me was “people of your background seldom complete a doctoral program.”

The negative perceptions in the class environment can affect how Chicanas experience graduate school and succeed in academia.

Faulty mentorship research suggests that retention of Chicanos and other Latinos in postsecondary institutions facilitates the adaptation to the new and alien environment. Valdez (2001) explains that Chicana(o) students depend on whether or not the university provides enough faculty of color, who can serve as role models. She also states that students possibly struggle to be like their mentors because their mentors understand the
same position of the students: therefore, it is important that the students have faculty of color.

A diverse faculty can enhance the graduate school experience. Scholars argue that the effects on graduate students of color who lack diverse faculty is needed for the production of knowledge and students who have, for example Chicano(a)/Latina(o) role models, have a more productive and successful graduate school experience (Gandara 1995; Barajas 2011; Ramirez 2014).

Through my experience, I felt the isolation, alienation, and the feeling of not belonging in the graduate school program because of my race, gender, and class. Ramirez (2014) states that students feel isolated and alienated in their graduate school programs due to the lack of race/ethnic, class and/or gender-based diversity in their disciplines.

Familial commitment

The findings revealed how important family commitment is to the success of Chicanas experiencing graduate school. I define familial commitment as the importance of support from parents, spouses, children and extended family and friends.

Family support is a major factor in the experience of graduate school. Without it the feeling of not belonging or isolation is a greater challenge and barrier for Chicana/Latina students. I felt that without my family’s support to continue my education, it would have been impossible for me to finish my education. Also, the added family obligation that we have while attending graduate school is also a challenge and
barrier in our success and achievement. Process choice is very important when choosing a program. For me, I had to make sure that the university was close enough so that I would not have to move to another city. The financial need was a great burden as was having to take out student loans for my graduate work, and when I finish the program, the stress of finding a job to pay them back will be a heavy burden.
Chapter Five

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The narratives, testimonios and autobiographies written by Chicana/Latina graduate students document their experiential knowledge, which have been an invisible and hegemonic feminist discourse (Huber and Cueva 2012). Chicana scholars have increasingly used testimonios to bring an understanding of the struggles Chicanas/Latinas face while seeking higher education. The major problem is the absence or lack of research of how Chicanas/Latinas experience graduate school and how race, class, and gender inequalities impact and shape theses experiences. Although most of the research on Chicanas/Latinas has been on the K-12 and undergraduate students, very little is known on Chicanas in graduate school. The main purpose is to study, explore, and advance the understanding of Chicanas experiencing graduate school. I revisit the research question: How have race, class, and gender inequalities shaped my experience as a Chicana graduate student?

A small growing number of scholars reveal that testimonio is used as a methodological approach to employ and provide what would expose and reflect on Chicana/Latina educational experiences dictated by race, class, gender, immigration, and sexual orientation. This approach builds from the work of academics, generally women of color scholars, within or outside the field of education who use testimonio to document the experiences of struggle, survival, and resistance within the context of oppressive institutional structures and interpersonal events (Perez Huber & Cueva 2012; Gandara 1999; Achor and Morales 1990).
These earlier works of scholars showed the beginning of a foundation of Chicanas/Latina research in higher education. These earlier studies explored the success of Chicanas/Latinas in higher education and the factors that lead to their achievement. Gandara (1995), Achor and Morales (1990), and Lango (1995) all asked similar questions; what factors associated with the success for Chicana/Latinas in graduate school are. Zambrana, Dorrington, and Bell (1997) examine and explore factors of the individual and the family to determine the completion of graduate degrees. Solórzano (1998) examines racial and gender microaggressions using critical race theory as a framework to analyze Chicana/Latinas in higher education. All these articles are the building blocks to further the research in higher education and graduate school. However, they do not expand on the factors or patterns of the experiences of graduate school. These earlier works of scholars showed the foundation of Chicanas/Latina research in higher education. The current research on graduate school experiences shows how the factors of race, class, and gender inequalities have affected the representation of Chicanas/Latina in graduate school. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) explore the patterns that affect minority students’ experiences in graduate school. Gonzalez (2006) examined the experiences of academic socialization of Latina doctoral students at U.S. research institutions. Banuelos (2006) examined different perspectives of educational inequality and gender exclusion, and the institutional marginalization of the Chicana/Latina graduate school experience. Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) examined and explored the social narratives of doctoral education students and how higher education illustrates a marginalizing and dehumanizing cultural experience for Black and Latino students. Ramirez (2014)
examined the challenges and structural inequalities that Chicanos/Latinos(as) experienced in their first year of graduate school. However, even with these recent research studies on the graduate school experience a gap still remains, and there is plenty of room for further research using qualitative narratives, testimonios (testimonies), and storytelling on the graduate school experience.

Chicana students, activists, and scholars have asserted the need to study Chicanas and their statuses in institutions of higher education in the United States. However, one pattern remains abundantly clear “Chicanas are severely underrepresented in institutions of higher learning at the undergraduate, master’s and doctoral levels” (Cuadraz 2005). Gonzalez’ (2006) main interest is on Latina doctoral students’ conceptualization of the institutions and how ethnicity, gender, and class affect their lives and survival at institutions of higher education. The two recognized conceptual theoretical frameworks I used to analyze the experience Chicanas face in higher education are intersectionality and standpoint theory, to discover how race, class, and gender intersect in the lives of Chicanas experiencing graduate school. Standpoint theory prescribes a reflective perspective of both the researchers and the object of research.

I explained how past scholars have used testimonio as methodology. I use this approach to analyze my graduate school experiences and how race, gender, and class inequalities shape graduate school experiences within the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and standpoint theory. I describe the data collection, research design, definition of testimonio, historical background and other research studies using the
approach of testimonio. Data consisted of documents and non-documented memories, note book entries, and family correspondence while attending CSU Sacramento. I also expand on the approach and usage of testimonio, with a section on criticism, contention, and justification.

I narrate my findings through the methodology of testimonio to analyze the graduate school experience and examine how race, class, and gender inequalities have shaped my experience as a Chicana graduate student. My testimonio has three major components: 1) I briefly explain my historical family background, 2) I tell of my k-12 and undergraduate educational experiences through the written voice of the methodology of testimonio, and 3) I focus on my experiences in graduate school at CSU Sacramento and how race, class, and gender inequalities have highly impacted these experiences in the sociology program.

Discussion Findings

My analysis revealed two major themes from my personal data. The first major theme was the familial commitment while in graduate school and the second theme was class environment, which highly impacts graduate school experience. Familial commitment is a major factor for the success of Chicanas experiencing graduate school. The support from spouses, parents, siblings, and children enhances the student’s ability to survive, overcome struggles, and create their own self-identity.

The second major factor reveled was the class environment in the experience of Chicanas in graduate school. Providing a positive racial climate with mentorship and
faculty of color creates an outstanding academic environment that could potentially lead to higher graduation rates at universities around the country.

Using Collins’ (2004) thematic characteristics of Black feminist thought, we can also assert that Chicanas in higher education struggle with self-definition and self-valuation. Chicana’s self-definition must challenge the political knowledge validation process that has also resulted in externally defined, stereotypical images of woman of color. Chicanas insistence on self-definition, self-valuation, and the necessity for a Chicana centered analysis is significant for two reasons: First, defining and valuing one’s consciousness of one’s own self-defined standpoint in the face of images that foster a self-definition as the objectified “other” is an important way of reasoning the dehumanization essential to systems of domination(Collins 2004:108). Secondly, Chicana’s self-definition and self-valuation are significant concerns that value in allowing Chicanas to reject internalized, psychological oppression. This potential damage of internalized control on Chicana’s in graduate school, self-esteem can be greatly damaging, even to highly educated women. Enduring the frequent assaults of controlling images requires considerable inner strength on the part from Chicanas experiencing graduate school (Collins 2004:108).

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of this study will contribute new qualitative knowledge to the research of Chicanas in graduate school. Another similar strength is that this study will introduce a new approach of testimonio to inform and contribute to quantitative and/or
qualitative future research on Chicanas’ graduate school experiences; however, the limitations include the possibilities of researcher biases within this study, and that the data collected is from my own educational experiences: from documented and undocumented memories, academic planners, and notebooks; I cannot generalize all Chicanas in graduate school and their experiences. Another limitation has been the criticism and contention of testimonio that has brought up major concerns with other academics on the knowledge of truth. Scholz defines testimonio within a western paradigmatic understanding of it as a method. Questioning its validity, objectivity, and reliability places limitations on its broader and more variable implications for academic work. Scholz (2007) argues that one of the primary critics of testimonio is David Stoll because of his controversial book on Rigoberta Menchu and the implications for understanding testimonio as a method and not as a cultural discourse. Historically, we look back at the conception of standpoint theory, and how it was criticized for being theorized primarily from the perspective of white liberal feminism and the exclusion of women of color. However, Scholz (2007) argues these critiques have given rise to additional conceptualizations of personal testimony and experience that advocate for the merging of multiple theoretical perspectives that more clearly take into account collectivism and the intersection of gender with race, culture, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation (2007:13).
Recommendations for Future Study

Further scholarship is needed in the education of Chicanas/Latinas in graduate school; little research has been done, with a few scholars like Dr. Ramirez (CSU Sacramento), who have brought to light this growing problem of Chicanas in higher education who does not continue on to post graduate work. Sociology is an evolving discipline and I argue that we should bring in a new method or approach (i.e. *testimonio*) of research to enhance scholarship and create new policies in graduate programs. I also recommend that sociology programs hire a more diverse faculty, especially in areas with a higher population of Latinos. Hiring Latino/a, Hispanic, and Chicana/o faculty can be an improvement in the success and experience of Chicana/o graduate students. A future direction for this work is to continue using *testimonios*, and to conduct qualitative interviews, or even a mixed-methods study using *testimonios* of Chicanas experiencing graduate school and quantitative data on how many Chicanas are in graduate programs and how race, class, and gender shape their graduate school experience.

Conclusion

In this study, I proposed how *testimonio*, intersectionality, and standpoint theory are used to explain the experiences and struggles of Chicanas in graduate school. *Testimonios* are not the method of choice in sociology for research, but I argue that this form of methodology can bring a valued knowledge. The discipline of sociology is moving in a direction that requires scholars to draw on new analytical tools that reach beyond the boundaries of the discipline. I used *testimonio* as a methodology for my
research to bring a better understanding of the theoretical perspective of experiences of graduate school.
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