

I CAME FOR THE CHILDREN, BUT I LEARNED FOR MYSELF: MEXICAN  
WOMEN, POWER, AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

by

LORI HUGHES GARRETT-HATFIELD

(Under the Direction of Thomas Valentine)

ABSTRACT

Mexican women make up one of the largest percentages of learners in adult English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes nationwide, and yet there have been very few studies about them in the literature. A review of literature suggested that Mexicanas may be unique in the adult education community because of their proximity to the United States border, the cyclical nature of immigration during the history of the two nations, and in the number of illegal immigrants from Mexico in the United States. In addition, many Mexican women have operated not only under a patriarchal system, but in the shadow of two women, Malitzin Tenepal and the Virgin of Guadalupe. Anecdotal evidence suggested that some women who strive to get an education may be subjected to abuse from their male partners because of their desire to become educated. Evidence collected in the qualitative study suggested that when the Mexicanas began learning English, their male partners resorted to coercion, verbal abuse, and physical violence to prevent them from attending classes. The Mexicanas in the study reported feeling a sense of hopelessness about their relationships with their male partners, but the feeling of hopelessness was present before the women began attending classes. The Mexicanas in

the study reported feelings of desperation when they could not advocate for the needs of their children because they did not know the language. Once the Mexicanas who were studied began to learn English, they were better able to help their children access services in the areas of medicine, education, and other community services. As the women learned English, many felt a sense of pride in themselves. They had dreams and goals of furthering their education and working in a career of their choosing. They also wanted to help other women within their community who did not know the language. Suggestions for changes within the community and future research are discussed.

**INDEX WORDS:** Adult Education, Adult Literacy, Domestic Violence, Family Literacy, Mexican Women, Power

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Mary Walsh Hughes (1917-2002). You gave me strength, courage, relentlessness, that danged stubbornness, and your sense of humor. I miss you so much. By the way Grandma, I didn't put your middle name here because I know how much you hated it.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM

How do you know when the person that you love, the person who told you he loves you, will always wish the best for you? How do you know that the person you love will never want to harm you because you do not agree with his beliefs? How can you decide that the person you fall in love with will want you to succeed, even if your goals are higher than his? Relationships are about power. In balanced relationships, power is shared somewhat equally between the two people within the relationship. In relationships that are troubled, one member wants more of the power for themselves. In a perfect world, power sharing would occur equally in every relationship. In a perfect world, children do not get hit in violence, women and men do not abuse each other, and no one ends up in jail for domestic violence, which is sometimes the end result of someone's grab for all the power. None of us lives in a perfect world, and as adult educators, we face the sometimes weekly task of deciding what to do about the students who are affected by shifts in the power dynamic within their relationships. Adult educators have for years discussed the problem of domestic violence as it occurs with the students we teach. Some adult educators choose not to discuss the relationships between women and men and how this might possibly affect their studies. I managed not to think about the power dynamic between men and women and its affects on adult education students until a few years ago.

I taught classes full of women trying to get an education for quite a number of years without really acknowledging the role that domestic violence played in the lives of my students until I began teaching adult ESOL in the fall of 2003. I loved teaching adults a new language. I had a group of students, all female, almost all Mexican, who needed desperately to acquire this new language as fast as they could. I had my students keep journals about their progress in their new language. At first, the students could write only in Spanish, but during the course of the year they began writing words and sentences in English. As they began writing, my students wrote with pride about their new accomplishments. One of my students wrote about how she was able to go to Wal-Mart for the first time without fear. Another of my students was able to take her child to the hospital when she broke her arm and tell the doctor what happened—in English. I could feel the pride coming from the text that my students wrote, but I could also feel something else . . . fear. One of my students wrote that her husband did not want her to come anymore because she was learning too much. Another one of my students showed up in class with a swollen jaw and a bruised arm. Her husband did not want her attending class either. He thought she was becoming too friendly with her classmates. I cannot give you the exact number of students that had a problem with domestic violence in their lives the first year that I taught adult ESOL, but I can tell you that there were enough of them to ring warning bells in my mind, enough for me to give the issue of domestic violence some serious consideration. I did a head count in my mind, and I began talking to my *Mexicana* (what my female students from Mexico called themselves) students in class about their home lives.

I realized that nearly all of them had some type of experience with violence, either passive, when their husband refused to drive them to class or hid the keys, or overt, threats of or actual violence.

I began wondering about the reasons for the violence in the lives of my students, whether their attendance in class caused the violence, and what made them keep coming despite the threats of violence in their lives.

### *Background of the Problem*

It is an undisputed fact that the United States can be called a nation of immigrants. Nearly all of us can trace our ancestry back to someone who emigrated here either voluntarily as immigrants, or involuntarily as slaves. For persons of Mexican heritage, however, the tale of immigration is different from the immigration experiences of other nationalities that entered the United States for three major reasons.

First, as Anzaldúa (1987) pointed out, Mexicans who immigrate to the Southwestern United States are part of "*la reconquista*" (the reconquest or the retaking). In other words, Mexicans were simply taking back land that belonged to them in the first place. Centuries before the United States legislators picked up a phrase from an editor and coined the term "manifest destiny" to justify expansion into the West in the 1840s (Gruesz, 2004), Mexicans had been living and working in the Southwestern U.S., where Mexicans held huge tracts of land that were used for ranching. When Mexico became independent from Spain in 1821, the leaders in Mexico immediately feared that the United States would try to take portions of what they considered to be northern Mexico, especially Texas, for their own purposes (Garza, 1994). The new Mexican government didn't have long to wonder: *Anglos* (what people of European descent who are not

Spanish are usually called in Mexico) began flocking to Texas, in direct violation of Mexican law. In 1829, the U.S. offered Mexico one million dollars for Texas, but the offer was refused. By 1835, there were 30,000 Anglos living illegally in Texas, with 2,000 slaves-and only 5,000 Mexicans. (Garza, 1994). The United States government, capitalizing on the non-native Texans wish to be a part of their government, annexed Texas in 1845, and sent their troops into Texas in 1846, which Mexico took as a declaration of war. The United States battled its way through Matamoros and Monterrey and occupied Mexico City in 1847. After the United States and Mexico signed a peace treaty in 1848, the United States got most of the Southwest, and Mexico left many of its citizens north of the new border (Anzaldúa, 1987).

The second way the Mexican immigration experience differs from that of other immigrants is in the cyclical nature of the immigration patterns. In brief, the cycles of immigration depended on the economic fortunes of both Mexico and the United States, and to put it bluntly, whether Mexican workers were needed by the United States to feed the industrial machine or not. For example, at the end of the Civil War, Mexican men were encouraged to come across the border to work in the mines and railroads of the West. When the railroads were done, the men were sent back to Mexico. Another example of the cyclical nature of immigration and deportation of Mexicans would be the beginning of World War I. When Mexican workers were needed in factories to replace the soldiers needed on the war front, the United States welcomed Mexicans with open arms (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). After World War I, however, the Mexican worker was no longer needed, and the Great Depression meant that there were few jobs for *Anglos*, much less Mexicans. The United States deported more than one million Mexicans during



the 1930s, people they had formerly welcomed (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). When the United States entered World War II, the “*Bracero*” (laborer in traditional Spanish, taken from arm in Spanish) program of welcoming Mexican workers began again, only to be reversed at the end of the Korean War. In 1954, the United States forcibly removed over a million and a half Mexicans during a forced repatriation of farm workers called Operation Wetback. This forced repatriation was in response to mounting criticism from Texans and other groups in the United States about the growing numbers of foreigners in their towns, and occurred during the height of the “Red Scare” when foreigners were not wanted in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). It should be stated here that Mexican workers were not the only immigrants the U.S. welcomed during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, nor were they the only group that saw their fortunes turn with the shifting U.S. economy. Yet no other immigrant group has had repetitive cycles of exploitation that resemble that of the Mexican people, perhaps because of proximity.

A third way that the Mexican immigration experience differs from the experience of other groups is in the sheer numbers and culture of illegal immigrants. The *Bracero* program, at the time it was operating, not only encouraged legal immigration of workers, but illegal immigration as well—Mexicans, like immigrant groups before them, sent money and letters home, and family members or friends followed them into this country. In the 1960s, the INS reported deporting about one million illegal Mexicans (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). In the 1970s, that number had risen to 7 million deportations for the decade. The U.S. government has been estimating the number of illegal Mexicans crossing its borders since 1980, and the number has risen steadily since then. In 1980, the government estimated that approximately one to two million illegal immigrants were

in the United States during that year (a good number of which were Mexican). In 1986, the number increased to 3 million (Hondgneu-Sotelo, 1994). Currently, there are estimates that nearly half a million Mexicans illegally enter the U.S. each year, and although estimates of the total number of undocumented workers are difficult to determine, estimates range from 8 to 11 million. A large number of these illegal immigrants are of Mexican origin (Camarota, 2003). The official U.S. estimate of the number of illegal immigrants residing in the United States in the year 2000 was 7 million, with approximately 350,000 new illegal immigrants entering the country every year (Office of Immigration and Naturalization Service, 2003). The United States deported over 200,000 illegal immigrants in 2004 (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2004).

Although there have been illegal immigrants in the United States in the past, mostly Haitians, Cubans, Vietnamese, and Chinese émigrés (Center for Immigration Studies, 2003), they have never numbered in the hundreds of thousands per year, as the illegal Mexican immigrants do. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) reports that the current wave of immigration of Mexicans began with “*La Crisis*” (the crisis or the troubles) in 1982. In that year, the Mexican government could no longer adequately feed its citizens, partly due to weather conditions, and partly due to the impact of the end of communal farming, which had been in place since the time of the Aztecs. The peso was devalued, inflation rose 100% in one year, and people living in Mexico who could have afforded to feed their families before 1982 now could no longer afford to do so. Anzaldúa (1987) states that mothers in Mexico who had never worked in their lives began working during “*La Crisis*”. Women with young children were forced to leave them in the streets, and work in the *maquiladoras* (factories usually located in border towns along the United States-

Mexico border) in order to survive. Many Mexicans believe that any risks they are taking when they cross the border into the United States are miniscule when compared to starvation and poverty (Anzaldúa, 1987).

The Mexican crisis is not the only reason Mexicans continue to cross the border. Businesses in the United States, even though prohibited by law from doing so, will hire Mexican workers who are *sin papeles* (without papers). It is cheaper for the businesses to hire illegal immigrants because they are cheaper labor than American citizens. They will work long hours for less than minimum wage, which allows the company to be competitive because they can keep wages down and they don't have to offer the illegal workers benefits. In addition, businesses can take advantage of Mexican workers who do not know the American system of wages, work weeks, and vacation or sick leave because they have no protection from government agencies due to their illegal status, and are afraid to go to the police because they fear deportation (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Businesses have been known to report their workers who are undocumented to the INS if they have completed a job, or if they cause trouble within the company (Valdés, 1996).

This phenomenon of "illegalness" status that Mexicans face sets them apart from other immigrant groups, both in the number of people within the culture that are illegal, and in the number of years that Mexicans may remain illegal. Valdés (1996) reports that Mexicans who are undocumented keep to themselves, do not get to know their neighbors, do not go to meetings at their children's schools, and do not talk to people at work, because any of these activities might be enough to get an immigrant reported, and nearly all Mexicans know someone who has been deported back to Mexico.

Other immigrant groups have assimilated into American society, like the Italians, the Irish or the Greeks. However, illegal Mexican immigrants, due to their culture, their religion, their language, and the vast numbers of Mexican undocumented workers who are living in the United States, have remained for the most part an unassimilated culture.

This notion of an unassimilated culture is particularly important when we consider the implications for our educational systems. Many of the immigrants who are crossing our borders come to America bringing their families with them. Grant and Wong (2003) suggested that nearly 40% of elementary schoolchildren enrolled in ESOL do not reach English proficiency by the time they finish elementary school. In addition, if a Latino child begins middle or high school in the U.S., and is not proficient in English, the odds are very small that the student will even graduate from high school. While 87% of white students graduate from high school nationwide, only 44% of Latino students graduate. Students of Mexican origin have the lowest graduation rate of all: 33% (National Center for Family Literacy, 2003).

The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 brought sweeping changes for school systems. Schools are held accountable for the test scores of all of their students, whether immigrant or not. If schools fail to meet their yearly goals for raising test scores, their schools may eventually be “reconstituted”. This could mean the school employees could be fired, or the school itself could be closed (U.S. Senate, 107-110, 2001). Many states outside the “usual” Southwest belt of immigration are feeling the tide of immigrants from Mexico reach their borders, and with it, a challenge that many of the schools in the South or the Midwest have never had to face previously. For example, Georgia has seen a 300% increase in its Hispanic population in the 15 years between

1990 and 2004, making it the third fastest growing Latino population in the nation.

Northeast Georgia's population grew 348% in the decade between 1990 and 2000.

(Census Bureau, 2004) As early as 1995, the Center for Immigration Studies identified Georgia's public school systems as having a potential for difficulty within its public school systems when it came to educating immigrant children. The article noted that Georgia did not have enough ESOL or bilingual teachers to teach the huge numbers of immigrant children expected to attend Georgia's schools, and there would not be not be enough services for children who spoke a language other than English, including translation services for parents, if the population of immigrants continued to increase (Bouvier & Martin, 1995). It would seem that because the school systems may not be prepared for students who speak a language other than English, the parents of the student would bear a greater share of the responsibility for teaching their children English.

Research has shown that one of the most telling predictors of a child's success in school is the literacy level of the mother (Chall & Snow, 1982; Fossen & Sticht, 1991; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale, 1986). Researchers have noted that if parents and more specifically mothers, do not read to their children, do not practice language acquisition activities with their children, and do not prepare their children for reading in elementary school by introducing them to numeracy and phonics, the children begin their educational careers already behind their peers.

Time and time again, research has shown that mothers, whether literate or not, bear the primary responsibility for making sure their children are educated (Anzaldúa, 1987; Rogers, 2003; Valdés, 1996; Villenas, 2001). Rogers, in her ethnographic portrait of a family in New York state, noted that an African-American mother of a family living

in poverty was responsible for the literacy needs of all of her children. The mother that Rogers discussed in her book only read on about a 5<sup>th</sup> grade level and her husband had his GED and could read on a much higher level. The mother in the family constantly had to negotiate her way through school forms, government forms, and employment forms that she did not understand in order to get the family what they needed.

If the mothers are newly arrived immigrants, they must become literate in another language, so in order to help their children succeed in school, they may attend ESOL classes. ESOL studies (Buttaro, 2001; Manton, 2001; Weinstein-Shr, 1993; Wrigley & Guth, 1992) showed that adult ESOL students want to learn how to help their children succeed in school; in fact, it is one of their chief concerns. It would stand to reason then that immigrant mothers would want to attend ESOL classes to enable them to help their children succeed in school.

Yet, there are also studies that show that women who seek to get an education in order to better their lives or the lives of their children are subject to intimidation at best, or at worst, violent attacks from their partners ( Frye, 1999; Manchura, 1997; Rockhill, 1987; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Tollefson, 1991).

*Mexicanas* face an uphill battle. They are in a foreign country where they may not speak the language and may not understand the culture. They are, because of their sometimes illegal status, forced into a shadow life of silence, never allowing themselves to trust anyone who is not a member of their family or their community. They may be in a situation where their husbands, fearing the decrease in their power, abuse them. Yet they must learn in order for their children to succeed in the United States. *Mexicanas* are at a difficult crossroads in an unfamiliar country.

How do *Mexicanas* balance this difficult juncture between the need for learning English in order to help their children become better educated and the potential risks they may face if their partner believes they are overstepping their boundaries? Sometimes with silence; this appears to be connected directly to the lack of power that *Mexicanas* may feel in their lives. Anzaldúa (1987) talked about silence. Language, Anzaldúa said, is male discourse. It would appear that in the lives of women in ESOL classes, it is what is not said that has more meaning than what is actually said. Anzaldúa said that culture is made by those in power: men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them to their children and the cycle continues.

How many times have I heard mothers and mothers in law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them, for being *bociconas* (big mouths), *callajeras* (gossips) for expecting their husbands to help with the housework and the rearing of children, for wanting to be something other than housewives (p. 16).

Silence in women was echoed in the Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule book *Women's Ways of Knowing*. The authors noted that the women they studied in this area of silence were deprived economically, emotionally, and socially, and that all of them were talented in one way or another, but that none of the women recognized their inherent gifts. For these women, the authors observed, words were weapons, used to break and disempower people, not to separate and connect people. The women have no way to describe themselves, no way to see themselves, and what is probably most important, they have no way to describe themselves or help their children (especially their daughters) see them from a position of strength. Silent women cannot teach anything at all, they feel like they have nothing to contribute. Again, it would appear that where silence is pervasive, a lack of power is also pervasive. If we are to effectively

address the needs of this large, marginalized population, we must understand how the family roles and the student roles of the *Mexicanas* intersect. We also must understand the consequences a woman faces when she makes a decision, often against her partner's wishes, to continue her education. There has also been some anecdotal evidence that domestic violence is a larger problem within this particular population of ESOL students. It is apparent that further study of this population is necessary in order to understand what practitioners and administrators within the field can do to help these women gain the tools they need to further their goals.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Over the last 20 years, there has been a tremendous influx of Mexican immigrants into the United States. The southern states have seen an unprecedented number of Mexican immigrants into areas where Mexican immigrants had not previously immigrated. Schools and social service programs were not equipped to serve a large population of immigrants who did not speak the language of the country they immigrated to. In order for their children to be successful in their new country, Mexican women, who by tradition are the persons responsible for the education of their children, need to learn the language of their new country. However, it is a possibility that when the women begin to take classes in English, their male partners may resent the *Mexicanas* advancement in the language.

While Latina women represent one of the largest groups in adult education ESOL programs (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2008), there are few studies that look at their representation within adult education, or the implications of the women attending classes in ESOL. Very little research has been done on the changes within the



women's lives as they began to learn English. While some research has been done on the problems that some women face in adult education programs when their male partners decide that they do not want to give up power to someone who is attending adult education classes, little information exists on the issues of power and the ramifications of sharing power in a family where power may not have been shared. There has also been very little research on the specific cultural factors of *Mexicanas* within ESOL. If one of the largest percentages of adults who attend ESOL classes in the United States are Mexican women (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2008) greater research needs to be done about this population.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to describe the ways learning English in an ESOL classroom impacts the power relationship within the home lives of *Mexicanas*. In order to accomplish this goal, the following questions were addressed:

- 1) How does learning English impact the power relationship between the *Mexicanas* and their male partners?
- 2) How does learning English impact the relationship between the *Mexicanas* and their children?
- 3) How does learning English impact the *Mexicanas* sense of personal agency?

#### *Significance of the Study*

Practitioners who work in the field of adult education discuss the topic of domestic violence in the teacher's lounge, at home with their spouses or partners, or with their friends at a social gathering. It is not usually discussed, however, at conferences, workshops, or during class time. It is almost as if as practitioners in the classroom, the

subjects of domestic violence, power struggles, and the home lives of our students are taboo subjects, and yet we know as practitioners that if the home lives of our students are traumatic, it is nearly impossible for them to learn what they need to learn in order to be successful. The information that was gathered from this study may be used by many people within the adult education field in order to gain understanding of a little understood population within adult education. Practitioners, support staff, and administrators of adult education programs may be able to use this research to formulate programs or plans to support students who are having problems at home with power struggles within their families, or who are victims of domestic violence. In addition, social service agencies who work with Mexican families may gain insight into the family structure and function, which would help them better serve their clients. Without an understanding of the population, misconceptions occur, and further misidentifying and mislabeling is not what these women need. What they need is a way to tell their stories, and a way to be heard and to find solutions after their stories are told.

In Chapter One, the nature of the problem was discussed. In the United States there is a very large population of Mexican immigrants, both legal and illegal. Many of the immigrants from Mexico have arrived within the last 20 years. While the Western states have traditionally been the home of most immigrants from Mexico, the immigrants have recently traveled to states which have not traditionally seen large numbers of Mexicans within their borders. Many of the immigrants bring their children into the new country. Students of Latino descent have had difficulty in school systems not prepared to accommodate them. *Mexicanas* have a deep desire to help their children be successful in their new country, but cannot fully support their children's educational needs because of

the language barrier. If the *Mexicanas* decide to attend school, they may face difficulties within their personal relationships, including verbal and physical abuse. How do *Mexicanas* balance the needs of themselves and their children with the desires of their spouses?

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of literature will consist of three major sections: a review of the education of immigrants in the United States; a review of the history of education with respect to women; and a review of how women are viewed in Mexican culture.

#### **The Education of Immigrants and its Effects on Culture and Society**

##### *How Has America Educated Its Immigrants?*

Historically, the United States has pursued literacy with the expressed ideal of education for “all men created equal”, but in fact, literacy in this country has been pursued with a different, mostly hidden agenda: literacy with the intent of creating citizens who can assimilate into “our” society and “work hard” for “our” factories. Before the Protestant Reformation, the prevailing wisdom among the clergy was that literacy was not necessary—priests could read and interpret text for the uneducated masses. But the Puritans, who began settling in this country in 1620, required that literacy be promoted within the church in order to give all parishioners an opportunity to learn to read so they could read the Bible themselves. In 1644, Massachusetts required that each town with 50 households have one teacher of reading and writing. This essentially made the government responsible for the education of its citizens (Stubblefield & Keene, 1994). Social justice also played a part in the Puritan culture. Cotton Mather established a foundation for African-Americans as a response to letters he received asking for his help. The foundation taught freedmen to read and helped them

establish groups to help themselves out of poverty (Stubblefield & Keene, 1994).

However, social inequalities were tolerated by the Puritans—in their way of thinking, prosperity was a signal of God’s favor on them, and therefore, poverty was seen as a lack of initiative, even as a sign that the individual was not heaven-bound. This dichotomy between belief in literacy, individualism, and (somewhat) in equality, and the mindset that “God helps those that help themselves”—between idealism and realism, so to speak-- would be repeated constantly in the history of adult education in the United States.

In the decades before the Revolutionary War, apprenticeships were popular in the Northeast. Apprenticeships were perhaps one of the only ways someone who grew up in poverty could learn both a skill/trade and become literate at the same time; in fact, many Northeastern states required that employers teach their apprentices to read (Stubblefield & Keene, 1994). However, the authors pointed out that while apprenticeships were a way for working class persons to become upwardly mobile, it also perpetuated the existing class system, and allowed the status quo to continue. It should also be noted that in the South, apprenticeships were not common at all, for two reasons. One, if masters desired that their slaves learn a trade, they taught the slaves themselves; and two, as early as the 1700s, teaching a slave to read was against the law in many Southern states, so in general, slaves remained illiterate (Stubblefield & Keene, 1994).

After the Revolutionary War, the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence—all men are created equal—again clashed with the notions of hard work alone being the key to success. Also, there began to be the notion, especially with the first big wave of immigration in the 1820s, that Americans needed a common language. Some citizens believed that the new nation needed an educated populace in order to

govern effectively, while other citizens (notably Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson) believed that only those men who had been educated should have the right to vote. All of the rest of us; women, minorities, and non-landholders, would have to wait a while (Stubblefield & Keene, 1994). As early as the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, reformers saw adult education as a medium for social change. Beginning in the 1830s, larger cities in the North began offering evening high schools, mostly for immigrants who worked during the day but who also wanted to continue their education. This contrasts with what became a common experience after the large Irish immigration—alienation of the “new arrivals” from the “citizens”. The Irish were seen as outsiders; they did not speak the same language as “we” did, their culture was different, and their religion was different as well. In fact, starting with the Irish, immigrants began to form societies to retain their cultural heritage, and as a shelter somewhat from the hostility of the citizens who came before them—it should be noted, however, that the problems within a culture were exacerbated by class struggle, which further served to fragment an ethnic group (Stubblefield & Keene, 1994).

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw further division between the idealism and egalitarian values, and the industrial, realistic worker climate. Although schools were established to teach adults English, and allow the immigrants the education they may have been denied in their home countries, the government, first through laws, and later through funding, used literacy education to promote their social agenda. And that agenda looked very much like the agenda of our founding fathers: we must educate these new immigrants so that they will be “just like us” (Stubblefield & Keene, 1994).

“Just like us” meant child rearing as well. As early as the 1910s, middle class women began forming societies to teach immigrant mothers how to raise children “properly” (Stubblefield & Keene, 1994). Ruíz (1998) said that in Texas, Mexican women would come to a Methodist compound in San Antonio for classes in English, for free day care, and for classes on “parenting” that differed from their cultural norms. For example, women were told not to speak Spanish in their home, and they were told that extended families living in the same house were “dirty”. One girl remembers her priest telling her not to play on the Methodist’s playground because the children who went to that playground were not the same children when they came out—they didn’t like to speak Spanish. Villenas (2001) stated that women especially have been targeted for “Americanization” classes such as the scene listed above because the government realized fairly early that women would make the best clients for Americanization: they were the primary care givers of the children, and the government realized that if assimilation within the family was going to occur, mothers were key.

*The Education of Mexicans in the United States*

In Kansas City, Kansas, in 1927, a man named Saturino Alvarado started a protest against the local school board. He had two children who attended Argentine High School. And, unlike in years past, when dark-skinned Mexican-American children dropped out of school in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade, he wanted his two children to continue to attend school. While two light skinned Mexican-American children had been allowed to graduate in 1924, no dark-skinned Mexican-American children had ever graduated high school in either Kansas or neighboring Missouri. It was expected (by the white population) that the Mexican-American children would quit school before high school to

go and work in the meat packing industry or the canning industry as their fathers had done. As had always happened before when Mexican-American children stayed in high school too long, the white parents in the school district protested, threatened violence, and the school board ordered that the children leave school. This time, however, Saturino Alvarado decided that he wasn't going to let the white parents dictate his children's future. He protested the school board's decision to the Mexican consul because he was a Mexican citizen, and hired a lawyer to represent his family and two other families in a lawsuit against the district. The district backed down, and Saturino Alvarado's children did graduate from Argentine High School. However, segregation was still the norm in Kansas City high schools until after World War II, and Argentine High School never had more than three Mexican-American children graduate from the school in any one year prior to 1939, even though they represented a sizable population in the district (Cleary, 2002).

The education of Mexicans and Mexican-American children represented an interesting dilemma for the United States. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were viewed as "white" in the court systems (Gross, 2005) and "white" for the census count (Ruíz, 2001), but they were considered non-white when it came to schools, restaurants, cinemas, and swimming pools (Gross, 2005).

After the Supreme Court decided that education of African-Americans in segregated schools in Louisiana was allowed as long as they received an "equal" education in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), school systems in the Southwest classified Mexican-American children as "colored" and educated them in "Mexican schools".



The “Mexican schools” that the children went to throughout the Southwest looked much the same as the African-American schools did in the South.

Most of the schools for Mexican children had poor or non-existent plumbing, no transportation to the schools, no lunch program, second hand books and materials, and no qualified teachers. Also, students were not allowed to speak Spanish at all, even on the playground.

It was rough because I didn’t know English. The teacher wouldn’t let us talk Spanish. How can you talk to anybody? If you can’t talk Spanish and you can’t talk English? It wasn’t until maybe the fourth or fifth grade that I started catching up. And all that time I just felt I was stupid.  
(Ruíz, quoting Mary Luna, 2001)

Often, Mexican children were urged to drop out of school. One person remembered his principal telling him that if he had to miss school for a day to pick cotton in Texas with his dad, he could just drop out of school and pick cotton forever (Ruíz, 2001). The curriculum at the “Mexican schools” was vocational in nature, and prepared the students for what the administrators believed were to be their careers in the fields or factories for the boys, and in white-owned houses as domestic workers for the girls. There was little, if any, encouragement to attempt an education beyond high school, and very few students ever attempted college (Ruíz, 2001).

It was fairly easy for the states in the Southwest to separate the children for education in the “Mexican schools”. Arizona passed a law in 1899 which allowed children to be separated and schooled in different schools because of language abilities (Ruíz, 2001). California had a code as part of their school code in the 1930s that provided for separate schools for “Indian children and for children of Chinese, Japanese, or Mongolian parentage”. The school boards in California usually included Mexican-

American children under the heading of Native American children. In many cases across the Southwest, Mexican-American children were sent to Mexican schools whether or not they were Americans and whether or not they could speak English (Gross, 2005). At times, children were subject in California to a visual search, to check for skin color, to ensure that only white children were going to white schools.

School and state leaders used many devices to ensure the continued segregation of their schools. Some states, like California, gave Mexican-American students rigged IQ tests to claim they needed special services. Other states used the language acquisition factor to separate students—whether or not the students could speak English was not relevant, if they spoke Spanish at home, they needed to go to a different school. There were some school districts who even stated that separating Mexican children was a health issue. The Orange County California School District Superintendent said in 1945 that he had a separate school for Mexican-American children because they had “lice, impetigo, dirty hands, face, neck and ears; they were generally inferior to the white children in personal hygiene” (Gross, 2005).

Beginning in October, 1925, however, Mexican and Mexican-American parents who had previously protested quietly, or who had accepted the ruling of the white majority, began to fight back. In October of 1925, a rancher named Adolpho Romo, Sr. sued the Tempe Elementary School District #3 because the district wanted to send his Mexican-American children to the “Mexican school” because they spoke Spanish, even though they and he were U.S. citizens, and were counted as “white” on the census. The Mexican school the children were to go to did not employ state certified teachers, and Romo argued this did not qualify as equal education under the Supreme Court ruling of

*Plessy v. Ferguson*. The judge ruled in the father's favor, and ordered the school district to admit these children to the white school since the school district did not provide equal education. But the district continued to segregate other Mexican-American children into the Mexican schools until the 1950s (Muñoz, 2001).

Another round of parents protested their children being sent to a Mexican school, much like Kansas City Kansas, in Lemon Grove, California. In 1931, the local school district built a "new school" for Mexican children, a barn that was furnished with second hand everything, and proposed to send all the Mexican children there. The 85 children's parents refused to send them, filed suit, and won. The children returned to the school they had always known, which had been integrated (Ruíz, 2001).

In 1945, five fathers, all Mexican-American, led by Gonzalo Mendez, filed suit with the help of LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) to integrate the schools in California. Until this time, Mexican-Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans were segregated into different schools. In 1947, the federal courts upheld the lower courts ruling which made segregation in California schools illegal. In June of that year, the governor of California signed a bill that officially ended segregation in the state (Wollenberg, 1976). Mendez, also, like the parents in Lemon Grove, had sent his children to an integrated school that he himself had attended. But when the school refused to educate his children, and insisted that his children go to the Mexican school, he and four other fathers filed suit in California, and effectively ended segregation there (Ruíz, 2001). The excuses the local superintendents gave during the course of the lawsuit for segregation are interesting. The Garden Grove Superintendent said that "Mexicans are inferior in personal hygiene, ability, and in their economic outlook." Another

superintendent said that Mexicans were “handicapped in interpreting English words because their cultural background prevented them from learning Mother Goose rhymes.” (Ruíz, 2001) These sentiments were the prevailing sentiments throughout the Southwest during this time period. Texas ended segregation of Mexican-Americans in its schools in 1948, Arizona and New Mexico soon followed (Ruíz, 2001).

*The Education of Mexican Women and its Effects on Their Children*

The education of Mexican immigrant mothers is critical for themselves and for the lives of their children. Dumka, Roosa, & Jackson (1997) found that when Mexican immigrant mothers began learning English, their children were less stressed and depressed. They attributed the reduction in stress to the child’s no longer needing to function as an interpreter between the parent and a representative of the majority culture, or the mother allowing the child to play with more acculturated peers, both inside and outside of the home. Also, the authors noted, the mothers may have been able to model better coping strategies for the child now that they were better able to negotiate their way in the United States, such as after school activities, counseling, boys’ and girls’ clubs, and other stress-reducing activities. Valenzuela (1999) bridged from the authors above by noting that Latino families in general do not ask outsiders for assistance, they rely on close family ties and ask for assistance from within the family network. I would argue as well that the close family ties are made even closer or tighter if one adds the stigma or shadow of “illegality” into the mix. Many of the women I spoke with would never have asked a person who was not in their family or known to them personally for help or assistance unless the situation was truly dire. Valenzuela also noted that many recent Mexican immigrants are from rural areas of Mexico where children are breadwinners and

stakeholders in the life of the family, not just a child to be doted on and cared for, as is often the case in post-industrial society. Valenzuela said that children of immigrant parents are asked to translate documents, phone calls and information from schools that their parents do not understand. In addition, Valenzuela pointed out, they must interpret on behalf of their parents with government and school officials and sometimes advocate on behalf of their family when the people representing the majority culture show little patience or understanding of their parent's lack of language. Valenzuela noted the undocumented status of families adds an additional level of stress on children and added that if the parents become legal citizens it was the children that guided the parents through the cumbersome system of naturalization.

It is interesting to note that Valenzuela discussed that it is primarily the responsibility of the mothers and immigrant daughters within Mexican immigrant families to make sure the children are enrolled in school, and are involved in school related activities. This echoes the findings by other others above, like Rogers (2003) and Anzaldúa (1987) that women are the agents of literacy within families.

Jería (1999) said that English language literacy is driven by labor market needs—which are defined by politicians, business leaders, and teachers. In addition, literacy is used as a tool to classify people as talented, intelligent, or skilled. Villenas (2001) agreed with Jería, stating that people who are not English language literate are viewed as deficient, and families who are not literate are seen within the “deficit model” of education—which has been criticized for looking at students from the standpoint of what they lack, not what they can add to the classroom, which ignores the enormous wealth of knowledge and heritage adults can bring to a classroom. Cultural differences are easily

deficient in the pretext of helping the cultural minority group—Villenas called this benevolent racism.

One additional fact cannot be ignored. Jería (1999) and others (Anzaldúa, Ruíz, Valdés, Weinstien-Shr) stated that although the government's hidden agenda is to have the new immigrants assimilate, they nevertheless need the immigrants to also become literate to provide the human capital (talent and skills) that the capitalist economy needs to survive. Immigrants also must acquire social capital (training) in order to become productive, and in reality, training cannot really take place without literacy in the 2<sup>nd</sup> language. In other words, literacy is good for business.

What should immigrants be taught, and how should the government teach its newest citizens? It is important for adult educators to differentiate between their sense of social justice and the government's quest for assimilation—we are often, if not always, at odds. Ferguson (1998) said that adult education teachers must realize that we have little problem selling the “American Dream” to immigrants, they believe it, thanks to the exportation of American culture via the media—but if the immigrants fail to meet their enormously high expectations, the immigrants blame themselves and not the system. Couple that with the need of the government to educate the masses in a mass production form of education, and it isn't hard to see the dilemma. Ferguson also stated that adult educators rely on government funding that determines who will teach the students, how the students will be taught, who will be taught, and for how long they will be taught—it is for this reason that adult educators must understand the government's political agenda. This dilemma is compounded in the case of Mexican illegal immigrants. Moriarty (1998) stated that teachers of undocumented workers must contend with all of the factors listed

above, and adds that a) the United States' open door policy where adult education is concerned creates a big problem for educators of illegal immigrants, in fact, government funding for most adult education programs is dependent on how many adults are served, which in many communities means that large numbers of illegal immigrants are served; and b) the mixed message climate of the country towards undocumented workers, exacerbated by the events of September 11 and the recession that followed September 11. Adult education teachers are told to get as many students in the classroom as possible, even if it means ignoring their status as residents.

How should immigrants be educated once they arrive in the United States? Freire (1970) stated that in order to teach literacy (and by teaching literacy, allowing adults to acquire power) to adults, teachers cannot merely dump new literacy on the heads of students and expect them to learn. Adult educators must find a way to teach literacy while not becoming culturally invasive, by blurring the lines between student and teacher so that each can learn from the other. Freire, in his quest to teach illiterate adults in Brazil, developed a plan to teach literacy that has formed the basis for many "participatory action" programs in which the students generated problems within their communities and worked to solve them. What is interesting about Freire is that he begins the teaching process by asking essentially the same question that Tyler (1949) asked: What does the student need? Unlike Tyler, Freire is concerned with what he sees as an oppressive economic system where the haves have all of the power and wealth, and who are not willing to share with those less fortunate. Freire believed in education of the poor so that the poor can not only liberate themselves and acquire power, but his hope was that eventually the poor would liberate the rich from their oppressive economic

ideals. Freire's ideals would seem very relevant to this population of Mexican immigrants coming across the border.

Freire, in order to teach, listened first. He and volunteers that he recruited from within the community would walk around, ask questions, and listen to the villagers. Freire would then determine what the community needed (in other words, he and the villagers brainstormed problems) and while he worked with the village to solve a particular problem, he would use their own words to help teach them literacy. Freire's legacy of participatory teaching and community learning is echoed many times in the writings of adult education researchers. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) echo Freire when they say that pedagogy must be participatory in order to be effective. They also believe that teachers must look at educating the whole student through what they call "funds of knowledge"—what the students already know and bring into the classroom as a bridge to what the students need to learn. This allows the student to participate in her own learning, which, as many researchers will agree is crucial both to adult education participation and education. Other adult educators like Auerbach (1992), Jería (1999), Villenas (2001) and Weinstein-Shr (1993) believed in the participatory educational model; that students must have a say in what is being taught, and how it is being taught.

When adult education researchers have asked the students what they want to learn, the same answers continued to appear. Wrigley and Guth (1992) interviewed adult ESL students and found that adults wanted to accomplish four things: to understand the United States and its system, so that they do not get taken advantage of, and so that they have the power to communicate their needs to others; become more independent, and not have to rely on friends and relatives for communication; to gain access to better jobs and



economic power; to help their children succeed in school, to get respect, and be seen as intelligent; and to be involved in education for the sake of knowledge.

In addition, Wrigley and Guth observed that adult education programs that have demonstrated a history of successful student participation plan their curricula around the following: a focus on self-expression, a focus on survival/life skills, a focus on the ability to pose and communicate problems, a focus on the culture of the students, and a focus on basic literacy. Jería (1999) also advocated through his research on the Hispanic population that language needs should be taught with problem solving, political action, job skills, and access issues (social services skills).

Jería pointed out that all the education in the world is not going to do a bit of good if immigrants are not schooled in the ways and morals of the dominant culture. Auerbach (1992) stated that students must be able to have a voice in the planning of their curriculum in order for that curriculum to be effective. Weinstein (1998) said that successful family literacy/ESL programs use progressive problem solving to inquire into the lives and problems of students. When the learners define their needs, Weinstein-Shr said, the program must work to address those needs; the program needs to encourage different generations to share knowledge and experiences; and the program establishes learning communities where both practitioners and learners teach.

### *Bilingual Education: Problems and Effective Practices*

Wrigley and Guth (1992) said that bilingual education is one of the best options for programs that serve non-literate learners who share a common language. Rivera (1990) stated that an increasing number of adults who immigrate to the United States are not literate in their native language, much less literate in their second language. Wrigley

and Guth (1992) believed that for these adults, bilingual classes are highly effective, since it is easier to learn to read and write in an adult's first language. The authors also stated that practitioners need to ask themselves to what extent the student depends on oral communication versus written communication in trying to determine whether or not to use bilingual education. Another population that could benefit from bilingual education according to the authors is adults who have not acquired English after attending monolingual classes for a number of years.

Proponents of bilingual education have three strong arguments in favor of bilingual education:

- bilingual classes allow for cultural recognition and awareness which, as I discussed above is lacking in traditional education. This cultural recognition leads to greater self-esteem for students, which is tied to literacy development
- bilingual adult ESOL classes allow for empowerment of students as well; they can ask questions in their native language and are able to discuss their needs, goals and concerns without a language barrier
- time is saved learning English when students can be taught bilingually, given the complex nature of the English language itself, students learn quickly and understand the complexities of English more fully when they are taught bilingually (Wrigley & Guth, 1992).

There are many advocates of bilingual education of adult ESOL students. Duran (1987) noted that bilingualism facilitates the transfer of skills and information across both languages. Valdés (1996) said that bilingual classes are especially important for low-level literate ESOL adults. Weinstein-Shr (1993) stated that adults who are able to

communicate with their teachers in their first language reveal a richness of detailed information to the practitioner that would not be available otherwise. She also noted that groups who are refugees (like the Hmong she taught in the past) benefit from keeping their culture and language intact, so bilingual education is very beneficial. Fowler-Frey (1996) said that bilingual education for non-literate or low-literate ESOL adults may be an important step to literacy in a second language, especially if the adult is not print-literate in their first language. Jones (1996) noted that the bilingual teaching of phonics to adult ESOL students may help them learn the difficult English phonemes more quickly. Buttaro (2001) in her study of Latinas in New York City, said that in order for the students in the study to push towards literacy, adult educators need to reaffirm the students' language and cultural identity (and bilingualism would be one way for this to be accomplished). Rivera (1990) spoke about the importance of maintaining the students' native language within the ESOL classroom because learners need to maintain their cultural heritage and because they are able to take an active role in the construction of their own realities.

There are, however, many people who believe that bilingual education is not the solution to the difficulties in educating adult ESOL students. Wrigley and Guth (1992) noted that some adult literacy programs feel that the opportunity to use English in the classroom must be maximized, which means leaving native languages at home. Also, the authors noted that there are some adults in ESOL classes who feel that using native language in their ESOL class is a waste of time; and may resent its use in the classroom. In addition, the authors argued that if a teacher shares a common language with some

students, but not with others, the use of only one or two of the languages could spark jealousy and resentment.

The authors were also concerned with time management issues in a bilingual ESOL classroom—it can be difficult, they said, to manage time and maximize use of English. Finally, the authors stated that teachers may underestimate their students’ ability to understand problems posed in English.

Most of the opposition to bilingual education comes from the K-12 system. One of the most vocal opponents to bilingual education came from a child of Mexican immigrant parents. Rodriguez (1982) stated that bilingual education delays having to learn the language of power that exists in the United States; in essence, teachers are doing their students a disservice if they speak to them in their native language:

Supporters of bilingual education today imply that students like me miss a great deal by not being taught in their family’s language. What they seem not to recognize is that, as a socially disadvantaged child, I considered Spanish to be a private language. What I needed to learn in school was that I had the right-and the obligation-to speak the public language of *los gringos* (the white people) (p.19).

Rodriguez also said that bilingualists scorn the value and necessity of assimilation, which he believes is necessary for success in the majority culture. Garvin (1998) cited numerous examples in his article of elementary school children in California being taught solely in Spanish, and learning no English at all, even after years in the public school system. In his article, Garvin cited examples of poor, immigrant parents in California whose children were placed in what educational administrators called “bilingual classrooms” but in reality, were Spanish-only classrooms—without the parent’s knowledge or their permission. In some cases, the children already spoke English, but because they were Latinos, they were automatically placed in bilingual education classes.

This sounds eerily like the history of “Mexican schools” discussed earlier in the chapter; if a student speaks any Spanish, or they look Latino, they are automatically separated from their white peers. Schechter and Bayley (1997) in their study of Mexican families in California and Texas also reported problems with the bilingual educational system. Many of the families in the study reported either that the children were not being taught enough English, which meant that they fell further and further behind their peers; or that their children were not being allowed to speak Spanish at all in the classrooms—which led in some cases to the regression of their primary language.

In summary, American education of immigrants is a dichotomy. On one side, the founding fathers’ principles of equality for all, and the need for an educated population to better the lives of families and to better the country as a whole; but on the other side, cynicism and prejudice, and the need to educate people merely to fill a position in the workforce. It is as difficult for practitioners to negotiate the dichotomy as it was for women to negotiate their way into an education.

### *The History of the Education of Women*

Women have been agitating for equality, or at least voice within the discourse, for hundreds of years. There is evidence within the literature of antiquity that many women chafed under the bonds of traditional roles. The Roman poet Sappho, for example, started a school for girls and spoke of changing roles for women. For every example of a woman who wanted to change her role, however, there are numerous examples in antiquity of the gods punishing a woman who chose to step out of her role, or who dared to challenge them. In Greek mythology, there is the example of Arachne, who dared to

weave tapestries as beautiful as the goddess Athena's, and then had the audacity to brag about it. The goddess, to punish her, changed her into a spider.

Education for women in both the United States and Great Britain consisted of primary school education (where it existed) in the 1700 and 1800s, and not much else. There were women who called for the education of her cohorts, which was against the prevailing wisdom that women did not need to be educated, as their chief duty in life was to run the household and care for the children. Wollstonecraft (1792) in a direct rebuttal of the male philosophers of her day like Rousseau and Pope, who believed women to be inferior, argued that a woman would be a better companion for a man if she were educated and given the same rights as her partner.

I love man as my fellow, but his scepter, real or usurped, extends not to me, unless the reason of an individual demands my homage; and even then, the submission is to reason, not to man....It appears to me necessary to dwell on these obvious truths, because females have been insulated, as it were; and while they have been stripped of the virtues that should clothe humanity, they have been decked with artificial graces that enable them to exercise a short lived tyranny. Love, in their bosoms, taking place of every nobler passion, their sole ambition is to be fair, to raise emotion instead of inspiring respect, and this ignoble desire...destroys all strength of character. Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women be, by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature (p.31-32).

Although there were scattered writings about women, by women through the centuries, the push for women's equality did not appear to begin in earnest until the 1840s. In 1840, two women, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, were chosen as delegates to a world anti-slavery convention in London, England. However, when the two ladies arrived at the convention, they were not allowed admittance because of their gender. Mott, who had been slated to speak at the convention, was denied her voice. The two ladies spent the week of the convention plotting their own conference, which would

be held in the United States, to address women's rights—the first conference ever to do so.

Out of this conference came The Declaration of Sentiments; this was modeled directly from the Declaration of Independence, and stated that man had established a tyranny over women, and offered the following statements as proof:

- He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.
- He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.
- He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.
- He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.
- He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.
- He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life. (Stanton, 1889)

This Declaration of Independence began what historians call the “first wave” of feminism, in which women in the United States called for equal treatment and suffrage (Brownmiller, 2002). There were other people besides the conference attendees at Seneca Falls calling for equality for women. Mill (1869) presented his arguments in “The Subjection of Women”, calling the subordination of women akin to slavery. He made many persuasive arguments for the equality of women, for example; if men truly want women to love and respect them, they must allow them equality, otherwise they will merely get the loyalty a slave has for her master; that men who don't allow women to learn to read and write must be truly afraid that women are smarter than they are; if men

can agree that women are perfectly capable of learning to read and write, then they must admit that they can do nearly every occupation that a man can do.

If men admit that women are capable of doing nearly every occupation that men can do, then men must admit that women could also hold office, which means they should be allowed to vote.

Martineau (1822) an Englishwoman, wrote that

In our own country, we find that as long as the studies of children of both sexes continue the same, the progress they make is equal. After the rudiments of knowledge have been obtained in the cultivated ranks of society (of which alone I mean to speak), the boy goes on continually increasing his stock of information, it being his only employment to store and exercise his mind for future years; while the girl is probably confined to low pursuits, her aspirings after knowledge are subdued, she is taught to believe that solid information is unbecoming to her sex, almost her whole time is expended on light accomplishments, and thus before she is sensible of her powers, they are checked in their growth; chained down to mean objects, to rise no more; and when the natural consequences of this mode of treatment arise, all mankind agree that the abilities of women are far inferior to those of men. But in the few instances where a contrary mode of treatment has been pursued, where fair play has been given to the faculties, even without much assistance, what has almost invariably been the result? Has it not been evident that the female mind, though in many respects differently constituted from that of a man, may be well brought into comparison with his?

In 1848, she added that

If it be true that women are made for these domestic occupations, then of course they will be fond of them. They will be so fond of what comes most naturally to them that no book-study (if really not congenial to their minds) will draw them off from their homely duties. For my part, I have no hesitation whatever in saying that the most ignorant women I have known have been the worst housekeepers; and that the most learned women I have known have been among the best, wherever they have been early taught and trained to household, as every woman ought to be.

A woman of superior mind knows better than an ignorant one what to require of her servants, how to deal with tradespeople, and how to economise time; she is more clear-sighted about the best ways of doing things; has a richer mind with which to animate all about her, and to solace her own spirit in the midst of her labours. If nobody doubts the difference in pleasantness of having to do with a



silly and narrow-minded woman and with one who is intelligent and enlightened, it must be clear that the more intelligence and enlightenment there is, the better.

Echenique (1876) agreed with Mill that women should be educated.

I would renounce and disown my sex if the mission of women were reduced only to procreation, yes, I would renounce it; but the mission of women in the world is much more grandiose and sublime, it is more than the beasts', it is the one of teaching humankind, and in order to teach it is necessary to know.

As Brownmiller (2002) pointed out, the first wave of feminism lasted until women in the United States got the right to vote in 1920, and then declined under the crushing waves of isolationism, post-WWI, the Depression, WWII, and backlash against the progress women had made in the previous decades. In the United States, education of women remained in the shadows until the "second wave" of feminism began in the mid 1960s. While women in the United States won suffrage in 1920, Mexican women did not win suffrage until 1953.

#### *Mexicanas* and their Culture

If I wish to understand the *Mexicana* culture as much as I can as an outsider, I must begin with *las dos mujeres* (the two women), as my students call them. Not only are the two women I will discuss below central to the notions of power that are central to my research, but they are also central to my students' sense of identity. Both *La Malinche* (the traitor) and *La Virgen Morena* (the dark Virgin) have been discussed in Mexican poetry, prose, movies, art, and other forms of popular culture in Mexico for nearly 500 years.

They represent two sides of a very old argument with regard to women—in stark black and white terms—are women self-sacrificing virgins who need to be protected, or are they traitorous whores who should never be trusted and deserve to be violated?

Let's begin with *La Malinche*—who I will call by her true name, Malitzin Tenepal (Del Castillo, 1974). Malitzin Tenepal was born into an Aztec royal family around 1505. Her father died when she was young, and her mother, named Cimityl, remarried and had a son. Malitzin, regardless of her gender, would retain her birthright, and her mother and her new husband decided that their child should be rewarded instead. Cimityl sold her daughter into slavery to the Mayans and told the Aztec people that Malitzin had died of illness. Del Castillo states that Malitzin must have been an intelligent child (all Aztecs of noble birth went to school) because documents from the time period state that Malitzin learned to speak Mayan, as well as other tribal dialects, and when the conquistadors came in 1519, she learned Spanish very quickly as well.

The conquistadors, led by Hernán Cortez, arrived and were welcomed by the Aztecs, who believed that Cortez was the incarnation of one of their gods, Quetzalcoatl. According to Aztec legend, Quetzalcoatl would return from the East, would be light-haired, and would wear white—and Cortez fit the description when he landed. Del Castillo does not note when or how Cortez and Malitzin met, but she does say that Malitzin was 14 and Cortez was 20 years older and that they probably met because Malitzin had learned enough Spanish to become a translator for some of Cortez's men. Cortez found Malitzin useful enough that shortly after he arrived in Mexico, he would not travel without her. Malitzin, Del Castillo argued, not only saved many Indian lives by acting as an intermediary, but saved Cortez's life several times as well. As the battle for

the Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan was raging, Malitzin and Cortez had sex—whether consensual or not is not clear, but keep in mind, Malitzin was approximately 14 or 15 years old at the time—and later, she gave birth to a son. After the conquest of the Aztec people, Cortez married Malitzin off to one of his lieutenants; she had another child, a daughter, and then died of smallpox, at the age of 22. For all of Malitzin Tenepal's dedication to Cortez, she was rewarded by marriage to a soldier, the torture and murder of her son, and the stolen birthright of her daughter. So why would the cultural heritage of my students be tied up in the story of a woman who died nearly 500 years ago?

For 500 years, Malitzin Tenepal, who by giving birth to *mestizo* (mixed) children, gave birth to a new race; has been the subject of derision and hatred by Mexican culture; held up, according to Anzaldúa, as an example of what she called a *mala mujer* (bad woman) (1987). Octavio Paz, one of Mexico's most famous writers, said that *La Malinche* represents "the cruel incarnation of the feminine condition...there exists an innate feminine vulnerability which transforms women into 'chingadas' (whores)" (Paz, 1961). In other words, Paz believed that because Malitzin was violated and conquered, she represents not only Mexico in general, which Paz believed was violated and conquered, but women as a whole. Women, according to Paz, even if they consent to relations with a man, are forever to be inferior, and as such always subjected to being "torn open" by men. Paz points out that Cortes forgot about *La Malinche* after she gave birth to his son; her usefulness was over. Finally, Paz illustrates the dichotomy found within the story of *La Malinche*: he blames her for the treason of her people, because she was seduced or fascinated by Cortes, so she is *una chingada*, a fallen woman, a passive woman who merely is acted upon, but does not react. She is also viewed as powerful by

Paz, because she turned her back on her own people, and gave aid and comfort to a conquistador. Petty (2002) pointed out that perhaps it is this paradox of *La Malinche* that upsets Paz the most; no matter which way you look at the situation, men failed *La Malinche*; they failed her because they did not protect her from the enemy, or they failed her because they did not react when she challenged their authority. *La Malinche* represents female sexuality in Mexico, according to Petty. Female sexuality in Mexico is either denigrated or controlled in common practice, and women are not therefore able to determine their own sexual destinies. To put it bluntly, women viewed under this light in Mexican culture are screwed either way—if she does not concede to sex, and it is forced upon her, she is a whore; if she does consent to sex, then she must like it, and she is a whore. The message, according to Del Castillo (1974), is that women are not to be self-assertive, they should be quiet and submissive. Alarcón (1989) said that women, through cultural transmission via their mothers, are led to believe that “indeed our very sexuality condemns us to enslavement.” She also noted that “the pervasiveness of the myth is unfathomable, often permeating and suffusing our very being without conscious awareness”.

Contrast the image of Malitzin Tenepal with that of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*—the Dark Virgin, and you get the very antithesis of rape (or lust—depending on who you ask), betrayal, and a woman scored—you get the very symbol of purity that is also somehow the symbol of motherhood—the Catholic church’s Mary, with a twist. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (the Virgin Mary), who appeared to a poor Indian, Juan Diego, in 1531. She did not appear as a white woman but as a woman with brown skin, and told the *pobrecito* (poor man) that she wanted a church built on the site that she had appeared

to him, which was on a hill in Tepeyac. She also, according to legend, gave Juan Diego (the *indio*'s baptized name) flowers to take to the bishop. When Juan spread the flowers out for the bishop, they melted into the cloak he had used to carry the flowers to the church, and formed an image of the dark-skinned Virgin. Only then did the bishop believe Juan Diego's story. Today, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is revered by not only *Mexicanos*, but by many Central and South American Catholics, and she has been used on political banners and posters, much as Joan of Arc used crosses when she fought the British. It is interesting that in a society where maleness had been so revered, homage is paid to *La Virgen Morena* (the dark Virgin) by nearly every man in Mexico, it would appear. One reason she is so revered by Latinos is because of her skin color; *los indios y los Mexicanos* claim her as their champion, since she appeared as a dark-skinned woman to a dark-skinned *indio*. As much as I would love to leave the story there, if one looks closer at exactly what about *La Virgen* is being worshipped, however, the image of women as Mexican men see them becomes clearer. *La Virgen* is said to be "the consolation of the poor, the shield of the weak, and the help of the oppressed. In sum, she is the Mother of orphans" (Paz, 1961). The Virgin of Guadalupe represents to *Mexicanos* the idealistic nurturer mother, who loves and takes care of all her children, and sacrifices for them daily: did not *La Virgen* sacrifice her only child for the good of humanity? Paz says that *La Virgen* "is pure receptivity, and the benefits she bestows are of the same order: she consoles, quiets, dries tears, calms passion" (p.76). One is to assume that *Mexicanos* expect their wives to do the same, and without complaint. How on earth are *Mexicanas* supposed to compete with a woman who was so perfect she

didn't even die, she was taken up into heaven so that her body would not be corrupted by the ground? It is an impossible task.

Anzaldúa in particular was a vocal critic of the Catholic Church; she said the priests made keeping a wife in line by beating her into submission merely a confessional sin, which was tantamount to condoning it. Anzaldúa (1987) said that “the culture and the church insist that women are subservient to males...for a woman of my culture, there used to be only three directions to turn: to the church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the homes as a mother. She observed that for “a very few” women now, there is a fourth choice: education—and yet, it is this quest for education that at times brings violence into Mexican women’s lives. In Mexico, there are twice as many illiterate women as there are men (UNESCO, 2003). Yet, as I have pointed out in Chapter One, it is the women within families, not the men that tend to be responsible for the literacy of the family, so what are *Mexicanas* to do?

With regard to the dichotomy of *La Virgen* and Malitzin Tenepal and the notions of power within Mexican female culture, it is important to remember again that this notion of power and subjugation is not true for all Mexican households, but so many Mexican feminists (Anzaldúa, Moraga, Alarcón, Del Castillo) discuss it that to ignore it would be to ignore what appears to be very important.

There are a couple of other cultural traditions that I couldn't ignore for the purposes of discussing *Mexicanas*. Several of the authors I have discussed here-- Valdés, Anzaldúa, Rodriguez, for example, have noted the extreme solidarity and importance of the nuclear family within Mexican culture. Many *Mexicanas*, especially those from rural areas, live with their spouse, in-laws, children, and many times, grandparents, uncles,

cousins and other relatives. In Mexican culture, it is considered unusual not to live with an extended family. In the culture of the extended family, work outdoors is split between the men in the house, and work indoors (usually, but this is not always the case) shared between the women in the house. The work of educating and training the children is generally left to the women (Valdés, 1996).

While I have noted several times already that it is impossible to generalize, there is no doubt the Mexican concept of an extended family (some of my students lived with as many as 10 or 12 family members) and my White-middle class concept of extended family (when my mom and dad use the spare bedroom) are not the same thing.

If I return to the myth of La Malinche for a moment, there are many within the Mexican female community who believe that women, not the men themselves, are responsible for their own downfalls. Alarcón (1989) wrote that mothers are entwined with the transmission of culture. “We may come to believe that indeed our very sexuality condemns us to enslavement” (p. 183). “All we see is hatred of women” (p.183). Alarcón said that the mother is powerless, impotent perhaps, to help the daughter. All of her energies seem directed, spent in her desire and need for man, a factor that repulses and yet somehow attracts the daughter. Love for mother is dichotomous with the daughter’s sense of abandonment by her mother—and yet the daughter is left to attract men the same way her mother did, and this cycle of loathing and self-loathing begins again. Mothers condemn their daughters to servitude as they themselves were condemned, but we would expect our mothers to provide psychic or sexual protection from men who would harm us. Alarcón noted, “When our subjugation comes through devotion, we are saints, and escape direct insult. When we are disobedient, hence

undeviating, we are equated with Malitzin; that is the myth of male consciousness, not the historical figure in all her dimensions (p.186).” Alarcón noted six sexual political themes that are interesting. I have listed some of them that are relevant to the research: for women to have to choose between patriarchies is not a choice; woman’s abandonment and orphanhood psychic/emotional starvation occurs even within a family; women are not only slaves emotionally, they are slaves economically; women are seen by all patriarchies as rapeable and sexually exploitable; blind devotion to a cause is not a feasible human choice, and where there is love or devotion it is at best deeply ambivalent. The words Alarcón wrote above are in line with much of Latina feminism —what is interesting to me is that Anzaldúa—arguably the most well known and celebrated Chicana feminist, did not agree with her. Anzaldúa said that the modern meaning of the word “macho” and the modern concept of the word itself was invented by *Anglos* as a way to put the Mexican man into a subservient role. Anzaldúa said that true macho men (like her father) could show love, that they were strong enough to show love outside the home while protecting the family inside the home. Today’s Mexican man, Anzaldúa said, has doubts about his ability to protect his family. In order to appear “strong” in the face of what has to be withering Anglo oppression, poverty and low self-esteem, the man abuses his wife because he feels abused—this “false machismo” allows men to cope with the loss of dignity and respect they feel. “To wash down the shame of his acts, of his very being, and to handle the brute in the mirror, he takes to the bottle, the snort, the needle, and the fist” (p.382). Anzaldúa offered men understanding, but not pity. She says in part that:

We demand the admission/acknowledgement/disclosure/testimony that wound us, violate us, and are afraid of us and our power. We need them to say they will



begin to eliminate their hurtful put-down ways. But more than the words, we demand acts. We say to them: we will develop equal with you and those who have shamed us.... Tenderness, a sign of vulnerability, is so feared that it is showered on women with verbal abuse and blows. Men, even more than women, are fettered to gender roles. Women at least have had the guts to break out of bondage (p. 382-383).

In traditional Mexican culture, it would appear that silence begins in childhood. Children should be seen and not heard; in fact, it is one of the moral stories used by Valdés in her study. Rodriguez (1982) made mention at the beginning of his book about how close and quiet it was in his house when strangers came to visit them, and his parents spoke in strange and disjointed English; and how close and intimate and noisy it was when the strangers left and Spanish was spoken again. Anzaldúa said that one of the best compliments to get in the Texas town she grew up in was “*tu muchachita bien criada*” (Your daughter was raised well)—it meant that she acted properly in public. Anzaldúa remembered asking the priest for forgiveness during confession because she talked too much, she gossiped, she joked, and she asked questions—apparently akin to blasphemy. Language, Anzaldúa said, is male discourse. It would appear that in the lives of *Mexicanas* it is what is not said that has more meaning than what is actually said. Anzaldúa said that culture is made by those in power: men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them to their children and the cycle continues.

How many times have I heard mothers and mothers in law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them, for being *bociconas* (big mouths), *callajeras* (gossips) for expecting their husbands to help with the housework and the rearing of children, for wanting to be something other than housewives (p. 16).

This culture of silence and suffering appears to echo throughout feminist writings.

In *Haciendo Caras: Making Face, Making Soul*, there is an entire section of writings dedicated to silence: a poem that spoke about the poet's fear to speak—for if she speaks no one will want her: *el barco que nunca atraca* (the boat that will never dock); the short story called “The Passage”, which told the story of a woman who after being molested when she was a child hears and sees a vision of what she must have felt echoed in the face of her daughter; the poet who is reminded by her mother daily *no hay que faltar al respeto* (You can't forget your respect). In Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1990), there is a section that Anzaldúa spoke about—she is sitting in her dentist's chair while he is working on a tooth and she flashes back to getting whipped at recesses in Texas because she was speaking Spanish and not English; she was also sent inside school at one point just for trying to correct a teacher when the teacher was trying to say her last name.

This theme of silence within the *Mexicana* culture I would like to explore just a little bit longer using the Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule book *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1997). The book opened with a chapter entitled Silence, and although the authors said later that not all women had to progress through all phases of knowing, and that many women might in fact never themselves experience a silent period, this chapter spoke powerfully to me. The authors noted that the women in this area of silence were deprived economically, emotionally, and socially, and that all of them were talented in one way or another, but that none of the women recognized their inherent gifts. For these women, the authors observed, words were weapons, used to break and disempower people, not to separate and connect people. The women have no way to describe themselves, no way to see themselves, and what is probably most important, they have no

way to describe themselves (or help) their children (especially their daughters) see them from a position of strength. Silent women cannot teach anything at all, they feel like they have nothing to contribute.

### *Women, Abuse, and Adult Education*

As far back as Dobash & Dobash (1979), there has been anecdotal evidence that women in abusive relationships were denied access to work or educational programs, family income, and personal income. Kirkwood(1993) found that it was difficult for women to leave abusive relationships because they were dependent on the men they were with. Kirkwood also found that male partners prevent women from working by injuring her, confining her, sabotaging her, or promising to take her to work and not following through. Riger, Bennett, Wasco, Schewe, Frohmann, Camacho, and Campbell found that women may be harassed at work until they are fired or quit (2001). Tolman (1999) and Raphael and Tolman (1997) found that domestic violence rates for women on welfare were consistently higher than for women in the general population. Lloyd (1997) found that women who were victims of domestic violence were more likely to have problems keeping a job or enrolling in an educational program. The National Welfare to Work Strategies Evaluation, which looked at ABE, GED, and ESOL programs nationwide, stated that 1/5 of the 40,000 adults studied reported some form of domestic violence during the five year study (1997-2002). In addition, the study found that education and training may reduce domestic violence in the long run, by giving the woman means to escape her living situation. Tellingly however, the study did not identify women who

were “in imminent danger of abuse”, saying that these women “may not have such positive effects, which may make it difficult for them to work or comply with welfare-to-work program requirements.” It should be noted that I could find no studies that specifically looked at ESOL women and domestic violence, although studies like Buttaro (2001) mention it. I could find no studies that specifically looked at Mexicanas, ESOL and domestic violence as reported by women.

*The Feelings of the Children and the Stressors on the Family*

It is difficult for immigrant families to adjust to life in their new country. As Valdés pointed out, *Mexicanas* must learn to survive in a culture that often does not want them here, and does not understand the culture of the country they came from. In many instances, *Mexicanas* have been silenced not only in their own country by their cultural boundaries, but also once they come here, by the educational system they have gone to for help. Many times, Latino families move to parts of the country where rents are cheap, and they can find work. Historically, this has been in the Southwest, but more recently, Mexican immigration trends have placed families in many Southern states as well that have not traditionally been settled by Mexicanas or their families, in part because the South has traditionally been undercrowded and undercrime-ridden. A recent study by the University of South Carolina’s Center for Latino Immigration Studies found that many Mexican immigrants to South Carolina settled in rural areas as well as suburban areas because there were construction jobs and other manufacturing and landscaping jobs available (Woodward, 2006). Nearly 60% of the men surveyed reported having a minor living with them. The average male Mexican immigrant makes \$21, 000 a year in South Carolina (Woodward, 2006). In the South as a whole, from 1990 to 2005, the number of

Hispanics living in the heretofore black/white divide quadrupled from about 562,000 to 2.4 million, due to word of mouth about good jobs, cheap cost of living, good climate, and space (New York Times, August 4, 2006). However, whether the children of Mexican immigrants live in the rural South, or in a city, there are many problems. Many of the communities Mexican families move into lack the associations and friendships that are necessary for children and adolescents to thrive, and *Mexicanas* find it difficult to find “social capital” resources that will assist them with their special needs and the needs of their children (Coleman, 1988). Because *Mexicanas* and their families in this study are recently immigrated, they may find it even harder to negotiate the large American social systems that children and adolescents become used to, and if their children act as translators for them, they are further marginalized. If the child acts as a translator for a long period of time, he or she in effect becomes a parent, an authority in the “outside” culture, and because they know the language, can undermine parental authority, and can feel as if they have no parental guidance (Szapocznik, Robbins, Mitrani, Santisteban, & Williams, 2002). As Baptiste (1993) pointed out, the longer Hispanic immigrants remain without learning English, the more they remain marginalized from American society. Further, Hispanic parents’ inability to speak English affects their children further by decreasing the likelihood that they will be able to find any job opportunities outside of manual labor unless they learn the language (Zea, Diehl, & Porterfield, 1996).

To summarize what the Review of Literature has discovered, *Mexicanas* find themselves in a unique situation. The Mexican people share a border and a long history with the United States, as well as cycles of employment when Mexican people were welcomed over the border and then deported when the job market soured. Because many

of the recent Mexican immigrants to the United States are here illegally, they may view outsiders and public entities with fear and suspicion. Mexican women also have a legacy of a patriarchal society where they must try to live up to the image of perfect motherhood and suffering presented by *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, and live down the image of *La Malinche* the traitorous whore. When the Mexican women arrive, they face many obstacles. They come to a country with a legacy of discrimination against those who are not white. They may have to fight to ensure their children are properly educated. The families of the *Mexicanas* may be living in poverty. The neighborhoods the *Mexicanas* live in may have a lot of crime. There may not be social service agencies that the *Mexicanas* can go to for help with situations that may occur within her family. The *Mexicanas* may have to face the possibility that their children may know much more English than they do. Their children may in fact have to translate for them with doctors, teachers, and clerks in stores, which may lead to their children learning about situations within the family that the *Mexicanas* did not want them to know about. They worry that their children will not maintain their culture, a culture they are very proud of. If the *Mexicanas* try to go to school in order to learn English to help her children, she may be subject to verbal and physical violence from her partner. When all of these factors are considered, *Mexicanas* are in an extremely difficult position when it comes to their education and the welfare of their families.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe the ways learning English in an ESOL classroom impacted power relationships within the lives of *Mexicanas*. In order to accomplish this goal, the following questions were addressed:

- 1) How does learning English impact the power relationship between the *Mexicanas* and their male partners?
- 2) How does learning English impact the relationship between the *Mexicanas* and their children?
- 3) How does learning English impact the *Mexicanas* sense of personal agency?

This chapter consists of three sections: an explanation of the theoretical framework that provided the lens to collect and analyze the data, an explanation of the process of data collection, and an explanation of how the data was analyzed.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

Relationships are about power. The issues of power within the family dynamic are crucial to the *Mexicanas* and their children who participated in this study. In order to begin formulating the outlines of research for the study, it was necessary to look at the philosophies that took into consideration how women and their children are viewed in society and the family unit. The theoretical framework that provided an appropriate lens was liberal feminism. Using this as a conceptual frame provided a means to guide the formulation of research methods.

Feminism has many different branches, and there were many perspectives within feminism that discuss power, or the lack thereof. Radical feminism, for example, discusses that men's domination of women is pervasive throughout every minute of our lives, and because of this, it is difficult to separate ourselves from the patriarchy in which we find ourselves (Tuana & Tong, 1995). Social feminists argue that because of power and the grab for it, oppression of women comes from gender and race issues in addition to the Marxist feminist argument that patriarchy arises from capitalism (Tuana & Tong, 1995).

What is central in this philosophy, however, is that the individual woman must be allowed to pursue her goals and dreams. Early philosophers within liberalism, such as John Locke, began to write about the view that God had not entitled men (Adam, in this case) to rule over women for eternity. Locke argued that women should be allowed to pursue their own interests and goals—within limitations, of course (Butler, 1995). Locke scorned the notion that women had no aptitude for self-rule. He pointed out that in a country where women had been queens and ruled quite effectively, that women had the intelligence and wisdom to govern well. He also pointed out that the Fifth Commandment of ten Christian commandments, which speaks of honoring one's father and mother, did not give husbands domination over their wives, but rather allowed children to honor their mother separately from the patriarchy of the father (Butler, 1995). Most importantly in terms of the research to be outlined here, Locke spoke of many types of power that could be found within society, rather than the power of patriarchy being the sole authority within the kingdom. Not only did Locke speak of there being several types of power, he also wrote about husbands and wives both having and sharing power within



the family (Butler, 1995). The quote below from Locke in his *Treatise of Civil*

*Government* illustrates his notion of men and women sharing power within a family.

Nay, this power so little belongs to the father by any peculiar right of nature, but only as he is guardian of his children, that when he quits his care of them, he loses his power over them, which goes along with their nourishment and education, to which it is inseparably annexed; and it belongs as much to the foster-father of an exposed child, as to the natural father of another. So little power does the bare act of begetting give a man over his issue; if all his care ends there, and this be all the title he hath to the name and authority of a father. And what will become of this paternal power in that part of the world, where one woman hath more than one husband at a time? or in those parts of America, where, when the husband and wife part, which happens frequently, the children are all left to the mother, follow her, and are wholly under her care and provision? If the father die whilst the children are young, do they not naturally every where owe the same obedience to their mother, during their minority, as to their father were he alive? and will any one say, that the mother hath a legislative power over her children? that she can make standing rules, which shall be of perpetual obligation, by which they ought to regulate all the concerns of their property, and bound their liberty all the course of their lives? or can she enforce the observation of them with capital punishments? for this is the proper power of the magistrate, of which the father hath not so much as the shadow.

This view of sharing power broke from traditional views that men ruled the home and dominated their wives. It should be pointed out however that Locke was not speaking of equal power for men and women within a home, but rather that women could handle having more power within a family. To Locke, the perfect state of humans within nature was a state of perfect freedom so that individuals could make their own way within society, dispose of property as they see fit, and make their own decisions about their lives (Butler, 1995). Locke also believed that women were capable of rational thought, and should be educated in much the same manner as men (Butler, 1995).

Although early liberal philosophers like Locke championed the rights of the individual over the rights of the monarchy, Tuana and Tong argued that those early philosophers did not recognize the importance of liberty and the need for women to achieve their independence from a patriciarchal system. Tuana and Tong discussed that modern liberal feminists recognize that the patriarchal system is pervasive. Although success has been gained in the area of gender roles—my daughter will be able to become whatever she wants to be in life, for example, but her grandmother had no such opportunities—liberal feminists, according to the editors, recognize there is still much work to do. Women still are not valued at the same rate as men. Although women are able to enter the workplace and compete for jobs with men, there are issues with childcare for their children that do not affect most men. In addition, Tuana and Tong discuss that women are still working two jobs, or a double day—women are working full time, and are then coming home to do housework and take care of children. Also, within this branch of feminism, women are concerned with voting rights, freedom of speech, property rights, and programs that aid women and children like Medicaid, TANF (Temporary Aid for Needy Families), and Social Security (Tuana & Tong, 1995).

Liberal feminism has been criticized, according to the Tuana and Tong, for not realizing that women are not equal to each other in this country (and perhaps in others as well). As the authors point out, women of color may see affirmative action quite differently than White women. Women of color may see a white woman who gets a promotion over an equally qualified African-American male differently than a White feminist would see it. There has also been the criticism that liberal feminists do not understand the difficulties of poor women.

The authors summarize the difficulties with liberal feminists this way: “Unless liberal feminist thought develops its “equal rights” analysis in ways that legitimate the personal integrity of individuals who do not wish to become white in order to become socially and economically powerful, it will tend to remain a theory that favors and forwards the interests of white women far more than those of women of color” (Tuana & Tong, 1995, p. 8).

With that being said, there are many tenets of liberal feminism that are central to the fundamental rights of *Mexicanas* in the United States. Liberal feminism gave voice to women who were seeking equality: equal pay, equal work, and equal rights at home and outside of the home. One could argue that these are the rights that *Mexicanas* want here as well. Perhaps, as Tuana and Tong argued, there is an equal place in liberal feminism for women of color, as long as white women within liberal feminism recognize that the voices of women of color may differ from theirs, and their objectives may be different as well.

During the course of this research, a decision was made whether or not the liberal feminist philosophy should serve as a framework for the research. Despite the valid criticisms given above, liberal feminism represents the basic human rights that every woman should have, yet daily in the United States and elsewhere, these basic human rights (the right to work and earn wages, the right to decide how those wages should be spent, the right of self-determination, the recognition that women should be treated on equal footing with men, and the right to an education) are denied them. It is apparent that for the purpose of this study, liberal feminism was an appropriate framework.

This study was concerned with power and how power influences the roles within the *Mexicana*'s family. Liberal feminism is concerned with power in that liberal feminists believe that power should be equally shared. The tenets of liberal feminism provided a framework for the research. The tenets of liberal feminism provided the background for the formulation of research questions. Second, the background of liberal feminism assisted in the development of the review of literature. The review of literature focused in part on early liberalist philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft and their beliefs that women deserved to live their lives as equals with men. In addition, because liberal feminism has been criticized for not listening to the voices of women of color, the writings of Chicana feminists were studied and included in the review of literature so that the importance of Chicana feminism within the lives of the *Mexicanas* was not ignored. Third, liberal feminist philosophies aided in the development of the interview structures and interview guides, as there was a concern whether or not the *Mexicanas* were allowed the fundamental rights that all women should have. Fourth, liberal feminist philosophies served as a guide in how the data was analyzed because the education of women and how power is shared within *Mexicana* families was important, especially since many traditional Mexican families are patriarchal in nature.

#### *Overview of the Study*

In this study, data was collected from nine women, all recent Mexican immigrants enrolled in an adult ESOL program. Individual interviews were conducted, with one follow up interview to collect further data.

Bogdan and Bicklen's (2003) and Creswell's (2003) grouping techniques were used to describe the themes that were uncovered during the course of the study.

### *Rationale for the Approach*

Creswell (2003) pointed out that there are several reasons why someone would choose to do a qualitative study. In order to do a qualitative study, Creswell said that one must position herself, focus on a single concept, and study the context of the setting or of the participants. Creswell said as well that many qualitative researchers bring their personal values into the study, make interpretations of the data, create an agenda for change or reform, and collaborate with participants. The qualitative approach lends itself to this study. The *Mexicanas* depth of feeling about issues related to the research questions and understanding of their world as it was changing could not have been explored without using the qualitative approach.

Many *Mexicanas* have historically been without power in their lives. Since this study deals with the themes of power, the women needed to have voice within the study. The qualitative narrative format appeared to be the best choice for research format. Merriam (2002) said that the first question a researcher must ask is whether or not the problem she wants to study lends itself to qualitative research. Merriam stated that qualitative research is designed to uncover or discover meanings that people construct about a particular event or phenomenon—but not surface meanings, the deeper meaning that usually cannot be gained through a quantitative instrument. Qualitative research, Merriam said, is interested in how (or why) people do things, and how they construct the deeper meaning within their lives. It would appear then, because the study covers

Mexican women and how they construct the meanings of self, marriage, and family within a patriarchal framework, this would naturally lend itself to a qualitative study.

Merriam (2002) said that the narrative format is a powerful tool in qualitative research that allows the research questions to be answered through storytelling. Bloom (2002) discussed that narrative research on women may act as a social critique. She states that “Carefully interpreted narratives can illuminate how, in an individual life, different dominant ideologies and power relations in society are maintained, reproduced, or subverted (p. 311). Because the Mexicanas are on the margins of society due to their ethnicity, their class, and their gender, it would seem important to challenge the dominant ideologies through the narrative process. There is another reason narrative is the best format here. Linda Alcoff called this problem “the problem of speaking for others” (2006). In her work by the same name, Alcoff discussed whether or not women doing research on women who were not of their ethnicity should be able to speak for members of the group that the researcher is not a part of. Alcoff said that

Persons from dominant groups who speak for other are often treated as authenticating presences that confer legitimacy and credibility on the demands of subjugated speakers; such speaking for others does nothing to disrupt the discursive hierarchies that operate in public spaces (p.79).

Given what Alcoff said in her article, one could ask why there would be a desire on the part of the researcher to research Mexicanas at all, since the research was being conducted by someone not ethnically similar to the research subjects, nor would the researcher want to speak for the women in the study. Alcoff said that before one attempts to speak for others, one should consider the following:

- That the impetus to speak must be analyzed and fought against, especially if one wants to always be the speaker in any situation (which could be a desire for dominance and mastery).

- That if one chooses to speak for another population to which one is not a member; one must realize that they are both accountable and responsible for what they say.
- Most importantly, one must realize that if one chooses to speak for others, one must understand that their words may travel beyond the initial speech. One must be cautious and look at what the words spoken will do once they leave the area where they were spoken. (pp.87-88)

There is no question that the issues of power within Mexican families are an issue of gravity, and cannot be taken lightly. Researchers generally have no desire to perpetuate stereotypes or stigmas against the women who have become close to the person doing the research. Considering the sensitive nature of this topic, and again considering that the *Mexicanas* in the study are operating from a position of powerlessness, it would appear to be all the more important to give them a measure of control and power during the interview process—again, a reason for the narrative format.

### *The Sample*

Creswell (2003) said that in order for qualitative research to be effective, purposeful sampling must take place in order to allow the researcher to understand as fully as possible the research question within the study. Rather than sample a large number within the population of families in the program, I chose to interview a small group of women in order to delve more deeply into their lives to gain understanding into the research questions and determine how learning English impacted their lives. . The number of women within the study was in line with what was believed to be the narrative qualitative nature of the study; in order to tell the big story well, the individual stories must be kept to a modest number.

A list of participants in the program was received from the family engagement specialist within the program, and I then went into the classrooms and talked to the

students about participating in the study. The students wrote their names on a list if they wanted to participate. The names were cut up, put into a bag and 10 names were drawn. One of the ESOL students declined to participate, which left nine students who were willing to participate in the study after the selection of names out of approximately 30 students who were initially willing to participate. The class size for both the beginning and the intermediate ESOL classes within the program was 38.

Nine women between the ages of 20 and 45, who were born in Mexico, and who have been in the United States less than 10 years were interviewed. All of the women were married or had a domestic partner who was male, and all of the women were mothers. All of the women were enrolled in an ESOL program at either the beginning or intermediate level of proficiency.

There were reasons for all of the stipulations above. In order to tell a story about *Mexicanas*, they must, by the nature of the word, be immigrants from Mexico. The women needed to have been in this country less than 10 years because if they have been in the country for longer than 10 years, their judgment about their experiences may not be as fresh as it was when they were newly arrived or when they had been here only a few years. The women that were needed for the study needed to be married or living with a male partner because the research questions were centered around power issues within families. Finally, the women needed to be enrolled in an ESOL program in a beginning or intermediate class because it is at the beginning and intermediate levels of literacy that practitioners (and the students) see the greatest amounts of growth and change in the amount of English learned and the ability to speak English.



If the students were discussing their personal growth in English, it would make sense to interview them at the points they would be experiencing the most growth.

It should be noted that the population of participants in the family literacy program studied have nearly always been illegal immigrants. It is possible that all of the participants in the study were illegal immigrants, although this was not a requirement, and their status in this country was not questioned during the interview. For this reason, and also because of the sensitive nature of the topics we discussed, a few precautions were taken. All of the *Mexicanas* chose a pseudonym to use during the course of the study—in this study, women chose their favorite colors as their pseudonyms. The women were allowed to voice their own preferences with regard to pseudonyms. In this study, a few of the women decided to use pseudonyms that could be considered offensive to others due to their color choices. Three of the women's pseudonyms were changed so that they would reflect as anti-racist a bias as possible. I felt this was especially important as an outsider looking into a community that was not my own. There were two women who chose the same pseudonym, so one woman's color choice was changed so that readers of the study would not be confused.

All of the participants were gathered from one program found within a county in the Southeastern United States. The county had a population of approximately 105,000 people in 2003. Although there is a major research university close by, which should mean wealth and prosperity for the surrounding area, the county ranked as one of the poorest in the state. In 2003, the county's population was about 7.5% Hispanic (Census Bureau, 2003) although the local school district, in an annual report, estimated the Latino population including illegal immigrants from Mexico and Central America at about 12%.

There was a federally-funded program within the county that provided ESOL or GED classes and childcare for approximately 145 families each day. Of these 145 families, 70% were of Mexican origin. The participants in this program knew me because I was a practitioner there until August of 2005, so the women trusted that I would keep their secrets and their anonymity and allow their voices to be heard within the dissertation.

### *Data Collection Strategies*

The data collection process took place in three distinct stages. Stage One consisted of two individual interviews per participant. The second interview was used as a follow-up interview in order for the participant to elaborate on earlier responses. The participants of the study were interviewed in one of the classrooms within the program setting, since it was a comfortable and familiar place for them, and they had no fear of either the police or *la Migra* (immigration) finding them there. While the *Mexicanas* were audiotaped during interviews, the audiotapes were labeled using the pseudonyms of the women. During the interviews, nearly all the women spoke Spanish during the entire interview. Because I am not a native Spanish speaker, in order to ensure that what the women said was what was transcribed, the Spanish transcripts of the interviews were verified using two outside sources who had no connection with the study. There were no pictures taken, and no video shots of the *Mexicanas*. Participation by the *Mexicanas* for the interview sessions was voluntary and the women agreed to be interviewed twice. For Stage One, the women were interviewed in a semi-structured interview format for approximately 1 ½ hours. An example of an interview guide can be found in the Appendix section. Stage Two consisted of individual follow up interviews, with each

participant, in order to follow up on what was said in the earlier interviews, and also to ask questions that were more in depth that were not asked during the initial interview.

Since language preference has not been addressed it before, it is important to address it now. The conversations, the storytellings, the questions, and the responses, were conducted in whatever language the women felt comfortable with. Nearly all of the time, the *Mexicanas* chose to speak in Spanish. Even if the *Mexicanas* began a story in English, when the topic was emotionally charged, as the issues of power and violence definitely were, the language switched back to Spanish. I switched back and forth between English and Spanish. I do not take speaking Spanish lightly, and I felt that I had adequate qualifications to undertake interviews in Spanish. I took 27 hours of Spanish for my undergraduate degree. I have been speaking Spanish in my classrooms for seven years, and have been translating school meetings, parent conferences, special education meetings and other official meetings for the counties I have worked for during the past several years, so I believe I am conversant in the language. However, because I am not a native speaker, there were inevitably going to be small imperfections within the transcript. What was transcribed literally may in fact be a colloquialism that was not meant to be literally translated. The interviews were transcribed to the best of my ability, but the fact that I am not a native Spanish speaker and may have missed a few words or the intent of the speaker from time to time must be recognized. In *Translated Women: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (2003), Behar spoke of the problem of "double translation". Each woman in the study spoke Spanish, which was recorded and transcribed. The Spanish was then transcribed into English for the quotations used in the study. The problem Behar speaks of was the difficulty of correctly translating what

someone says once, much less twice, and the worry becomes that some of the meaning the women intended may be lost in the recordings or the translations. It is my hope that because two other *Mexicanas* who were not a part of this study double checked the quotations used, the meaning has come through correctly, but there may be instances in the quotations where the meaning may not come through as clearly as intended.

It is my belief that knowing Spanish created more of an atmosphere of trust with the *Mexicanas* than there would have been if they had been interviewed with the help of an interpreter. In addition, if an interpreter had been used for the interviews with the *Mexicanas*, it would have been difficult to ask follow up questions in a second interview, because if the women would have been communicating with me through an intermediary, the nuances of the conversation would have been more difficult to determine. It has been my experience that when Spanish speakers have moved to the United States, especially to areas where Latinos have not always lived in large numbers; and people who are not Latino and yet speak Spanish are greeted with surprise, and then genuine warmth—and sometimes gratitude if the person of Latino ethnicity does not speak English. Speaking Spanish did not give me instant rapport with the *Mexicanas*, but there was an intimacy between speaker and researcher that perhaps would not have been possible with a non-Spanish speaking researcher.

Stage Three consisted of member checks. In order to ensure the validity of the data, Bodgan and Bicklin (2003) and Creswell (2003) say that member checks are a way to ensure that the participants' voices, not the voice of the researcher, is being heard. The *Mexicanas* returned to look at the initial findings and portions of the transcripts on April 25, 2007, and June 25, 2007. The participants did not disagree with the findings. Had

the participants dissented with the analysis, it would have been noted it in the findings section of the dissertation. In addition, two *Mexicanas* not related to the study looked over the translations of quotes in English and Spanish in order to ensure that the *Mexicanas* in the study were characterized properly. The women completed their readings of the translated portions of the text on March 10, 2008.

#### *Data Preparation and Analysis*

Creswell (2003) has a step by step procedure for analyzing qualitative data. Creswell's procedures were followed when data analysis began. Creswell noted that one should convey a sense of the overall activities of qualitative data analysis. He (and he credits Rossman and Rallis (1998) here as well) stated that data analysis is an ongoing process that involves ongoing reflection about the data, asking questions about the data, and rather than waiting until the data collection process is over, writing down thoughts during the process. Also, Creswell said that the data in qualitative research is open-ended, so the researcher must ask general questions and develop an analysis from participant information provided.

Creswell discussed that in order to analyze effectively, one must:

- Organize and prepare the data for analysis. Interviews must be transcribed.
- Read through all the data. One needs to obtain a general sense of the information and reflect on what the information might mean. What kind of tone does the information represent? Is the information credible? Can I use the information? It is possible at this stage to write notes in the margins, some general thoughts noticed from the information.

- Begin detailed analysis with coding. Coding means that the text data, segmenting sentences into categories, and labeling categories with a term or phrase. It is possible that the phrase might be based on language used by participants during the interview process.
- Use the coding process to describe the people and events gleaned from the interviews. In addition, use coding to generate a few themes to be used.
- Discuss how the description and themes will be used in the qualitative narrative.
- Interpret the data.

The data was organized and prepared for analysis. All the interviews were transcribed. I then read through all the data in order to obtain a sense of the information contained in the interviews and to reflect on its meaning. At that time, general impressions that could be gleaned immediately from the data were written down. Important passages within the transcripts were highlighted. I began organizing the material into chunks by coming up with categories and labeling those categories with a term. Similar topics were clustered together, possible quotes from the participants were arranged with their respective topics, and thoughts that I had while looking at the data were underneath the categories. Most of the possible codes that were gleaned from the data had to do with the perspectives of the women in the study. The coding process was used to come up with several smaller themes, and then I organized the smaller themes under the research questions. Narrative quotes from the participants were used to describe each of the themes in the study.

*Subjectivity Statement and Questions about Outsider Status*

I am not a *Mexicana*. My family is a blend of mostly Irish and English immigrants with a little Native American thrown in on my mother's side. I learned to speak Spanish, Castilian Spanish, in both high school and college, and learned to speak a dialect of Mexican Spanish while teaching adult ESOL students and learning words that my students use that students living in Spain do not. Although I speak a dialect of Spanish, I am still an outsider studying a culture that I am not a member of.

According to the book *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader* (1996) by editors Wilkinson and Kitzinger, the concept of "other" comes from both the notion that Simone de Beauvoir began about being somehow "different" than the subject one is studying as well as from anthropology's representations of race and identity.

The two authors cited two large dilemmas when researchers look to represent "the other": First, feminists want to enable the voices of the "others" to be heard but they also want to create social and political change on behalf of others. These two goals are not always compatible, say the editors. It is difficult as a feminist not to desire to reach from what is perceived to be the "top" of the heap from the perspective of White feminists and pull fellow feminists "up". The trouble is, a White feminist's notion of "up" may not be what women of other ethnicities want at all. As a White feminist, I must keep in mind that I should talk less, and listen more. If I can listen more, I may be able to effect change with the women who I represent in this study, and not for them as some kind of super heroine. Second, it is difficult to negotiate "others" and difference—it is difficult at times to refuse to believe that there is that great a difference between people and it is

difficult as well to insist that differences could be used to maintain existing power structures rather than subvert them. Wilkinson and Kitzinger, in Chapter One, spoke about a researcher's commitments being in conflict: the commitment to enable "the others" to be heard, and the commitment to create change in the world. The authors speak about writers as being merely "conduits" for info; they speak because others "cannot" speak for themselves. But by speaking for someone because they "cannot" could possibly lead to resentment and anger from the participants—and may lead the researcher to presume that she has "power" and the participants do not. In other words, how can I presume to "speak" for my students? I cannot. But I can use their words and phrases to enable them to speak for themselves and to a larger audience.

I cannot speak about what it feels like to be *una Mexicana*, in places where it is not bright and cheerful, in all of their hidden dark secret quiet places, but because I share some of the same dark, quiet places that some of them have, I can speak to those experiences, the experience that we share of domestic violence. I may also be able to speak to the experience of being poor when I was younger, what it feels like to be hungry, to visit pawn shops, to roll coins for gas money. In other words, I can empathize of some of my students' experiences but not all of them: all of my students are *Mexicana*, but not all of them have experienced abuse in their lives, and not all of them have been poor. Johnson-Bailey (2004) called this the "shifting sands" of outsider/insider status as a researcher. There are times when I was able to relate directly to the experiences of my students, and there are times, many more times, when I could not.



There are times, as Johnson-Bailey pointed out (1999) that it is assumed that when members of one race interview members of the same race, there is an “empathetic bond of understanding” will be demonstrated (p.659), but that this may not be the case, as gender and class intersect with race. Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhammad (2001) discussed the advantages and disadvantages of being an insider within a culture and studying it, and an outsider studying a different culture.

Griffin in the *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader* (1996) text said that “. . . when, as a feminist and as a researcher, I ‘speak for’ other women. . . I cannot avoid telling my story about their lives. I can use the voices of others from (my understanding of) their positions, but I can never speak/write from their positions” (p.101).

So as a researcher am I to assume that I can speak for my participants at all, just because we happen to be women and just because we might happen to have a set of shared experiences, but have other experiences that are not in common with each other? Mohanty, the editor of *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (1991), I think might answer an emphatic no, or perhaps a quieter no with reservations. Mohanty spoke of her concerns about the production of Third World Women merely as a monolithic subject in Western texts—which concerned her because feminist scholarship will bring feminist politics and policy—so as research follows scholarship, if politicians see Third World Women as merely a commodity, a single generalizable unit, the women are easier to identify—and easier to either forget or exploit—and they should be neither.

A small caveat here, the term Third World is problematic because it contains negative connotations. However, because Mohanty is using the term as an advocate of Third World issues, rather than a critic, I believe her use of the term to be benevolent.

Mohanty noted six general ways Third World Women are viewed in discourse by Western scholars. I would add that although my participants are now living in the United States, they are still living in the Third World within the United States, so Mohanty's observations would apply here.

1) Women as victims of male violence. "Male violence must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies in order to both understand it better and to organize effectively to change it. Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete historical and political practical practice and analysis." (p.24) This one is the hardest for me to acknowledge, merely because of my background. Mohanty, however, does have a point. I cannot assume all of my participants are in an abusive situation merely because I have observed it before and have experienced it myself. In addition, I needed to be careful about my interpretations of male violence within Mexican society.

2) Women as universal dependents. Scholars cannot generalize all women into a single group of mothers, but mothers may be classified by how their mothering is valued in their culture, for example. I would add that in this particular culture of the *Mexicanas*, it appears that women are placed on a pedestal too high to keep—they are supposed to model the Virgin Mary after all.

3) Married women as merely victims in the colonial process of colonialism.

Mohanty said this assumes that women have no control over their own choice of

husband, which in many cases is not true, and the experiences of each group of women are heavily context-dependent. Mohanty is probably right on this one, with respect to the culture I studied. The women in this study had varying degrees of power over their choice of a spouse.

- 4) All women within familial systems occupy a subservient role. Again, this is clearly dependent on context and individualized family structure. In this culture, as Anzaldúa (1987) pointed out, mothers-in-law have a lot of power, especially if the sons and their wives live with them.
- 5) All women who belong to the same religion believe the same thing. While this may be a true characterization Mohanty describes, that it is indeed not wise to lump all of women's beliefs about their religion into one category, I would argue that in the case of my participants, their religion becomes very important to them, because they are in a new country, and their religion is a string they can hold on to as a reminder of what they left in Mexico. The Catholic Church (the religion that all of my participants are) predominates this culture, and therefore, I would say, the patriarchal beliefs of the church are held within the minds of the people within this culture, and the beliefs are ingrained and perpetuated by the women within the culture.
  - a. All Third World Women have the same economic problems and needs. Mohanty is correct again, each situation of Third World Women is different, but everyone needs to be fed, to be housed, to be clothed, and to feel secure. The security part is the part in my participant's lives I am not sure that they have. All of the participants in the study were able to feed,

house, and clothe themselves and their families. Not all of the women in the study felt secure within their households. And as Maslow (1943) pointed out in his Hierarchy of Needs, if someone does not have her basic needs satisfied, they cannot go on to the next level, the level that involves educational pursuits. If the woman is in fear of her situation at home, her mind is concentrated on survival, which basically means that no learning can take place.

If, as a female researcher I want to study women who are not from my culture, what do I keep in mind? According to Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1996), researchers should keep the following in mind when representing the other: 1) give “the others” a copy of your representations of them and ask the participants if the representations are valid, 2) listen to “the others” talk about you as a way of exposing this operation of othering, 3) listening to members of the group in power talk about the ways that they construct the “other”, and 4) develop a dialogue between “us” and “them”.

I think, when it comes down to it, my outsider status had to be addressed. It was, I believe, one of the few concerns I had about Rogers’ study of a poor African-American family in an urban setting. Rogers (2003) spoke in the book of her utter powerlessness within the context of a meeting that took place to decide Vicky’s daughter’s placement into junior high special education for the next school year. Although Rogers knew that Vicky did not want her daughter placed in special education, she sat at the conference and did not voice her reservations. I felt for Rogers as a researcher, but I also felt for Vicky, both as a mother, and as a teacher that has many memories of adult students who struggled through life because they couldn’t read, and did not have the power I naturally

had because of my race and socioeconomic status. My question is this: if a researcher knew she had power because of your race and status to make change happen, could she have used her power to benefit a child? I believe that many researchers have experiences that come up within their careers that put them at this crossroads: whether or not to lend assistance to a participant in need. It appears as if Rogers felt she was doing the right thing as a researcher in the situation described above. I am not certain that I would have made the same decision. We all have scars from the past that now lie within us—if what happened to me helps someone to realize that they are not alone—then so much the better. I am not only an outsider because of both my ethnicity and my language, I am an insider as well. The women in my study and I share a part of common past. Because of my first hand familiarity with violence between partners, I am able to ask questions and gain trust where others might not be able to. In addition, I had two advantages that perhaps another researcher that is an outsider might not have had: one, my ability to speak Spanish, which I have already discussed, and two, my ability to blur the lines between teacher and student, which is what Freire suggested is effective for adult learning and gaining trust—and establishing a unique relationship.

To summarize the problems of an outsider who wishes to research a population not her own in a few pages is difficult. I must research with caution, ask questions, and then shut up and listen to the answers. I tried to represent the women in the study in their own words, and rather than draw a picture of their lives, allowed them to represent their lives as clearly as possible. I examined what the *Mexicanas* said, and used their words to develop themes within the study. I was then able to place the responses of the *Mexicanas* with the themes of the study. I then went back and asked the women if the conclusions I

reached were representative of their interviews. The *Mexicanas* agreed with what I had written about them during the course of the research. I then finished the placement of statements from the *Mexicanas* under themes and began to write the findings chapter of the research.

## CHAPTER 4

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM AND PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

In order to paint as complete a picture of the program and its participants as possible, there must be a description of the program and its participants.

#### *The community*

The community where the program was housed is a small southern city in the Southeastern United States. The community grew up around the university located here. The university is quite old, the oldest building on campus dates from the very early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The university can boast one of the most beautiful campuses in the South. There are ivy covered buildings, huge live oaks, and thousands of flowering plants that dot the large campus. The campus itself is approximately two miles long and one mile wide. The university is large, one of the largest in the South, with nearly 40,000 students.

The downtown area of the community dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well. There is a monument to Confederate dead in the middle of the downtown area, close to the university. The community is known for the arts. Many music groups got their start there, and there are Pulitzer-prize winning authors who reside there. There is a large 19<sup>th</sup> century house that is a museum for the arts, and the location of a summer arts program for children. The community boasts an extensive summer leisure program for children. The elementary schools are well thought of. In the past, the community was considered a bastion of Southern hospitality, with all of the good and bad connotations that go with being called a bastion of anything in that part of the country.

Underneath this veneer of Southern hospitality lies a dichotomy of haves and have nots. While the community is considered to be a haven for artists and art lovers, the university that grew the artists and art lovers was built with slave labor, and today there is a large population of people living in poverty. A recent report by the government found that the county is the poorest in the state per capita. There are pockets in between the graceful columned homes of trailer parks and public housing.

Over the last 15 years, the population within the community has shifted. In years past, the community was overwhelmingly white. Professors and employees of the university resided in the community. Presently, many professors and employees of the university have moved to a different county to take advantage of what they believe are better schools in a phenomenon commonly known as “White Flight”. In the community, the number of minority students is on the rise. Many elementary schools have seen their population shift from overwhelmingly white to substantial minority populations. One school on the edge of the community has seen its population change from 65% white and 30% African-American to 30% white, 50% African-American, and 20% Hispanic. This is a representative example; other schools have seen a far more drastic change.

The number of ESOL students within the county has exponentially increased. Ten years ago, there were four ESOL teachers at the elementary school level in the community. Only 3 of the elementary schools in the county had an ESOL population. Today, 11 of the 13 elementary schools have ESOL populations, and the county has 22 elementary ESOL teachers. Many of the elementary schools have ESOL populations that are the majority population within the school.



### *The Program*

The program that the *Mexicanas* attended was a federally funded family literacy program that had its beginnings in the early 1990s with a federal grant program. The federal grant required that a parent or family member attend ESOL or GED classes while one or more of their children attend preschool. In addition, the parents were required to take parenting classes each week, and spend time with their children doing educational activities. When the funds were originally distributed, there were approximately 200 programs throughout the United States. However, the number of programs decreased under federal review. The state in which this particular program resides had as many as 6 programs, at the time this study was beginning, there were 3.

The program was in the community studied for 12 years, beginning in 1994. At the time of the study, the program served about 150 families each day. There were five teachers, and six administrators/social service providers within the program. Each participant had to demonstrate financial need in order to be placed within the program. There were four GED classes at the time of the study, and three ESOL classes: one beginning, one intermediate, and one advanced ESOL class. Each adult education class within the program had at least a two-month waiting period, with the beginning and intermediate ESOL classes having an 18 month waiting period for entrance. Each of the women within the program was enrolled in either the beginning or intermediate ESOL class.

### *The Women*

The following descriptions are of the nine women who agreed to participate in the study.

### *Amarilla*

Amarilla was born close to Acapulco, in Guerrero state. She has three children, two boys and an infant daughter. Her husband works for a landscaping company. They live in a trailer in one of the largest trailer parks in the community. Her trailer is typical of many of the trailers I have been in of the *Mexicanas* and their families. The outside is old and rusty, but the inside is warm and comfortable and extremely clean. There is a picture of *la Virgen* in the living room. Amarilla has been in the United States for eight years. She crossed the border in Tijuana, and lived in California for 3 years before moving to this community. How she crossed the border is interesting. She was driven over the border in a false bottom of a car trunk.

### *Azul*

Azul was from a small town close to Monterrey in Nueva Leon state. She came from a family where some of her cousins and brothers were drug runners for a local cartel. She lived in a fairly large house in her home state. Azul and her husband crossed the border by walking out into a desert area close to the Big Bend area of Texas, and crossing at an unguarded area. She has three children; her youngest was 4 years old. Her oldest daughter, who was 15 at the time of the study, became pregnant by an older man, a member of a street gang. Azul's husband did work, but she did not disclose what kind of job he had. She and her husband lived in a new house with two new cars. Her home was beautiful, with fairly new furniture, and extremely clean. She had pictures of *La Virgen* hanging in every room. One picture she was particularly proud of was made by prisoners in her home state. She owned a parrot, which she loved dearly and would talk to frequently. Azul was in her early 30's.

### *Magenta*

Magenta was born in Matehuala in San Luis Potosi in central Mexico. She was in her early 30's with three children under 10. Her husband worked in construction. She and her family lives in a small trailer park behind a liquor store next to a retention pond. All of the residents of the trailer park are Mexican, and when Magenta has parties, everyone attends. When she crossed the Rio Grande in Texas with her oldest daughter, a toddler at the time, it was dark and she was with a group of people who had a homemade raft. One of the men slipped off the raft and into the water. She doesn't know what happened to him. None of the people on the raft knew how to swim. After the crossing of the Rio Grande, Magenta had to walk for many hours with her daughter on her back. The *coyote* (what Mexicans call someone who is paid to lead others across the United States border illegally) told her that if she slowed down she would be caught.

### *Marina*

Marina was from Monterrey in Nueva Leon. Her family was poor, but not as poor as Violetta's. She said that she walked across the border close to a main border crossing in order to come to the United States. Marina came in the late 1990's and lived for a while in San Antonio, Texas, close to one of her sisters who crossed earlier. Marina has two sons, both in middle school. She began the program as an intermediate ESOL student, and has received her GED. Her husband, who Marina said drank too much, worked in construction.

Marina lived in a larger house in the community. She and her husband also owned a small rental house where they lived prior to moving into their larger home.

*Roja*

Roja was the youngest participant in the study. She was 22 years old. She and her husband crossed the border together. They are both from a tiny community called Abasolo in Guanajuato state. They walked from Guanajuato to the Texas-Mexico border near McAllen, where they crossed the river. Her husband was a laborer. She had two children, one who was five years old, and an infant. She and her husband lived in a large trailer park in the eastern part of the community. They were recently able to purchase a truck, which she was very proud of.

*Rosa*

Rosa was from Puebla in Tlaxcala state. She was 17 when she crossed into the United States through the Arizona desert. She said she crossed and walked for two days without food or water. She noted that the *coyotes* in the group she walked with had water, but they saved it for themselves. She said that there were snakes and large spiders and she was afraid. She was also afraid that there would be White men with guns close to the border. She and her husband have two children, both boys, one in elementary school, and one in middle school. Her husband was a laborer. They lived in the same trailer park as Magenta. She worked for a while before she had children in one of the maquiladoras in Tijuana.

*Turquesa*

Turquesa was from Irapuato in Guanajuato state. Unlike the other women in the study, Turquesa's family had a lot of money when she was growing up. She described

growing up in a lovely house with a garden and a housekeeper. She was also the only woman in the study who came to the United States in an airplane with her one year old daughter. Her husband was convicted of fraud, and it was for that reason Turquesa came to the United States. Her husband was a factory worker. They lived in a large trailer in the same trailer park as Amarilla. She and her husband have cars. She has three children, one in middle school, one in elementary school, and an infant. Her trailer has pictures done by her children hanging in the kitchen.

#### *Verde*

Verde was from Celaya in the state of Guanajuato. It is a small community, and poor. Verde crossed the border in the Arizona desert. She said she had to walk 20 hours in order to reach a town. She began her walk at night, when it was cool, but she said the sun was burning by the time the group stopped. Verde, like some of the other women in the study, used a *coyote*, a person she paid to guide her across the border from Mexico. Verde has been in the United States since the year 2000. She has three daughters, all in elementary school. Her husband was a factory worker who only comes home on the weekends. She and her daughters lived in a house in one of the newer subdivisions in the community.

#### *Violetta*

Violetta was from a small town in the state of Nueva Leon, Galeana, which is close to the large city of Monterrey. Her family was extremely poor. Violetta grew up with no electricity and no running water in her small house. She came here in the late

1990's, she was not sure of the year. She crossed the Rio Grande River to come to the United States. Like all of the women in the study, Violetta did not know how to swim; she instead found a spot with some others where the depth was shallow enough to wade across. After she crossed the river, she said she had to walk a very long way until she came to a small town. She was 21 when she crossed the Rio Grande; at the time of the study she was in her early 30's. She was married with two sons, one in elementary school, and one in middle school. She also has an infant daughter. Her husband was a construction foreman. They lived in a tidy house with nice furnishings close to the elementary school where one of her sons is a student. Both she and her husband have cars.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the qualitative study. The findings are organized according to the three research questions which were presented in Chapter 3. The finding and themes that emerged after analyzing the data will be discussed in the order of the research questions. The research questions were as follows:

1. How does learning English impact the power relationship between the Mexicanas and their male partners?
2. How does learning English impact the relationship between the Mexicanas and their children?
3. How does learning English impact the Mexicanas sense of personal agency?

The first section of this chapter is a brief introduction to the study and the overall themes as discussed in Bogdan and Bicklen (2003) and Creswell (2003). The second section of this chapter addresses research question one and discusses the socioemotional factors that have impacted the power relationship between Mexicanas and their male partners. The third section of this chapter addresses research question two and discusses the socioemotional factors that impact the relationship between the Mexicanas and their children. The fourth section of this chapter discusses research question three and discusses the socioemotional factors that impact the Mexicanas sense of personal agency. Finally, a chapter summary provides a synopsis of the chapter.

*Findings Related to Research Question One: How does learning English impact the power relationship between the Mexicanas and their male partners?*

When I first began working with Mexicanas in 2003, discussions around their family life revolved around the lives of their children. They showed me pictures of their children, celebrated every tooth falling out, every step they took. I heard about every celebration, every misstep at school, every correction that needed to be made to their behavior. What I did not hear about from the women were stories about their husbands. In the White middle-class culture, women talk with each other, and tell stories, usually funny ones, about their husbands, which usually end with a shrug of the shoulders, eyes raised towards the ceiling, and an understood undertone of “men...can’t live with them, can’t live without them” mentality. In the working class White culture, it has been my experience that many of the same stories about husbands/male partners exist, although it has been my experience working with adults who live in poverty that at times, women within this culture talk of other stories about their husbands that most middle-class White women would not discuss with strangers/outsideers.

Nowhere present in this ESOL setting were these “oh, those men” stories that White middle-class women tell each other. There were times within the program that ESOL classes were combined with GED classes for a parenting class. The GED classes tended to be full of African-American or White students, while the ESOL class was overwhelmingly *Mexicana*. During the parenting classes, the African-American or White students would complain about their significant others, “my boyfriend doesn’t help me with the kids”, or “my wife expects me to do EVERYTHING”. The *Mexicanas* said nothing.



One day, the women came into the classroom very upset. A woman they knew had been beaten very badly by her husband in front of their kids, which they believed was the worst part of the beating. The *Mexicanas* in the class did not believe that violence should be exhibited in front of children at all. We began to discuss abuse in the classroom, but slowly, in a very small circle. The *Mexicanas* began to speak about abuse within their homes, as if they had been holding back for a long time. After this great outpouring in the classroom, the women felt somewhat freer to discuss what was going on within their homes. As I have stated earlier in the limitations of the study, I believe that the reason these women were mostly honest with me was because they knew me, and they trusted me as much as they might trust any woman who was not of their culture.

After analyzing the data in the responses to Question 1, three distinct themes emerged. All of these themes were common threads with at least a majority, if not all of the women participating in the study. These three themes are summarized in table 5.1 below and are discussed in detail in the following section.

*Table 5.1 Themes from Research Question One*

Theme 1: Eight of nine women were coerced to remain at home rather than attend classes by their male partners through various means that ranged from verbal threats to coercion, to confinement, to physical abuse.
Theme 2: A majority of the <i>Mexicanas</i> felt powerless in their relationships with their male partners, but this loss of power was present before the women began the ESOL classes.
Theme 3: The women used the education and welfare of their children as a bargaining chip to justify coming to ESOL classes when their male partners wanted them to stop coming to class.

*Theme 1: Eight of nine women were coerced to remain at home rather than attend classes by their male partners through various means that ranged from verbal threats to coercion to confinement to physical abuse.*

Adult educators have known for a long time that abuse of women can escalate if they are in a relationship when the student begins her studies; there has been some evidence anecdotally in research that the level of violence increases as a woman begins to learn a skill, trade, language, or obtain a diploma (Carnack, 1992; Frye, 1999; Manchura, 1997; Rockhill, 1987; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Tollefson, 1991).

All of the women in the study talked about abuse in one form or another. None of them called it abuse. Many of the women would make excuses for their husband's abusive behavior, saying "he only does it when he drinks" or "he's really a good father". Every single one of these women saw their mother, sister, or other female family member of their families or their husband's families abused in one way or another.

Amarilla, the most outspoken of the group of women, said this:

*Una Mexicana tiene mucha fuerza para luchar lo que quiere y no importa si es mujer, trata de alcanzar sus metas. Yo creo que personas de otra cultura también, pero una mexicana siempre lucha mas porque el país donde—de donde vengo, todavía existe el machismo. Donde el hombre quiere ser mejor que la mujer y la mujer tiene que pelear contra eso, porque siempre hay un hombre que no quiere que la mujer crezca. Ya sea en la—en la escuela o por decir en el matrimonio o en un trabajo. Siempre hay un hombre que no quiere que esa mujer sea mas que el.*

A Mexican woman has to have much strength to fight for what she wants, because it's not important that it is a woman, trying to reach her goals. I think that there are people in other cultures too, but a Mexicana always has to fight more because the country I come from, still exists the machismo. Where a man wants to be better than the woman and the woman has to fight against this, because there is always a man who doesn't want a woman to grow. I know in the school or to say in the marriage or in a job. Always there is a man that does not want that this woman is more than he is.

It is for precisely this reason that many of the women in the study were reluctant to begin coming to school at all. They were worried about what their husbands might think about them learning English, and they were worried about learning more English than their husbands knew. For many of these reasons, the women left their study materials at school, rather than taking them home, where they could have used them to learn English faster. One of the women hit on a brilliant idea to begin using note cards in order to study, because she could easily slip them into her purse, where they were not visible. Thereafter, note cards were provided in class to help with vocabulary retention.

I was prepared for violence to show up within the study, but I was not prepared for the amount of coercion and confinement that takes place along with the violence. Here are some examples of the types of violence the women self-reported to me. Let's begin with the most egregious examples of violence that the women reported. Two women out of nine in the study reported being physically abused by their husbands as a direct result of their wanting to come to class to learn English. Here are some examples of the abuse the women were describing. Please note that the single letter referents are the Mexicanas, and LG is the researcher. In a couple of cases, the colors are denoted by more than one letter. Also, when the woman spoke English only, English was transcribed. When the woman spoke English and Spanish, both languages are shown, and the Spanish is in italics.

*A: El puso la pistola en la mesa, y lo giró. A veces tenía una bala, y a veces no tenía.*

*LG: El lo hizo muchas veces?*

*A: Fue solamente cuando el le tomó drogas.*

*LG: El lo tomó muchas veces o no?*

*A: Todo el tiempo. . .*

LG: . . .*porque no me vas a la casa segura?*

A: *Y que va a hacer con mis hijos? Como yo voy a ganar dinero?*

A: He would put the gun on the table, and spin it around. Sometimes it would have a bullet in it, sometimes it would not.

LG: Did he do this often?

A: Only when he was taking drugs.

LG: Did he do that a lot?

A: All the time. . .

LG: . . .why can't I take you to a safe place?

A: What about my children? How would I get money? Azul

MAR: . . . *despues de el tenía su accidente motocicleta, el no me pegaba. Antes, el me pegaba, y despues, nunca lo hacía.*

LG: *Tenias feliz?*

MAR: *Yo tenia mucha feliz, Miss Lori. Porque no necesita iba al doctor con cuentas.*

MAR: . . .after he had the motorcycle accident, then he stopped hitting me. Before, he would hit me, and after, he never did it again.

LG: Were you happy?

MAR: Very happy, Miss Lori. I didn't have to go to the doctor any more with stories. Marina

LG: *Hay tiempos que tu esposo te dije malas palabras antes de sales por la clase?*

A: *Si, a veces. . . el me dijo que no quiere que yo voy a la clase.*

LG: *Hay amenazas?*

A: *Si.*

LG: *Que tipo de amenazas?*

A: *Que el me pegara. . . o el me matara. . . pero solamente cuando el le toma drogas, si el no lo toma...el no me dice nada.*

LG: Are there times in your house that your husband says bad things to you before you go to class?

A: Yes. . . sometimes. . .he tells me he doesn't want me to go to class.

LG: Are there threats?

A: Yes.

LG: What kind of threats?

A: That he will hit me. . .or that he will kill me. . .but only when he takes drugs, if he does not take...he doesn't say anything. Azul

These findings echo the earlier some of the findings of other researchers, but perhaps dispel somewhat the myth that all Mexican men beat their wives all the time.

However, what I found far more frequently, was the type of abuser that is called an “intimate terrorist” (Johnson’s 1995 category) but in the control/no threat group (Leone, Johnson, Cohan, and Lloyd, 2004), the husband keeps control over the wife by other means that do not involve physical violence. All of the men in this study could be considered abusers, but only the two men above are intimate terrorists. The others may belong in the control/no threat group of partners. Some examples of the control/no threat group of intimate terrorists are shown below

*“...el es muy sádico. . . Del sentido de que no me motiva, si no me dice, es que no estas aprendiendo nada. El pienso que con humillarme, con ofenderme yo voy a motivarme. O sea, el es sádico. . . El me- como que me baja.”*

He is very sadistic. His sentiments are that if he doesn’t “motivate” me, I won’t learn anything. He thinks to humiliate me, to offend me, I will be motivated not to learn. On this, he is sadistic. He wants me to be low. Turquesa

*A: El me dice palabras malas.*

*LG: Que tipo de palabras malas?*

*A: El me dice que yo soy una asna, una tonta, una putana. . . que yo no puedo aprender nada. . .*

*LG: y el te dice muchas veces. . .*

*A: Si. . . muchas veces. . .*

*A: He calls me many bad things.*

*LG: What kind of bad things?*

*A: He tells me that I am an ass, a stupid woman, a whore. . . that I cannot learn anything. . .*

*LG: . . . and he tells you this many times?*

*A: Yes. . . many times. . . Azul*

In none of the quotations above does the husband threaten to kill his wife, as in the earlier quotes, but the husbands are attacking the women’s sense of self-esteem in an attempt to get them to quit going to class because they believe they cannot learn English, no matter how hard they try.

In other words, the women are being systematically told over and over again they are stupid in an attempt to get them to quit so that all of the equilibrium in the house is restored.

There were other instances where there was actual coercion and/or confinement when the women either needed to get help or to get to classes.

*T: . . . porque no contaba con nadie que me ayudara, porque mi esposo ni siquiera estaba ahí tampoco. O sea, fue otra etapa difícil, difícil que me motivo a estudiar.*

*LG: Tú sabes que es posible que no hay una explicación. Es muy difícil. . .*

*T: Yo me siento como. . . como si fuera culpable porque esa noche yo me sentía muy mal*

*y yo no fui al hospital porque. . . o sea, yo no hablaba el inglés, y mi esposo no me quiso llevar. Le dije ay! Yo voy y como les voy a decir y que voy a hacer yo. Entonces, yo no fui al hospital de emergencia y mi esposo no me quiso llevar. Después de días que me toca la cita me dice el doctor que mi bebe estaba muerto. Le digo, pero, no, yo lo siento. O sea, como te digo, o sea, yo no- yo no fui al hospital porque yo no lo dominaba este idioma y y me sentí como que no, yo no podía hacer nada para irme al hospital y decirles, sabes que? Me siento mal.*

T: . . . because I told no one that I needed help, and my husband wasn't there for me. O, it was a difficult time, this difficulty that motivated me to study.

LG: You know that it is possible there is not an explanation. It is very difficult.

T: I feel that. . . that I was culpable because that night I felt very bad and I did not go to the hospital because. . . well. . . I did not speak English, y my husband did not want to bring me. I said oh! If I go alone how am I going to do it? So, I didn't go to the emergency room and my husband didn't take me. After days, I had a doctors appointment, and the doctor said that my baby was dead. They said. . . no, but I felt it. Or it is like I said to you, I couldn't go to the hospital, because I couldn't speak the language, and I felt that no. . . I couldn't have done anything. . . but go to the hospital and speak. . . but do you know how? I feel badly. Turquesa

Although I did my best to reassure Turquesa that this incident was not her fault, she still lights a candle at mass for the baby she killed, she told me. She is not sure she will go to heaven, although she says she has asked for forgiveness. Had her husband, who spoke English, taken her to the hospital, it is possible the baby might still have died, but it would not have left Turquesa with such a huge sense of guilt.

Here is another example of confinement, a little different than the one above.

*A: . . . el asustó mis llaves, y el me dijo que yo no voy a la clase este día. . . o el me hizo llorar. . . me dijo que estoy estúpida. . . me dijo que no necesita la clase...yo no puedo aprender nada. . . Entonces, yo pido la esperanza para ir.*

A: . . . he hides my car keys, and he tells me that I am not going to class today. . . or he will make me cry. . . tell me I am stupid. . . tell me I have no business to go to class. . . I can learn nothing. . . so I lose hope to go. . . Azul

There were other examples the women spoke of. If the child had to go to the doctor, and the husband was off, he would refuse to take the child to the doctor. There were times the wife would come to class because the husband had agreed to watch the child, only to have the husband call on the cell phone with an excuse so that the wife would have to come home. There were other men who would refuse to watch a sick child so the wife could go to class. Rosa's and Amarilla's quotes sums up the beliefs of the men as their women see it below.

*RO: Mi esposo, pues, el no esta convencido, porque el es de los hombre de que la mujer debe estar en casa cuidando los hijos. . . es más activo cuando viene acá que si estuviera en la casa encerrado.*

RO: My husband, well, he is not convinced, he is one of those men that the women needs to be in the house caring for the children....

he is much happier when he comes home and I am in a closed house. Rosa

*A: Por decir, este, hay personas que están en la clase y su esposo le dice, ya no vayas a las clases de ingles si no estas aprendiendo lo suficiente, que ni si quiera puedes decir esto bien, o cosas así.*

A: For example, there are people that are in the class and their husbands say to them, you are not going to English class anymore if you do not learn enough, if I don't think you can talk good, or things like that. Amarilla

Verde was forbidden from partaking in her favorite pleasure after she was married.

*El día mas peor de mi matrimonio fue-fue de que recién casado, recién casados, como te decía agarraba y se iba a los bailes, se iba solo, se iba solo a bailar. Dice que no bailaba, según el, pero, pero yo sola y el allá divirtiéndose, yo creo que fueron, fueron los peores día de mi vida. Porque, me sentía bien desesperada. Que me arrepentía de haberme casado con el.*

The worst day of my marriage was- was when I had just gotten married, we had just gotten married, when he would get me and go to the dances, and sometimes I would go alone, I would go alone and dance. He told me that I could not go without him, but, but I went alone before, and we used to have a lot of fun there, I think that those were the worst, the worst days of my life.

Eight out of nine women agreed that each of them had been coerced in one way or another not to come to class. All of the women said that the abuse they suffered from was systemic, that it did not occur every day. Also, all of the women agreed that their relationships were abusive before they began ESOL classes, but that there seemed to be an escalation in the violence during the times of the year when the women would be in class.



Amarilla put it this way:

*Yo creo que la mayoría de las mexicanas somos luchadoras, somos bastante inteligentes. . . y, bastante valientes. Porque, a veces para que una mexicana este en una escuela como esta, que se viene a listar, tiene que tener problemas en su casa para poder llegar aquí. Tiene que pelear primero contra su esposo, para que el permita que ella este aquí. Porque, yo creo que el hombre de mi cultura, nunca quiere que la mujer este sobre el. Porque si esa mujer gana mas dinero o sabe mas y se siente inferior, pierde, digamos, su dominio. Entonces, desde que esa mujer empieza a querer ir a la escuela, tiene que luchar para poder llegar a ocupar una silla allí. Desde su casa empieza.*

I think that the majority of Mexicanas are fighters, they have enough intelligence, and enough courage. Because sometimes, for a Mexicana to be in a school like here, she comes with a list of problems from her house for wanting to come here. She has to fight against her husband first, that he wants that she should stay there. Because I think that the man of my culture, none of them want that the woman be above him. Because if a woman has more money or knows more and he feels inferior, he loses, listen, his domination. So, before the woman begins to want to go to school, she has to fight to want to go to occupy a seat here. At her house it begins.

The table below represents a summary of the levels of violence the women experienced. Because the violence within the study was so pervasive, I chose to represent it here. The table includes each of the nine women studied and the levels of violence that they self reported during the study. It is clear from the summary chart that Azul, Marina and Turquesa represent the three relationships within the study that were the most violent. Turquesa was in a less physically violent relationship than either Marina or Azul. Five of the remaining six reported experiencing coercion or confinement, or both. One of the women, Roja, experienced no violence in her relationship with her male partner.

*Table 5.2 Types of Violence Experienced by the Participants in the Study*

<b>Name of Participant</b>	<b>Physical/Verbal Abuse</b>	<b>Coercion/Confinement</b>
Amarilla	Verbal	Coercion
Azul	Physical, Verbal	Coercion/Confinement
Megenta	Verbal	Coercion
Marina	Verbal, Physical	Coercion/Confinement
Roja		
Rosa	Verbal	Coercion
Turquesa	Verbal, Physical	Coercion, Confinement
Violetta		Coercion
Verde	Verbal	Confinement

*Theme #2: A majority of the Mexicanas felt powerless in their relationships with their male partners, but this loss of power was present before the women began the ESOL classes.*

It would appear that these women have never felt powerful in their lives, judging by their comments during the interviews. Yet many of the women had survived crossing deserts or climbing mountains in the blistering summer heat to get to the United States without a male partner. Also, all of the women in the study were left for a period of time by themselves with the children in Mexico while their husbands came to the United States to work. Half of the women lived with other family members during the time that their husbands were away, but others lived on their own. In the United States, we view a woman living on her own with or without children as any great surprise, but the *Mexicanas* told me that a woman living alone in Mexico, especially in the rural areas, is

not common at all. So, it would appear that these women were capable of surviving, persevering on their own, but comments like those below are telling.

*LG: Como sientes cuando el te pega?*

*A: A veces, yo no siento nada.*

*LG: Y otras veces?*

*A: A veces. . . yo siento triste, o sin esperanza. . . yo no puedo hacer nada... yo pedi a la Virgen para ayudarme.*

LG: How do you feel when he is hitting you?

A: Sometimes, I feel nothing.

LG: And other times?

A: Sometimes. . . I feel sad. . . or without hope. . . I can do nothing. . .

I pray to the Virgin for help. Azul

*T: O sea, con todo eso tu Lori, o sea, o sea, fue de que estar pensando, analizando, y llego un momento que, que no me importaba nada y la soledad que sentía, la tristeza, este me hizo querer matarme.*

Or if, it is all told to you Lori, if it is as I was thinking, analyzing, and there came a moment that nothing was important to me, and in my solitude and sadness that I wanted to kill myself. Turquesa

It is interesting to note that Turquesa had the most difficult route to the United States, and one would think she would have been the most self-sufficient of the women. She was not. Turquesa's husband was jailed in her native Mexican state for fraud. She was forced to leave her beautiful house, as she called it, with a housekeeper and a car, sell it, and move in with her in-laws, who she hated. She worked overnight at a factory to help her in-laws and to raise money to get her husband a proper trial. She then decided life would be better in the United States, so she crossed the border with her oldest daughter and moved to California, where she did more factory work under bosses that were at best, yelling what she knew were sexual innuendos at her. It is interesting to note that it was after her husband joined her that the incident where she lost the baby took

place. The woman who had been so self sufficient now felt she could do nothing to save her child, hence the above quote.

It would be easy to blame the husbands alone for this sense of helplessness, but the women explained to me that they had always listened to what others were saying, and that there is indeed a pattern at work within some families of Mexican origin. Roja is in an egalitarian marriage, the only woman in the study that did not experience abuse within her marriage, although she described abuse in both her family of origin and the family of her husband. She and her husband began English classes within the program at the same time, and she was the quicker study. He was proud of her, and told all of the women in the class how proud he was that she was going to move on to the intermediate class soon. However, when Roja described the contact between her father in law and her infant daughter, one could see how the pattern of powerlessness begins, sometimes in infancy.

*LG: Que fue un día peor en tu matrimonio?*

*R: Un día peor?*

*LG: Sí*

*R: Con mi esposo, realmente, no, tenemos peleas, claro, pero, nunca me pego, Nunca me grito, pero me suegro. . .*

*LG: . . . tenías problemas?*

*R: Conmigo. . . no, realmente, no. . . no mucho. . . y con mi hijo, no también, pero. . .*

*LG: Tenías problemas con tu suegro y quién?*

*R: . . . a veces. . . sí. . . con mi hija...el presto atención a mi hijo, compró juguetes, dulces...pero, a mi hija, no. No se besa, no se abraza, nada (voice breaks)*

*LG: Por que no quiere abrazar su hija?*

*R: (crying). . . Porque el dice que el quiere dar sus sentidos en su nieto porque es un hombre es mas importante.*

*LG: Y como sientes?*

*R: Yo siento triste, no es por mi, pero por mi hija, ella es bonita, es hermosa, y el nunca se miró.*

LG: What was the worst day of your marriage?

R: A bad day?

LG: Yes.

R: With my husband, really, no, we have fights, of course, but he has never hit me, he has never yelled at me. . . but my father in law. . .

LG: You have problems?

R: With me really no. . . not many. . . and with my son. . . no also, but. . .

LG: You have problems with your father in law and who?

R: . . . sometimes yes, with my daughter, he paid attention to my son, bought toys, candy,

But my daughter, no. He doesn't kiss her, he doesn't hug her, nothing.

LG: Why doesn't he hug your daughter?

R: Because he tells me that he wants to give his emotions to his grandson because he's the man, it's more important.

LG: And how do you feel?

R: I feel bad, not for me, but for my daughter, she is beautiful, she is beautiful, but he never looks.

Roja was not worried about herself, she was worried that her daughter would grow up thinking that she was less than a man because her grandfather did not show her love. Many of the women in the study talked of the difficulties of their lives growing up, how distant they felt from their fathers because they did not see him very often, and how work and poverty were all they knew as children as Violetta explains below:

*V: Bien diferente, porque alla se levantan a las 4 de la mañana a cocer el maíz, a molerlo, a hacer las tortillas, a cocer los frijoles, a ayudarle a su esposo con—aparte que hacen su que hacere es de su casa, lavar asi bien duro, y le ayudan a sus hijos a trabajar en la labor diaria.*

*LG: Es una vida muy difícil.*

*V: . . . yo veía a mi mama que tenía que regresarse antes de las 12 para hacer la comida hacerle el lonche, y ir caminando mucho—hasta bien lejos, con bastantes fieras, espinas había viboras, de la arañas, pero ahí teníamos que ir nosotros subiendo a ir a dejar el lonche a mis hermanos o a mi papa.*

*LG: Cada día?*

*V: Todos los días.*

*LG: No hay domingo para descansar?*

*V: No. Alla no hay día de que hoy es domingo no, nada. Ni ir a pasear a donde. Teníamos que ir a darle de comida otra vez a los animales. Los animales tienen que comer todos los días. (Laughter)*

V: Very different, because there they get up at four in the morning to cook the corn, to grind it, to make the tortillas, to cook the beans, to help her husband with..apart from what there is to do in her house, to clean here is very hard, and help the children with their daily labors.

LG: It is a difficult life.

V:.. . I saw my mother who had to return at noon to make the lunch, and she walked a lot, it was very far with many wild animals, thorns where poisonous snakes lived, lots of spiders, but here we had to go to bring lunch to my brothers or my father.

LG: Every day?

V: Every day.

LG: You could not rest on Sundays?

V: No. There there was no day that was like Sunday, no, never. Nor could we pass the time anywhere. We had to go and give food again to the animals. The animals had to eat every day.

All of the women that were studied reported abuse in their family of origin or in their husband's family of origin. This would contribute to the powerlessness that the women felt. To the women in the study, abuse within the family was the norm, not the exception, as is illustrated below. It would be difficult for the women to observe a role model of a women in a position in power when there were no women in positions of power within their families. The women in the families of the *Mexicanas* in the study were in positions of powerlessness, as Roja and Marina illustrated below.

*LG: Yo creo que tu esposo no es un macho mexicano.*

*R: Oh, no. Tiene que ver a lo mejor tiene que ver como fueron los papas de el. Porque su papa así es, fue un machista, como tú dices. . .*

*LG: Porque tú dices que tu suegro es un machisto?*

*R: Porque el papa golpeaba a su mama muchas veces. . . y dijo muchas palabras malas.*

LG: I think your husband is not a macho Mexican.

R: Oh, no. You have to see that he is better than his father. Because his father is that, that macho man that you said. . .

LG: Why do you say that your father in law is a macho Mexican?

R: Because he hits his wife lots of times, and says many bad things. . .Roja

MAR: *Yo tenia muchas palabras malas, y mi mama tenia golpes. . . fue horrible, tu no crees?*

LG: *Si, es horrible.*

MAR: *Pero en mi familia, fue normal.*

MAR: I had lots of bad words, and my mother had bruises, it was horrible, don't you think?

LG: Yes, it is horrible.

MAR: But in my family, it was normal. Marina

LG: *Tú crees que tu mama tenía golpes?*

A: *La miré con golpes.*

LG: *Tú sabes como tenía?*

A: *La recibía de mi papa.*

LG: *Lo siento por este.*

A: *La mire mi mama cuando ella lloro también. . . el la dijo palabras malas a veces. . .*

LG: *Que tipo de palabras malas?*

A: *Una putana.*

LG: Do you think your mother got hurt?

A: I saw her with bruises.

LG: How do you think she got them?

A: My father gave them to her.

LG: I am sorry for that.

A: I saw her crying too. . . sometimes he called her bad things.

LG: What kind of bad things?

A: A whore. Azul

A: . . . y cuando en mi familia hay hombres que tratan mal a su esposa, siendo una mujer y no tienen la razón, yo siempre le digo a ella "ay! por que te dejas? Por que no haces esto?" O le digo a el, "por que la tratas así, si no es tu hija, no es tu mueble, no es esto?"

A: . . . and when in my family there are men that treat their women badly, they hurt their women, and they don't have a reason, I always tell her, "Oh. . . why don't you leave? Why don't you do this?" Or I tell him, "Why do you treat her like that if she's not your child, and she's not a piece of furniture, she's not this?" Amarilla

The only woman who reported having any money growing up was Turquesa.

Azul's family was not as well off as Turquesa's, but they were comfortable. All of the women in the study except Turquesa and Azul grew up in rural Mexico in small

communities with very little money. The women reported that dating in small Mexican communities followed a ritual. The girls in their towns usually were not allowed to date until after they turned 15. If their parents could afford it, the girls were given a quinceñera, a large party to celebrate the girl's transition into adulthood. The girls were then allowed to date under the watchful eyes of their community. Usually, the girls dated someone older. Most of the women in the study married someone who was at least 3 years older than they were. The dates in their Mexican communities consisted of going to the park to talk, going to a dance in the middle of the town, or sitting in front of their parent's house. All of their dates were very public. Many of the women reported dating only one or two men before they married, and they married very young, in their late teens or very early in their 20 s. This is a stark contrast to the dating patterns of women in the United States. As Turquesa explains:

*A nosotros como mujeres era parte así como que-como padre Mexicano este, que no nos daba permiso de ir a salir con los novios, el no nos daba permiso de- de salir con el novio. En ese sentido si fue así como un típico Mexico. . .pero en el otro sentido de la palabra no. El jugaba mucho con nosotros era-nos demostraba su carino. Cuando eramos ya arriba de antes era muy raro en Mexico. Nos daba permiso de salir y viajar, y de andar, o sea, pero, porque siempre nosotros andabamos con dos hermanas juntitas. Nos dejaba pasear. Y, el lo que nos decía, lo unico que les pido es que mantengan su distancia con los varones dense a respetar, para que no un día nos vayan a faltarles al respeto.*

It was like that with us (girls), with a Mexican father, that he would not give us permission to leave with boyfriends, he wouldn't give us permission to go out with a boyfriend. In this sentiment he was like a typical Mexican, but in the other sentiment of the word no. He played with us a lot-he demonstrated to us his affection. When this type of emotion was rare in Mexico. He gave us permission to leave and travel, and walk around, but we had to always walk around together with two sisters. We could leave to take a walk. And the only thing he said to us was, the only thing he asked us was to maintain our distance from the boys, so they would give us respect, so that one day we would not be without respect. Turquesa



She also described the family of origin her husband came from:

*O sea el si era un típico Mexicano que no quería dejar a las niñas estudiar, ni trabajar, ni pasear en un tiempo.*

Well, he was a typical Mexican in that he didn't want his girls to study, or work, or walk around.

According to Erikson's Stages of Development (1968), during adolescence, teenagers are trying to incorporate their many roles into a self image. As a young adult, men and women are learning to make personal commitments to spouses, parents, or partners. One could surmise that if a *Mexicana* marries at a young age, it is possible that she never incorporates her many roles as wife, mother, worker, lover, and student into a self image. It would also be possible that she could never really become close to anyone in early adulthood. If the women could not form bonds with family and friends outside their marriage, it is possible they could feel a sense of isolation, and it is possible that the struggle for power within their families would serve to further isolate the *Mexicanas* from sources of power and assistance in the community.

*Theme #3 The women used the education and welfare of their children as a bargaining chip to justify coming to ESOL classes when their male partners wanted them to stop coming to class.*

Over and over again, the women in this study told me that they wanted to learn English not for themselves, but for their children. They described scenes of humiliation where they could not make themselves understood to people within the community.

These scenes of humiliation and frustration took place at locations that we might take shopping in for granted as English speakers in the United States: grocery stores, doctors offices, pharmacies, schools, parks, and other places where mothers with children gather. The situation below is probably one of the most desperate the women reported during the study.

*A: En un ocasión mi hijo, el segundo, tuvo una infección en el oído. Entonces, su oído se rompió, se reventó. . .*

*LG: Oh, pobrecito!*

*A: . . . y estaba sacando pus.*

*LG: Oh, pobrecito!*

*A: Tú sabes. . .*

*LG: Sí!*

*A: . . . el liquido amarillo. Entonces, yo me sentía desesperada porque no podía llevarlo al doctor yo sola. No sabía que hacerle y tenía que esperar hasta que la otra persona pudiera ir conmigo y yo sentía dolor al ver a mi hijo sufrir y no poder ayudarlo . . . entonces, yo quería ser el, que el no sufriera, que a mi me hubiera pasado eso. Esa es mi historia. Por lo cual dije, basta! Tengo que ir.*

*LG: Y, cuantos anos fue tu hijo?*

*A: Tenía meses. . . como cinco meses. . . Era horrible. . . lloraba y lloraba.*

*Amarilla*

*A: In an occasion my son, the second one, had an infection in the ear. Then, the ear, broke, it ruptured. . .*

*LG: Oh, poor thing!*

*A: . . . and it was leaking pus.*

*LG: Oh, the poor thing!*

*A: You know. . .*

*LG: Yes!*

*A: . . . yellow fluid. Then, I was feeling desperate because I could not bring him to the doctor by myself. I didn't know what do and I had to wait until someone else could go with me and I felt hurt to see my son suffer and I could not help him. . . so I wanted to be him, so that he didn't have to suffer, I wanted that to pass. That is my story. That is when I said, enough! I have to go.*

*LG: And how old was your son?*

*A: He was months. . . about 5 months old. . . it was horrible. . . he cried and cried.*

*Amarilla*

Over and over the word that the women used during the study was desperate.

They were desperate to learn English so that they could help their children succeed

school. They were desperate to learn English in case one of their children got sick so they could communicate with the doctor. They were desperate to learn English so that they could ask questions about their child at their children's school. They were desperate to learn English so that they could read the labels on over the counter medications at the pharmacy. Here are some examples that further illustrate the desperation the women felt.

MAR: When I moved from Mexico. . . my husband, he knew some English, but I did not know any. . . and my oldest son, he did not know any. . . . I wanted to help him feel better about coming to this country. . . my son, he wanted to take karate classes, so I started asking about classes from the women that I knew, and they told me about a man who spoke Spanish and taught karate. So I took my son there, but no one there would speak Spanish to me. I had to go back and bring my husband to get my son into the classes. And so it went. . . my son was taking the classes. . . then one day, one of my friends, who also had a son in the school asked me if I got an invitation to the party that the man who owned the school was having. I told her no, and I discovered that everyone at the school received an invitation to the party but my son. I knew a little English, and so I went to talk to the man. The man told me that he did not invite my son because he did not want my son at the party, and he said that he did know Spanish, but he did not want to communicate in Spanish with me.

LG: How did you feel?

MAR: I was so angry and sad. . . for me, and for my son. He wanted to go to the party and be with his friends. I decided to learn English in spite of this man. I wanted to show him what I could do, so that my son would never be embarrassed by me again. Marina

*V: Este, y ya cuando decidí es cuando ya, ya dije mi hija, pues si- que necesitaba que me decían la maestras que necesitaba yo ayudarla. Pero, pues si yo no sabía nada, tampoco no la ayudaba, y por eso es que decidí-decidí aprender.*

V: This is when I decided because I had my daughter, I needed to talk with her teachers to help her. And because I didn't know anything, so then I couldn't help her, so for that reason, I decided to learn. Verde

*V: Y segundo, por mis hijos que-para comunicarme con sus maestras, en la secundaria y yo quiero sabe que es lo que habla con los amigos. Tratar de comunicarme con sus amigos, porque la mayoría de sus amigos son americanos.*

LG: Y, tu piensas que es importante?

*V: Si. Bien importante, porque yo siempre pienso en decir- que si yo se decir una palabra en ingles, no quiere decir que yo ya sepa ingles. O sea, esa palabra puede usarse para diferentes oraciones o diferentes. . . que es lo que le están diciendo a uno.*

V: And second, it was for my sons- so that I could communicate with their teachers, in the conferences. And now, now I feel forced to learn English because my son is in secondary school and I want to know what he's talking about with his friends. I am trying to communicate with his friends, because the majority of his friends are Americans.

LG: Do you think this is important?

V: Yes, very important, because I always think that until you can say a word in English, you cannot say that you know it in English. Like, this word could be used for different sentences or different. . . depending on what they want to say.

Violetta

*R: Yo decidí aprender-o sea, venir a las-a estudiar ingles porque mis niños ellos nacieron acá. Ellos empezaron de pre-K, kindergarten, hasta hoy que tiene 9 anos el niño y que me pregunta cosas y yo no le se responder. Ya me lo reprobaron una vez por no saber leer ese lenguaje, porque yo le ayudo en matemáticas, en lo que yo puedo. Pero, en ingles no. Yo no se nada y es lo que mas me hizo que viniera a aprender ingles, por mis niños.*

R: I decided to learn. . . well, I came to the. . . to study English because my children were born here. They began pre-K, kindergarten, until now my son is 9 years old, and he asks me about things and I can't answer. He was disapproving of me once because I did not know this language, because I could help him in math, in this I could help. But in English, no. I did not know anything, and this is why I had to come to learn English, for my children. Rosa

Increasingly however, the women began to have problems with their husbands, who were pressuring them to stop coming to classes for a variety of reasons. Some men said they wanted their wives to be at home with the children when they came home from school. Two of the husbands wanted their wives to go to work to help out with the family finances. None of the women in the study were ready to leave the ESOL classes, at the time of the study, all of the women were either in beginning or intermediate ESOL, which means that some of them could communicate on a basic level, but none of them were fluent in English. The women had not finished the goals they set for themselves, and so they needed a way to stay in the classes without incurring further violence.

Many of the women in the study discussed with their husbands that they needed to remain in the classes in order to help their children in the United States. They told their husbands that without additional help to learn English, the husbands would have to continue to help them take the children to the doctor, help the children with their homework, go to the grocery store, and attend school functions. All of these are duties that traditionally the women would have done in Mexico. The women never said in the study that they did not want to do these duties, they said that because of the language barrier, they could not do these duties. In fact, the women were desperate to do the duties that were traditionally theirs to do. The desperation of the women was made even more difficult because in the community the women lived in, there was no real Latino outreach network. Until recently, there were no Latino grocery stores, and no one who spoke Spanish at the local Wal-Mart. Most pharmacies and doctors' offices in the town do not have Spanish speaking employees. The school system where the women's children attended school was not prepared for the influx of Latino students and did not normally have people on staff who speak Spanish. At the elementary schools in the county for example, there are about a dozen elementary schools in all. Six of the elementary schools have Spanish speaking people on staff full time. If the women had lived in San Antonio or Miami, for example, they would have had an easier time. When I visited there, I discovered Latino outreach networks, translators in the schools, dozens of Latino grocery stores and businesses, all with Spanish-speaking employees. There were plenty of Latinos in the workforce that can help newcomers with translations at places of business. There were doctors and pharmacists who were bilingual. The school systems are used to newcomers who speak Spanish and many elementary schools have employees who are

bilingual. The women's isolation and need to learn English was exacerbated by the location they live in.

The women spoke of explaining to their husbands that they needed to stay in the classes a little longer to help their children. They told their husbands that if they didn't stay in the classes, that they would not be able to fulfill their duties as mothers. In a manner of speaking, the women used their children as bargaining chips so that they could continue to attend classes.

*RO: Mi esposo, pues, el no esta convencido, porque el es de los hombres de que la mujer debe estar en casa cuidando los hijos. Entonces, por eso, pero, cuando le doy razones que tengo que llevar los niños-por ejemplo, el bebe al pediatra, que tengo que ir a recoger el WIC, o vacunas, cualquier cosa, entonces yo hago todo eso, y el no se tiene que salir del trabajo para hacer eso. Y si yo no hice. . . yo le digo, si yo no viniera ni nada, el tendría que salirse para hacer todo eso.*

RO: My husband, well, he is not convinced, because he is of the men that (think) the woman should be in the house caring for the children. So, for this reason, well, I give him reasons that I have to take the children: for example, the baby to the pediatrician, that I have to go and pick up the WIC, or shots, whatever thing, I do all of this, and he doesn't have to leave his job to do this. And if I couldn't do it. . . I tell him, if I couldn't come do anything, he would have to leave to do all of this. Rosa

*MAG: . . . Entonces, tengo que esforzarme un poco mas para ayudar a mis hijos, por eso mismo. . . Esta contento de saber que, que ya me puedo desenvolver. Dice que me falta un ano nada más para que yo me ponga a trabajar. Y le digo, si, dice, y a la próxima entrevista, dice, ya no te voy a necesitar para nada. Le digo, porque yo puedo aprender ingles y me voy a defender yo sola.*

MAG: So, I have to force myself to go a little more to help my children, for this reason. . . (Her husband). . . He is content that I am learning, but he thinks I can get by. He said that one more year and no more and I will have to go to work. . . and I said to him, I said, yes, and maybe the next review, I will need no more. I told him that because I will have learned English and I can defend (my children) myself. Magenta

*A: y mi esposo, yo le digo que yo necesito aprender ingles por los hijos, porque mi necesita llevar los hijos a la escuela, y hablar con las maestras. . . y al doctor. . . y a veces, hay una emergencia, y necesito ir en un lugar sin el. . . yo le digo este. . .*

A: and my husband, I say that I have to learn English for the children, because I have to take the children to the school, and talk to the teachers. . . and the doctor. .

and sometimes. . . there is an emergency. . . and I have to go to a place without him. . . I tell him this. . . Azul

The women have devised what is really a clever idea, use what is expected of them, the role of mother, to stay in the class that allows them a greater education. It does not appear that the women have talked about this among themselves, or that they believe they are being deceptive. They merely continue to feel a sense of desperation, and that sense of desperation drives them to do whatever they need to do to make life better for their children, including going against the wishes of their husbands. It is interesting, for example, that Verde did not begin taking classes in English until her husband began leaving the community for work in another town, coming home on the weekends.

*Estamos pasando por una etapa bien bonita, en donde nos hemos ayudado, a pesar de que el trabaja lejos, lejos de aqui, este, yo creo que cuando nos vemos, nos vemos con mucho carino. . .*

We are in a good period, in which we are helping, in spite of the fact he is working far away, far away from here, in this, I think, we are with a lot of love. . .

Amarilla also explains her conversation with her husband below:

*Oye, pero es que necesito esto y no tengo con quienirme, necesitas tu venirte del trabajo o necesitas ayudarme, porque yo no puedo. Yo necesito esto y no hay quién me ayude, tienes que hacerlo tu. Y en cambio ahora solo le digo voy a ir tal lado.*

Listen, it is going to be necessary if I have no one to go with me, you are going to have to leave work or you are going to have to help me, because I can't do it. I need this, and there is no one else to help me, you will have to do it. And now it has changed because I can go some places on my own.

For Marina, the conversation was much the same.

Aye, it was very, very hard because I didn't know how to talk in English, and I don't know how to go places and do things and I couldn't tell my husband to do things for me and I was disappointment with him, I don't know how to do anything in this country. I need to learn English. ...My husband knew it and he came to the United States. My son, he is in school in Texas. Why I decide to learn English because my son was in school. I tell my husband if he no let me learn English I cannot fight for his sons in this country.

It does not seem to have mattered how the women managed to tell their husbands that they intended to stay in the classes, but somehow they managed to walk a fine line between determination and supplication. Not all of the women who begin the ESOL classes in the program were able to complete their studies. During the time the study was taking place, there were women within the program who could not stay in the educational programs because of their spouses. The women in the study talked about them with sadness.

*Findings Related to Research Question #2: How does learning English impact the power relationship between Mexicanas and their children?*

One day, in my capacity as an adult education teacher who happened to speak Spanish, I was asked by one of my adult ESOL students to come with her and speak on her behalf at a parent teacher conference because the liaison who normally translated was busy with another student. My student's daughter was having great difficulty in her 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom; she was failing two of the subjects in her class. I sat down with my student, her daughter, and the three teachers who taught her in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. After a few minutes, it became quite evident that there was a huge communication gap on two fronts, between my student and her daughter, and between the school and my student. Like so



many schools in the county where the adult education program I studied is in, there was no one employed in the school who spoke Spanish. The teachers could not communicate with my student that they felt her daughter was not doing her homework, and that they had questions about how much English she knew. My student could not communicate with the teachers that her daughter was telling her that she didn't have any homework, and that the teachers were mean to her because she was a Latina. The child was taking advantage of both the teachers and her mother because she was the only person in the situation who was bilingual. Because the school had no one on site to translate on a daily basis, the child was placed in an adult position of having to translate information for her mother, and at times her teachers. She quickly learned exactly what she could get away with.

This situation that my student found herself in is not a unique situation at all to immigrant parents who do not speak the language of the new country. It happens quite frequently that the children of immigrants, who tend to pick up the language more quickly than their parents, have more power in their new country than they did in the native country. The women in the study discussed their concerns about their children, and how the power dynamic has shifted within their families, as is shown by the themes in Table 5.3 below.

*Table 5.3 Themes Related to Research Question Two*

<i>Research Question Two: How does learning English impact the power relationship between Mexicanas and their children?</i>
Theme One: The women experienced frustration, anger, and sadness when they could not help their children because of the language barrier.
Theme Two: The women experienced pride when they were able to help their children
Theme Three: The women reported that their children were proud of them for beginning to learn English.

*Theme #1: The women experienced anger, sadness, and frustration when they came to America and could not help their children. This is the primary reason they chose to learn English.*

As discussed above in the themes related to Research Question Two, the women in the study described their feelings about needing to learn the language when they came to the United States as desperate. Because they had children here in the country with them, the women believed the situation was even more desperate. The women felt trapped in this new country where they did not have the language, and they felt a range of emotions when they could not help their children in the new country. One of the primary necessities every parent feels they need to do for their child is to be able to provide for them access to medical care. Yet for 7 of the 9 women in the study, there was an occasion that the woman could not provide her child access to medical care because she could not speak English. As Amarilla explains below:

*A: En un ocasión mi hijo, el segundo, tuvo una infección en el oído. Entonces, su oído se rompió, se reventó...*  
*LG: Oh, pobrecito!*  
*A: . . . y estaba sacando pus.*  
*LG: Oh, pobrecito!*  
*A: Tú sabes. . .*  
*LG: Sí!*

*A: . . .el liquido amarillo. Entonces, yo me sentía desesperada porque no podía llevarlo al doctor yo sola. No sabia que hacerle y tenía que esperar hasta que la otra persona pudiera ir conmigo y yo sentía dolor al ver a mi hijo sufrir y no poder ayudarlo. . . entonces, yo quería ser el, que el no sufriera, que a mi me hubiera pasado eso. Esa es mi historia. Por lo cual dije, basta! Tengo que ir.*

*LG: Y, cuantos anos fue tu hijo?*

*A: Tenía meses. . . como cinco meses. . . Era horrible. . . lloraba y lloraba.*

A: In an occasion my son, the second one, had an infection in the ear. Then, the ear, broke, it ruptured. . .

LG: Oh, poor thing!

A: . . . and it was leaking pus.

LG: Oh, the poor thing!

A: You know. . .

LG: Yes!

A: . . . yellow fluid. Then, I was feeling desperate because I could not bring him to the doctor by myself. I didn't know what do and I had to wait until someone else could go with me and I felt hurt to see my son suffer and I could not help him. . .so I wanted to be him, so that he didn't have to suffer, I wanted that to pass. That is my story. That is when I said, enough! I have to go.

LG: And how old was your son?

A: He was months. . . about 5 months old. . . it was horrible. . . he cried and cried.

It would be difficult not to hear the desperation, the frustration in Amarilla's voice as she recalled sitting at her house with a screaming baby who was in horrible pain while she waited for someone who could take her and her son to a doctor. There was another instance that Amarilla spoke of not having access to medical care for her sons because she could not speak English. As she explains below, this is a particularly frustrating when their child has an immediate need and the women feel they cannot fulfill it.

Amarilla explained:

*. . . cuando tuve mi primer hijo, necesitaba la ayuda de otra persona para poder ir al doctor, o a la vacunas, y si mi niño se enfermaba y era algo muy delicado, ya tenía que esperar a que a veces otra persona tuviera tiempo en ese día para poder ir al doctor. O sea, no podía moverme por mi misma.*

When I had my first child, I needed the help of another person to take me to the doctor, or to the shots, and if my child got sick, or in a delicate condition, I had to wait until another person had time in the day to take me to the doctor. In this way, I could not move.

Turquesa echoed Amarilla's sentiments:

*Porque es muy frustrante estar en este país y que no domine-que no puedas comunicarte con las otras personas. Que te preguntan-o sea, estás en el país y el idioma es el inglés-es frustrante que ni siquiera puedas llevar a tu hijo al doctor porque no sabes el idioma. De que en una emergencia no puedes valerte por ti misma porque no sabes el idioma. Entonces, eso más que nada me motivo de que siguiera.*

Because it is really frustrating to live in this country and you don't have mastery-that you can't communicate with other people. When they ask you. . . or well, when you are in this country and the language is English-it's frustrating that there isn't even anyone that can take you to the doctor because you don't understand the language. If there is an emergency you can't pay for the same reason because you don't know the language. So, this and nothing else motivates me really.

Verde echoes the frustration Amarilla felt. At the time of this story, Verde was a new mother. One can only imagine how frightening it would be to be pregnant in a new country where the language sounded like gibberish. To make matters worse, Verde had complications in the third trimester of her pregnancy. Her daughter was born prematurely, and she had to stay in an incubator for several weeks. As Verde describes below:

*No me sentí. . . me sentía frustrada porque venía embarazada y se me complicaron-el parto se me complico, este, estuve internada en el hospital por fiebres y mi hija se estuvo en la incubadora. Yo estaba sola, no tenía a nadie, o sea, solamente mi hermana, y pero, mi cunado trabajaba. Cuando llovía yo tenía que ir a ver a mi hija, lloviendo, porque tenía que ir a verla. Me tenía que subir al bus y me sentía muy sola, muy sola. Y, ya cuando llegue yo aquí a fue en el noventa y en ese mismo año del 97 que me vine con mi esposo, pero me sentí también frustrada porque la niña se me enfermaba y tenía que pedir raite.*

No, I was. . . I was frustrated because I was pregnant and I had complications... there was a complication, I was interned in the hospital with fever and my daughter was in an incubator. I was alone, I had no one, well, only my sister, and well, my brother- in- law worked. When it rained, I had to go to see my daughter, in the rain, because I had to go to see her. I had to ride the bus, and I felt all alone, all alone. And when I got here in the ninetes, in 97 when I came with my husband, I was frustrated also because my daughter was sick and I was losing time.

Magenta discussed an occasion when her daughter was ill, and she could not take her to the doctor. And when she finally was able to take her to the doctor, she had no way of knowing what the doctor said she had, and no way of helping the doctor with the treatment for her daughter.

*Y, despues cuando mi niña se enfermó que la quise llevar yo al doctor, no pude, no supe como decirle al doctor que era lo que la niña tenía.*

And after, when my daughter was sick and I wanted to take her to the doctor, I couldn't, I didn't know what the doctor said it was that she had.

With Magenta as well, it was the difficulties of pregnancy at work and the absolute refusal of her factory boss to let her sit down at periods during her 12 hour shift that caused her to want to learn the language. She was afraid she would lose the baby, or begin labor at work and there would be no one to take her to the hospital who spoke Spanish and could help her. When she asked if she could sit down to do her job because she was heavily pregnant, this is what happened:

*Entonces, me dice el yo no te voy a permitir que tu estés sentada como estuviste el ano pasado. Entonces, yo volteaba y yo le decía a la que me estaba interpretando, pero por que? Si yo le estoy sacando mí producción. Yo ya no puedo estar 12 horas parada, yo necesito sentarme un rato. Y, el me decía, ese no es mi problema. Yo no te mande a que tuvieras hijos. . . . Entonces, en este momento, fue cuando yo decidí buscar ayuda, quién me ayudara para poder defenderme de todo.*

So, he said to me I'm not going to let you sit like you did last year (when she was pregnant with another child). So I turned and I said to him that which they were interpreting for me, but why? If I was getting my production. I couldn't be 12 hours on my feet, I needed to sit a little while. And he said to me, this is not my problem. I didn't order you to have children. . . . So, in this moment, was when I decided to look for help, who could help me defend myself against all.

Marina hated having to depend on her husband to take her to her son's doctor's appointments, or having to call her husband at work to ask him to call the doctor for her. She felt like her husband was angry with her because she needed him.

*Imagínate, porque al principio que llegue a los Estados Unidos, pues mi esposo sabía inglés porque él había estudiado mucho inglés, entonces, él no tenía ningún problema. El problema era yo. Porque yo tenía que llevar a {her son} a las citas, yo tenía que llamar al doctor, y yo no sabía. Entonces, él dice que yo dependía de mi esposo.*

Imagine, because at the beginning when I came to the United States, well, my husband knew English because he had studied a lot of English, so he didn't have any problems. His problem was me. Because if I had to take {her son} to his appointments, I had to call the doctor, and I didn't know how. So, he said I would always depend on my husband.

Rosa reported that there were times when her son would have to translate for her at the clinic because the people at the clinic would become angry if she did not understand them.

*Que por lo menos cuando tengo citas con el pediatra, cuando tengo que ir a la clínica, yo ya entiendo un poquito. O sea, por lo menos las cosas más necesarias de palabras, y antes no. Las personas se enojan con uno porque uno no sabe inglés. O sea, los mismos de clínicas y así se molestan con uno, y mucho antes. Cuando yo vine aquí, que recién tuve a mi hijo de 9 años, no había intérpretes. O sea, yo sufrí mucho con eso, porque se enojaron porque yo no sabía inglés y no había intérprete, era muy difícil. Sí. Hace nueve años.*

That at least when I had appointments with the pediatrician, when I have to go to the clinic, I now understand a little. Well, at least the more necessary words, and before, no. The people get mad with one when one doesn't know English. Well, it is the same with the clinics and in this way they bothered one, and a lot before. When I went here, I recently took my 9 year old son, there were no interpreters. Well, I suffered a lot with him and this, because they got mad because I didn't know English and there was no interpreter, it was very difficult. Yes. It's been nine years.

Although not having access to medical care in a timely manner was one of the most important reasons the women gave for needing to learn English, there were many instances during the interviews where the women in the study experienced frustration, anger, or sadness because they could not do for their children what they felt needed to be done. All of the women in the study discussed the need to learn English so they could help their children to succeed in schools here in the United States.

Rosa reports that she came to the program because she needed to learn English, and after being reprimanded by her son, and the difficulties of living in a town she did not have anyone other than her son to help her translate, she decided to go and learn English. It would be difficult to imagine a more shameful occurrence than an occasion a mother would be reprimanded by a son who knew more of a language than she did.

*Yo decidí aprender-o sea, venir a las –a estudiar ingles porque mis niños ellos nacieron acá. Ellos empezaron de pre-K, kindergarten, hasta hoy que tiene 9 anos el niño y que me pregunta cosas y yo no le se responder. Ya me lo reprobaron una vez por no saber leer ese lenguaje, porque yo le ayudo en matemáticas, en lo que yo puedo. Pero en inglés no. Yo no se nada y es lo que mas me hizo que viniera a aprender inglés, por mis niños.*

I decided to learn, well to come to the –to study English because my children, they were born here. They began pre-k, kindergarten, until now my son is 9 years old and he asks me questions and I can't answer them. He reproached me one time because I could not read this language, because I could help him in mathematics, in this I could help him. But in English, no. I did not know anything and this is why I had to come to learn English, for my children.

Roja decided to learn English because she and her husband got tired of asking for favors whenever they needed someone to interpret at their son's school.

*Te sientes mal porque no te puedes comunicar con nadie. Y, porque tú estas acostumbrada a valerte por ti misma. Y, cuando no sabes, no sabes, no puede hacer las cosas tu sola, y dependes de esa persona. . . . Entonces, al no saber ninguno de las dos parejas, ni la esposa ni el esposo, entonces, tienes que andar pidiendo muchos favores. . . .Y entonces, se siente como impotencias, no?*

You feel bad because you can't communicate with anyone. And because you are accustomed to being worth something for the same reason. And, if you don't know, you don't know, you can't do things by yourself, you depend on this person. . . . So, when neither in the couple, husband or wife, knows anything, you have to go around asking for a lot of favors. And so, one feels like you are impotent, no?

Violetta, like all of the mothers in the program, wanted to learn English so that she could communicate with all of her children's teachers, and make sure that her children's needs were being met in the schools. She also wanted to learn so that her children did not have the upper hand in communicating with anyone.

*Por mis hijos, que, para comunicarme con sus maestras, en las conferencias. Y más ahora-hoy me siento mas forzada a aprender Ingles porque mi hijo esta en secundaria y yo quiero sabe que es lo que habla con los amigos. Tratar de comunicarme con sus amigos, porque la mayoría de sus amigos son americanos.*

For my children, that I can communicate with their teachers, in the conferences. And more now, I feel much stronger about learning English because my son is in middle school and I want to know what he is talking about with his friends. I am trying to communicate with his friends, because the majority of his friends are American.

Amarilla discussed two conferences at her son's school where even though the school has an interpreter, there was not one present at either of the two conferences. In both instances, her son was present. In the first instance, her son had to act as an interpreter, which put him in the difficult position of having to take on an adult role of listening to the teacher talk in English, and listening to his mother talk in Spanish, and translating for both of them.



*En la escuela de mi hijo, el mayor, también, este, si hay interprete, pero ya voy yo directamente con la maestro y no con el intérprete. Incluso, por decir antes, yo le decía a mi hijo, como se dice esto, y como se dice esto? Dime, para que yo le diga o dile tú.*

In my son's school, the oldest, also, there is an interpreter, but I now I go directly to the teacher and not with the interpreter. Even last year, I was saying to my son, what did he say? What did he say? Tell me, so that I can tell you what to say or you can tell me what to say.

For Marina, it was the treatment by her son's karate teacher that made her want to learn English. She was so embarrassed by the treatment she received at the hands of a man who was bilingual but refused to speak Spanish to her that she decided to learn English so that she would never have to be embarrassed about her language deficit again.

MAR: When I moved from Mexico. . . my husband, he knew some English, but I did not know any. . . and my oldest son, he did not know any. . . I wanted to help him feel better about coming to this country. . . my son, he wanted to take karate classes, so I started asking about classes from the women that I knew, and they told me about a man who spoke Spanish and taught karate. So I took my son there, but no one there would speak Spanish to me. I had to go back and bring my husband to get my son into the classes. And so it went. . . my son was taking the classes. . . then one day, one of my friends, who also had a son in the school asked me if I got an invitation to the party that the man who owned the school was having. I told her no, and I discovered that everyone at the school received an invitation to the party but my son. I knew a little English, and so I went to talk to the man.

The man told me that he did not invite my son because he did not want my son at the party, and he said that he did know Spanish, but he did not want to communicate in Spanish with me.

LG: How did you feel?

MAR: I was so angry and sad. . . for me, and for my son. He wanted to go to the party and be with his friends. I decided to learn English in spite of this man. I wanted to show him what I could do, so that my son would never be embarrassed by me again.

Roja describes the feelings of all the women in the program when she declared:

*Te sientes como prisionera. Bueno, yo me sentí que es como estar en una prisión donde no puedes, no puedes salir tranquilamente. Aparte de la forma en la que cruzas, como que te deja traumada. No, yo siento que deja traumas, este, desde siempre tienes un constante miedo que nunca se va. Nunca se va. Y nada es tuyo.*

I feel like a prisoner. Well, I feel like I am in prison that you can't, you can't leave peacefully. Apart from the way that you cross, like how you leave traumatized. No, I feel that you leave traumatized, but you always have constant fear that you will never go. That you will never go. And nothing will be yours.

Magenta also said this about living in fear, which many of the women spoke of in general terms. The women discussed being afraid to go places because they could not speak the language. They were afraid of their neighbors, people at work, or as Magenta describes:

*Y, cuando yo iba a la tienda me preguntaban, en que quieres que yo ponga tú comida? Yo no sabía ni que decirle, solo me le quedaba viendo. Era frustrante para mi el salir, yo no quería ni salir ni de mi casa, porque no podía de hablar. Tenía miedo que sonara el teléfono o que me fueran a tocar la puerta, porque no sabía que iba a decir.*

And when I went to the store, I asked them, what do you want me to put your food in? I could not understand what anyone said, so I had to leave it and go. It was frustrating for me to leave, I never wanted to leave my house because I couldn't talk. I was afraid of the ringing telephone, or that I would have to open the door, because I didn't know what they were going to tell me.

*Theme #2 Once the women began to learn English, they discovered they could help their children in many areas of their lives, and this became a source of pride for them.*

Once the women decided to enter the program, and began learning English, some of their children also entered the program's childcare and pre-K programs. Many of the women reported satisfaction with the children's literacy part of the program. They were

proud that their children were doing so well. The women expressed their pride in their children below.

*V: La otra razón es porque ayudan mucho a mi hija, a Jessica. Es la chiquita y que esta aquí. Y, yo- la han ayudado mucho, mucho, mucho. Porque ella, ella tiene problemas de, de lenguaje y tiene una maestra y en ese transcurso de este año ella avanzó mucho. Aprendió mucho, como ya se va a Pre-K, este yo siento-y a ella le encanta estar jugando con los niños. Le gusta convivir, y por eso me gusta más, por ella.*

V: The other reason is because they [the program] help my daughter a lot, Jessica. She is the smallest and the one that is here. And I, they have helped her a lot, lot, lot. Because she, she has problems with the language and she has a teacher and over the course of the year she has advanced a lot. She has learned a lot, and when she went to Pre-K, this I feel- and she loves to play with the children. She likes to be together [with the children], and for this reason I like it more, for her. Verde

Amarilla was able to compare her son with her nephew, since they are the same age. She expressed satisfaction that her son seems to be learning a lot in the program and is able to transfer that to activities at home. She also noticed how much her son enjoys coming to school, and this was a source of pride for her.

*Mi niño que va a cumplir 3 años, le gusta venir a la escuela, por decir los sábados y domingos que no venimos el me dice, por que? Vamos a la escuela. El domingo, por decir, ya en la tarde me dice, mañana si vamos a la escuela? Yo quiero jugar con mis amigos. El aprende colores, aprende a pintar. Yo comparó a mi hijo con su primo, que el niño no ha- no va todavía a la escuela. Entonces, cuando yo le doy un papel a mi niño y le doy un papel a mi sobrino, y los pongo a pintar, mi hijo raya súper rápido todo, y pinta mucho. Y mi sobrino se queda pensando que es que es lo que va a hacer. Digamos, la práctica o la agilidad, pero, es porque mi hijo ya ha estado en la escuela y el otro niño no.*

My son is three years old, he likes to come to the school, for he says on the Saturdays and Sundays that we don't come, he asks me, why? Let's come to the school. Sunday, he's saying, already in the afternoon he is saying, "tomorrow are we going to the school? I want to play with my friends." He knows his colors, he knows how to color. I compare my son with his cousin, he doesn't go-he's not going right now to the school. Then, when I give a paper to my son and I give a paper to my nephew, and they can color, my son has lines everywhere, really fast, and colors a lot.

And my nephew is still thinking about what he is going to do. We say, it is because they practice, or their agility, but it is because my son has been in the school and the other boy no.

Turquesa also noticed how much her daughter enjoys school. What has given Turquesa the most pride is that her daughter has become bilingual. Turquesa understands that being bilingual at a young age will give her daughter an advantage once she leaves the program's pre-K and begins to attend elementary school. Turquesa has had difficulties with her oldest daughter, who was born in Mexico, and had to learn English in an elementary school ESOL program. She believes her youngest daughter will have a better beginning in the school system.

*Hasta {her daughter} tiene 3 años, ella ya me sabe hablar inglés. Y para mi es mucha ganancia eso, de que ella ya domina el idioma. Y, me habla inglés y español. O sea, sabe los dos idiomas. Entonces, para mi es muy comfortable que, que ella que esta chiquita lo aprenda desde ahorita para que ya mas grande no se le dificulte.*

Before {her daughter} is three years old, she now knows how to speak English. And for me, it is better that she knows the language. And, she speaks to me in English and Spanish. So, she knows both languages. So, for me it is very comfortable that she is learns it now when she is little then when she is bigger she will not have difficulty.

Verde also reported that her daughter was happy and advancing in the program, which made her happy that she found it and could do something good for her children's education.

*Primero, por lo que te digo que a {her daughter} le encanta la escuela. A mi hija le encanta la escuela. Ella se levanta en la mañana, este vamonos a la escuela, mami. {Laughter} Y yo me siento contenta, porque a ella le gusta vendré a la escuela.*

First, because I tell you that {her daughter} loves school. She loves school. She gets up in the morning, and this, we are going to school, mami. {Laughter} And I feel contented because she likes coming to school.

Marina recalls this incident below with pride. Her oldest son, who was in elementary school at the time of this story, came to her because he had been helping a female classmate who did not speak any English. He needed Marina to help the classmate because he could not help her with all of her homework. Her parents did not speak English either, so they could not help her with her nightly homework, and this lack of parental help was causing the student problems in school because she was unable to keep up. Marina said it was because she was learning English in the program and was able to help her son that he could help someone else who needed it.

*Imagínate que una vez el me dijo, es estaba en tercero y le ponen a una niña que es de México, una amiga, entonces {her son} llega muy contento y me dice, mami, mami, enseguida me pusieron a una niña que se llama Beatriz. Y luego le digo que ella no sabe naditita inglés, pero, me la pusieron enseguida para que yo le diga todo lo que dice el maestro. Le digo, y luego, mi amor, y yo le tengo que ayudar. Lori, y mi hijo se estaba de la middle school, dos semanas para acá y se recibió clases en inglés. Y decía, ay mami, te acuerdas de Beatriz cuando no sabia hablar ingles, mami? Pero, que yo puedo ayudarla. Y yo digo, si, mi amor. Decía mi niño te acuerdas mami, que yo le decía la tarea por teléfono? Lo que tenia que escribir. Te acuerdas, mami? Y le digo, mira {son's name} tu es un héroe de ella. Porque tú le ayudaste, ella pudo terminar su tarea. Imagínate, ella siempre te va a llevar en su corazón del ella, porque porque tu fuistes el primer niño que la ayudo. Ella nunca te va a olvidar, mi amor.*

Imagine that one time he told me, when he was in the third grade, and they got a girl who is from Mexico, a friend, then {her son} arrived home very content and said to me, mami, mami, at once they put me with a girl named Beatriz. And later he told me that she didn't know any English, but at once they put him with her and he told her everything the teacher said. I told him later, my love, you have to help her. Lori, my son is in the middle school now, two years ago he was getting classes en English {ESOL classes}. And he said, mami, do you think that Beatriz doesn't know how to speak English? Will you help her? And I said, yes, my love. My son said do you think you can tell her the homework by telephone. That which she needs to write? Do you think? And I told him, look, {son's name} you are her hero. Because you helped her, she can finish her homework. Imagine, she will always carry you in her heart because you were the first boy that helped her. She is never going to forget you, my love.

The most important source of pride for Azul was that she could read books to her youngest child in English. She could also pick out and read bilingual books to her daughter. She knew that being able to read to her daughter in English and Spanish would help her daughter when she started school, and that made her feel really good about what she was doing.

*Cuando yo empecé las clases in inglés, yo no sabía nada. Pero, ahora, yo puedo leer libros en inglés a miya. . . el menor. También, yo busque para libros en español y inglés, los dos, porque yo creo que los dos son importantes para miya. . . para su educación. Antes, yo no podía hacer este, pero, ahora, yo puedo hacerlo. Ella le gusta cuando yo le leí los libros.*

When I began the classes in English, I didn't know anything. But, now, I can read books to my youngest daughter in English. Also, I look for books in English and Spanish both, because I think that both are important for my daughter, for her education. Before, I couldn't do this, but now, I can do it. She likes it when I read the books to her.

Rosa was also happy about being able to read to her children.

*Yo siento que, que le ayudado un poco mas, porque ya estoy con el leyendo un libro. Por lo menos, ya la mitad del libro voy entendiéndole, o sea, las palabras y yo pienso que es mucho mejor tanto para el y para mi que estoy como si con el.*

I feel that, that it has helped me a little more, because now I am with him reading a book. At the least, now when I read a book for a while I am going to be understood by him, well, the words and I think it is so much better for him and for me that I come here with him.

Violetta also described the joy she felt because she could read in English to her daughter, who was an infant. She regretted not being able to read in English to her sons when they were little, and she was glad she was able to begin reading books in English to her daughter right away.

*... antes que no tenia la bebe, yo ya trataba de leerles u libro a mis hijos, en ingles y a ellos les da mucho gusto. Y, ahora con la bebe, ella está bien.*

... before when I didn't have a baby, I already tried to read to my sons in English, and they liked it. And now with the baby, she is good {with my reading to her}.

Roja echoed Rosa's feelings about reading to her children.

*Yo puedo leerle los libros a mi niño, cuando están nada mas en inglés, puedo leérselos en español, cuando quiere que se los lea en español y que le gusta que se los lea así.*

I can read books to my son, when they are only in English, I can read them in Spanish, when he wants to read them in Spanish and he likes when we read this way.

Roja also discussed going to class at the same time as her son was attending pre-K classes. She felt that she was setting a good example for her son because she and her husband were showing him how important getting an education was. She spoke about the ritual that was taking place at their house.

*Pues, les están ayudando, porque el se motiva nosotros a estudiar, y cuando nosotros estudiamos y el dice, yo también tengo que estudiar. {Laughter} Si, el dice así. Y cuando lo pongo a hacer la tarea también a mi hermanito ponle a hacer la tarea. Entonces, mi hijo necesita escuchar eso. Entonces, como que le estamos enseñando que el debe que necesitamos de estudiar con esforzarse, y el no los cree mas cuando nos ve que nosotros también tenemos enseñar y estudiar.*

Well, we are studying, because he motivates us to study, and when we are studying and he says I have to study too. {Laughter} Yes, that's what he says. And when I am doing my homework he says he also has to do his homework. So, my son needs to hear this. So, how can we be studying and not do it with strength, because we owe him, and he doesn't think anything about it other than we also have to learn and study.

Three of the women also spoke about the parental education classes offered by the program, which they felt made them better mothers. The women learned about school

readiness for their children, literacy, numeracy, safety, stages of growth and development, healthy pregnancy and postpartum care, immunizations, and other aspects of children's lives. Gee (1996) might call this learning the school discourse—perhaps they were becoming more assimilated into the school culture. I would argue that some assimilation to the school culture is necessary if the parents intend to remain in the United States with their children. I would also argue that perhaps when programs strive to educate people from other countries, they must be careful to give adult students a role in their own education, as Cervero (1994) discussed. Magenta appeared to place importance on the family engagement portion of the program, and valued staff comments on her parenting skills.

*Pero, me ha dado cuenta, que, yo creí que era muy buena madre, pero me doy cuenta de que aquí aprendo muchas cosas también para por mis hijos los mas pequeños. Yo decía que yo no leía en inglés porque mis hijos, pues, no me iban a entender, pero, no tampoco- no necesariamente lo tengo que leer en inglés. Si yo les leo en español voy abriendo mas o menos. ...este programa me ha ayudado a aprender el idioma y a ser mejor madre.*

But, I valued, that I think I am a very good mother, but here I have learned many things also for my youngest children. I said that I would not read in English because my children, well they did not understand me, but now {I know} it's not necessary that I read to them in English. If I read to them in Spanish I am going to unlock {their minds} more or less...this program helped me to learn the language and become a better mother.

Turquesa also felt she learned a lot from the parenting education classes within the adult literacy program.

*Aparte de las clases en inglés, porque nos dan el programa de padres. Entonces, es muy, muy interesante para me, eso.*

Apart from the English classes, because they have a program for parents. So, it's very, very interesting for me, this {part}.



There were field trips to places that parents and children in the program would not normally have gone. The women felt that they were giving their children opportunities to learn that they didn't have. As Violetta explains:

*Y, muy triste porque cuando como yo donde no había luz, eh a mi me gusto algo mucho de aquí de la escuela. Cuando me llevaron a un paseo ver el aeropuerto de aquí, yo nunca en mi vida había visto un avión cerquitas y aunque estaba chiquito, pues, nosotros, es, cuando éramos niños nos emocionábamos cuando oíamos un ruido de un avión y era muy alto, y ahí estábamos todo los niños afuera viendo el avión. {Laughter} O sea, aquí fue donde yo vine en un avión.*

And it is very sad because where I come from there are no lights, I very much like things here at the school. When they took me on a field trip, to see the airport here, I have never in my life seen an airplane close, and although I was very young, I still remember when we were children and we were emotional when we heard the noise of an airplane and it was very high, and here were all the children outside looking at the airplane. {Laughter} Well, here was where I saw a plane.

The women in the study felt that by attending classes within the program, and by bringing their children to the program and beginning their education, they opened the doors for their children to succeed in school. They felt more confident about getting their children access to medical care. They felt that they could be an advocate for their children in the school system. All of the above made the women feel a sense of pride that they were doing what needed to be done for their children in their new country. They were fulfilling what they perceived to be their role as mothers was.

*Theme #3 The women reported that their children were proud of them for being able to communicate in English and being self-sufficient.*

The women reported the desperation that they felt when they could not be advocates for their children because they did not know the language. The women reported their sense of pride when they began to be able to advocate for their children and

ensure their access to medical care. They also felt they helped their children with readiness for the school system. These things were important to the women in the study. But when asked how their children felt about their learning English, the women reported that their children were proud of them for their improved communication skills and increased self-sufficiency, especially as it relates to the realm of education.

Many of the women reported that they were able to help their children with school related problems. Magenta said that she was able to resolve a conflict between her daughter and another student without the aid of a translator. She reported that her daughter was proud of her that she could help her with her problem at school and didn't need to rely on someone else to help her.

*Y ahora, esta mi hija la mas grande viendo que yo estoy platicando con su maestra, tratando de hablar y me dice ella, yo te ayudo. Y cuando salimos de ahí, ya me dice mami, me da mucho gusto, dice porque ahora ya veo que tu sola me puedes defender. Hace dos meses llego con un golpe en la pierna. . . que un niño le pego, le dio una patada. Le digo, y le dijiste a tú maestra. Dice, no, porque no fue, le dije a la sustituta. Entonces, se llego el viernes que es cuando tengo una conferencia con la mas chiquita. Fui con la maestra de ella y le dije, yo necesito hablar contigo, y me dice, si, ven. Y, como pude, veda? El poquito inglés y a senas yo le explique. Entonces, esta atrás de mi una niña que habla español, y me dice, si quiere yo la puedo traducir señora. Y ya le empieza a decir a la maestra, y le dice la maestra, yo le entendí, dice yo le entendí lo que ella me dijo, me siento, me siento yo contenta y orgullosa de saber que puedo hacer algo por mis hijas. Y me dice mi niña, en la tarde que llego a la casa, me dice, le dijisteis a la maestra, veda, mami? Le dijo, si mija. Le digo, yo tenia que decirle. Y dice, ay, que bueno, dice, y pudistas tú sola? Dijo. . . Le digo, si, le digo.*

And now my oldest daughter sees that I am talking with her teacher, trying to talk, and she tells me, I will help you. And when we left there, she said to me mami, thank you so much, because she said now you can defend me by yourself. Two months ago, she came home with a bruise on her leg, that a child hit her, that he kicked her. I told her, I will talk with your teacher. She said no, because she {the teacher} wasn't there, there was a substitute. So I arrive on a Friday for a conference with my youngest child's teacher. I went to my daughter's teacher and I said, "I need to talk to you." And she said, "Yes, come in". And what do you think? with a little English and some signals I explained it. So behind me, there was a girl who spoke Spanish and she said that if I wanted her to she would translate for me. And she began to talk to the teacher, and the teacher said I understood, I understood what she told me, and I felt, I felt content and proud that I could do something for my daughters. And my daughter said to me that afternoon when she arrived home, did you talk with the teacher, mami? I said, yes, my daughter. I had to say it. And she said, oh, that's good, she said, and you did it by yourself? Yes, I told her.

Amarilla discussed how things have changed now that she learned some English.

She had difficulty in the past with obtaining a translator when she needed one, although a translator was available at her son's school. Her son had been put in the position of translator before when an adult was not available, and Amarilla describes what happened during conference time after she learned some English. Her son was no longer translating for her, and she said he was proud of what she had learned. Again, it is important to stress that because her son no longer needed to translate for her, Amarilla has regained some of the power she lost because she did not know the language. It would appear that the women developed a sense of empowerment that they did not have before they began classes—exactly what Freire (1970) would say should happen in adult education. Amarilla spoke about her sense of empowerment below:

*En cambio ahora, el se queda callado y nada mas espera escuchar lo que yo estoy diciendo. Y si yo digo algo mal, el me dice, no se dice así. Pero el ahora, no tengo buena pronunciación, pero entiende el sentido de lo que quiero decir. Entonces, el me dice, esta bien. Y la otra persona me entiende. . . Mi hijo, el mayor, el que es el que entiende por que estoy aquí, yo creo que el esta orgulloso de que yo estoy tratando de aprender ingles. No tanto por mi, sino también por ellos. Porque la necesidad es mutua. El, por decir, si el habla dos idiomas, yo creo que es justo que la mama pueda entender al menos parte de los idiomas, no?*

Now it has changed, he {her son} he remains quiet and he does nothing more than wait to hear what I am saying. And if I say something wrong, he says to me, you don't say it that way. But he now, I don't have good pronunciation, but he understands the feeling I am wanting to say. So he says to me, it's good. And the other person understands me. . . . My oldest son, he understands why I am here, I think that he is proud that I am trying to learn English. Not just for me, but for them. The necessity is mutual. He speaks both languages, I think it is fair that the mother can understand a little bit of the language, no?

Verde talked about how the preschool program has helped one of her daughters who was having language difficulties in English and Spanish. She believed that the program is the reason why her daughter was doing well in her pre-K classroom. She also spoke of her daughters wanting to correct her English because they thought they knew more than she did. As she explains below:

*Y pero también es el sentimiento-pero es gracioso porque cuando le hablo a veces a mis hijas en ingles, me corrigen. Me dicen, no, no, así no se dice. Y se burlan. Es lo que pasa. . . . Hasta la más chiquita de cuatro anos me esta corrigiendo. Es lo gracioso. . . . Porque al menos también ya me pongo a {daughter's name} me ponga a ayudarla, a ayudarla, o le leo un libro. Me dice léeme un libro. Y ya pues se lo leo. ...o sea a veces a mi hija de 9 anos que no entiende, hay veces que, que le dicen problemas y yo luego, luego, yo le ayudo. Creo que con poquito ellas se sienten contentas.*

And but also it's the feeling-but it's funny because when I talk my daughters sometimes in English, they correct me. They tell me, no no, you don't say it like that. And they outwit me. That's what happens. . . . Even the little one that's four years old is correcting me. It's funny. . . . Because at least I can also help {daughter's name}, I can help her, or read a book. I tell her read me a book. And so she reads to me. . . . Sometimes my 9 year old daughter doesn't understand, there there are times that they tell her problems and later, I help her. I think they are somewhat content.

Turquesa discussed the happiness her oldest daughter felt when she could help her with her homework, and go to conferences at school. She described that she and her daughter as felt more secure in their world because knew her mother could communicate with her school in English.

*Mi familia también, o sea, a uno puedo ayudarle bien a hacer las—sus tareas y ya me siento con la confianza de ir a la escuela y sentarme ahí cuando hay una junta. . . .se diga con mi hija grande y hasta con mi familia, yo siento que ha cambiado, porque como yo me siento más segura. Mi hija esta feliz.*

My family also, well, one thing I can help her better with her homework and I feel more confident to go to the school and sit there when there is a meeting. . . I say with my oldest daughter and with my family, I feel that it has changed, because I feel more secure. My daughter is happy.

Violetta said her sons encouraged her while she learned English. She said that her sons were proud of her because she could speak English.

*Si, porque mis hijos se sienten conmigo, se sienten felices porque entiendo poquito, aunque hable una palabra, dicen, "oh mami tu ya puedes! Ya puedes!" Aunque es poquito lo que yo he aprendido, pero ahí estoy aprendiendo. A mi se me hace mucho, porque no sabia nada.*

Yes, because my sons feel with me, they feel happy because I understand a little, although when I say a word they say "Oh, mami, you can do it! Now you can!" Although it is small what I have learned, but I am learning. I have done a lot because I didn't know anything.

Verde told the story below. She said that her sons were always willing to help her when she didn't know a word in English. She echoed the other women when she said that her sons were proud of what she had learned.

*Mis niños me dicen, mami, como puedes enseñar hablar ingles. Y me da mucha risa, Lori, porque cuando digo una palabra yo les pregunte y ellos dicen no, no se dice así {Laughter} y luego les interesa. Es como yo hablo ingles y con que me entiendan esos palabras. Pero, pero están orgullosos. Están orgullosos de mí. Se sienten contentos porque, al principio, cuando {son's name} esta en el tercero ano preguntar en la escuela y dice mami, me da una conferencia. Y luego, el me preguntaba, tu entiendes lo que el maestro dice? Y le digo, si mi amor, ya le entiendo todo.*

My sons tell me, mami how could you learn to speak English. And I laugh a lot, Lori, because when I say a word I ask them, and they say no, no you say it this way, and so they are interested. It's because I speak English and with that they understand these words with me. But, but, they are proud. They are proud of me. They feel content because, to start, when {her son} was in the third grade he asked in the school and he says mami, I have a conference. And later, he asked me, did you understand what the teacher said to you? And I told him, yes, my love, now I understood everything.

It is interesting to note that the women reported that their children were proud of them only as it related to the school setting. It would appear that again, the women focused on the education of their children as being the most important factor for their children's success in their new country when they were asked how their children felt in the study. It is also possible that this "proudness" could be related to a general discourse about English language acquisition that the children are bringing home from their teachers, who are telling the children how proud they are that they have learned English. It is possible that the children are merely repeating the "proudness" that was dictated to them at school.

*Findings related to Research Question Three: How does learning English impact the Mexicanas sense of agency within themselves?*

One of the reasons teachers stay in adult education is because they get to see their students grow and change as they continue their studies. One of my students began ESOL with no expectation other than to learn English to help her children. She wanted to be able to communicate with her children's teachers at school. She wanted to be able to talk to people in the community around her when she needed them for her children.

Once she began her studies in English, and she began to have success with the language, she also began to have dreams and aspirations to continue her education. She wanted to learn as much English as she could. She wanted to continue her education beyond the ESOL program, perhaps go to the alternative high school in the community, or get a GED. She also thought about working outside the home, something that she had never even thought of before. Because she was learning English, her outlook on her own life was changed. Cervero and Wilson (1994) call agency the effects of human action. Tisdell (2001) called agency power from within. She discussed that social change, the transformation of power relations between dominant and oppressed groups requires action. I would argue that the women were oppressed by the country they lived in, by the language they spoke, by their poverty, and by their male partners. Agency allowed the women in the study to act on what they have learned, and exert some measure of power over their situations. It should be noted that there was a definite shift in how the women see themselves as agents of their own lives, rather than someone else making decisions for them. Table 5.4 below shows the themes from Research Question Three.

Table 5.4: Themes from Research Question Three

Table 5.4 How does learning English impact the Mexicanas sense of personal agency?
Theme 1: The women experienced a sense of pride in themselves.
Theme 2: The women had dreams and future plans of action.

*Theme #1: The women experienced a sense of pride in themselves for learning the language.*

Magenta told this story of eating in a restaurant. She said it was a great source of pride for her because this incident was the moment when she knew she could do what she needed for her family. Magenta said this particular event was life changing. This sense of pride in themselves was echoed by all of the *Mexicanas* in the study. All of the women felt that they were in the process of accomplishing a goal. They were providing access for their families in places where they were not granted access before because they did not know the language. One of the places the women in the study did not want to go before were restaurants. Magenta herself discussed her fear about going out in public earlier in her interview. After she learned some English, she felt much more confident.

*Fui el sábado al restaurant con mi esposo a comer y la señorita se acercó y empezó a pedir el-lo que vamos a comer, y yo sola, me defendí yo sola, pedí lo que iba a comer yo, lo que iba a pedir mi niña y los que iba a pedir el bebe. A los tres les pedí y mi esposo levanta los ojos y me dice, me dice en ingles, "Tú puedes pedir mi comida?" Y le digo, si le digo, "Que quieres?" Y el me empieza a hablar muy rápido en inglés y le digo no, no, puede pedir tú comida, pero en eso cambia mi vida.*

I went Saturday to a restaurant with my husband and a girl came near, and began to ask him what he wanted-what we were going to eat, and I alone, I alone defended, I asked for what my daughter wanted, and what my baby wanted. I asked for the three of them and my husband raised his eyes and he said to me in English, "Do you want to order my food?" And I said, yes I said, "What do you



want?” And I began to talk very quickly in English, and I told him “No, you can ask for your food.” But in this I changed my life.

As discussed above, many of the women mentioned how difficult it was to communicate in the United States with no English or very limited English. Schools and doctors offices are frightening places with lots of unfamiliar vocabulary to a non-English speaker. The women discussed their struggles with learning the language, how difficult it was to learn English, how difficult it was to be able to speak in English, because of the pronunciations of words. To be able to go out into the community and ask for what they wanted was very liberating for the women, as Verde describes below, again using the words “life changing”. I agree with what Tisdell (2001) said that participants within her class had activated their own power from within, change could take place.

*Pero, de que ya no me da miedo ir al doctor, que ya no me da miedo ir a la escuela. O sea, ya que ya, ya puedo salir. Ya me voy al hospital. Antes tenía que depender todo de mi esposo. Y ahora ya no. Eso es lo que, es lo que—son lo que ha cambiado en mi vida.*

But of that now I am not afraid to go to the doctor, that now I am not afraid to go to the school. Well, now that now, I can go. Now I go to the hospital. Before I had to depend all on my husband. And now no. This is that which, that which has changed in my life.

Amarilla discussed being able to communicate with everyday people on the street as being liberating. She said that she liberated herself.

*Ya sea publicidad, que si necesitas por decir otra línea de teléfono y eso, y ya puedo decir, no, no quiero nada, o si. Pero, ya son diferentes cosas que uno domina. Por decir, ir al doctor que no tienes que depender de nadie. Saber contestar el teléfono, o poder hacer una pregunta, o hasta poder preguntar la hora en la calle. Son cosas que uno-bueno, vale la pena estar aprendiendo.*

There will be advertisements, that if you need to say for example on the telephone and such, I can now say, no, I don't want anything, or yes. But, now there are different things that one can master. For example, to go to the doctor that you don't have to depend on anyone. To know how to answer on the telephone, or to ask a question or if you can answer a question about the time on the street. These are things that one. . . well one values the punishment of learning.

Violetta described going to places for the first time without her husband. All of the women in the study discussed how important it was for them to be able to go out in public without their husbands. If the *Mexicanas* had not learned the language, that feeling of liberation would not have been possible.

*Cambio de que ya cuando voy a la clínica ya no me siento nerviosa.  
Cuando voy a un restaurante y mis hijos quieren comer, ya puedo pedirles.  
Cambio mucho mi vida, porque ya no dependo mucho de mi esposo, ya  
hago yo las cosas. . . . mi hizo ser independiente.*

It changed in that now when I go to the clinic I am not nervous now. When I go to a restaurant and my children want to eat, I can ask for them. My life has changed a lot, because now I don't depend much on my husband, I now can do the things. I can become independent.

Marina told the story about going back to the hospital where she was cared after the birth of one of her children. She nearly died from complications and the staff took good care of her, even though they did not speak a word of Spanish, and at the time, she spoke no English. She said she was so proud the day she could go back and tell the nurses thank you for taking such good care of her and her son.

*Y mira, cuando llegue, cuando me moví para acá, para acá, para {state}, este, vine, Lori, y, y, todos hablaron inglés aquí. Y mira, también cuando yo estuve embarazada con mi hijo {name of son}, porque yo aquí en este pueblo tuvo un hospital para que vea {son's name}, y yo estaba en el hospital por dos semanas me los pase en el hospital. Lori, cuando estaba {son's name}, estaba aquí, no sabía como decir gracias en inglés. Imagínate. Entonces, me moví para {city} y como ya sabía un poco de inglés, un día mi cunado me manejaba y fue a buscar las enfermeras de allá de la oportunidad de decirles gracias. Yo estoy contenta.*

And look, when I arrived, when I moved here, to {state}, this one, I came, Lori, and, and, everyone spoke English here. And look, also when I was pregnant with my son {name of son}, because here in this city there was a hospital where I could see {son's name} and I was in the hospital for 2 weeks, I passed time in the hospital. Lori, when {son's name} was here, when I was here, I did not know how to say thank you in English. Imagine. So, when I moved to {city} and I knew a little English, one day my brother in law drove me and I went to look for the nurses there for the chance to tell them thank you. I am content.

Roja was proud of the kind of things that so many native speakers take for granted, but can be so important to a second language learner. The women wanted access to everyday goods and services, access that they could not get because they did not speak English. They were only granted access when they began to learn the language.

It is apparent that by gaining access to goods and services within the United States, the women became agents of change for themselves and their children.

*Puedes, puedes entender cuando una persona te habla en la calle. A lo mejor, no puedes todavía platicar mucho, pero si puedes entender el sentido, porque para mi ha sido mas fácil entender que hablarlo, porque no trabajo. Entonces, no tienes igual de relación y lo que aprendes más importante y necesito hablar o necesito ver. . . . Si diferente en que tu puedes darle-en ir a comprar en tiendas, en leer cartas, lo que te llega y muchas cosas.*

You can, you can understand when a person talks to you on the street. Even better, you don't have to talk much, but if you can understand the meaning, because for me it has been easier to understand what is being said, because I have to work at it. So, you don't have an equal relationship and you have to learn that which is most important and I need to talk or I need to see it. . . . it is different in that you can give them. . . in going to buy things in stores, in reading cards, where you are going and many things. Roja

Turquesa spoke of being secure.

*Siento mas seguridad en mi misma y se que si un día no me vuelvo a equivocar, eso me va a servir para salir adelante y se que debo aprovechar al máximo y siempre por mis hijos, y con lo que se viene, y aprovechar el tiempo y todo, y no preocuparme por un futuro donde me he hecho cambiar de mi estado, de mi sentir. Te digo, me siento mucho mejor.*

I feel more secure in myself and know that one day I won't return to getting it wrong, this is going to serve me for going forward and that I can leave making the most of it, and always for my children, and with that which I came, and make the most of the time and everything, and I am not preoccupied for a future where I have made to change in my state, of my feeling. I tell you, I feel much better.

What Turquesa said told the story of freedom from fear, which appears to be paramount in the minds of the *Mexicanas*. They wanted to be able to liberate themselves from the fears of everyday life that non-English speakers have in this country. Turquesa also spoke about the pride that she felt about what she had done in the face of her husband's verbal abuse. Her husband was constantly declaring that she could not learn, that she was stupid, that if she left him, she could not survive. Turquesa stated that:

*Porque yo me siento segura de mi misma, con el idioma. El que me dice que-si el me deja, yo no soy nada. Te equivocas. O sea, haz la prueba. Déjame y-porque no se el idioma, por eso. Le digo, no. Yo puedo trabajar, yo puedo mantener a mis hijas. Dice cosas y no sabe que el idioma lo fundamental es que yo me esfuerce, que no he aprendido yo. Yo se que he aprendido. Porque no necesito de ti para ir súper, para ir-yo sola me muevo para todos lados y el ingles ha cambiado mucho mi vida.*

Because I feel secure in myself, with the language. He tells me that, when he tells me that I am nothing. You are wrong. Or well, you want proof. If he leaves me, and because I don't know the language, because of this. I tell him, no. I can work, I can care for my daughters. He says things, and he doesn't know that the fundamental thing about the language is that I try very hard, when I don't understand. I know that I can learn. I don't need you feeling superior, so if you go, I alone can move to do things and English had changed my life a lot.

What Turquesa said cannot be undervalued. She now believed that she could be successful in this country without her husband. This statements stands in direct contrast to the desperation the *Mexicanas* felt earlier in this chapter. It is also a huge departure from the status quo in the *Mexicanas* culture as well. Many Mexicanas who immigrate to this country immigrate with the same cultural constraints on them as many women in Mexico have. The women believed their place was in the home with their children. It was not their job to get an education, to leave their homes and go out into the unfamiliar and scary world that their new country represented. However, when the Mexicanas realized that their children needed them to learn English in order to help with the children's everyday lives, to be able to communicate with the outside world; the women found the power within themselves to create change in their lives. The *Mexicanas* found agency.

Turquesa has gone one step further. She believed that now she can maintain the lives of her children in the United States by herself, without her husband. I am not saying that all of the *Mexicanas* should leave their husbands. What I am saying is Turquesa has realized she can survive on her own, without her husband, and that is vital. She is her own agent of change. As Tisdell (2001) said, Turquesa has activated her own power from within.

All of the women spoke about succeeding in their endeavors to learn English. Whether the women called their educational success a little victory, or as many of the women described it, a life changing event, the important detail is that the women took pride in their successes, whether they felt they were big or small. Agents of change do not necessarily have to enact sweeping changes in order to create power within themselves and their lives. For these women, small steps can create huge changes in perspective.

*Theme #2: The women had dreams for future careers and continuing their education, as well as helping other women. These were dreams they did not have before they began classes in English.*

When the women began their studies, they had goals, which were to give their children a better life, and access to health care and success in the school system. But the women discovered that once they began learning English, they wanted to continue learning. Eight of the nine women expressed a desire to learn more English than they already knew. The women had dreams of future careers and of helping other women within their community.

First, the women wanted to continue to learn English. As Marina expressed:

*Yo voy a lograr, Lori. Y yo voy a dominarlo.*

I am going to advance, Lori. I am going to master it.

Verde echoed Marina's sentiments:

*Quiero seguir, quiero seguir aprendiendo.*

I want to continue, I want to continue learning.

She also said that she wants other *Mexicanas* to be able to learn as well, in order to contribute more to the country that they are living in now. She spoke about all the Mexican women becoming educated so that they can help their children.

*Pues, que, que yo creo que todas las mexicanas estamos interesadas a aprender ingles y en ayudar nuestros hijos. . . .y pues que le vamos a seguir echando ganas a este país para ayudarlo, tal vez, no nos quieren, pero pues igual vamos a seguir. Vamos a seguir luchando, vamos según vamos a seguir intentando para que tengamos voto-voz y voto en este país.*

Well, that, that I think that all of the *Mexicanas* are interested to learn English and in helping our children. . . . and well, that we will continue to struggle in this country to help it, maybe they don't want us, but well, equally we will continue. We will continue fighting, we will accordingly attempt because we have to get a vote, a voice and a vote in this country.

It is interesting that Verde talked with such passion specifically about Mexican women getting a voice and a vote in the United States. Women got the right to vote in Mexico in 1953, so Verde's mother would have been able to vote in elections. But Verde was not talking about voting in Mexico, she was talking about voting here. She envisioned her future as being here in the United States, which separates her from three of the other women in the study, who wish to return to Mexico at some point.

Amarilla also talked about learning more English.

*Y este, yo si quisiera aprender bien ingles para poder tener un buen trabajo.*

And this, I want to learn English well in order to get a good job.

Amarilla also had a dream for her future.

*Yo quisiera estudiar una carrera. Cuando yo estaba en mi país, yo estuve dos años en la universidad y deje la universidad por falta de dinero y mi mama no lo quiso ver así. Yo sabía que ella ya no podía mantener mis estudios y yo le dije a ella, voy a dejar la escuela y ella se enoja conmigo porque creyó que yo lo hacía porque no quería ir mas a la escuela y porque yo quería casarme. Yo dije me voy a casar pero no porque—para que ella no se sintiera mal. Porque mi mama es sola y yo sabía que ella ya no podía, y la universidad es bastante cara, porque hay que comprar muchos libros, y si no compras muchos libros tienes que pasar mucho tiempo en la biblioteca. . . . {Yo quiero} estar una psicóloga o una abogada. Son las dos cosas que mas me llaman la atención.*

I want to study for a career. When I was in my country, I was in the university for two years and I left the university because I didn't have enough money and my mama didn't want to see this. I knew that she couldn't maintain my studies and I told her, I want to leave the school and she got mad at me because she believed that I wanted to do this because I didn't want to go to school anymore and because I wanted to get married. I said I am going to marry but not because—so that she would not feel bad. Because my mother is single and I knew that she couldn't, and the university is expensive enough, because there are many books to buy, and if you don't buy a lot of books you have to spend a lot of time in the library. . . . {I want} to become a psychologist or a lawyer. Those are the two things that are calling for my attention.

Rosa said the following about continuing her education in the program:

*Siento que voy-que voy aprendiendo un poco mas, tanto a leer como a escribirlo. Y, si no viniera a la escuela no supiera nada. Estuviera en la casa encerrada, tal vez trabajando, y no supiera nada. Ni mi niño, o sea, mas que nada también a mi niño le hace muy bien, porque, desde que viene aquí, esta despertando mas, mas inteligente, mas que todo que estuviera en la casa.*

I feel that I am going-that I am going to be learning a little more, so much to read like to write it. And, if I wasn't coming to the school, I would never learn anything. Or my son, or well, my son can do more than nothing, because after he came here, he was more awake, more intelligent, more than if he was in the house.

Once some of the women began to learn English, their dream became helping other women within their community, because they knew how difficult it was to be in a community that was not adapted to Spanish speakers. The *Mexicanas* wanted to reach out to other non-English speakers. It is interesting to note that the women wanted to form a community of women who were learning English, a support group of sorts. This is again reflective of the women finding their power within themselves and becoming an agent of change for others. In the community where the women lived, there were limited resources for people who were Spanish-speaking.



The local university had a Latino students group, there was a Catholic Church charity that provided financial assistance and Christmas present help to many of the women in the study, but there was not an organized group in the community to support Spanish speakers.

The women did not organize themselves into a group and set out to help others, although they spoke of banding together, they helped the women within their community in small ways on an individual basis. Marina spoke of helping a woman who could speak no English.

*Me siento muy confiada, Lori. Ahora, quiero platicar con toda la gente. Puedo ir a con el doctor. Y, ahora como puedes ver, pues, ahora llevo a mis amigas que vayan a algunas lugares y no saben ingles. Por ejemplo una que acaban de operar. Hoy voy a ir con ella a hospital. Tiene la cita a la una y le dije, no te preocupes, yo voy a recogerte, porque no puede manejar porque la operaron de una mano. Le dije, no te preocupes, yo voy a estar contigo y ahora hasta haciendo de traductora. Yo te digo, no soy la profesora, pero soy lo mejor que puedo. Y siempre les digo, tienes que aprender, tienes que aprender, tienes que aprender.*

I feel very confident, Lori. Now, I want to talk to all the people. I can go to the doctor. And now how you can see, well, now I can go with my friends that go to some places and they don't know English. For example, one is going to be operated on. Today I am going to go with her to the hospital. She has an appointment at one and I told her, don't worry, I am going to pick you up, because she can't drive because they operated on one hand. I told her, don't worry, I am going to be with you and now I have done translations. I tell her, I am not a professor, but I will do the best that I can. And I always tell them, you have to learn, you have to learn, you have to learn.

Marina felt that all of the women she came into contact with in the community who do not speak English need to learn for the sake of their families, so when she helped someone within her community, she acted as an advocate for the program and urged them to sign up. The ESOL classes within the program were always full, and many families

were on the waiting list to get into the classes. Marina also spoke of helping women who live on the border between Mexico and the United States. She wanted to go back to *la frontera* during the summer and teach the women and children English, provide them with clothing and food, and hopefully, make their condition better. Marina also has found the power within herself to change her life, and later, to become an agent of change for others.

Amarilla had a different view of helping women. She also spoke of helping women who did not speak English by translating such things as school papers, advertisements, bills and other papers that women needed help with, but she also wanted to help women from what she called a feminist perspective.

*En general yo te podría decir que me gustaría que la gente supiera que no -no por ser feminista siempre estoy de lado de la mujer. Si no que cuando veo una injusticia porque hay mujeres que también abusan de los hombres, tampoco estoy de acuerdo. Yo apoyo la igualdad de las personas. Yo soy muy feminista cuando defiendo una injusticia en contra de una mujer, pero también soy consciente cuando hay una injusticia en contra del hombre y yo tampoco quiero estar encima del hombre. Si no quiero que haya igualdad. Y, no es un ataque contra un hombre.*

In general I can tell you that I like that the people know that I am not—I am not for becoming a feminist to always be on the side of the woman. If not that when I see an injustice because there are women that also abuse the men, I am also in agreement with that. I support the equality of the people. I am very feminist when I am defending a woman against injustice, but also I am conscious when there is an injustice against a man and I also want to be on the top for the man. If I didn't want that we have equality. And, this is not an attack against the man.

Amarilla continued on to say that she had two sons, and she said that she taught them to treat women as equals, but that she wanted women to treat them equally as well. None of the women in the study spoke of women gaining control over men, or being superior to a man. The women wanted (to an extent) to be treated equally. The

Mexicanas expressed a desire to be able to make choices for themselves, to be able to do what they thought was right for their children, and for themselves. Only two of the nine women interviewed spoke of leaving their husbands at all. None of the women in the study left their husbands during the course of this research. Again, the women were proud of what they had accomplished without the help of their husbands, and they wanted to have the power to achieve more, and become agents of change for others.

The *Mexicanas* began this conversation between researcher and subject describing their levels of abuse by their male partners, their feelings of hopelessness about the abuse, and their levels of abuse in their families of origin and their husband's families. They discussed that sometimes their male partners did not want them to attend a school to learn English because they felt the *Mexicanas* should stay at home. The *Mexicanas* talked about the tactics their male partners used to get them to remain at home rather than going to class.

Couple the pressure that the *Mexicanas* felt from their male partners to stay at home with the pressure the *Mexicanas* felt to help their children. The *Mexicanas* were desperate to learn English to be able to negotiate their way through the various systems in the United States: schools, doctor's offices, stores, restaurants. Instead of folding under the enormous pressure coming from two very different directions, the *Mexicanas* found the power within themselves to go to class to help their children because they believed their children were most important.

When the *Mexicanas* realized that they could go out into the United States and advocate for their children because they were learning English, they felt a sense of pride in themselves that they had not felt previously. They reported that their children were

proud of them also. In addition, the *Mexicanas* discovered that once they began to learn English, they wanted to continue their studies, not only for themselves and their children, but in order to become agents of change for others. Rather than succumbing to self doubt (perpetuated by their male partners to some extent), the Mexicanas continued to learn and discovered self awareness and pride. The change in these women cannot be understated. As Turquesa put it, “learning English has changed my life.”

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

All of the women in the study had an enormous contribution to make to the research. Some of the women told stories of triumph and a growing sense of their own power. Some of the women told sad, even horrific stories of abuse at the hands of the men the women said they loved. All of the women spoke of the love for their children as motivation for the path they took towards education. They also spoke about the pride they felt when they could advocate for the needs of their children. Through their words, some implications may be drawn from the Findings in Chapter Five.

#### *A Summary of the Findings:*

As shown in Table 6.1 on the following page, when the women spoke about their relationships with their spouses, and how the power dynamic shifted when they began to learn English, the women described many forms of coercion that their male partners use to get the women to remain at home. The men used various means of coercion that ranged from verbal threats to simple coercion to confinement to physical abuse. In addition, a majority of the Mexicanas felt powerless in their relationships with their male partners, but this loss of power was present before the women began the ESOL classes. In order to continue their education in the face of the opposition from their male partners, the women used the education and welfare of their children as a bargaining chip to justify coming to ESOL classes.

<i>Table 6.1 A Summary of Findings from the Study</i>	
Research Question	Findings
<i>How does learning English impact the power relationship between the Mexicanas and their male partners?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The male partners of the women tried to prevent them from attending class through various coercive methods.</li> <li>2) The women often felt powerless in their relationships with their male partners.</li> <li>3) The women used their children as bargaining chips in order to continue attending ESOL classes.</li> </ol>
<i>How does learning English impact the relationship between the Mexicanas and their children?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The women experienced a sense of frustration when they could not advocate for their children's needs.</li> <li>2) The women discovered that once they began to learn English, they could advocate for their children, and that made them proud.</li> <li>3) The women reported that their children were proud of them for learning English.</li> </ol>
<i>How does learning English impact the Mexicanas sense of personal agency?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The women were proud of themselves for learning English.</li> <li>2) The women had dreams and future plans of action.</li> </ol>

With regard to how learning English affected the power dynamic between the Mexicanas and their children, the women experienced anger, sadness and frustration when they came to America and could not help their children. This was the primary reason they chose to learn English. Once the women began to learn English, they discovered they could help their children in many areas of their lives, and this became a source of pride for them. The women reported that their children were proud of them for being able to communicate in English and being self-sufficient. With regard to how learning English affected the Mexicanas sense of power, the women experienced a sense

of pride in themselves for learning the language. The women had dreams for future careers and continuing their education, dreams they did not have before they began the classes in English.

*Discussion and Implications of the Findings Related to Question 1: How has learning English impacted the power relationship between the Mexicanas and their male partners?*

- The male partners of the women used many forms of coercion in order to keep the women at home. These forms of coercion ranged from verbal threats to simple coercion to physical abuse.
- A majority of the Mexicanas felt powerless in their relationships with their male partners, but this feeling of powerlessness was present before the women began ESOL classes.
- In order to continue their education in the face of the opposition from their male partners, the women used the education and welfare of their children as a bargaining chip to justify their continued enrollment in ESOL classes.

First, the women reported that their male partners used many forms of coercion in order to keep the women at home. The forms of coercion as reported by the women included verbal threats, simple coercion, and physical abuse. All of the women but one reported experiencing some form of violence during the time of the study. Each woman stated that some of the violence they were reporting was a result of their attendance in the adult education program. All of the women in the study saw violence as well within either their family of origin or their male partner's family of origin. Two of the women experienced what could be considered extreme violence in her relationship with her male

partner. One of these women redelivered that violence to her daughter by calling her the very words that her husband called her and that her father called her mother in the past.

The women in the study seemed to take their experiences with violence as a matter of course within their realm of experience in Mexico. This realm of experience did not end at the border, rather, the same culture of violence that the women in the study experienced in Mexico merely transferred across the border when they came across themselves. One of the women, Marina, told me a story after the tape recorder was turned off. She told me that before she crossed the border, her family stayed with relatives in Tijuana. She was out with her husband shopping at a local market when she witnessed an argument between what she assumed was a husband and wife. The husband was yelling, and the wife was crying. In full view of what Marina said were five or six policemen, the husband pulled out a pistol and shot the woman in the head. He then continued down the street alone. The policeman did not move. The woman told me that she knew in Mexico her life was not worth any more than the dead woman lying in the street. She told me she was grateful her son was not with her that day to see the violence. I am not saying that every Mexican man is violently abusive towards his wife, but I am saying that the women in the study reported that they came from a culture of violence.

The experiences of the women in the study seem to be in line with the few studies to speak about violence against women who are attempting to further their education. There are a line of studies beginning with Dobash and Dobash (1979) and their large studies of what they termed “battered women” in Great Britain, and continuing with Carnack, (1992); Frye, (1999); Manchura, (1997); Rockhill, (1987); Skilton-Sylvester, (2002) and Tollefson, (1991). All of these studies spoke about their research that



indicated women who are attempting to change the power dynamic within a family may be subject to abuse by their male partners. Kirkwood (1993) found that it was difficult for women to leave abusive relationships because they were dependent on the men they were with. Kirkwood also found that male partners prevent women from working by injuring her, confining her, sabotaging her, or promising to take her to work and not following through. Riger, et al. found that women may be harassed at work until they are fired or quit. (2001). Tolman (1999) and Raphael and Tolman (1997) found that domestic violence rates for women on welfare were consistently higher than for women in the general population. It should be noted that the Tolman and the Raphael and Tolman studies took place after welfare reform legislation was passed, so the women in both of those studies would have been enrolled in an educational program. Lloyd (1997) found that women who were victims of domestic violence were more likely to have problems keeping a job or enrolling in an educational program. The National Welfare to Work Strategies Evaluation, which looked at ABE, GED, and ESOL programs nationwide stated that 1/5 of the 40,000 adults studied reported some form of domestic violence during the five year study (1997-2002). The government study found that education and training may reduce domestic violence in the long run, by giving the woman means to escape her living situations. Each of these studies in one way or another reflected the findings of this study. It appears that it is more difficult for a woman to continue her education or maintain a work history if there is a male partner within the household who does not support her efforts. It would also appear that the culture the women and their male partners were raised in does play a role in the violence, however, I would caution against stereotyping here. It is too easy to lump all Mexicans in a role of machismo

abuser and victim without looking at other factors. One factor that may have played a role in this study is that all of the women except one came from rural areas of Mexico, where older traditions are far more common than perhaps in Mexico City, which is far more urban and accepting of new traditions. Also, as Anzaldúa (1987) pointed out, the men in this study may have only been acting out against the stressors in their own lives. Living in the United States as an immigrant who suffers from discrimination where a language barrier may be present, working in difficult conditions for little pay, with the added stressor of possibly being in this country illegally can contribute to violence, although it should be stressed that Anzaldúa stated that no matter what the stressors were, there was not an excuse for violence.

These findings are significant. This study fills in some gaps of what was previously known about Mexican women who attended ESOL classes and the amount of violence they face at home when they try to learn English. The women in this study were attempting to continue their education in the face of persistent coercion and violence. Other studies suggest that women in other branches of adult education programs like Adult Secondary Education (ASE) or Adult Basic Education (ABE) who face unremitting violence tend to leave those programs rather than face the abuse of their male partners. But in ESOL adult education programs, the attendance rate is higher than other adult education programs. The program that was studied here had an 18 month waiting list to get into one of three ESOL classes. Attendance rates in the three ESOL classes in the program studied here were high. The women had decided for themselves that even if they had to face violence at home, they wanted to continue their studies. This study is perhaps

one of the first to draw a direct link between the Mexican women's participation in ESOL classes and the violence that they experienced in their homes.

Practitioners who teach women, but especially with regard to this study, Mexican women, cannot ignore these findings. Teachers of adult ESOL must make time within their classrooms for women to journal, talk with each other, and discuss openly the violence that they may be encountering because they have chosen to learn English to help their children. While it is important that the women learn the language as rapidly as possible to adhere to mandated goals by the government, it is probable that the women who are experiencing violence benefit from the support group like atmosphere they could find within a classroom setting.

In addition, practitioners should involve the resources within the community to provide assistance to the women who are encountering violence. In the community studied here, there were resources available for the women, but the *Mexicanas* would not go to them because there was no translator available, or because they did not trust the *Anglos* running the shelters, or because they went for counseling within their Catholic faith, and the priest advised them to stay with their husbands if they could. I am not saying the Catholic Church advocates physical abuse, what the women told me was that they were encouraged to stay both by their culture and by their church. Nearly all of the women in this study did not see divorce as an option. If there was a shelter run by women of Hispanic descent, or if the shelter within the community had translators available, it is possible, but not likely, that some of the women within the study might have left their husbands. As far as the women in the study, only three of the women ever

talked about leaving their husbands at any time in their marriages. Azul, who was by far in the most abusive relationship, never even considered leaving her husband.

Program planners and administrators must ensure that the adult ESOL programs they plan or administer include resources that will aid the women in their path to independence. The program studied here included one full time family engagement specialist and one assistant. Both of them were overworked. The program desperately needed a counselor, therapist, social worker-someone who had experience dealing with relationships and access to community providers. The family engagement specialist worked himself to death to try and improve the quality of the lives for the women and their children in the study, but so much more needed to be done. Adult ESOL programs must out of necessity have a social services/therapy outlet. Perhaps a link could be forged within the psychological community so that there would be therapists on hand on a rotating basis if no funds are available within grants for counseling services-and the chances of grants providing funding for counseling services are slim to none.

In addition, family literacy programs such as the one studied here could benefit from reaching out to the men in the family. Many times, the men work long hours during the week with little time to further their education, whether vocational or ESOL in nature. One of the women in the study commented that if her husband could take classes too, he might not be so threatened. I am not in any way saying that the women in this study deserved any of what happened to them when they walked through their doors. What I am saying is that there could be a possibility of helping the women by helping the men. Anzaldúa commented that one reason that Mexican men oppress women is that they themselves are oppressed. She said this not as an excuse, but merely to point it out.

Anzaldúa had a good point. When men are oppressed, it is possible they oppress back. Education may be one path towards the cessation of oppression.

Finally, no matter what is stated in the mass media, violence against women takes place both in this country and in Mexico with frightening regularity. Failing to acknowledge that, whether it is in the educational area, within medicine, in workplaces, and within churches, allows the abuse to continue unabated and unacknowledged.

In the second theme of Research Question One, the women reported feeling a sense of powerlessness in their relationships with their male partners. They discussed that because of the abuse they received at home, they felt worthless and at some points, hopeless. One woman discussed suicide. These sentiments echoed sentiments that previous research done by Dobash and Dobash (1979), Skilton-Sylvester (2002), Kirkwood (1993) and others. What makes this study significant is that each woman, regardless of the level of violence felt a sense of powerlessness, which seems to suggest that any amount of violence over a period of time in the woman's household or the woman's family of origin may lead to a feeling of powerlessness.

Also, the women reported that they felt powerless before they began to take classes in English. It would appear that the women's life experiences before they lived with their domestic partners may have played a role in their sense of powerlessness. All of the women in the study reported that they experienced violence outside of their homes with their male partners, either in their family of origin or their husband's family of origin. Because each woman experienced violence elsewhere before she lived with her male partner, one would assume that the violence that nearly all the women experienced at home only added to her sense of powerlessness. The more violence that each woman

experienced throughout her life, the greater the sense of powerlessness she felt. This is supported by the evidence within the study. Two of the women, Turquesa and Azul, who experienced the greatest violence in their relationship, also reported the greatest feeling of hopelessness. Turquesa reported feeling suicidal on at least one occasion, and Azul expressed her sense of powerlessness to be able to effect change within her family. She had become numb to the level of violence in her relationship, and could discuss incidents of violence with no emotion whatsoever.

It bears pointing out that part of the feelings of powerlessness the women experienced may not be due to the levels of violence within their homes at all. All of the women in the study reported a feeling of powerlessness when relating their stories of what life was like for them when they arrived in their new community. The women all felt that they could not function in their new society, and because of the language barrier, they were denied access to all of the most basic elements of American society: schools, grocery stores, doctor's offices, pharmacies, and emergency care. This idea of powerlessness of immigrants who do not speak English is echoed in the literature, such as Valdés (1986) and Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994). The two authors cited here also speak about the curtain of silence/illegalness that is pervasive within the Mexican community. Because it is possible that some of the women in the study were in the country illegally, they must out of necessity be cautious in the people that they talk to, and they lived in fear of being discovered and being deported. This climate of fear was exacerbated if the women had children who were born in the United States.

As the law currently stands, if illegal immigrants to the United States have children that were born here, and the parents face deportation back to Mexico, the children may become wards of the state if a relative or friend of the family cannot be found to take them in.

Practitioners could balance this sense of hopelessness found in the *Mexicanas* in this study with projects designed to improve their self-esteem. One of the benefits of family literacy programs such as the program studied here was the parent-child interaction time and the positive results the women felt in their traditional role as mothers. The women wanted to be a positive influence for their children. They wanted to help their children be successful. They were willing to take home materials in order to help their children. Practitioners could incorporate children's learning activities into the adult ESOL curriculum in order to play to what the participants in this study saw as their strengths. In the program studied, the women benefitted from the parenting component that the program had for two reasons: one, because they felt the program gave them the tools that they needed to help their children in this country; and two because they felt that they received praise from the practitioners and other workers within the program for the love and care they gave their children, which validated the *Mexicanas*.

Program planners and administrators, again, need to provide social services and counseling for the women in their ESOL programs. This could be accomplished either by developing resources within the program through grants and donations or by networking with other social service agencies within the community.

The program I studied did a good job of networking with other agencies in order to benefit the participants, but resources within the community studied are stretched very thin, and there are simply not enough resources to meet all the needs of the population.

Finally, the women reported a sense of powerlessness because they could not provide their children access to the services they felt their children needed to be successful in this country. Because the *Mexicanas* were unable to communicate with school personnel, employees at doctor's offices and pharmacies, this led to a sense of shame and powerlessness for them. Although many of the women feel a sense of powerlessness when they cannot provide for their children, it could be argued that because of the culture the women in this study come from, and the need to live up to the perfection of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the *Mexicanas* in this study felt a greater sense of powerlessness and helplessness than would otherwise be expected with other groups within the population. It would seem that although all of the women reported a sense of powerlessness in their relationships with their male partners, the sense of powerlessness that the women felt was coming from multiple sources.

Practitioners could combat the sense of hopelessness and desperation that the women in the study felt by instituting a beginning ESOL program of "survival" English. In other words, practitioners need to teach immigrants the words and phrases that would be extremely important when communicating with members of the community that are vital to the success of the children of the immigrant community. "School" English, "Doctor" English, terms and phrases that could be used quickly in order to communicate are far more important than perhaps phrases and expressions that are taught in some beginning ESOL classes. It is especially important to teach "Emergency English" to



immigrants who are not literate in their primary language. A few of the immigrants from Mexico that were encountered in this study were either low level literate or non-literate in Spanish, and it would be extremely difficult to elevate them in English above their level of Spanish comprehension.

Third, and perhaps the most significant finding within the study is the notion the women expressed that in order to continue to come to the ESOL classes which they felt were vital to them, they had to placate their male partners to ensure their continued enrollment in the classes. In order to placate their male partners, the women in the study returned to the image of the perfect mother, the Virgin of Guadalupe. The Mexicanas used the need to gain access to goods and services within the United States for their children as a reason for their continued attendance in the program. It is interesting that by using their children as a bargaining chip, the women deflected the sense of loss of power that their male partners felt and justified for the men the reason they needed to continue their education classes within their own cultural framework. By allowing the women to continue to attend classes, the men could feel that they gave the women a favor, and that they too were adhering to their cultural norms by allowing the mother her traditional role of responsibility for the welfare and education of the children. However, the level of violence within the home did not decrease simply because the men allowed the women to go to class.

I would reiterate here what was stated earlier: programs that teach women in an ESOL setting must provide for time for the women to share with each other and to journal. Activities and coping strategies must be used in the classroom that would enable the women to better prepare themselves to “fight” against their husbands. Although the

women in the study did the best they could in coping with the obstacles thrown in front of them, ESOL programs could give them more tools that they need to negotiate their way through the objections.

Program planners and administrators must again seek out programs and resources to support immigrant women when they come into the programs to learn English. Resources existed, however limited within the community studied that could have aided the cash-strapped program with providing services for its clients. It would appear that while the program studied did as much as they could given time and the sheer size of their work force, the community could have provided more aid had the program requested it.

*Discussion and Implications of the Findings related to Question 2: How does learning English impact the power relationship between Mexicanas and their children?*

- All of the women experienced anger, sadness and frustration when they came to America and could not help their children. This is the primary reason they chose to learn English.
- Once the women began to learn English, they discovered they could help their children in many areas of their lives, and this became a source of pride for them.
- The women reported that their children were proud of them for being able to communicate in English and being self-sufficient.

One of the women told me a story with a great deal of pride during the period of member checks. She said that one day; she was sitting in her house enjoying a minute of peace and quiet from her three daughters when she heard a cry from outside. She ran out

to see what was the matter, and found her middle daughter lying on the ground crying pitifully. Apparently, the daughter had fallen and landed with all of her body weight on the top of her foot. The mother could see that the foot was swelling, and there appeared to be a bone on the top of her foot that did not look as it should. The mother immediately picked her daughter up, carried her inside, began to ice the foot and debated within herself whether or not to take her daughter to the emergency room. Although both of the local hospitals have interpreters, the woman knew that sometimes it was difficult to get an interpreter to come down to the emergency room, and she worried that one would not be available for her when she needed it. While the mother was thinking, the daughter's cries of pain became very intense, and the mother decided it was better to take her child to the emergency room and hope that a translator could be found. When the woman got to the hospital, she waited with her daughter for a few minutes, and was then ushered back to a room to wait for the doctor. When the nurse asked her a question about what happened, the woman managed to get out, "My daughter...she fall...her foot...is broken." After she said the words, the woman said that she felt very proud because even though she didn't speak English fluently yet, she knew enough English to get her child what she needed, and she could see the relief on her daughter's face when the doctor gave her pain medication. The woman told me that it was in that moment that she thanked God for the English she had learned, because she could advocate for her child's needs in an emergency.

This example illustrates the sentiments of the Mexicanas' responses to Research Question Two. First, the Mexicanas discussed their anger, frustration, and sadness because they could not fulfill their roles as mothers to the extent they would have liked

to. In the culture of the Mexicanas, to be a mother is to be revered, and bad mothers are castigated. None of the women in the study wanted to be thought of as a bad mother, and their level of frustration at their inexperience with the English language came out very strongly during the interview process. There were interviews, as with Turquesa, where their language deficiencies caused the Mexicanas a great deal of sadness, guilt and shame.

It was apparent through the words of the women that they became desperate to learn the language, in fact, many of them used that exact word *desesperada* when telling their stories during the interview process. It was also apparent that the younger the children that the women had at home, the more anxious they were to learn the language. If the women had older children at home, those children were able to help their mothers with access to basic necessities, and so the situation was not as desperate for some of the women. For the women with small, primary grade children, access in English was not possible unless an interpreter was present.

This need for communication and the desperation the women felt appears to reflect Mezirow's Theory of Transformational Learning (1991), in which Mezirow suggests that adults undergo transformational learning when they experience a disorienting dilemma, and can no longer get by using their old rules and thoughts, but must construct new rules for themselves. All of the *Mexicanas* experienced a disorienting dilemma when they found they could not communicate to give their children access to basic services. Had the women stayed in the rural areas in Mexico, it is likely they would have remained in their traditional roles as housewives with possibly no attempt to further their education. However, in a new country, where the women could

not fulfill their traditional roles as caregivers, they felt they had no choice but to return to school for the sake of their children. These results echo earlier research which has shown that mothers, whether literate or not, bear the primary responsibility for making sure their children are educated (Anzaldúa, 1987; Rogers, 2004; Valdés, 1996; Villenas, 2001). These earlier findings are echoed throughout this study. Although all of the *Mexicanas* male partners knew more English, and most were better educated than their wives, the women were left to advocate for their children, even though they were unequipped to do so.

Research has shown that one of the most telling predictors of a child's success in school is the literacy level of the mother (Chall & Snow, 1982; Fossen & Sticht, 1991; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale, 1986). The researchers in the previous statement have noted that if parents, and more specifically, mothers do not read to their children, the children begin their educational careers already behind their peers. It would appear then that the burden of education is heavy on the shoulders of immigrant mothers who have no tools to begin to prepare their children for literacy activities in English. Other ESOL studies (Buttaro, 2001; Manton, 2001; Weinstein-Shr, 1993; Wrigley and Guth, 1992;) show that even though a huge language barrier existed between what the adult learners needed to know and what they actually knew, adult ESOL students wanted to learn how to help their children succeed in school.

Once the women began to learn English, they discovered that they could help their children in many different areas of their lives, not only with the rudiments of communication. Over and over again during the interviews, the *Mexicanas* expressed pride that they were able to solve problems for their children in their new country.

Whether it was interceding for their children at school conferences, or at a doctor's office, or at a grocery store, the women felt that their educational pursuits were benefitting their children. Dumka, Roosa, & Jackson (1997) found that when Mexican immigrant mothers began learning English, their children were less stressed and depressed. They attributed the reduction in stress to the child's no longer having to function as an interpreter between the parent and a representative of the majority culture, or the mother allowing the child to play with more acculturated peers, both inside and outside of the home. Valenzuela (1999) pointed out that children of immigrant parents must interpret on behalf of their parents with government and school officials and sometimes advocate on behalf of their family when the people representing the majority culture show little patience or understanding of their parent's lack of language. In other words, children are forced into roles of power that they do not always understand, or as what happened with one of my former students, the child may exploit the parent's lack of language acquisition to their advantage.

It cannot be understated the importance of a shift in power from the children back to the parents when children no longer have to translate for their parents. The Mexicanas in this study, who were able to begin speaking for themselves without the aid of their children discussed how powerful that made them feel, and how happy and relieved their children were when they did not have to translate for their parents. Also, the authors noted, the mothers may have been able to model better coping strategies for the child now that they were better able to negotiate their way in the United States, such as after school activities, counseling, boys' and girls' clubs, and other stress-reducing activities. Again, the earlier research serves to reinforce the research here. The women in

the earlier studies were able to advocate for their children much as the *Mexicanas* were able to advocate for their children, which leads to a greater sense of accomplishment for the mother. Valenzuela (1999) noted that Latino families in general do not ask outsiders for assistance, they rely on close family ties and ask for assistance from within the family network. Some of the *Mexicanas* had family members in the area where the study was done, but most of the women studied had no family members close to them. This may have made the situations of the *Mexicanas* in the study more desperate, because they had no one to rely on that could help them advocate for their children.

The literacy program studied here had a parent-child component that allowed parents and their children to do activities designed to both foster the parents' knowledge of English and the child's growth in the language. This parent-child together time was essential to the mother's sense of pride within themselves, and the child's sense of pride in their mother. Although this literacy program no longer exists, there are plenty of activities online to help parents of young children be ready for English. Many of the sites are available in other languages besides English. Fostering the sense of pride within older children and finding parent-child together time for children not enrolled in a family literacy program is difficult, but not impossible. The *Mexicanas* were devastated by the closing of the program in the summer of 2006. Some of the women were able to begin attending classes again under a new program that opened in the fall of 2007. The other *Mexicanas* were not in school when I spoke with them last. However, the women told me that they were taking their children to the libraries, they were asking questions to improve their English, they were reading their children's books that they brought home from school, they were learning more English on the Internet—they were continuing their

education however they could. This is a testament to the *Mexicanas* deep desire to continue to learn and advocate for their children.

Practitioners can use the resources of the local school system to help organize activities for older children. However, if the school district is like the district within this study, there are not enough translators available many times to interpret for the parents to give them the tools they need to help their children be successful. Program planners and administrators could write into the grant for their programs activities for older children as well as younger ones. In addition, resources within the community could be utilized. The community studied here had a wonderful outreach program in two locations: at a local trailer park and at the main community library. This outreach program, like so many in the town studied, had many people wanting the programs assistance and educational programs, and not enough resources to serve everyone.

It should be noted that some of the burden of educating the immigrant parents of school-aged children must fall to the school district. The district that the children of the *Mexicanas* attended was understaffed with advocates and translators for immigrants from Mexico, which represented the largest segment of the ESOL population within the district. The district, like many other districts across the nation, was concerned with test scores. It would appear that offering programs to parents who want to learn English would be beneficial to raising test scores.

*Discussion and Implications of the Findings Related to Question 3: How does learning English impact the Mexicanas sense of personal agency?*

- The women experienced a sense of pride in themselves for learning the language.
- The women had dreams for future careers and continuing their education, dreams they did not have before they began the classes in English.



Throughout the study, the women expressed a need, a desire, a desperation to learn English for the sake of their children. What none of the women expected to gain from their classes in English is a sense of pride for learning the language. While it is not apparent that the women had a burning desire to be educated, to obtain knowledge for knowledge's sake, as the earlier feminist writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did, the women clearly enjoyed the educational community they found themselves in. Before they began attending ESOL classes, the *Mexicanas* felt isolated. During their time in ESOL, the women formed a community within themselves and discovered that they could not only learn English together, but help other women within the community who did not know the language. The *Mexicanas* desire to help other women within their community is an echo to the earlier writings of Wollstonecraft and Mott. It is almost as if the women wanted to use what I would call the ladder system, once one woman is educated, she pulls another women up the rungs of the ladder. It also brings to mind Freire's (1970) method of teaching literacy within a non-literate community. Friere's method did not employ outsiders to teach the villagers, but rather people within the community learned and taught each other in a way that they could understand.

The *Mexicanas* cannot initiate real social or political change in this country on any level until they acquire English because they have no leverage. I would argue that this is especially true if one is new to this country, have not been fully educated in the home country, come from a patriarchal society, and do not know the language. These women need to be able to create power from a place where they have perhaps very little power.

By continuing their education, and by working to educate others, it is possible that these women, who bonded together, may be able to effect social change within their community.

Practitioners can foster the women's sense of community by engaging in community development projects. The women in this study wanted to help others, and they deeply desired an opportunity to both help their community and practice their English. There are plenty of opportunities for immigrant women to practice and help their community within the local school district. Many school districts, like the one in the community studied here, need volunteers to read with children. Other women could do art projects with children. There are recycling centers that need help, crisis centers, food banks-all of which would give the women a chance to practice, and give them a sense of belonging to their community as well.

The philosophy of liberal feminism, beginning with Locke, believes that every woman has the right to pursue her own goals and dreams, even if those goals and dreams differ from her husband's. Anzaldúa added that Mexican women had the right to pursue their goals and dreams, even if they differ from her husband's. I would agree that it is a woman's basic right to obtain an education if she chooses to do so, even if her husband does not agree. Because the rights of women are so closely tied to the rights of children, I would argue that if agencies do not support the *Mexicanas* in their quest for an education, they are helping to ensure a slow acquisition of English on the part of the women, and a slower acquisition of English on the part of the children. In addition, if women are not supported in their educational endeavors, their children may have a difficult time in their educational endeavors. That was the belief system of the program

studied, one must help the adult in order to help the child, and it should be the belief system of agencies in general.

*What Can be Learned from the Findings*

Many of the findings within the study echo what was already known anecdotally. When these *Mexicanas* wanted to learn English, their husbands or male partners, to varying degrees, tried to hinder the process of education. For some of the women, the effect of acquiring an education on their home lives was minor, an inconvenience. For other women within the study, it was, as Amarilla put it, a battle that began before the woman could sit in a chair in the classroom. This risk of physical harm, or coercion, cannot be understated. Although the women within this study continued their educations, there were women in their class who did not. One woman in the class was beaten by her husband badly enough to go to the hospital. She never returned to class. Another woman had to stop coming because her husband refused to drive her to class. There is no question that for some women, the threat of physical violence or verbal abuse keeps them from attending classes, which is precisely what their male partners wanted.

Administrators and educators who work with women in ESOL programs must both recognize that a problem exists within their population and offer assistance to the women within their program who need services for domestic violence. Most adult education programs do not have resources in place to offer counseling and other services in house. Literacy programs will have to work with other community resources in order to assist their clients. An additional problem for many communities in the South is that while social services are in place for women who are victims of domestic violence, very few of the organizations have counselors and other providers who speak Spanish and

understand the special problems of the Mexican immigrant population. In addition, administrators and educators must work within the classrooms to address issues of power and violence in a setting where the women feel comfortable.

Second, while the federal government sees fit to dismantle family literacy programs, most notably the Even Start programs across the nation, for the women in this study, family literacy was vital. The program that the *Mexicanas* attended was specifically geared for family literacy. They provided childcare and education for children aged zero to five, and classes in parenting as well as literacy education. While there is little evidence within the study that the *Mexicanas* benefited from the parenting classes overall, other than a general feeling of pride that they were praised for being good mothers, there is great evidence that the women were able to use the childcare and educational resources available to their children to further their own education. In the community where the program was located, there are no literacy programs that offer childcare and education as well as adult literacy along the same lines as the program studied. For women especially, these family literacy programs are essential to facilitate their education in English.

Finally, because all of the women in the study had school aged children, and discussed their frustration with the school district because in most cases they had no way to communicate with people that were important to the success of their children, school districts who are experiencing the large influx of Mexican immigrants need to have resources in place to communicate with the new population. In many cases within the school district of the community studied, there was not a translator present in the individual schools. Also, at many schools within the district, there was not a central

figure the women could turn to that could help them obtain access to information and assistance in English. The women could have benefited from assistance from another public agency to lessen their dependence on their male partners.

#### *Implications for Further Research*

Although this study provides a look at power in the lives of Mexicanas, and changes within the power structure, further research is necessary on several fronts. First, a continuation of this study is needed because the number of participants studied was small. Second, during the course of this study I listened to the life story of a Mexican man, here illegally, working on his GED. His wife has told him numerous times that if he did not do what she wanted she would call the police and have him deported. I am curious whether this is an isolated incident, or whether this happens frequently when a person here illegally from Mexico marries a citizen of the United States. Third, further study is needed to determine whether issues of power exist between women and their male partners in other areas of adult education.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Guide for Interview 1 in English and Spanish

#### Interview Guide for Interview 1

These questions are merely a guide, and I may divert from these questions depending on the participants' responses.

- 1) Tell me how you came to this country.
- 2) Tell me how you felt when you first came to this country and you didn't know the language.
- 3) What made you decide that you needed to learn English/ or Why did you begin taking ESOL classes?
- 4) What are the reasons you like coming to school?
- 5) What has changed in your life since you began learning English?
- 6) Do you feel differently since you began speaking English?
- 7) How do you think your children feel about you going to school to learn English?
- 8) How do you think your husband feels about you going to school to learn English?

#### Interview Guide 1 in Spanish

- 1) Dígame sobre como tu crucistes en este pais.
- 2) Dígame como tu sentiste cuando tu viniste aqui, y tu no sabiste este lengua.
- 3) Por que tu decidiste aprender ingles? O Por que asististe las clases de ingles?
- 4) Cual son las rezones que te gustas venir a las clases de ingles?
- 5) Que se cambia en tu vida despues de tu empieza aprender ingles?
- 6) Sientes diferente despues de tu empieza aprender ingles?
- 7) Que piensa sobre los sentimientos de tus hijos sobre tus clases en ingles?



- 8) ¿Qué piensa sobre los sentimientos de tu esposa sobre tus clases en inglés?

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Guide for Interview 2 in English and Spanish.

#### Interview Guide for Interview 2 in English

- 1) What makes you want to go to school every day?
- 2) If you could tell your daughter anything about being a Mexicana, what would it be?
- 3) Tell me about the best day of your marriage.
- 4) Tell me about the worst day of your marriage.
- 5) What do you want people to know about being a Mexicana in ESOL classes?
- 6) What do you want people to know about you?

#### Interview Guide 2 in Spanish

- 1) ¿Qué cosas quererte ir a la escuela cada día?
- 2) Si tu decirías a tu hija cualquier sobre ser una Mexicana que decirías a ella?
- 3) Dígame sobre el día más mejor de tu matrimonio.
- 4) Dígame sobre el día más peor de tu matrimonio.
- 5) ¿Qué cosas tú quieres que la gente sabe sobre estar una Mexicana en las clases de inglés?
- 6) ¿Qué cosas tú quieres que la gente sabe sobre ti?