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Salir Adelante: A feminist ethnographic study of transnational Latina mothers and the practice of resilience

by

Angelica Reina

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

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DEDICATION

Dedicado a mis padres Elena y Fabio, quienes, con mucho esfuerzo y sacrificio, me armaron de herramientas para poder lograr lo que me propongo; me motivaron y me dieron todo el apoyo en los momentos más difíciles. A mi hermano Fabio José por creer en mi. Y a Héctor, mi pareja, por tu amor, paciencia y comprensión; por no dejarme vencer.

A Elizabeth, Patricia, Gloria, Silvia y Bridgett por haberme abierto las puertas de sus hogares y permitirme viajar por sus vidas, por compartir conmigo sus historias y llenar mi vida de sabiduría y esperanza.

A todos y cada uno de ustedes les dedico con todo mi cariño esta tesis doctoral.
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ABSTRACT

Resilience is a social and cultural learning process that is practiced and achieved by individuals. Positioning resilience as part of individuals’ interactions with people in their community and the use of tools available in their environment allows researchers to identify different possibilities for interventions. This dissertation is a qualitative study, exploring the development of resilience of Latinas both theoretically and methodologically, introducing relevant information regarding both individual actions and collective activities that help these women address conditions of social vulnerability and withstand adversity (Zolli & Healy, 2012; Carter, 2007). Qualitative data provided rich information using transnational Latinas’ own words and lived experiences to convey and describe the ways they recuperate or bounced back from life challenging events. Additionally, through Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) merged with Transnational Feminist Theory, this study demonstrates a concrete method for the analysis of the cultural, historical, and social aspects of the resiliency practices of transnational Latina immigrants to the U.S. Midwest, highlighting the necessity for ethnographic evidence to investigate the phenomenon (Carter, 2007). Furthermore, framing resilience development as an agentive activity from a CHAT perspective provides the opportunity to identify and examine specific motive(s) driving Latinas’ objects of achieving their material and emotional goals.
CHAPTER 1. OVERVIEW

I am a Latina doctoral student whose research interests are focused on a variety of experiences of undocumented immigrants such as domestic violence, and physical and mental health, more specifically, resilience. I became interested in exploring Latinas’ development of resilience after the research work I did for my master thesis, which examined Latina victims’ experiences and perceptions of current organizational and advocacy responses to domestic violence interventions in Iowa. The results of that study indicated that all of the Latinas in the study faced emotional and physical problems related to poverty, social isolation, and racial discrimination. Other problems they faced were associated with being undocumented, being Latina, being unemployed and/or underemployed, and lacking English proficiency. From my interactions with these women and reading the stories of their lives in the data narratives, I later began to wonder how these women were able to grow as persons, be and stay strong, and move forward no matter what problems came their way. Stemming from this experience, I decided to perform a research study that would bring new perspectives and deeper understandings of the resiliency practices of transnational Latinas living in the Midwest.

This dissertation explores the development of resilience of Latinas both theoretically and methodologically, introducing relevant information on both individual and collective activities that help individuals address conditions of social vulnerability and withstand adversity (Zolli & Healy, 2012; Carter, 2007). Additionally, through Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) merged with Transnational Feminist Theory, this study demonstrates a concrete method for the analysis of the cultural, historical, and social aspects of the resiliency practices of transnational Latina immigrants to the U.S. Midwest, highlighting the necessity for ethnographic evidence to investigate the phenomenon (Carter, 2007).

1.1. Existing Scholarship on Resilience

Scholars Zolli and Healy (2012) define resilience as “the capacity of a system, enterprise, or a person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed
circumstances…[Resilience is] an essential skill in an age of unforeseeable disruption and volatility” (p. 7-8). Furthermore, resilience has been defined as “the capacity to cope with life’s setbacks and challenges” (Moen & Erickson, 1995, p. 169). Similarly, Walsh (2006) defines resilience as “the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful… an active process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to crisis and challenges” (p. 4). Other scholars have described it as a dynamic process that involves positive adaptation and capability to recuperate from experiences of significant adversity (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Jackson, Firtko, and Edenborough (2007) explain the concept as “the ability of an individual to adjust to adversity, maintain equilibrium, retain some sense of control over their environment and continue to move on in a positive manner” (p. 2).

Authors argue that an individual’s resilience is rooted in their belief system, their character, experiences, genes, as well as in their habits of mind (Zolli & Healy, 2012). These authors also claim that inherent personality attributes like optimism and confidence have been found to be among the individual’s protective factors against stressful events. Such intrinsic characteristics, embedded in systems of values and beliefs, permit individuals to “cognitively reappraise situations and regulate emotions” (p. 127). Other researchers have linked development of resilience to external factors such religion (Carter, 2007), cultural identity (Wexler, 2009), and high functioning social networks such family, friends, community organizations, and access to public resources (Werner & Smith, 1982).

Finally, resilience has been connected to self-identity. Trueba (2004), whose work has focused on immigrant populations and resilience and education, argues that people who exhibit resilience and a capacity to overcome burdensome situations “demonstrate an ability to use multiple identities and to understand the strategic value of playing different roles, using different languages, controlling communicative skills in sending messages to different audiences, and manipulating information from different possible frameworks of interpretation” (p. 162). Trueba further contends that immigrants possess numerous identities that are part of distinctive cultural affiliations and characterize the social and cultural capital learned through human experience.
This indicates that in order to study resilience among immigrants, researchers must take into account the cross-cultural setting(s) and the multiple levels of power and interactions within which resilience is expressed (Trueba, 2004).

While existing work on resilience has focused on personal characteristics and personality attributes such as capacity, psychological flexibility, persistence, and motivation, or the beneficial outcome of ongoing interaction between nature and nurture that is encouraged by family and social experiences (Rutter, 1999), few studies focused on how individuals’ specific learning activities impact their development (Engeström, 1987), in this case the development of resilience. This dissertation seeks to fill that research gap and offers a look at resilience as a social and cultural learning process that is constructed and practiced by individuals. Because this understanding of resilience includes analysis of human activity, particular attention is given to action and broader practices and actions of a given community. Further, this approach demonstrates how individuals can learn and grow through adversity (Martin-Breen & Anderies, 2011) through interactions with people in their community and the use of tools available in their environment. Therefore, it follows Engeström and Miettinen’s (1999) argument that “human nature is not found within the human individual but in the movement between the inside and outside, in the worlds of artifact use and artifact creation” (p. 5).

The present study of resilience moves away from stigma (Shih, 2004) or resistance to illness (Yi, Smith, & Vitaliano, 2005), towards a focus on strength and agency (Barton, 2005). In addition, an activity analysis of resilience moves beyond the exclusive focus on interactions of individuals with their environment to consider the inclusion of other social and cultural dimensions of resilience. This research is relevant for Latino communities because it recognizes Latino individuals as learners and knowledge makers and acknowledges the significance of family, community, and cultural dynamics that might help them to navigate through difficult situations.

In addition, I explore how being a Latina woman in the United States, who is transnational, influences resiliency practices. There is international literature on the experiences
of transnational families across national borders, more specifically families from the Caribbean and Italy migrating to Britain (Goulbourne et al. 2010). In this study, the authors found that low-income immigrant mothers in Britain, unlike low-income Latina mothers in the U.S., actively participate in the labor market and are able to find affordable childcare. Transnational families also forge kin social networks in their communities that act as important resources and engage in family caring practices across the border. Although there are similarities in the transnational caring practices among these transnational families and that of U.S. transnational families (e.g., send remittances or call often to families across borders), there was not extensive information regarding motherhood caring practices of Britain immigrant mothers who had left children behind. Perhaps there may be similarities because of the importance of family and mothering responsibilities among these families, but what is important to note is the context of immigrant reception and the socio-cultural and historical conditions of the place that might preclude or facilitate opportunities for transnational practices to develop or take place. This dissertation focuses on the experiences of transnational Latina mothers living in the U.S. with a particular attention and focus on transnational motherhood practices that may be crucial to their life experiences as transnational mothers.

Lastly, because we cannot seek a single common explanation of resilience that holds true for all individuals (Martin-Breen & Anderies, 2011), I use methodological perspectives that take individual differences into account by examining in detail the live of five Latina transnational mothers. Using a qualitative approach, differences in individual resilience experience can be addressed most successfully through the use of interviews (or conversations) rather than surveys, because such data can provide rich information on the action of individuals’ meaning making that underlies their behaviors (Merriam, 2009; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

1.1.2. Demographics of Latinos

During the last three decades, the foreign-born population of the United States has increased by more than 20 million (Population Reference Bureau, 2010), a consequence of a large-scale migration primarily from Asia and Latin America (Min, 2002). More specifically,
since 2000, Latinos have become the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). It is estimated that by the year 2050 there will be 132.8 million Latinos, comprising 30% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). It is further estimated that by that same year, one out of every four women will be a Latina (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

There are 20 states in which Latinos were the largest minority group in 2013. These states were: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington and Wyoming (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). These Latinos represent a multitude of ethnic and national backgrounds including: Mexican (close to 2.4 million), Puerto Rican (168,000), Guatemalan (48,000), Spaniard (42,000), Cuban (37,000), Salvadoran (35,000), Honduran (24,000), and all other Hispanic (259,000; Saenz, 2008). Furthermore, it was found that 3.2 million Latinos live in rural areas across the country. Up to now, Latinos’ immigration settlement continues to disperse across the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), including both urban and rural areas.


Evidence from gender and migration research suggests that women have played a significant part in the migration movement. Between 1980 and 2004, the number of all female migrants from different countries to the U.S. increased from 7.3 million to 17.2 million (Fry, 2006). This growing role of migrating women has been attributed to economic factors and changes in gender relations within families, which encourages female migration as women seek
control over their economic mobility and standard of living (Fry, 2006). Unfortunately, there is little research on the female migrant population (Cerrutti & Massey, 2011). Given the changing migration patterns, particularly for Latina immigrants, the continued rapid population growth, and the lack of research on these populations, understanding the conditions of life of these women after they settle in the U.S. is essential.

1.1.3. Life challenges

Examining Latino immigrants’ life challenges and their ability to overcome such life constraints is important for many reasons. Over many decades, families from different Latin countries have migrated to North America with the idea of obtaining employment and economic opportunities; in other words, to have a better life. In a study of 10 undocumented Mexican immigrant families, researchers found that all families moved because they wanted better job opportunities to support both their migrating family members and those who stayed in Mexico. Families also discussed escaping chronic poverty in Mexico and believed that by having basic living conditions in the U.S. they could attain life improvement (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). However, the same literature revealed that once Latino families moved to the U.S., they experienced a number of costs and challenges associated with social and economic constraints.

Among such challenges, researchers have found poverty, racial discrimination, and isolation from the larger society (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009; Schmalzbauer, 2009; Sassen, 2006; Lee, 2000; Lee, Maume, & Ousey, 2003) to be widely experienced by migrating groups. Latino immigrants are usually “found at the bottom of a racialized hierarchy and dehumanized by equating them with cheap labor” (Salcido & Adelman, 2004, p. 165). In addition, the immigration experience is often characterized with the challenges of learning a new language, shifts in socioeconomic position, disorienting cultural changes in the new area of settlement (Hernandez & McGoldrick, 1999) and exclusive problems (e.g., educational challenges and substandard housing conditions) associated with the lack of legal permanent residence status (Rothenberg, 1998). Mendez-Shannon found in her study in Queens, New York, that challenges
faced by undocumented Latinos included language barriers, limited or non-existent education, and unfair wages at work.

Research on gender and migration indicates that women and men experience their encounters with and the incorporation to the host society differently (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005). The specific life challenges faced by Latina immigrants when they moved to the U.S. are complicated. Studies have shown marital or romantic conflicts between Latino couples because of changes in traditional gender roles (Donato & Kanaiaupuni, 2000). For instance, Latina immigrants may want and expect to have physical and economic mobility and personal independence (Deeb-Sossa & Mendez, 2008), but this new perspective might conflict with their traditional social emphasis on family care and male power and authority (Gutman, 1996; Mirandé, 1997), and might challenge the Latino male role as the sole household breadwinner (Kantor, Jasinski, & Aldarondo 1994). In contrast, other studies have found that patriarchal roles in the household tend to transform in a positive way as Latina immigrants are able to participate as equal decision makers in the household. In addition, the authors found that these women’s self-esteem increased, and they were able to secure more material resources (Pessar, 1984; Pessar, 2003).

Furthermore, being undocumented can exacerbate the life challenges of Latina immigrants. These structural factors might keep them entirely isolated from the larger community so that they encounter difficulties in getting access to subsistence resources (Chavira-Prado, 1992). In addition, undocumented Latinos undergo specific challenges: discriminatory practices at the workplace (e.g., less pay and limited medical assistance) (Trueba, 2004); they choose not to seek social or healthcare services (because they are afraid their immigration status would get them in trouble); and do not have opportunities to reach academic achievement (Trueba, 2004). In Iowa, for example, Baker (2004) found that undocumented female Mexicans frequently endured discrimination and harassment in public spaces. Some participants from Baker’s study alleged they were raped and abused at an egg-processing plant. The life challenging situations encountered by undocumented women immigrants are, as feminist
theorists have pointed out, a result of an intersectionality of systems of oppression—that is, multiple oppressions due to their gender, class, race, ethnicity, and lack of language proficiency (Weber, 2010; Crenshaw, 1991). These multiple systems of oppression and structural inequalities, including poverty, unemployment and economic marginalization, racial discrimination, and unauthorized immigration status have contributed to and exacerbated oppressions of minority women (Crenshaw, 1991), such as low-income and marginalized Latinas.

1.1.4. Latinos and resilience

Literature has demonstrated that despite socioeconomic difficulties and social adversities, individuals are capable of taking charge of their lives and going on to live fully (Walsh, 2006). Indeed, when facing and dealing with difficult life situations, there are factors that have been shown to contribute to Latinos’ resilience experience. Research shows that Latinos’ resilience is related to personal and environmental factors (Perez et al. 2009; Buchanan & Martinez, 2005), and family and cultural resources (Mogro-Wilson, 2011). Research has also discovered that having access to social and community networks is associated with better health outcomes among Latino populations (Hovey & Magaña, 2000). Other studies have discussed how the creative use of cultural resources among Latino families demonstrate their extraordinary resilient response to the challenges of crossing cultural borders in pursuance of material survival and wellbeing (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

Most research on resilience among Latinos focuses on children and youth within educational contexts (Perez et al., 2009; Trueba, 2004; Trueba, 1999), or academic resilience, more specifically, personal and environmental protective resources for academic resilience. A few studies have reported on immigrant women’s coping processes, but the focus has been on the loss of country and social support (Espín, 1999). For instance, Latina feminist and psychology scholar Olivia Espín (1997) argues that immigrants confront psychological processes, that is, “the need for [mourning and] grieving the loss of both the home country and loved ones” (p. 115) as a result of the process of immigration. Espin also suggests that female immigrants
“struggle with the strain and fatigue derived from adapting and coping with cognitive overload, feelings of rejection from the new society, which affect self-esteem and may lead to alienation, and confusion in terms of role expectations, values and identities” (p. 19) among other issues. Therefore, it is imperative to explore and understand the emotional well-being of women who are affected (and continue to be affected throughout their whole life) by the process of immigration (Espin, 1997).

Even less attention has been paid to rural immigrants, who are more likely to face major economic shifts, and possess fewer opportunities for economic upward mobility, because they are often less educated and more likely to be underemployed than urban migrants (Jensen, 2006). It is important to study rural female populations, as literature has suggested that women who live in rural areas are more likely to experience symptoms of depression (Kiang et al. 2010), anxiety, and other types of emotional stress because, oftentimes, they have to transgress prescribed traditional gender roles (Schmalzbauer, 2011).

1.1.5. Latinas in Iowa

States in the Midwest have experienced a rapid population growth of Latino populations. In Iowa, for example, the Latino population is small in absolute numbers (134,402 as of July 1, 2009), but is the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority group, constituting 4.5 percent of the state’s total population (the Latino population has shown a 63.0 percent increase for the period 2000 to 2009). It is estimated that by July 1, 2040 there will be 384,320 Latinos, comprising 11.0 percent of the state’s total population (Iowa Division of Latino Affairs, 2010). This dramatic population growth can be attributed to state-led economic development initiatives and recruitment of Latino migrants by the meatpacking industry (Grey, 1995; Grey & Woodrick; 2002; Kandel & Cromartie, 2004). Although Latino migration has increased consistently over the last decade, the growth of Latino immigration in the rural Midwest is considered a recent phenomenon (Johnson, 2012). Therefore, the available literature regarding Latino immigrants’ experiences in rural Midwest communities is scarce (Casey et al., 2004; Blewett, Casey, & Call
The life experiences of immigrant Latinas in rural Iowa has been studied rarely. The majority of existing work addresses issues related to labor force involvement (e.g., meatpacking, construction, and manufacturing industries) (Baker & Hotek, 2003); the formation of attitudes of rural adolescents toward immigrants and diversity (Gimpel & Lay, 2008); the educational experiences among undocumented Latino youth populations (Bruna, 2010b); obesity, food insecurity, and housing (Greder et al., 2009; Greder et al., 2012). Only three studies, to my knowledge, exclusively emphasized life experiences (i.e., behaviors and ideologies) of Latina immigrant women in Iowa (Baker, 2004; Greder et al., 2009; Greder et al., 2012). Baker’s study recognized that while Mexican immigrant women hold traditional and nonegalitarian ideas about their roles as mothers, wives, and women, they would not preserve such views because of changing material conditions (e.g., enter the workforce). The study also showed that reunification with their husbands or partners, the desire to improve the lives of their children, and being able to take care of their extended families were the main reasons that motivated Mexican women to move to the U.S. Baker’s study is a valuable starting point for more research into the Latina experience in Iowa, however, she did not concentrate on how Latinas manage their lives day to day and deal with psychological and/or material adversity.

1.1.6. Transnational Latinas

This study seeks to move subjects away from representations of “immigrant” or “migrant” Latina women, as the terms are limited in their definitions and fail to show the depth of experience and connection between the women, their communities of origin and the new communities they join and transform. This study is about transnational Latina women. The concept of transnational individuals is well suited towards the Latina mothers whose life stories contributed to the development and production of this study. First, participants in this study have close ties with relatives from their countries of origin, draw on transnational networks (e.g., family or communities back home) for social, emotional, and material support, and create new
networks on both sides of the border to support their families (Trueba, 2004). Second, these women are transnationals because their life experiences demonstrate how well they “function effectively in two or more cultural environments” (Trueba, 2004, p. 47), the cultural context in which they live here in the U.S. and the one they have and want to preserve, at home.

Lastly, when transnational Latinas migrate to the U.S., not only do they cross geographical borders, but also trespass emotional and behavioral boundaries (Espín, 1999). They also find themselves caught between two worlds, living “binational lives” (Trueba, 2004, p. 118), having binational experiences. Thus, transnational Latinas struggle as they try to reorganize and reintegrate their sense of identity, the same self-identity that was originally formed somewhere else (Espín, 1999) but that now is transformed, and continues to transform. The following section will describe the reasons for which this study was developed.

1.2. Problem Statement

This study finds a point of collaboration between Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and transnational feminist perspectives. The use of CHAT offers an alternative conceptualization of resilience. I argue that through particular goal oriented actions and mediating tools Latinas are able to construct and maintain a happy and optimistic personhood that enables them to recuperate from disturbing life challenges, leaving an area of study that merits further attention. There is a need to focus on the concrete representation of what individuals do to craft resilience rather than focusing on the abstract quality of individuals’ characters. Discovering the resilience practices that lead to the healthiest mental and emotional outcomes will help minority populations reduce the deleterious impact of isolation, poverty, and racial discrimination. Furthermore, examining how Latina immigrants develop resilience will provide better information for social workers, community educators, practitioners, and researchers to develop practices that help Latinas accomplish their social-economic and emotional wellbeing.
This study differs from existing work by focusing on first generation transnational Latinas, opposed to most studies that do not distinguish between recently immigrated (undocumented or documented) Latinas, those who immigrated as children, second or third generation immigrants, or those who are citizens (e.g., Cuban-Americans or Mexican-American). Additionally, using vague and general ethnic categories for Latina immigrants makes it difficult to fully understand their specific life experiences (Cecil-Dyrkacz, 2011). This study pays attention to the differences in class, national origin, and length of residence in the U.S. among participants that might affect how they perceive and recuperate from life challenges. Specifically, only first-generation immigrant women were studied, whose ages ranged between 25 and 35, were low-income, and migrated from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico.

Current Latino immigrant research has focused on individual, family and community aspects related to mental and physical health, resilience, parent-child and marital relationships, poverty, acculturation, discrimination, education attainment, and housing, among others (Casey et al., 2004; Blewett, Casey, & Call 2004; Blewett, Smaida, Fuentes, & Ulrich 2003; Perez et al. 2009; Vega, Hough, and Miranda, 1985; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). Researchers who have drawn on the concepts of CHAT and have used critical ethnographic methodological approaches in Latino studies have focused on understanding Latino students’ agency and learning (Bruna, 2010); however, there is no research aiming to understand and explain Latinas’ resilience as an ongoing practice from a critical ethnographic perspective.

**1.3. Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the present study is threefold. First, this study identifies life challenges associated with being an immigrant in a rural area of the Midwestern United States. Although there are life challenges frequently experienced by rural transnational Latinas that were mentioned in the previous section, I do not assume that those are the life events that are stressful for all Latinas. For that reason, I directly questioned participants about their own perceptions of the difficulties they have encountered in the past and from the moment they moved to the U.S.
Second, this study explores the factors that promote resilience among rural Latina immigrants. Specifically, this study investigates resilience actions and practices transnational Latinas engage in and use to promote their personal, familial, and community growth and well-being. Third, this study broadens the use of the conceptual and analytic tools of CHAT and combines those tools with transnational feminist theory to examine the influence of the interaction between context and individuals on their resilience development. While the literature on Latinos has examined resilient behaviors with life stressors at the individual (and inner) level, for transnational Latinas the process of resilience might occur differently, because they use transnational resources (e.g., transnational practices) that help them to engage in resiliency practices when they experience stressful events. In addition, understanding the interactions of the individual, family, community, and cultural contexts provides more insight into what aspects of these interactions can be utilized to promote improved emotional functioning in rural transnational Latinas dealing with life challenging circumstances.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The present study has implications for social and family workers (including school teachers and community educators) who work directly with Latinas and who are responsible for helping them achieve social, economic, and psychological well-being. Social workers, clinicians, and researchers may benefit from this study because of its investigation into interventions that may assist rural Latinas in expanding their resilience practices, and may help them to improve their chances for life success. Knowledge of factors that promote resilience in Latina immigrants will improve researchers’, practitioners’, and policymakers’ cultural competence by elevating their awareness of the individual, and social and cultural factors that might mitigate the effects of life challenges on emotional distress among Latinas. Additionally, this study may influence theoretical and methodological assumptions about the ways transnational Latinas get through physical and psychological struggles in the course of their lives in the U.S.
1.5. Research Questions

This dissertation was guided by two research questions: 1) What are the challenging life events experienced by transnational Latinas?; and 2) How do Latinas practice resilience in response to those life challenges? Both guiding research questions take into account the milieu of the larger setting in which life challenging events and development of resilience take place.

1.6. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into 7 chapters. Chapter 1 presents an overview of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on life challenges and resilience among Latino populations. The literature review also includes information regarding current (and the need for) feminist perspectives on resilience studies. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical frameworks in which I discuss how Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Transnational Feminist perspectives provide a significantly different way of examining and understanding resilience.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology and is organized in two sections. In the first half of the chapter, I discuss in detail how the use of a feminist ethnographic strategy is pertinent to studying transnational Latinas’ experiences. The second half of the chapter describes the research procedures. Chapters 5 and 6 contain the major findings and discussion of life challenges and the development of resilience among research participants. Limitations of the research study will also be discussed. Finally, Chapter 7 presents the conclusions and implications for public policy, practice, and further research.
CHAPTER 2. PREPARING THE STAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE LIFE CHALLENGES OF TRANSNATIONAL LATINAS

“When immigrants cross borders, they also cross-emotional and behavioral boundaries. Becoming a member of a new society stretches the boundaries of what is possible in several ways…. In the new culture, new societal expectations lead to transformations in identity. The identities expected and permitted in the home culture may not be those expected or permitted in the host society. Boundaries are crossed when new identities and roles are incorporated into life. Most immigrants who, either eagerly or reluctantly, cross geographical borders do not fully suspect the breadth of emotional and behavioral boundaries they are about to cross (Espín, 1997, p. 188).”

Resilience is been described as the positive outcome after being exposed to stress, hardships, life disruptions or challenges (Southwick et al. 2011). Therefore, the first part of this dissertation examines different challenging life events affecting Latino populations. A variety of issues that have been considered pertinent to rural Latina immigrants’ lives by dominant literature are addressed in this chapter. These issues cover poverty, racial discrimination, and isolation. Next, a brief discussion of those structural issues from a feminist perspective is provided to enable both the researcher and the reader to understand the myriad of structures of oppression and power against Latina immigrants. Later, I offer a critique of current literature of resilience definitions. In the following section, information regarding elements in rural contexts that are present in the experiences of Latino immigrants is also incorporated. Finally, a chapter summary is presented.

2.1. Life Challenges

The online Oxford Dictionaries define challenge as “a task or situation that tests someone’s abilities” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014). In the case of a life challenge, one might assume that this refers to specific crises or persistent stresses (Walsh, 2004) that test an individual’s ability at a certain moment in time. When it comes to humans, we might find a broader spectrum of harrowing life experiences: issues related to formal education or economic
functioning and (in)stability; tragic and unexpected events; and issues related to physical and mental health. In other words, life challenges can be material, social, and/or psychological. This study explores the ways in which Latina mothers describe (and experience) their specific life challenges as transnational individuals in a growing new immigrant–receiving community in the state of Iowa, United States.

Besides dealing with the loss of a way of life, family, familiar smells and environments, familiar foods, and familiar routines from their countries (Espín, 1997), transnational Latinos have to deal with a multitude of life challenges produced by the process of living and adjusting to a new culture (Marsiglia et al. 2011), experiences that can be disorienting and disruptive with profound psychological consequences (Espín, 1997). These challenges often include: language barriers, worries about the socialization of children, lack of daycare and supervision of children, poor health, limited access to medical care, acculturation to a new environment (Hovey, 2001), poverty, unemployment (Coutin, 2000), and geographical and social isolation, particularly in rural areas (Schmalzbauer, 2011). Also, studies demonstrate that Latinos have higher unemployment rates and are more likely to have lower incomes than their non-Latino white counterparts (Therrien & Ramirez, 2002).

Although all the above conditions are stressors faced by Latino immigrants in the U.S., this study focuses on poverty, racial discrimination, and isolation. Based on the dominant immigration and Latino families’ literature (Parra-Cardona et al. 2006; Hovey, 2001), and my professional research experience with low-income Latinas’ experiences with domestic violence, I purposely decided to explore those issues in more depth. Below, I provide information regarding the concept of transnationalism and the importance of using such a term in my study (to denominate my participants and to analyze my data). Later, the literature describes the life challenges cited above, and how they influence Latina transnationals’ lives. Although those challenges are discussed separately, they exercise their influence in unison; as other scholars have pointed out, very rarely does literature identify only one of them affecting the life of low-income Latina immigrants (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002).
2.1.1 Understanding the concept of transnationalism

Transnationalism is a perspective useful for studying the process of international migration (Mendez-Shannon, 2010; Goulbourne et al. 2010). The concept of transnational has been ascribed to immigrants who live in a different country but manage to be in continuous contact with family members (or other significant communities) living in their home country (Goulbourne et al., 2010; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Trueba, 2004). Meanwhile, Goulbourne et al. argue that such conceptualization might be deficient because it is too wide and vague, provides little analytical use, and overlooks the specificity of the transnational experience of individuals. They called for a concept that could “transcend the nation-state — such globalization, migration, communication, travel, diasporas and cosmopolitanism—” (p. 4). Transnational feminists have addressed this dearth of theoretical accuracy.

Haller & Landolt (2005) present a new theoretical lens to study and understand the phenomena of migration. In their theory, the transnational framework on migration investigates the relationship between space, place, and identity transformation. They propose a theory of transnational migration that focuses on transnational ways of being and belonging; that is, an inquiry that identifies and addresses “the material border-crossing practices” of individuals and explores the circulation and distribution of resources of the institutions and social spaces in which those individuals are embedded (p. 1189).

In the area of human development for example, the transnational perspective has been used to identify and describe associations between transnationalism and housing and health risks experienced by rural Latino immigrants in the Midwest of the United States (Greder et al. 2009). The same study found that transnational activity such as speaking Spanish in the home, frequent contact with family and friends (social support) from the country of origin, and frequent travel to the country of origin ameliorated health risks among study participants.

Globalization has produced and increased the border-crossing phenomena (Fernandes, 2013). It is well known that lower class or poor immigrant individuals have been (and continue to be) forced to move across territorial borders because of economic necessity or political
persecution or repression (Goulbourne et al., 2010). The subject of transnational individuals has raised questions about issues related to migration, identity, communities, social relations and resources (Goulbourne et al., 2010). Please note that I do not intend to discuss globalization or present in-depth information regarding the particular political, economic, or historical reasons that motivate Latino populations to move to the U.S. because: 1) a considerable amount of research has been undertaken into that issue; and 2) it would distract the readers from the theme of this study, which is the resilience experiences of transnational Latinas. However, it is important to understand that research on transnational individuals calls attention to cultural, political, and economic spaces and processes that influence the borders-crossing activities of transnational individuals (Fernandes, 2013).

The inequalities and relationships of power embedded within the transnational phenomena have been brought to light by transnational feminist perspectives (Fernandes, 2013). Transnational feminists trying to produce knowledge of women from marginalized positions are now “attempting to link local and global processes and … paying attention to the intersecting identities that shape women’s subjectivities” (p. 27). From this point of view, transnational feminism has become a key paradigm to understand the transnational experience of female migrants, particularly in the U.S. I will comment in more detail about the transnational feminist framework in the next chapter. For now, I would like to highlight two key aspects of feminist transnationalism that are greatly relevant to the focus of this study. First, the concept of transnationalism used here provides the analytical lens to understand the distinctive transnational space and the transnational practices (Fernandes, 2013) that may enable the development of resilience among transnational Latinas. And second, examining gender, race, class, and citizenship under a transnational lens, allows for close attention to women’s engagement with other social actors/institutions beyond national borders through transnational relations, transactions, and circuits of care, both virtual and ‘real’ (Alvarez, 2000). In the following section I present a review of different strands of research on poverty, racial discrimination, and isolation
to provide a better understanding of transnational Latinos/as experiences. In addition, I provide an outlook of each problem from a feminist perspective.

2.1.2. Poverty

Poverty has been understood as “a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing inability to satisfy basic needs, lack of control over resources, lack of education and poor health” (Murali & Oyebode, 2004, p. 216). The measurement of poverty is based on individuals’ income and family size. “Poverty status is determined by comparing annual income to a set of dollar values called poverty thresholds that vary by family size, number of children and age of householder. If a family's before tax money income is less than the dollar value of their threshold, then that family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). In 2012, the official poverty line for a family of four, including two adults and two children, was $23,492 and the poverty line for a family of five was $27,827. Families living under those poverty lines were considered poor (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Poverty is an increasing issue among Latinos living in the U.S. Information about income in different racial/ethnic groups reveals that in 2008 Latinos earned $38,000 a year as compared to $47,000 by African-Americans, $56,000 by Non-Hispanic Whites, and $66,000 by Asians. Further, the average amount of personal earnings was lower for foreign-born Latinos ($20,368) in comparison to Native-born Latinos ($24,442) and to African-Americans ($24,951) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

The economic downturn, which began in 2007, had a large impact on Latino communities (Hugo Lopez & Velasco, 2011). The unemployment rate among Latino immigrants increased considerably. The Pew Hispanic Center reports that Latinos’ personal finances were in “only fair” or “poor” shape (75%) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012). However, other research demonstrated that Latinos were more optimistic than other minority groups about the prospect for better days yet to come. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported an increase of food insecurity among Latino households at the start of the economic downturn. In 2007, 23.8% of Latino households with children encountered food insecurity; however, by 2008,
32.1% of Latino families were facing the same problem (Hugo Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Furthermore, in 2010 the poverty rate among all Hispanics was 26.6%, the highest it has been since 1997.

As alarming as these statistics are, there are other Latino populations that are additionally affected by other economic obstacles; they are the undocumented Latino communities. Undocumented transnational Latinos experience downward mobility and barriers to economic advancement due to the lack of legal work authorization and language proficiency, as well as the absence of formal educational experience (Jensen, 2006). Many transnational Latinos (in particular those who do not possess high educational levels) are locked into low paying jobs that do not allow opportunities for economic development (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Ibarra, 2000).

Studies have linked economic conditions and life in rural areas to food insecurity and access to health services. One study recognized that employment opportunity, local economy, acceptance of public assistance, and immigration policies determine the food insecurity situations among rural low-income Latino households (Sano et al. 2010). Comparatively, other studies indicated that there was an association between food insecurity with low income, low asset levels, unemployment, and access to health insurance in Latino communities (Mazur et al. 2003; Carlton & Simmons, 2011).

During hard economic times or unemployment, many Latino immigrants cannot be eligible to obtain public services such as Medicaid, unemployment benefits, or other services that are usually offered to families facing unemployment or financial strain (Cohen, 2009). Thus, poverty and income disparities might place Latinos at a particular disadvantage, with repercussions on the well-being of the adults and children in families.

While the economic position affects both immigrant men and women, literature demonstrates that the jobs that Latina immigrants accept are both racialized and gendered occupations, and are characterized by the lowest wages (e.g., domestic work and caretaking; (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Schmalzbauer, 2011). There is also evidence that workforce participation rates are lower for Mexican immigrant females than those of Native American
women, though they work longer average hours (Enchautegui & Malone, 1997), they are paid less than males, and have limited access to higher job wages, improved labor forced conditions, or other avenues of economic mobility (Chavira-Prado, 1992). Aysa and Massey (2004) found that wage work opportunities for Latina women are usually most limited in rural areas. Conversely, research on new rural areas of settlement suggests that culture, economy, spatial organization, and geography exacerbate women’s subordination in their communities (Schmalzbauer, 2009).

Studies reveal that individuals who undergo poverty are more prone to struggle with violence, abuse, hunger, poor health and stress (Seccombe, 2002). For example, in a study about the lives of immigrant *Mexicanas* in Iowa, Baker (2004) found that many participants endured discriminatory and dangerous working conditions at meatpacking plants, and alleged abuse and rape by their supervisors. Women claimed they were afraid to testify because of their unauthorized immigration status.

Studies on immigrant Latinas showed that they experience depression because of difficulties with poverty, acculturation, and discrimination (Shattell et al., 2009). Concerns about money were a major factor that contributed to these women’s depression; participants identified stomach problems, lack of energy or motivation to perform domestic duties, mood swings, and sleep disorders as depression symptoms. Other studies demonstrate that individuals who experience unemployment, social destabilization, and poverty are more likely to attempt suicide (Department of Health, 1999), and report obsessive–compulsive and anxiety disorders (Meltzer et al, 1995). Furthermore, research shows that poverty rates are higher among Latinos and other minority groups (Seccombe, 2002); so affording and sustaining healthcare in the U.S. can be a real barrier to their well-being.

All in all, we have to understand that we live in an era of unprecedented immigration, with Latinos the largest and most rapidly-growing minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006), with Latina women playing significant part in the migration movement of Latinos (Baker, 2004). Latina women migrate to the U.S. because of economic reasons, more
specifically because of global economic restructuring (Baker, 2004). But following their immigration, they still face other challenges related to the experiences of immigrants. They must accustom to a life away from home and families left behind and deal with a multitude of material and emotional life constraints produced by the process of living and adjusting to the U.S. (Marsiglia, Kulis, Garcia Perez & Bermudez-Parsai, 2011); thus, it is timely to understand and address the psychological implications and consequences of living with a number of challenging situations for transnational Latinas. To examine these multiple stressors from a critical standpoint, we can turn to feminist perspectives on women and poverty.

2.1.2.1. A feminist perspective of poverty among Latinas

The feminization of poverty can help account for the socioeconomic status of transnational Latinas. Thibos, Lavin-Loucks, and Martin (2007) define the feminization of poverty as the unquestionable low economic status of women when compared to men. For these authors, the feminization of poverty exemplifies something more than a simple dearth of income or a state of economic need for women. Although the definition of poverty usually entails the failure to meet basic needs such as shelter, food, or clothing, being poor also entails the absence of choice, the lack and denial of opportunity, the inability to accomplish life goals, and eventually the loss of hope (Thibos, Lavin-Loucks, & Martin, 2007).

Women’s inferior position in the labor force, among other forms of gender oppression, has been researched and analyzed from the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality social systems along with relationships of dominance and subordination. Weber (2010) explains, “oppression exists when one group has historically gained power and control over valued assets of a society (e.g., wealth, information, and political power) by exploiting the labor and lives of other groups and then by using those assets to secure its position of power into the future” (p. 23). She claims that the welfare of a certain group of people, the dominant group, relies upon the poverty of another, the subordinated group. Weber emphasizes that the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities is produced and reinforced mainly in three social domains.
First, the ideological domain refers to the ideas and knowledge about society, why is organized the way it is, and how people should act in pursuance of function in such society (Weber, 2010). Second, the political realm, which represents institutions (e.g., government and law enforcement) with a political commitment, that is, the creation and enforcement of laws and government structures that determine residents’, and nonresidents’ rights and privileges, to exercise direct control over people (Weber, 2010). Lastly, the economic sector, that corresponds to institutions (e.g., finance and manufacturing) whose primary purpose is the production, distribution, and control of material goods and resources such as wages and benefits, jobs, education, and healthcare to society (Weber, 2010). These organized domains (re)produce the social hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality by reinforcing certain ideas that legitimize inequality benefiting dominant groups. These ideas provide them with power and social control, and promote the unequal distribution of resources to middle and upper classes, white men, heterosexuals, and U.S. citizens (Weber, 2010).

In the political realm, there are now restrictive policies and directives targeting Latino immigrants that have been adopted at the state and local levels that impede their upward mobility in terms of economic and class status (Schmalzbauer, 2011; California’s 1994 Proposition 187). Some states have enacted local policies restricting education access, health care services, or housing for undocumented immigrant families, or fining employers who hire undocumented workers (see Reina, Maldonado, & Lohman, 2013). These types of laws define Latinos’ rights and allow political institutions to exert direct control of the behaviors of Latino populations. Thus, transnational Latinas’ actions, life constraints, and responses to those constraints might be controlled and compromised politically as well. The economic domain produces and distributes limited material goods, resources, and opportunities to immigrant Latinos “integrating” them into a hierarchical system of production. And, it is through the division of labor that the economic domain and the institutions associated with it, exert the power and social control to organize social and production relations (Foucault, 1976). Undocumented Latino workers are then located
below other immigrants’ workers, and undocumented women are at the bottom rungs of the hierarchy (Chavira-Prado, 1992).

2.1.3. Racial Discrimination

While Latinos have to face economic challenges as a result of unequal distribution of resources and opportunities that threaten their wellbeing, Latinos also have the extra burden of managing racial or ethnic discrimination (Sassen, 2006; Falicov, 2005; Falicov, 2007). When immigrant women come from a country where they belong to a majority ethnic group, their experience of being labeled as a racial minority in the U.S. is disheartening. Confronting unexpected racial discrimination becomes a disorienting and frustrating experience (Espín, 1999).

Racial discrimination has been defined as the “beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements, and acts that end to denigrate individuals of groups because of phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliation” (Clark et al., 1999, p. 805). Racial discrimination is an ethnicity-related stressor that has plagued the individual stories of Latino immigrants for decades (Falicov, 2005). According to a Pew Hispanic Center survey, 61% of Latinos responded that discrimination against Latinos was a major problem preventing Latinos from succeeding in America (Pew Hispanic Center 2007). The same survey demonstrated that the length of time of immigrant Latinos in the United States influenced their perceptions about discrimination. Those who have lived less than 20 years were more likely to perceive discrimination as problematic than those who have lived in this country for a longer time (Lopez, Morin & Taylor, 2010).

Numerous studies have found evidence of racial discrimination within Latino populations. For instance, in one study regarding the impact of the economic crisis on Mexican migrant families in rural Montana, the researcher found that all migrants reported at least one personal experience of overt racial discrimination, and struggle with isolation and marginalization (Schmalzbauer, 2011). Similarly, a study by Dalla and Christensen (2005) involving Latino immigrants residing in three rural, Midwestern meatpacking communities, discovered that some participants had witnessed or were aware of existing discrimination.
According to one participant, one family that was trying to purchase a home experienced denial of housing because of racially motivated reasons. The authors concluded that racial stereotypes of Latinos is particularly deleterious at the level of social service delivery, in which social service personnel frequently rely on racial and cultural characteristics to categorize immigrants as undeserving individuals (Deeb-Sossa and Mendez, 2008). Likewise, another study indicated that Latinos seem to underutilize mental health services because of racially discriminatory diagnostic procedures, lack of linguistic skills, and a conflict in treatment practices due to different cultural practices and values (Collado-Proctor, 1999). What is more, Latinos who have faced discrimination by services providers are less likely to request services because of the fear of discrimination recurrence (Blanchard & Lurie, 2004).

As previously mentioned, restrictive policies and directives targeting Latino immigrants have been adopted at the national, state, and local levels. The states of Arizona and California, for example, have enacted policies restricting housing for undocumented immigrants, or denying public education and healthcare (e.g., California’s 1994 Proposition 187). Correspondingly, some law enforcement agencies have required federal funding to enforce immigration laws locally. Since Latinos have different legal statuses, such as documented (e.g., student, husband or wife of a US citizen, family-sponsored immigrant, or temporary worker nonimmigrant) and undocumented, the impact of discriminatory and restrictive policies targeting undocumented individuals for instance, extend beyond the undocumented population, to many who are legal U.S. residents or citizens (Schvaneveldt & Behnke, 2012). Discrimination and hostility toward Latino immigrants in receiving contexts can produce further isolation and contribute to social and economic downward trends (Deeb-Sossa and Mendez, 2008).

Research on health and discrimination has revealed that being stigmatized and discriminated because of race or ethnicity can have serious repercussions on individuals’ mental health. For example, Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) found that discrimination could cause anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder. Further, in a meta-analysis synthesizing 51 studies examining racial/ethnic discrimination against Latino populations in the U.S., Lee and Ahn
(2012) discovered that anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and unhealthy behaviors had significant correlations with discrimination. Anxiety had the strongest correlation with discrimination, followed by depression, and educational and job performance. In addition, stigmatization of undocumented immigrants from the media and mainstream societies has been shown to lead to low self-esteem and depression (Dumon, 1983). Not only does discrimination affect individuals’ health and well-being, but also that of their offspring. There is evidence suggesting that perceptions of discrimination by immigrant Latina mothers could have negative effects on the health of her child from a very early age (14 months) (Halim, Yoshikawa, and Amodio, 2013).

The psychological and health effects of discrimination of undocumented Latinos have been minimally addressed by healthcare scholarship (Sullivan & Rehm, 2005). I point out, along with Lee and Ahn (2012), that examining the racial discrimination consequences on Latinas/os’ health and also identifying the best mechanisms by which they successfully overcome such damaging effects is a timely and critical matter of investigation in social science.

2.1.3.1. Racial discrimination through feminist lens

Feminist scholars emphasize the importance of examining the intersections of oppression in our understanding of racial discrimination among Latinas. Gender has been described as a system of inequality that is linked to other systems of inequality (Harnois, 2013). For instance, Chicanas as well as other Latin-American women suffer from distinctive forms of oppression. They are oppressed by racism and imperialism, experiences that prove to be the same for non-white men. However, oppression by the force of sexism is unique to their experience as women (King, 1997; Martinez, 2002). Other feminist researchers argue that each social category of race, gender, class, nationality, and sexuality has an evident hierarchy of who has more power and control over resources, for example money or access to education (Cecil-Dyrkacz, 2011). In consequence, as Dill and Zambrana (2000) explain, individuals are ordered into these social hierarchies that create cross-cutting forms of oppressions, depending on the individual’s race, gender, class, nationality, and sexuality. Therefore, the discriminatory practices and “racial
microaggressions”¹ encountered by a woman, which are based on racialized, classed, sexualized, and gendered stereotypes, are shaped by her location within these intersecting hierarchies (Harnois, 2012).

Feminist theory asserts that regardless of the strides in attempting to desegregate U.S. society during the last three decades, racial segregation persists, deeply rooted in housing, schooling, and employment (Massey & Denton, 1993). For women of color, racial discrimination is not a form of oppression that exists in the distance (Hill, 2000). They experience racism on a daily basis at workplaces, school, housing, and social interactions with others (St. Jean & Feagin, 1998). Discrimination, Black feminists argue, involves society’s attempts to objectify women of color. bell hooks (1989) writes, “as subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history.” Though, “as objects, one’s reality is defined by others, one’s identity created by others, one’s history named only in ways that define one’s relationship to those who are subject” (p. 42). Racial discrimination exemplifies the many forms objectification can take. Defining and maintaining images of women of color as the “other,” as the members of our society do, encourages unequal and hierarchical relationships in which subjects can rule the objects (Hill, 2000).

There is currently scarce research on racial discrimination against transnational Latinas in the Midwest. It is generally assumed that Latinas are targets of racial discrimination because of their social or structural statuses as “the other” within ethnic and foreign subgroups (Lucid, 2010). Moreover, research by and about women who occupy multiple marginalized statuses can challenge universal classifications of gender and race. Marginalized locations can grasp social relations that are not clear-cut to privileged vantage claims (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 2003). Therefore, research from the perspective of transnational Latinas is crucial in order to get a more complete understanding of the social world and their unique discrimination experiences, to yield

¹ Racial microaggressions are defined as “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273).
information about how they practice resilience in response to racial discrimination, and to find the most effective ways to reduce racial and ethnic discrimination against Latino/a populations.

2.1.4. Isolation

In addition to poverty and racial discrimination, research has noted that Latino immigrants experience social isolation. Wilson (1987) defines social isolation as “the lack of contact or of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society” (p. 60). Indeed, a growing body of research supports the idea that socioeconomic and racial segregation increases the degree of social isolation in communities (Lee, 2000; Lee, Maume, & Ousey, 2003), which in turn limits the ability of their female members to access the resources they need to secure their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their families (Schmalzbauer, 2011). Immigrant women can easily find themselves living extremely isolated lives as they often leave behind their extended families and close friends. They move to a host society where they may lack the host-place linguistic skills, proper legal documentation, or may not know the physical geographic area (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002). Due to isolation, Latina immigrants might have limited ability to access the material and cultural resources they need.

Emerging research suggests that physical geography of rural communities serves to isolate and place women immigrants in disadvantaged positions. Based on her research in rural Montana, Schmalzbauer (2011) concluded that limited social and spatial mobility, immigration status, and fear of family separation greatly constrain the life experience of rural immigrants. In the case of immigrant women living in rural regions of migration settlement, the factors that might contribute to their isolation include the relatively new presence and the small number of Latinos, making it difficult to form networks with other community members, and the lack of English proficiency as they might find themselves in communities of mostly English speakers (see Sandoval & Maldonado, 2012; Menjívar & Salcido, 2002).

Research studies have pointed to specific detrimental effects of social isolation and lack of social support on individuals and their family system (Kyle, 2012). Furthermore, the negative impact of isolation is more profound in low-income and minority individuals, the fastest growing
population in the U.S. (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2003). The same authors found that perceived social isolation is a stressor that can produce anxiety, depression, irritability, hostility, mistrust, and low feelings of self-worth. They also discovered that individuals who felt socially isolated displayed signs of high vascular activation and sleep disorders (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2003). It is important to note that: 1) participants were young and senior White and Midwestern individuals; and 2) the researchers focused this study on perceived social isolation using the UCLA loneliness scale rather than social isolation as such.

In an examination of the factors contributing to depression among Latinos residing in the United States, it was found that participants recognized social pressures and life circumstances (e.g., financial problems, interpersonal issues, and isolation) as the causes of their depression (Cabassa, Lester, & Zayas, 2007). In another study of Latino immigrants’ conceptions of depression, participants reported that being isolated from other people was very damaging to their mental health. They perceived isolation as the cause of depression rather than the isolation being the result of depression (Martínez Pincay & Guarnaccia, 2007). Lastly, another study with low-income Mexican-born mothers living in North Carolina found that they expressed symptoms of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and shame. The stressors they pointed out as contributors to their emotional health included financial obligations, family separation, social isolation, and discrimination. It should not be so surprising that these Latina mothers drew on social networks and available community resources to cope with those stressors (Ornelas et al., 2009).

The present study provides rich understanding of the experiences with isolation (and its impact on their overall health) of undocumented transnational Latinas living in a rural community in the Midwest. These insights can inform public policy and future research addressing health issues faced by this population.

2.1.4.1. A feminist view of isolation

Isolation can be understood through the systematic processes of segregation and surveillance. Monahan (2011) defines surveillance as “the systematic monitoring of people or groups in order to regulate or govern their behavior” (p. 498). Surveillance in race and class
segregated spaces is a mechanism of social control employed by dominant groups as they perceive minority groups, immigrants, and the poor as lawless and dangerous (Weber, 2010). Anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies targeting immigrants, the relative isolation in which they live, and the fear of detention and deportation of those who have unstable immigration status, slow down and single out Latino immigrants or those who are considered risky (Monahan, 2011), restricting their ability to integrate in communities and access educational and economic resources (see Sandoval & Maldonado, 2012; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002).

Segregation is associated with residential segregation, and its detrimental consequences on poor communities of color. Patterns of discrimination against minorities have resulted in such groups being physically situated in extremely segregated communities that are often located in hazardous area settings (Morrow, 2007), keeping communities of color socially and economically isolated. Businesses for example, are less likely to locate in segregated places, and schools usually lack social and material resources in such geographical contexts. Segregation then, organizes and isolates individuals and grounds the conditions of control over communities by concentrating poverty in certain places (Massey & Denton, 1993). According to Massey and Denton (1993), the effect of segregation on minority communities’ welfare is not individual but structural. Residential segregation affects human experience regardless of personal characteristics or achievements; thus it lies beyond individuals’ capacity to change their circumstances.

Furthermore, communities and neighborhoods are differentiated by race and class, and in segregated places, there are other aspects that might increase inequality as well: employment status, income, and health status. When entire communities live under the poverty line, have lower occupation status, and poorer health, it is the dominant-culture ideology that “encourages people to understand these facts by referring to notions of community inferiority—not to system,—practices that segregate, exclude, and discriminate against” (Weber, 2012, p. 158) subordinated groups.
In sum, social isolation, which is associated with segregation and exacerbated by surveillance control methods, tends to characterize the rural context of reception for Latino immigrants. Isolation may force Latino families into economic and geographic restrictions, or in other cases, may be used as “the most practical defense” to avoid or prevent deportation among the undocumented (Schmalzbauer, 2009, p. 760). The focus on isolation and rural Iowa for this study might provide theoretical and practical insights into much broader incidence of immigration into other rural areas across the US, filling a prominent gap in the Latina migration literature (Schmalzbauer, 2009).

In conclusion, minority women undergo severe poverty (also called racial feminization of poverty by Palmer, 1983), discrimination, and isolation as a result of the intersectionality of their race, class, gender, and immigration status. Because some Latinas are not able to work due to their lack of English proficiency, education level, immigration status and other factors, they fail to meet their basic needs. Faced with economic hardship and the absence of decent job wages available to their class, the probability that transnational Latinas are able to achieve upward economic mobility is almost nonexistent. In addition, subtler forms of racism, such as discriminatory practices and “racial microaggressions,” encountered by Latinas at the social service delivery (and many other settings), housing, schooling, and employment levels, and the physical segregation and isolation from mainstream society foster and maintain race, class, gender, and other hierarchies in our society. If one is to address these issues, the question I am left with is: How do Latina immigrants endure, overcome, and defeat poverty, racial discrimination, and social isolation? In the next section, I provide a review of the literature on resilience and Latino/a populations.

2.2. Resilience

In this section, I present a literature review regarding the different conceptualizations of resilience at the individual level and then move to other social entities such as family, community (Mendez-Shannon, 2010), and culture. It is important to understand how these
aspects serve as sources of strengths (or mediating factors) that foster a progressive adjustment among Latino immigrants (Ornelas et al., 2010) that might help them achieve their overall well-being. In addition to that, I offer information regarding the different definitions of resilience across various science disciplines, more specifically sociology and psychology, and then discuss a more pertinent definition that should take into account the structural context in which individuals live (Seccombe, 2002).

2.2.1. Conceptual framework and literature review

Family scholars have been suspicious of the negative implications of identifying and labeling individuals as being at risk for negative life conditions (Finley, 1994). While resilience represents a process connecting multiple risk and protective factors (Matsen & Obradovic, 2006), a resilience framework is more focused on strengths rather than deficits to understand healthy development in spite of adversity (Perez et al., 2009). Consistent with the notion of strength and positive adjustment, researchers have argued that it is more feasible to foster the development of resilient functioning as early as possible in the course of individual development than to apply interventions exclusively designed to repair existing disorders among individuals who are in potential risk or hazard (Luthar, 2000; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000).

Resilience has been viewed as a process rather than a personal trait (Werner & Smith, 1982). Indeed, resilience has been denoted as a process that involves interactions between attributes of individuals, their families, communities, and environmental and cultural support systems, such as churches or folkhealers (Garza et al., 2004; Berenzon & Juárez, 2005). The factors that enable individuals to recuperate from adversity include individual assets and external resources (Oeppen & Vaupel, 2002). In their research on adolescent resilience, Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) described assets as the positive factors located somewhere within the individual, including competence, coping skills, and self-efficacy. Further, the authors identified resources as the positive factors that help individuals overcome risk, but these resources were external to the individual. Resources included adult mentoring, social support, or community institutions that were in fact promoting positive development. The term resources in Fergus and
Zimmerman’s (2005) paper, stresses the social environmental influences on individuals’ health and development. Thus, it places the resilience model in a more cultural and historical framework, and it moves away from conceptualizations of resilience as individual trait (Werner & Smith, 1982). The next section provides information regarding the development of resilience among Latinos.

2.2.1.1. Latino resilience

Scholars point out that resilience must be defined by context, individuals, risk and promotive factors, and a specific outcome (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005, p. 404). For that reason, this study supports and expands upon Trueba’s (1999, p. 157) description of resilience among Latino/a immigrants:

Resiliency is a term that means different things to different people. In the context of our discussion on immigrants, I would conceive of resiliency as the capacity of immigrants to withstand pain, to survive physically and psychologically in circumstances that require enormous stamina and determination (such as crossing the border many times and doing farm work for several years) as well as the psychological flexibility they need to adapt to a different lifestyle in the absence of their familiar environment. Resiliency is shown when a person persists in the face of serious problems and challenges, with a clarity of goals and a serious intention to complete a task. At the heart of resilience is motivation. People make rational choices with the information they have at the time. (p. X)

Enrique Trueba explains that the instability in the lives of Latino immigrants is balanced with the stability of their close relationships as well as their ability to adapt to members of other groups. Latinos create networks and exchange goods that allow them to meet their needs and resolve their problems. In addition, Latinos engage in cultural and traditional practices that serve to maintain group cohesiveness (Trueba, 1999). In their study on the effects of perceptions of group disadvantage among Latinos, Spencer-Rodgers and Collins (2006) found that a strong sense of attachment to their racial/ethnic group was related to more favorable Latino in-group attitudes and a more positive self-image. In conjunction with this idea, Smokowski and Bacallao (2007)
indicated that Latino families’ sense of familism and maintenance of cultural traditions help individuals to preserve their racial pride and develop bicultural competencies.

Studies have demonstrated that resilient individuals possess protective factors that might help them to manage life stressors (Christle et al., 2007). According to Vega, Hough, and Miranda (1985), a person’s ability to buffer stress depends upon personal and environmental factors including the person’s personality and belief system and the accessibility of social support. It is well reported that Latinos do not seek professional mental health care services to ameliorate the effects of life challenges on their emotional functioning (Vega & Amaro, 1998; Vega et al., 1987). Instead, they have been found to utilize social support from their families and community network ties (Burnette & Mui, 1999; Hu et al. 1991), and from external (and alternative) cultural resources such as folk healers and spiritual sources (Berenzon & Juárez, 2005). For instance, research shows that family and social networks play an important supportive role for low-income Latina immigrant mothers when coping with feelings of hopelessness. Adding to family and friends, Latinas have been found to often rely on church leaders in times of adversity (Lefley & Johnson, 2002; Parra & Guarnaccia, 1998).

Not only do Latinos have cultural practices that help them to manage life challenges but also they have internal assets that have protective influences on their well-being (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). Studies on Latino’s resilience demonstrate that goal-directedness, self-motivation (Shetgiri et al., 2009), positive perceptions of adversity (Bender & Castro, 2000), and their capacity to adapt their belief systems to make meaning of a life constraint (Walsh, 2003), are factors that account for the sense of resilience among Latinos that contribute to their successful development. Furthermore, self-concept and intelligence have been associated with resilience across ethnic groups (Gordon, 1995), and a strong sense of attachment to a one’s racial/ethnic group has been connected to resilience among Latinos who are exposed to elevated psychosocial risks (Spencer-Rodgers & Collins, 2006).
2.2.1.2. Individual and contextual factors influencing resilience

There are individual assets, and family, community and cultural factors that have been described in literature as protective mechanisms that are salient for Latinas within particular challenging conditions (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). The next section describes each factor in detail and discusses specific feminist standpoints and their pertinence to comprehend the development of resilience.

2.2.1.2.1. Individual assets

Classic scholars have identified several types of individual assets, for example self-esteem and mastery (Perlin & Schooler, 1978) that increase an individual’s development of resilience. Self-esteem refers to the individual’s positive attitudes toward self; mastery concerns the extent to which one regards oneself as being able to control environmental events (Perlin & Schooler, 1978). Another concept that is considered in research on stress and individual protective factors is hardiness. Hardiness encompasses three attitudes: 1) commitment: being able to easily commit to what one is doing; 2) control: a general belief that events are within one’s control; and 3) challenge: perceiving change as a challenge rather than a threat (Kobasa, 1979). These attitudes structure how people think about their interaction with the environment and provide them motivation to do difficult things (Maddi, 2002). Although the concept of hardiness has been well received in academic and clinical work and has been applied across diverse populations, the term was developed based on data from white, male, middle- to upper-level business executives; thus the individual characteristics of hardiness may not be a legitimate measure of the experience of other individuals (e.g., women and minority groups) that were not included in the study (Hartling, 2008).

Resilience has also been described as the ongoing interaction between nature and nurture that is encouraged by social experiences, family (Rutter, 1999) and community (Kimhi & Shamai, 2004). An individual-centered oriented approach to resilience might be problematic because it fails to incorporate the larger social and cultural contexts in which development takes place (Kirmayer et al., 2009). Therefore, to understand and promote resilience we must attend to
the interplay between occurrences within families, communities, and social and racial climates in which an individual thrives (Rutter, 1987). The next section explores the family, community and cultural factors that might increase or contribute to individuals’ ability to handle stress (Walsh, 2006).

2.2.1.2.2. Family

According to Woolcock (2001), families develop a bonding process between parents, children, and extended family members to provide emotional support. The adaptation of every family member and the welfare of the family as a whole is directly influenced by the ways a family faces and deals with stressful challenging events and moves forward with their lives (Walsh, 2006, p. 15). In her research on family resilience and therapy, Walsh (2006) found that strong sibling bonds of affection and good communication in times of adversity provided a long-lasting mutual resource for individuals. Other research suggests that children who have supportive relationships with at least one adult can attain positive outcomes despite severe adversities (Hartling, 2008).

The central role of the family to support family members has been demonstrated across different ethnic groups including African American, Arab American, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese (Yeh & Wang, 2000; Ben-Ari & Lavee, 2004; Taylor, 1985). For Latino families, the significance of family support and familial interconnectedness is captured in the notion of familismo (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004). Research on Latino families’ health has concentrated on familismo in relation to health (Mogro-Wilson, 2011). Familismo refers to cultural characteristics and beliefs that reflect the significance of interpersonal connections between family members and other kin (G. Marin & Marin, 1991; Marin & Gamba, 2003) that foster loyalty, solidarity, and respect (Falicov, 1998). Family support and stability has been associated with healthier outcomes for low income Latinos (McGlade, Saha, & Dahlstrom, 2004). Familismo provides families with a sense of mutual responsibility that delineates roles and responsibilities in meeting the challenges in living situations (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007).
2.2.1.2.3. Community

While individual and family assets have received increased attention in literature, there is little written about the role of community in resilience (Kimhi & Shamai, 2004). In their paper Community Resilience: Models, Metaphors and Measures, which focuses on community resilience and Aboriginals’ health and well-being, Kirmayer et al. (2009) included two interpretations for the notion of community as a source of resilience: “1) it may look at how people overcome stress, trauma and other life challenges by drawing from social networks and cultural resources embedded in communities; and 2) it may consider the ways in which communities themselves exhibit resilience, responding to stresses and challenges in ways that tend to restore their functioning” (p. 66). The present study follows the first interpretation, as it explores how communities help individuals to ameliorate the effects of life stressors on their emotional functioning.

Literature identifies how important cultural and community resources are for minority families when coping with mental health problems (Lefley & Johnson, 2002; Parra & Guarnaccia, 1998). Friends, coworkers, and community members are part of the informal social support of an individual’s informal network (Goebert, 2009; Vega, 1991). These informal supports (or systems) operate outside formal institutions, and involve a great number of people (Gottlieb, 1976). Research consistently reinforces the importance of community and social networks for individual resilience. In one study of Latina victims of domestic violence, findings demonstrate how church and Hispanic clinics can also be important resources helping Latina immigrants to manage domestic violence (see Reina, Maldonado & Lohman, 2013).

Landau (2007) defines community resilience as “the community’s inherent capacity, hope, and faith to withstand major trauma, overcome adversity, and to prevail, with increased resources, competence and connectedness. Community links act as a natural agent or change, relying on the family as the foundation of community” (p. 352). In this definition, Landau makes emphasis on the relational aspect of individuals that help them to adjust to change or adversity.
Furthermore, in using the term community in their research, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that the term community does not suggest some rudimentary cultural sharing entity. The term community denotes a collective participation (with collective goals) in which participants share understandings about what they are doing, and what that means in their lives and for their communities (van der Riet, 2011).

Within Latino populations, community leaders appeared to be associated with their ability to be resilient. The servidoras have been described as community female members who are leaders in terms of helping other community members to deal with personal or familial problems (Hough, 1985). Vega et al. (1987) used the servidoras in their study to assist middle-aged and recently immigrant Mexican Latinas to cope effectively with life strains and health problems. Findings demonstrated an increase in social confidence levels and self-efficacy among participants. Researchers argue that having an informal community leader as a healthcare provider facilitated the process since they were part of the Latino community, had more empathy, and were more sensitive to the participants’ cultural background. The second theoretical framework used in this study (CHAT) also includes the concept of community in its analysis. Later in the theory chapter I provide a conceptualization of community (in CHAT model) that is employed to understand the development of resilience among transnational Latinas.

**2.2.1.2.4. Cultural practices**

Feminist perspectives challenge universalistic thinking of culture because universal conceptions of human beings neglect the differences among cultures and ways of living (Nussbaum, 2007). Furthermore, contemporary and critical scholars have rejected the idea of conceiving culture as a category of identity as it often encourages deficit perceptions of cultures (Gildersleeve, 2010). The conceptualization of culture as identity has been commonly linked to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic position (Gildersleeve, 2010) and nationality (Rogoff, 2003). For instance, existing literature among minority populations tend to overemphasize the role of culture in specific behaviors (e.g., intimate partner abuse) of different racial/ethnic groups.
(Hampton, Carrillo, & Kim, 2005). These stereotypes regarding minority cultures often perpetuate their cultural values as pathologic and deviant when compared to White communities (Malley-Morrison & Hines, 2007). In response to this problem, some scholars have redefined culture as mutually created experiences of persons and their communities (Rogoff, 2003). Latinas’ culture, in this case, refers to the meanings they have made from their experiences within their communities situated in a specific context, experiences that have acquired value over time (Gildersleeve, 2010).

Other researchers have associated culture with cultural practices and human development (Rogoff, 2003). For instance, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that the social structure of a cultural practice, the power relations embedded in it, and its conditions for legitimacy outline the possibilities for learning. Further, Rogoff (2003) claims that individuals’ performance depends in good part on the conditions that are routine in their community and on the cultural practices they are habituated to. Rogoff contends that individuals’ behavior are determined by both the cultural meaning they give to events and the institutional support from their communities for learning and performing particular roles in the social activities they engage in.

Cultural practices have been shown to have positive influences on Latinas’ resilience. Cultural knowledge and behaviors enable flexibility and coherence, which are key components in the development of resilience (McCubbin & McCubbin, 2005). Aboriginal researchers have included an additional cultural-relational dimension to resilience by focusing on traditional practices in individuals’ lives, such as spirituality and healing behaviors (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008).

Many studies have addressed the impact of religion on individuals’ well-being (Koenig, McCullough & Larson; Seybold & Hill, 2001). In one qualitative study of African Americans’ attitudes toward mental illness help seeking, researchers found that African Americans stressed religious coping as an alternative treatment for mental health problems (Matthews, Corrigan, Smith & Aranda, 2006). Another study found that Latino veterans preferred to talk about emotional distress with a priest or a friend instead of seeking out help from a conventional social
service provider (Becerra & Greenblatt, 1981). While religiosity has been documented, to date, there is limited research on religion as a cultural protective factor among diverse ethnic groups. Studies by Guarnaccia et al., (1992) and Vega, Hough and Miranda (1985) indicate that religiosity is a strong value in the Latino culture; hence, researchers and practitioners should recognize the important impact of religiosity on the mental health of Latino populations.

In the Latinos’ cultural context, there are folk practitioners such as espiritualistas (spiritual counselors), curanderos (healers), yerberos (herbalists), and sobadores (masseuses) (Vega, 1980) with formally intended health and counseling roles (Valle & Bensussen, 1985). Such alternative approaches have been derived from ancestor indigenous societies, and for some Latinos, they provide culturally appropriate treatment and a particular (and more natural) style of interaction (Vigil, 1989). In support of this idea, Romero de Slowing (2012) found that when rural Latina immigrant mothers were living in their home country, they used culturally specific-traditional health practices to provide health care for their families. Some of them mentioned taking their children to the sobadora or with the comadrona (midwife) when something was wrong with their health. Findings from the study also show that once Latina mothers moved to the U.S. they kept using some culturally specific-traditional alternatives; they reported the use of herbs and home care remedies and sought health care through curanderos (Romero de Slowing, 2012). Researchers in the areas of health and immigration point out that folk healing practices are deeply embedded in the Latino culture and a special focus on their incorporation into policymaking and practice is warranted (Rogler, Malgady & Rodriguez, 1989).

Although literature indicates that alternative healing activities are considered mediated practices that help Latinos with emotional and mental problems, not all Latino communities report engaging in such practices because (1) Latinos with many generations in the U.S. are less likely to know about or use folk practices and cures (Vega, 1980); (2) some Latino communities might feel embarrassed by these folk health practices in the American context declaring they do not recourse to them (Vega, 1980); and (3) folk healing may be a lower class/rural area practice that is discarded in urban communities (Rodriguez, 1987).
Lastly, there are additional cultural artifacts that mediate the resilience processes of Latinas. In a study of the impact of violence on U.S. Latino and Mexican youth, Clauss-Ehlers and Lopez-Levy (2002) found three factors (values and normative routines among Latinos) critical for resilience: the responsibility to nuclear and extended family members (familism); the authority of elder family members and senior people (respeto); and the nature of relationships, which in Latino communities are valued for their own merit and not as a means to some other interest (personalismo).

It has been shown in research that cultural practices relate to the development of reasoning and solving problems (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). If we are truly interested in understanding: 1) the tools/artifacts, beliefs, and guiding values that might mediate development of resilience among Latinas; and 2) how they perceive their agency in relationship to their social structure, it makes sense to focus and include in our analysis Latinas’ participation in cultural practices. A first step would be to understand how Latinas make sense of their life challenging situations and the salient cultural influences shaping the ways they respond to such difficult circumstances. An ethnographic design facilitates the gathering of this type of data by examining the cultural nature of Latinas’ everyday life and allows for a micro- and macro-analysis of Latinas’ participation “in cultural traditions in the structures and institutions of family life and community practices” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 10).

2.2.1.2. A critique of current literature on and definitions of resilience

In their article *Deconstructing resilience: Myriad conceptualizations and interpretations*, Arshi Shaikh and Carol Kauppi (2010) provide a rich overview of the construct of resilience from both psychological and sociological theories. Part of the definitions and literature about this construct presented in the above section have been criticized by Shaikh and Kauppi’s theoretical arguments. In the following paragraphs I specify the shortcomings of those definitions.

According to Shaikh and Kauppi (2010), there have been inconsistencies in numerous and different definitions of resilience within published literature. For instance, the definitions derived from the psychology perspective, that is, focusing on personal traits or characteristics
(i.e., perseverance, self-reliance, equanimity, hardiness, strong self-esteem, adaptability, and tolerance) portray resilience as a static characteristic. Others psychology researchers have compared resilience with human adaptation and development in the context of risk, problems, or pathology (Masten, 2001). This premise assures that an individual is resilient if s/he faces adversity or risk, and “the quality of adaptation is acceptable” (Shaikh & Kauppi, 2010, p. 159). In addition, such conceptualization of resilience captures this idea that individual adaptation happens in different stages of human development that confront ‘normative’ expectations so the standards for positive development only mirror the rules/norms grounded in a mainstream society (Shaikh & Kauppi, 2010).

While the early psychology disciplines described resilience as individual traits, the contemporary sociological perspectives relate the concept to human agency, resistance, and survival. Human agency for example, highlights the active engagement of individuals with the relationships with others (social support) that contribute to resilience. Resistance as a form of resilience describes the capacity of individuals to develop adaptive strategies to withstand oppressive environments (Shaikh & Kauppi, 2010). Additionally, sociology definitions “signify the familial and extra-familial contexts of individuals [and] emphasize the structural and material conditions [that] shape and are shaped by resilience” (p. 166). These definitions have been used to develop research on marginalized and disadvantaged groups in mainstream society (Shaikh & Kauppi, 2010).

The authors of the article did not criticize the sociological conceptualizations of resilience; however, they note that all definitions (psychological and sociological) fail to recognize factors such community and culture that influence resilience (Shaikh & Kauppi, 2010). The authors provide the readers a unifying conceptualization that would better fit the needs of those investigators that study resilience. They agree with Seccombe (2002) on the need for a conceptualization of resilience that moves beyond individual factors, family protective factors, and community strengths. They all call for a definition that takes into account the ecological and cultural nuances, namely racism, oppression, and social class (Seccombe, 2002) while
considering the structural deficiencies of social and economic policies precluding individuals, families, and communities effective functioning in adverse circumstances (Shaikh & Kauppi, 2010).

In the present study I considered these suggested conceptualizations. In the analysis of the data for this study, racism and oppression is taken into account through the use of a feminist lens that also enabled me to understand resilience as an agentive activity achieved through practice, more specifically as transnational Latinas’ agentive active practice of negotiating their socio-emotional and the material environments (with the use of tools available and the ayuda [help] from community individuals and public institutions) in order to constantly experience the feeling of salir adelante [moving forward], that in every moment of their lives, they are trying to move themselves (and their families) forward.

In addition, social policies needed to better assist transnational Latinas so they can recuperate from adverse situations are addressed in the implications chapter. Now I turn to a discussion of a few elements in rural contexts that seem present in the experiences of transnational Latinos. Because this dissertation sought to understand the life conditions of transnational Latinas in a rural area of Iowa, I consider important to understand place-specific conditions.

2.3. Rural Context

Literature provides information about immigrants’ preference of rural over urban living. In one study, immigrant participants perceived the rural community as morally superior to the urban, characterizing the latter as violent, drug infested, and value free (Schmalzbauer, 2011). Further, in another article with the same data from rural Montana, the author noted that Mexican women felt they could take care of their families better than they could in traditional urban areas of settlement because such places provided high quality of life (Schmalzbauer, 2009). Other studies showed that manufacturing employment opportunities (Guzman & Diaz McConnell,
2002) and the lower cost of living in rural communities (Nord, 2000) have played a role in drawing Latinos to new areas (Garcia, 2009a).

While the tranquility and economic opportunities of rural areas attract migrant Latinos, there are structural conditions that affect them in different ways. Latino immigrant populations have place-specific vulnerabilities that are distinctive to their experience. There are places that provide different settings of reception for immigrants that can be more or less friendly atmospheres, and that may offer opportunities for or obstacles to integration to the community in which they live (see Reina, Maldonado, & Lohman, 2013). Studies show that, in rural areas, particular actors and structural conditions (e.g., social workers, health care providers, and labor market conditions) implement restrictive immigration policies and eligibility requirements that negatively affect Latino families (Deeb-Sossa & Mendez, 2008). As in the case of other localities (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Schmalzbauer, 2009) and for undocumented Latinas, migrant women in rural areas of Williamsburg, Virginia, and North Carolina faced restricted physical mobility that hindered their ability to both participate in public life and access community assets (Deeb-Sossa & Mendez, 2008).

Latinos who live in rural areas face additional challenges related to long physical distances they have to travel over/across to accomplish daily life activities (Schmalzbauer, 2009); such challenges are compounded with a lack of public transportation in rural Iowa. Individuals need to have a car to get go from one place to another. Thus, Latinas who do not have a car or do not know how to drive, may have to depend on their partners’ or others’ mobility to get access to health care, and social and educational services for their children and themselves (Deeb-Sossa & Mendez, 2008).

Overall, the particular structural conditions of rural contexts might restrain and impinge immigrants’ efforts to increase their economic mobility, and their ability to form and access networks (Deeb-Sossa & Mendez, 2008). Thus, the context of reception is what may mitigate or reinforce the impact of such challenges in Latinas’ lives. Nonetheless, despite being victims of gender inequality and racial discrimination from racist neighbors and community members, and
the isolation that characterize their lives, immigrant women have reported feelings of optimism and satisfaction in terms of their ability to provide safety and better opportunities for their children (Schmalzbauer, 2009). In addition, studies have demonstrated Latinas’ resilience in overcoming obstacles to social inclusion and seeking out educational classes (Deeb-Sossa & Mendez, 2008).

2.4. Connecting Resilience to Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

In Chapter three, I provide an in-depth explanation of the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) that is used as a tool for understanding the development of resilience in the face of life challenging events. In this final section of the literature review chapter, I offer information on what I have come to currently know from sources across different disciplines about the use of Activity Theory (including CHAT) as a tool to explain human development.

In educational research, the lens of Activity Theory (AT) has provided insights into how teaching practices are affected by the use of new technological tools (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008). Researchers have examined students’ educational histories and their use of technology to understand instances of their resistance to new tools in contexts for knowledge development (Blin, 2004). AT has been used to study online programs at different organizational levels, that is, the interfaces between e-learning at the macro levels, such as strategy and policy, and the micro levels for everyday working practice and individual adaptation (Benson et al. 2008). Further, CHAT (an activity theory that includes cultural-historical contexts) has helped to illuminate challenges related to higher education opportunities and college access/choice by exploring the artifacts that mediate the choice processes of students (see Gildersleeve, 2010) and participation of Latino families in school activities (Durán, 2011). Bruna (2010) relied on CHAT perspectives to understand how student life experiences and science instruction intersected and shaped student agency. In addition, CHAT has been used in health research areas to describe, for instance, sources of conflict and similarity in critical areas of practice with caregivers of individuals with dementia (Toth-Cohen, 2008).
CHAT has also been applied to limited studies of resilience. For example, Edwards and Apostolov (2007) examined evidence from two studies of social exclusion of vulnerable children and suggested that individuals’ capacity to act effectively in the world is developed relationally and is evident in people’s thoughtful actions in their worlds. They concluded that CHAT’s view of development emphasizes the importance of a multi-layered approach to resilience as resilient behavior can be developed through relationships with others (Edwards & Apostolov, 2007).

Theories of human development (including resilience theories) assume that individual, family, and community characteristics can function as risk or protective factors during individuals’ resilience development. And, that the effects of risks factors may be off set by the presence of accessibility of protective factors (Masten & Osofsky, 2010). However, understanding resilience from risks and protective factors has some limitations. For instance, risk/adversity factors can have different meanings for example they can refer to negative outcome variables or negative life conditions (e.g., measures of poverty or lack of basic amenities). Risk or adversity can be relative or situational because of the lack of explicitness in timing, severity and duration of the construct (Schoon, 2006; Schoon & Bynner, 2003); therefore the constructs might have greater significance to investigators than to individual subjects that have been studied (Schoon, 2006).

Further, protective factors as part of conceptualization of resilience also have shortcomings, more specifically when protective factors are associated with positive adaptation (Shaikh & Kauppi, 2010). Research suggests that protective factors that contribute to adaptation in some circumstances might no have the same positive effects in other situations (Shaikh & Kauppi, 2010). Studies have shown that protective factors are diminished in specific contexts (e.g., extremely poor neighborhoods) (Silk et al. 2007).

Furthermore, resilience theories too often regards to context as immediate situational settings for instance family or community ignoring the interlocked nexus of social, historical, and political influences shaping such immediate settings and relations among them (Spencer et al. 2006). What is more, human development theories addressing resilience frequently overlook
information processing and make-meaning processes that explain context as individuals’ interpretations of reality and action (Van Oers, 1998). I agree with Shaikh’ and Kauppi (2010) question to address this limitation: If the environment (including significant others) “challenges an individual’s interpretation of the ‘stimulus,’ how will resilience occur?” (p. 163). Spencer et al. (2006) articulate the importance of recognizing individual meanings attributed to their experiences as such meanings may differ according to the socio-cultural and historical context in which individuals are in embedded. Here I suggest that a CHAT framework to understand resilience might be opportune.

### 2.5. Summary of Literature Review

An assessment of the current literature gives a restricted picture of transnational Latinas’ life challenges, and this gap supports the need for studies such as this one. In summary, low-income Latinas are more likely to face financial necessity due to the lack of legal work authorization, language proficiency, and the lack of formal educational knowledge. Also, transnational Latinas who live in rural areas tend to experience racial discrimination from their communities, in particular from services providers. In addition, Latinas often experience isolation, which limits their economic and geographic mobility, restricts their ability to access the resources they need, and inhibits the creation of social support networks in their communities. Moreover, some Latina immigrant mothers believe their community environments implement restrictive immigration policies and social services eligibility requirements that negatively affect their families.

While literature provides a partial picture of transnational Latinas’ life hardships, there is still scant knowledge about how they experience resilience in the face of adversity, or in activity theory terms, how their specific learning activities (and conjunction with broader practices and actions of a community) impact the development of resilience. There is scarce research studying the development of resilience as a dynamic process of interaction between developing individuals and sociocultural (Howard, Dryden & Johnson, 1999) and historical contexts. Further, research on Latino immigrants has focused on male migrants’ experiences and mostly
dismissed women as secondary reunification individuals (Kossoudji & Ranney, 1984; Baker, 2004).

Lastly, of the literature reviewed, only few of the studies were conducted using critical ethnographic methodologies. A critical ethnographic approach allows for assessment of meaningful insights of participants’ life challenging circumstances from their own perspectives, information that cannot be achieved through quantitative analysis (Stake 2008). Therefore, this study seeks to fill these literature and methodological gaps by focusing exclusively on the experiences of first-generation rural transnational Latinas.
CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In the literature review chapter the lack of theoretically backed research that has been done to understand the development of resilience of undocumented Latinas as they endure life-challenging situations was noted. In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework choices that allow me to understand such phenomenon. To examine and understand the experiences of transnational Latinas, I use two theories: Transnational Feminist Theory and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (hereafter, CHAT). In the first section of this chapter, I provide extensive information of transnational feminism (including the theory’s origin) to engage in conversations of gender, agency, transnationalism, and social transformation, and to understand how Latinas mobilize against hierarchical structures of oppression and marginalization with which they struggle. Later, I describe the origins and components of CHAT and present the reasons of the chosen approach as the theoretical and analytical instrument of this study. Finally, through the use of CHAT, resilience is studied as an agentive activity achieved through practice, in which transnational Latinas, through the use of mediating tools, are capable of mastering their lives.

The significance of the use of CHAT over other resilience theories in this dissertation derives from three premises: 1) Instead of focusing solely in protective factors facilitating the development of resilience, it examines resilience as a collective process that is continuously constructed by individuals; 2) Because learning is socially and culturally mediated and historically driven (Foot, 2014; Engeström, 1987), individuals learn to construct resilience through interactions with other people at any point in time. Thus, CHAT positions resilience as an activity in which individuals act collectively and learn by engaging in such collective activities; and 3) the resilience activity is understood as an active practice of individuals, and their participation in that activity is directed toward achieving a specific goal in their lives. So there is a great focus on the object, a purposeful target that includes the motive for the activity (Leont’ev, 1978). Next, I provide information regarding the transnational feminist framework that is used to understand the life challenges of transnational participants from a critical standpoint. Later I return to additional information regarding the CHAT framework.
3.1. Transnational Feminism

I pursue this dissertation research by drawing from feminist transnational perspectives. Transnational feminism is a framework that is “engaged with cultural, economic, and political trends associated with recent process of globalization [and with] theoretically oriented discussions of culture, power, knowledge… and activism” (Fernandes, 2013, p. 12-14). Further, unlike local feminism, transnational feminism examines women’s experiences from a broad perspective and admits the ways a global standpoint homogenizes difference among women (Richards, 2000). And that is because, on the one hand, international feminisms rested on dominant narratives on nation-state borders, without giving sufficient thought to globalization issues (Richards, 2000). On the other hand, global feminisms have been criticized for “prioritizing northern feminist agendas and… homogenizing women’s struggles for socio-political justice” (p. 4). Following, I present succinct additional information on the origins of the transnational feminism theory and its pertinence as a theoretical framework for the present study. Later, I offer information regarding the production of knowledge, then I position transnational feminism in the present study and explain the different transnational feminist stances that would be used to describe resilience among transnational Latinas.

3.1.1. Transnational feminist theory origins

Transnational feminism is a contemporary framework that has roots in Postcolonial theory, and emerged during the 1980’s from the need to address colonialism, modernity, and globalization within gender studies (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000). Indeed, transnational feminism aroused from the necessity of theorizing about transnational cultural movements and the material circumstances structuring the lives of women living in diverse locations (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). This feminist paradigm critiques global feminism’s positions on gender as they have failed to address issues neglecting the “diversity of women’s agency in favor of universalized

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2 Indigenous, Chicana, and Third World feminists have called themselves transnational feminists (although their paradigms are not identical). In my research theoretical framework I use transnational and other feminism perspectives simultaneously because they are “heterogeneous, irreducible, related” (Lock Swarr & Nagar, 2010, p. 49) and, perhaps, complementary.
Western model of women’s liberation that celebrates individuality and modernity” (p. 17). Consequently, transnational feminists developed and used this framework to challenge current global feminist notions of gender as a unified category by articulating the relationships of gender to economic globalization, male-controlled nationalisms, ‘authentic’ traditions, and local and legal-juridical forms of oppression (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994).

Transnational feminism was the new name that replaced *global sisterhood*, the name First World, White, middle-class feminists used during the 1970’s and 1980’s. But, the idea of *global sisterhood* has been discarded today because of the profound divisions of class, race, sexual identity and nationality produced among women across the world (Mendoza, 2002). The inclusion of the term *transnational* in feminist theory was intended to destabilize “locational politics of global-local or center-periphery…[that particularly] influence every level of social existence” (p. 13). The pioneers of the theory’s development during the 1980’s chose to use the term transnational over international because they sought to unsettle and challenge the boundaries of gender, race, and nation (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000). They argued that transnational underlines the contradictory circuits of culture and capital, which enables feminists to recognize and criticize relationships among oppressive systems, namely patriarchies, colonialisms, and racisms, among other forms of domination (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000).

Transnational and postcolonial studies coincide and overlapped in the same feminist analysis trajectory. That is, they focus on the inequalities produced by patriarchal capitalists in different periods of globalization (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000). Post-colonial theories and methodologies have allowed transnational feminists to conduct transnationality analyses (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000). These transnational feminists stated that theories such “orientalism,” “hybridity,” “traveling theory,” and “border theory” among others provide the necessary conceptual tools to assess representational politics (p. 1). Further, they argue that by focusing on the history of contemporary imperialism, feminists can recognize and understand race, gender, and class “as concepts that ‘travel’—that is, circulate and work in different and linked ways in different places and times” (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000, p. 1). In sum, transnational analyses
stemmed from postcolonial theories of nation and nationalism (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000) and remind U.S. feminists that individuals around the world cannot be exclusively constructed by “the trinity of race-sex-class” (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, p. 19). Transnational feminists acknowledge the inclusion of other categories into questions of identity formation both within and outside the U.S., and encourage attending to social relations and practices affecting individuals located at both sides of the border.

Lastly, transnational feminism is not only a theory, but also a commitment to practice that seeks to uncover differences and boundaries in order to build solidarity and allegiances that cross geographical borders (Colling, 2010). Transnational practices encompass coalitions, collusion, and resistance that ought to confront inequalities (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000). Through transnational practices within transnational studies, transnational scholars engage in self-conscious discourses and activist practices (Sarat, 2010) that enable them to address the uneven and compounded relationships between women around the world (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000).

3.1.2. Transnational feminism in the present study

Transnational feminism seeks to move the essence of feminism from the political forces of global and international feminism (Lock Swarr & Nagar, 2010). Transnational feminism views the local and the global as paradigms that complemented each other (Lock Swarr & Nagar, 2010). In conjunction with that, transnational perspectives unsettle this idea of the U.S. as a locked and independent geopolitical space (Fernandes, 2013) addressing concepts of race and diaspora that reposition the U.S. inside a clearer and ampler “global understanding of the movements of people, capital, and culture” (p. 186).

One substantive contribution of transnational feminist standpoint is the acknowledgement of the historical and political aspects of the transnational flow of capital stemming from cultural displacement and migration. More specifically, transnational feminism seeks to develop critical analyses of the transnational space (linkages between the local, national, and regional realms) in which transnational individuals attempt to negotiate, resist, and shape their transnational circumstances (Fernandes, 2013). Transnational feminism can account for the experiences of my
study participants because it helps to make sense of cross-border social relations and address issues of identity transformation that might align transnational Latinas’ behaviors in response to their emotional and/or material objects or needs (life challenges).

Transnational feminist research explores new spaces associated with border-crossing issues. This explicitly focuses on the human experience of border-crossing at the cultural, political, and socioeconomic levels (Fernandes, 2013). This framework looks beyond mere visible (geographical/territorial) border crossing and helps to explore the invisible discursive crossing between identities of gender, class, race, and citizenship or, in other words, the scattered identities of transnational individuals (e.g., being a racial majority there and a racial minority here; being a citizen there and undocumented here; being a mother there and a babysitter here).

Transnationalism and identity are concepts that are interrelated (Vertovec, 2001) and usually go hand in hand. When individuals settle down in a different nation they must negotiate their identities within social spaces that span more than one place (Vertovec, 2001). Furthermore, Vertovec (2001) argues that in the host communities, transnational networks are developed among individuals who share some form of identity, language and cultural traits, and country of origin. These network of relations are based on communication-based relationships and resources, knowledge-sharing, and socio-cultural and political engagement (Vertovec, 2001) that requires individuals to uphold specific social statuses and identities (Lacroix, 2012). What is more, transnational individuals maintain strong connections and exchanges between origin and host contexts including marriage agreements, religious engagement, and commodity consumption that affect the construction, conservation, and negotiation of their collective identities (Vertovec, 2001).

According to Lacroix (2012), transnational individuals embrace a transnational mode of living as they often move across social spaces. The author further argues, “transnationalism is an outcome of societal dynamics at both ends of the migration process” (p. 26). Lacroix also points out that immigrants can be non-migrants because they are still citizens, villagers, workers, sons, daughters, fathers, or mothers on the other side of the border. The development of transnational
practices and relations depend on the opportunities, resources, and restrictions resulted from immigrants’ dual insertions (Lacroix (2012). My study of transnational Latinas’ experiences seeks to understand and present theoretical reflections on these women’s dual lives—the I am here but I am there (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997), with a closer look to transnational practices that might help them to navigate social, cultural, economic, and political boundaries within distinct social spaces.

Before moving on to the issues of the study of the development of resilience through transnational feminist lens, I would inform the reader about the production of knowledge and corresponding practices that accompanies transnational feminism. These concepts help to illuminate the experiences of transnational Latina mothers.

3.1.3. Transnational feminism and the production of knowledge

Transnational feminism has questioned the nature and direction of knowledge production (Fernandes, 2013). Transnational feminist theories challenge the exclusive focus on knowledge as a purely epistemological process, and propose a framework that can cover all the distinctive dimensions of knowledge production: the epistemological (how we know), the ontological (the materiality of knowledge), and practical (the realm of ethical/political agency) (Fernandes, 2013, p. 105). Karen Barad, whose work is cited in Fernandes’ (2013), developed a theoretical understanding of the complex ways in which the three realms of knowledge production interact. In addition, she has urged scholars to reflect on the materiality of their knowledge practices (Fernandes, 2013).

Barad’s theory of agential realism or agential realist ontology incorporates all three dimensions of knowledge production. In her theoretical writings from Meeting the Universe Highway, Barad (2007) specifically contends that “knowing is not about seeing from above or outside or even seeing from a prosthetically enhanced human body… knowing entails specific practices through which the world is differentially articulated and accounted for… knowing is ….an ongoing performance of the world” (p. 149). The world that we seek to know and understand then is materialized through (or made up of) ontological knowledge practices
(Fernandes, 2013). Following this epistemological and ontological grounding of knowledge, Fernandes notes that transnational feminism research is greater in the sense that the knowledge produced from this paradigm not only represents reality but also makes it by representing and engaging with another part of the world (Fernandes, 2013).

The present study, from a transnational feminist perspective, follows the three dimensions of knowledge production: the epistemological, ontological, and practical. My study’s approach is epistemological as it seeks to analyze how the categories of resilience and transnational have been known and perhaps misperceived or misrecognized; it tackles the ontological dimension as I seek to analyze and understand the transformative materialization of transnational women’s identities (Anzaldúa, 1987). Lastly, the knowledge produced from this study has ethical implications. Primary, this study challenges the assumptions and misconceptions (and homogenization) of the notions of underserved and marginalized women who come from Third World (Latino countries). Certainly, Third World women have been framed based on gender (read: sexually constrained) and place or origin, ‘Third World’ (read: ignorant, poor, illiterate, family-oriented, oppressed, etc.) (Mohanty, 2003).

In addition, this research seeks to unsettle the notion that the academic researcher is the sole individual who creates knowledge (Fernandes, 2013) or the only “true intellectual thinker” (Lock Swarr & Nagar, 2010, p. 8) by developing research through collaborations with study participants and mentorship from other academic professionals. My motivation in such collaborative activist-research endeavors offers an opportunity to break down power relations between research agents (Fernandes, 2013).

Along with Barad and Fernandes’ ideas, Maria Lugones has been influential in feminists’ understandings of transnationalism and the transnational experience. In what follows, I provide information of the insights of Lugones and other important transnational feminist theorists in an effort to understand and explain the resilience of transnational women through a transnational feminist lens. Their work will be (implicitly) infused in the data analysis and discussion of findings.
3.1.4. Transnational feminist stances to explain the development of resilience

Over the last twenty years, human behavior theories have slowly changed from viewing distressed individuals as damaged, turning its focus on the resources that can be used to strengthen those in need (Walsh, 2006). Research on resilience moves away from illness and stigma towards a focus on strength and agency (Barton, 2005). Theorizing on individual agency allows researchers to explore the sources of strength that are present and available to them, their communities, and their culture. For instance, Multiracial feminists Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (2003) state that women of color craft sustainable lives from the oppressive positions based on gender, race, and class. They also resist and challenge relations of power that control them. They seek to maintain their dignity as they struggle to shape their lives and that of their families. Women of color have developed the skills involved in confronting, negotiating, accommodating, and transcending difference (Sandoval, 2004) arising from structures of race, gender, class, citizenship and culture. Nonetheless, feminist scholars remind us that although every woman possesses the capacity to be resilient, “a generalization ought not be created to develop a measuring tool to critique the level of resilience for all women” (Booker, 2005, p. 48).

As I argued in Chapter 2, some resilience scholars have criticized the dominant focus of research solely on the individual’s character; resilience in these cases tend to be described as a form of intrinsic toughness allocated to a few heroic individuals (Hartling, 2009). Hartling, for example, claims that in a social context in which a dominant group appreciates more individual achievement and autonomy, relational factors are likely to be disregarded and dismissed. Consequently, the significance of relational dynamics that might promote individual growth in the face of adversity is also dismissed (Hartling, 2009). In that vein, social psychologist Virginia O'Leary discussed that social relationships enable women to thrive and that those individuals with social support are more likely to report good physical and mental health (1998).

Maria Lugones’ account of “World-travelling” has a strong resonance with women of color’s capacity for resistance. Lugones’ research is intended to address the complexities of resistance to interlocked oppressions (Lugones, 2003). She uses the concepts “world” and
“traveling” as spatial vocabulary to engage in a logic resistance discourse. By “world” Lugones refers to “an actual society given its dominant culture’s description and construction of life, including a construction of the relationships of production, of gender, race” (Lugones, 1997, p. 153). However, she argues that ‘world’ can refer to a society with a nondominant construction or a society with an idiosyncratic meaning. She recognizes the complexities of having all constructions of the same society; however, she described such societies as different “worlds,” because societies can have a deep multiplicity of “worlds” (Lugones, 2003). The term “travelling” or “travel” denotes the forced travel of the subordinated, exploited, and enslaved to the “worlds” in which they perform as subordinate beings (Lugones, 2003). The author calls “travel” as a willful or unconscious shift from being someone in one time/place, to being someone else, according to the “world” in which you are expressing yourself (Lugones, 1997).

World-travelling refers to a strategy exercised by the “outsider” that allows her to shift from the dominant construction of life where a woman is “constructed as an outsider,” to “other constructions of life where she is more or less at home” (Lugones, 1997, p. 148). As previously stated, women who have been subordinated, marginalized, and exploited have been forced to travel to “worlds” in which they embodied oppressed beings (Lugones, 2003). This unwillfull practice, to some degree, has facilitated the traveling of women of color to hostile White/Anglo worlds (Lugones, 1997), and has enabled some to negotiate their lives in the tensions of many oppressing ⇔ resisting relations (Lugones, 2003).

Additionally, Lugones (1997) argues that individuals who are outside mainstream society are world-travellers because they need to learn to survive in a hostile place. They have to inhabit more than one “world” at the same time. A transnational Latina can be at the same time in a “world” that constructs her as stereotypically Latina and also in a “world” that constructs her only as Latina. Being stereotypically a Latina and being simply a transnational Latina are different concurrent constructions of women who are part of different “worlds” (Lugones, 1997).

The faculty of maneuvering such “travelling” is what I intend to underscore through this study. In the analysis of data related to resilience, the concept/perspective of “travelling” or
“travel” is infused in the CHAT model to understand the forced travel of participants to the “world” or “worlds” (Lugones, 2003) in which they may not be part of it but still occupy. Such “travelling” may help a transnational Latina to confront emotional and/or material constraints. For example, a transnational Latina might behave differently around people in different social spaces. At the doctor’s office, with staff who do not speak Spanish and who are racist, she becomes a different person: she is a respectful individual, with a choiceful sense of self (as she may choose not to be affected by such oppressive circumstances), though still a subordinate being living in hostile White/Anglo world (Lugones, 2003). However, the woman she becomes with her family is completely different: she is a decision maker, a caring mother and wife, and an active learner of the new “world” so she can provide for her children. This action of shifting from being one person to being a different person becomes part of the resilience activity. This study seeks to understand how this shifting process takes place. The World-traveling thesis will also be used in Chapter 4, the methods section, to explain my experiences as a World-traveller and researcher in the lives of transnational Latina participants. I use this perspective to explain my insider and outsider positions in their lives and the research process as a whole.

The connection of feminist perspectives to an analysis of life challenges and resilience achievement is evident. Through transnational feminism (and feminist frameworks discussed in the literature review section) I examine the challenges experienced by transnational Latinas from a critical standpoint, that is, I can have a closer look at hierarchical structures of power and oppression based on their gender, race, class, and citizenship constraining their lives is distinctive ways. Additionally, transnational and Latina feminists postulate a possibility for understanding how women of color can, and constantly do exercise resistance and emotional strength (despite all the constraints they undergo). Feminist perspectives then contribute in a fundamental way to ongoing theoretical considerations about notions of agency and truth (Moya, 2001). Drawing on this array of feminist perspectives, the following section outlines the key cultural components that help to explain how transnational individuals negotiate and resist their transnational circumstances (Fernandes, 2013). In presenting such components, I argue that
resilience takes place at a socio-cultural level, taking into account the interplay of individuals, their immediate context, and the structural society system (Lacroix, 2012).

3.1.4.1. Actors/domains involved in resilience achievement

There are distinct though interrelated actors/domains associated with the development of resilience. Such actors/domains work in unison so to understand resilience we have to understand the dynamic interactions among them.

3.1.4.1.1. The transnational individual.

As previously mentioned, some resilience scholars criticize the dominant perspective on individualism, where resilience tends to be described as a form of intrinsic toughness allocated into some individuals, disregarding the role of relational and contextual factors on its development (Hartling, 2009; Shaikh & Kauppi 2010). A feminist stance on resilience takes into account the significance of relational dynamics (e.g., social relationships) promoting individual growth in the face of adversity (Hartling, 2009). Furthermore, transnational feminist perspectives can help to develop a race-gender and cultural-conscious framework that includes transnational Latinos’ crucial strategies often ignored by mainstream perspectives.

Controlarse (control of the self) is a central dynamic theme upon which Latinos draw to manage challenges. According to Cohen (1985) and Castro et al. (1984), controlarse is a cognitive and behavioral mechanism for controlling life adversities by managing feelings such as anger, anxiety, and depression. Control of the self leads to various states: aguantarse (endurance) refers to the ability to resist stress in times of hardship; resignarse (to resign oneself) reflects the passive acceptance of a tragic event and consent to fate; no pensar (don’t think of a problem), or avoidance of (and desire to suppress) distressing thoughts and feelings; sobreponerse (to overcome oneself), or the effort to overcome reactions to situations of adversity; it represents a Latino’s disposition to confront a problem and desire to modify his or her response to disturbance (Cohen, 1985).

The present study explores what factors contribute to Latina immigrants’ development of resilience in times of adversity. The assumption is that transnational Latinas are active in the
pursuit of their wellbeing through different forms of resistance and the cited cultural factors above might help them to deal with difficulties more effectively. Specifically, they have the strength and capability to preserve their integrity when they encounter dramatically changed circumstances (Zolli & Healy, 2012). Further, they are able to use multiple identities and to travel to different “worlds” (e.g., new social spaces, the U.S. society) to learn (and use) information from different sources from their immediate environment (Lugones, 2003; Trueba, 2004) to improve emotional, material, and social conditions. But, the strengths and capacities of transnational Latinas to overcome hardship or distress might not be intrinsic individual characteristics (Walsh, 2006); instead there are the outcomes from social interactions with others from a context (e.g., family and community individuals) that enables individuals to practice resilience.

3.1.4.1.2. The transnational family.

The importance of family in the development of resilience can be described through the ethic of care, a feminist perspective that helps us understand the transnational caring practices of families among Latino populations. Supporters of morality-based and care-based arguments claim that morally good individuals often strive to meet the demands of caring for themselves and people around them (Tronto, 2007). Feminist scholars assure that ethic of care practice is not simple, as it involves particular acts of caring and a common “habit of mind” towards care that informs all conditions of an individual’s moral life (Tronto, 2007, p. 252). I borrow from Tronto’s four practical, ethical elements of care namely attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness, to place care at the core of Latina immigrant families’ values. These four elements are used to explain the importance of the family closeness among Latinos, assuming that: 1) issues or constrains related to family are always a priority for Latina mothers; and 2) family is a key resource for emotional/material support, facilitating resiliency achievement. Feminist and cultural-historical theories recognize the importance of an analysis of motivation with great emphasis on care-giving practices in order to understand gender
differences between female and male participation in activities related to family (John-Steiner, 1999).

Attentiveness refers to the recognition of somebody else’s needs (Tronto, 2007). Being attentive to another’s problem denotes the capacity to suspend one’s own goals, needs, ambitions, and concerns so as to recognize and to be attentive to her/his problem, a moral achievement that can portrayed in Latino families. Responsibility is a concept embedded in a series of implicit cultural practices (Tronto, 2007). Tronto writes, “responsibility has different meanings depending upon one’s perceived gender roles, and issues that arise out of class, family status, and culture, including cultural differences based on racial groupings. In arguing for the inclusion of care as a political and philosophical notion, I am suggesting that we are better served by focusing on a flexible notion of responsibility than we are by continuing to use obligation as the basis for understanding what people should do for each other” (p. 254). Responsibility does not suggest a need to conform to personal or group obligations, because individuals are capable to conceive care as a value instead of an obligation. I argue that the sense of responsibility of care among Latino families corresponds to a group value that stems from their social, political, and economic subordinated positions in society that require them to adequately provide care for their own.

The competence phase of caring is aligned with moral consequentialism; it refers to a moral notion that requires individuals to demonstrate their willingness to offer any form of caregiving and provide care without failing (Tronto, 2007). Constant support of family, solidarity, loyalty, and long-lasting mutual resources exemplify the notion of competence of caring by Latinos. When Latinos engage in resistance practices to counteract the hardships of everyday life, it is the family that operates as a whole system, making certain that the caring work is done competently.

3.1.4.1.3. The community

The dominant theoretical perspectives that study communities and their role in human development do not take into account the “the gendered nature of power differentials, economic
and political forces, and the structures and values of local communities” (Bond et al. 2000, p. 589). The reconceptualization of resilience in the present study entails the inclusion of community as a group of actors who participate or engage in a resilience activity. Further, a feminist perspective allows an examination of the ways in which the lives of Latina immigrants are shaped by the unique cultural, economic, and political conditions of the communities in which they live (Bond et al. 2000). In addition, a feminist standpoint in the present study claims a respect for diversity and the cultural influences that shape individuals’ lives and that of their communities, expanding (and challenging) scholarly conceptualizations of “normal” or “normative” to include variations rooted in different ethnic backgrounds, life and interpersonal choices, and systems of guiding values (Chavez, 1991; Bond et al. 2000).

For this study, I borrow from Benedict Anderson’s (1983) concept of the “imagined” community or communities to describe the domain of action, the movement and communication of transnational individuals through social and emotional landscapes between two national spaces, the U.S. and their home countries. The imagined community through a transnational feminist lens incorporates an analysis of the globalization of the structure of feelings (the dispersal of feelings, emotions, and suffering) between transnational individuals who live “here” and their families who live “there.”

Anderson (1983) developed the imagined community notion to redefine the concept of ‘nation.’ According to Anderson, the nation is imagined and limited at the same time. It is imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the imagine of their communion.” It is limited because “even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations” (p. 15-16). Anderson also describes the nation imagined as a community, because irrespective of the inequality and exploitation of a nation, it would always be perceived as a horizontal comradeship and fraternity, even if such nation remains at the other side of a border.
The concept of imagined community is useful for this research for many reasons. First, transnational people are part of an imagined community of individuals located somewhere else. Put simply “the realm of their community extends to the imagined world outside” the community in which they live (Norton, 2001, p. 164). Second, the imagined community of transcultural individuals it is not tangible, perhaps is a product of their imagined-nation. But there is this idea of belonging to a community located across national borders—an idea that in the mind of a transnational individual “communities are to be distinguished… by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson, 183, p. 15). Also, the structure of feelings that surrounds it is the notion of keeping that community alive, even though that community is far off and is changing. There is a connection to this other place (social space) through the structures of the materiality of individuals’ activities in their immediate community (e.g., making money to send remittances or building a house to live there in the future). When we study transnational Latinos we need to understand that they are people who are here, but are investing in their imagined communities that transcend space. And all this is part of their transnational identity, and resilience might be constructed through decision-making and goal-oriented actions that are distributed across two spaces. For instance, an assumption of this study is that transnational Latina mothers who leave behind their family become transnational daughters, transnational mothers, or transnational sisters when they migrate to the U.S. And for those whose pain and suffering is associated with family separation, the only way to maintain their core purpose or integrity might be through strategic transnational practices and decision making; for example, by sending remittances or boxes laden with goods or calling family often to provide or receive emotional support. My study seeks to substantiate this premise.

There has not been, to my knowledge, any attempt to apply the feminist transnational approach to studies on transnational Latinas’ experiences with life hardships and the ways they react to their changing environment. One task that stands before me is to further understand the

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3 By structure of feelings I refer to individuals’ social experiences, which have “meanings and values…[that] are actively lived and felt, [are shape by] nuanced interactions between selected and interpreted beliefs… institutions, and explicit general relationships, and [are reflected in] acted and justified experiences” (Williams, 1977).
nature of resilience through a transnational feminist lens. I argue that resilience is not purely individual and seek to provide a theoretical understanding of resilience that transcends the assumed intrinsic toughness allocated to transnational Latinas. I use transnational feminist perspectives as an epistemological device (Fernandes, 2013) to produce knowledge and political claims.

3.2. Cultural Historic Activity Theory (CHAT)

The transnational feminist perspectives are useful for explaining individuals’ agency and their capacity for endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to life challenges (Walsh, 2006). It also allows me to incorporate multiple systems of analysis, such as the individual and environment (and the linkages between the local, national, and regional realms), and to identify and understand border-crossing relations affecting the lives of transnational individuals through this framework; however, it fails to account for the dynamic and dialectical relationship between individuals and the context of actions in the form of social, institutional, cultural, and historical factors (Van der Riet, 2009) that might contribute to resilience development. Therefore, I merge transnational feminism with Cultural Historic Activity Theory.

3.2.1. Cultural Historical Activity Theory origins

CHAT has its roots in soviet Russia in the 1920s in the classical German philosophy (Karl Marx and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel) and Russian school of psychology (Lev Vygotsky, Alexei Leont’ev and Alexander Luria). The basic theoretical perspective was formulated by Vygotsky (1896-1934), who was the founder of the school. According to Vygotsky, psychology was dominated in his time by two theoretical orientations, namely psychoanalysis and behaviorism (Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research University of Helsinki, n. d.). In reaction to these psychology routes and the biologically inspired approaches of the time, Vygotsky and his colleagues formulated a completely new theoretical concept to surpass the problem: the concept of artifact-mediated and object-oriented action (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 40). As Luria and Leont’ev (1968) observed:
“The primary and fundamental task of that time [the late 1920s and 1930s] consisted of freeing oneself on the one hand from vulgar behaviorism and, on the other, from the subjective understanding of mental phenomena as exclusively internal subjective states that can only be investigated through introspection” (p. 6).

Vygotsky, Leont’ev and Luria argued that an individual uses cultural means, tools and signs that mediate the relationships between a subject and an object. With this new approach, these revolutionary psychologists were able to break down the Cartesian dualism between subject and object, between individual and society, between inner consciousness and the utter-world of society. They incorporated culture in their understanding of human functioning (Van der Riet, 2009).

Foot (2014) provides a good explanation of the designation of each word in CHAT that is helpful to understand the theory’s foundation. The word cultural suggests that humans are enculturated, and that individual behavior is shaped and determined by cultural values and resources. The words historical and cultural are used together to denote that cultures are grounded in histories and develop over time, hence analyses of human behavior requires an understanding of the historical trajectories in which individuals’ actions take place. Lastly, the activity concept refers to what individuals do together that is modified by cultural and historical processes.

3.2.2. The concept and structure of activity

CHAT signifies learning (therefore development) as participation in social practices, rejecting the idea of learning as a cognitive process (Cole, 1996; Sawchuk, 2003b). In CHAT, individuals are constituted by their practical activity, especially by their participation in social, cultural, and historical practice, thus, humans are the product of their own activity (Sanino, Daniels, & Gutierrez, 2009; Tolman, 2001; Engeström & Middleton 1996; Billett, 1998). In order to study individuals and their learning processes, researchers have to focus on the activities they engage in the world (Van der Riet, 2009); in order to understand human behavior the unit of analysis must be the activity (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Engeström, 1987).
According to Sannino, Daniels & Gutierrez (2009), activity organizes individuals’ lives, because through activities they develop skills and their personal character. Through activities individuals also transform social circumstances and construct cultural artifacts/tools to confront contradictions. The authors further argue that from an activity theoretical approach “human life is fundamentally rooted in participation in human activities that are oriented towards objects. Thus, human beings are seeing as situated in a collective life perspective, in which they are driven by purposes that lie beyond the particular goal” (2-3). Object-oriented activities then, are the core of the activity theory and is what distinguishes this theory from other approaches to understand human behavior (Wertsch, 1985).

Kaptelinin (2013) elaborates on the key aspects that distinguish activity from other types of interaction: (a) subjects of activities have needs that should be satisfied through an interaction with the environment, and (b) activities and their subjects equally determine one another; or, more broadly, activities are creative forces that transform both subjects and objects. Kaptelinin and other scholars expand on these aspects:

“Subjects have needs. Activity is a “unit of life” of a material subject existing in the objective world. Subjects have their own needs and they must carry out activities in order to survive, strictly speaking, interact with objects of the environment to meet their needs (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006, p. 33).”

In addition to that, the authors argue that activities and their subjects determine each other. For example, an individual would solve a math problem depending on his/her skills and the level of difficulty of the problem. However, the subject (individual) and the object (to solve the math problem) are transformed by the activity over time: Individuals develop math skills through solving other complex problems in the past. While it is a fact that an individual’s abilities determine how s/he solves a problem, it is also true that solving problems determine his/her skills. Therefore, subjects (individuals in this case) both express themselves in their activities and are also produced by the activities (cf. Rubinshtein, 1986).
In CHAT, the unit of analysis is the object-oriented collective and culturally mediated human activity or activity system (Engeström, 1987; Engeström, 1993). In this theoretical framework, the idea of activity focuses on human collectives rather than isolated persons (Foot, 2014). The notion of activity encompasses individuals operating together in a determined system of interactions with other persons and organizations as well as with the natural environment (Foot, 2014). Activity, Foot argues, does not mean “behavior” or a linear sequence of separated actions; activity indicates “a process-as-a-whole” (p. 9).

3.2.3. Three-level model of activity

According to Leont’ev (1978; 1981), human activities are units of life that are organized into a three-level scheme. First, the top level is the activity itself, which is driven by an object-related motive. The motive is the object that the subject ultimately needs to satisfy. Second, actions are situated in the middle level of the activity. Actions are conscious processes directed at goals, undertaken by subjects to fulfill the object (Kaptelinin, 2013); an individual’s (or a group of individuals) action is driven by a conscious goal, it is goal-oriented (Leont’ev, 1978). Lastly, at the bottom level there are operations, which are routine and unconscious processes that produce changes to an action that is part of an ongoing situation (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012).

Figure 1: The Structure of Human Activity
When actions become automatic they become operations (Foot, 2014). Individuals are not usually aware of their operations. Further, operations are described as the means by which actions are carried out according to the tools and conditions of the action at hand (Leont’ev, 1978). Engeström (1987) argues that individual actions are always situated in a context and understood only through a broader collective activity rather than individual action itself. So focusing on the whole activity is more important than individual actions. This dissertation follows Engeström’s premise by focusing exclusively in the broader collective activity system of resilience, although it highlights key goal-oriented actions undertaken by subjects to fulfill their objects (Kaptelinin, 2013).

3.2.3.1. Engeström’s activity system and components

This dissertation draws on activity system analysis expressed by Engeström (1987). Engeström (1987) developed a model of the structure of activity that illustrates how human activity is always given by the interacting components of subject, object, tools, rules, individual memberships of a particular group of individuals (community), and division of labor. Engeström conceptualizes the idea of the activity system outlined in Figure 1 and describes his theoretical model as follows: The subject of an activity system refers to the individual (or individuals) whose agency is chosen as the point of view (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008).

The object “refers to the ‘raw material’ or ‘problem space’ at which the activity is directed and which is molded or transformed into outcomes with the help of physical and symbolic, external and internal tools” (Engeström, 1993, p. 67). The object of the activity can be a material thing (going on a trip), something less tangible (designing a work plan) or totally intangible (figuring out a mathematical object or learning a new language) as participants in the activity can manipulate and transform it (Kuutti, 1996). To understand an activity system, it is necessary to understand its object as the central aspect that differentiates one activity from another (Leont'ev, 1978, p. 50). Because object-related motives drive the collective activity, there is a particular focus on what really motivates (or drives) individuals toward achieving their objects (Stetsenko, 2005). The individual’s (or subject’s) orientation and motivation toward
objects or “things-to-be-acted-upon” is influenced by their personal and cultural-historical experiences (Foot, 2014, 10). Again, this is what distinguishes this theory from other human development theories.

Tools (or artifacts) mediate the activity. They can be external or material (e.g., a textbook, a computer) or internal (e.g., language or prior knowledge). The subject uses the tools to act on the object or work toward the desired outcome, which can be either desired or unanticipated (Engeström, 1993; Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008). Tools reflect past individuals’ experiences and such experiences are accumulated in the physical and operational properties of tools (e.g., shape or material), as well as in the knowledge of how the tools are used (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012). Tools are crafted by individuals at a certain point in time and adapted over time, this is to say, “their development is shaped by the needs, values, and norms of the culture in which they are created and used” (Foot, 2014, p. 5).

Community denotes the group of actors who engage or join in an activity or practice and who have a common object of activity (Engeström, 1993). Lave’s and Wenger notion of the community of practice is useful to understand the component of community. For them, the concept of community does not make reference to some rudimentary cultural sharing entity or defined identifiable group existing within socially visible boundaries. They describe community as participants’ engagement in the activity system in which they share understandings of things they need to do and the consequences of doing it (or not) (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Rules are explicit and implicit norms and conventions that regulate, govern, or constrain actions toward an object and interactions between individuals within the system (Engeström, 1993). Furthermore, rules denote formal or informal conventions that can either constrain or liberate the activity, offering the subject direction on procedures and acceptable interactions to take with community individuals participating in the activity (Engeström, 1993). A very basic example is the convention (implicit norm) of taking off the hat to sing the national anthem.

Lastly, the division of labor refers to the shared tasks or responsibilities among community individuals (Engeström, 1993). It also involves the division of roles and power and
status (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008). The division of labor incorporates dynamics of gender, power, class, age, and they are specific to particular contexts (Van der Riet, 2011). The division of labor in an activity creates different positions for the participants as they carry their own experiences (Engeström, 2001).

Mediation, tensions, and historicity are three significant aspects that are part of activity system analysis. First, the concept of mediation was developed by Vygotsky (1978) to explain the process that enables human cognitive processes development through interaction with artifacts, tools, and social others in a context. According to Vygotsky the relationship between an individual and an object is never direct but is always mediated by tools and signs. Individuals relate to and create meaning to the world through tools; therefore, mediation (and mediating artifacts) become a central feature of human activity (Engeström, 1987).

Next, within the activity system there might be tensions due to systematic contradictions between components (Engeström 1987, 1993). Tensions surface when there are conditions in the activity system preventing the subject individual (or precluding other participants’ assistance to) achieving the object. If tensions remain and are not resolved (and affect considerably the activity system) the subject might not be able to achieve the object (Engeström, 1987).

Finally, the analysis of historicity of an activity system allows us to understand how the activity system “takes shape and gets transformed” over time (Engeström, 2001, p. 136). Engeström & Miettinen (1999) suggest that an activity system takes shape and is transformed over time through the creation and use of cultural resources, namely historically formed mediating tools/artifacts. So, if we want to understand why a system is resistant to change (or develop), we need to focus on tools and problems and potentials (to change) against their own history (Van der Riet, 2011).

3.3. CHAT and the Production of Knowledge

Epistemology is defined as a theory of knowledge especially concerning “the methods, validations and possible means of achieving knowledge of reality” (Marietto, Meireles, &
Sanches, 2012, p. 96). Further, epistemology refers to the general philosophical assumption about how we can understand the world (Maxwell, 2009). CHAT (and Activity Theory) offers methodological strategies to capture how social, cultural, and historical factors foster human development and guides investigators to examine the contexts in which development takes place (Marietto, Meireles, & Sanches, 2012). CHAT as a methodological approach allows us to create knowledge of psychological problems and to understand processes of change and transformation (Riet, 2009; Van der Riet, 2011) in human behavior. Furthermore, the epistemological approach in CHAT maps the ways individuals construct knowledge in social interaction using mediational artifacts (Prawat, 1996). CHAT constitutes a conceptual system to understand knowledge construction as a constant process that is constructed from the relationship between mind and world and interactions between acting subjects and the environmental objects (Postholm, 2008). Thus knowledge is constructed “during socially mediated activity” (p. 42).

Ontology is “a concept concerned with the existence of, and relationship between different aspects of society, such as social actors, cultural norms and social structures…ontological issues are concerned with questions pertaining to the kinds of things that exist within society” (Barron, 2006, p. 1). Ontology denotes to general philosophical assumption about the nature of the world (Maxwell, 2009). Ontological issues in CHAT are concerned with the idea of human subjectivity. CHAT seeks to understand individual subjectivity as inherently collaborative processes of acting individuals, who enact collectivities by transforming them through their own individual contributions (Stetsenko, 2013). Also, the CHAT framework proposes a non-reductionist ontological outlook of human nature and development embedded in social practices that produce and are produced by social interactions and subjectivity (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2002).

According to Arias (2011), through an activity analysis, the whole (making reference to an activity system) “can be broken into its parts; the parts can even be explained one by one, but cannot lose sight of the whole, and above all, of its present and historical dynamics…” (p. 63). This activity analysis practice is key in the process of knowledge production in individuals
(Arias, 2011) in which researchers in this area engage in. Furthermore, the activity concepts developed by Vygotsky have made great contributions to the development of a social theory that recognizes processes of action and cognition (Daniels, 2008). The philosophical roots of CHAT (e.g., Vygotsky and Engeström) provide a significantly different conceptualization of the relationship between the individual and society (Van der Riet, 2009).

### 3.3.1. CHAT as an approach for understanding the development of resilience

This dissertation uses CHAT to provide a “framework for system-level analysis of culturally and historically situated, artifact-mediated sets of relations” (Foot, 2001, p. 7) to explain how transnational Latinas might create, engage in, or enact resilience. Through CHAT and transnational feminism, I reconceptualize the current understanding of the idea of resilience as an individual trait (particularly among transnational Latinas), to present resilience as *transnational Latinas’ agentive active practice of negotiating their socio-emotional and the material environments (with the use of tools available and the ayuda from community individuals and public institutions) in order to constantly experience the feeling of salir adelante, that in every moment of their lives, they are moving themselves (and their families) forward.* Further, resilience in the present study would be perceived as transnational individuals’ capacity to construct as well as to use resources in settings as they try overcome a life challenging event through material social practices; resilience is then understood as an agentive activity achieved through practice.

CHAT analysis to understand behavior allows examining the development of resilience through simultaneous or concurrent relations between the individual and the context. As individuals change their understandings and responses, so do the context(s) they inhabit (Edwards, 2007). CHAT and transnational feminism reconceptualize transnational women as creators and transformers of their outer and inner worlds; therefore, Latinas are perceived as capable of mastering their own lives and futures. This line of reasoning is completely consonant with human agency as a central focus (Yamazumi, 2009). Additionally, CHAT as a theoretical framework resonates with the methodological strategy of this study (ethnographic research) as it
offers an approach to examine the interactions between individuals and the world in a natural setting (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

In activity theory, the unit of analysis is the object-oriented activity itself (Engeström, 1987). This study positions resilience, an agentive activity system, as the central unit of analysis in understanding transnational Latinas ability to overcome life-challenging events. Conceiving resilience as an inner phenomenon or as a result of the impact of context on the individual diminish the significant role of individuals as active agents and participants on their own development. Resilience should be perceived as a learning dynamic process of interaction between sociocultural contexts and developing individuals (Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999). I challenge the traditional view of resilience and show how a shift of focus on activity, rather than individual or context, makes more practical sense for real-world transnational Latina mothers.

Object-oriented activity is described as a mediating process in which individuals participate, driven by their goals and motives (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The environment comprises discrete objectively existing entities, namely objects. Objects have their “objective” meanings, determined by their relationship with the subject and other entities existing in the world. The subject has to reveal the objective meaning of the object in order to meet her/his needs (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012, p. 29). Based on Wertsch’s (1981) work and their past investigation on objects of activity (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006), Kaptelinin & Nardi (2012) define object of activity and its importance as follows:

Object-orientedness states that all human activities are directed toward their objects and are differentiated from one another by their respective objects. Objects motivate and direct activities, around them activities are coordinated, and in them activities are crystallized when the activities are complete. Analysis of objects is therefore a necessary requirement for understanding human activities, both individual and collective ones (p. 29).

The idea of object-oriented activity is useful in the present study because it provides for rich description of the way Latina immigrants interpret a task or problem, which later shapes the
way they respond to it. The need to overcoming life’s setback(s) or challenge(s) would serve as the object of the activity.

The notion of the mediational conception of human mental functions undermines the idea that cognitive processes (and agency processes) inhabit the mind of individuals (Van der Riet, 2009). Engeström and Miettinen (1999) note that individuals’ cognitive action (private and internal mental) is a process derived from individuals’ participation in their social world through culturally mediated practices. Therefore, Latinas might act privately or mentally to the extent that they are culturally and historically located (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). Further, CHAT positions participation of transnational Latinas in a cooperatively undertaken mediated activity, focusing on the mutually constituted relationships between activity (perceived as an ongoing historical cultural system), and their practices and artifacts through which the activity is instantiated (Wells, 2006).

Another key concept within the CHAT agenda relevant to my analysis and understanding of resilience as an agentive activity is human agency. Human agency has been described as the creation of new tools and forms of activity through which individuals transform their internal and external worlds and thus control their own lives (Engeström, 2005a). Furthermore, Engeström, adopting a social notion of human agency, contends that responses to problems call for unpredictable collaborative and negotiated responses. He describes human agency as a powerful set of collective intentions, in which “intentionality capital and object-oriented interagency are offered as ways of beginning to describe what enables the “reaching out” that occurs when people operate across activity systems” (Edwards, 2009, p. 199). From this perspective, and in this study, agency is not understood as an individualistic characteristic; rather, it refers to a collective activity where other people contribute to its achievement.

Lastly, CHAT as a framework allows for an examination of how transnational Latinas act on their worlds through the use of conceptual and material artifacts available to them in the social world (mediating artifacts that take part in the process of development of resilience and practice), and how these women shape their worlds by their actions on it (resilience is
constructed and shaped by their actions in their world) (Edwards, 2013). So approaches or interventions to facilitate resilience might not be about changing transnational Latinas’ behaviors or states of mind, but rather about enabling them to change or reconstruct their own situations. Therefore, this ethnographic study seeks to capture the mediating artifacts or tools used by Latina immigrants that may assist them toward overcoming adversity and the hardships of everyday life. In the current study, a particular emphasis is placed on macro-level entities or structures such as social class, race and ethnicity, institutional structures, and social power, as these structures place Latinas in a different material life.

3.3.2. Transnational feminism and CHAT: Their meeting points to explain resilience as an agentive activity achieved through practice

Cultural-historical and feminist theorists acknowledge the significance of going beyond the individual domain when examining human development and action because it challenges traditional notions of individualism (John-Steiner, 1999). John-Steiner claims that both theoretical perspectives have critical contributions towards each other. For instance, crucial for both is that individuality or the constitution of the individual is the result of relationships with others (John-Steiner, 1999) all embedded in larger-scale social forces (Fernandes, 2013). Such a claim is the antithesis of Western traditional views of individuals as subjects driven by intrinsic forces (John-Steiner, 1999). Furthermore, through a feminist lens, cultural-historical researchers can distinguish and understand the specific social and individual practices women engage in to achieve an object. In addition to that, John-Steiner discussed shared and complementary themes between the two theoretical frameworks: a) the social sources of development; b) the importance of culturally-patterned practices and power relations; and c) the mutually and constituting roles of self and community (p. 210).

Despite the significance of incorporating CHAT with feminist perspectives to understand human activity, it remains largely absent in contemporary scholarship (John-Steiner, 1999). Only few feminist researchers and activity theorists have come forward to fill this theoretical gap (John-Steiner, 1999; Park, 2008; Hasse, 2009). Until this present study on transnational Latina
mothers, none have specifically incorporated transnational feminism to understand resilience activity.

Engeström’s model of activity system makes possible the examination of a multitude of relations within a triangular structure of resilience as an agentive activity achieved through practice. An activity system model is employed in this study as a methodological and graphical tool for mapping out information in an organized fashion (Moller & Harvey, 2009) in order to isolate the most significant factors that need to be addressed and analyzed to understand resilience as an agentive activity. In addition, I infuse transnational feminist perspectives in some of components of the CHAT model (subjects, objects, tools) that would help me re-understand both experiences and context within distinct social spaces. Transnationalism works as a distinctive feature on the CHAT model because it acknowledges and identifies the connections and exchanges between origin and host contexts that might assist (or deter) transnational Latinas in achieving resilience. Next, I explain how I am integrating transnational and feminist perspectives in the analysis of each component of CHAT.
For instance, in the triangle model presented in figure 2, a *transnational subject* in the model describes a Latina as a transnational individual who keeps strong ties and contact with her come country. This transnational Latina is perceived as “a free being [who] pursues her own goals, forms her life projects, [and] can cease to follow existing norms and rules” (Lektorsky, 2009, p. 79) in order to achieve her life goals. The *transnational Latina* is a woman, is Latina, is immigrant, and may be poor and undocumented. The transnational feminist lens allows for an analysis of her social positions/categories in a mainstream society that is driven by global processes.

The *transnational Latina subject* is also depicted by practices she has developed and knowledge she has acquired from her living experiences (Moll, 2011). She too might be able to manage problems, often accompanied by feelings of distress or excessive concern, by controlling herself (controlarse), resigning herself (resignarse), overcoming herself (sobreponerse), and/or through endurance (aguantarse). The *transnational Latina subject* is a woman who has to confront, negotiate, accommodate, and transcend difference (Sandoval, 2004). She is the woman “whose agency is chosen as the point of view in the analysis” (Engeström, 1990, p.79).

The transnational Latina’s *need* to overcome a life struggle is examined as the *motive* towards the resilience activity is directed to. The *motive* is the *object* that the subject ultimately needed to satisfy. The *object* in the CHAT model, from a transnational feminist stance, refers to life (emotional/material) constraints that are often unique to the lives of transnational Latinas. Poverty, racial discrimination, and isolation are the main *objects* that this study seeks to understand (and expects to find as key objects in the life of participants). Poverty (and economic marginalization), racial discrimination, isolation, and unauthorized immigration status have been found to contribute and exacerbate oppressions in women (Crenshaw, 1991), including low-income and marginalized transnational Latinas, with serious repercussions on their wellbeing. Therefore, the *objects* in this study are analyzed through transnational feminist lens to attend the relations of power and inequity and the connections between local, regional, national, and international processes affecting the transnational experience (Fernandes, 2013).
A transnational Latina (subject) may overcome a life challenge (or satisfy her needs) through *mediating artifacts*, that is, useful instruments or *tools* for engaging the object of the activity. *Tools* can be artifacts and social others acting as resources for a transnational Latina in the activity, for example family or community members from the host country. These *tools* in the CHAT model can be material and emotional assets and cultural and transnational practices that may work as resources for a transnational Latina. These *transnational/transcultural tools* connect individuals (transnational subjects in this case) to distant homelands (Haller & Landolt, 2005) so they can establish or keep border-crossing relationships that afford them different types of support. In addition, there may be *psychological tools* affecting mind and behavior (and resilience development); for example, the knowledge and skill acquired in their home country for cooking and selling food to achieve some economic security in the U.S.

*Rules* (implicit and explicit) constitute the norms, conventions, behaviors, gender role expectations (within her social structure) or ideological frames through which the transnational Latina might behave; these rules govern and regulate her actions and interactions within the resilience activity system, for example, a patriarchal social or family system may allow or judge certain female behaviors (e.g., leaving their children in the care of babysitters to work outside the home because she needs money to satisfy her *material need* of buying food).

A transnational Latina’s resilience practice may involve the participation of other members of the *community* or the “community of significant others” who co-engage the activity’s object (Foot, 2001), and who may shape and reshape the conditions of resilience development. The *community* is the social reference group that a transnational Latina identifies being a member of, while exercising resiliency practices. Members of this group may participate in (and collaborate with) activities with a transnational Latina while she tries to overcome a particular life-challenging event. Some of these members may live in their home country and may constitute a virtual or *imagined community* with whom a transnational Latina may forge webs or circuits of communications and relationships. For instance, calling a relative from their country of origin to find solace and comfort during distressing family situations.
The division of labor of the activity involves the division of tasks and roles among these individuals within the activity. One example for this study would be the gender relations in the resilience activity. A transnational Latina and her partner might assume different roles (or share the tasks) that are related to the activity of overcoming a life challenging situation.

I should like to close this illustration by saying that the agentive activity of resilience among transnational Latinas in the CHAT model should be understood as a social practice, crafted and enacted within a particular interactive, social, historical and cultural context (Kippax, 2003), which in this case is a transnational context. In sum, transnational Latinas can be perceived as “actively engaged with the environment…. always in the flow of doing something—the something being a historical, collectively defined, socially produced activity—and it is within this meaningful intent toward their surroundings that they respond to whatever they encounter in the environment” (Holland et al. 1998, p. 39). Together, the transnational feminist lens with CHAT provides a method for understanding and describing the historical, collectively defined, socially produced resilience activity and identify the tools/artifacts that mediate this human activity.
CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter lays out the methodology for the present feminist ethnographic study involving five transnational Latina mothers living in a Midwestern rural area of the U.S. The first section elaborates on qualitative inquiry, the research paradigm, and its associated epistemological and ontological assumptions. In the next section the trustworthiness of the study is described. In the following section I explain the ethical considerations for this study as well as the role of the researcher. Next, I describe the main research procedures for a feminist ethnographic design, and later, I provide information detailing the sampling, participant descriptions, and research site. The next section outlines the data collection procedures, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and field notes. Then, I described the data collection procedures and data management. The following section discusses the frameworks that will be drawn from for data analysis. This includes a discussion of techniques for data analysis suggested by several qualitative and ethnographic researchers (Charmaz (2006); Loftman et al., (2006); Miles & Huberman (1994); Spradley (1980)) and its pertinence to research with CHAT, resilience, and transnational feminist perspectives. The last section offers a chapter summary.

I take a moment here to remind the reader that the guiding questions for this study were:

- What are the challenging life events experienced by transnational Latinas?
- How do Latinas practice resilience in response to those life challenges?

4.1. Qualitative Inquiry, Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions

“The qualitative approach to research is a unique grounding—the position from which to conduct research — that fosters particular ways of asking questions and particular ways of thinking through problems” (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 3). Such an approach prioritizes a focus on the social meanings individuals attribute to their experiences, situations and circumstances, aside from the meanings individuals embed into texts and other objects (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Qualitative investigators continuously come to their inquiry with certain
views of what knowledge is and what they can do to attain knowledge. It is important, almost required, that researchers are clear about their own beliefs and assumptions about their inquiry. This has been called research paradigm (Bryman, 2004; Morgan, 2007; Maxwell, 2009; President & Fellows Harvard University, 2008).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) define a research paradigm as the “basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator” (p. 105). A paradigm is the net that holds the investigator’s ontology, epistemology, and theoretical position (Mayan, 2009). Briefly, an ontology refers to “a philosophical belief system about the nature of social reality — what can be known and how” (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 4). The ontology assumption concerns two questions: is there a predictable real social world? Is the world constructed through human interactions? (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). A research paradigm also has an epistemology, a philosophical belief system about relationships between the “knower” and the “known” (President & Fellows Harvard University, 2008; Mayan, 2009). A researcher’s epistemological position reflects the “view of what we can know about the world and how we can know it” (Marsh & Furlong 2002, p. 18-9). Lastly, a paradigm contains a theoretical position/perspective (or methodology) that encompasses particular lenses, philosophies, and theoretical foundations that are referred to throughout qualitative writing (Mayan, 2009). Theoretical perspectives position the researcher with particular lens and theory to understand and explain the world (Mayan, 2009).

The present exploratory study is governed by a critical theory paradigm. The critical approach asserts that knowledge of the social world is constructed and reconstructed by individuals in evolving power-laden settings (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). A critical stance rejects that idea of an absolute truth and challenges categories that seek to essentialize difference. For instance, the notion of similarity or sameness among individuals that represent one group tend to understand “women’s experiences” as the same regardless of their race, social

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4 Exploratory studies seek to investigate a phenomenon that has been underresearched. The information garnered is preliminary data that helps shape the direction of forthcoming research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).
class, sexuality, religion or nationality” (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 20). The current study sought to challenge such a position and describe how the lives of Latina immigrants are constructed and reconstructed, and how specific structures of power oppress them as low-class women, Latinas, mothers, immigrants, undocumented, heterosexual, and Christian or Catholics.

Additionally, this study draws on critical theory views to create knowledge that would destabilize power relations and symbolic dominance (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) by challenging dominant ideologies of knowledge that maintain values and beliefs usually put forth by those in power (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). For instance, Latina immigrants have been characterized within mainstream American society as “illegals,” vulnerable, weak, and powerless. This type of public rhetoric only serves to justify any type of violence against them (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

In addition, I seek to assess the unique perspectives and experiences of Latina immigrants with a close examination of the “micro-politics of power” (Foucault, 1976) that may operate in their everyday life, and may shape their capacities to withstand difficulties. One particular goal was to critically describe how Latina immigrants come to resist (and act upon) social inequalities and to overcome the odds against them.

This study privileges a materialist-realist ontology stance. Such a position is based on the premise that reality can be understood only as connected to power. Reality (or multiple realities) from this ontological position “makes a material difference in terms of race, class, and gender” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 27) and such realities are structured by means or are a consequence of those factors (Mayan, 2009). Critical theory confronts the assumptions of positivist models of research by developing the work through multiple stages (McTaggart, 1997) including planning, observing others, and self-reflecting (Kidd & Kral, 2005). Furthermore, the “ontology of knowing” from a transnational feminist perspective does not only represent another part of the world but also “is engaged in a set of knowledge practices that materially mark this other part of the world” (Fernandes, 2013, p. 122).
In the current study, the ontological epistemological assumptions of critical theory hold subjective (Hutton, 2009) and constructive positions. A guiding understanding within subjective positions is that the evidence gathered during research is never independent from researchers’ selves and is inextricably connected to their perspectives. Therefore, researchers provide a more introspective account of self in the process of fieldwork (Preissle & Grant, 2004). In the constructive section of the scale, the investigator is in relation with the respondent (or other sources of data); s/he not only accounts for it throughout qualitative writing but also makes it explicit (Mayan, 2009). Knowledge from this assumption is mediated reflectively between the researcher and the researched by sharing ideas and respecting the knowledge of others as a means to exercise action (Kidd & Kral, 2005); therefore, “subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning” (Crotty, 1999, p. 9).

This study draws on feminist positions/perspectives that are based on the premise that the nature of truth “is unequal and hierarchical” (Skeggs, 1994, p. 77). Such assumption warrants the use of qualitative inquiry, ethnographic strategies, in-depth interviews, and critical analytical approaches. I agree with transnational feminist Fernandes (2013) regarding the importance of paying attention to research representation (e.g., ethnography) and the strategies of representation so the knowledge derived from them do not recolonize women in the same ways they have been in the past. Research questions, data collection and analysis, and findings from a feminist perspective should be conceptualized through a gendered stance (Mayan, 2009). Approaching research from a feminist perspective entails placing women as a main source of knowledge and offers a privileged standpoint in discovering different formations of truth (Agra & Adan, n.d.). It is my goal as a researcher to reveal the social positions and gender inequalities (Mayan, 2009) of my participants and challenge dominant values and ideologies around them.

Few studies in the field of resilience and Latino populations draw upon ontological and epistemological positions that see evidence as socially derived knowledge in natural settings (Sparks, 1999; Shetgiri et al. 2009). Such positions prioritize qualitative data collection through observations of interactions and practices of individuals, as well as the way they make meaning
and act on them (Mason, 1996; Gleason, 2012). Thus, the present study drew upon a critical theory paradigm from materialist-realist ontology and subjective and constructive stances. The following section explains the theoretical and methodological considerations with respect to feminist research.

### 4.2. Feminist Ethnographic Strategy

As the previous sections outlined the research paradigm as well as the epistemological and ontological assumptions, the subsequent sections will go into greater detail about the ethnographic research methodology with a feminist perspective component, and the rationale for the data collection approaches that were adopted. Next, I present issues related to the trustworthiness of the study and the researcher’s positionality. The following sections will present the groundwork for the ways in which data in this research venture was collected, interpreted and presented, including the different approaches and techniques for data analysis and display.

Contemporary ethnographic research is grounded in social constructivism, interpretivism, critical, and other connected paradigms (Crotty, 1998). Ethnographies from these approaches are grounded in an epistemology that rejects the idea of an absolute truth claiming that “truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world.” Therefore, “meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8-9). In this research fashion, ethnographers participate in the lives of the researched in order to observe social communication and interaction (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999); they also learn through systematic observation in the research arena by interviewing and recording what they see and hear, while learning the meaning individuals make to what they do (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

An ethnographic strategy resembles developmental approaches in cultural-historical activity theory with regard to its orientation to individuals’ practice and participation in change processes (Chambers, 2000). An ethnographic inquiry guided by the CHAT theoretical framework allows for understandings of human action as historically situated (Chambers, 2000).
It also helps to examine human actors that are “embedded in multiple social relations, whether defined as community, a group, a complex organization, a class, a political party, a marriage, or a religious or ethnic group” (Alford, 1998, p. 15). Additionally, CHAT enables an analysis of these different social relations as context in which social actors construct their own self (Alford, 1998). I also borrow from ethnographic inquiry (infused with transnational feminist perspectives) as the present study engages in a cultural assessment by investigating broader political, social, and economic issues, and border-crossing activities and experience (Fernandes, 2013) and explores conflict, struggle, constraint, and power (Schwandt, 2001) of transnational Latinas.

Ethnographic research is a methodology “grounded in a commitment to the first hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting on the basis of (though not exclusively by) participant observation (Atkinson et al., 2001, p. 4). This research methodology is used to understand ways of life from a native point of view (Spradley, 1980). Ethnographic research enquires into what the world is like for individuals who are different, who do not belong to a mainstream group. It is important to note that the term culture is an ambiguous one, but ethnographers have come to a general use of it as the shared meanings present in any given group of individuals (Spradley, 1980; Chambers, 2004).

Ethnography is deep-rooted in the concept of culture. Ethnography inquiry refers to the work of describing or interpreting a culture (Spradley, 1980). The result of ethnographic inquiry, the story or description, represents a theoretically informed understanding of the culture of the setting, community, or group of individuals (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Theories of culture are situated in time and space and are built as explanations of how individuals think and behave (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). When ethnographers investigate other cultures, they must make assumptions of what people do (cultural behavior), what people know, believe, think, and understand (cultural knowledge), and the things people make and use (cultural artifacts). Ethnographers must distinguish among these aspects to engage in ethnographic fieldwork (Spradley, 1980; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Reading exemplifies a cultural behavior; a cultural artifact in this case would be a book or a newspaper; and the cultural knowledge would
involve the things an individual would have to know in order to read; for example, grammatical and spelling rules or previous exposure to books or similar material (Spradley, 1980).

Cultural theory scholars argue for a focus on how individuals participate in everyday cultural practices, as it provides a direction for understanding such practices as constant processes operating under powerful structural constraints (Levinson & Holland, 1996, p. 14; McDermott & Varenne, 2006). Thus, the present ethnographic research focused on the cultural practices of Latina immigrants that mediated their development of resilience as they faced constraints arising from structures of race, gender, class, citizenship and culture.

The scope of ethnographic research designs can range along a continuum from macro-ethnography (e.g., numerous communities) to micro-ethnography (e.g., a single family). This idea is presented in Table 1, adapted from Spradley (1980, p. 30). Macro-ethnography requires extended time periods of research and involves numerous ethnographers. On the other hand, micro-ethnography of a single social situation can be accomplished in a shorter time (Spradley, 1980). The present study is short in scope as it explores a single social situation: it describes the world of five rural transnational Latinas from their perspectives to better understand how they achieve resilience as they confront life-challenging circumstances. I want to remind the reader

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<th>SCOPE OF RESEARCH</th>
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Table 1: Spradley's variations in research scope.
that this study is described as ethnographic research rather than ethnography because, although I used ethnographic methods (in-depth interviews and participant observation), and the research was conducted in a natural setting rather than an artificial setting (Willis, 2007), this study did not entail deep involvement with a specific culture or community (Preissle & Grant, 2004). The concept of context refers to individuals, groups, institutions, history, and socio-economic and political factors that influence/shape the behaviors and beliefs of people (LeComte & Schensul, 1999). Context also denotes to the cultural, historical, political and social relations that connect individuals, groups, organizations or institutions (LeComte & Schensul, 1999), an aspect that closely resembles the analytical approach in (and methodological intention of) CHAT, the theoretical framework of this study.

As previously noted, ethnography is a research methodology that is informed by particular theoretical frameworks, such as social constructivism or critical theory. Previous ethnographic fieldwork has been firmly located in the critical tradition and has used CHAT as a tool of analysis. Researchers have been interested in addressing issues facing immigrant Mexican students within educational institution spaces (Bruna, 2010a; Gildersleeve, 2010) as well as housewives’ activism learning in community-based organizations (Park, 2008). Their research entailed data collection from fieldwork on topics such as learning activities of high school students; college-going and post-secondary opportunity; and adult participation and learning in community-based organizations. Their work, with a critical orientation, embodied assumptions of socio-historical and cultural practice influences; regrettably, much of the ethnographic work that has relied on CHAT as the primary analytical model has focused on understanding young Mexicans’ educational and Korean women’s learning (Park, 2008). The ethnographic approach in the present study seeks to address the dearth of cultural-historical inquiry of transnational Latinas by following, during approximately a 6-month period, their life histories and life challenges.
4.3. Feminist Perspectives in the Present Study

The present study is informed by a critical theory, more specifically transnational feminist perspective stances. Feminists of color have argued that traditional feminist narratives developed from white female experience disregards the ways of thinking/knowing of women of color (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Consequently, minority feminists sought for a “democratization of knowledge” (Tedlock, 2003) and turned toward qualitative and ethnographic inquiries grounded in critical and constructivist frameworks that would 1) accommodate notions of class, gender, race, culture and power, and would 2) validate social criticism and negotiated meaning (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 27).

Contemporary fieldwork and ethnography can be located in the idealism position of the nature of reality; that is, “the reality is a creation of the human mind and consequently is unstable” (Preissle & Grant, 2004). In this line of research, fieldworkers understand social conditions and meanings as fluid and changeable, and advocate for a fieldwork method that allows them to become a part of the meaning-making process (Blumer, 1969). Feminist researchers continue this line of argument by challenging assumptions of social life as a concrete reality, which has done nothing other than subordinate the experiences and perspectives of less powerful people. Thus, a feminist position in research allows researchers to “capture women’s lived experiences in a respectful matter that legitimates women’s voice as source of knowledge” (Liambuttong, 2007, p. 10).

Feminists have relied on qualitative inquiries to study women’s experiences (Weber Cannon, Higginbotham & Leung, 1988; Grant, Ward & Rong, 1987). Qualitative approaches and qualitative data gathering techniques in feminist research can help investigators to uncover and reveal social and power relations that (re)produce gender-specific struggles on the lives of women (Garcia, 2009a). For instance, participant observation with a feminist orientation allows researchers to see female participants as full members of the socioeconomic, political (Reinharz, 1992), and historical worlds of which they are a part. Similarly, through in-depth interviews, the researcher explores women’s views of reality and can access their ideas, thoughts, and memories.
in their own words (Reinharz, 1992). Interviewing from a feminist standpoint is consistent with feminists’ interest in avoiding control over participants and developing a sense of connectedness with them (Reinharz, 1992).

A feminist position provides several methodological implications for the study of the development of resilience of marginalized women, in particular low-income transnational Latinas. First, I use transnational feminist stances as a stepping-stone towards an analysis of border-crossing issues, and transnational spaces and forces (which are the product of such cross-national experience) that shape transnational women’s lives (Fernandes, 2013).

Second, a feminist perspective is suitable to the methodology of this research project because of its emphasis on shifting the point of view of research to those who have been historically and socially downgraded and racialized. Feminist stances on research not only help researchers to explore, uncover, and describe patriarchal social dynamics and relationships (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) in contemporary societies but also to produce valuable knowledge that would make changes in the lives of the researched women (Letherby, 2005). According to Epstein, Jayaratne & Stewart (1983), feminist researchers should always ask themselves what do they need to create a positive impact on women’s lives. Feminist perspectives with the inclusion of ethnographic fieldwork can move research toward improving the lives of women due to a focus on promoting the need for social change and the value of diversity (Letherby, 2005). Further, it can provide a deep understanding of participants’ experiences with broader structures of social power and control that might reinforce their existing social images (Mayan, 2009, p. 39).

Third, an ethnographic approach in the spirit of feminism uncovers meanings and perceptions of the research participants, viewing these understandings against the background of the individuals’ overall worldview or ‘culture’ (Crotty, 1998). In line with this approach, the researcher, or in this case the critical ethnographer, uses her privilege and skills to cross borders of difference and break through to hear the voices of women whose experiences have been excluded from research (Madison, 2012). This means that the researcher intends to create
emancipatory knowledge and increase public awareness and understandings of the participants’ lives. In her feminist methods book, Reinharz (1992) cites social scientist Renate Klein, “we cannot speak for others, but that we can, and must, speak out for others” (p. 16). In the present study, I do not intend to speak for transnational Latinas, my participants. Rather, I recount their life stories and incorporate my assumptions and reflections throughout the whole research process (Eghbal, 2011). Considering the feminist vision of empowering women through research, I center their voices and views of reality to generate new knowledge.

Fourth, my choice for adopting a feminist position in this study enables me to explore the interplay of social structure and agency. Feminist perspectives allow me to understand how Latinas construct change in their lives and that of their families as they often resist and undermine social oppression because of their race, class, gender (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 2003) and citizenship.

Next, the present research design calls for a methodological perspective that allows us to examine diversities instead of universals (Scott, 1997). A feminist position makes it possible for a new way of analyzing and understanding constructions of meaning and power relations (Scott, 1997) shaping the lives of a diverse group of women. According to transnational and Chicana feminists, Latinas are exposed to multiple social worlds because of their social class, language, sexuality, nationality, colonization, and cultures (Lugones, 2003; Sandoval, 2000; Anzaldúa, 2003). In an attempt to transform themselves and their worlds, transnational Latinas may develop the skill of navigating and challenging linear notions of social reality (Hurtado, 2010).

Also, transnational feminists urge for “the rewriting of history based on the specific locations and histories of struggles of people of color and postcolonial people, and on the day-to-day strategies of survival utilized by such people” (Mohanty, Russo & Torres, 1991, p. 10). The feminist approach in my study sought to empower transnational Latinas through the de-mystification of ideologies of gender, sexuality, race, and citizenship that affect their daily lives (Mohanty, Russo & Torres, 1991). My ultimate goal was to disrupt and destabilize mainstream
views of Latinas as powerless and weakened—dominant discourses that seek to subordinate them based on their gender, race, and cultural allegiance (Groenewold, 2005).

Feminist research is committed to work against those who perpetuate the exploitation of women (Reinharz, 1992). A central characteristic of feminist research is that rejects the exploitative relationship that takes place when researchers investigate individuals to benefit their own careers or of the other research’s stakeholders, and to recognize the positive or negative effects on the researched individuals (Gorelick, 1991). The use of a feminist perspective is of great significance because my research remained ethical and principled, faithful to the tenets of the feminist value system, faithful to the experiences of participants, faithful to a social change agenda (promoting the value of diversity in research), and faithful to a feminist “movimiento toward a subjected self whose agency serves as a liberating force” (Groenewold, 2005, p. 93).

Lastly, the use of critical methodology enables the ongoing consideration of the relationship between researchers and researched, particularly in studying private and sensitive issues. Critical researchers, specifically feminist researchers, work to achieve strong level of comfort with their participants by breaking down the barriers that exist between the researcher and the researched, and by providing a safe space where participants can comfortably converse and develop a relationship more like friendship or sisterhood instead of conventional positions between strangers (Boom, 1998).

As demonstrated by the context of rural areas and immigrant life described in the literature review section, the economic and social discrimination experienced by transnational Latinas warrant methodological approaches that capture the nature of the power relations embedded in their social lives. I studied participants in their natural setting, closely examining their ways of life, and describing their cultural values and practices (Van Maanen, 1988). My intention was to immerse myself in the daily lives of the study participants in order to gain access to their social and environmental contexts. This study entailed periods of observation in which I took the role of participant-observer and I documented observations in detailed field notes (White, Drew, & Hay, 2009).
In sum, drawing on my fieldwork into transnational Latinas’ daily lives, I worked within feminist and ethnographic frameworks to challenge standard social definitions, particularly the dominant notion of Latinas as victims, fragile or powerless individuals. As Latinas’ life challenges and the way they respond to them are related to larger political and economic forces, distinctions between those socially relevant structures and Latinas’ experience of/with them were positioned to uncover the multiple relations of power they face.

4.4. Trustworthiness of Study

Numerous steps were followed to maximize the trustworthiness of this research. Trustworthiness follows the tenets of the rigorous criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Miles and Huberman (1994), namely confirmability (parallel to objectivity), credibility (parallel to internal validity), transferability (parallel to external validity), and dependability (parallel to reliability). It should suffice to note that this study, like most of qualitative (and feminist) studies, was “guided by the ethic to remain loyal or true to the phenomena under study, rather than to any particular set of methodological techniques or principles” (Altheide & Johnson, 1998, p. 290). Therefore, I only used two tenets of the rigorous criteria: Confirmability and credibility. I decided to use these precepts to verify my own understandings and interpretations of findings and to follow specific steps for research procedures.

4.4.1. Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative inquiry requires a researcher to certify that data collection and interpretations are accurate, and not fabrications of the inquirer’s imagination (Schwandt, 2001). It also entails explicitness of the unavoidable biases that exist (Miles, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 278) specify a set of relevant issues that help to address this issue. I followed most of those issues in my study. First, the study’s methods and procedures are described explicitly and in detail (see information presented below). Second, the reader is able to follow the actual sequence of how data were collected, processed, condensed, and displayed for conclusions (see data analysis section). Next, the conclusions of this study are explicitly
connected with exhibits of displayed data. Last, I have been explicit and self-aware about my personal assumptions and insider/outsider positions in the research process (see 4.5.1. *Positioning myself: My role as a researcher*).

Confirmability is based on the acknowledgment that the research inquiry is never objective (Morrow, 2005). It is based on the perspective that research results must represent, as far as is (humanly) possible, the phenomenon that has been researched, and the researcher’s biases (Morrow, 2005). Sandra Harding (2004) calls for a “strong objectivity” in feminist research, which demands that the subject and object(s) of knowledge be positioned at the same critical trajectory. Harding draws from standpoint approaches to consider the subject of knowledge as culturally, historically, and socially embodied that is also part of the object of knowledge.

In Harding’s thesis, objects of knowledge appear to social scientists only as they are previously socially constituted in some of the ways that individuals and their communities are already socially constituted for the social scientist (p. 133). Objects of knowledge then become socially constructed “through the shapes and meanings these objects gain for scientists because of earlier generations of scientific discussion about them” (p. 133). Therefore, strong objectivity requires researchers to critically identify the interests, beliefs, and values that have shaped the results of the sciences (Harding, 2004). This critical perspective of objectivity in feminist research informs my ethnographic study as I attempt to situate myself in socially situated grounds (subject of knowledge) as a resource for maximizing objectivity (Harding, 2004).

4.4.2. Credibility

Credibility suggests that the findings of the study should be accurate and credible from the viewpoint of the reader, the researcher, and the participants (Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Credibility involves considerations of the fit between research questions, data collection methods, and analytic procedures (Howe & Eisenhart, 1992). It is also involves attention to the validity of the data analysis and interpretation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). These issues are presented and explained in the data analysis section. Other strategies used to
enhance research credibility include prolonged engagement in field, persistent observation in the field, and member checks. I was involved in the research field for about seven months and I spent a lot of time with each Latina. I also conducted prolonged participant observations during formal and informal everyday life activities of participants. Long-term participant observation provided me with additional data about specific situations and events in the life of Latinas (Maxwell, 2009).

Critical scholars reject the idea of member checks to verify the accuracy of participants’ experiences as they trust and respect all data generated and co-constructed in inquiry (Gildersleeve, 2010). While I agree with that thesis, I relied on member checks with my participants to verify my meaning making of their experiences. I wanted to make sure I understood the meaning they attributed to different objects, life events, and relationships with people around them (Krauss, 2005). Thus, I involved my respondents in reviewing the transcripts, most importantly, about my assumptions and interpretations of the results.

After analyzing the data, I offered my participants the option of reviewing and confirming the consistency and accuracy of my interpretations of interviews, observations, and field notes. I met with Latinas individually for about 1-2 hours, showed the transcripts, and presented my interpretations. For each individual I created a file with a compilation of findings related to their life challenges and the ways they worked towards overcoming those challenges. In the summary of the findings in a Word document, I organized one theme called “challenges” and included what the transnational Latinas told me were their challenges. I also included a theme named “ways of being strong” and other section called “things and people” who helped them to feel better during those moments of struggles. In each section, I put their quotes related to the theme and underneath my understandings and interpretations of what they were saying. I also showed them their sociogram, a graphic illustration of their social relations with other individuals in their context (see APPENDIX G). I shared with them my subjective understandings of their lives; we exchanged ideas, we interacted, we reached agreements (Krauss, 2005).
Ultimately, my participants and I engaged in a meaning making activity, participating in the mind of each other, understanding not only our words “but the meanings of those words as understood and used by” each one of us (Krauss, 2005, p. 764). Latinas’ feedback, our agreements (and disagreements), interview responses, and participant observation data were all taken as evidence regarding the validity of my accounts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Critical researchers have criticized the parallel criteria outside the postpositivist frame of research (Morrow, 2005). Scholars have included consequential validity to assess the success of the research in terms of social and political change (Patton, 2002). My strategy to guarantee the consequential validity of this research takes place in one specific way. Since my research aims to increase awareness about structures of power and oppression, it was my goal to identify and challenge these sources of inequality through my writing. Furthermore, I intended to (re) present the perspectives of a hitherto silenced population that has been disempowered (Morrow, 2005) in both research and society in general. My final goal was to achieve a collective “consciousness, a deepened solidarity and a new or renew primary or total allegiance” (Merton, 1972, p. 11) with my research participants.

4.5. Ethical Dimensions of the Study

Ethical considerations entail addressing concerns of trust (Gleason, 2012). Feminist thinkers insist we recognize the “ethic of care” as a practice involving specific acts of caring and a general “habit of mind” to care (Tronto, 2007, p. 252). The ethic of care approach provided a good starting point to set the research stage in which participants felt protected and supported. Some elements of the ethic of care were taken into account to ensure participants were in a safe and caring environment.

First, the probability of discomfort in the study, more specifically during interviews, informal visits, and participant observations was not greater than routine life. However, participants did talk and share information about their life challenges, which were sensitive and susceptible topics for them. Following the tenet of attentiveness, I sought to recognize their
needs and provide them with comfort, suspending my personal goals, ambitions (Tronto, 2007) and will to power; I was attentive to their life stories, to their suffering and resistance, to their moments of joy. While there was a risk of emotional discomfort during our conversations, it was minimized because my participants were women who expressed their willingness to talk to me about their experiences prior to being contacted. Regardless, and practicing the second dimension of care, responsibility, I emphasized and reminded respondents that they could decline to answer any question or stop the interview or observations at any point if needed.

Second, as responsibility usually becomes political (Tronto, 2007; Barad, 2007), I shared information about resources that I felt might be of assistance to my participants. For instance, I did provide information about the Public Health Nursing Services. I also shared information about the Crisis Intervention and Advocacy Center. I provided information about local health intervention services and parenting programs. In addition, information regarding public assistance for low-income families was offered. I did obtain brochures from all these places, made copies, and I gave them to my participants when I felt it was pertinent and at the end of the data collection process.

“Care as a practice involves more than simply good intentions. It requires a deep and thoughtful knowledge of the situation, and of all of actors’ situations, needs and competences” (Tronto, 2007, p. 255). Therefore, the (legal) safety and well-being of participants was a concern for me. All Latina participants were undocumented, so I explained them in great detail issues related to confidentiality and reminded them that information related to their legal status (and that of other family members) would be removed from data upon their request. Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym that was used throughout the whole research process. This procedure ensured their anonymity in the study (Pattom, 2002).

Further, Latina participants’ daily routines and activities were interrupted during the research process. I sought to decrease such interruption by clarifying the research purposes and the benefits the research might represent for them as well as the Latino community. Discomfort was also ameliorated by the fact that participants chose the places and times for visits that were
convenient for them; although the participant observation stage required me to observe them engaged in their daily life routines. In addition, I provided participants with a written consent form, a document that followed the IRB guidelines (see APPENDIX D) that explained the research procedures. The written consent form explained issues of confidentiality and participants’ rights during the study’s process. This form was available in Spanish and English so I asked participants for their language preference. All chose to read and sign the Spanish version of the form.

Finally, one of the ethnographer’s responsibilities is to make sure that participants understand the benefits of the research (Gleason, 2013). I reminded Latina respondents that participating in my study would lead to increased knowledge (deMarrais, 2004) about Latina mothers resiliency practices in response to life constraining events. Because life changes and life strain may affect the psychological functioning and adjustment of Latinas, I explained to my participants how the study results could be applied for the promotion of emotional health of Latino families. Further, once I formed a strong relationship with the study participants, I noticed they felt comfortable and grateful because they had someone who would appreciate their stories (deMarrais, 2004). Additionally, I provided them with a gift card each time we met as a form of remuneration for their participation in the study.

4.5.1. Positioning myself: My role as a researcher

“Feminists must attempt to reject the scientist/person dichotomy and, in doing so, must endeavor to dismantle the power relationship which exists between researcher and researched” (Stanley & Wise, 1983, p. 194-95).

Central to qualitative inquiry is the positionality of the researcher and the researched. LeCompte and Schensul (2010) define positionality as “the power position in which a person or group is situated socially. It is related to ascribed or achieved characteristics, such that individuals are partly defined by the situation and partly by the engagement — or agentic interaction — with the structural constraints of the situation” (p. 30). Thus, individuals, participants, and researchers in this respect, inhabit different and contradictory positions, depending on the power ascribed to
their gender, race, class status, sexual orientation, age, educational status, and culture among other characteristics (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010). The problem, then, is that higher positions in social class or education attainment, for example, generally triumph over lower status in citizenship or age (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010). Therefore, it was imperative to identify and reflect on the multiple positions of power I had in respect to my participants, and acknowledge the social positions occupied by (or ascribed to) my research respondents (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010; Stanley & Wise, 1983).

The role of the researcher in qualitative research can be either as insider or outsider. In reference to the insider position, sociologist Merton (1972) asserts that investigators who share affiliation or credentials in the same social categories as their research participants (e.g., race and gender) have a better possibility to uncover information about issues related to those people or to those categories. That is, researchers might have privileged access to information or might be entirely excluded from it by virtue of their social ascribed status or group membership (Merton, 1972). Most recently, critical researchers and ethnographers have pointed out the importance of the inquirer positions within research (Tedlock, 2003; Narayan, 1993). For example, Young (2004) claims that in particular cases the familiarity of having an insider position might promote indifference or apathy as one of the research agents might not seem to follow the conventional rules of a conversation for people who know each other. Young argues that those involved in the research process may feel they may not have to ask or say certain things to familiar others because they should already be ‘in the know’ (p. 194).

In the present study, I had the position of outsider/insider. Firstly, I recognize my outsider’s position because (1) I am childless so my experiences as a woman in this matter are not the same, in fact nonexistent; (2) I have upward mobility into a professional career and posses educational credentials (I am a doctoral student in human sciences); (3) I have opportunities for economic progress; and (4) our life-challenging circumstances, our resilience activities, and the resources available to assist us in in meeting these needs are different. These factors placed me at some level of disadvantage to deeply understand the issues I was trying to
explore. Nevertheless, it was that same outsider position that allowed me to have some sort of neutral understanding of participants’ experiences, the source of knowledge of this study.

Further, feminist researchers point out that “women’s binary view or ‘dual consciousness’—similar to the double consciousness attributed to blacks and other racial minorities—gives women a certain advantage in understanding oppressed people worldwide (Tedlock, 2003, p. 183). I embodied an insider position because of my gender, ethnicity, and place of origin (a developing country). My insider position, of course, was linked to my personal experiences. Being a Latina in our society and being exposed to discrimination and prejudice (because of my gender, race, and assumptions of immigration status) helped me to understand and sympathize with Latinas who may experience discrimination or prejudice as well. It was my insider positionality that allowed me to locate Latinas and create relationships that surpassed, at least to some degree, our differences in class, nationality, and immigration status (Deeb-Sossa & Bickman, 2008). Nevertheless, while being an immigrant Latina might have enabled me to comprehend, at some level, the experiences of other Latina immigrants, it was (and still is) impossible for me to fully comprehend the type of problems they encounter in their lives.

4.5.1.1. Traveling to my participants’ “worlds”

“A “world” in my sense may be an actual society given its dominant culture’s description and construction of life, including a construction of the relationships of production, of gender, race, etc… A “world” need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society… there may be “worlds” that construct me in ways I do not even understand. Or it may be that I understand the construction but do not hold if of myself”…. And “one can “travel” between these “worlds” and one can inhabit more than one of these “worlds” at the very same time… most of us who are outside the mainstream of the U.S. dominant construction or organization of life are “world”-travelers as a matter of necessity and of survival” (Lugones, 1997, p. 154).

Feminist and ethnographic researchers have used (or have been encourage to use) Lugones’ “world”-traveling theory to elucidate their role as researchers in their studies (Mendes Giesel, 2003; Madison, 2005). In a similar fashion, I used Lugones’ thesis to explain how I came to understand my participants during the research process. When I entered the “world” of my
participants, I entered an unfamiliar “world” as I was socially and materially advantaged (and I had a stable immigration status). The social and economic “worlds” of my participants were different; for me, it signaled disadvantage and lack of opportunity. But at the same time I noticed they have this capacity to “travel” between the Latino “world” and the Anglo “world,” and I was able to understand through our conversations how their ability to endure harsh realities mirrored a practice that was “skillful, creative, rich…[it was] a loving way of being and living” (Lugones, 1997, 148). I tried to enter the “worlds” of transnational Latinas not as a tourist (Mendes Giesel, 2003) for a leisured journey or as a colonial research explorer (Lugones, 2003). I entered their worlds as an invited guest to enjoy a hosted tour of a special event, a moment of their lives. And I felt welcomed! And I got a sense of what it means to be a Latina mother in White/Anglo “worlds.” I gained insight into what it means to be a transnational Latina who may be torn between different social (Lacroix, 2012) identities. I came to know them and understand them by learning to travel to their “worlds.”

As I “travelled” to the “worlds” of my participants, I embodied several identities with them. In that process, we became closer. When I first met them, I told Latinas about my research interests, and of course, we ended up talking about my educational background. “You are a psychologist!” they exclaimed. “That is great… I like to have someone to talk to,” some mothers said. At this point, in the initial stage of my research, I came to be perceived as a “psychologist,” someone who would listen to them, someone to whom they could trust their problems, because as a “knowledgeable person” I could help them. Immediately, my psychologist identity opened up a door to their “worlds” for me. They felt trusted and soon enough they were sharing their lives with me. As time passed, and after long-term interaction with the participants, it appeared to me that we became acquaintances with peer relationships. Participants began to perceive me as someone who they could turn to for additional help and support (e.g., asking me to call nurses to get an appointment with the doctor or calling me to give me a delicious Mexican recipe). Some of them even invited me to their children’s birthdays and family gatherings. I felt that they stopped perceiving me only as the “educated-researcher person” and my position was transferred
to a different dimension. I am positive that I was no longer a stranger to my participants and I am confident I gained their trust and confidence. However, I am uncertain whether they were able to perceive me as anything else besides a researcher. In Cotterill’s words:

One indicator of friendship is having someone to confide in and knowing that person will listen sympathetically to what you have to say. Another indication is reciprocity, in that confide in and listening are usually shared activities between close friends… But close friends do not usually arrive with a tape-recorder, listen carefully and sympathetically to what you have to say and then disappear (1992, p. 599).

Lastly, given that understanding the lives of transnational Latinas from CHAT was one of my research goals, I tried to place my class, race, culture, and gender beliefs and practices within the same historical and critical moment of my participants (Tedlock, 2003, p. 183) so we could join a collaborative construction of knowledge (Postholm & Madsen, 2006). Once I entered into the “worlds” of my participants, we all became part of a context for actions to play out (Postholm & Madsen, 2006) in the research atmosphere; considering that the CHAT paradigm understands reality as multiple and constructed, the knowledge generated in this research activity emerged from our ongoing interactions (Postholm & Madsen, 2006) and reciprocal influences. I was transformed in the process of the research activity because I was “influenced and taught by [my] respondent-participants” while at the same time, I influenced them too. Knowledge developed from these relationships (Gorelick, 1991).

4.6. Research Procedures

As I began to envision a qualitative inquiry about transnational Latina mothers in rural Iowa, my decisions and actions of selecting my participants were firmly rooted in the idea of promoting the inclusion of marginalized women in academic conversations and feminist work. My study involved Latina women in several ways: A Latina researcher conducted the research; Latina mothers were the focus of analysis; Latina recruiters and service providers facilitated the research process.
After obtaining IRB approval (Appendix A), I located and contacted several community members who worked directly with the Latino community, in particular with female Latina mothers. Information about these services providers was available on the Internet. I also contacted a person who worked as a Family Extension employee in my university and who had worked in other university projects related to Latinos living in the research site. Additionally, I contacted another person who was working in a program called Families: Well-Being and Development Program (pseudonym), whose goal is to provide services to families with children throughout pregnancy until kindergarten. After explaining to them my study, I provided them with the participant recruitment scripts they needed to use to help me recruit participants (see Appendix C). Not surprisingly (at least for me), all these persons were Latina women themselves! They were active Latina community members who contributed immensely to the research cause as they helped me to recruit potential participants.

I set up a meeting with these Latinas to discuss my project. Some meetings took place at a coffee shop, and few others at their offices. After explaining my study, I asked them to contact Latino mothers who were between 25 and 40 years old, had lived in the U.S. between 2 and 8 years, and had at least one child between the ages of 2 and 5. Then, services providers needed to share information about my study with potential participants and ask them if they were willing to participate. Subsequently, I did recruit via telephone calls those participants who expressed their willingness to participate in my study. In this round of phone calls I answered questions that participants had about the research, and provided information about the interviews (which constituted the first phase of the study), the participant observations (second phase of study), the types of questions I would ask, the reasons behind doing observations, and how confidentiality was going to be maintained.

In addition to recruiting participants from these Latina service providers, I established contact with the Women, Infants, and Children’s (WIC) program, a program I knew low-income Latina immigrant mothers usually resort to for different forms of support. The WIC program took place three days a month and operated in an office of a community social service
organization, an agency that I am going to call Helping Our Families (pseudonym). This local community agency works to bring together members of the community through the provision of health, educational, nutritional, and public assistance programs.

In order to recruit Latina mothers from WIC, I had to ask permission to the CEO of the Helping Our Family office. After a long conference call, I was given the authorization to go to the agency during WIC days (through a consent letter), set a table in the hallway, and wait for mothers after they finished their appointments so I could talk to them. Luckily, for me, there were two Latina volunteers working at WIC as translators for Latina mothers who helped me to establish contact with potential participants. Since they worked on a regular basis with low-income mothers, they knew which WIC recipients would qualify for my study. After WIC appointments, Latina translators told clients about my study and sent them to me; some mothers stopped by the table. I talked to them and explained them my study. Some of them agreed right away and gave me their contact information. I gave them my business card in case they wanted to call me for additional questions. Others took my business card and assured me they would call later; they never did. During my first visits to WIC I learned to always get the names and phone numbers of those who would express their interest in participating in my study. It took me several visits to WIC in order to find my participants. Lastly, I made flyers (see Appendix C) that, with permission from store and office administrators, were placed in Mexican stores, laundry locations, Parks and Recreation Center, and WIC, Head Start, and Family Extension offices. Nobody contacted me though these sources of recruitment.

I met several times with each participant once we started the research process. However, I could only compensate them with $74.99\footnote{Research participants from studies conducted by Iowa State University personnel who receive more than $75 for compensation are required to provide a social security number. Since all participants were undocumented, they only were able to get $74.99 for their participation.} for their participation in the study. Participants received $10.00 for seven visits (both interviews and observations). The last visit (visit #8) the participant received a $4.99 gift card. Compensation was provided at the end of each meeting.
All participants signed the ISU Controller's Research Participant Receipt Form, which the lead investigator kept in her records in a locked drawer at her home.

4.6.1. Sampling

According to Patton (2002), “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 230). A purposeful sampling procedure was used in the present study. Participants were purposely selected based on whether they were immigrant Latinas. Purposeful sampling allowed for sampling of immigrant Latinas from Latino countries of origin who lived in Iowa. The preferred age range for potential participants was 25 to 40 years, and the length of time living in the US was between 2 to 8 years. Participants had to have one child between 2 and 5 years old.

Also, participants were considered for participation on the basis of low income so I recruited participants that use public assistance (e.g., food banks or social service organizations such WIC offices). The organizations that helped me to recruit participants (e.g., the community members who work with the Latina population, the ISU Family Extension employee, the Parent and Family Development employee, etc.) did not ask potential participants about their economic status. Once I met potential participants, I asked them individually if they had low incomes 200% or below. That is, if the participant household consisted of 3 persons and the household yearly income was $38,180 or below, that participant would qualify to participate in my study; for each additional person in the household, $7,640 was added. I was careful to select Latinas from low-income statuses, as it would allow me to inspect the effects of (interlocking) social class and gender inequalities (Menjívar, 2011) on transnational Latina lives.

I recognize the existence (and the importance of research) of LGBT immigrant mothers, as their social locations and sexual identifies might add to the complexity of their life challenges in rural contexts. However, in this feminist ethnographic study, I limit my focus to heterosexual mothers, as the study also examines gender and power relations (with male partners) affecting transnational mothers’ capacity to withstand difficulties. I was interested in the specific
characteristics noted above because I wanted to explore how socio-economic factors (and the struggles participants had in relation to access to childcare and the lack of economic resources) might have influenced emotional development in women at this stage. Edwards (2007) argues that individuals can be more or less resilient in different circumstances so they locate themselves differently in relation to how they access and contribute to the resources of the environment. Thus, it was my goal to examine how mothers with young children achieve resilience in relation to the socio-economic resources that were (or were not) available to them.

In-depth examination of small samples is key to uncovering the distinctive quality of subjects’ lives (Weber Cannon, Higginbotham & Leung, 1988). Fewer respondents that are interviewed in greater depth often produce the kind of understanding and information qualitative researchers pursue (deMarrais, 2004). Additionally, small samples that are purposeful selected for some relative homogeneity might offer more confidence that results represent the average members of the population (Maxwell, 2009, p. 235). For those reasons, only five transnational Latina mothers were selected to participate in the feminist ethnographic project.

4.6.2. Participants’ descriptions

The participants of this study were five transnational Latina mothers (Elizabeth, Patricia, Gloria, Silvia, and Bridget) all of whom were first-generation immigrants, and who had lived in the United States between two and eight years. Three Latinas were from Mexico, one from Guatemala, and one from El Salvador. Their ages ranged from twenty-five to thirty and they each had two to four children. Only one Latina was legally married; the others were cohabiting with a male partner whom they referred to as mi esposo (my husband). Only two participants had a few close relatives living in the same area. All Latinas were undocumented at the time of the study. They were all Spanish speakers and had reported having limited or no fluency in English. None of them had obtained more than a high school diploma. Three Latina mothers moved to the Midwest directly from Mexico and Guatemala; the other two moved first to Arizona and North Carolina, but the lack of economic stability forced them to move to Iowa. All were unemployed but one participant applied (and obtained a seasonal low-wage job) during the research process.
Please note that the two finding chapters describe in great detail the life stories and personal characteristics of each transnational Latina mother.

4.6.3. Research site

This study examined the resilient lives of Latina immigrants who are residents in a rural town in Iowa that I shall name Salford (pseudonym). Salford\(^6\), has a total area of 3.98 square miles approximately. This town has a population of about 8,850 people. The median household income is $39,400, lower than the state’s overall median ($49,944) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). However, the poverty level is modest at 16.3%, considering that many community members (Latinos in particular) derive their income from paid labor in the agriculture and construction industries (Grey & Woodrick, 2002; Baker, 2004). Salford, like many communities in the Midwest, has been experiencing increased economic sustainability in the last decades (Schneider, 2010). The economic growth (and the Latino population growth) in Salford, and most communities in Iowa, has been driven by state-led economic growth initiatives (Grey & Woodrick, 2002) and the increase in demand for low-skilled labor (Baker, 2004).

Salford is just off a highway and about a half-hour from Des Moines, the state capital. There is a popular bicycle trail nearby, a 78-mile bike path that ties downtown Chagrin Falls to Salford. The same highway connects Salford with other three rural communities towards the east. Most of businesses in Salford are located in downtown. In Main Street for example, you can find stores and community service facilities such as Latino grocery stores and restaurants, and a couple of ice cream and coffee shops. The Main Street at Salford can be described as a limited strip, a draw to people in the immediately surrounding area. However, if residents want/need additional social distractions, they have to go somewhere else (e.g., Chagrin Falls). Nearby, there is a hotel and a public library. A few miles away, you find churches, two plazas, some American

\(^6\) I provide fewer details about the research site to ensure participants’ anonymity in the study. In addition, I deliberately altered (as little as possible) the population and place size and the ethnic/racial breakdown to make the place unrecognizable.
grocery stores (e.g., Fareway, Hy-Vee, Dollar General), and the Salford police department. Six to eight miles east from downtown is the Hospital.

Like any other American town, there are McDonald’s, Burger King, and Subway restaurants, and some convenience chain store/gas stations. There is a Head Start program, one Elementary School, one Middle School, and one High School. In addition, the community has a Community College that has also campuses across the state. Next to one of these schools a Parks and Recreation center is located. There is no public transportation service in Salford; there is a local transportation service for residents to call in to request (and pay for) the services. That means that residents who do not have a private car (or enough money to spend for transportation services) are not able to go from place to place as easily or at all.

The ethnic/racial breakdown in Salford is: White persons (81%), Hispanic persons (33%), African American persons (1.9%), Asian persons (0.7%), American Indian and Alaska Native persons (0.3%), Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons (0.1%), and persons reporting two or more races (3.3%) (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). While there is some level of diversity in Salford, I have come to the conclusion that Salford is a racially segregated town. My conclusions are being drawn from my field observations and participants’ shared stories. While Latinos and White residents live in proximity of each other, social interactions between groups are very limited, virtually non-existent. During my visits to the town I barely saw a common social space (or event) for all residents. In terms of living location, White residents usually lived in the outskirts of Salford; Latinos on the other hand, tend to live in close proximity to the Head Start and the local elementary school. Many of the Latinos I met (and some African refugees) lived in trailers in racially segregated neighborhoods of Salford. A few others lived close to Main Street.

The purpose of my study was to tell the stories of transnational Latinas, exposing the difficulties and intricacies of their everyday life in Salford. One of the characteristics of Salford that made it an attractive option to conduct a feminist ethnographic study on transnational Latinas’ development of resilience is its history of unprecedented growth of Latino immigrant
populations. In addition, the rural life in Salford might provide insights into how rural places come to shape Latinas’ experiences with life challenges and the way they withstand such difficulties.

**4.7. Data Collection Methods**

Feminist Sandra Harding (1987) describes a research method as “a technique for (or a way of proceeding in) gathering evidence … all evidence-gathering techniques fall into one of the three categories: listening to (or interrogating) informants, observing behavior, or examining historical traces and records” (p. 2). Further, cultural researchers emphasize the use of holistic approaches, such as qualitative methods, in order to understand the meanings, behaviors, practices, and rules of ethnic minority families (Sue & Sue, 2007). Qualitative methods are appropriate to this study because they allowed me to listen how Latinas think about their lives (Harding, 1987). Additionally, I employed qualitative methods as they have been recognized as consistent with feminist values because they foster a less mechanical and powered relationship between the researcher and participants (Epstein Jayaratne & Stewart, 1983).

Ethnographers and critical researchers use participant observation, field notes, in-depth interviews, and focus groups as data collection strategies. They also use other data sources such as cultural artifacts, video, poetry and textual materials (Mayan, 2009). Data collection took place over a seven-month period between June and December. In this study I decided to use interviews and participant observations to provide data in response to my guiding questions. Informal, unplanned conversations with family relatives and friends were also included as part of the data collection method. Through all these data collection strategies I was able to convey the complexity of Latinas lives, their resilience activities, and the interplay of social structures and agency, research matters that I would not have been able to access by simply employing only one of the methods or questionnaires (Eghbal, 2011).

**4.7.1. Interviews**

The unstructured interview (employing open-ended questions) was the primary data collection strategy used. According to Mayan (2009), unstructured interviews allow participants
to share their stories through few broader questions. Further, Fontana and Frey (2000) note that unstructured interviewing enable researchers to understand the multifaceted behavior of individuals without imposing pre-categories that may influence the research process. Unstructured interviews offered me the opportunity to ask further questions during interviews, conversations, events, and activities to attain deeper understanding of the situation I was participating in with the transnational Latinas. In line with a feminist approach, unstructured interviews helped me to access participants’ ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in my own terms (Reinharz, 1992).

My method of interviewing followed the principles of feminist interviewing. Previous feminist research has demonstrated how interviews and narratives inform researchers about how intersectionality (e.g., class, race, gender) affects the lives of women being researched (Bell-Scott, 1994). The use of this method allowed me to converse with participants and gather rich and detailed data through their personal narratives. Furthermore, it offered the possibility to clarify their statements and to explore additional information when needed.

Further, the collection of data through interviews provide a researcher with a means of a reciprocal interaction that allows her to be open and willing to give something of herself by sharing information or answering questions when asked (Oakley, 1981). This process breaks down the hierarchy between the researcher and the participant(s), and lets respondents get a level of control over the research process (Oakley, 1981). Because my goal was to understand Latinas’ life experiences and resilience practices, it was essential to have the flexibility of using interviews that would allow me be responsive to my participants. Through unstructured interviews and continuous dialogues, research participants and I had the possibility to become companions (Reason & Rowan, 1981), and established a confidential relationship.

My approach to the interviewing process modifies Lugones’ accounts of “world”-traveling by integrating Paulo Freire’s (1978) term: conscientización (critical consciousness). Conscientización is defined by the Freire Institution as the “process of developing a critical awareness of one’s social reality through reflection and action … action is fundamental because
it is the process of changing the reality” (Freire Institution, 2013). Furthermore, Perilla (1999) describes *concientización* as “an appreciation of our options and potential to effect change in our environment … is about reinventing our culture in light of the new reality of this new country, creating a mestizo culture that includes both the old and the new (p. 129).

In my “traveling” to transnational Latinas’ “worlds” and, in my attempt to empower them through conversation (and reflection), I adopted the *concientización* paradigm. The *concientización* of Latinas in my research entailed an awareness of their capacity to liberate themselves from their emotional, social, and material suffering. *Concientización* was a “joint exploration” (Perilla, 1999) of the ways they develop tolerance (Anzaldúa, 2003) and resistance, as they negotiate the social conditions and power relations embedded in the host society they inhabited. As an instrument for promoting women empowerment, I found ways to let participants know about “the power inherent in the use of [their] agency” (Perilla, 1999, p. 129). Apart from that, in my practice of feminist interviewing, I moved away from adopting an exploitative attitude of Latinas as sources of data (Oakley, 1981) and restrained myself from treating them only as “data providers” (Oakley, 2005, p. 60). I tried to humanize the research conditions and ambience. I shared about my life challenges and my coping strategies; I answered their questions and shared my feelings (Fontana & Frey, 2003).

4.7.1.1. Interview questions

The interview questions were intended to inspire conversation about Latina participants’ accounts of what they perceive as life challenge(s) and how they practice resilience in response to such challenge(s). To develop these questions I used use Charmaz’ (2006) recommendations on crafting open-ended questions. See Appendix B for the interview guide. The organization of the questions changed accordingly with how the participant responded. Interviews varied from unstructured to semiformal conversations using an interview guide to free-flowing informational interactions between my participants and I (Holstein & Gubrium 1998). The first type of interview, the initial interview, included demographic questions (e.g. age, country of origin, length of time in the US, etc.). It also included a loose description of Latinas’ perceived
strengths, and the particular situations in which they used such strengths to confront or deal with a challenging life problem. In subsequent interviews, participants were asked about their families and communities; more specifically, Latinas were encouraged to talk about the role of the group of actors (in their families and/or communities) who participate on multiple levels in their resiliency practices (Engeström, 2001).

4.7.1.2. The interviewing process

The interviewing process started in late June 2012 in Salford, Iowa. I interviewed my five participants three to four times. During the first round of interviews, most emphasis was placed on getting to know the participants. The second round of interviews was conducted in July-August of the same year. Most of interview questions were intended to follow up what had been discussed during the last interview. The last set of interviews took place in August-September of 2012. The themes that were addressed in this last phase were determined on the basis of the previous interviews. At the end of the day, after any round of interviews (or recorded conversations) was done, I went back home, listened the full interviews and revised my fieldnotes. I also filled out a contact summary sheet (see APPENDIX E) that contained focusing and summarizing questions about my research field contacts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Based on what I wrote in my fieldnotes and heard from interviews, and information from the contact summary sheets, I developed follow up questions I felt pertinent and thought-provoking. This process helped me to think deeply on important issues that were not addressed at the time of the interviews or conversations.

In addition, follow up questions for the interviews were also determined by what I saw during participant observations. Participant observations took place during interviews and at the end of the data collection phase in December. Although I planned to interview 5 participants, the number of interviews depended on data saturation and the disposition of respondents to provide detailed information. Interview questions that were addressed in the second and third phases were determined on the basis of the responses from the first set of interviews. Please note that I had informal conversations with some participants at the end of the year.
At the beginning of the interviews (and participant observations) I explained to participants the purpose of and my interest in the study. I encouraged them to ask me any question or to address any concern about the project. The main concern of participants was the confidentiality of the personal information. I explained them all the steps that would be taken in order to protect their privacy and that of their families, relatives, and friends. I also asked them permission to have the interview audio-taped and write notes in case I needed to. Then, I gave participants a signed copy of the consent form, asked them to read it, and then signed two copies of the consent form, one for them and one for my records. Understanding that there could have been different levels and types of language use among Latinas, I asked them for their language preference and, accordingly, offered the consent form and all information related to the study in Spanish. All the interviews and conversations were conducted in Spanish, their mother tongue. All participants agreed to meet with me at their homes for the interviews. There were times when we took children to the library or a park so mothers could have some free time (from kids) to be interviewed. The interviews lasted approximately between one and two hours in length.

4.7.2. Informal conversations

Besides conducting interviews, my participants and I engaged in informal conversations on the phone, in doctor office waiting rooms, in my car when I took them to some places, while we were “hanging out” at local community sites or at their homes, and in short visits at their homes. Informal conversations included asking questions regarding pertinent issues that happened during those situations. Some in-person conversations were recorded when I felt it was relevant for the study. Field notes were also taken when needed.

4.7.3. Participant observation

Participant observation is a method that has its roots in traditional ethnographic research. Participant observation in ethnographic fieldwork emphasizes on culture and requires the researcher “to observe through participating in events… and document and record the course of such ongoing events” (Preissle & Grant, 2004, p. 163). Researchers can also assess body language and other nonverbal cues that contribute meaning to the words of the individuals being
researched (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2003). One criticism of participant observation is that of the presence of the investigator that may influence how informants behave. Informants may feel suspicious of the investigator, unwilling to participate, or be eager to please. Taken this into consideration I tried to build a relationship based on trust with my participants (Iacono, Brown, & Holtham, 2009), I strived to have interactions that would flow naturally, and provided them with a safe space to talk through feelings. Although participant observation presents unique challenges to researchers, it offers the possibility to obtain unique insights from research participants, information that may not be available through interviews (Mayan, 2009). Later, in the results chapter, I explain in more detail my findings from participant observations.

My role in this study was that of a participant as observer. That means I was fully involved in the activities of participants (Mayan, 2009). My decision to participate in such activities helped build trust with (and get to know better) my participants. Further, Yamagata-Lynch (2010) explains, from an activity theory framework, how the different participant observer approaches affect “the ways in which investigators experience participants’ everyday activities” (p. 66). She argues that the role of participant as observer in naturalistic inquiry with an activity theory perspective allows researchers to be able to engage in participants’ goal-oriented actions that are related to their object-oriented activities; this allows researchers to gather rich information of first-hand knowledge from participants’ experiences.

While observing, and having informal conversations with participants, I wrote down brief sentences that later, at home, were expanded. In many occasions, I also recorded (wrote or audio-taped) my field observations at the end of the day. To record observations, I used LeCompte and Preissle’s (2003) questions framework: Who was in the scene? What was happening here? What was the person in the scene doing? Where was the scene located? How are the identified elements connected or interrelated, either from the participant’s point of view? Why the person(s) behave as she/he does? These questions were addressed after I left the social situation I was observing (Spradley, 1980).
The present feminist ethnographic study focuses on the life-challenging experiences of transnational Latinas. The guiding question of this project concerned how these women practice resilience in response to those life challenges. In order to answer this question, the study required me to immerse myself into the lives of my participants, engaging in intensive observation practices. Going along with Latinas in their daily actions and activities provided information on their interactions with their families and other community members, as well as on their learning experiences from their participation in their social world. I was able to observe (and examine) how they were affected and determined by the context of the rural life, issues that I could have not assessed through other data collection strategies.

According to Spradley (1980), “all participant observation takes place in social situations” (p. 39). The author claims that a first step to do ethnographic work is to identify a social situation. Social situations are identified by three key components: a place, actors and activities (Spradley, 1980). When researchers conduct participant observations they often locate themselves in a specific place, they watch actor(s) and interact with them, and watch and participate in activities with the actors as well (Spradley, 1980). These three components “serve as a springboard into understanding” socio-cultural meaning of a social situation (p. 40). Figure 3 might help researchers to think about a social interaction: The illustration represents individuals that participate in any social situation. Spradley (1980) argues that when researchers first enter a social situation it is difficult for them to recognize what sort of actors are present. This was not the case in my studies because I knew I was going to observe my participants and the people who they usually interact with. The activities that take place in a social situation encompass the other element in the triangle.
Repeated observations of individual acts often fall into patterns of an activity making it easier for the observer to recognize specific behaviors. Examples of activities include drinking a beer, hunting, and deposit money at the bank (Spradley, 1980).

**Place** refers to “any physical setting [that] become[s] the basis for a social situation as long as it has people present and engaged in activities” (p. 40). A grocery store, an ocean pier, and a bank window are some of the examples Spradley provided. A **social situation** incorporates all three components. Some cases of social situations include a playground of a low-income neighborhood, family breakfast, and a chemistry laboratory (Spradley, 1980). In the following section on participant observation activities, I offer information regarding the actors, activities, places, and social situations that I observed during the data collection phase.

### 4.7.3.1. Participant observation process

Once the interview phase of the study was completed, Latina participants were invited to participate in a second stage, which entailed participant observation. It should be clear that many of the participant observations took place during (and between) interview and conversation meetings. I asked participants to think and make suggestions of things, situations, or places they felt important and thought would help me understand their daily lives. Asking my participants suggestions for observations and respecting their decisions might have helped them to achieve some level of comfort and/or control in the study.

Latinas chose the activities they wanted me to be part of and observe. I conducted observations of 3-5 community experiences of each participant. I conducted participant observations while I was “hanging out” with Latinas at local community sites (sometimes at their homes). In this stage, I took part in some social activities or personal experiences of participants with other community members, services providers, and family members (see 4.7.3.2. Participant observation activities). Time spent conducting participant observation at each site and activity lasted between three to four hours, sometimes more than half of a day. Further, information from
third party participants\textsuperscript{7} was intentionally withheld. Since the main goal of this study was to explore the factors promoting or facilitating development of resilience among Latinas (e.g., family or community members, friends, community leaders), I did not want third party participants’ behaviors being influenced; therefore, they were not informed about the study at any moment and did not sign the inform consent form. Third party participants included services providers, clerks at stores where participants shopped, friends who they visited or spent time with, a teacher or employer at a school, individuals at a community meeting, and a doctor or nurse at a doctor's appointment. Family members were aware of my study; yet they were not required to sign the consent form.

4.7.3.2. Participant observation activities

I began observing my participants in the summer of 2012. I conducted participant observations one to two times per week depending on the availability of participants. I observed and participated in activities such as: visits to doctors, birthday parties, shopping at grocery stores, doing laundry at local sites, having lunch or a snack at a restaurant, spending time with children at the community pool, cooking and selling foods at their homes, going to a place to learn about seasonal job postings, and learning working out exercises at home. Table 2 presents the actors, activities, and places of the social situations that were observed. Participant observations were focused on any social interaction between participants and their social environment.

In this feminist ethnographic study I kept “detailed record of both objective observations and subjective feelings” (Spradley, 1980, p. 58). I kept a field diary that I used to reflect throughout the whole study process. The field diary preserved my observations at the different local sites, the situations I witnessed, and the activities I was part of. I recorded my participants’ interactions with other people around them. In the same field diary (or journal) I recorded my

\textsuperscript{7} All of the requirements for human subjects protection from the university were met in this study. One requirement necessary for protecting the privacy of the other individuals involved in the study was to refer to them by using a pseudonym. The Institutional Review Board of Iowa State required me to use a pseudonym for the town as well.
personal reflections about the participants, situations, feelings, interpretations, ideas, moments of confusion, and hunches (Mayan, 2009). My journal also contained a record of breakthroughs and problems that arose during fieldwork (Spradley, 1980).

Table 2: Illustration of actors, places, and activities that were observed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Places</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Home, library, car, community pool, laundry places, doctor’s office, hospital, dentist, supermarket, park and recreation center</td>
<td>Exercising classes, going to the pool, buying groceries at the supermarket, birthday parties, spending the afternoon at home, cooking food to sell it, visiting a doctor, applying for a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse/partner</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Helping wife to sell food; helping host a birthday party, fixing things at home, taking children to run errands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Home, pool, park, laundry places, doctor’s office, dentist, Head Start, birthday parties</td>
<td>Playing at home and at the park, visiting their doctor, waiting mother while she takes an exercise class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Visiting family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>Home, birthday parties</td>
<td>Spending time with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>Checking the child’s health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>Taking temperature and asking health related questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Home, birthday parties</td>
<td>Talking, eating, asking for advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintances; employer</td>
<td>Home, job site</td>
<td>Asking information regarding services, applying for a job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes kept in field diary were later included in the data analysis process. In the next section, I present the data management procedures and the data analytic techniques that were used.
4.8. Data Management and Analysis

4.8.1. Data management procedures

Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants were assigned a unique numeric code and this code was used on the tapes, which were subsequently transcribed. Recordings of the interviews or conversations from participant observations were deleted once the transcripts were typed. Only the lead investigator (Angelica Reina), her supervisor, a professor from her dissertation committee, and a transcriber had access to the study records. The study records were kept in a locked file cabinet in my house. The tape-recorded data was transcribed between October and December 2012 and I conducted most of the tape-recorded transcriptions. Data then were destroyed within months after transcription completion.

Interviews and field notes from participant observations kept participants names off the record. Participants’ identities and the names of community places and people (friends, family members, services providers or community members) remained confidential. Information and details about participants and their lives/families that would make them identifiable was not used. Once the data analysis phase was finalized, I invited respondents to meet (or talk over the phone) so they could review my assumptions and interpretations of the results. Only the information participants agreed to leave on record will be kept and used for publishing purposes.

4.8.2. Data analysis procedures

Before I continue, I must alert the reader that the upcoming section provides in great detail my analytical techniques. Some qualitative scholars have long criticized the negligence of qualitative investigators of providing enough and thorough public accountings of this process (Anfara & Brown, 2001). In this section I take up that challenge and present every methodological strategy that was used. I believe that by systematically detailing my data analytical techniques and processes I will increase the trustworthiness of my study.

Data analysis in qualitative research involves a the process of turning raw data into ‘findings’ or ‘results’ ” (Lofland et al., 2006). In ethnographic research, data examination refers to the process of figuring out what to do with large amounts of data from the ethnographic
research project (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The authors explain that researchers must organize, sort, code, reduce, and pattern the data into interpretations that should answer the research guiding questions, making sure that the resulting information is adequate, coherent, and comprehensible so that it can be disseminated.

4.8.2.1. Social anthropology approach to data analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that there are three approaches to qualitative data analysis: interpretivism, collaborative social research, and social anthropology. Interpretivism is a line of inquiry that views human activity “as a collection of symbols expressing layers of meaning” (p. 8). Interpretivists seek to understand actions and interactions, and the interpretations made by the researcher and the social actor(s). Interpretivism takes into account the researcher’s convictions, conceptual orientations, and their cultural and historical membership (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Collective social research takes place in a social setting. The investigators that work with this research approach work with their subject individuals in a specific setting in order to achieve a change or action related-data (Berg, 2008). The present study uses the social anthropology approach to data analysis.

The interactions between researchers and the individuals or study population provide them with a unique outlook on the collected information during the research process, and a unique understanding of research participants and their own interpretation of the world (Berg, 2008). The social anthropology approach fits in easily with my research work as my involvement with research site and participants follow the tenets of this approach. I employed ethnographic data collection methods; I made field and participant observations and tried to pursue perceptions from various angles and in diverse ways (PCMH Research Methods Series); and I participated directly with participants, interacting with them and other individuals important in their lives (Berg, 2008).

4.8.2.2. Flow model of data analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) define analysis as a process that involves three simultaneous flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the present
study, I used their model of data analysis as I felt was pertinent to explain my data analysis procedures. In addition, I combined the analytic techniques of ethnographic inquiry with those of feminist research.

**Data reduction** is an activity in which a researcher singles out information from large amounts of data in order to create manageable, focused, and interpretable summaries (Arcury & Quandt, 1998). This process entails selection, simplification, abstraction, and transformation of data that appear in fieldnotes and/or transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994); data reduction sorts out, focuses, discards, and systematizes data so ‘final’ conclusions can be substantiated. The data reduction phase of my analysis involved several activities: revising contact summary sheets, coding, and memoing. More on this process is presented later in this section.

**Data display** entails the organization and assembly of data that allows the researcher to make conclusion drawings and actions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through data displays I was able to assemble organized information with matrices and networks so later I could draw justified conclusions based on what I saw and understood (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Conclusion drawing and verification** is an activity that involves deciding what patterns, explanations, causal flows, and propositions are meaningful to the study. These conclusions are often verified throughout the whole process of writing up the study results (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Verification flows the trustworthiness process of the study; that is, confirmability (parallel to objectivity), credibility (parallel to internal validity), transferability (parallel to external validity), and dependability (parallel to reliability).

**4.8.2.3. Data analysis process**

I decided to work on the data of participants independently; that is, I did a separate data analysis for each participant. I printed out all data (and made copies of fieldnotes) and created a separate file for each Latina and named the file using their pseudonyms. Since this study is focused on understanding transnational Latinas life challenging events and resilience processes, the coding of data was guided by three themes: (a) an emphasis on life situation problems and the effects of such problems on participants’ psychological and physical integrity, (b) a focus on
ways participants demonstrated to be strong and coped with problems, and the people in their lives and the ways in which they helped participants with a problem, and (c) attention to information related to who the participants were, their personality values, skills, and how Latinas respond to what is going on around them. A subsequent analysis using the CHAT model for understanding resilience is presented and explained later in this section.

4.8.2.3.1. Data reduction

The data analysis process\(^8\) began with data reduction in two phases: initial coding and focused coding. The early stage, initial coding, involves naming words, sentences, or segments of data (Charmaz, 2006). First, I read each transcript to get a general sense of respondents but did not take any notes. Then, I conducted line-by-line readings of the interviews, and, in front of those lines, I gave a name (code) and recorded a reflection (memo). These two processes are called coding\(^9\) and memoing\(^10\). Sometimes I coded one line; sometimes I coded a complete answer. There were also sub-codes derived from initial codes. I also revised contact summary sheets (see Appendix G) and coded chunks of data when I thought pertinent. It is important to note that although I was the one who chose the words that constituted the codes, I sought to stay close to my data by using participants’ words or starting codes from their actions and/or experiences (Charmaz, 2006). I provide an example of how I coded one segment of a transcript in this coding stage. This idea is presented in Table 3, adapted from Charmaz (2006, p. 52) presented below.

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\(^8\) All interviews, conversations, and fieldnotes were in Spanish and were used for data analysis to avoid losing the narrative meanings of Latinas' responses.

\(^9\) Coding is a process of “categorizing segments of data with a sort name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43).

\(^10\) Memoing refers to “writing down all [the] ideas about [the] various coding categories and their interconnections, and even about [the] procedures and fieldwork experiences” (Lofland et al., 2006, p. 209).
Following Charmaz’s (2006) suggestions for data coding, I tried to develop codes that were close to the data. The excerpt presented in Table 3 demonstrates how the participant was affected by her partner’s decision to come to the U.S. It also shows how her partner did not want to tell her before, how he would discuss his decision with his mother instead of his romantic partner, and that the respondent found out the news right before he migrated. In a subsequent analysis, this excerpt and other chunks of data (from interviews, conversations, and observations) from same participant helped me to understand how decisions were made in the household.

After the initial coding stage I moved to the focused coding phase (see Table 4). In this stage I selected significant and frequent initial codes to sort out, organize, and integrate my data (Charmaz, 2006). Focused coding helped me to determine and develop the most salient codes that later were grouped and used to create initial categories (Charmaz, 2006). To illustrate this

Table 3: Model of Charmaz's initial coding: line by line coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt 1: Elizabeth, age 27, from El Salvador, interview 1</th>
<th>Initial codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P: Participant</td>
<td>Moving to U.S. by himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Interviewer</td>
<td>Staying behind in her home country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: When he (partner) told me… because he came (to the U.S.) by himself…</td>
<td>Feeling bad (about him leaving her)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: You stated there (El Salvador)?</td>
<td>Suspecting about his decision before telling her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: Yeah… and well, when he told me I felt bad… so I told him… because I suspected that but he wouldn’t tell me</td>
<td>Looking suspicious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: And why did you suspect?</td>
<td>Talking to his mother (behind her back)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: Because he looked suspicious and he would talk to his mother but he wouldn’t say anything to me… only when he was about to come here he told me about his decision</td>
<td>Avoiding disclosure of decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: And then?</td>
<td>Telling her that right before moving to the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: Well I asked him not to come, not to leave me alone there but he told me he needed to come because he wasn't working there</td>
<td>Moving to the U.S. in search of job opportunities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Memo
Partner made the decision to move to the US without Elizabeth’s opinion (or consent?). Seems like his family (mother) knew about his decision except for Elizabeth. He let her know about it just days before he was migrating.
process I used the same excerpt from Table 3. In this process I selected the most significant codes to explain that data and later compare them with data from the other respondents. For instance, I selected the codes ‘staying behind in her home country,’ ‘avoiding disclosure of decision’ and ‘telling her that right before moving to the U.S.’ to capture and understand the key themes of this response. I also developed a theoretical code ‘gender relations’ to conceptualize and integrate the codes into a possible theory (Charmaz, 2006). I left out the code ‘moving to the

Table 4: Model of Charmaz’s focused coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt 1: Elizabeth, age 27, from El Salvador, interview 1</th>
<th>Focused codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>P</strong>: Participant</td>
<td>Staying behind in her home country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong>: Interviewer</td>
<td>Feeling bad (about him leaving her)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P</strong>: When he (partner) told me… because he came (to the U.S.) by himself…</td>
<td>Avoiding disclosure of decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong>: You stated there (El Salvador)?</td>
<td>Telling her that right before moving to the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P</strong>: Yeah… and well, when he told me I felt bad… so I told him… because I suspected that but he wouldn’t tell me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong>: And why did you suspect?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P</strong>: Because he looked suspicious and he would talk to his mother but he wouldn’t say anything to me… only when he was about to come here he told me about his decision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong>: And then?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P</strong>: Well I asked him not to come, not to leave me alone there but he told me he needed to come because he wasn't working there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Memo</strong></td>
<td>GENDER RELATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner made the decision to move to the US without Elizabeth’s opinion. This excerpt can be an example of who is making the decisions in this relationship/household. I also include a <strong>theoretical code</strong> gender relations (see definition in table) because it may specify possible relations between categories to explain same issue across all transcripts (and respondents).</td>
<td>Social relations between Elizabeth and her partner that generate some sort of constrain in her life and influence her way of living</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
U.S. in search of job opportunities’ from this analysis and incorporated later into a category that describe the reasons behind participants to move to the United States.

Once I was done with the initial and focused coding activities I moved to a second level of analysis, pattern coding. Pattern coding is an activity that entails grouping a summary of segments into a reduced set of themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At this stage, I looked for repeatedly observed behaviors, values, norms, cultural domains, and feelings or emotions expressed by participants; causes/explanations of actions; relationships among people; and emerging constructs\(^{11}\) (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Spradley, 1980). During the pattern coding stage, I decided what earlier codes were suitable for classifying my data for further analytic purposes (Lofland et al., 2006). Most of the early coding of transcripts indicated that participants talked about life challenges in terms of constraints and suffering. That is why both terms were used to categorize such responses. Further, the apparent emotional suffering in Latinas’ narratives made me decide to label their feelings towards their life constraints, so I described those feelings with the category ‘feelings related to that constraint.’ I also identified geographical place(s) where those life constraints took or were taking place.

Next, I again revised the data and all the initial and focused codes. There were several codes describing the different ways and situations in which participants demonstrated strength or resolved a problem, so I grouped them in a theme that was named ‘ways of being strong.’ The same category was used to clutch codes that point out the ways participants accomplished things, and their strategies, methods and tactics for meeting their material/emotional needs (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992). I also included codes that described their feelings here with the label ‘feelings related to this emotion’ and identified the geographical place as well.

After that, I looked for data that was coded with the code ‘tool,’ ‘artifact,’ or ‘instrument’ and I classified them as ‘tools participant names that work as a support for her,’ in anticipation of the CHAT analysis, which includes the use of pre-categories, such as tools and community, that

\(^{11}\) I note here that I searched for metaphors and analogies used by participants to depict their thoughts, perspectives, and experiences (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Metaphors and analogies were used later as exemplars of the meanings and understandings of experiences of transnational Latinas.
mediate an activity, in this case resilience activity. Following this, the code ‘social relationships’ and sub-codes ‘challenges’ and ‘resources’ were used to identify the social structure or world of participants, that is, the coalitions, friendships, and relationships (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992) of respondents and the ways in which these helped them (or not) with life challenging situations.

Later, I selected all data coded with ‘describing herself/personality’ that would give me a sense of participants’ personhood, how they describe themselves, how they understand themselves. This information was used for the CHAT analysis of resilience. There were other significant categories that were used to describe relevant data and include ‘gender relations,’ ‘interrupted life,’ ‘family separation,’ and ‘sense of hope,’ among others. At the end of this stage I used constant comparison techniques to determine analytic differences of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 cited in Charmaz, 2006), that is, to compare information across categories. Through constant comparison methods, social situations, events, or statements present in an interview were constantly compared within the same interview and compared in different interviews (Charmaz, 2006). This process allowed me to generate statements of relationships, discover new relationships and typological dimensions, and continuously refine and redefine codes, categories (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), and working definitions.

I used the constant comparative procedure to compare/contrast data with data from the same participant (and across participants) to find similarities and differences (Charmaz, 2006). Later, I compared codes and themes within and across respondent categories looking for both commonalities and discrepancies (Macy et al., 2010). The gender relations category, for example, was examined across all instances in which it took place. All coded data were scanned for gender relations, and situations, statements or instances related to that issue were compared and contrasted. After that, theoretical assertions concerning gender relations were subsequently developed (procedure example taken from Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Once all these coded data were selected and grouped into categories, they were subsequently organized in tables (see data display section). The codes, categories, themes, and
respective data mentioned above were the starting point for the subsequent data analysis process that sought to answer the research questions of the study.

4.8.2.3.2 Data display

After the hand coding for each transcript of each participant was done, I transferred the information to an electronic Word document and organized the data and corresponding codes and categories in tables. This process helped me to have a visual format that displayed my data systematically so it could be used later for further analysis or to draw well-founded conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first format for data display was a matrix that organize and general situations in the life of Latinas, their behaviors, people in their social worlds, life problems and ways to solve them. I used the same matrix for each transcript or information I gathered from each participant. Appendix F shows a matrix that sorts out information by the specific themes that were mentioned above. I also included two additional columns. I used one column to add comments and/or interpretations (memos) regarding that excerpt. I also looked for data from fieldnotes related to the issue and entered it in the column called observations. At the end of each table I also provided additional reflective memos of what I felt important about the transcript. Most of those reflective memos were used later for analytical purposes.

Another matrix was created to organize other types of data. This matrix was called unordered list of salient issues and illustrations related to Ayuda (help), Defenderse (to defend oneself), Superarse (to better oneself), and Salir Adelante (to get ahead/to move forward) (see Appendix F). These codes emerged constantly from data, so during the initial coding they were counted and condensed into a display. The data analysis strategy that uses frequency counts is called enumeration in ethnographic research and provides descriptive material and information that generates and refines research assumptions (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). In this study, this enumerative system was “used for data quality control” (p. 185). This system provided supportive evidence for the existence of research themes that were pertinent to the ways participants talked about getting the right help when needed, overcoming problems, becoming better persons, and growing as individuals. The process was straightforward. I looked throughout
the data from electronic files and did a word search for each of those words stated above. Then, I cut and pasted the data containing that word into the matrix. I developed one matrix per participant.

The reader may probably wonder about my reasons for using these codes in Spanish. The reasons were simple. Following Spradley’s verbatim principle, I wanted to encode what participants said in their own language because I did not want to overlook language differences and lose significant clues to cultural and/or transnational meaning (Spradley, 1980). I did not want to translate and simplify (Spradley, 1980) their stories because I wanted to respect their freedom of speech and expression. Keeping and using folk and native terms would help me to discover and understand participants’ meanings of their culture (Spradley, 1980). This procedure complies with the objective of feminist analysis of data because the unique properties of the cultural instances of transnational Latinas are preserved throughout the study (Leavy, 2000).

Besides using matrices I also organized data in a format of networks called a sociogram. A sociogram is a graphic representation or diagram of relationships between individuals (Education Portal, n. d.). The main goal of a sociogram is to expose the underlying relationships between individuals. Researchers can use sociograms to increase their understandings of individuals’ behaviors (Education Portal, n. d.) and social relationships. Sociograms were useful tools for me because they helped me to identify and analyze social networks of and the relationships (Education Portal, n. d.) between translational Latinas and other individuals present in their “worlds.” Furthermore, sociograms were employed as a tool in this study for carrying out additional detailed analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Please refer to APPENDIX G for sociogram illustrations.

Driven by the research questions and developed codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of this study, sociograms were created as a visual representation of the social world and relationships of Latina participants (see results Chapter 5). Through a sociogram I was able to see the people in my participants’ social lives. In the graph I included notes about the challenges related to the sphere or relationship between the participant and each individual or institution. Also, I
identified the resources that the participant was getting from/in that relationship. All transnational Latinas interacted and had relationships with friends, family members, acquaintances, social services, hospitals, churches, and community members. This information was used to understand the role of these different actors in the lives of participants (tools and community components of CHAT).

4.8.2.4. CHAT analysis process

After I completed the data reduction and data display steps, I extracted and grouped excerpts from data that were associated with the subjects. I systematically worked through all tables (and went back to transcripts when needed) and identified information regarding the subjects participants, for example, excerpts in which they described themselves, the system values that influenced the ways they thought about and perceived life, and their feelings and emotions that explained their states of mind.

I looked for information I felt represented tools/artifacts used by Latinas that facilitated or constrained their participation in resilience activity. Once I chose all the tools, I grouped them by theme, gave each theme a name, and conducted a descriptive analysis on each theme based on several reflective questions. For example, in the theme ‘ayuda’ [help] I described how, when and from whom participants received help, what type of help they received (material or emotional), what did they get out from that help, and in what situations help was not received and how participants responded to those circumstances. Ayuda was described as any form of assistance given by people or institutions in the lives of transnational participants that made it easier for them to work towards overcoming a life challenge (or achieving their goals). Another example of tools was the theme ‘transnational practices.’ Based on previous definitions of transnational practices (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Sucedo, 2005) and the narratives of participants, this theme was described as the product of circuits of relations between transnational Latinas and their families living in their countries of origin as well as repeated sets of traditional actions that have been socially and culturally ordered over time and are now use in transnational contexts. This theme was generated by using reflecting questions such as: how does
a practice mediate the relationship between a participant subject and her need to overcome a problem? Were there other specific situations in which the same tool mediated resilience?

Later, I identified themes that would reflect norms/rules or conditions that were clearly regulating interactions between subjects and other individuals. Then I moved to identify all individuals involved or helping participants to work towards solutions to their life challenges (community). To do so, I used the information displayed in the sociograms: each sociogram reflected the social world of each participant, for example, all individuals who were present in their lives, with whom they had interactions and experienced challenging situations (see APPENDIX G). Last, I grouped excerpts of roles and responsibilities of the community individuals when they were helping participants, all the while taking into account power relations and gender dynamics among these individuals (division of labor). Once I was done with this phase I explored and examined dynamics or interrelations between components of the system and then compared them across participants.
CHAPTER 5: LIFE CHALLENGES

ELIZABETH, PATRICIA, GLORIA, SILVIA, & BRIDGETT’S WORLDS

“It’s hard when you don’t know anybody… you got here and you don’t know anyone, you don’t know whom you can trust, you need to talk to someone and don’t have anyone to talk to, is very hard, or when you feel sad… like me, I felt very sad because I didn’t have my child with me and because people didn’t know me, they would judge me, they would say: you came here because you wanted to, you wanted to leave your son… they didn’t know how I was feeling… that is difficult.” Bridgett

In this chapter, I address Research Question 1 by providing additional information about the lives of study participants and the challenges they experience as transnational mothers. I also discuss similarities and differences among them. I also analyze, through a feminist lens, how their experiences are produced by (connected to and mediated by) a dominant socio-economic structure that positions them at a disadvantage. More specifically, I employ concepts from the feminization of poverty; transnational feminism; ethic of care; and the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and citizenship (as multiple and simultaneous forms of oppression).

5.1. Introducing Transnational Participants

This section provides an introduction to the lives of five transnational Latina mothers: Elizabeth, Patricia, Gloria, Silvia, and Bridgett. Please note that most of the details of their lives are discussed throughout this chapter and in Chapter 6.

5.1.1. Glances of Elizabeth’s world

Elizabeth was a 26-year-old Latina from El Salvador. She had been living in the U.S. for about six years and three and half of those years in Salford. She was not married but had a
boyfriend, whose pseudonym in this dissertation will be Pablo and she referred to him as her *esposo* (husband), with whom she had been sharing her life for about nine years. Elizabeth had four children, all with the same partner: Lucia was seven years old and lived in El Salvador with her grandparents, Adela who was five, Lisa who was three, and Esteban who was two, they all three lived in the U.S. with their parents. All children but Lucia were US citizens. Elizabeth had obtained three years of secondary education. She did not speak English. At the time of the study she was babysitting a child and was selling beauty products from home (AVON).

Elizabeth migrated to the United States following Pablo, who had moved a year before to North Carolina. Elizabeth’s father-in-law and sister-in-law, who had been living in the US for some years, persuaded Pablo to come to the states to have some economic advancement and a better life. Pablo and Elizabeth were unemployed in El Salvador and lived from the remittances sent by Pablo’s father ($10.00 a month). Pablo saw this chance as a real opportunity to escape unfavorable economic conditions. Elizabeth was eight months pregnant with her first child when Pablo migrated. Elizabeth found out about his decision to move to the United States a U.S. few days before he moved.

Lucia, Elizabeth’s oldest daughter, was one year old when Elizabeth decided to come North. The initial plan was to bring Lucia along with her but after giving it a lot of thought, Pablo decided it was too dangerous and had Lucia stay there with his parents. Lucia was left in El Salvador, and still lives there. Elizabeth’s half-brother, who was a *coyote*, helped Elizabeth to cross “illegally” three different borders to get into the U.S.: from El Salvador to Guatemala; from Guatemala to Mexico; and from Mexico to the U.S. It took her a month, substantial risks, and $7,000 (half was saved money from work and the other half was borrowed) to get into the U.S. Finally, Elizabeth successfully broke through the U.S. border.

5.1.2. Glances of Patricia’s world

Patricia, who was 27 years old at the time of the study, moved to the U.S. to escape from sexual harassment committed by a relative (her father’s brother-in-law). She migrated from
Mexico to the United States to avoid psychological suffering. Patricia hoped things could be better in Texas. And they were, only for a while.

Patricia crossed the border (between Mexico and the U.S.) twice with the help of a coyote. The first time she was caught by border guards and was sent back to Mexico. She was able to cross the next time. It took her one-month, a couple of days in jail, a flu-like illness at the border, and $500 to get into the U.S. Patricia arrived in Houston, Texas and attempted to start a new life. She worked and met her first husband. Soon she became pregnant and had her first son. Two years later, she got pregnant with her second child. Her husband always was the one responsible for the economic stability of the household. Then, Patricia got pregnant for a third time, but the pregnancy ended in a miscarriage when she found out her husband had died from overdosing on alcohol. Later she met a new partner and moved out of Texas to Iowa.

Patricia has been living in the U.S. for a total of 8 years, two of which were spent in Salford. Like Elizabeth, she was not married but had a boyfriend (his pseudonym is Miguel and she also referred to him as her marido); they had been living together for about 3.5 years. Miguel worked in the construction industry. Patricia had three children, two boys, Alejandro and Roberto, from her first marido, and a daughter named Sofia from her current partner. Alejandro was seven, Roberto was five, and Laura was two. All children were U.S. citizens. Patricia had completed the third grade in primary school. She does not speak English. At the time of the study Patricia was unemployed but actively looking for jobs. There were a couple of times (I witnessed) when she made and sold Mexican food for economic purposes.

5.1.3. Glances of Gloria’s world

Gloria was 25 years old at the time of the study. She grew up in a big city located at the U.S.-Mexico border. Gloria is very different than the other transnational Latinas of this study because she came with a tourist visa. Her parents were well-established in Mexico. Her father made good money working for an American company driving a truck transporting glass from Mexico to the U.S. She also told me her mother was a stay-at-home mother and her brother was in college. She would cross the border legally with her parents (with a tourist visa) for vacations.
During her adolescence she decided to come to the U.S. for six months and stayed with her aunt. She studied English in High School because she wanted to become a bilingual teacher in Mexico. She then extended her visa, and later, decided to stay indefinitely even though she knew she was becoming an undocumented immigrant. She did not have any other reason to stay than her new boyfriend, who is now her romantic partner (Antonio). She was 18 years old by that time.

Gloria had been living in the U.S. for six years. She moved directly from Mexico to Salford. She was not married to Antonio but referred to him as her husband. They had been together for 7 years and had two daughters: Sol, who was 6, and Mariana who was two. All children were U.S. citizens. Gloria went to High School in Salford but did not graduate because she needed to complete a General Educational Development (GED) class. She had some level of English although she constantly stated she needed to take additional English lessons and get her High School diploma. Gloria was unemployed. Antonio, her husband, worked in construction (installation of windows). Gloria and Antonio were planning to apply and get conditional permanent residency through the DREAM Act. Gloria’s economic conditions went awry after she moved to the U.S. She was resentful of her inability to achieve her life aspirations because of the amount of time she spent taking care of children and the lack of time to take care of herself.

5.1.4. Glances of Silvia’s world

Silvia migrated from Guatemala to the U.S. when she was 20. She moved following her immigrant partner Orlando, who moved to the U.S. because his mother had abandoned him when he was little she decided to make it up to him. He moved first and 10 months later sent for Silvia. With the help of two coyotes Silvia crossed two borders: one from Guatemala to Mexico, then the other from Mexico to the U.S. She got caught at the Mexico-U.S. border and was sent back to Mexico. Then crossed the border again, but this time from another place; she successfully got into the U.S. Crossing the borders took her about a month, a car accident, being hidden under the belly of a truck amid toilet paper, and $5,000. Silvia’s husband got the money by saving money from his paycheck.
Silvia had been living in the U.S. for about six years. She was not married to Orlando but like the other mothers, she referred to him as her husband. They had been together for 11 years and had three children: Jonathan, who was 5, Alisa who was 3, and Mace who was 2. They were born in the U.S. Silvia completed ninth grade in Guatemala. She did not speak English, but considered taking classes. Silvia did not have a job outside the home but was looking for seasonal work. She did have experience in the agriculture sector (i.e. manually cultivated and harvested vegetables, fruits, or field crops). Orlando worked for a seed company, doing logistical work.

Her years as an immigrant mother in Salford were difficult and arduous. She constantly expressed feelings of being discriminated against by community members, most of the time Americans. Silvia was the transnational Latina mother who had the hardest time in terms of racism and discrimination. She was unsettled with the idea of being an immigrant, and being perceived as “the other.” Silvia felt she was not treated well and my data shows how she repetitively voiced her desire to return to her home country.

5.1.5. Glances of Bridgett’s world

Bridgett, who was 30 years old when we met, came (from Mexico) to the U.S. escaping from her in-laws who, according to Bridgett’s account, operated within a gender relation system that constrained her freedom and her relationship with her husband. She felt oppressed in that environment and wanted to get out. Bridgett (and her husband) wanted to be free even though they had some economic status in their home country. They had four children: Elsa who was 14, Alfonso who was 9, Carlos was 7, and Paz who was 4. Only the last two children were U.S. citizens.

Her husband Efrain migrated first. One year and two months went by and her husband sent for Bridgett and their two youngest children (the other two were born in the U.S.). But unfortunately, only one child was brought to the U.S. at that time. Bridgett and her husband decided it was too risky to cross the border with a 17-month-old child. They planned on bringing the baby later with legal documents (borrowed from another U.S. citizen baby) with the help of a
relative who had legal papers to live in the U.S. Efrain paid $7,000 to bring her oldest daughter Elsa and wife to U.S. Bridget crossed the border with Elsa (who was 4) and came to the U.S. with no major difficulties (according to Bridgett). But, the other child was still in Mexico in the care of Efrain’s parents. Bridgett could not bear the thought of her son being away, that she abandoned him!

Bridgett had lived in Salford for 8 years. She was married for 5 years, but her and her partner have been together for a total of 17 years. Bridgett completed Middle School. She did not speak English but did understand a little. At the time of the study she was not working; her last job was at a seed plant cutting and packing corn. Bridgett’s husband worked at the same seed plant where Bridgett used to work.

5.2. Discrimination, Isolation and Poverty: Are these their biggest challenges?

Research tells us that Latinos move to the U.S. in search of a “better life” or “better future,” in other words, better job opportunities to support their families (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). Unfortunately for them, once they move to the U.S. they still face additional challenging situations related to their condition as immigrants. In the literature chapter, I argue that transnational Latinas’ struggles are often related to being poor, physically and socially isolated, and discriminated against. I assumed that participants in this study would recognize and name their struggles as such. Surprisingly, only one participant explicitly identified being discriminated against (for being Latina) as her major challenging circumstance.

From the dominant perspective, we might think that many Latinas who come from developing countries are poor, live isolated, and constantly face racism and we may think that these are their fundamental challenges (objects), that they are women struggling to survive the socio-economic conditions of their environment (Coutin, 2000; Therrien & Ramirez, 2002; Schmalzbauer, 2011). And they are, because the women in this study were all facing those structural problems; however, their accounts show me they were struggling with other specific situations too. This led me to the conclusion that poverty, discrimination, and isolation were all
structural dynamics that served as the context in which transnational Latinas functioned in their daily lives but that these factors were part of the larger socio-economic context of being undocumented. Furthermore, these conditions or challenges were also part of the context in which they practiced resilience.

5.3. Transnational Latina Mothers’ Common Struggles

This section presents relevant information about the life experiences of transnational participants with socio-economic, socio-cultural, and structural problems, which provide a common ground for which these women experience everyday life in the U.S., and confront (old, new, and emerging) struggles as they try to adjust to a new culture. First, I offer a look into their economic situations. After that, I provide information about their understandings of poverty that might help us to comprehend why they would not describe or identify themselves as poor women. Next, I present evidence of their frequent and similar experiences of racism and discrimination with different community members or institutions. Later, information regarding their life situations in terms of social isolation or inclusion to their communities is included. Then, I move to the substance of the shared socio-cultural challenges faced by transnational participants.

5.3.1. Transnational Latina mothers’ immediate-material challenges (immediate-material objects)

Participant mothers faced innumerable challenges related to their economic situations. The next section presents information of how participants struggled with getting by in terms of material resources. In addition to that, information regarding their strategies/practices to turn their economic situation around is presented.

5.3.1.1. Tengo lo necesario para vivir [I have enough to live on]

The U.S. official poverty line for a family of four individuals including children is $23,850 a year. If the income for a family of four is below that line, the family and each individual in it are considered poor (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). The
material life conditions of transnational Latina participants represented the U.S. government definition of poverty. Elizabeth’s family consisted of 5 individuals, including her. They were all living in a two-bedroom trailer. In one bedroom the parents and youngest child slept, and the other bedroom belonged to the two other kids. They all shared the same bathroom. Elizabeth did not work outside the home. Her partner had a job as a house painter. He worked approximately 40 hours a week and made $1,600 a month ($19,200 a year). They paid around $500.00 for the rent bill, which included the water utility, electricity and part of the food expenses. Every month they sent $500 to El Salvador to Pablo’s parents to pay the expenses of Lucia, the daughter who stayed in El Salvador. With the money that was left they would pay other bills (e.g. T.V., cable, and cellphone).

When I met Patricia, she was living in an old motel on the outskirts of town. The motel was right off a highway. Patricia, her husband and the three children lived in the same bedroom. The two oldest children slept in a bunk bed; the little girl slept in a baby/toddler bed; Patricia and her husband had a bed. Next to their beds, there was a small kitchen with a dinner table. There was half of a wall between the kitchen and the bathroom. Outside the bathroom there was a big shelf where food and cleaning items were organized. A few weeks later they moved to a bigger house, which they rented. Like Elizabeth, Patricia did not work outside the home. Miguel, her husband, worked in construction and spent a lot of days away at different construction sites around the Midwest. Miguel’s paycheck was $2000 a month (25,000 a year). They paid $300 in rent. The rest of the money was used to pay food, school material, house bills, cellphone bills, car insurance and gas, and Patricia’s medical expenses on some occasions.

Gloria was unemployed, and her husband Antonio was the sole breadwinner of the household. Antonio worked in construction, specifically in the installation of windows of houses. He made $1400 a month ($16,800 per year). They spent about $400 in food, $338 in rent, $140 in electricity, and $60 to $70 in gas. So they had left about $400 to pay for Catholic private school for their daughter, gas, car insurance, TV cable, Internet, and cellphone bills. There were times when Gloria had to pay medical bills of $170 (no medicine included) because she did not
have health insurance. There were times where they had to wait for the next paycheck (two weeks) to keep up with the bills. Because Antonio was making “a lot of money” every month they did not qualify for food stamps. They only qualified during the winter when Antonio made less money. They did not qualify for gas assistance (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) because they did not have social security, a requirement to be eligible for such aid.

There were five members in Silvia’s family. Silvia did not work outside the home when we met. Her husband Orlando worked at a soybean company and made $2,400 a month during summers and $1,500 a month the rest of the year. They lived at Orlando’s mother’s house. The house was a two-story nice house; it had three bedrooms, one living room, one kitchen, two bathrooms and one hall. It was nicely decorated by Silvia’s mother-in-law. They were living there so they did not have to pay electricity, gas or water. They paid $400 in rent and the rest of the money was used to pay gasoline, car insurance, food, and cellphone bills. Sometimes Silvia would send money to Guatemala to her mother or grandmother. Silvia still owes money ($2,000) from pregnancy health care and childbirth expenses at the clinic.

Bridgett lived in a two-story old house. She shared the place with her husband’s uncle’s family (him, his wife and their three children). The house had three bedrooms but one room was being repaired. Each family slept in one bedroom. Both families shared the living room, the kitchen, and one bathroom. Efrain, Bridgett’s husband, worked at a meat packing plant. He made about $400 every week ($1,600 a month). Sometimes he would make less money, depending on the amount of work and hours. They sent $200 every month to their son, who was living in Mexico, and $50 to Bridgett’s mother. They paid $220 in rent and $150 in food every week. They paid other bills (gas, electricity, cable, water, cellphone, and car insurance). Sometimes Bridgett had to go to the doctor and paid $42 for each doctor visit.

But despite their economic conditions (they named and I observed) none of them described themselves as poor. They felt they had what they needed at the most basic level. They equated poverty or being poor as not having food to eat or a place where to live. When I asked Elizabeth if she lived in poverty she responded: “No. No, pues tengo todo lo necesario para
vivir. Pues allá en El Salvador tampoco... pero así como él no trabajaba si pasamos necesidades verdad... estamos mejor acá” [No. I have everything necessary to live. There, in El Salvador, we didn’t have anything… he didn’t have a job so lived with many needs. Here we are better]. When I asked Elizabeth what she meant by having all the necessary things to live she said: “Pues una casa, pues tengo la comida de mis hijos no me falta, tengo todo” [well, a house, I have food to feed my children, I have it all].

Similarly, Patricia described her economic status as having enough to satisfy her (basic) needs such as enough food and good health:

“Digo siento que tengo lo suficiente... Si... porque le digo ahora gracias a Dios tenemos salud, tenemos este... pues de comer no nos falta... que es lo más principal... o sea por ese lado le digo yo me siento bien... aunque a veces si nos la miramos dura con los billes o con otro y mas ahorita pero... pero jajaja pero le digo que yo creo que ahí poco a poquito vamos a ir saliendo adelante.”

[I say we have enough… yes… because thanks to God we have health, we have enough food, which is the most important… I feel good in respect of that… though sometimes we have some difficulties with bills or other things but… hahaha but like I say I think that, little by little, we are going to move forward].

Gloria, whose economic status negatively changed when she moved to the U.S., talked about living from hand to mouth: “mire yo creo vivimos, igual que mucha gente, al día” [look, I think we live from hand to mouth, like many other people]. She did not feel she was living in poverty though. She later added “lo más importante es que tengas salud y que estemos bien...y como familia, yo... nosotros estamos bien” [the most important thing is to have good health, that we are good, and as a family, me… we all are OK].

Silvia’s comments intertwined with Elizabeth’s and Patricia. When I asked Silvia if she felt she was living in poverty she said: “pues no, pues a lo mejor pienso que no... porque pienso que tengo lo más... lo mas necesario o sea no tengo por decirlo uno demasiado pero pues que la comida que es lo más importante nunca nos falta.” [No, I don’t think so… I think I have the most… the most needed, I mean I do not have a lot but I have food that is the most important
Interestingly, later in our conversations, Silvia explicitly described herself as a poor person but affirmed she only needed a house and a stable job to live better.

Like Gloria, Bridgett had some class status in Mexico. But things changed when she moved to the U.S. Bridgett was experiencing a declining economic situation to the point where she (and her family) had to live with another family so they could share housing and other expenses. She recognized she was living in poverty but felt they had enough to eat and clothes to wear; she felt she never lacked anything. For her, living in the U.S. provided her the freedom she could not have when she was living in Mexico:

“Vivía mejor en México… pero…no me importa mucho porque aquí soy libre…. Hago lo que quiero… salgo adonde yo quiera… estoy con mi esposo… hago mis cosas que yo quiero… pero en realidad no me hace falta nada… nunca nos quedamos sin comer… si ellos (hijos) necesitan zapatos tenemos para zapatos… tal vez no tendremos para hijos como para hacer un viaje y así pero en realidad siento que tengo lo que necesito… no se… le digo comparado a como vivía allá (con los suegros) pues puedo decir que si vivimos pobres pero pues nunca me falta nada.”

[I was better off in Mexico… but… I don’t care so much because I am free here… I do what I want … I go wherever I want to go… I’m with husband… I do the things I want… in reality I have everything I need… we are never left without food… if they (children) need shoes we have enough to buy them shoes… perhaps we don’t have the luxury to go on trips but the reality is that I feel I have everything I need… I don’t know… if I compare how I used to live there (with her in-laws) I can say that we are poor but I have everything I need].

The cases of Gloria, Patricia, and Bridgett demonstrate a contradiction about what dominant literature says about the main reason behind Latino immigrants’ intentions of migrating to the U.S. Scholarship indicates that Latinos move to the U.S. for economic reasons (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). However, the cases of these women contradict such information. Bridgett lived in deeper poverty here in the U.S. than in Mexico. But she felt happier here because she was free. She used immigration to escape from family feuds (or sexual harassment, in the case of Patricia). These women talked about immigration as a way that was giving them something in terms of their identity. A liberated transnational identity!
How they understand and experience poverty is a shared context of these transnational Latina mothers’ lives. All of these women said they had all they needed. But their accounts show that it was about all about surviving. For them, having *lo suficiente* (enough) was all about meeting their basic standards of living, namely having food, shelter, clothes, and money to pay the bills. They also talked about *salir adelante* (to get ahead/move forward) that was part of their goal as transnational individuals, to *move forward* in this new world. Once they were able to achieve their basic material needs they talked about planning to improving their life circumstances (e.g., education for themselves and their children; getting a better place to live).

5.3.1.2. Making ends meet: *Si no tengo de que comer pues tengo que buscar la manera* [if I have nothing to eat I have to find the way]

Because money was so scarce, participants had to make choices about how to earn additional incomes to make ends meet. They were economically active not only by preparing and selling foods (or selling cosmetic products) to neighbors or friends, but also by looking for jobs and working outside their homes. Elizabeth for example, watched another Latina’s baby all day, sold cosmetic products from Avon, and made and sold *pupusas* (a traditional dish from El Salvador). A Latina friend who also sold Avon products trained her. She did not like to sell it because she felt she did not have the personality to sell anything, but she did not have other choices. She did not have papers to work “legally” and did not speak English. Elizabeth sold Avon for a while, but one day someone did not pay her what they bought from her and she ended up paying for the debt. She stopped selling Avon. Elizabeth was also babysitting a 9-month baby girl (from 4am to 4pm everyday) and made $50 every week. There were times when they needed to make additional money to pay the bills so Elizabeth decided to sell *pupusas* every other Saturday at home and once in a while at the Church.

Elizabeth invited me on a Saturday to try and taste her pupusas. I accepted the invitation. I was curious about that dish and I wanted to learn what Elizabeth was doing to help her husband to make end meets and send money to Lucia. That day, she started to prepare things at 4:00 am; I remember getting at her house at 7:00 am. I spent the whole morning and part of the afternoon
with them. Elizabeth and her sister-in-law were cooking in the kitchen while the husbands were
talking in the living room; children were playing outside. I was with the women in the kitchen
trying to understand how the food was made. The *pupusas* looked like a corn pancake and were
made with pre-cooked maize flour along with water and salt. They were stuffed with cheese,
meat, and herbs. And they were delicious. The food was made to order. Pablo would wait for a
round of *pupusas* and take them to community acquaintances outside the neighborhood who had
previously ordered them. Elizabeth’s oldest daughters Adela and Lisa would take the *pupusas* to
neighbors around their trailer home and would bring the money back afterwards. That day
Elizabeth and her sister-in-law made about 100 *pupusas* that were sold at $2.00 each. At the end
of the day they made about $200 and Elizabeth kept half of the money. When I asked Elizabeth
why she did not make *pupusas* every day or more often she told me she was “afraid of the
police” and did not want to get in trouble.

Patricia, just like Elizabeth, felt the need to help the household’s economy. She did not
have papers that authorized her to work in the U.S. and finding a job was a challenge, so she
would also cook and sell food (made to order) at home. In her case, *tamales* were the key to
getting some economic resources to make ends meet. Patricia would sell food any day of the
week, depending on the needs or circumstances. She also invited me to eat her Mexican *tamales.*
Same as the *pupusas,* preparing *tamales* takes a lot of time. Patricia would wake up at five in the
morning to start making the pork and chicken (used to stuff the tamales). I got to her house at
eight. By that time they had already moved to a house and were no longer living in a motel. That
day Miguel was at home, fixing things around the house. Patricia (with Laura her youngest child)
and I spent all morning talking while she was making the tamales. A *tamal* is a seasoned meat
(chicken, beef or pork) wrapped in cornmeal dough. It is often steamed or baked in cornhusks or
green plantain leaves. It is common for Mexicans to eat one or two for lunch. Patricia would sell
tamales to people she knew from the community. That day I saw people coming to the house to
get their tamales and paying with cash. She made about $300 that day (sold each tamal for
$2.00). Patricia did not make tamales every week but she told me it was quite often. There were
times when she also sold corncobs with mayonnaise and cheese. That was her way of making additional money to help out with the household expenses.

Both transnational participants talked about the way they had to make extra money. Their economic resources: AVON, preparing food, and watching other people’s children, were related to the things women have traditionally done in the private spheres of the home. I would like to note here that Elizabeth, Patricia, and Gloria did not like the idea of leaving their children at the care of babysitters (who did not have a certificate) and did not have the resources to pay for expensive childcare.

Gloria’s case was a little bit different. She did not have to work or find ways to make ends meet. When they had a tight budget, they would borrow money from Antonio’s family or Gloria’s aunt. Nevertheless, I should like to comment that Gloria was actively looking for jobs but her lack of documents to legally work and English proficiency precluded any meaningful opportunity.

The story of Silvia was also different. She did work outside home. When I met Silvia she was between jobs. She told me she had worked first in a soybean company, in which her main tasks included weeding, harvesting, and packing soybeans. She made $7.50 per hour, and worked 38 hours a week. Most of the work involved standing in the field during the summer for hours under the sun. She was fired because she was caught working with forged documents. Then, she started working at a farm, picking and cleaning up apples. She made $10.00 per hour, and worked 20-30 hours a week. She did not have problems with her papers, but it was only a seasonal job so she needed to find another job. Later, during the data gathering for this study, she found another job in a corn production plant. She was working in a line cleaning leaves, stalk or trash from whole cobs. She worked from 7am to 6pm six days a week and made $8.25 per hour ($12.38 overtime). None of Silvia’s jobs offered health insurance coverage. Silvia’s story corroborates what has been found in other studies, that undocumented Latinos endure specific discriminatory challenges at the workplace as they get limited or non-existent medical assistance (Trueba, 2004). With the money Silvia was making she was helping Orlando to pay the bills and
also was saving it to send it to her grandmother in Guatemala. She also showed me a big cardboard box she was filling with a computer and clothes for her family that would later be sent to Guatemala by regular mail. The job at the corn factory was also seasonal job, so she was already looking for another job. She was considering babysitting children at home, as she had done that right after she migrated from Guatemala. She did not like the idea of taking care of children, because she would not make more than $10.00 per day per child.

Similarly, Bridgett worked outside the home. When I met her, she was unemployed but noted she had worked in a soybean factory, the same factory Silvia worked, and doing the same type of labor. At the time of this study Bridgett’s husband was working there. She worked 38 hours a week and was paid $7.50 per hour. She also was fired because she was working with fake papers. To date, finding a job (and being able to help her husband with additional material resources) remains an aspiration rather than an executed plan, as Bridgett struggles with lack of authorized papers to work and the need to care for her youngest children. Contrary to Elizabeth, Patricia, and Gloria, Silvia and Bridgett left their children at the care of Latina babysitters who did not have a Child Care Certificate, so they only paid very small fees.

During the study, all participants used public services such Women Infants, & Children program (WIC), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) often called food stamps, and the Medicaid Program. These programs provided food purchasing aid, health care referrals and services, and nutrition education and for low-income families living in the U.S. and were used for transnational participants as an additional financial resource to make ends meet. It is pertinent to note that undocumented immigrants (transnationals in this case) do not qualify for most public benefits or programs including those that were mentioned above. These transnational Latinas were able to use such programs because their citizen children were all eligible. Yet, all transnational Latinas complained because the little help available was not enough to cater for their financial/material necessities. They told me years ago the assistance provided them with better resources but with governmental cut budgets they were just getting basic resources.
The global economic restructure and the inequalities produced by patriarchal capitalism (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000) forced these women’s husbands/partners to migrate from their home countries in search of a better future (Baker, 2004). Some transnational participants moved to the U.S. to reunite with their transnational loved ones, while others were escaping from family feuds, but somehow or other they all hoped they could improve their lives. They all reported having some improvement in their lives in terms of material goods; but, although there were some economic improvements for some of the participants, most of them voiced having to struggle to make ends meet. The economic statuses of these transnational Latina participants can be explained by reference to the fact that they experience barriers to economic advancement because: 1) their partner, who most of the time were the breadwinners of the household, did not make enough money to make ends meet; and 2) although transnational Latinas wanted to help out through different means, they did not have legal work authorization, English proficiency, or educational attainment (Jensen, 2006) so the jobs they could get or the money they made from other labor activities was not sufficient. These women (and their families) barely met their basic needs (shelter, food, and clothing) and their stories evidence the absence of choice and denial of opportunity (Thibos, Lavin-Loucks, & Martin, 2007).

What is more, the jobs that these transnational Latinas were eligible for or had access to consisted of racialized and gendered occupations that were characterized by the lowest wages (e.g., food making or childcare) (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Schmalzbauer, 2011). There was also evidence that participants (Silvia and Bridgett) who worked outside the home did not have access to higher job wages (Chavira-Prado, 1992), such as those that can be earned from retail salesmen or office assistant jobs, so they barely improved their economic mobility.

Furthermore, because the dominant socio-economic and political structures do not provide these low-income undocumented transnational Latinas equal access to achieving economic stability and mobility (Weber, 2010), they all had to engage in creative and often time “illegal” strategies to achieve the same economic objectives everyone desires (Merton, 1968) for example cooking and selling food without a proper permit or using forged social securities to
work outside home. More in-depth analysis of their survival strategies and activities will be provided in the resilience chapter (Chapter 6).

5.3.2. Transnational Latina mothers’ structural challenges

Not only were the transnational Latina participants connected by similarities in terms of socio-economic experience, but also they all faced socio-structural challenges such as discriminatory experiences with social services providers and community members, lack of papers and language proficiency, and social isolation. But before I present the findings of this theme, it is appropriate to ensure that the reader understands what I mean for socio-structural challenges.

Social structure can be described as the systematic pattern of social relations and social institutions that comprise a society. Social structures are not immediately visible to the observer, though they are present and affect all aspects of human experience and behavior in society (Lacroix, 2012). Further, social structures shape the access to material resources that individuals have in their society and shape many interactions that these individuals have with each other, for example social class (Lacroix, 2012; Merton, 1968). For the purpose of this dissertation, socio-structural challenges are defined as social categories attributed by U.S. society that position transnational Latinos in unequal status and at a disadvantage in respect to dominant or mainstream groups (see Reina & Lohman forthcoming). Those challenges encompass racial discrimination, lack of papers and language proficiency, and social isolation. As I highlighted in another research article, structural challenges should be conceived as societal constructed categories (see Reina & Lohman, forthcoming) instead of individual inadequacies (Zabrocki et al., 2013).

5.3.2.1. ¡Ellos son racistas! [They are racist!]: The micro-aggressions of everyday life

Racism was an overarching theme that constantly emerged and was expressed by transnational Latina mothers. I remind the reader that racial micro-aggressions refer to “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). All participants were subjected to
discriminatory and unpleasant circumstances in different community spaces such as neighborhoods, doctor’s offices, clinics, public transportation systems, stores, and social service institutions. During our conversations Elizabeth and Silvia shared their experiences with their neighbors:

Elizabeth: “acá vive una, vivía una señora Americana, y ella era bien racista porque ella me mira a mi, como yo soy hispana, ella no me voltea a ver más que los pies. Los niños, no deja que su niña se relacione con los hispanos, a la niña no la saca. A veces uno pues hello, por respeto pues, y ella no le va a contestar el saludo.”

[An American lady used to live there, and she was very racist because she wouldn’t look at me, because I am Hispanic, she would only look at my feet. She wouldn’t let her daughter to play with Hispanic children, she did not let her child to go out and play. Sometimes I would say hello, out of respect, and she wouldn’t respond to me]

When I asked Silvia about her neighbors and if she talked to them this is how she responded to me:

Silvia: “puros americanos hay... no, no nos hablamos... a veces si, si salutan pero son como muy... no sé... cómo ya son señores grandes los que viven ahí donde vivo yo... como que son algo racistas... luego lo ven a uno y se le quedan viendo y ya así cómo feo.”

[there are a lot of Americans… no we don’t talk… sometimes they say hi but they are like… I don’t know… my neighbors are older people… and they are somehow racist… they see you and stare at you, like ugly]

Transnational participants encountered discrimination at the doctor’s offices, clinics, and schools due to prejudice against their race and their lack of English proficiency. For instance, when these mothers looked for health care (for their children and themselves) they were treated poorly. Some of their children underwent discrimination at their schools. See for example the experiences of Elizabeth, Patricia and Bridgett:

Elizabeth: “Pues a veces cuando uno les dice que uno habla español pues ellos (médicos) como que se molestan porque no hablas ingles... porque ellos son medio racistas con uno... no sé por qué. Hay unos que no quieren ni que los niños se muevan de donde están pero los niños son inquietos usted los ve más enfrente de las personas... y una vez no la dejaba ni que agarrara ni un libro la niña... (le decía) que no que dejara eso... que no lo tocara... aja y ya pues hizo lo más rápido... ni me la revisó bien a la niña...no la revisó bien.”
[Because sometimes when one speaks in Spanish they (doctors) get bothered because one doesn't speak English... because they are racist... I don't know why. There are some (doctors) that don’t want children to move (during the medical consultation) and you know they are restless, especially in front of other people. One time he (doctor) didn't let her (daughter) to take a book (that supposed to be there for children to read/play), he told her not to even touch the book... and he just did the medical consultation faster, he didn’t check the girl... he didn’t check her well]

Elizabeth was conscious of the fact that she had a neighbor who was racist. What is interesting in her case is that at the doctor’s office, Elizabeth felt discriminated against, but she told me she decided not to care about that situation because she needed the doctor’s ayuda [help] in order to get health care for her daughter. I asked Elizabeth “did your neighbor’s attitude affect you?” She responded no. Then I asked “why hers didn’t affect you and why the doctors did?” She said, “because I needed the help from him, I needed his help, I didn't need anything from her, not from people like her...” In her case, the need of help mediated her feelings towards the doctor and the whole situation.

Patricia and Bridgett talked about the life of transnational Latina mothers in Salford. They expressed their discontent of the way they felt others were looking at them and their families:

Patricia: “Se siente uno diferente, yo digo a veces personas (enfermeras) me miran mal por ser hispana. Lo siento con las miradas... cuando te miran cuando vas al doctor, cuando sabes que no puedes hablar el mismo idioma. Siento esa mirada, como de reproche! A lo mejor nos discriminan por eso, por ser inmigrantes. Va uno a la tienda y se nos quedan mirando...”

[You feel you are different, I think there are people (nurses) who look at me bad because I’m Hispanic. I can feel it with their looks... when you go to the doctor and the way they look at you there, when you know you can’t speak the same language. I feel that look, like a reproaching look! Maybe they discriminate us for that, for being immigrants. You go to the store and they stare at you...]

Bridgett: “La (hija) mayor si una vez se quejó de una niña de la escuela... ella se peleó en la escuela con una niña americana porque le dijo que los hispanos comían piedras y vivían abajo de los puentes... le dijo que cuando mi niña venía cruzando la frontera la iban a atravesar con una flecha.”
[My oldest daughter complained about another girl from school… she got into a fight with an American girl from school because she said Hispanics eat rocks and live under bridges… (the girl) told her that when she was crossing the border they (border police) were going to kill her with an arrow.]

Similarly, Patricia and Bridgett felt very uncomfortable because of the ways people in their community, particularly healthcare providers and school members, perceived them. Just as Elizabeth, they both were aware of their “otherness” position in respect to individuals from the majority (or mainstream) group.

Gloria and Silvia reflected on their personal encounters with social service providers (food pantry) and a public transportation driver. They expressed their frustrations with these individuals’ behaviors and were deeply disgruntled at being treated unfairly for being Latinas:

Gloria: “Yo creo que a veces el racismo… como que… yo me considero una persona que a mi me da vergüenza a veces pedir… pero cuando en verdad la (comida) necesitas por qué te la van a negar… son gente egoísta de no ayudar a la gente.”

[I think the racism, sometimes…. you know… sometimes I feel embarrassed when I have to ask for something… but when you really need it why would they deny it to you? They are selfish people because they do not help others]

Silvia: “Necesitaba ir al programa de la Cigüeña, era en el tiempo de frio y le dije a la señora (Americana que manejaba el bus) para donde iba. Y le dije donde me tenia que dejar y no me dejó ahí sino que me fue a dejar más lejos y me tocó que caminar desde allá y me dijo bien feo… y le dije como pude de verdad que no era ahí donde me tenia que quedar, y no me quería bajar y me dijo no! aquí bájate y se paró… y le dije como pude de verdad que no era ahí donde me tenia que quedar. No era tan lejos pues pero esta muy frio.”

[I needed to go to the Stork program, it was cold so I told the lady (American bus driver) where I was heading to. I told her where she needed to drop me off but she did not stop there, she dropped me off farther and I had to walk, and she was very mean… And I told her, as clear as I could, that I needed to stay in another place but she didn’t want to take me there, she said no! You have to get off here… I an unsure if she didn’t want to or because of racism… I was five month pregnant and my two-year-old child was with me, and I did not want to walk carrying him. It wasn’t that far but it was very cold]

Gloria felt ashamed when she had to ask for food at the food bank. When she requested food assistance, service providers denied it. She described them as selfish because they did not help
other people who were in need. In Silvia’s case, she hoped to get where she needed to, but the bus driver dropped her off somewhere else. It is important to understand that in Salford, like any rural town in Midwestern areas, there is only one bus (sort of a shuttle) that does not operate on schedule. A person needs to call ahead of time and pay certain amount of money for its services (free for those who go to get Medicaid services). Silvia had used the bus service before and assured me she had been dropped off at the correct place. Silvia felt the female bus driver did not want to help her, although was uncertain she was being racist.

These micro-aggressions and discriminatory experiences would likely not have happened to these participants if they were in their home countries. They experienced these situations because they are part of their transcultural/transnational experience. Yet, they demonstrate they attempted to negotiate and resist their transnational circumstances (Fernandes, 2013). Although racial discrimination experiences can be profoundly disorienting and frustrating (Espín, 1999), these transnational Latinas decided not to hold any feelings about it. They were keenly aware of their “racist” neighbors, nurses, doctors, and other community members, but chose not to let racist situations or micro-aggressions disturb them because they did not want to get sick; in Elizabeth’s words: “only by thinking about it you can get sick… is better to let it go…[after all] we are all human beings.” What I see as problematic about this finding, however, is that ongoing racial discrimination might encourage unequal and hierarchical relationships (Hill, 2000) among Salford community members (i.e., between White and Latinos) and Latinos are affected particularly if they are the ones who mostly look for and use social/public or healthcare services, while service personnel are most of the time White individuals.

5.3.2.2. En este país uno sin papeles no vale [In this country one without papers is worthless]

Globalization and the material conditions of developing countries structure women’s lives (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994), and such conditions, often times, result in migration and cultural displacement (Fernandes, 2013). Transnational Latinas in this dissertation crossed geographical borders “illegally.” They did not have the “legal” immigration status to live or stay in the U.S. but they made the decision to settle here. Being undocumented was part of the context of their
daily lives. Participants’ experiences with the consequences of not having “legal” residence demonstrated how their immigration status influenced their transnational life.

Being worthless because they did not have a “legal” status was not the only perception or feeling participants had regarding being undocumented. They all expressed wanting to find a stable job, but it was hard for them to find one, and when they found one they had to accept whatever the employer wanted to pay them because they were undocumented. Elizabeth, very frustrated, expressed her suffering and talked about what it meant for her to be undocumented:

“Pues la realidad aquí se sufre... Porque las personas indocumentadas sufren porque no (silencio)... pues a veces no encuentran trabajo...no le quieren dar trabajo en cualquier parte y cuando viene a agarrar un trabajo pues tienen que aceptar lo que le paguen porque por lo mismo no tiene papeles no puede ni agarrar su aseguranza, nada, pues aquí se sufre en ese sentido. Y pues un indocumentado no puede digamos agarrar su casa y querer vivir en casa; no puede porque siempre les piden papeles pues social y todo eso.”

[One suffers here, that’s the reality…undocumented people suffer because they can’t find a job…they can’t get a job anywhere and when they find one they have to accept whatever the employer wants to pay them because they do not have papers… they can’t get health insurance, nothing, so here we suffer in that sense means. The undocumented can’t buy or own a house; they can’t because they need to have papers, social security and all that]

Gloria’s statements mirrored those of Elizabeth’s. She complained about the high cost of healthcare services and medicines. In general, for her, being undocumented prevented individuals from getting well-paid jobs (and healthcare coverage) so they often had to delay going to see a doctor unless they had a severe illness.

“De preferencia si vemos que no es algo tan grave yo creo que mucha gente se espera para no ir porque para ir a pagar una consulta de $170... y eso es la consulta no mas... todavía te falta ir a comprar tu medicina, y la medicina de aquí es muy cara... porque el sueldo que a veces uno gana por no tener papeles es poco.”

[If we know is not a severe illness, people prefer to wait and do not go to the doctor because they would have to pay $170… and that is only for the medical consultation… then you have to buy your medicine, and here the medicine is very expensive… and the salary that a person who does not have papers earns is little]
Patricia also complained about how difficult it was for undocumented individuals to find a job: “Es muy difícil (encontrar trabajo)... porque muchos no te quieren por los papeles, porque batallas mucho, porque lo primero que te checan son los papeles” [It is very difficult (to find a job) because a lot of people don’t want you without papers, because you battle a lot, because the first thing they check is your papers].

Silvia also commented on the need of having legal residence papers to obtain a good job and salary. In addition, being undocumented made it extremely complicated for her to meet the health care needs of her children. For instance, Silvia did not have “papers” so she could not qualify for a driver license. There were times when she had to cancel doctors’ appointments or delayed taking her children to the emergency room because she did not have anyone else to take them to the clinic. So the case of Silvia is a clear example of how lacking papers can affect the lives of transnational Latinas. Silvia needed to go to the doctor but she could not drive because she did not have a driver license; in Salford, there are no taxi services; taking the bus might not be an option because of her experience with the bus driver. Her husband worked all day and she did not have a lot of friends to ask them for favors. This is an example of how constrained her mobility options were due to her “illegal” immigration status.

Just as Silvia, Bridgett expressed annoyance and fear about not having a driver license. But unlike Silvia, Bridgett (and the other transnational participants) drove her car without proper documentation. And they all were afraid to drive or commit any unlawful mistake due to fear of deportation, so they drove carefully out of necessity. In addition to that, Elizabeth, Patricia, Silvia and Bridgett expressed their frustrations with the lack of papers as their undocumented conditions did not allow them to travel to visit their families in their home countries. Later, when I asked Bridgett about her feelings about how other people perceive undocumented Latinos she responded:

“Me da como coraje... digo: estamos aquí trabajando... no estamos viviendo nada más del sistema, hacemos cosas también, como yo soy voluntaria en la escuela, ¡soy voluntaria! Si yo puedo ayudar lo que pueda ayudar aunque sea las 8 horas al día yo lo
According to Bridgett, the only thing that placed her outside of the law was her immigration status. She was aware that undocumented Latinos who come across illegally operate outside the law, but once they settle in the U.S. they always stick to the law. Bridgett described the undocumented as nice people who enjoy volunteer work in their communities, who like to help, and who pay their taxes, yet they have to break some laws in order to survive (cross the border and work without legal documentation). Bridgett’s narrative demonstrates her own understanding of being inside and outside the law and her frustrations of being perceived as a criminal, which she was not. As I reflected on Bridgett’s accounts I felt that her comments reflect mainstream society’s way of understanding the undocumented as transnational and/or immigrant Latinos merely in such dualistic, ambiguous, and prejudiced terms (“legal” and “illegal”).

In sum, “illegal” residency constrained the life of transnational Latina mothers in many different ways, be it in terms of employment, access to health insurance and housing, inability to drive to take care of family health needs, and stigmatization and prejudice from their community (and society as a whole). Their particular vulnerability because of their immigrations status may be explained by feminist Deborah King’s interactive model of oppression. King (1997)
challenges Beale’s (1972) term “double jeopardy” through which Beale explains the dual discrimination of sexism and racism that oppress black women. King argues that the concepts of double or triple jeopardy (when class is addressed) assume that the relations between all type of discrimination is additive and proposes the concept of multiple jeopardy concept that better captures the relationships among all discriminations. She notes: “the equivalent formulation is racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism” (p. 223). I agree with King’s theory but to address and understand the undocumented experience in a mainstream society I suggest to include a fourth form of discrimination against undocumented Latinos that I would like to call immigration status prejudice.

The experiences (and perceptions) of transnational Latinas as “illegal” serve as an example to illustrate the model. Transnational and undocumented Latinas and Latinos suffer from a similar lack of economic mobility and racial discrimination, but those who are undocumented are subjugated to an additional prejudice and mistreatment because they come to (work and live in) the U.S. “illegally.” They are perceived as criminals as they embodied a crime. But to complicate an already complex experience further, undocumented Latinas are also subject to another form of subjugation in accordance to their gender: sexism. First, they were often confined in the private sphere of the home, taking care of their children and house chores. Second, for those who worked outside the home, they earned little money, and often times less than their Latinos counterparts. Last, husbands/partners were the ones who made all decisions at home. This interactive model of oppression, classism, racism, sexism, and immigration status prejudice is also illustrated in several sections presented below.

5.3.2.3. Se molestan porque uno no se sabe comunicar con ellos [they get upset because one cannot communicate with them]

English is the primary language of the U.S. and was the dominant language spoken in Salford. All participants noted they had very little English proficiency, except for Gloria who had some English skills as she had completed two years of High School in Salford. Still, all transnational participants pointed out that language limited their interactions with non-Spanish
speakers and made them feel discriminated against. They also noted that even having interpreters at social service institutions was not sufficient because oftentimes interpreters did a very poor job. See the case of Elizabeth who described her interactions with nurses at the doctor’s office:

“…llega ella y empieza a hablar en inglés… como la enfermera yo creo que es… la que anota todo… pues empieza a hablarme inglés.” [She starts talking in English… I think she is the nurse… the one who takes notes of everything… so she starts talking to me in English]. Then I asked Elizabeth what she said in that moment, to which she responded:

“That I need an interpreter because I do not understand… well I understand a little bit but she talks too fast… and she keeps writing and writing… then she asks me something and I say: I don’t understand… and she makes this strange face… and she leaves the room angry… when she gets back and she has this face… she doesn’t look at me… she only talks to the translator]

Patricia elaborated on her similar experiences with nurses at the doctor’s office: “a veces se molestan porque uno no se sabe comunicar con ellos y no entienden el idioma de nosotros tampoco.” [sometimes they get mad because one doesn’t know how to communicate with them (nurses) and they do not understand one’s language either]. Silvia also experienced the same situation. There were some occasions in which there were no translators available. On several occasions Silvia had to go to the gynecologist, but because they did not have interpreters available, Silvia had to bring her husband’s stepfather to translate for her. Silvia felt embarrassed and even ashamed of talking about her intimate health in front of a man she barely knew.

Similarly, Gloria complained about the services of interpreters at the clinic. Contrary to the other participants, Gloria had some basic level of English, so when she went to the doctor she sort of understood some of what was said. However, she did not understand fully and always requested an interpreter. She resented their ineptitude and indifference:
“…entonces te dan tu interprete y te dice: y que tiene la niña y tu les vas diciendo... y luego te dice.... el doctor le contesta y como que te dice... yo digo yo entiendo muchahs cosas... y ya me dice por decir ni la quinta parte de lo que me tiene que decir.... pero yo digo si te están preguntando y eres interprete tienes que traducir todo lo que están diciendo... yo les he dicho y me dicen ay es que yo nada mas te estoy diciendo lo mas importante... o sea... yo, una madre... de una madre para tus hijos... a mi me interesa todo lo de mis hijos, lo relacionado con mis hijos.... como me vas a decir nada más la mitad.”

[so they provide you with an interpreter and ask: what is wrong with the girl and you just tell them...then the doctor talks and she (interpreter) says… well I understand a lot of words… and she just tell me less than a fifth of what she suppose to say… but I think if they are asking you and you are the interpreter you have to translate everything they are saying… I have told them that and she says ‘I’m just translating what is most important’… I mean… I, the mother of my children… I care about all regarding my children… how can you tell me only half of the information]

Like the other participants, Bridgett criticized the services provided by employees at the clinics, though she emphasized the attitudes (and arrogance) of Latina receptionists. She felt that a Puerto Rican woman discriminated because she needed her as an interpreter and the woman did not want to help her. I would like to note here that during my participant observations, I involved myself in the life of my participants and I accompanied them (and their children) to their doctors and served as their interpreter. First, we would talk to the nurse who collects information about the child’s health. Then the doctor would proceed with the consultation. Most of the times, doctors would not look at the mother when they spoke, they would only talk to me, and when I asked more than once to repeat something I did not understand, they seemed to be frustrated. There was a time when a doctor decided he wanted to perform a surgery on Silvia’s oldest son but she did not want to; she kept asking me to tell him to run more tests and make sure the boy really needed the operation. I had to tell the doctor four times in four different ways until he finally agreed to it. I witnessed how language, at the doctor’s office, was indeed a major problem for these women.

In this section I presented the language challenges of translational Latinas at the doctor’s offices. However, the challenges of not speaking English transcended into other social spaces.
For example, participants struggled with language when they had to communicate with their landlords, shop salespersons or schoolteachers; to make bank transfers; and to run errands at the post office. Some of them even wanted to make friendships with non-Spanish speakers in their community and do volunteer work at the school; unfortunately, the lack of English proficiency among these transnational Latinas was a hindrance.

Even for Gloria, who had some English skills, reported having a very difficult time trying to help her daughter with school related assignments:

“…tú sabes que los niños que están estudiando te lo dicen exactamente como se pronuncia la palabra correctamente, entonces a mi lo que me…no quiero ya enseñarle algo a ella y confundirla como enseñarle a pronunciar palabras que no son correctas…”

[…]you know that when children are learning they pronounce correctly the words, so for me…I don’t want to teach them something and get her confused… like teaching to pronounce words that are incorrect…]

The other women did not talk about trying to help their children with their homework, and due to the open nature of the interviews, I did not direct this issue towards them. Only Gloria mentioned several times she was having a hard time trying to help her child with her homework. This is another example of how these women felt frustrated because they could not engage in important activities with their children. Also, unlike the other husbands, Antonio was fluent in English and was the one who would help with their child’s studies. What is yet more interesting about Gloria is that in our conversations, she kept differentiating herself from the other transnational Latinas of her community because she had some English knowledge. Gloria was always searching for ways to improve her educational and immigration status.

All the above responses are clear examples of the experiences of transnational Latinas as they try to navigate across cultural linguistic borderlines. Salford was an English language normed community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and they could not follow that rule, so they felt reprimanded and rejected for that. The only way out for transnational participants is to learn English (they all have expressed their sincere desire for learning it) because it would make
a difference in their lives; they would be able to cross cultural linguistic borders and engage in community activities of daily living. However, they had to take care of the household chores and children, so did not have free time to go to classes.

In conclusion, English language skills could have enabled transnational Latina mothers to act in more powerful and functional ways. However, absence of language, like in the case of all participants, made it impossible for them to meet any demands of a solely English speaking community.

5.3.2.4. No me siento tan aislada [I don’t feel so isolated anymore]

Social isolation has been described as “the lack of contact or of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society” (Wilson, 1987, p. 60). When I asked participants if they felt isolated from mainstream community members they all responded they felt welcomed! They did not describe social isolation as a challenge in their lives. However, their comments reflected how restricted and somewhat isolated participants really were. And, as other research has shown, it was specifically the lack of linguistic skills and proper legal documentation (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002) that hindered their full integration into Salford. It should suffice to note that three transnational Latinas lived in race and class segregated spaces, more specifically, trailers and a motel outside Salford. Trailers or mobile homes were located in a trailer park in the outskirts of Salford.

During my visits to their homes, I observed that most of their neighbors were either Latinos or African refugees. I saw an African family at Gloria’s daughter’s birthday, so that meant she interacted with these families. There were some Anglo neighbors but participants rarely interacted with them (just remember the incident of Elizabeth). In addition to that, microaggressions and racial discrimination restricted their ability to socialize with those outside their ethnic group. Here are some significant excerpts that illustrate how they perceived their isolation experiences:
Patricia: “Pues yo digo yo ahorita no me siento tan aislada, no porque a veces doy mi opinión en algún lugar o en otro lugar verdad? Antes si porque no sabía yo cosas, yo no sabía el movimiento de aquí de Salford pero ya no… ya aprendí a andar con todos ellos (hijos) y a unirme le digo…”

[I don’t feel so isolated anymore, no because sometimes I give my opinion here and there right? Before, I felt isolated because I didn’t know things, I didn’t know how things work out here in Salford, but not anymore… I learned to move around with them (children) here, and to integrate I say…]

For Patricia, isolation was related to being able to give her opinion. She did not feel isolated because she could give her opinion to those individuals who she would often interact with (family and close Latino friends). She did not understand isolation as physical interaction with other community members including Anglo individuals, she thought about it in another way. Ultimately, we might need to understand that there is a different way of being a transnational Latina in a host society where you feel integrated, as long as you can express your opinions to people around you and learn to move around the place you live in.

In response to my question about her feelings of being integrated and having social interactions with community members Gloria said:

“… es que yo casi no, si salgo pero no soy tan… pues si hay racismo como en cualquier lugar pero yo casi no me he… trato de no meterme con la gente ni nada… si no te metes con ellos tampoco se meten conmigo…”

[…] you know I don’t, I go out but I am not like… yes there is racism like any other place but I do not… I try not to become involved with people… if you don’t get involved in their business they don’t do get involved in yours…]

Gloria’s lack of contact or interaction with people in her community was the result of her lack of desire to become involved with others, as she wanted to be left alone. What makes me uneasy about her response is the fact that racism was perceived as a common affair that took place everywhere, and perhaps Gloria avoided social interactions because she did not want to feel discriminated against.

Silvia did not interact with many community members, just like Gloria, though her reasons were different. She did not have time to go out and meet new friends because she had to
either work all day or take care of her children when she was off from work. She also asserted her American neighbors (and people in general) were racist and did not feel like making friends with them. Bridget provided a different perspective. She was very optimistic about feeling integrated to her community.

“Yo me siento aceptada desde el primer momento que en que yo llegué aquí me sentí aceptada si... más por los americanos... porque uno de hispanos... otros hispanos están y uno los ve oh hola soy de México, y ya... pero es importante... por lo menos para nosotros es importante ver que los demás americanos nos aceptan y nos hemos sentido aceptados.”

[I feel accepted from the moment I got here, I felt accepted yes... more from the Americans... because with Hispanics you always say hi I’m from Mexico and that’s it... but is important, at least for us, to know that other Americans accept us and we have felt accepted]

She emphasized she has felt discriminated by other Latinos in places such the gym and her work place (soybean plant) and did not have a lot of Latino friends. For her, Latinos did not know how to use the power that they have (those who have papers, speak English, and have a class status) and felt there was a lot of (intra-ethnic) tension between those who had power and those who did not. Bridgett was also keenly aware of racism at schools, clinics, and other social spaces. She did not have American friends even though she told me she wanted to. Bridgett’s comments conflict with those of Patricia and Silvia. I wonder whether Bridgett’s understanding about being and feeling integrated are influenced by her own interpretations of what it really means to be accepted by mainstream society and her discriminatory experiences with other Latinos in Salford.

As is evident in the above passages, there are strong indications of social isolation from both mainstream and non-mainstream community members. Still participant responses were somehow contradictory. Some of them felt welcomed at Salford but did not engage in any social activity with non-Latino residents. Others lived in very isolated areas and complained about their non-Latino neighbors. And as previously addressed, they all complained about racial
microaggressions. Social isolation may not be perceived as a challenge for these transnational participants yet their experiences were the reflections of the social context in which they live.

As I mentioned above, all participants experienced poverty, isolation, and racial discrimination but did not perceive those experiences as the most challenging circumstances. This might suggest two things: from a critical perspective we might think that such conditions went undetectable because, oftentimes, oppressive conditions of women are “deeply internalized and therefore buried beneath the conscious level” (MacKinnon 1987, cited in Gorelick, 1991, p. 463). Worse yet, many of the underlying causes of these “structures of oppression are also well hidden from them” (Maguire 1987, p. 37). But from their own point of view (and from a empowering standpoint) transnational women decided not to be affected by structures of social power, channeling their attention and strength to circumstances from their social lives they felt were more important.

5.3.3. Transnational Latina mothers’ socio-cultural challenges

Transnational Latina participants underwent issues that challenged their socio-cultural values, traditions, and practices. They not only crossed geographical borders but also crossed social relations that transformed their Latina identity into transnational identity. As Latinas, they had traditional notions of female roles in their Latino society (e.g., woman, wife, mother) (Baker, 2004) but as transnational Latinas they had to confront such roles. They had to negotiate with changes in their social environment that required them to transgress traditional gender behaviors (Baker, 2004). Thus, these challenges were interconnected to the cultural and economic contexts (Trueba, 2004) of the U.S. Further, the devotion and dedication to family appears to be a defining feature of transnational participants. However, family affairs and conflicts disturbed their lives in many ways and participants had to either take action when they could or put up with the conditions when such conflicts developed.

In addition to that, some transnational participants used religion venues outside of their Catholic faith because they could find emotional support from other religions’ representatives (evangelicals). Further, while other transnational participants desired to follow their Catholic
customs and traditions, in comparison to their home countries, they felt that American priests were superficial during the mass, perhaps because of the priests’ lack of Spanish proficiency, making it difficult for them to maintain the same religious interest they used to have back home.

5.3.3.1. Transnational gender relations: Changes and challenges

All participants told me they did not work outside the home while they were living in their home country. It was expected for them to work inside the home and look after their husbands and children. But things changed when they migrated to the U.S. Elizabeth and Patricia for example, were involved in gendered and informal work at home but were actively seeking work. Gloria was a stay-at-home mother who was considering going back to school so she could find a well-paid job later. Silvia was between jobs, and after my second visit, obtained a job at a corn production plant. Bridgett had worked in the paid labor force doing agriculture work. Silvia and Bridgett left their children at the care of other mothers so they could go out and work outside their homes; their actions contravened traditional notions of motherhood, and worse yet were disapproved by other acquaintance Latinos when they found out that Bridgett (and Elizabeth) left a child behind in their home countries. More on Bridgett’ and Elizabeth motherhood challenges is explained in detail in the upcoming section of specific life challenges.

For these transnational Latinas, transgressing traditional gender roles was not an easy task. Bridgett, for example, shared her conflicts with her husband as she was trying to find external means to materially support her family:

“…lo mas dificil que he pasado aqui fue la...como se dice... como que pasó al siguiente nivel porque en México mi esposo era muy celoso, muy posesivo, muy de que yo no podía hacer nada sin él y aquí pasó... el primer año fue dificil cuando llegamos porque yo trabajaba y él trabajaba...Él no quería que yo trabajara y yo le decia pues si yo vine a trabajar porque vamos a traer al niño, hay que mandarle dinero al niño, entonces era como que: y que hiciste en el trabajo, y con quién comiste, con quién platicaste... como mucho control... y después como que poquito a poquito el se fue adaptando”

[…] the hardest part here was. how would you say that…like it escalated to the next level because in Mexico my husband was very jealous, very possessive, like I couldn't do anything without him and here… the first year was very difficult because we both were working here… he didn't want me to work and I would tell him: I came here to work
because we are going to bring our child, we have to send him money, so he was like: what did you do at work? Who did you eat with? Who did you talk to? With a lot of control… but later little by little he started to adjust

Transnational Latinas daily life activities demonstrated they had more freedom in Salford than in their home countries. And this freedom experience seemed to be intersected with their access to more economic resources and the demands of everyday life and work. They learned how to drive and run errands on their own, went to the gym to exercise, and engaged in volunteer work. They expressed feeling more independent from their husbands than they did before. Yet their husbands did not like the idea of these women’s total independence and freedom. Patricia noted “pues me siento mas independiente porque ya no dependo de él y él me lo ha dicho, me dice: hombre mejor no te hubieras enseñado a manejar porque todo lo quieres hacer tu sola…” [well I feel more independent because I do not depend on him anymore and he has told me: you shouldn’t have learned how to drive because now you wanna do all on your own…]. Similarly, Elizabeth had to tell her husband where she was going all the time so “he could trust” her. He did not like the idea of Elizabeth going to the gym to exercise to keep in shape. She stopped working out few months after she started.

The cases of Bridgett and Elizabeth indicate that there is a possibility that they did not have a lot of freedom in their home countries and that their husbands had more control over them; but now that these women were living in the U.S. and doing more things outside the home made their partners feel threatened as they may lose some control. These experiences are examples of how the lives of transnational Latinas change at the moment they cross the border and their behaviors start to fall outside the traditional Latino gender patterns (Baker, 2004).

Silvia, who had been exposed to numerous jobs, complained about the lack of help and support from her husband when she needed extra help with household chores. Even when she was working outside the home she felt he was not helping her. She was not only taking care of the house and children, but also assuming the responsibilities assigned to her agricultural job position:
“... raras veces si me ayuda... no decir que nunca pero de vez en cuando me ayuda... pero no todos los días que sea así constante que todos los días venga y me ayude no... él viene y le sirvo la comida, se sienta, come y se acuesta o se sienta en la computadora, es todo... no hace nada.”

[...he rarely helps... I can’t say he never does but he does it once in a while... not everyday, like he was constant and would help me every day, no... he comes I serve him a meal, he sits, eats, he goes to bed or goes to sit in the computer, that’s it... he doesn't do anything]

The other women did not explicitly complain about the same issue, though in our conversations about their daily routines and from what I observed, all transnational participants were responsible for the housework. There is a “conventional gender ideology” (Baker, 2004, p. 397) in traditional Latino families in which women are expected to take care of domestic matters. It seems that perhaps to have a woman or wife who is able to serve and run the house business is a commodity for men. This is all about gender relations and some sort of gender unbalance regarding house chores and children care.

When we were talking about her work experiences in the U.S., Bridgett described how working outside home to make ends meet had profoundly impacted her role as a “good mother.” She reflected on the contradictory roles of being a mother and an agricultural worker. Bridgett expressed her sadness and disappointment as she left her one-month baby at the care of a babysitter so she could go out and work:

Fue difícil, no por el hecho de trabajar, sino por el hecho de dejar a mi bebe, porque yo le daba pecho. Y yo andaba así en el field y mis pechos llenos de leche. Solo me ponía las toallitas para que no se me tirara, y me quedaba yo bien triste porque decía, no se si será verdad, pero decía mi suegra que cuando a uno se siente que le baja la leche es porque el bebe tiene hambre. Entonces cuando yo empezaba a sentir que mis pechos se ponían duros que era la leche, yo sentía que mi bebe tenía hambre y me daba mucha tristeza.

[It was hard, not because I had to work, but because I had to leave my baby, because I was breast-feeding him. And when I was at the field I would feel my breasts full of milk. I would put paper towels so the milk didn’t pour out, and I was very sad because I thought, well I don't know if is true but my mother-in-law used to say that when you feel your milk lets down is because the baby is hungry. So when I felt that my breasts felt hard because of the milk, I felt my baby was hungry and it made me very sad]
Working at the field instead of feeding her baby at home was too difficult, and she blamed herself. Her options were between staying at home and being able to feed her baby or working in the field to make money to feed the rest of her family. Bridgett’s gender transgressive behaviors, that is, behaviors that challenge traditional gendered ideologies (Baker, 2004), might create intangible yet powerful intersections between the social constructions of a “good mother” and the need to improve economic hardship. Gender relations are changing (whether good or bad), and, consequently, the sense of self of these women is changing to new transnational ways of being (Haller & Landolt, 2005).

5.3.3.2. La familia: The source of support and constraint

The significance of family support and familial interconnectedness among Latino populations has been described as familism (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004). For all transnational Latinas caring for their families, the value of familism was very important. For instance, information gathered from our conversations and from participant observations demonstrated how attentive and responsive they were to family members’ problems and needs. Regarding their nuclear family, these transnational Latinas focused on providing family care in a variety of ways. The childcare activities ranged from bathing and feeding their children to engaging in social activities and taking the children to the doctor. Mothers, accompanied by their husbands, participated in parent conferences at the school. When they could not help their children with homework, they found ways to do so through teachers and tutors from school. Some participants would take their children to extracurricular activities such soccer and catechism classes.

Transnational Latinas also took care of all household chores and managed the budget. Some of them would wake up early in the morning (5am) to prepare their husbands’ breakfast and a lunch they would take with them to work. Then they would help the children get ready for school. After the kids were gone, they usually cleaned the house and prepared something for a late lunch, but they called it dinner. Once or twice a week they would go to a community laundry room to take care of everyone’s laundry. Then, they waited for their husbands to come back
home between 4 and 6pm, so dinner had to be ready by then. Not only did these transnational Latina mothers take care of domestic duties, but also were particularly mindful and would engage in constant and intensive conversations with their husbands and children. They talked about the children’s day at school, conflicts with husbands, and even talked about their future in Salford. For mothers who had family in Salford, they would always gather together and help each other with economic or emotional problems. These transnational Latinas were the backbones of their families, and even the pillars of support of extended family members who lived on the other side of the U.S. border.

Taking care of families left behind in their home countries was part of their everyday life. Transnational Latinas would call very often to their families, send remittances, and provide and obtain emotional support when needed. Here in the U.S. their interactions with family members were also common; although most of participants did not have family in Salford, they often interacted with their husbands’ extended families. They felt they sustained good relationships with members of their husbands’ families but assured they had a lot of conflicts.

Before moving to the U.S., Elizabeth lived for a while with her in-laws in El Salvador, but did not like it because they treated her as a domestic servant. Bridgett’s case was similar. She moved with her husband and lived with his parents and brother-in-law’s family for a year. Her mother-in-law expected Bridgett to take care of all household chores and wanted to get involved in their marriage relationship and child rearing practices. These two participants did not like the idea of living with their in-laws because they felt oppressed. They felt enclosed in their homes and wanted to get out. After many family conflicts they had to move to the U.S. They noted they still had family issues even from a distance though the situation was more manageable.

Silvia and Gloria also had issues with their mothers-in-law, who both lived in Salford. Silvia lived in the same house with her husband’s family and Gloria’s in-laws lived in a different house. It was very challenging for them because familism was important and a lot of contact was expected to happen. But both participants felt threatened by their mothers-in-law because, to some level, they interfered in their family affairs. Silvia shared: “Pues como a veces este
“problemas que pasan en la casa y que a veces veo con mi suegra que pasan cosas así problemas así... pues no problemas grandes pero así como que a veces no estamos de acuerdo en algunas cosas.” [sometimes we have problems at home, I have problems with my mother-in-law… not big problems but sometimes we cannot agree in some things]. By “some things” Silvia meant they did not agree about how to raise Silvia’s children; Silvia felt her mother-in-law pampered and spoiled her children and that contributed to their misbehavior.

Likewise, Gloria expressed having several issues with her mother-in-law. She got into a fight with Antonio because he would tell everything to his mother, and Gloria did not like the idea of having a mother-in-law who knew every detail about their relationship and family conflicts. From what I could observe, Gloria felt disappointed and betrayed by her husband, who constantly demanded solidarity from her mother-in-law. Gloria shared with me a situation with her husband in which he and his mother were trying to interfere with money-related affairs. Gloria sent $50 to her mother in Mexico because she needed the money. Gloria’s husband and mother-in-law got upset because they felt Gloria’s mother had economic means in Mexico and didn’t need the money. Gloria thinks that was not their business and they did not have the right to intervene. Her mother was across the border, and as a transnational daughter Gloria felt compelled to her mother’s request and even if she did not need the money, the action of sending her mother money was a way for Gloria to show to her mother how much she cared about her, at least from a distance.

For transnational Latina mothers, family and family relations were key in different ways. They were completely dedicated to their nuclear families and expended a considerable amount of time and energy undertaking household and childcare duties. And they enjoyed it! But at the same time their families, extended family members who lived close and outside the States made things complicated for them. These transnational participants stressed out over conflicts with their families (e.g., childrearing, money, gossip, and power and control among other problems) and part of their everyday life was learning how to maneuver those situations.
5.3.3.3. *Yo me he alejado de Dios* [I feel more distant from God]: Changing and challenging their religious faith

All participants had a connection or were associated to a particular religion or religious institution. Religion was present in their new environment but not in the same way it would have been if they were living in Guatemala, El Salvador or Mexico. These transnational Latinas’ feelings about religion, church, and the way they felt about the church minister were not the same. Elizabeth for instance, used to go to a Catholic church in El Salvador; but in Salford, she went to a Christian church every Wednesday night and Saturday mornings named León de Judas, with pastors from Cuba and Guatemala. She felt welcomed in that church and liked the religious classes they had for children. That church allowed Elizabeth to sell pupusas when they had special events. Elizabeth also met some friends there and even connected with a woman who helped her (and taught her) to sell AVON products.

Patricia described herself as a Catholic but did not go to the Catholic Church in Salford. Every week, Tuesday or Wednesday, Patricia welcomed in her home an evangelical woman and would spend time with her talking about her life. While she did not like it that much, she liked the idea of talking to someone because it made her feel good:

“…conozco a otra señora pero… esa señora son de las personas que estudian mucho la biblia y todo eso verdad… pero pues yo soy católica pero siemper pues para estar platicando con mi vida aunque sea lo que sea le digo… nos ponemos a platicar… a mi me gusta… bueno no me gusta tanto verdad pero con tal de que… con tal de que estemos platicando con alguien… pues si… me siento bien…”

[I know this lady…she is one of those people who study the Bible and all that… but you know I’m Catholic but at least I can talk to someone about my life… we talk… I like it… well I don’t like it that much but as long as… as long as I can talk someone… well, yes… I feel fine…”

Although Patricia did not go to church, she constantly prayed to the Virgin of Guadalupe to find peace and feel well. Yet, she preferred talking to her husband or her sister when she needed emotional peace. Gloria too showed devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe, a tradition that she also learned as a child. She talked about all the cultural and religious traditions she had practiced in
Mexico with her family (e.g., parents, grandparents, and cousins), including lighting a candle to the Virgin of Guadalupe every day. Now, in Salford, Gloria would go to the Catholic Church to light a candle in the name of the Virgin. But she could not go constantly because she did not own a car. Gloria wanted to light the candle in her trailer but she was afraid the house might get burned down. Gloria’s religious traditions and practices got interfered after she moved to Salford.

Gloria also commented about feeling more distant to God because she could not connect to the church minister who was American but spoke Spanish at the mass:

“Aquí en Salford yo me he alejado de Dios… no mucho… porque …yo creo que depende del padre… el padre no es mala persona si no que es la manera como te habla el padre… nosotros vamos a las conferencias que hay mucha gente pero hay veces te quedas… no le entendí a esta persona… y no me llegó… eso es lo que pasa… no me llega.”

[Here in Salford I feel more distant from God… not a lot but… I think it depends on the Father… he is not a bad person but is the way he talks… we go to the mass, and there is heavy congregation, but you feel like…. I don't understand that person… it doesn’t arrive in me what he says… it just doesn’t]

Silvia also noted she could not understand the minister and attributed that to his Spanish language proficiency:

“Porque la verdad no entiendo nada de lo que dice el padre porque es americano y no habla bien el español… pues le digo a mi esposo no entiendo que dice pues habla el español pero como que se le complica mucho a él… no le entiendo que dice entonces no voy.”

[To be honest I don’t understand what the Father says because he is American and doesn't speak very well Spanish… so I tell my husband: I don’t understand what he says because is hard for him to speak Spanish… I don’t understand the Father so I don’t go (to the church)]

Neither Gloria nor Silvia were moved by what the minister said in the Mass. The religious message did not come to them, they did not get it. Perhaps because the way he presented it or because he did not speak Spanish well. In spite of that, Gloria nor Silvia felt like changing their
religious orientation over that problem. They both were actively engaged in their religious practices at home and with their own families. Different, however, was the case of Bridgett, who described herself as a Catholic who believed in God, but did not go to Church because she did not believe in the institution. Bridgett used to read the Bible in Mexico but that practice, like in Gloria’s case, got interrupted after she moved to Salford. Bridgett shared about her spirituality experience and how she practiced her religion beliefs through other means:

“Yo aquí no tengo una biblia pero yo en México sí la leía mucho y yo siento que practico mi religión siendo una buena persona, ayudando a los que necesitan, no haciendo cosas malas a nadie, respetando a mi esposo, a mis hijos…. Yo siento que de esa manera la practico”

[I don’t have a Bible here but I used to read it a lot in Mexico… and I feel like I practice my religion by being a good person, helping to those in need, not hurting other people, respecting my husband and my children… that is how I feel I practice my religion]

In Latino societies, religion, particularly Catholic religion, is considered an important aspect of life (Guarnaccia et al., 1992; Vega & Miranda, 1985). And it remains important even after Latinos migrate to the U.S., although their religious orientation is likely to change (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008). This is all consistent with this dissertation’s findings. All transnational Latinas talked about their religious orientation and their activities and practices related to faith. But they also faced challenges. Some of Catholic participants had interactions with other religion faiths because such religious communities were better meeting their needs (e.g., evangelicals). Others experienced challenges because they did not understand the church ministers so they found different ways to incorporate their religious beliefs and rituals in their lives. The problem of changing their faith or being dissatisfied with the way religious institutions proclaimed the Catholic faith is that the cultural practices they were habituated to (Rogoff, 2003) that may help them to cope with a challenging situation may be affected, perhaps deteriorate over time.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that transnational Latina mothers undergo material or economic challenges, although the study participants seemed not to be affected by them. For these women having a lot was not important, it was all about having enough and being
happy with their families. They also faced socio-structural discriminatory experiences with social services providers and community members though again, they chose not to be afflicted by such attitudes and microaggressions. The lack of papers and language proficiency had a great negative impact especially when they tried to care for their health and that of their families. All their stories also tell us that they had to challenge and transgress gender ideologies and expectations to be able to make ends meet and navigate the U.S. system. Lastly, family and religious faith were important aspects of their lives albeit religion to a significantly lesser extent than in their home countries. All these challenges are particular to their experience as transnational Latina mothers and provide us a background/context of their structural positions in the U.S.

5.4. Transnational Latina Mothers’ Specific Life Challenges

The last section described numerous challenging situations shared by transnational Latina mothers. I provided such information because it is important to understand the economic contexts of their lives and how they struggle economically, socially, and culturally as transnational individuals. But, besides that, these women were facing very different and individual problems and the focus of their lives was around those very unique challenging circumstances. Two participants, Elizabeth and Bridgett left their children behind in El Salvador and Mexico respectively; Patricia had family feuds with her own mother and was not ready to forget and forgive; Gloria was not able to achieve her life aspirations; Silvia did not settle with the idea of being an immigrant and living far from her family. The following section presents in detail each of these transnational Latina mother’s life struggles and constraints.

5.4.1. Leaving a child behind: Transnational motherhood constraints for Elizabeth and Bridgett

My participants and I engaged in long conversations that helped me to learn and have a better understanding of their life and the life challenges of their private worlds. Contrary to what scholarship often tells us about the experiences of low-income Latinas (that they are often physically and emotionally affected by poverty, isolation, and/or discrimination), both Elizabeth
and Bridgett voiced having to endure other extremely difficult challenges: the sacrifice of leaving a child in their home country. Leaving behind (a conscious decision) and missing their child was the most difficult experience for them since they migrated to the United States. Next, I offer specifics about these devastating experiences in the lives of each woman.

5.4.1.1. Elizabeth’s Constrain: *Ahorita mi más sufrimiento es ese... que no tengo a mi niña* [Now my greatest suffering is not having my daughter with me]

Elizabeth was the first participant I met. Most of our conversations and participant observations took place at her home, inside in the kitchen and outside in the front yard of her trailer. Although Elizabeth was very shy, she easily (and openly) talked about her life. We always had her three children and the baby she was babysitting around. Sometimes we had a hard time having long conversations because children would fight with each other, but Elizabeth would always make sure they behaved. Elizabeth was not inclined to mince her words when we talked about her biggest life challenge: leaving Lucia behind in El Salvador in the care of her in-laws.

In our first interview Elizabeth recounted the story about how she and her husband (from a distance) decided to leave Lucia in El Salvador, as it was too dangerous to cross the border with a little child. However, they hoped that soon after Elizabeth arrived in the U.S., Pablo would be able to send for Lucia with somebody they could trust (his cousin). They also needed to save enough money to pay for the travel costs. At the time of this writing, at 11 years old (9 during the study), Lucia still lives in El Salvador. Elizabeth looked forward to the day when she will see her daughter again. She describes her feelings at the moment she left El Salvador: “*Yo sentía que me moría en ese instante... y la niña tenía año y medio y la niña me decía que me la trajera que no la dejara.*” [I felt I was dying in that moment... she was one and a half years old and she would tell me to bring her with me, that I shouldn’t leave her].

Her sadness and grief was (and still is) ongoing. Once living in the U.S. there were times when Elizabeth felt discouraged and lacked interest in people or usual activities: *A veces yo no quiero ni que nadie me hable... No, a los niños no, no los aguanto... quiero estar sola, no más*
llorando y llorando por ella. [Sometimes I do not want anybody talking to me… No, the children, I can’t stand them… I want to be alone, only crying and crying for her]. Furthermore, Elizabeth placed the situation with her daughter as a barrier between her and her happiness, as something that divided her heart in two. Her daughter was Elizabeth’s defining challenge (object) “por una parte si (soy feliz) pero por otra no porque mi corazón esta dividido… mi hija la tengo allá y yo estoy acá… si la tuviera a ella acá ya entonces si fuera feliz” [On the one hand yes (I’m happy) but on the other I’m not because my heart is divided…my daughter is there and I’m here… if she was here then I would be happy].

Elizabeth’s sad feelings were exacerbated when she heard Lucia’s emotional constructions of her mother’s imaginary presence. At times, when they talk over the phone, Lucia would touch the telephone’s wire and would tell her mother she could feel she was touching Elizabeth; Elizabeth had no choice but to listen. Only through pictures (a technical/material tool) that her family sends by mail or telephone calls, can Elizabeth monitor her daughter’s growth. Elizabeth does not like what she sees, Lucia with a “deep sadness” on her face. Elizabeth is certain that her daughter is unhappy and there is little she can do. The options are few and complicated. If Elizabeth wants to go to get Lucia (and cross three borders again), who would take care of her three children while her husband works all day? If Pablo wants to go to get Lucia (and cross three borders again), who is going to provide for Elizabeth and her three children while Pablo is gone? If a coyote is going to cross the border and bring Lucia, would that be safe? Would they get the money to pay a smuggler? If Lucia leaves El Salvador, with a visa, how is she going to do it without her “undocumented” parents’ permission to leave the country?

As there are no more options for Elizabeth, she has to settle with the idea of communicating with Lucia every week (or when her in-laws allow) and talking about her day, school, and life over the phone, sending her money to pay all her expenses, and the consolation that one day they will make the (economic) effort to bring Lucia, and Elizabeth, finally, would have her daughter back; in her own words: “vamos a hacer el animo de mandarla a traer para que se me quite el sufrimiento” [we are going to make the effort to bring her back so my
suffering would go away]. What is evident from her stories is that Elizabeth’s mothering and ethic of care practices (Tronto, 2007) were transformed into transnational caring practices, and, from the distance and between two worlds, she strove to fill the emotional and material gaps of an absent, (pre)occupied, and bereaved mother.

5.4.1.2. Bridgett’s constraint: *Es desesperante para mi saber que tengo tres aquí y una allá. Es como que me falta algo* [it is heartbreaking to know that I have three [children] here and one [child] there. It feels like something of me is missing]

I met Bridgett at the WIC services office in September of 2012. She was the last participant I contacted for my study. Most of our interviews took place in her home, in the living room. Her husband’s uncle’s wife Beatriz was with her little son at home all the time but Bridgett would ask her to stay in their bedroom watching TV until we were done with the interviews. The house was small so we had to speak very softly. I can describe Bridgett as an outspoken woman who liked to talk and share her life experiences in Salford.

Bridgett, like Elizabeth, left a child behind in her home country. Alfonso, her son, was one year old when Bridgett migrated to the U.S. It has been 8 years since the last time Bridgett saw Alfonso. Bridgett was expressive and easy to talk to, so getting into the details of her biggest constraint was not an arduous task, at least for me. When we first talked about Alfonso we were seated on the couch in her living room. Bridgett talked and talked, and I felt like she was trying to unburden herself through talk. Bridgett told me that when she left Mexico (with her oldest daughter), to reunite with Efrain, her husband, she was certain they would send for Alfonso a few years later. At times, she felt desperate and wanted to go back to Mexico. But once they decided to bring Alfonso to the U.S. Bridgett’s mother-in-law did not allow Alfonso to come. Now Alfonso, who is now eight years old, is the one who does not want to come:

“Yo venía confiada pero cuando llegué aquí y vi que no se podía yo me desesperaba yo tenía ganas de regresarme yo le decía a mi esposo es que qué vamos hacer, y me dijo: no te preocupes vamos a esperar que el niño cumpla los tres años y lo vamos a traer... cuando el niño cumplió los tres años y que quisimos hacer los planes mi suegra no lo dejó venir... ella dijo que no... que no se iba a venir el niño y ahorita él es el que no
I was confident... but when I got here and learned I could not bring him I was very desperate and I wanted to go back and I would tell my husband I don’t know what are going to do, and he would say: don’t worry let’s wait until he turns 3 and we will bring him here... then he turned 3 and we were planning to bring him but my mother-in-law didn't let him come, she said not, and now he is the one who doesn’t want to come and is nerve-racking to know that I have three (children) here and one (child) there. It feels like something of me is missing]

Even with a plan in mind (having a coyote who would bring Alfonso here), and with money saved to pay for it, Bridgett could not bring her child back. Alfonso was used to life in Mexico and living with his grandparents. Bridgett believed Alfonso was “brainwashed” by her in-laws, but her consolation was that he wanted to stay there with his grandparents because they were treating him well. Bridgett told me that the only way to bring Alfonso here is if Efrain went to Mexico to get him out of there. But, as in Elizabeth’s case, Efrain could not go because he was the breadwinner and his family needed him around. Bridgett also noted the greater degree of her problem as she felt her in-laws kept controlling her from the distance by “brainwashing” her son; in that way, she felt persecuted and did not want to feel controlled. She not only struggled and suffered because her son was in Mexico with her in-laws but also because her son still connected her to them.

Leaving Alfonso behind made her feel like a bad mother. Bridgett felt guilty because she left her son to follow her husband, and people in her community made her feel that way. For instance, her Latina female co-workers would reproach her because good mothers do not leave their children abandoned. Such allegations increased the remorseful and culpable feelings of Bridgett. Feelings of guilt and neglect (her biggest suffering) began even before Bridgett arrived to Salford. The story of Bridgett tells us it started as she was crossing the border, as she was becoming a transnational woman.

“Me sentía desesperada porque yo decía que y si le pasaba algo a la niña... yo decía estoy aquí en medio, dejé a un niño allá con mi suegra, mi esposo está en otro lado y yo...
aquí en medio con la niña enferma… así me sentía… que estaba uno de un lado, uno del otro y yo en medio con la niña enferma (suspira)"

[I felt desperate because I thought something could happen to my daughter…I was right in the middle (at the border), I left a child behind with my mother-in-law, my husband is at the other side (U.S.) and I’m here in the middle with a sick daughter… that is how I felt…one of them was on one side and the other on the other side, and I was in between, with a sick daughter (she sighs)]

This guilt in terms of transnational experience signals a transgression of the traditional notion of how to be and behave as a mother and a wife (Baker, 2004). Bridgett was literally on the border of becoming a transnational mother at the moment of crossing, making decisions that would mark her life as a Latina mother. Bridgett is now a transnational mother, wife, daughter-in-law, sister, and daughter. She will be in between two worlds (like the other four transnational participants) as long as she lives in the U.S.

Elizabeth’s and Bridgett stories and sufferings showed an interruption of family life because were part of dis-unified families. In that sense their family was both a source of support and at the same time the source of suffering. These transnational Latina mothers, as Latina mothers have shown in other studies, constantly talked about being worried of her child being neglected or harmed in her absence (Hondagnu-Sotelo’s & Avila, 1997) or “brainwashed.” Elizabeth’s and Bridgett depictions of the emotional consequences of having a child living somewhere else might suggest a disruption of their previously established identity (Espín, 1997), the mother’s identity. Although they had other children living with them in the U.S., they “struggle to redefine and reconstruct” their relationship with their other children across the border and “in that process [they try to] redefine and reconstruct [their] own identity” (Espín, 1999, p. 146). Elizabeth and Bridget represent a means to transnational affection and economic well-being, a transnational mothering identity or “transnational motherhood,” a concept that signifies “the circuits of affection, caring, and financial support that transcend national borders” (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997, p. 548-550).

The stories of these two women were mirrored in other ways. They both had issues with their in-laws and did not like the idea of living with them because they felt enclosed and
manipulated. Neither of them liked the division of labor (e.g., cleaning the house and cooking) or the gender relations and roles in their patriarchal in-law families (e.g., waiting for husbands to go out with them to run errands; asking their permission to do anything). Elizabeth’s and Bridgett’s in-laws operated within an inequitable gender system that severely constrained their lives. While both women moved to the U.S. escaping from those traditional gender ideologies (Baker, 2004), their stories demonstrated that they continued fulfilling the same traditional gender roles in the new home domain.

It is worth highlighting that Bridgett had an additional challenge that she did not feel was her biggest constraint, but her attitude and ways of responding to the problem exemplified her resilience practices. After Bridgett moved to the U.S. and had her second child, she gained a lot of weight; she told me she was obese. She also suffered from kidney stones and her doctor insisted she needed to lose weight. She felt depressed and unhappy. She would not go out or go to social events because she felt bad about herself. One day, after giving it a lot of thought, she decided to have a healthier life. It was not an easy task but after following a rigorous diet and daily workout routines she was able to lose all the weight. Bridgett lost 170 pounds in a year. I would like to make an argument here that although her biggest constraint was not having her son with her, she turned her attention towards something that she could really control and change: her weight. So her actions and tools used to overcome her weight issues are important to understand because the way she uses tools in some challenging circumstances demonstrate the ways she could use tools to address other problems. She may learn the tools that really work for her. The CHAT analysis presented in Chapter 6 addresses and amplifies the discussion about this phenomenon.

5.4.2. Patricia’s Constraint: En ese momento todo se me venía abajo [in that moment the whole thing broke down]

When I met Patricia at the WIC office and after I explained to her my research, she quickly began talking to me about her life. I remember I had to stop our conversation and clarify we needed to meet in another place to safely talk. I could see her urge and her need for
unburdening herself to me when she found out I had a B.S. in psychology and now was studying the life struggles of transnational Latinas. The next day we met at her room in a motel located on the outskirts of Salford. She talked about many struggles in her life.

Understanding the most constraining problem in Patricia’s life was not an easy task. At first, Patricia talked about the pain she suffered when her first husband died from an overdose of alcohol a few years ago. And worst of all, she was pregnant with a third child and had a miscarriage as she dealt with the loss of her husband. She was economically dependent on her husband, so while she was undergoing a crisis she was also learning how to become self-sufficient and how to move forward with her two little children. Patricia felt she was not going to be able to take care of all:

“Como que yo sentía que no podía con tanta presión, hacer todos los papeleos, los niños, todo el papeleo de los niños, porque el hacia cita para el doctor, el llenaba papeles, el todo, entonces cuando me quedé yo sola, Dios mío que voy hacer, yo no puedo yo sola con todo esto, yo no voy a poder trabajar, sacar a mis hijos a adelante, o sea que se me cerraba el mundo yo sola.”

[I felt I couldn’t do anything with all that pressure, doing the paperwork, my children, the paperwork of my children, because he was the one who would get the doctor’s appointments, he would fill out the paperwork, he would do everything, and then I was left alone, oh God what I’m going to do (she thought during that time), I can’t do all this alone, I cannot work, to help my children moving forward, I mean I felt shut off from the world]

The above excerpt is a clear statement of Patricia’s constraint, the idea that she lost her husband (and a miscarriage) and having to do everything by herself. But, eventually, she learned to be independent, to move around and do things on her own, she learned to move forward. She also met a new man, who was her current husband and with whom she had a daughter. Patricia experienced changes in her life at first when she moved to the U.S. She became a transnational Latina after she crossed the border. Then she met her first husband who suddenly died and left her alone. Her circumstances changed and she changed too. She learned how to be a transnational individual who lives between two transnational spaces.
But this life challenge was part of Patricia’s past and Patricia seemed to be reconciled with her loss, appeared to be happy, and acted and talked in a self-realizing manner. I included this past experience in this section because it serves as the foundation for understanding how Patricia practiced her resilience. I now turn to another challenge that was present in Patricia’s life, something that was latent in her mind: her relationship problems with her mother.

Another constraint of Patricia was her relationship with her mother. Patricia moved to the U.S. because her uncle (Patricia’s step-father’s brother-in-law) sexually harassed her and tried to rape her. Patricia’s mother, instead of reporting the abuse to the proper authorities, decided to send Patricia to Texas, to live with her aunt (her mother’s sister). Patricia described her life in Mexico as “un infierno” [a hell] where her mother, the only person who was supposed to love her and protect her, did nothing to address the sexual harassment and attempted rape situations. Patricia never forgave, nor did she ever forget her mother’s behaviors. Patricia recounted her living infierno in Mexico:

“He was 30 or 40 years old and I was 12 or 13 when he started to harass me, he did until I was 19, sometimes I feel I want to get a gun to kill him, I felt desperate there, I didn't have a life, I couldn’t date anyone because he would threaten him, he would threaten us with a gun so I was like what can I do? I felt I was going to explode… he would get to my home, because he was like a family member, they would let him in, and there he was, trying to touching me in front of them and they would say nothing]

The consequences of her mother’s inattention to the problem and the way things were handled were profound and complex. Although Patricia recognized all the good things her mother did for her, she felt resentment and had the urge to talk to her to reclaim her actions.
“Yo lo sé que es mi madre… yo sé que ella ha hecho muchas cosas por mi pero a veces eso no se lo puedo pasar… eso lo traigo aquí … siento como algo atorado (señalando la garganta) que no le digo… no sé… quiero ir a verla… quiero arreglar todo eso… principalmente por mis hijos… pero yo quiero superar todo eso… todo ese rencor… ese rencor que yo siento hacia ella.”

[I know she is my mother… I know she has done a lot of things for me but I cannot let that go… I got that here… I feel like something is stuck (pointing out her throat) that I can’t tell her… I don't know… I want to see her… I want to fix all that… mainly for my children…. Because I want to overcome all that… all that resentment… the resentment I have towards her]

Her immigration position does not allow her to deal with this problem (because she is here, stuck without papers to go outside the U.S.) and once again we see how she (as other participants) struggled with family affairs as she lived between two transnational spaces. She became a transnational daughter and the phone was the only way to keep her connected with her mother. A similar situation applies to Elizabeth’s and Bridgett cases: the analogous situations with the daughter and the son at the other end of the line: transnational relationships are made possible through the phone. Telephones become key tools for transnational Latinas that can assist them to transcend national borders (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997).

5.4.3. Gloria’s constraint: Yo me he dejado [I have left myself abandoned]

Gloria was the youngest of all transnational participants. She had just turned 25. Most of our conversations took place at her trailer. Gloria enjoyed our conversations although she talked less than the other participants. But on several occasions she mentioned she liked the idea of my research because she thought there was a need to understand the specific needs and struggles of Latina mothers living in Salford. She often complained about the lack of services and resources for the neediest members of her community. Gloria invited me to her daughters’ birthday parties so I got to know most of her extended family members and those of her husband. They all seemed to get along with each other, although I could perceive the extensive involvement of the mother-in-law in many activities Gloria was trying to organize during the party. It was Gloria’s husband who would make the choices of games, time to serve the food and open the gifts. Gloria
spent most of the time serving sodas and snacks, paying attention of what kids were doing, and making sure everyone was enjoying the parties.

Just as Bridgett and Patricia, Gloria went through different challenges that were interrelated. One problem was having a sick newborn child and learning how to take care of her daughter. Sol, Gloria’s younger daughter, suffered from asthma from the moment she was born and Gloria spent a lot of time going from hospital to hospital and taking care of her sick child at home. Gloria was always concerned about the health of Sol and decided not to work for pay until her daughter was older. She did not feel well, and felt constrained in not doing the things she wanted because she had to take care of her daughter. She did not trust others with the health and wellbeing of Sol.

“Te digo con mi niña la más chiquita, desde que yo salí embarazada y me alivié de ella… mira me la he pasado de hospital en hospital en hospital… a la semana iba dos o tres veces al hospital… hasta la fecha no me siento como bien… de que ya no me he puesto a trabajar por lo mismo… de pensar y si no me la cuidan bien, y si no le dan su medicina, bien, y si no le dan a tiempo el inhalador… ella no puede tener contacto con perros, no puede tener mucho contacto con mucha tierra… el cambio de clima a ella le hace daño… el frío es cuando más le hace daño.”

[You know with my Little girl since she was born… I’ve spent my time from hospital to hospital… going 2 or 3 times a week… up to this date I don’t feel OK… I haven’t being able to work because of it… thinking what if they (daycare) do not take care well of her, if they do not give her the medicine or the inhaler, she cannot have contact with dogs or sand… she gets very sick when the weather changes (gets colder)]

Her accounts about this challenge centered on going to the hospital and getting the best health care services and medicines for her daughter. Gloria’s lack of English proficiency skills made it more difficult to get the services and information/resources she needed. Language in Gloria’s case was a big obstacle in helping her daughter to be healthy. She had to change to a doctor who had his office in another town (40 minutes away from Salford) to get the appropriate health assistance for her child.

Besides taking care of her sick child, Gloria was a mother who was very involved with her children in terms of doing a lot of extra-curricular or leisure activities (e.g., soccer,
swimming, and catechism) and of taking care of domestic chores. But by doing that Gloria felt she left her own life behind. Thus her biggest challenge was not about her daughter; it was about her.

“Fijate que yo a veces... me he descuidado mucho por estar pendiente de mis niñas... me he estado enfocando más a ellas... como que mi vida, yo misma me he dejado... hasta de arreglarme me he dejado por mis niñas, por estar atrás de una, atrás de la otra... yo a veces he pensado de que si mi niña reacciona bien al cambio de la escuela... siento que para mi va a ser un alivio, a lo mejor se escucha mal decir que es una liberación para mi... pero tal vez que el tiempo que yo me quede sola me va a quedar para mi... voy a tener tiempo para mí.”

[Look, sometimes I feel like...I have neglected myself a lot for being very involved in my children’s lives...I’ve been focusing more on them...I have left myself abandoned...I don’t even take care of myself because of them...running behind one child, then the other...I think that if my (younger) daughter reacts well at the Head Start is going to be a relief, perhaps it sounds wrong to say it but it would be like liberation for me...the time I would be alone I can spend it on myself...I may have more time for myself]

For Gloria, her biggest challenge (object\(^\text{12}\)) was not being able to take care of herself, and not being able to achieve her aspirations (get papers, learn English, get her GED, go to the gym to lose weight). Gloria’s story did not reflect the same type of suffering reflected in the lives of Elizabeth, Bridgett or Patricia. Her pain was about her self-fulfillment. Remember that Gloria’s story is different because she came with a tourist visa; she is from a different class status. And she often talked about wanting to be able to salir adelante by going to school and taking care of her body (going to the gym). I get a sense that because of her social-class circumstances she was more independent (than the other transnational participants) and it was hard for her to have a child that was extremely dependent on her. Gloria wanted to have time away from her daughter (and family commitments) so that she could have time for herself. Her daughters were keeping her from being who she really wanted to be (educated and independent). What is more, and interesting about her story, is that Gloria had access to resources that could help make those changes happen. For example, she was applying for and able to get papers and was getting ready

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\(^{12}\) In CHAT, human activity is always directed towards a specific object (Leont’ev, 1978). In this study the object was the life challenge(s) the study participants were trying to overcome, the goals they were trying to achieve.
to start her GED classes. In the cases of the other transnational participants this was not even a possibility. Clearly, their situations were more complicated because they did not qualify for the visa Gloria was trying to get. They needed to have some years of school education in the U.S. and none of them had that experience.

5.4.4. Silvia’s constraint: Para mí ha sido muy difícil porque no tengo a nadie aquí [is been very difficult for me because I don't have anybody here]

Comparing my relationship with my participants, I felt most closely connected with Silvia. Silvia would call me often to talk about whatever was going on in her life or to ask me a favor when she needed an English speaker (e.g., call her doctor to make an appointment). She liked to keep me updated about her children’s activities and accomplishments. Even after the data collection phase was done, Silvia would text and ask me: “¿cuándo viene a visitarme?” [when are coming back to visit me?]. My relationship with Silvia gave me the sense that the power dynamics between us were, at a certain level, negotiated. My research relations with Elizabeth and Patricia were very similar, though not as close as with Silvia.

Silvia and I met several times and talked in different places. We would spend time at the library, parks, her house (her mother’s in-law house), or in my car when I took her to the doctor or to a place where she applied for a job. Her three children were always around, fighting and picking on each other. Sometimes it was difficult to get her full attention because she needed to scold them or attract their attention. Nevertheless, I would like to comment on her openness and willingness to spend time with me to share a moment of her life.

The most painful part of Silvia’s life was living away from her family and not having people from her family close. When I asked Silvia how it was living in Salford she noted: “Pues para mí ha sido muy difícil porque... no tengo a nadie aquí... más que a mi hijos... no tener familiares... el estar solita” [for me the most difficult part is... not having anyone here... only my kids...not having family... being alone]. Silvia specifically missed her grandmother, who was the person who raised her. When she moved to Salford (to live with her husband and in-laws) Silvia felt weird and wanted to go back to her home. She did not feel Salford or the new
house as her home. In several occasions Silvia told me she wanted to go back to Guatemala and that the only reason why she stayed was her husband and children. She believed her children could have a better future in the U.S. because they could have education and Medicaid, resources they would never have in Guatemala. Silvia was reconciled with the idea of staying for a long time in Salford, although her words and feelings indicated some sort of resignation.

In addition to the prolonged constraint of living apart from her grandmother, Silvia was not really settled with the idea of being an immigrant. She was the transnational participant who had the hardest time in terms of racism and discrimination. She named being racially discriminated as one big challenge. She recounted her feelings around the incident with the bus driver: “Pues mal siente uno como discriminada eso es una discriminación... porque pues creo que me bajó por el hecho de ser latina yo creo porque no había por qué... por no ser americana.” [One feels very bad for being discriminated, that is discrimination… I think she made me get off the bus because I’m Latina, I think so because there was no reason… because I wasn’t American]. This result reveals what I was expecting to find in this study. Silvia recognized racism as a problem that affected her. She did not like the way she was treated by other people in her community. She felt people treated her like she was useless and she preferred to keep distance from them, specially from White community members: “Pues (me siento) muy mal, yo a veces ni los volteo a ver porque se siente mal que lo vean a uno así” [(One) feels very bad, sometimes I don’t even look at them because it feels bad when people look at you that way]. This is also very interesting because the other transnational women acknowledged that racism existed and that they had experienced it in various ways, but they chose not to care or not to let it affect them. Silvia had worked outside the home, thus was more exposed to interactions with community individuals (e.g., bus driver, nurses, doctors, school teachers, neighbors) and her accounts demonstrate how she perceived people around her, and how people behaved with her. She had much more contact with other members of the community than the other participants, which is probably related to the fact that she has so many stories to tell about being treated (in some ways) because she was out there more. What is thought-provoking about Silvia’s story is
that social interactions with others in public spaces is what helped her to deal with depression, isolation, and conflicts with her partner or mother-in-law.

Silvia also felt very isolated and depressed when she had to stay at home after seasonal work was done. Winters were the worst for her and her depression symptoms were more complicated. Silvia did not have a lot of friends and places to go to, so she spent a lot of time enclosed at home.

“Es que como me estresa mucho el estar aquí encerrada también, como que me deprime... Porque no tengo para ningún lado donde ir... no mas que a la tienda... cuando salgo a caminar al parque y de ahí no, no voy para otro lado... me deprime mucho y más para el invierno... cuando viene la nieve... pues como que no quiero hablar, no quiero ver a nadie ya... me duele mucho la cabeza...”

[I feel stress out being enclosed here, I feel depressed... because I do not have anywhere else to go... only to the store... or when I go out for a walk at the park, I don’t go anywhere else... I get depressed and it gets worse during winters... with the snow... I don’t feel like talking or seeing anyone... my head hurts a lot]

This is how Silvia talked about isolation and how it affected her emotional wellbeing. Even when I asked Silvia how she felt about meeting new friends she noted she did not interact with other Latinos because she did not have time; but even when she was not working she felt other people were too busy to socialize. Among all the women, Silvia was the only one who named isolation and racial discrimination as her immediate and significant challenges. Being socially isolated had serious repercussions on her mental health. This is consistent with previous studies in which Latino participants reported that being isolated from other people was very detrimental to their mental health (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2003; Martínez Pincay & Guarnaccia, 2007).

5.5. Summary of Chapter

The life challenges of these transnational Latinas demonstrate that there are perhaps constraints that are immediately present and can be addressed; here I highlight the overall themes or challenges described in the previous section (socio-structural, material, and cultural challenges). Transnational Latina mothers also have the extra burden of managing racial ethnic
discrimination (Sassen, 2006; Falicov, 2005). These women experience deep psychosocial or emotional constraints related to challenges that could not be fixed or were beyond the means of transnational Latinas. For example, the feelings and suffering from having children across borders, having unresolved problems with a mother who is also on the other side of the border, or losing a partner and a child, were a few of the struggles beyond these women’s control. What I feel important to stress is that these women have material/economic needs, and even if they did not explicitly say it, their accounts show how they struggled to meet those needs (e.g., feeding themselves and their children). They had challenges just like any other mother, but unlike women with other class statuses, race, level of education or language skills, they are addressing psychosocial or emotional concerns while they are also trying to practice resilience. And, regardless of the type of life constraint, these transnational Latinas demonstrated considerable agency, actively pursuing the objective of maintaining their “core purpose and integrity in the face of [these] dramatically changed circumstances” (Zolli & Healy, 2012, p. 7).

All participants in different ways tried to manage with their individual grief; they also coped with changes in their life routines and their social roles, and changes in the life conditions or way of life (Espin, 1997) that we now understand as particular to their experiences as transnational Latinas. These changes magnified their sense of loss and suffering. But yet they managed to go on with their lives. How do they do it? What are the practices that they engage in to achieve or develop resilience in response to their life constraints? In the next chapter, I present and explain the analysis of the transnational participants’ resilience activities: agentive, culturally-mediated, and object-oriented activities that are achieved through practice(s).
CHAPTER 6: RESILIENCE UNDERSTOOD AS AN AGENTIVE ACTIVITY

ACHIEVED THROUGH PRACTICE

“Pues muchas veces utilizo… mi fuerza para salir adelante, le digo a veces tengo ganas de dejarme caer y me levanto otra vez y digo tengo que luchar! tengo que salir adelante por mis hijos por mi misma, que voy a poder... se que voy a luchar adelante y más y más…” Patricia

[Sometimes I use… my strength to move forward, sometimes I feel like I want myself to let fall but then I get up and say I have to fight! I have to move forward for my children, for my own self, and I know I can do it… I know I’m going to fight forward, and more and more…]

An activity theory perspective means a focus on activity rather than either the individual or context (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In this dissertation, the activity system was defined as resilience activity. An activity theory, such as the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), helps us understand resilience as a social and cultural learning process that is practiced and achieved by individuals. This new understanding of the development of resilience eschews its conceptualization as an intrinsic individual trait and posits resilience as part of individuals’ interactions with people in their community and the use of tools available in their environment. Furthermore, framing resilience development as an agentive activity from a CHAT perspective provides the opportunity to identify and examine how social actors within a social structure constrain and/or enable individuals’ resiliency practices.

Through utilization of the CHAT model, we find that resilience is not an activity enacted by one individual (transnational Latina subject); it is a collective activity in which different individuals engage in actions in order to achieve an object (overcoming or coping with a life challenging situation). Individual actions (and relations) are regulated or constrained by explicit and implicit rules and norms (e.g., patriarchal family system or gender relations). This group of individuals, those who share an interest in and participation with the object of the activity (Foot, 2001), constitutes the component of community in CHAT. For this dissertation, the community included all individuals presented in the lives of transnational Latinas that were involved,
influenced, or constrained in the resilience activity. Lastly, the component of division of labor indicates the division of tasks and responsibilities among the individuals of the community toward the object. This component refers to distinct dynamics within the resilience activity linked to the relative power and status of individuals (Van der Riet, 2009).

The purpose of this research was to construct a model of the activity system to explicate each of its components, namely subject, object, mediating tools, rules, community, division of labor, and the internal relations of this system. An analysis of the activity system of resilience activity (which is achieved through practice) formulates the “dialectical relationship between subject, object, and outcome in the activity, and explicates the dialectical interaction between individual and society” (Van der Riet, 2009, p. 84).

6.1. Transnational Latinas: The subjects of the resilience activity

To understand the subjects of the resilience activity it is pertinent to recapitulate the key understandings put forward around transnational Latinas changing identities and life circumstances in the U.S. Basically, the results provided in Chapter 5 contend that these women were (and still are) transforming their identities into that of individuals who were responding to the mainstream behavioral traits of the community where they live. They all struggled with what it meant to be a transnational Latina in terms of how to be a mother, wife, daughter, and all sorts of (gender and) social identities. Data from Chapter 5 demonstrated how they negotiated and resisted these transnational circumstances (Fernandes, 2013). These subjects are considered transnational Latinas because not only they cross geographical/territorial borders but also because of the fluid emotional and social boundaries (Espín, 1997) in response to their emotional and/or material objects or needs.
6.1.1. System values and self-conceptualization: A glance at Latinas transforming identities

In order to understand transnational Latina participants’ identities and personhoods, I identified and examined data regarding their value system and self-image. The information presented in this section would allow for understanding who these women really are and the ways they have come to reconstruct themselves as transnational women in the US.

6.1.1.1. Transnational Latinas’ values system

I looked at the data and searched for responses that revealed elements of or information regarding participants’ value systems. I sought to understand these women in terms of their value system and how that interacted with the way they learned to navigate their social environments. These transnational mothers valued their families, commitment to their marriage/romantic relationships, reliability from and respect for their mothers, and the recognition of other people’s needs. These women applied those values to the ways they used (or had to negotiate) the resources available to navigate a very limited social space. These core values also underpinned and informed transnational Latinas lifestyle practices and ways of understanding their “world.”

This follows Foot’s (2014) argument that individual behaviors are molded by and rely on cultural values and resources.

As previously stated, the value of familial interconnectedness (familismo) is fundamental in the lives of transnational Latinas. Their lives revolved around their motherhood responsibilities; that is, providing access to adequate and sufficient food, clothes, and medical care to their children; making sure their children had the resources required to have a better future in terms of educational attainment; and installed values of courteousness and tolerance. They were trying making sure the children wanted for nothing financially and did not experience the same poverty they suffered: “yo no quiero que a ellos me les falte nada... que no sufran las pobrezas que nosotros hemos sufrido” [I don't want my children to lack anything… don’t want them to suffer the poverty we have suffered] Elizabeth.

Further, the value system they had and their life experiences were continuously interacting. In order to be a great mother to their children, they had to get the resources they
needed even though that would make them feel ashamed or stressed. Because they prioritized the health and the welfare of their children, they would endure racial discrimination and/or embarrassment at the doctor’s office because they did not speak English. That is the way they navigated the social (and structural) environment and the way their system of values influenced their decisions. Here, the perspective of Lugones (2003) is helpful to understand the faculty of maneuvering the forced “travelling” of participants to hostile “worlds” such the doctor’s offices. These women endured discrimination, yet they said they were always respectful with doctors and nurses; they decided not to be affected by these oppressive experiences because they did not want to get sick, or because they needed healthcare for their children. However, in the private sphere of their homes, they did not need to undergo those situations. They became super women. They become caring mothers and wives finding ways to help and take care of their families. In Bridgett words: “uno tiene que hacerse súper mamá, súper esposa, porque trabajas, cocinas, cuidas niños, revisas tareas, alistas ropa, lavas, haces todo” [one has to become a super mother, super wife, because you work, you cook, you take care of children, you check their homework, you do the laundry and wash the dishes, you do everything]. This is another clear example of how they learn to be resilient; they learn to “travel” to different “worlds” (to take care of their families) always maintaining their core purpose and integrity.

Gender relations and the value of family played a significant role in the ways participants behaved and managed their romantic relationships. Even in the face of the worst marital conflicts, these transnational Latinas did not consider leaving their husbands or separating; they preferred to work on their relationships through talk and dialogue. They were truly committed to their relationships as part of the values transmitted from their own mothers or families. For instance, Elizabeth, who had conflicts with her partner, told me they never had such problems in El Salvador. Here in the U.S. her husband was often irritable and stressed from his work. In our conversations Elizabeth told me she had never considered leaving her husband because she was raised with the idea that women have to stay with the same partner/husband for a lifetime.
All participants talked about how they were taught (and socialized) to develop and keep long-lasting romantic relationships in a similar fashion.

“la crianza que a nosotros nos dieron es que uno se acompaña con un hombre para toda la vida y es lo que yo quiero (¿quién le enseñó eso?) mi mamá… que uno no debe andar así pues con uno y con otro y es lo que yo quiero... pasar toda mi vida con él.”

[They taught us that one has to stay with one’s man all life and that is what I want (who taught you that?) my mother… that one shouldn’t be hanging in around with one man after the other… and that is what I want, to spend all my life with him]

Elizabeth as well as the other participants knew they had the commitment to stay with their romantic partners for the rest of their lives, but in the U.S. they were facing all these changes as transnational women, and at the same time were trying to manage changes in their relationships within a context full of constraints. These transnational Latinas were trying to maintain their core values (and their core purpose and integrity) despite changing circumstances (Zolli & Healy, 2012).

All participants talked about having conversations with their husbands and talked about their relationships, things related to their families, and their different life challenges. Conversaciones [conversations] helped participants to work through their emotions because it helped them to deal with family affairs. For instance, Patricia noted that through conversations with others (i.e., husband) she always felt a load off her mind and liberated: “platicándolo a veces cuando yo lo hablo... siento como un peso menos le digo... como que siento yo que estoy bien pesada y me siento como si me liberara” [talking about it I feel like a take one load off my mind… like I’m feeling very heavy and then is like I’m liberated].

Participants not only valued relational activities with their husbands or partners but also the role of their mothers or female figures in their life. All participants were solely raised by women. Elizabeth and Bridgett were raised by single mothers because their fathers passed away when they were very young. Gloria and Patricia grew up with stepfathers and had minimal contact with their biological fathers. Silvia was raised by her grandmother because her mother
got married for a second time and her stepfather did not want to raise other’s people children. Silvia’s biological father was never in the picture. Female figures were key in the lives of the transnational Latinas, and were described as a fundamental source of trust, confidence, and support. Gloria’s excerpt exemplifies the importance of her mother in her own life:

“Mira yo no sé si mi mama me enseñó mal o me enseñó bien…mi mama para mi es mi amiga... pero siempre así con respeto.... Nunca le he faltado al respeto porque para mi, mi mama es mi amiga, mi confidente, y yo tengo que estar con ella... y como ella me dice yo nunca te voy a decirte un mal consejo y voy a querer un mal para ti...sino quiero bien para ti... entonces yo estoy acostumbrada... aunque estemos lejos y no me pueda ver... pero siento la confianza de ella.”

[Look, I don’t know if my mother taught me right or wrong…for me my mother is my friend… I feel a lot of respect for her… I have never disrespected her because for me my mother is my friend, my confident, and I have to be on her side… and like she says to me: I never going to give you a bad advice or want that anything bad happen to you… only good things… so I am use to… although we live far away and she cannot see me… I feel I can trust to her]

In their values system there was also an understanding that there were people who needed more material resources than they did, so some participants only would ask for social assistance when they really needed it. Patricia for example, saved a lot of money with her husband for lean times:

“Siempre tratábamos de ahorrar... si porque dice que estamos en un país donde no sabes si te van a dar ayuda o no... incluso yo nunca pedía comida... nada...si sabia que existía pero nunca lo pedía porque le digo... yo tengo ahorita lo voy a pedir algún día que no tenga... o que tenga menos...y siempre con esa idea me hice y dije no a lo mejor otras personas la necesitan mas que yo... como se los voy a quitar.”

[We would always try to save money… because we are in a country where you don’t know if they are going to help you or not…even I never ask for food before… nothing.. I knew that (option) exists but didn’t ask for it because I think… I have (resources) now but I would ask for it if I need to or when I have less… and I always have that idea in mind… that perhaps other people need it more than I do…how am I suppose to take that from them?]

In a similar vein, Gloria mentioned she did not like to take advantage of public aid unless she needed it. Gloria talked about feeling ashamed when she needed to ask for food at a food pantry but was more upset when services were denied for her: “Si el servicio de ahí... una cosa de que a
veces a uno... yo me considero una persona que a mi me da vergüenza a veces pedir... pero cuando en verdad la necesitas por que te la van a negar...” [Their (food pantry) services… sometimes they don’t… I described myself as a person who feels ashamed to ask (for this type of help)… but when you really need it why would they deny it to you…]

Political and public discourses have described Latinos, in particular immigrants and undocumented individuals, as people who like take advantage of and abuse public/social assistance. But the responses of these two transnational mothers shows that these women felt dignity because they did not use social services unless they really had to. It is important to acknowledge, though, that these women barely made ends meet and struggled to advance themselves and their families in terms of socio-economic status.

6.1.1.2. Self-conceptualization

All participants talked about their self-concept and how they struggled with what it meant to be a transnational Latina in terms of being a mother, lover, wife, daughter and all sort of social identities (how people perceived them was important to them). Given the participants’ material and emotional circumstances, they all described themselves as joyful and satisfied persons and such self-conceptualizations might be connected to the idea of resilience. Feeling happy, optimistic, positive, and strong is a way to describe their state of mind and that they do have resilient lives.

When I asked Elizabeth to describe herself she said she was shy, but was a very joyful person, a woman who liked to stay at home, be with her family, and liked to have friendships. Elizabeth described herself as a good mother because she would take care of her children and liked to spoil them (in a good way); she would also provided them with what they needed. She defined herself as a helper, someone who really liked to help others. Unlike Elizabeth, I found Patricia to be very articulate and it was not difficult for me to learn about her, whereas it was hard for Elizabeth because of her shyness. Patricia described herself as a kind person who liked to get along with everyone. She felt herself to be a calm and peaceful woman who liked to deal with challenges herself. Patricia liked to learn things on her own and be able to stand on her own
so she could keep fighting for those who need her. The next excerpt illustrates how Patricia made sense of herself, and the ways she talked about practicing resilience:

“Me gusta saber que yo sé hacer mis propias cosas, darme cuenta que si me doy de topazo con algo se que soy yo, que no me llevo otra persona... Y valerme por si misma siempre, o sea que si me caigo volverme a levantar y luchar por los que me necesitan.”

[I like to know that I can do my own things, knowing that if I fall I know I won’t hurt anyone else… And being able to stand on my own, always… I mean knowing that if I fall I can pick myself up to keep fighting for those who need me]

She also described herself as a strong woman who liked to fight to move forward and strove to understand and learn situations as they came.

Gloria was not very extroverted but enjoyed talking and reflecting about herself. She told me she was a happy person who attached a lot of importance to her children’s and husband’s happiness. She considered herself a very private person who did not like gossiping or telling other people her personal life. She was very protective with her children and did not care so much about material things. Gloria also perceived herself as a helper who would help her friends or family when they needed; she liked helping others through volunteer work in community organizations. Most of her personhood descriptions were directed towards a helper identity:

“Me gusta que la gente sea sincera... que si te van a ayudar que te ayuden bien... a mí me gusta ayudar... si alguien viene y estoy comiendo, yo creo que si comemos 4 comen dos más... yo no soy de esas personas que me cierro o que no me gusta ayudar...”

[I like people to be sincere…if they are going to help you they have to do it right… I like to help…if someone needs my help and I have food in my table… well if four of us can eat two more can… I’m not those type of people who is a locked-in person that does not like to help…]

Silvia talked about herself as a very optimistic person who would fight for the things that she wanted (within her reach). She felt she had a very strong character and very convincing attitude. During crucial moments she felt she was very positive, always thinking things were going to get better. She also thought she was a good person because she liked to do favors and help others who need it: “…si me piden un favor o algo pues si está en mis posibilidades de hacerlo si lo
hago y lo hago pues este bien digo este hago bien el favor... soy una persona muy tengo un carácter muy muy fuerte” [if somebody asks me a favor and it is within my possibilities, I do it, and I do it right… I am a person who is very… a very, I have a very strong character]. It was interesting to me that when I asked Silvia if she felt she was a happy person; she first hesitated in her response and then explained to me what happiness really meant to her. For Silvia, there was not a true or continuous state of happiness because there were always daily life problems. Silvia expressed feeling happy, especially because of her children:

“Uno es feliz pero como ve que día a día siempre hay cosas que pasan... O como que en la vida no se es totalmente feliz porque siempre como que hay una cosa que uno dice no pues, está esto.. o sea siempre hay problemas en el diario vivir digo... y pues no, no se puede estar... o sea si puede decir uno que es feliz pero como que vaya a decir no pues yo soy completamente feliz porque no tengo ningún problema? Yo pienso que nadie lo puede decir porque pues... yo siento que soy feliz... con mis niños, tengo a mis hijos pero como que diga, como decirle cien por ciento feliz digo no.”

Bridgett depicted herself as a very funny person who enjoyed having fun in a very healthy manner. Like the other participants, she liked to help others, even those who she did not know, who had problems and needed a hand. She had a commitment and loyalty to her friends, which for her meant not to talk/gossip about them:

“Pues soy muy divertida (se ríe)... me gusta mucho como el relajo sano.. yo soy buena amiga...me gusta ayudar a las personas aunque no las conozca, si están en problemas me gusta ayudarlas...soy leal, pues, como se puede decir...no me gusta hablar mal de nadie.”

[Well I am very funny (giggles)... I like having fun in a very healthy way… I am a good friend… I like to help other people, even if I don’t know them, if they are in trouble I like to help them… I am loyal, well, how can I say it… I don't like to talk about others]
Later, in other conversations, Bridgett talked about being a very good mother and wife who was always attentive to her family’s well-being. Also, albeit they had difficult moments in terms of material or economic stability, Bridgett felt she was always contenta [content].

To understand what motivated transnational Latinas to overcome problems, to learn to be resilient, and keep going with their lives, I examined how they were able to maintain their spirit, maintain this feeling of themselves as joyful persons, despite all their constraints. In terms of their integrity and their core purpose of life, we are going to understand that as their sense of themselves. They are mothers, wives/partners, daughters, sisters, believers, and helpers. They were optimistic and hopeful. The next section explains the concept of hope, a fundamental feeling or state of mind that helped participants to maintain their core purpose and integrity.

6.1.2. Hope as a key component of resilience practice

One concept that has been associated with resilience is hope, an emotional state that is been defined in mental health settings “as the expectancy that a positively rated event is likely to occur in the future” (Roth & Hammelstein, 2007, pg. 9). Further, hope has been also referred as the conviction that something would make sense, no matter how things progress later (Havel, 1990). This feeling of expectation that something would happen or change has been linked to research around the development of resilience in individuals exposed to war or other high-risk environments. Thus, hope is considered a key component of resilience (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010).

In my analysis of resilience, I use the concept of hope developed by Freire (1994) that has also been used to explain the resiliency experience of Latino immigrants within educational settings (Trueba, 2004). Freire notes:

“Hope is an ontological need… [And] without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle… Hope, as it happens, is so important for our existence, individual and social, that we must take every care not to experience it in a mistaken form, and thereby allow it to slip toward hopelessness and despair. Hopelessness and despair are both the consequence and the cause of inaction or immobilism” (p. 8-9).
Individuals feel hopeless and desperate when they feel they do not have control over their lives, when they cannot control their struggles. The women in this study demonstrated to be hopeful and optimist despite adversities. They believed their lives could be better and that there was a chance for changes. In moments of pain, suffering, and despair they show to be persistent and hopeful; hope was constructed as an indispensable condition to continue with their lives (Trueba, 2004). They decided on being happy, optimistic, faithful, positive, and strong to *move forward*. This is the way they constructed their resilience: they had the conviction things were going to get better for them and for their families. Here is an example of the way Patricia demonstrated to be hopeful in despair circumstances: “*voy a echar ganas para delante no pa tras sino para delante...yo puedo, yo puedo (sonriendo) echar para adelante... por mis hijos*” [I’m going to do my best to *move forward*, not to move back but to *move forward*… I can, I can (laughs) *move forward*… for my children]. In a similar way, Elizabeth chose to be hopeful and faithful thinking that one day she would see her daughter again: “*yo me pongo a pensar que primero Dios, algún día voy a tener a mi otra niña conmigo*” [I always think that is God’s plan, that some day I will have my daughter with me again].

But learning or practicing resilience is not only about being hopeful; it is not that simple. Resilience is practiced as individuals use resources from their social milieu. How such resources (when they are available) are used is also important. Such resources include material or conceptual tools, and *help* through community or social others. Later in this section these factors are addressed and examined. Meanwhile, the next section revisits the issue of the life challenges of transnational Latinas but this time I refer to life challenges as *objects*, a critical component in the CHAT model.

### 6.2. Understanding the Object(s) Transnational Latinas Sought to Overcome

In Chapter 5, I presented the life struggles of all participants. From a CHAT perspective, their *need* to overcome those life struggles was examined as the *motive* towards the resilience activity. The *motive*, I must remind the reader, is the object that the subject (participants)
ultimately needed to satisfy. In that activity (resilience activity), the object “is molded or transformed into an outcome [by the subject] with the help of physical and symbolic, external and internal tools” (Engeström, 1993, p. 67). Transnational Latinas’ resiliency practices were directed toward the object of recuperating from material/emotional constraints. Their life struggles were deeply connected to a specific moment, place, and socio-economic situation (beyond their control) that had negative repercussions on their emotional being.

The life challenges of transnational Latinas in this study demonstrated that there were challenges or constraints related to the material or economic conditions of their lives (material-economic objects) as participants struggled with poverty and with making ends meet. Further, they also have the extra burden of experiencing racial or ethnic discrimination and isolation, issues that were compounded by the lack of “legal” documentation and language skills, material and non-material tools required to be socially and economically integrated in their community (structural objects). They also coped with gender roles challenges at home, family feuds, and religion faith changes (socio-cultural objects).

In addition to that, they faced deeply psychosocial or emotional constraints affecting their emotional or physiological wellbeing (psychological objects). And on top of it all, these women had an ultimate goal, a fundamental object: salir adelante [move forward/get ahead], and helping their families to salir adelante. So when we talk about the life challenges of transnational Latinas, it is essential to organize all their challenges on different levels. In the first level, the physical level, we find the material-economic objects, then in the next level there are the socio-cultural objects, next the structural objects, and finally the profound psychological objects. All these objects were interrelated and affected the lives of transnational Latinas in a variety of ways (as presented in Chapter 5). What is more, transnational Latinas were confronting these socio-economic, structural, cultural and emotional conditions, keeping themselves hopeful, strong, and optimistic so they could balance all objects to eventually salir adelante. Resilience is not about overcoming one specific object; it is about confronting and balancing different objects at once.
(see Figure 4). This is the information that later will be used to understand and explain their resilience activity mapped out in the CHAT model.

For the purpose of this dissertation and to understand resilience, I used particular moments in the lives of participants to explore the ways they all used resources and tools (external-material or internal-symbolic) to address or achieve two particular objects at the same time: the *material-economic objects* and *psychological objects*. I decided to focus on these objects because they were the most salient struggles in the participants’ lives and I wanted to understand their resilience as their capacity to balancing these two objects.\(^{13}\)

![Figure 4: Salir adelante: Representation of the objects of transnational Latinas](image)

**Figure 4: Salir adelante: Representation of the objects of transnational Latinas**

As I stated in Chapter 5, the *structural objects* were not explicitly acknowledged as life challenges by four participants. Only Silvia emotionally and physically struggled with structural objects. Therefore, in the cases of the other participants these objects were placed as part of their context, they were factors outside transnational Latinas’ control influencing and constraining

\(^{13}\) It is always the case that one activity system has multiple objects, some of which are addressed in the whole system and some of which are addressed in one or many of the actors within the system. But there is often a super ordinate object or set of objects that are the explicit purpose of the particular system (Williams, 2004).
their lives (they were not the objects participants were trying to achieve). Please be aware that in this study some of the *structural objects* and *socio-cultural objects* that were not perceived as goals to be achieved became mediated tools or norms/rules as they mediated and influenced transnational Latinas’ actions and decision-making choices. Previous research has demonstrated that a shift in the function of the components of the activity (e.g., mediating tools into norms) depends on how the subject constructs the component to satisfy its need, constructs it as a social demand or as a useful tool to achieve a goal (Foot, 2001).

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 5: Resilience as an agentive activity of transnational Latinas**

6.3. Mediating Tools/Artifacts

In the activity system of resilience there were innumerable tools that mediated the activity. These mediating tools/artifacts include: social others, psychological tools, and technical/material tools that enact changes on material objects. In the following section, I present information about the most salient mediating tools and include examples of the ways they were used by transnational Latinas. The tools were the reflection of the context, so all participants
shared the same tools in different situations. Many of the tools overlapped in the different objects of recuperating from material/emotional constraints.

Figure 6: The triangle model of the resilience system

6.3.1. Ayuda [help]

After reading the field notes and interviews, I noticed that all participants were using one noticeable semantic word, sometimes it was used as a verb and sometimes it was used as a noun, to describe the ways they achieved their material and psychological goals: through *ayuda*. In the context of transnational Latinas, the term implies the possibility of surviving. Participants’ narratives demonstrate how *ayuda* emerged, through interactions with other individuals, as a tool that when was present assisted participants when they were trying to achieve their goals.

Across all participants there was a language of *ayuda* and support. All women talked about receiving from (or providing help to) other individuals/institutions from their community. They were fully aware of how and who could provide them with vital support and *ayuda* at different levels: the material and/or the psychological. In terms of resilience one idea of getting *ayuda* can be viewed as resources or assistance they could get from the government, namely
WIC, food stamps, Medicaid, and Head Start (because they had U.S. citizen children). Such resources allowed them to make ends meet, to feed themselves and their children, to pay their bills, and to get education and health services for their children.

Participants also reported getting ayuda from family members and friends, for example by taking care of their children or giving them rides to run errands. When they were not getting the ayuda they needed they were actively finding ways to help themselves, which is tied to the idea of learning and practicing resilience through the use of tools available in their environment. Here are some examples of the ways in which participants accounted for ayuda at the basic material level:

“Julia me está ayudando con eso... estampillas y Medicaid.... ella me interpreta allá pues a veces yo necesito una carta y ella me la hace... y me la traduce a inglés.”

[Julia is helping with that... food stamps and Medicaid... she interprets for me there and when I need a letter she write it for me... she translates it into English] Elizabeth

“Cuando necesito (ayuda) es una americana y una hispana pero la americana habla español (evangélicas) y ellas me dicen cuando necesites yo puedo ayudarte... y si me ha tocado hablarles y si ellas me hacen el favor de llevarme”

[When I need (help) an American and a Hispanic, the American speak Spanish (evangelicals), they tell me: when you need something we can help you... and I have called and yes they give me rides] Silvia

“Me gustan mucho las escuelas, en las escuelas tratan de ayudarle mucho a uno como uno que no habla inglés ellos buscan la manera de hacerse entender con uno... me gusta que también hay personas que lo ayudan mucho a uno aquí (por ejemplo) está un lugar que se llama padres como maestros.”

[I like the schools a lot, they try to help you out a lot because one doesn’t speak English so they look ways to make you understand... I like it here because there are people who help you a lot... (for example) there is this place called parents as teachers] Bridgett

Patricia compared the social and public help or assistance provided for low-income families in Mexico with the U.S and quickly contended:
“A veces digo no pues es mejor aquí porque aquí vas al WIC y te dan una dispensa vas a una iglesia y te ayudan con dispensa... aunque sea con frijoles o cosas enlatadas te dan... y ahí en México no.”

[I can say is better here because you can get WIC, you can also go to the church and they help you with food pantry services… even if it only is beans or canned food, they give it to you… they don’t do that in Mexico]

Ayuda also fostered the development of resilience as participants were working toward achieving their psychological objects. They reported getting emotional ayuda and support from husbands/partners, family members, and from religious and spiritual sources such God and the Virgin of Guadalupe:

“Pues también él [esposo me ayuda bastante porque... Él se pone a hablar conmigo.]”
[he (husband) helps me out a lot because… he converses with me… ] Elizabeth

“Pues, a veces le decía yo, ay Diosito Santo!, ayúdame a tomar una decisión.”
[Sometimes I would say: oh Holy God! help me to make a decision] Patricia

When Gloria’s younger daughter was sick with asthma (one of Gloria’s past challenges), her husband helped her take care of the baby; her mother helped as well (from Mexico) by giving advice and encouragement. Now that Gloria is trying to move forward with her life by getting “papers” and learning English, her husband is helping and supporting her in every step of the process.

As I discovered the theme of ayuda, I searched for previous literature about the concept and its relevance in Latino populations. Unfortunately, I could not find any scholarship describing the concept. What I feel important to highlight about ayuda is that for Latinas it means to be able to get basic social services and it means to have someone you can trust who is there for them to deal with their life struggles, as opposed to mean entitlement. Having ayuda at both the material and emotional levels fosters a balance between body and mind, and fosters well-being and integrity.
6.3.2. Transnational practices

In this study transnational practices were described as the product of circuits of relations between transnational Latinas and their families living in their countries of origin as well as repeated sets of traditional actions that have been socially and culturally ordered over time and come to be used in transnational contexts. Results from this dissertation show that transnational Latinas construct resilience through transnational practices and a set of goal-oriented actions\textsuperscript{14}, to achieve both their material-economic and psychological goals. These practices helped them to navigate spatial, social, cultural, and economic boundaries (Lacroix, 2012) in the U.S.

In order to achieve some economic stability (\textit{material-economic object}), participants engaged in food cooking and selling practices at their homes. Because of their social structural positions (lack of papers, language, education, socio-economic status) they had to engage in such practices so they could make money to be able to make ends meet, to send money to their children or other relatives, or to save money that eventually would bring their children here. Money was used to financially support those who were left behind and who played the significant role of the psychological objects in their lives. Sending money or material goods was a statement of care of these mothers to their families.

Part of the resiliency practices that participants constructed were transnational by nature; they were transformative because they did not take place just here in the U.S., it was also constructed through social practices that they brought with them from their home countries. The use of skills here, such as cooking, was part of the resilience activity to achieve material objects. As Rogoff (2003) claims, individuals’ behaviors depend on the conditions that are routine in their community and on the cultural practices they are habituated to. Therefore, cultural practices as mediated tools of human behavior are the product of cultural and historical traditions and experiences that have been transmitted to individuals and groups by those who went before (Engeström, 1987).

\textsuperscript{14} Goal-oriented actions in CHAT refer to a set of steps a subject might take in the process of working towards achieving an object (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).
Transnational motherhood (Hondagnu-Sotelo’s & Avila, 1997) and daughterhood were also transnational practices that were used by participants to achieve their emotional objects. Transnational Latinas developed these practices in response to their needs to redefine and reconstruct their relationship with their children and significant family members across the border (Espín, 1999) and as a way of reassuring their identity as mothers and daughters. While they could not fully achieve their psychological objects, they could feel greatly comforted as they felt they were preparing their children to move forward. Elizabeth for example, communicated with her daughter Lucia from El Salvador every week, sometimes twice a week by phone. She and her husband also supplied money towards Lucia’s expenses at home. Bridgett participated in similar goal-oriented actions that contributed towards the eventual satisfaction of her need (to be her son’s mother at least from the distance). She also talked often to her son and worked countless hours during the summer and in agricultural jobs to send him $100 a month. Over the phone Bridgett would remind her son to behave well, listen to his grandparents, and do well in school. Calling and sending him money provided her some sort of comfort and peace with herself.

Patricia and Silvia were also involved in transnational practices as daughter and granddaughter respectively. Silvia was raised by her grandmother, so for her this person represented nurturance, guidance, and social and material support. Patricia’s and Silvia’s emotional objects were deeply connected with family members who lived across national borders. Transnational daughterhood practices for these two women comprised sending money or material goods (e.g., computers, cellphones, and clothes), asking for or providing emotional support, and instilling in their children love and respect for their grandmothers who lived away. These transnational practices of Patricia and Silvia enhanced the possibility of emotional comfort through circuits of affection and care that transcended geographical borders (Hondagnu-Sotelo’s & Avila, 1997).

Lastly, familism also mediated transnational participants’ responses to their struggles. When I asked participants what enabled them to maintain their integrity and well-being as they coped
with all their life challenges, they all concurred with the idea of having to be strong for their children. The value of family and love for their children was a tool they used to construct a vision that things were going to be better. See for example Patricia’s excerpt: “Mi motor mas que tuve fueron mis hijos, porque dije mis hijos están pequeños, mis hijos me necesitan fuerte, no me necesitan débil, necesito estar fuerte para mis hijos.” [My motive was my children, I thought: they are very little, they need me strong, they don’t need me weak, I need to strong for my children]. Previous research on teen violence has found familism to be an important cultural artifact mediating the resilience processes of Latinos in the U.S. (Clauss-Ehlers and Lopez-Levy, 2002). I would like to point out here that these transnational practices (as tools) were gendered, and it did not surprise me as gender literature has demonstrated how women, particularly in Latino populations, have been socially and culturally legitimized as key care providers for the family and household related responsibilities (Parrado & Flippen, 2005).

6.3.3. Religious practices

Religious practices among transnational Latinas helped them to work toward maintaining their core purpose and integrity in the face of adversity, more specifically their emotional struggles. All five participants, Elizabeth, Patricia, Gloria, Silvia and Bridgett prayed to God or the Virgin of Guadalupe to find the strength to be able to salir adelante. This finding is consistent with other studies that have found religion as an alternative treatment for emotional distress (Matthews, Corrigan, Smith & Aranda, 2006). To present findings regarding their religious practices as a source of help I crafted one narrative using (and merging) participants’ words:

“Yo lo que le pido a Dios es que me ayude a tener a mi niña aquí…me siento en paz, me siento desahogada. Yo decía Dios mío ayúdame, ilumíname que debo de hacer. Y a la virgen de Guadalupe le pido por mi familia, que nos lleve por buen camino… aunque estemos bien nosotros que siempre nos guíe, que no nos deje que nos desviemos. Le pido mucho, mi fortaleza es Dios, Dios mi fortaleza. Yo me ponía y decía: Dios ayúdame Diosito, mira siento que me esta faltando la fuerza, mándame una señal… y si me sentía mas reconfortada… yo decía Dios me está ayudando desde allá arriba”
[I ask God to help me to bring my daughter here… I feel in peace, I feel unburdened. I said my God help me, take me to the light so I know what to do. And I ask to the Virgin of Guadalupe for my family, to guide us onto the right path… even if we are fine I ask her to lead us, that we don’t deviate from our path. I ask God a lot, God is my strength, God strengthens me. I would pray and say: God help me God, I feel that I’m losing my strength, send me a sign…and yes, I felt comforted… I could say God is helping me from the above]

Even for those whose religious traditions and practices changed after they moved to Salford, they all believed in the existence of a superior being(s) that was used as a tool to find peace, strength, guidance, and comfort. Praying and asking for strength to God or engaging in transnational motherhood or daughterhood practices were not the only tools assisting transnational Latinas in constructing resilience. There were also significant social others that participated in the lives of these women and engaged in different goal-oriented actions to help and support them to recuperate from emotional and/or material misfortunes.

6.3.4. Social others

In the activity system there were family and community members that functioned/acted as mediating tools of resilience. The activity of resilience was, to a certain degree facilitated through providing support, love, sympathy, advice, and material/economic resources. These persons were a legitimate source of comfort in the lives of transnational Latinas.

*Husbands/partners.* Husbands/partners were the tools participants had available to achieve or work toward achieving both their economic and emotional objects. For instance, Patricia identified her husband as an important tool that has helped her to manage her resentment against her mother. According to Patricia, her husband mediated her feelings and attitudes toward her mother through talk and advice:

“Yo quiero superar todo eso… todo ese rencor… ese rencor que yo siento hacia ella… le digo ahorita ya no tanto… siento que ya no tanto le digo porque a través de él (esposo) él me ha ayudado mucho a superar eso a querer que yo le hable mas seguido… a que yo conviva mas con ella aunque sea por teléfono…”

[I want to overcome all that… all that resentment… the resentment that I feel against her… now I don't feel as bad… I don't feel as bad because through him (husband), he has]
helped me a lot to overcome that, to feel like I want to talk more with her… to spend more time with her, even if it's just over the phone]

All participants talked about constant conversations they had with their husbands or partners. They all said that through conversations about their daily or emotional problems with their husbands they were able to find some contentment. In the activity system of resilience husbands were tools that facilitated transnational Latinas’ participation in the resilience activity.

_Servidoras._ Early research suggests that community female leaders assist Latina immigrants to cope effectively with life constraints and health problems (Vega et al. 1987). The authors have called these informal community leaders _servidoras_. Findings from this dissertation corroborate those presented in Vega’s study. There were in fact three Latina _servidoras_ helping transnational Latinas by connecting them with social services and activities that eventually helped them to achieve their economic goals as well as to get informative and material resources when they were pregnant and breastfeeding their children. These _servidoras_ worked at the Head Start, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) office, and an agency designated to help community members navigate the health system.

All participants stated that before deciding to use public services they distrusted the government system, thinking their children were going to be taken away or that, at some point, later, they needed to give money back. There was also a belief that the social service agencies were not giving them what they were entitled to have, or agencies claimed that they were not eligible because they were undocumented.

Meanwhile, with the help of _servidoras_, all participants learned about services and were able to apply and get WIC, food stamps, and other public services. The servidoras were a tool in the lives of transnational Latinas because they informed participants about public services they had access to. Participants trusted in these Latina _servidoras_ because they were Latinas who spoke the same language. These _servidoras_ became a mediating tool in participants’ life more specifically when they were trying to achieve their material-economic goals. There was no
indication that any of these sources of help contributed to or enabled participants to achieve their psychological or emotional objects.

**Distraction.** The notion of distraction was salient among participants: Elizabeth, Patricia, Silvia and Bridgett. They were all trying to construct happiness through distraction in a variety of ways. Elizabeth and Patricia talked about taking their kids to the park or playing with them at home to get their mind distracted. Elizabeth for instance, would take her children out and play with them; she felt that by doing that (at least to some degree) she could move forward with her life: “*me ponía a jugar con mis hijos, ahí me traía tras de ellos jugando, digo tengo que salir adelante y se que voy hacerlo de esa manera*” [I always played with my children, I was playing with them all the time, I thought: I have to move forward and I know I will do it this way].

Patricia, Silvia and Bridgett reported distracting themselves from their sufferings when they looked and found work outside their homes. As the quotes below show, that allowed them to think on other things and feel happier with more freedom. Please note that Patricia’s excerpt makes reference to another object she was trying to achieve in the past (loss of her first husband and a miscarriage). I decided to include her account here because understanding resilience as an activity that is learned and practiced requires examining past experiences that helped them to cope with other life challenges.

> “*En ese momento, empecé yo a buscar trabajo y ya encontré el trabajo y ya no pensaba tanto en ellos ni en mi dolor... que pensaba mas en el trabajo, para que el trabajo me saliera mucho mejor y entonces esa fue mi terapia, el trabajo.*”

> [In that moment, I started to look for a job, and I found one, and I did stop thinking about them, about my pain… I was thinking more about my work, that I needed to do a good job there so that was my therapy, my job]

Similarly, Bridgett noted that finding a job in Salford (agricultural job) helped her to unburden herself and stand on her own. Through her job she was also able to send money to her child (emotional object) and mother, significant people she left behind when migrated to the U.S., which helped her achieve some freedom and happiness:
“El trabajo me ayudó mucho porque me empecé a desenvolver todo lo que estaba adentro mio como si fuera reprimido sali… yo hacia las cosas por mi yo decia yo le ayudo a mi esposo a pagar las cuentas, a mandarle dinero al niño a mandarle dinero a mi mamá”

[My job helped me a lot because I started to develop something inside of me, like something that was suppressed got out… I did things for myself and said I’m helping my husband to pay the bills, to send money to our child and my mother]

Silvia also cited distraction through her job as a way of decreasing stress and depression caused by being enclosed in her house, with limited social exchanges with other individuals. She perceived her job as a possibility to interact with other people and earn money, both reasons that would make her feel happy:

“Es que me estresa mucho el estar aquí encerrada… como que me deprimio mucho entonces como que (por el trabajo) salgo y veo más…. Pues allá (en el trabajo) van a haber muchas personas y veo gente diferente y platico… o sea a lo mejor no vamos a ser amigos pero pues si ve uno gente diferente y pues si, si me pongo contenta y aparte que voy a ocupar el dinero para algo que también me va a hacer feliz”

[It stresses me out a lot to be enclosed here… I feel like I get depressed a lot so (through work) I feel like I can go out and see more… like there (work site) there will be more people, and I can see different people and can talk… I mean maybe we are not going to be friends but at least I can see different people, and yes, it makes me happy; besides, I am going to make money to pay or buy something that would make me feel happy too]

All four participants started to feel better (or thought they would feel better) when they found a job or were working outside their homes. Distraction was an important mediating tool in their lives, although this tool was not always present or available in their environment. Because they were undocumented they had to use purchased forged documents (e.g., social security numbers of deceased U.S. citizens). Most of the time their employers found out participants were breaking Iowa’s identity theft law and fired them. In other places their employers did not care too much about the forged documents used by undocumented employees and allowed them to work in low-skilled jobs as cheap labor (Kandel & Parrado, 2005). Thus, jobs for participants were unstable or non-existent.
6.3.5. Documents: An absent tool

Immigration documentation was an absent tool, but a critical one to respond to their challenges. From a human development perspective, my dissertation revealed that the lack of “legal” documents mediated transnational Latinas’ resiliency practices and precluded their choices to achieve their material and emotional objects. When participants described to me how the lack of “papers” disturbed their lives, they related it to economic burden, discrimination, and fear (of legal authority). They all talked about not being able to find well-paid jobs, buy their own house, or find affordable healthcare. They also talked about not being able to drive (and being scared of getting caught by police men when driving without a driver’s license) to take care of their children’s health or important things related to their families. Lastly, some participants expressed their feelings about being discriminated against, or having the stigma as undocumented criminals.

In addition to hindering opportunities for material/economic achievements, “papers” obstructed transnational mothers’ opportunities to attain their personal goals (psychological objects) of bringing their children to the U.S. or going back home to resolve family feuds that led to emotional constraints. Two Latina participants, Elizabeth and Bridgett, left a child behind in their countries when they migrated to the U.S. These women endured incredible pain, suffering and shame. See for example an illustration of Elizabeth’s suffering because she could not apply for a visa for her child. Undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are not eligible to apply for any type of visa for themselves or their families:

“Pues mi más sufrimiento es que…. Imagínese si uno .... Yo tengo mi niña allá en el Salvador yo le quisiera sacar visa a la niña pero no se la dan pues yo ahorita.... Ahorita mi más sufrimiento es ese, que no tengo a mi niña y ella solo me pasa diciendo que quiere estar conmigo ella solo llorando.”

[My greatest suffering is that… I have my daughter in El Salvador and I want to get her a visa but they (government) do not grant it… that is my greatest suffering now, that I don't have my child with me… And she just keep telling, crying, me she wants to be with me]
Critical research demonstrates that the global economic restructuring and the inequalities produced by patriarchal capitalism (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000) forced individuals from developing countries to migrate to the U.S. Elizabeth did not want to come north, but because her husband migrated in search of economic opportunities he could not have in his home country, she had no other choice than to followed and reunite with him. While some may say this is indeed a choice, the transnational feminist framework reminds us that women are placed within a constructed hierarchy of gendered expectations, beliefs, and behaviors that are reinforced by social norms. In truth, the participants had no choice if they were to consider themselves and be considered by others to be good mothers, wives, and daughters. Once here, they did not have a fundamental tool (papers) to leave the country to return with children left behind, or to address issues with their families back home. These women’s stories exemplify the sorrow of families living at two sides of the border without “papers,” a very common suffering among undocumented and transnational individuals. The lack of “papers” was a barrier to achieving both material-economic and psychological objects.

6.4. Rules/Norms

Formal or informal rules/norms encompass societal standards and expectations (of behavior) that influence an activity and the interactions of community individuals within the same activity (Engeström, 1987; Engeström, 1993). In the present CHAT analysis of resilience there were salient shared rules that governed and regulated transnational Latinas’ practices and interactions with others in their respective resilience activity system. As previously discussed, one of the most significant values among Latino populations is the importance of the family unit (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004), and this socio-cultural belief might establish a norm (or traditional notion) of what it means to be a mother and/or a wife. Females in the family unit are expected to take care of their own children, thus leaving a child behind was perceived by others in the community as negligence or misbehavior towards those of close kin. The following statement exemplifies Bridgett’s insights of how the negative attitude towards mothers who leave
behind their children as a rule perturbed Bridgett’s feelings and the way she interpreted the object within the resilience activity system:

“Yo acá me sentía bien triste porque no estaba mi hijo conmigo y este como no conocía (muy bien) a la gente, la gente me juzgaba, me decía te viniste porque quisiste, quisiste dejar a tu hijo no sabían lo que yo estaba sintiendo... eso es difícil.”

[Here I felt very sad because I didn’t have my child with me, because I didn’t know (very well) people they judged me, they said: you came here because you wanted to, you wanted to leave your son there… they didn’t know how I felt… that is difficult]

Even the idea of leaving their children at the care of other individuals (at daycares) was not valued positively by Elizabeth, Patricia, and Gloria. They preferred to stay at home, taking care of their children and forego the possibility of working outside home (material object), rather than letting strangers or with individuals without proper child care training (Gloria’s case specifically) take care of their children.

Familism in other cases facilitated opportunities for transnational participants to cope with their emotional challenges. The loving care of children, and emotional support through conversations with partners/husbands or with family members (i.e., their mothers) across national borders allowed participants to unburden themselves and helped them to cope. In addition to that, the love for their children and their ultimate goal to help them move forward became an important consideration for the maintenance of their active participation in the resilience activity system. Patricia, for example, explained that she did not let herself fall because her children needed her, they were her motive to salir adelante:

“Mis sentimientos eran, echar adelante por mis hijos, no dejarme caer por que tenia mis niños que me necesitaban mas que nunca, ellos son los que me necesitan... eso era lo que más me motivaba a seguir adelante, mis hijos.”

[I felt like… moving forward for my children, I did not let my self fall because I had my children who needed me more than ever, they the ones who need me… that is what motivated me to move forward, my children]
Familism or the importance of family ascribed by Latinos both facilitated and constrained actions and interactions of the subjects in the resilience activity system.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, participants’ accounts suggest that once Latinas move to the U.S. traditional gender relations are challenged and some of their behaviors fall outside the conventional Latino gender patterns (Baker, 2004; Schmalzbauer, 2011). Gender norms and relations were perceived as a legitimate foundation of intimate relationships and decision-making behaviors among participants.

“También se le dificulta mucho cuando uno va llegando y el esposo trae la mentalidad de allá (México) que no puede salir sin que tu marido te de permiso o que tu esposo es celoso… eso se le dificulta mucho a uno una mujer aquí.”

[It is also difficult when one gets here and your husband brings this mindset from there (Mexico) that you cannot go out anywhere without your husband’s consent or that your husband is very jealous… that is very difficult for a women who lives here] Bridgett.

Another explicit rule that regulated resilience, particularly in relation to their practices to achieve material or psychological needs, were the requirements for public services eligibility (U.S. citizenship). The resiliency practices of participants’ were facilitated through providing their U.S. children access to social/public services. Transnational Latinas were not citizens and did not qualify for any social services or affordable medical insurance. However, their children qualified as they were born in the U.S. (only Bridgett’s oldest daughter was born in Mexico and did not qualify for such aid). Still, the women were not eligible for any health resources so they either found other ways to take care of their health (e.g., servidoras connected them with other health resources available in their community) or refrained from looking for health care from formal resources. For instance, Patricia talked about wanting to find help with a psychologist so she could overcome all her problems, problems she had as a child (sexual harassment) and problems she was currently facing (problems with her mother) but she was aware about the cost of getting that type of help and was not able to find an affordable doctor.
[To date I’ve been meaning to go (to a psychologist) to overcome my childhood problems and my current problems, and I want to go, I have tried to look for someone who is cheap… but nothing]

When Latinos move to the U.S., it is expected that they will actively participate in the process of integration in the host community. Part of this integration is being able to express themselves in the dominant language (English) and engage in the host country’s social and/or citizenship practices (Schmalzbauer, 2011). There is also research suggesting that Latinos’ lack of English proficiency often hinders their interactions with community agents (Jensen, 2006). Participants in this study did not have English proficiency. Only Gloria had some English skills because she finished her High School in Salford. Community individuals, more specifically public service providers, expected that transnational Latinas spoke English and seemed to be frustrated when that was not the case. Having language proficiency in the context of their everyday life can be perceived as an explicit norm of U.S. society that regulated participants’ practices and interactions with others in their respective resilience activity system. For example, women had limited interactions with non-Spanish speakers, and when they did because they needed resources, they felt discriminated against. In the case of Silvia, the participant who appointed isolation and discrimination as her object (life struggle), the lack of language proficiency did not provide her with opportunities to engage in social interactions with community members (outside her family) that might have helped her to feel integrated. On the contrary, it functioned as an oppressive rule that instigated embarrassment and discrimination.

Lastly, the expectation of knowing how to drive or being able to move from one place to another was an implicit rule that regulated participants’ actions within the activity system. Salford was a rural town where a public transportation system barely existed, so new immigrants needed to either learn how to drive and buy their own affordable car or depend on other social others (family, friends, or coworkers) for rides. When transnational participants arrived in
Salford, most of them (four women) found the means to overcome transportation issues, for example, by learning to drive on their own and without a driver license. They did not like the idea of depending on others to run errands or to get to work. However, Silvia was terrified of driving because she did not have papers and felt that driving was too difficult for her; she then depended on her family, sometimes coworkers, to move around Salford or go to work. She was also the one who had discriminatory experiences with a bus driver, so she did not like the idea of taking the one public bus available in town. What was interesting about Silvia’s story was that old-timer Latina acquaintances that helped her with rides at the beginning of her stay oftentimes criticized her and made her feel like a burden. In her community, it was expected that she would learn how to drive so she could do things on her own, the same way the rest of the transnational Latinas in Salford learned to do it. A Mexican coworker told Silvia:

“She said: you should have already learned how to drive because here people have to learn to drive, it is necessary and I told her I know is necessary. She said: you have to learn to drive so you do not bother people, so you learn to do your own things, on your own without telling other people, without asking them any favors… uff!! I felt so bad and I told her: I know… so that is why I am not going to work, I do not want to bother her, because years ago she would give me rides… you know to get my children and everything]

Such expectation regulated her actions towards achieving her material goals because she could not count on others to take her to her job (not even her husband, as he worked all day out of town). Worse still, she did not want to rely on public transportation because she might experience discrimination.
6.5. Community and Division of Labor

The community component in an activity system refers to the people who share the same object with the subject, specifically, individuals who engage or participate in the activity of the object (Engeström, 1987; Engeström, 1993). Activity is understood as a collective process dependent on relations (Hedegaard, Chaiklin, & Jensen, 1999) between the subject and this community. Such interactions are regulated by norms/rules and the division of labor among individuals of that community. For this dissertation, the community component includes all individuals that intervened and/or influenced resiliency practices of transnational Latinas. This community extended transnational individuals’ actions within the resilience activity system through the formulation of norms/rules and expectations (Engeström, 1993) that enabled or constrained opportunities of achieving their material/emotional goals.

In my analysis and presentation of results I organized these individuals into three different units: Family (i.e., transnational and immediate family); friends or acquaintances; and other community members (i.e., formal/informal service providers; employers). Individuals of each group assisted or hindered transnational Latinas’ resiliency practices in different ways. The same groups of individuals have been identified in other studies as key social and economic resources for Latino populations (Trueba, 2004; Greder et al. 2009; Ornelas et al. 2009; Gildersleeve, 2010; Mogro-Wilson, 2011).

I agree with Gildersleeve (2010) that Latinos in the U.S. have been (socially and politically) marginalized; therefore, I was expecting that the social world of these participants to be small and restricted and that individuals participating in the resilience activity would be people close to them. What is more, it was anticipated that interactions with “other” community members outside their families would inhibit some participants’ actions, as these people would perceived Latinas as second-class citizens because of their race, immigration and class status, and lack of English proficiency.

The division of labor element refers to how the tasks between the members of the community are shared (Engeström, 2001). The attention to the division of labor permits a further
analysis of the horizontal division of tasks (equal distribution of tasks) as well as the vertical division of power, positions, and access to resources in the environment (Engeström, 1987; Engeström, 1993). In the CHAT analysis of the resilience activity, the labor of the resilience activity was divided or distributed into specific tasks among individuals of the community. I categorized tasks accordingly with the subjects’ goals, emotional or material objects. Next, I present each group of individuals and their respective tasks that enabled or constrained participants’ opportunities of achieving transnational Latinas’ material or emotional objects.

6.5.1. Family

All participants stated they drew on their family for emotional and economic support. They talked about asking and obtaining ayuda from their partners/husbands, mothers, and siblings. In many occasions, as presented above, partners or husband functioned as tools mediating the activity system. But in other situations, they functioned as members of the community in the immediate family that participated in unison (and not necessarily mediating) transnational Latinas’ resilience practices.

For instance, when I asked Elizabeth about what/who helped her to deal with the suffering of not having her daughter with her, she immediately responded, her husband. She told me they conversed a lot about her sadness and struggle and her husband was the one who consoled her: “Pues también él me ayuda bastante porque... él se pone a hablar conmigo y me dice que piense en los niños que no estoy sola... que él me quiere que los niños me necesitan” [He helped me a lot because… he starts talking to me, he said I need to think about our children, that I am not alone… that he loves me and the children need me]. Partners provided assistance through conversations and advice. They were also helpful in the decision-making process about what tasks to do in order to assist women’s goals (e.g., sending money overseas to their child or collecting documentation to apply for papers). Data demonstrates how both a transnational participant and her husband were deeply invested in the specific outcome of the resilience activity: that the subject would be able to maintain her integrity and core purpose of life and to ultimately move forward.
Bridgett also received a lot of emotional assistance from her husband. He would spend hours talking with her about their son (comforting her) as well as working to save money to find ways to bring him to the U.S. Even when Bridgett gained a lot of weight and decided to lose it all for her medical condition (another object in her life), her husband helped her with support and cooperation (horizontal level of division of labor); for example, they both would work out everyday and he would encourage her to eat healthy foods.

Another significant member of the community in the family who participated in the division of labor were the participants’ mothers (and in one case the grandmother). As previously stated, women in this study were raised by their single mothers because their fathers died or ran away when they were young. Female figures were crucial in the lives of transnational Latinas because they were a source of trust, confidence, and support. An important issue to point out here is that participants’ mothers (and grandmother) lived in their home countries so physical contact did not exist; yet transnational participants maintained cross-border social relations (Fernandes, 2013) that aligned their feelings in response to their emotional objects or needs (life challenges), thereby participating in the division of labor. For instance, when participants felt a lot of suffering they would call their mothers to talk about their problems. Mothers would listen and provided them with advice and comfort, assisting the transnational Latina in achieving psychological objects.

Also, by keeping participants informed about the well-being of the children they left behind, mothers and grandmothers from home countries participated in the division of labor. In both Elizabeth’s and Bridgett’s cases, their children were left at the care of their in-laws. These mothers were often worried about their children and the type of care they were getting from their grandparents. Bridgett’s and Elizabeth’s own mothers would go to visit their grandchildren so they could inform their daughters about their children’s welfare. Such monitoring and reporting tasks helped the transnational mothers feel a sense of relief. See for example Bridgett’s accounts when she recently moved to the U.S.:
“Mi mamá lo iba a visitar en los cumpleaños… lo iba a ver siempre y me decía que el niño estaba muy bien que lo tenían bien cuidado y bien en todo… este lo iba a ver siempre entonces decía no te preocupes mija que ya habrá algún día que te lo vas a poder llevar pero no te preocupes el niño está bien tu sabes que yo no te voy a mentir si yo viera que el niño no estuviera bien yo misma te diría… el niño está bien no te preocupes…y como que yo me fui haciendo la idea de que mientras el estuviera bien, aunque yo estuviera sufriendo que lo importaba era que el estuviera bien”

[My mother would go and visit him for his birthday… she would always go to see him and tell me he was fine, that they (grandparents) were taking good care of him… she would to see him and would say: don’t worry, one day you would be able to take him with you… don’t worry because he is fine, you know I wouldn’t lie to you if I knew the child is not OK, I would tell you myself, he is fine don’t worry… so I started to get use to the idea that as long as he was OK, even if I was suffering, the most important thing was that he was OK]

Elizabeth’s situation was more complex because her mother did not get along with her in-laws, so her visits to her granddaughter were more sporadic. There were a few times in which her mother told Elizabeth that Lucia, her daughter, was not dressed properly and looked very sad.

The in-laws caring for the children were also participants in the division of labor. These people were important in their lives because they provided assistance through childcare and childrearing. Money or material resources were sent from transnational mothers (and their husbands) to grandparents with the objective of paying for education, clothing, and food. These families’ division of labor consisted of sending and receiving economic resources from the U.S. to invest in the primary care of the families across borders. Same family caring practices have been found in transnational families in other countries (Goulbourne et al., 2010).

Occasionally, siblings, who lived either in Salford or in another state in the U.S., took responsibility for assisting transnational Latinas in coping with their emotional or economic struggles. For example, Elizabeth described her brother as “un padre para mí” [a father to me] because her father died when she was a child and was the one who helped her mother raise the other siblings. He and his family lived in Salford close to Elizabeth’s home and she would go often to visit him. In respect of her material object, Elizabeth’s brother’s wife (who was a U.S. resident) used her green card to rent the house where Elizabeth and her family lived. Her brother would also lend her money when she needed help. Oftentimes, Elizabeth would go to his house
only to talk about her daughter; she told me that her brother would cry with her and promise he was going to get the money to help her bring Lucia to the U.S.

Patricia had a half bother and sister who lived in Texas and were her biological father’s children. Recall that Patricia first lived in Texas, where she met her first husband, who later died. Her half brother and half sister (younger than her) assisted her toward recuperating from her loss. They moved to live with her, took care of her children or household chores when needed, lent her money, helped her to find a job, and provided moral support.

Bridgett, Silvia and Gloria did not have siblings in Salford and did not report talking with them even from a distance. However, they expressed having social support from their aunts, female figures who were important in their lives besides their mothers. Bridgett’s husband’s family (uncle and aunt) lived with Bridgett in the same house. Bridgett referred to them as her own uncle and aunt. Bridgett became very close with her aunt and was the one who would help her by taking care of her children or household responsibilities (e.g., keeping the house cleaned and cooking) while Bridgett was working at the plant. Although her aunt was Bridgett’s husband’s family, Bridgett felt she could also trust her to help her when she felt sadness or grief. The distribution of tasks in this case was basic yet very significant for Bridgett: talking, listening, and giving advice to each other. A very similar situation applied to Gloria and Silvia, though Gloria’s aunt lived in Salford and Silvia’s in Texas.

6.5.2. Friends

Transnational Latinas reported receiving ayuda from few Latina friends whom they could fully trust. When participants moved to Salford they made new friends from other countries who had been living there for a longer time and knew about how to move around Salford. In some cases, participants received emotional support from friends, while through others they learned about resources. This is consistent with existing scholarship revealing that women establish informal networks in host communities that enable them to get access to social services information and social support (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002); my findings substantiate previous literature. Elizabeth, who did not have a lot of friends, had a close female friend from Guatemala
who lived across street. This friend, who had a green card, offered herself to adopt Elizabeth’s daughter to bring her to the U.S. In addition to providing this type of support, another Latina friend, whom she met at the church, also served as a socio-economic support system by connecting her with AVON and training her to sell cosmetic products so she could have some income working from home. The division of tasks was at a vertical level as both Latina friends had a relative power (immigration status and previous knowledge of selling cosmetic products) over Elizabeth.

Silvia met a few friends at a community program that helped pregnant Latina mothers and their babies through parenting and educational activities. These friends were from Mexico and El Salvador. They also informed Silvia about job opportunities in the area and later would take the responsibility of providing her ride to take her to work or run errands. Unfortunately for Silvia things only worked out for a short time, as these friends grew tired of giving Silvia rides and thought she needed to learn to drive and do things on her own.

Bridgett had two Mexican friends, who provided assistance with advice and recommendations about how to bring up her young children. Also, when Bridgett decided to lose weight because of her health situation (a past object in her life) one of her friends learned about the things Bridgett was doing and decided to be part of the process. This friend would go to Bridgett’s house (or vice versa) to exercise every day or talk about diet and healthy food choices. Both women had the broader goal of losing weight and engaged in actions to achieve it. On a horizontal level these women shared the responsibilities of providing a space in their homes to exercise, and committing themselves to meet three times week. On the vertical level, Bridgett had a more powerful role, as she was the one who lead the activity of exercising and teaching lessons. Please note that Bridgett had no previous knowledge about healthy dieting or exercising; she learned all the information she needed at the library, reading books and watching videos in Spanish. Once she lost weight she encouraged her friends to work out with her; sometimes the director of the Head Start would call her and invite her to do exercising sessions to other Latina
mothers every week. Bridgett never charged for her services because she felt she did not have the right to do so because she did not have a degree in nutrition or related area of education.

The important point to consider in Bridgett’s case as well as the rest of participants is that female friends (as well as female family members), no matter what the subject’s object was, became key to enable the subject to achieve their objects. In addition, the roles in the resilience activity and the division of tasks at different moments in the activity were noticeably gendered.

6.5.3. Community members

Other individuals who engaged and participated in the activity of helping or preventing transnational Latinas to achieve their material/economic objects include social service providers, coworkers, and evangelicals. The public service system is a social institution created to help low-income U.S. citizens with health and social care, public housing, or social security. Public service personnel assisted transnational subjects, more specifically their U.S. citizen children, through material/economic resources, for example WIC, food stamps, and Medicaid. Because the assistance included food or money for food, transnational mothers also benefited from it.

But getting access to these services was not an easy task. Participants needed to follow several procedures: filling out applications, providing proof of their immigration status (i.e., driver’s license, social security card, or alien documentation card) or that of those who were going to use services, and proof of income (e.g., check stubs, bank accounts, or self-employment records). Participants followed similar actions to apply for Medicaid for their children. They could do it either online or by sending a paper application. They all chose to do it in person by getting help from public service personnel, most of the time two Latinas who worked as interpreters. In these circumstances, the servidoras became members of the community. Their labor in the resilience activity system consist in helping transnational Latinas filling out forms to apply for recreational services, informing them about or organizing parenting classes, or connecting them with pregnancy prevention programs or public services.

But employees at social service facilities were not always helpful. Gloria’s accounts illustrate how the negative assistance that social service providers constrained opportunities for
transnational Latinas to achieving, in some way, their material goals. For instance, food pantry services were offered in the same office as WIC, food stamps, and Medicaid, and Gloria complained about the lack of culturally responsive services (i.e., American food) and the mediocre and egoistic attitude of White American service personnel because they hid the food that was supposed to be available for low-income families. Gloria thought employers would deny access to food or throw it away rather than give it to who really needed it. She felt discriminated against from individuals who allegedly were working for and helping those most in need.

“Yo creo que a veces el racismo... yo creo que por ser un hispano... yo me considero una persona que a mi me da vergüenza a veces pedir... pero cuando en verdad la necesitas por qué te la van a negar... (la comida) se la han negado a muchos... no hay pan dulce... no es tanto por el pan... prefieren que se les eche a perder a que lo agarre la gente... que se lo den a gente que en verdad lo necesita... estamos en estados unidos y prefieren tirar la comida... en México hay mas pobreza pero yo creo que un pedazo de pan no lo echan a perder, se lo dan a la gente... son gente egoísta (aqui) de no ayudar a la gente”

[I think sometimes there is racism... I think because one is Hispanic...sometimes I feel ashamed to ask (for assistance) but when you really need it, why they would deny it to you? They have denied access to it (food) to a lot of people...they don't have sweet bread... and is not just about the bread...they would prefer to get the food spoiled instead of giving it to people who really need it... we are in the U.S. and they prefer to throw the food away... there is more poverty in Mexico but I think they never let a piece of bread to get spoiled, they give it to people... they are egoist (here) because they don't help people]

Coworkers were another group of community individuals who were negatively engaged in discriminatory practices that constrained transnational Latinas intentions to achieve their economic goals. Interestingly though, these coworkers were Latino immigrants who had the proper documentation to work and live in the U.S. Silvia told me she worked at a farm stuffing bags with apples and had two female supervisors from Mexico who had been working at the farm for many years. Silvia expressed her discontent with the treatment from her supervisors because they were rude and treated her like she was worthless or incompetent. There were times when Silvia felt like not going to work but would go and did everything her supervisors asked
her to do only because she needed the job (and money). Silvia worked there for two seasonal harvests and decided not to go back:

“Ellas a veces eran bien o sea como que se pasaban pues de lo que tenían que mandar y yo todo lo que ellas me decían yo lo hacia la verdad porque yo necesitaba trabajar... pero habían a veces que no quería ir a trabajar... hasta sentía miedo cuando las miraba... es que las señoras son bien malas... pues contestaban bien así como bien groseras... lo trataban a uno como si uno fuera inútil o no se como que no hacía bien las cosas”

[They were very… I mean, they asked us to do more than they should but I would do anything they told me because I needed the job… but there were times I did not even want to go to work… I was afraid of looking at them… they were very bad people… they were rude… they would treat you like one was worthless or like one didn’t know how to do things right]

The analysis of these data underlines significant power dynamics in the division of responsibilities between transnational Latinas and service providers or coworkers. Power within the resilience activity resides with these community members and their discriminatory attitudes towards transnational Latinas. Participants sought economic assistance (or financial stability) and often times it was either denied it or they had to endure hostile work environments. Social service providers as well as coworkers had power because of their job position and “legal” status, that allowed them to control the way material goods or work tasks were distributed. Power dynamics significantly influenced the nature of the activity as participants were having difficulties in achieving economic progress.

Besides their family, the only community individuals who assisted transnational Latinas to work towards overcoming their emotional objects were two female evangelicals. Two evangelicals went around Salford knocking on the doors to talk to people about Christ and humans’ spiritual life. Silvia and Patricia, who were Catholic, would always welcome these evangelist ladies (one of them spoke Spanish) in their homes once to twice a week. Neither Silvia nor Patricia had the intention to convert to a new faith but they liked the idea of talking with someone about their emotional problems and expressed having some relief after their conversations. The same evangelicals provided assistance to Silvia by taking her to doctor’s
appointments or parent meetings at school and participated in Silvia’s life as a source of emotional support when she experienced discrimination or felt isolated.

6.6. Revisiting the Objects of Activity and Redefining the Concept of Resilience

As previously discussed in Chapter 5, all participants reported experiencing struggles related to their lives as transnational individuals. They did not migrate to the U.S. by their own will; they moved to the U.S because they were following their husbands/partners, who came north driven by the search of economic opportunities. Socio-political, economic, and historical conditions forced/motivated the migration of these transnational Latinas and their families (Espín, 1997). Other participants were escaping familial vulnerable situations.

Once they crossed the border, transnational Latinas suffered pain because their families got separated, the consequences of not speaking the dominant language, and the cost of being a foreign and minority immigrant. All participants reported having to endure racial discrimination, and, although not explicitly defined as constraints, facing poverty and social isolation (from Anglo community members). In addition to that, they experienced emotional struggles associated with living away from their families and communities or not being able to achieve personal self-fulfillment.

The life goals of these women were to bring their children to the U.S., to confront family problems, go back to school and get a degree, and reconcile with the idea of being treated differently and not being able to go back to see their family. However, there was nothing in their social structure helping them to fulfill their needs: they did not have papers or economic resources and/or opportunities, and could not change the negative perceptions among Anglo community members; but nevertheless, they were able to construct a happy, optimistic, and hopefully lives. They were also working towards maintaining their integrity in different ways as they navigated their changing circumstances to get the tools they needed to address their life objects.
When I analyzed resilience in the context of these women, it was quite clear that there were different levels of their objects (challenges they were trying to overcome/goals they were trying to achieve). In the first level, the object of the resilience activity was immediate-material to the environment, the need to attain economic resources. The goal was to feed themselves and their children, to pay the bills, and to have enough to economically survive. Then, there was the profound object of overcoming socio-emotional challenges making Latinas confront places of pain and suffering. Both type of objects constitute a multi-dimensional object that includes both material and emotional needs. Part of the challenge for participants to actively pursue resilience was in balancing their material and emotional objects in order to achieve the ultimate and holistic goal of advancing themselves (and their families), salir adelante [moving forward] with their lives.

Let me point out here that, as previously stated, the definition of resilience always invokes an obstacle/challenge individuals have to rebound from or overcome. In the context of these transnational Latinas salir adelante was not definitional to an obstacle because salir adelante means to move forward. It is a fact that all participants struggled with obstacles, but they did not specifically talk about being resilient or working towards being resilient. What they constantly referred to though, was the goal of just getting ahead in life, of moving forward with and for their children and their families. This is the reason why salir adelante becomes their fundamental goal in life they seek to achieve once they reach their material and/or emotional objects.

Literature has defined resilience as a process comprising relations between individuals, families, communities, and environmental and cultural organisms (Walsh, 2003; Berenzon & Juárez, 2005; Zimmerman, 2005) that enable individuals to recuperate from adversity (Walsh, 2003; Garza et al., 2004). Other scholars who have done research on immigrants have defined resilience as their capacity to endure pain and survive physically and emotionally in the face of difficult circumstances (Trueba 1999). However, for the purpose of my dissertation, I understood resilience as transnational Latinas’ agentive active practice of negotiating their socio-emotional
and the material environment (with the use of tools available and the ayuda from community individuals and public institutions) in order to constantly experience the feeling of salir adelante, that in every moment of their lives, they are moving themselves forward.

6.7. Summary of the Dynamics of the Elements of CHAT

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I presented and discussed the CHAT model of the resilience activity by examining each of the components of the activity system (i.e., subject, object, mediating tools, rules/norms, community, and division of labor). Here, I provide a brief summary of the dynamics between all components to explain resilience as an agentive active practice.

As illustrated in the figure 6, at the beginning of the last section, a transnational Latina subject undergoes specific life constraints (objects) that are related to her life as a transnational individual living in a Midwestern rural town in Iowa. The Latina mother comes to address her life challenges through explicit cultural practices and social others (mediating tools). Cultural practices included the transnational practices of cooking and selling food, as well as maintaining a mother-daughter relationship across borders. Religious practices of praying to God and the Virgin of Guadalupe were also found to be important tools mediating participants’ pain and suffering. The use of help (a conceptual tool) from people (community individuals) immediate to their environment also mediated participants’ resilience practices. However, it all depended on who offered the help and how accessible was this help to the transnational Latina mother. Further, distraction, either with their families or through agricultural work (when it was available) also functioned as an important tool that fostered resiliency practices among participants. Mediating tools also included social others, for instance their husbands/partners and female Latina servidoras that either mediated their feelings toward their emotional objects or helped them navigate the system of public assistance.

Furthermore, these transnational Latina mothers’ actions toward their emotional or material objects were regulated by implicit and explicit norms. The implicit norms generated
from society’s beliefs about behavior expectations of men and women and included gender roles/relations. For example, the expectation of mothers to take care of their children and/or household tasks created tensions between the women and their partners as they were trying to find work outside the home; yet, these women attempted to transgress gender behaviors as a result of their economic necessities. Another implicit norm was familismo, the value of family that facilitated opportunities for participants to endure and confront their emotional constraints. Because the relational connections between family members was a fundamental norm for transnational Latinas, they found emotional support from their children and through conversations with their partners/husbands and their mothers. In addition to that, participants’ ultimate goal to help children move forward forged their active participation of achieving their emotional/material objectives of their lives.

Explicit rules or norms in the activity system of resilience affected (and precluded) transnational Latinas’ engagement in actions towards their emotional and material goals. These rules stemmed from the broader economic and political context (Foot, 2014) in which participants and members of their community interacted. Public service eligibility requirements regulated participants’ access to social services. Because they were undocumented, they were not eligible for any type of assistance (e.g., medical or social), which subjected them to find poorly-paid or illicit ways of generating income. Also, the expectation of learning the dominant language and not being able to express themselves in Spanish hindered participants’ possibilities to engage with community members outside their kin, and made them feel rejected and discriminated against, so clearly, they had no opportunities to fully integrate into Anglo-American communities. Gloria, whose object of activity was to achieve her academic goals (take the GDE and go to college), had to fulfill the requirements of passing the GDE and taking all the steps needed to be admitted to college. Gloria would be able to take the GDE test because it was available in Spanish. Additionally, her husband was fully English proficient so he would assist her to comply with the admission rules.
Transnational Latinas were assisted in working towards achieving their material/emotional goals by family and community individuals. These individuals included family members such as husbands/partners, mothers, siblings, and other female members of the extended family as well as community members, namely social service personnel and members of religious movements. The division of labor and tasks distributed between the subjects (transnational Latinas) and the members of the community within and outside the family were influenced and enforced by socially established gender relations and unequal power dynamics.

It is essential to note that the absence of a fundamental tool that pervaded the life circumstances of transnational Latinas from the moment they entered the U.S. was “papers.” The lack of “papers” mediated (more specifically constrained) participants’ actions towards achieving their material and emotional objects. Women associated the lack of “papers” to economic burden, racial discrimination, and fear of law enforcement. They found it difficult to find a job and were afraid to be caught driving without a driver license. The absence of papers also obstructed participants’ opportunities to: achieve their psychological objects of bringing their children left back home to the U.S.; go back to their countries to take care of problems with their families; be able to apply to a public community or technical college that was affordable; or be socially accepted as active members (instead of as second-class citizens) by the Salford community.

6.8. Historicity in the Resilience Activity System

Historicity is a principle in CHAT that implies that activity systems “take shape and get transformed over lengthy periods of time” (Engeström, 2001, p. 136). Addressing this principle in the activity system’s analysis allows us to understand the tools that have shaped the activity over time (Engeström, 2001), accounting for the resistance to (and potential for) change (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). This dissertation did not illustrate the development of the resilience activity system over time because its purpose was to use one moment in each transnational participant’s life to look at the way they used the resources in their environment to
address a particular object. However, data from participants allowed me to uncover a resiliency trajectory in other particular moments (objects) in the lives.

The socialization of cooking and selling food in the cases of Elizabeth, Patricia, and Bridgett helps to explain the history of cooking and selling food as a tool to achieve material/economic goals. All learned cooking and selling food from an early age in their home countries, and this skill became a tool for achieving objects. Tools acquired and developed in the past, and in different places get taken up as part of community of practice in the U.S., and therefore become transnational practices.

Patricia, Gloria, and Bridgett mentioned having other life challenges in their past: losing a husband and a miscarriage, having an asthmatic child, and being obese with kidney disease. They all reported being assisted by their partners/husbands, siblings and other members of their extended families. They also engaged in agentive or transnational practices such finding distraction through work or family activities, praying to God, or learning (on their own) about healthy eating habits and exercise. Developing new skills and learning about new tools can help transnational women to achieve their objects in life over time. While this dissertation reports on women’s experiences over only a short time, resilience is practiced over a lifetime, and follows a non-linear trajectory.

6.9. Closing Remarks

My data analysis demonstrated the struggles all transnational women faced and acknowledged the many factors that obstructed their behaviors or responses to problems. Considering their very limited and constrained social worlds, because of their social structure, transnational Latinas participants may never fully achieve their emotional/material goals. Further, their experiences with poverty, racism, and social isolation appear to construct transnational Latinas as passive and oppressed victims. But that was not the case for these transnational Latinas. They all actively worked within the resilience system and practiced agency by accomplishing (or working towards achieving) their goals in many ways, with the tools
available from their environments. Such tools were crafted by participants, and shaped by the needs, values, and norms of (Foot, 2014) their Latino culture (transnational practices). Transnational Latinas were also assisted by community individuals present in their lives, which helped them to maintain their core purpose and integrity to *salir adelante*.

Finally, part of the resilience achievement among these participants was their capacity of creating a positive sense of themselves. In this dissertation I build on María Lugones’ account of “World”-travelling to explain how within a constrained social structure, transnational Latinas constructed resilience. These women were active agents navigating social and institutional systems through a very limited (often discriminatory) public space, but their accounts demonstrate they were able to exercise resistance and build emotional strength.

**6.10. Limitations of the Study**

There are important limitations of this dissertation that should be considered for future research. First, information regarding the research site was omitted in order to protect the confidentiality of participants. Because the safety and well-being of transnational participants was a major concern for me, I had to make decision of not disclosing the name of the town in which the research was conducted. Research in Midwestern rural areas of Iowa is scarce, though growing, and there is a real need to enhance knowledge in regards to life challenges and coping strategies of low-income undocumented Latinas in specific places in which Latino populations are growing significantly. By keeping the name of the town undisclosed, resources and implications for public policy and practice might not be brought to this Midwestern area and its community members.

Third, subjectivity was a challenge in the present ethnographic study and might have been connected to my perspectives (Preissle & Grant, 2004) and theoretical assumptions, for example, that all participants endured racism, poverty, and social isolation. I was the sole researcher in this project and had limited opportunities for peer review of data analysis. I sought to mitigate this problem by providing rich description and detailed information concerning
participants’ experiences in the findings chapter (including direct quotes) and presenting my research bias in the methodology chapter.

Another significant limitation of this study was the length of the study and the lack of data to examine the course of the resilience activity system over time. This dissertation does not have enough data to account for the evolution of the resilience activity system of each woman. Additional analysis of the interaction and relations between components in other activity systems from the past (and other life challenges), a longer involvement with participants, and a follow up period may have produced distinctive results.

A further limitation of this study is the lack of attention to social dynamics, namely gossip and intra-ethnic tensions, between participants and other Latinos in their communities. The data collection process did not focus on these aspects, and although there was some data pointing to these dynamics, there was just not enough information to examine the nature and influence of gossip and intra-ethnic tensions on individuals’ responses to constraints.

Another limitation was the need for further examination of other tools/artifacts that mediated transnational Latinas relationships with their environment, most specifically their objects in the resilience activity. There were countless tools that deserved attention; perhaps a whole new study needs to be done for their in-depth examination. For instance, Avon (cosmetic products) appears in the life of one participant as a source of financial income because it did not require her to have “papers” to sell the products and provided the possibility of working from home. Avon can be a tool in the life of transnational Latinas that might allow them to achieve material/economic stability. Further, it is worth mentioning that the time-space relationships between transnational Latinas and their families back home was enabled through the use of technical/material tools (technological devices) such the telephone, Facebook, and pictures. Transnational mothers gained access and learned to use these devices that contributed to transformative learning opportunities that allowed them to talk to their love ones left behind, that helped them to feel hopeful and optimistic. The analysis of these tools may have provided additional information important to understand resilience learning processes.
A final limitation worth noting is that the CHAT framework alone does not provide opportunities to address social structural problems such as classism, racism, sexism, the socio-political and economic dimensions of the activity (Sawchuk, 2003a), or a critical analysis of the transnational space in which transnational participants attempted to negotiate or resist their transnational circumstances (Fernandes, 2013). The benefits associated with using transnational feminism compensate for this limitation. Feminist perspectives provided critical points for the analysis of these interlocking categories of social experience (Weber, 2010) affecting all aspects of participants’ daily live (objects of activity and/or context) and at the same time untangled the influence of these systems of power over the tools and (transnational) resources participants used or needed to use to achieve their emotional and material/economic objects.

Despite these limitations, findings from this dissertation still have important implications for future inquiry regarding transnational Latinas’ resilience development. Conclusions and implications of this study are discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation contributes towards our understanding of life challenges of transnational Latinas and the ways these women practice resilience in the face of these challenging events in order to maintain their core purpose and integrity (Zolli & Healy, 2012). Interviews, informal conversations, and participant observations with five transnational Latinas were analyzed, and, from that analysis, I claim that resilience is an agentive activity achieved through practices, through the use of tools available in the immediate environment, and the assistance of community individuals and/or social others. Transnational Latinas practiced resilience as they work towards achieving their emotional or material/economic goals, that, at some point in the future, would allow them (and their families) to salir adelante with their lives.

7.1. Conclusions

This dissertation was conducted using a feminist ethnographic approach, locating women as a main source of knowledge (Agra & Adan, n.d.) in order to challenge dominant values and ideologies around them. The ethnographic inquiry (infused with transnational feminist perspectives) allowed me to examine larger social and economic issues as well as the results of the border-crossing activities of transnational Latinas (Fernandes, 2013). The methodological approach in this study also enabled me to explore ways of life from the native point of view (Spradley, 1980) of participants. Through ethnographic work, I gathered information about participants’ Latino culture, their values and beliefs, and the things transnational Latinas made and used (cultural artifacts) to engage in their worlds (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) and construct their resilience. This ethnographical inquiry on the resiliency practices of transnational Latinas contributes to the understanding of Latinas’ active participation and investment in their emotional and physical well-being. Findings derived from this feminist ethnographic research, with the use of the CHAT model, have potential to enhance the growing body of knowledge
about transnational Latinas living in Iowa and their life challenges, and informs future research into the area of the development of resilience.

7.1.1. Life challenges

In the first stage of data analysis I sought to answer research question one: What are the life challenging events experienced by transnational Latinas? Transnational participants of this study encountered struggles related to being poor, discriminated against, and physically and socially isolated. They also faced other personal and specific challenges related to their lives as transnational individuals.

To begin, the material life conditions of participants represented the U.S. government definition of poverty; that is, they all lived below the U.S. poverty line ($23,850 a year). These women lived in trailers, small houses that were shared with other families or a motel. But in spite of their very basic economic conditions, none of participants described themselves as poor because they felt they had everything they needed to live well (i.e., shelter, food, clothes, money to pay their bills). They defined being poor as not having food to eat or a place to live. Further, Latina women talked about having to struggle with making ends meet. They had to earn additional income by preparing and selling foods, selling cosmetic products, working outside home in agricultural low-skill jobs, or taking care of others’ children. They all used social services such WIC, food pantries, and Medicaid for their children. They did not have “legal” documentation to get access and apply for jobs, and for those who did it, they did so because they bought and used forged Social Security cards. None had health insurance because the job sites did not offer it or because the cost was prohibitive. The experiences of poverty described by my participants are reasonable given other scholarship on the economic status of Latino families in the U.S. For instance, previous studies have found that Latinos face numerous life challenges produced by the process of living in a new culture (Marsiglia, Kulis, Garcia Perez & Bermudez-Parsai, 2011) including poverty, unemployment (Coutin, 2000), and social isolation predominantly in rural areas (Schmalzbauer, 2011). Other studies demonstrate that low-income
Latinos do not have access to health insurance (Mazur et al. 2003; Carlton & Simmons, 2011), have higher unemployment rates, and are more prone to have lower incomes than their non-Latino white counterparts (Therrien & Ramirez, 2002). In addition, my findings confirm what gender and immigration literature has found in the past. The jobs that Latinas were eligible for or had access to consisted of racialized and gendered occupations that were characterized by the lowest wages (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Schmalzbauer, 2011) for example food making and childcare.

Other important themes that frequently emerged throughout the data analysis was discriminatory experiences with social services providers and community members, lack of papers and language proficiency, and social isolation, problems that I called socio-structural challenges. All women were subjected to discriminatory attitudes and racial micro-aggressions from community neighbors, doctors and nurses, bus drivers, store clerks, and social services personnel. They felt there was a prejudice against their race and their lack of English proficiency and did not like the way non-immigrant community members would look at them. But, the very worst matter was that transnational participants would go to a clinic to take care of their children’s (or their own) health and doctors or nurses would treat them with discrimination. Surprisingly and also important, they complained about discrimination behaviors from other Latinos who apparently had “legal” documents or other power status. These findings provide support for the claim in immigration research that racial stereotypes of Latinos can be particularly detrimental at the level of public service delivery, as services’ personnel use racial and cultural cues to classify immigrants as underserving individuals (Deeb-Sossa & Mendez, 2008).

One intriguing question is why there were intra-ethnic tensions in the form of discrimination between Latinos. One must argue that relations of power might surface as documented Latinos felt more integrated because they had legal documentation to work and stay “legally” in the U.S. “Papers” turned into possibilities of economic upward and perhaps social integration and also a tool of prejudice against those who did not posses them. Furthermore, the
lack of “papers” contributed to additional socio-economic burden. Participants were not able to find high-skill and well-paid jobs because they were undocumented. When they were able to find a job they had to accede whatever the employer wanted to pay them. They also had to cope with stereotypes posed by their criminal action of being undocumented (Lahman et al., 2011). It would not be a surprise that racial segmentation and discrimination would have also constrained the employment options of participants (Malveaux & Wallace, 1987).

What is more, two unauthorized participants bought forged documents to be able to work outside their homes. These actions from a political standpoint might be perceived as fraudulent and criminal endeavors (Anderson, Rogaly, & Ruhs, 2012). But participants did not feel they were doing anything wrong because: 1) they were doing exactly what others who migrated first were doing (so the criminal activity becomes a regular and accepted activity among your kin); and 2) they had to rely on that activity because they did not have more choices. They needed to find ways to make ends meet and when their agency was limited, because they were undocumented, they did not have any choice than to bend immigration rules (Anderson, Rogaly, & Ruhs, 2012).

Furthermore, and as previously stated, critical literature argues that the global economic restructuring and the inequalities produced by patriarchal capitalism (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000) forced immigrants from developing countries to migrate to the U.S. in search of a better future (Baker, 2004). But in the traditional literature of migration the word “force” might not be the correct term to describe immigration patterns, as immigrants are the ones who supposedly choose to migrate (Holmes, 2013). Holmes further argues that such understanding of immigrants’ migration decisions assumes a rationally acting person who has self-interests (e.g., economic opportunities) and has control over her/his destiny through choice. This understanding of migration as choice dismisses the structural context and forces the constraint of immigrants’ choices (Holmes, 2013). I therefore agree with Holmes that to understand migration we must address the political and economic forces influencing immigrants’ decisions to come to the United States. My participants (just as Holmes’ Latina immigrants from his study) experienced
their immigration as anything but a voluntary decision. Some of them followed their partners who had moved before escaping from poverty, while other were escaping sexual harassment or family feuds.

Lack of English language proficiency proved to impede transnational Latina mothers to act in more powerful and functional ways, as they were not able to meet the demands of the English speaking community in Salford. Transnational participants in this study indicated that constraints of language restricted their interactions with non-Spanish speakers (e.g., neighbors, healthcare service providers) and made them feel discriminated against; thus, English, a basic element of social life in the U.S., negatively shaped their interactions with other community members. There is empirical evidence describing English fluency as a social variable linked to economic mobility as well as discrimination against immigrants who are not able to speak the language (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002; Gee, Walsemann, & Takeuchi, 2010).

Transnational participants talked about feeling integrated to the community and welcomed by White community individuals. However, their comments reflected how restricted and somewhat isolated they really were. They barely interacted with White individuals and when they did often times they encountered interactive conflicts. Also, they lived in race and class segregated spaces, more specifically in home trailer neighborhoods and a motel outside Salford. Previous studies have found that the more an immigrant experienced discrimination, the larger the social distance between immigrant and non-immigrant populations, directly affecting the incorporation of the immigrant into the host society (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Sucedo, 2005). What is more, the lack of the place linguistic skills and proper legal documentation hindered immigrants’ full integration to society (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002) and exacerbated their social isolation more frequently in rural areas (Schmalzbauer, 2011). Findings from this dissertation confirm those assertions.

Lastly, my findings indicate that structural problems, such as racism, psychologically affected participants. Some of them reported suffering depression and stress when they felt discriminated against by others, or would not even leave their home. This is certainly consistent
with the effects of isolation and racial discrimination on mental health described by Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) and Lee and Ahn (2012). According to the authors, discrimination has been associated with anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder in minority populations. Further, anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and unhealthy behaviors were significantly correlated with discrimination against Latino populations in the U.S.

In this dissertation, poverty, discrimination, and isolation were not perceived as the most difficult challenges for participants; only one participant reported having to endure discrimination and isolation and to bear with the emotional effects. Therefore, these effects are considered structural forces that functioned as part of the context in which they behaved in their daily lives. Poverty, discrimination, and isolation were part of the larger socio-economic context of the undocumented Latina mothers.

Besides facing issues related to socio-structural challenges, transnational participants faced socio-cultural challenges; that is, constraints associated with social relations, gender roles, and socio-cultural practices. Participants confronted and negotiated traditional gender roles of what meant to be woman, wife, and mother in their host society (Baker, 2004). For instance, two transnational participants left behind their children, unable to take care of their wellbeing. Other participants, who had never worked in their home countries, worked in the paid labor force doing agriculture work. While only one participant complained about her limited physical mobility (additional factor that contributed to her social isolation), the other participants indicated they had more physical mobility and felt more independent from men than they used to be in their home countries (Baker, 2004; Zentgraf, 2002). These women transgressed the expected and traditional gender ideologies from their Latino society but at the same time had to manage conflicts with their husbands, who did not like the idea of having their wives and mothers of their children working outside the home. This is a clear example of how the global economic structure (demand for low-wage labor) intersects with both local contexts of immigration settlement and the specific characteristics of transnational individuals, with significant (sometimes negative)
repercussions on gender norms and relations within the private space of their households (Schmalzbauer, 2011; Fernandes, 2013).

7.1.2. Transnational Latina mothers’ specific life challenges

Women in this study were facing very specific problems and the focus of their lives was just around those very unique life challenges. Two participants, Elizabeth and Bridgett, left their children behind in El Salvador and Mexico respectively. Their stories signify an interruption of family life because they were part of dis-unified families and a disruption of their previously established identity as mothers. Yet, they (emotionally and financially) worked towards redefining and reconstructing their relationship with the other children across the border (Espín, 1999). Transnational feminism contends that when immigrants settle down in a different nation they negotiate their identities within social spaces that extend to more than one place (Vertovec, 2001). In this study, participants negotiated their transnational identities in response to living their lives across borders. The suffering of these women represent the negative effects of mobility in Latino families that is a consequence of global capitalism forcing them to come north (Baker, 2004) and separate.

Another participant’s life challenge was related to being a transnational individual living in the U.S. She had family feuds and resentment towards her own mother. Her mother lived in Mexico, so her life constraint was also part of a dis-unified family because she was not able to go back to Mexico and deal with their problems. She also redefined and reconstructed her relationship with her mother across the border, but in her case as a transnational daughter.

Another transnational Latina aspired to a professional career and employment in a high-skill job, but was not able to achieve that life aspiration because of her social structure. She needed to have “legal papers” and a better income to be able to go back to school, finish her GED and get into college. Currently, there is a law called Deferred Action that would enable young people to apply for a temporary (and renewable) work authorization to those who meet the key criteria: have come to the U.S. under the age of sixteen; have continuously resided in the
U.S. since June 2007 and for at least 5 years (and is able to provide extensive proof); is currently in school, have graduated from high school, or have obtained a general education development certificate; have not been convicted of a felony offense; is not older than 30 years (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012). This participant was in the process of getting all the information needed for her and her husband to get into the process of Deferred Action. The other participants were not eligible for this immigrant law because they did not meet the requirements of the administration’s program, specifically, they did not go to school in the U.S. when they came and did not plan to do so. They cited lack of English proficiency and involvement in household and childcare responsibilities as factors that inhibited their intentions to go back to school.

Finally, one participant felt extreme social isolation and was emotionally affected by racism from Anglo community members (and other Latinos as well). Besides, she did not settle with the idea of living far from her family. The main assumption of this study was that transnational Latinas’ struggles would be related to being poor, discriminated, and physically and socially isolated. Surprisingly, only this participant explicitly identified being discriminated against and socially isolated as her major challenging circumstance. The experiences of this participant substantiate my initial research premise. This finding is supported by other studies that demonstrate that immigrants from rural areas often struggle with racial discrimination, isolation, and marginalization from non-immigrant individuals (Schmalzbauer, 2011; Pew Hispanic Center, 2007; Dalla & Christensen, 2005).

7.2. Resilience as an Agentive Activity

Resilience, the practice of transnational Latinas to maintain their core purpose and integrity in the face of aforementioned life circumstances (Zolli & Healy, 2012) was explored through the use of a CHAT model by analyzing each of its components and their interlocking dynamics. This was the focus of research question two: How do Latinas practice resilience in response to their life challenges? My data analysis with a CHAT model framework yielded rich
information of the different social and community actors, mediating tools, and rules/norms that either enabled or precluded transnational Latina’s actions towards their goal of achieving material or emotional stability.

The model of the activity system was composed of different elements, namely subject, object, mediating tools, rules, community, division of labor, and the internal relations of this system. First, transnational Latinas’ resiliency practices were directed toward the object of recuperating from material/emotional challenges. These objects were connected to a specific moment, place, and socio-economic situation of transnational participants. One interesting, though unexpected finding that emerged was that participants faced different challenges in unison. For instance, their constraints were related to the material or economic conditions of their lives (material-economic objects) as they struggled with poverty and making ends meet. They also experienced racial or ethnic discrimination and isolation, issues that were compounded by the lack of “papers,” a fundamental tool required to be socially and economically integrated in their community (structural objects). In addition to that, transnational participants had to manage gender role challenges at home, and family feuds (socio-cultural objects). Furthermore, participants were confronting all these socio-economic, structural, cultural and emotional conditions, keeping themselves hopeful, strong, and optimistic so they could balance all objects to eventually salir adelante. Resilience in the contexts of transnational Latinas was not about overcoming one specific object; it was about confronting and balancing different objects at once.

This dissertation examined the ways participants addressed or achieved two particular objects at the same time: the material-economic objects and psychological objects. These objects were the most salient struggles in the participants’ lives and I focused my data analysis to understand their resilience as their practices to balancing these two object. The structural and socio-cultural objects shifted their function as either context, mediating tools, or rules/norms when they were not perceived as goals to be achieved by transnational subjects.

Second, a thorough analysis of the subjects of the activity was essential. Transnational participants were subjects that experienced a transformation of their identities from Latinas to
transnational Latinas as they were responding to the mainstream behavioral traits of the community in which they lived. These subjects were not empty vessels; they had their own personal and cultural value system that determined their behaviors and responses to problems. They valued their families, mainly their children, commitment to their marriage/romantic relationships, reliability from and respect for female figures, and the recognition of other people’s needs. These transnational Latinas were trying to stay true to these values despite the fact that things around them were changing; they were trying to maintain their core values (and their core purpose and integrity) despite changing circumstances (Zolli & Healy, 2012).

Another significant finding related to the subjects was the ways they described themselves and their states of mind. Despite adverse circumstances, participants described themselves as joyful, optimistic, positive, and strong. Also, they demonstrated to be hopeful believing that their lives could be better and that there was a chance for changes. These self-conceptualizations were connected to the idea of resilience because the feelings of persistence and hopefulness regulated their emotions and were indispensable conditions to continue with their lives (Trueba, 2004; Southwick et al. 2011). This was the first step in their constructing of their resilience: the affirming state of mind and the way they talked about their future.

Third, there were countless mediating tools that either facilitated or constrained transnational Latinas’ participation in the resilience activity. For the purpose of this dissertation, I centralized my attention to the most salient and significant tools used by transnational participants to address their constraints at a certain point of time in their lives. These tools included ayuda [help] from several individuals and institutions, a central and fundamental conceptual tool that in the context of the participants made reference to the possibility of surviving; transnational and religious practices; and social others. There is growing evidence suggesting that the sense of familism, maintenance of cultural traditions, and cultural practices help Latinos to develop bicultural competencies (Smokowski, Roderick, & Bacallao, 2008) and manage life challenges (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). These women also reported using some type of distraction, for example, activities with families and work outside the home. There
is research on mental health and coping strategies that demonstrate how individuals’ ability to distract themselves functions as a protecting factor against feelings of depression or sad moods (Southwick et al. 2011).

The participants spoke about having a connection to a religion (or religious institution). They all described themselves as Catholics who believed in God and the Virgin of Guadalupe. However, some expressed discomfort with the ways the priest celebrated Mass, so they connected with Christian churches or protestant individuals to talk about the Word of God. Other studies have found the Catholic religion as an important aspect of life among Latinos (Guarnaccia et al., 1992; Vega & Miranda, 1985) even after they moved to the U.S. In this study, some Catholic participants looked into other religious communities that were better meeting their spiritual needs (e.g., evangelicals) yet they never intended to change their religious faith.

The absence of one specific tool constrained opportunities for transnational Latinas to fully achieve their emotional and material goals. In the U.S. context “papers” is an important avenue for the economic and social mobility of immigrants because it allows them to find jobs (though low-skill jobs), to have social security contributions, to buy a house or a car, to get access to healthcare, to obtain a driver license, and move freely in and out of the country. Documents or “papers” was found to mediate participants’ daily life because they were undocumented, so they had minimal opportunities to attain their personal or economic goals. Lack of papers generated stigma and discrimination as undocumented participants were perceived as criminals by non-immigrants or documented individuals.

Next, data reflected specific rules/norms that governed and regulated participants’ use of tools, and their actions and interactions with other individuals as they were trying to achieve their material and emotional goals. Gender roles and expectations, requirements for public services eligibility, and English language skills were implicit and explicit norms that hindered opportunities for women to achieve their goals. The implicit norm of the commitment to their family generated positive emotions and motivated participants to move forward.
Further, some participants recognized gossiping and bitterness as a society norm that governed their behaviors because they did not trust others outside their family circle and were afraid that their emotional sufferings were going to be exposed to others. They chose not to ask for emotional support from friends to avoid gossip and potential embarrassment. Hence, for those participants who did not have family in the U.S. the possibilities of getting emotional support from other sources different than that of from their families were either limited or non-existent. Other transnational studies have shown how the transnational activity of gossip curtails or modifies Latino immigrants’ behaviors and serves as a means of public control over the choices they make about their relationships with others (Dreby, 2009). Unfortunately, I did not have enough data to go into a detailed analysis of gossip and its effects on transnational daily life.

Lastly, there were individuals that provided assistance to transnational Latinas in working towards getting some financial or emotional stability. These individuals formed part of the community of transnational participants and were spread out over different places. The resilience activity was configured by the assistance of individuals in two different environments, that is, ayuda was drawn from across two frames of communities. Individuals who assisted transnational Latinas’ resiliency practices included: transnational and immediate family (i.e., mothers and other female figures across borders, husbands, and siblings), close Latina friends, servidoras, and evangelicals. Social service personnel were other members who were supposed to provide immediate aid through services, but their discriminatory attitudes hindered transnational Latinas in achieving their economic goals. Further, each group of individuals participated in the resilience activity by engaging in different distributed tasks. My analysis reveals the gendered nature of the division of tasks and the significant power dynamics in the division of responsibilities between transnational Latinas and these community individuals. This finding also demonstrates that there was a collective involvement in the resilience activity in which different individuals engaged in actions in order to help or influence participants’ responses to their challenging situations.
7.3. Implications

Findings from this dissertation hold important implications for researchers, policymakers, or community individuals who seek to understand and help Latinas to achieve emotional (and economic) wellbeing, and underline the importance of integrating feminist perspectives and methodology and CHAT into research of resilience with transnational Latinas. Community institutions in rural areas focusing on helping low-income families can develop programs or other sources of help to assist undocumented mothers who struggle with poverty and making ends meet. A first step is to fully understand the life of these populations, what type of struggles they suffer, and what aid works best for them. A second step would be to connect to federal and state government grants as well as non-profit charities to help develop well-designed programs to deliver appropriate help.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) played an essential role for rural transnational Latinas’ economic stability. Yet the use of these two programs did not lift these women and their families above the poverty line. Policymakers should focus on adjusting (instead of decreasing) SNAP and TANF benefits yearly to help low-income families to meet their basic needs. Furthermore, eligibility requirements should include participation in community programs focusing on teaching service beneficiaries how to manage small household budgets, informing them about housing subsidies, and offering training to help them become self-sufficient. One big obstacle for these families is their immigration status, so finding and qualifying for a job is problematic. It is important to keep in mind how the lack of immigration status also constrained every aspect of the undocumented life. One way to ameliorate this problem is to push an amnesty legislation (besides the Deferred Action) that would grant work permits to those undocumented individuals who have been living in the U.S. for a certain amount of time and have proved to contribute to the U.S. society. This dissertation work would assist lobbyists and pro-immigration political groups in understanding the depth and profound effects of immigration status on people from a human rights perspective.
Undocumented women’s stories can reconceptualize the way researchers, policy makers, and others intervene into helping these women to become active members of their communities. Because these women are often physically and socially constrained, community agencies should increase their outreach efforts with respect to these women, build support networks around them, and establish adequate training mechanisms so they can achieve personal and professional goals. For example, English classes, General Educational Development (GED) classes, and professional and postsecondary education trainings, parental education and skills, and educational classes focusing on to adapt to a community that is not their own; all trainings and classes should provide child care to ensure their participation. Such trainings can help these women to develop their own tools that later would allow them to achieve their economic well-being.

Historically some individuals have been ordered into social hierarchies that create cross-cutting forms of oppressions, depending on the individual’s race, gender, class, nationality, and sexuality (Dill & Zambrana, 2000); hierarchical positions and oppression enable a certain group of individuals to secure their position of power and privilege (Weber, 2010) in society. Therefore, eliminating social and institution racism and discrimination it is a complex and very difficult task. But one effective way to work towards reducing racial and ethnic discrimination against Latino/a populations might be to educate the general population about the history, and (the political and economic) causes and consequences of Latinos’ “illegal” immigration to the U.S. They should also learn about the social and economic contributions Latino immigrants have made and will continue to make to U.S. society. Also, social (and other) service personnel should be required to have a series of multi-cultural trainings designed to better meet the needs of multicultural beneficiaries.

Lack of language proficiency constrains and limits immigrant Latina mothers’ interactions with non-Spanish speakers, for example, healthcare providers such as doctors and nurses. Having bilingual interpreters at those institutions is not sufficient because they do not translate all the information is been said or there is a concern (from patients) that Latino
interpreters are not going to maintain discretion and protect their privacy. Once again, there is a need to ensure the proper multi-cultural trainings for interpreters and individuals involved in healthcare delivery to Latino populations.

Immigrants with low incomes have been and continue to be forced to move across territorial borders because of economic necessity (Goulbourne et al., 2010), a consequence of global economic restructuring and inequalities produced by patriarchal capitalism (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000). Thus, globalization disrupts the fabric of family unity and families have to deal with constraints in family relations or other sufferings related to leaving family behind. Research and public policy should consider the social impact of migration in families and find alternatives supporting family reunification, for example, a reunification-type visa for children who had been left behind in other countries. There is also a need for a comprehensive immigration reform that would stop deportations and protect child immigrants who have entered the U.S. “illegally” to join their parents.

The results of this feminist research have also uncovered some issues that should be explored in future research on resilience. For example, the high value placed on family and children (familism) and their relational interactions with immediate family members drive Latinos’ behaviors and serves as a source of strength in difficult situations. Additionally, religious practices and representatives of the Christian faith can be instrumental in promoting emotional stability among Latino immigrants. Mental health interventions should integrate key family members and cultural values and practices in a culturally competent framework.

Further, immigration and the lack of contact with family members produce feelings of anxiety and depression, mental health issues that are exacerbated by exclusion and discrimination experienced in the host society. Future research and intervention should explore immigration long-term outcomes on health, as well as the benefits of transnational individuals’ interactions/resources that prove (in this study) to foster psychological well-being. And for those individuals whose sufferings are associated with family members across the border, therapeutic options must include an affordable bilingual and multi-cultural therapist and access to long-
distance telephone (or through other communication devices) therapy (Falicov, 2007) to ensure everyone’s involvement in the process.

In sum, knowledge of factors that promote resilience in rural Latina immigrants will improve researchers, practitioners, and policymakers cultural competence by elevating their awareness of the different factors that might mitigate the effects of life challenges on emotional distress among Latino populations.

In terms of theory and methodology, this dissertation holds important implications for researchers and scholars. The experiences of undocumented Latinas living in a rural area of the U.S. may encourage researchers to ask further questions regarding the participation of undocumented women in “transnational social spaces” (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005, p. 896), the formation of transnational relationships and transformation of identities, and the effects of migration on gender roles and expectations, as well as the intersection of globalization and legislation and government policy to determine whether current transnational, gender, and immigration theories tackle the consequences of migration (and illegality) on Latinas’ emotional, social, and economic well-being.

Examining transnational motherhood and daughterhood through transnational feminism helps to recognize and understand the circuits of love, caring, and material support that surpass national borders (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997) and offers a new possibility to conceptualize relationships across space and time (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997) as key to resilience achievement among transnational Latinas. Further research should be undertaken into analysis of the reconceptualization of family life and relations within distinct social spaces and the disruptions or changes in traditional social norms affecting family members at home and host countries.

In traditional frameworks of resilience transnational Latinas might be perceived as resilient because they are trying to maintain their mental health in the face of many circumstances that victimize them (poverty, discrimination, citizenship, isolation). However, transnational Latinas are getting more mobility in terms of gender relations and socio-economic
status because they are taking advantage of opportunities (social mobility and freedom) that the U.S. is offering them. They do not perceive themselves as oppressed individuals, although they are very aware of the structural constraints associated with being undocumented transnational Latinas. Yet they are constructing new lives as they use the emotional and economic resources available for them, resources that for some of us might look very limited but for them are enough to move forward. Research on resilience should identify socio-economic progress and freedom, factors that seem to be implicated in the development of resilience among transnational Latinos populations.

Cultural historical activity theory contributed to depicting resilience as a social and cultural learning process that is practiced and achieved by individuals. Positioning resilience as part of individuals’ interactions with people in their community and the use of tools available in their environment allows researchers to identify different possibilities for interventions. Furthermore, framing resilience development as an agentive activity from a CHAT perspective provides the opportunity to identify and examine specific motive(s) driving the production of the object of achieving material and emotional goals. Future research should investigate the construction of additional tools that transnational Latinas use to address their life challenging situations, more specifically ayuda [help], which seems to be a fundamental socio-cultural tool extending Latinas’ opportunities to ameliorate the effects of social, structural, and emotional hardships.

Qualitative data provided rich description using transnational Latinas’ own words and lived experiences to convey and describe the ways they recuperate from life challenging events. The feminist approach allowed me to focus on the social meanings participants attributed to their experiences, situations and circumstances (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) and uncovered their specific gender-constraints, positioning their voices as the mainly source of knowledge of the dissertation. Further inquiry should use same theoretical and methodological approach but instead of focusing on a single situation or particular moment of their life, it should explore other different Latinas’ challenging moments to understand the course of the resilience activity system
over time and learn about the historicity of the tools that have shaped the social and cultural learning process of resilience over time (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999).

The present feminist ethnographic study started in June 2012. As any regular traveler visiting another “world,” I packed my bags, three different bags. In one of the bags I carried my tape recorder, a field notebook, IRB forms, brochures with information of community resources, gift cards, pens, and my wallet and cellphone. I was also carrying a heavy luggage filled with formal knowledge and critical thinking, a heavy baggage I tried to leave in the car anytime I walked into my participants’ “worlds.” In addition, I brought with me a bag full of anxiety, fear, uncertainties, and distress; emotions, feelings, and concerns that shifted as time went by over the course of the study. A travel visitor usually takes souvenirs back to her home country or town with no difficulty and without wrong intentions. Although I did not specifically bring souvenirs back I brought the most significant insights into transnational Latinas’ life experiences and ways in which their experiences can be channeled into a better understanding of resilience development.
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515-294-4666
FAX 515-294-4267

Date: 6/25/2012
To: Angelica Reina
3102 Pearson Hall
CC: Dr. Brenda Lohman
2330 Palmer, Suite 6230

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: A Biocological Analysis of Resilience among Latina Immigrants
IRB ID: 12-274
Approval Date: 6/25/2012 Date for Continuing Review: 6/18/2014
Submission Type: Now Review Type: Full Committee

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 50), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.

- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

English Version

Demographic Information

Where are you from?

How old are you?

How long have you been living in the US?

How long have you been living in Iowa? And in ____ town?

Do you have a romantic partner? If yes, what is the status of the relationship: living together or married?

Do you have children? How many? What are their ages?

How much schooling have you had?

Are you currently employed? If yes, what is your job position?

Background

What brought you to Iowa, to this town?

When you moved to the US, to this town, is this what you were expecting to see/find? Why?

How is been like since you moved here? How is it like living here?

Tell me what is like to be an immigrant woman here?

Perceived individual strengths/assets

How would you describe yourself to somebody you never met?

What are you really good at?

What do you think are your strengths?

Have you use those strengths to manage the life challenge(s) you previously mentioned? How?

Tell me about a time you think you handled it well?
What are the strengths or weaknesses that influence whether or not you can manage life challenges?

Please describe a challenging moment or situation in which you thought you couldn’t go on but later you were able to manage it

*More interview questions will be determined on the basis of responses*

**Perceived family strengths/assets**

Now let’s talk about your family.

Tell me about your living situation. Who do you live with?

Do you have family in the area? What members of your family live here?

Who are you close to in your family, if anybody?

In your family, who are the most important people in your life? What do you value about your relationship with them?

How would you define your relationships with your family?

How often do you see (or visit) your family? (in the case of extended family)

Please describe the role of your family in your life

You mentioned you had ______ life challenge. What was the role of your family when you faced that problem?

Have you sought help among your family members? How they have assisted you? (If the answer is NO: Why don’t you seek help with them?)

*More interview questions will be determined on the basis of responses*

**Community**

Tell me about the people in your life other than your family?

What is the nature of the relationships with those people?

How often do you get together? What type of activities do you do together?

Besides your friends and family, do you have contact with other members of the community?

Who?
Do you ever ask them for help when needed?

How do people in the community react to your problems?

Have you sought help among your friends? How they have assisted you? (If the answer is NO: Why don’t you seek help with them?)

Have you sought help within formal contexts such doctors and clinics? How they have assisted you? (If the answer is NO: Why don’t you seek help with them?)

You mentioned you had ______ life challenge. What was the role of your community (friends, neighbors, or other community members) when you faced that problem?

What would you change in your community so other women who struggle with the same problem as you do can get the services needed?

*More interview questions will be determined on the basis of responses*

**Culture**

Tell me about your culture, what cultural traditions you practice here?

Do you feel your values, beliefs, normative routines, or traditions help you in times of adversity? How?

What are the strengths that you think these cultural practices (beliefs, values, etc.) has that make things easier when you face problems?

Do you go to church? How often?

In times of adversity, have you sought help with priests or spiritual leaders? Why you look for help with them? How they have assisted you? (If the answer is NO: Why don’t you seek help with them?)

In times of adversity, have you sought help with herbalists or healers? Why you look for help with them? How they have assisted you? (If the answer is NO: Why don’t you seek help with them?)

**Exploring Life Challenges**

What do you think you struggle with? What is hard for you?

Have you ever experienced any challenges or constraints in your life? Elaborate

How would you describe your experiences with that challenge?
How has that challenge affected your life?

When you struggle with that problem, what do you do?

Where do you look for help?

Previously you talked about having ________ challenge(s). How did you manage those challenges? What did you do?

You also mentioned that you have ________ strengths/assets. Were there part of this successfully recuperation?

Were there other people or resources that helped you with that problem? Who? (Ask about family members, community members or leaders, or cultural traditions)

*More interview questions will be determined on the basis of responses*

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**Interview Protocol Spanish Version**

**Información demográfica**

¿De dónde es usted?

¿Cuántos años tiene?

¿Hace cuánto tiempo vive en los Estados Unidos?

¿Hace cuánto tiempo que vive en Iowa? ¿Y en ….?

¿Tiene compañero permanente? Si la respuesta es sí ¿Cuál es su estado civil?

¿Tiene hijos? ¿Cuántos hijos tiene? ¿Qué edades tienen?

¿Cuál es su nivel educativo?

¿Tiene empleo actualmente? Si la respuesta es sí ¿Cuál es su posición de trabajo?

**Antecedentes**

¿Qué la trajo a Iowa, a este pueblo?

¿Lo que usted vio y encontró aquí era lo que usted esperaba? ¿Por qué?
¿Cómo es la vida de una mujer inmigrante en este pueblo? ¿Cómo se siente vivir aquí como una mujer inmigrante?

**Fortalezas individuales percibidas por la participante**

¿Cómo se describiría usted a una persona que no la conoce?

¿En cuáles habilidades es sobresaliente? ¿En que cosas o situaciones se desenvuelve mejor?

¿Cuáles considera usted son sus fortalezas? Me podría contar alguna anécdota en la cual usted haya usado esas fortalezas?

¿Ha usado esas mismas fortalezas para sobrellevar y sobreponerse de esa dificultad que mencionó anteriormente? ¿Cómo?

Cuénteme de alguna otra situación en donde usted se haya sobrepuesto de algún problema

¿Cuáles son las fortalezas que usted cree que tiene que le ayudan a sobrellevar cualquier dificultad en su vida?

¿Cuáles son las debilidades que usted cree que tiene que no le permiten o le hacen mas difícil reponerse de los problemas?

Por favor describa algún momento o situación en donde usted pensó por algún momento que no iba a poder reponerse pero que al final si pudo lograrlo. ¿Qué hizo?

*Más preguntas se harán dependiendo de las respuestas de la participante*

**Fortalezas de la familia percibidas por la participante**

Ahora vamos a hablar sobre la familia

Cuénteme acerca de su vivienda. ¿Con quién vive usted?

¿Su familia vive aquí en este pueblo? ¿Cuáles familiares suyos viven aquí en el pueblo? ¿Viven en su casa?

¿A que familiar es usted mas cercano o tiene una relación más estrecha?

¿Para usted cuál es la persona mas importante de su familia? ¿Qué es lo que más valora usted de su relación con su familia y con esa persona?

¿Cómo definiría y describiría su relación con su familia?

¿Qué tan a menudo visita a su familia? (en caso de que tenga parientes)
Por favor describa el rol o papel que tiene su familia en su vida. ¿Qué importancia su familia en su vida?

Usted mencionó que tuvo dificultades con..... ¿Cuál fue el papel de su familia cuando usted pasó por ese problema?

¿Buscó ayuda entre sus familiares? ¿Cómo la ayudaron? (Si la respuesta es NO: ¿Por qué no le(s) pidió ayuda?

Más preguntas se harán dependiendo de las respuestas de la participante

Comunidad

Ahora hablemos de las personas que están en su vida pero que no son sus familiares. ¿quién es son?

¿Qué tipo de relación tiene con ellos?

¿Qué tan seguido se reúne usted con ellos? ¿Qué tipo de actividades hacen juntos?

Además de sus amigos y de su familia, ¿tiene usted contacto con otras personas de la comunidad? ¿Quién(s)?

¿Usted les pide ayuda a cuando lo necesita?

¿Cómo la gente de su comunidad reacciona a sus problemas?

¿Ha buscado ayuda con sus amigos? ¿Cómo le han ayudado? (si la pregunta es NO: ¿por qué no les ha pedido ayuda a ellos?)

¿Ha buscado ayuda dentro de instituciones formales como doctores y clínicas? ¿Cómo le han ayudado? (si la respuesta es NO: ¿Por qué no les ha pedido ayuda?)

Usted mencionó de tuvo dificultades con ______. ¿Cuál es el rol de su comunidad (amigos, vecinos u otros miembros de su comunidad) cuando usted se enfrenta a algún reto o problema?

¿Qué cambiaría es su comunidad para que usted u otras mujeres que enfrentan problemas similares reciban servicios adecuados?

Más preguntas se harán dependiendo de las respuestas de la participante

Cultura

Hábleme acerca de sus costumbres, hábitos y estilo de vida. ¿Qué tradiciones culturales practica usted aquí?
¿Usted cree que sus valores, creencias, rutinas diarias o tradiciones la ayudan en momentos de adversidad, en momentos difíciles? ¿Cómo?

¿Cuáles son las fortalezas que estos valores, creencias y tradiciones han hecho que sus problemas sean más llevaderos? ¿La han ayudado a superar los problemas? ¿Cómo?

¿Usted va a la iglesia? ¿Cuál? ¿Qué tan a menudo?

En tiempos de adversidad, ¿ha buscado ayuda donde algún cura o líder espiritual? ¿Por qué ha buscado ayuda con ellos? ¿Cómo la han ayudado? (si la respuesta es NO: ¿Por qué no les ha pedido su ayuda?)

En tiempos de adversidad, ¿ha buscado ayuda donde algún curandero o hierbero? ¿Por qué ha buscado ayuda con ellos? ¿Cómo la han ayudado? (si la respuesta es NO: ¿Por qué no les ha pedido su ayuda?)

**Explorando las dificultades de la vida**

¿Con qué problemas usted tiene que lidiar? ¿Qué situaciones son difíciles para usted?

¿Qué tipo de situaciones difíciles ha experimentado en su vida?

¿Cómo describiría usted ese problema o dificultad y lo que vivió y sintió cuando experimentó ese problema?

¿Cree que ese problema ha afectado su vida? ¿De que manera(s)?

Cuándo usted pasa por esa dificultad ¿Qué hace?

¿Busca ayuda? ¿Dónde? ¿Qué hace para remediarlo?

Anteriormente usted me dijo que tuvo problemas con __________. ¿Cómo se recuperó de ese reto? ¿Qué hizo?

Usted también dijo que tiene __________ fortalezas. ¿la ayudaron estas fortalezas que tiene a sobreponerse?

¿Hubo algún otro recurso o personas que la hubieran ayudado a superar este problema? ¿Qué o quiénes? (preguntar acerca de su familia, miembros o líderes de la comunidad, o tradiciones culturales)

**Más preguntas se harán dependiendo de las respuestas de la participante**
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS

Phone Scripts English Version

Social service providers will contact potential participants, will explain my study, and will ask for permission to give me their contact information. Social service providers also will ask for the best day and time for me to call them. Once I have their information and permission to contact them, I will contact them via phone.

Good morning/afternoon/evening, Can I talk to ________________?

If the potential respondent answers:

This is Angelica Reina. I am a graduate student from ISU and I am doing a study about Latinas’ experiences in (name of town). (Name of service provider) have already told you about my study. She also told me you said I could contact you.

After explaining the study purpose and process I will ask:

Would you be interested in participating in the study?

If the person says yes:

When and where would you like us to meet our first interview?

(Participant will choose day, time, and place)

Ok, thanks and I’ll see you then.

If the person says no, I will thank her for her time and hang up.

If someone other than the respondent answers, I will ask for the potential respondent. I won’t say anything about the study or personal information to protect the confidentiality of the potential respondent.

If the person is not at home:

Do you know when she will be home? Ok, thanks I’ll give her a call then (later)
If a get a voicemail or nobody answers, I will hang up and call back later.

Phone Scripts English Version For participants who directly contact the researcher

Hello, this is Angelica Reina. Thank you for your call and interest in my research. I am a graduate student from ISU and I am doing a study about Latinas’ experiences in (name of town), Iowa. The purpose of my study is to identify the life challenges associated with being an immigrant in (name of town). Specifically, I want to investigate how Latinas deal with and overcome life challenges. Also, I want to explore what are the factors at the individual, family, community, and cultural level that promote resilience among these women. I would like to conduct 3-4 interviews with you. Your will choose the place and time you feel more convenient. Once all interviews are done, you will be invited to participate in a second research stage, which entails 3-4 participant observations. I will conduct observations of 2-3 community experiences that will be chosen by you (e.g., running ears, shopping, school meetings, doctor visits). More than conducting observations, I will be “hanging out” with you at local community sites. In this stage, I will take part in your activities or experiences with other community members, services providers, and family members. During those observations we will be talking and I will ask questions related to the subject matter when needed. To compensate you for your time participating in this study, I will offer you a $10.00 gift card after each interview and participant observation. Please be aware that the total visits (interviews and observations) will be 6 to 8 times. The last two meetings will be arranged depending on further comments or additional information you may want to share, and to discuss about the transcriptions obtained from field notes and tape records. You will be compensated with a $10.00 gift card the first 7 visits. The last visit (visit #8) you will receive a $4.99 gift card. Your participation in this study will be completely voluntary and you can refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. The
information you will say and hear in the interviews and participant observations will be kept confidential. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. If you would like a written statement about participating in this study before you agree to meet with me, I would be glad to provide you with one. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects, please contact the Iowa State University IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu.

Would you be interested in participating in the study?

If the person says yes, I will ask for her phone number and ask:

When and where would you like us to meet for our first interview?

( Participant will choose day, time, and place)

Ok, thanks and I’ll see you then.

If the person says no, I will thank her for her time and hang up.

If someone other than the respondent answers, I will ask for the potential respondent. I won’t say anything about the study or personal information to protect the confidentiality of the potential respondent.

If the person is not at home:

Do you know when she will be home? Ok, thanks I’ll give her a call then (later)

If a get a voicemail or nobody answers, I will hang up and call back later.

Interview Script to Recruit Participants at WIC

Hello there. Do you have a moment to talk with me?

If the person says yes:
Thank you for your time. My name is Angelica Reina and I am a graduate student from ISU and I am doing a study about Latinas’ experiences in (name of town), Iowa. The purpose of my study is to identify the life challenges associated with being an immigrant in (name of town).

Specifically, I want to investigate how Latinas deal with and overcome life challenges. Also, I want to explore what are the factors at the individual, family, community, and cultural level that promote resilience among these women. I would like to conduct 3-4 interviews with you. You will choose the place and time you feel more convenient. Once all interviews are done, you will be invited to participate in a second research stage, which entails 3-4 participant observations. I will conduct observations of 2-3 community experiences that will be chosen by you (e.g., running earns, shopping, school meetings, friend, church or doctor visits, family events). More than conducting observations, I will be “hanging out” with you at local community sites. In this stage, I will take part in your activities or experiences with other community members, services providers, and family members. During those observations we will be talking and I will ask questions related to the subject when needed. To compensate you for your time participating in this study, I will offer you a $10.00 gift card after each interview and participant observation. Please be aware that the total visits (interviews and observations) will be 6 to 8 times. The last two meetings will be arranged depending on further comments or additional information you may want to share, and to discus about the transcriptions obtained from field notes and tape records. You will be compensated with a $10.00 gift card the first 7 visits. The last visit (visit #8) you will receive a $4.99 gift card. Your participation in this study will be completely voluntary and you can refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. The information you will say and hear in the interviews and participant observations will be kept confidential. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits
to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. If you would like a written statement about participating in this study before you agree to meet with me, I would be glad to provide you with one. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects, please contact the Iowa State University IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu.

Would you be interested in participating in the study?

If the person says yes, I will ask for her phone number and ask:

When and where would you like us to meet for our first interview?

( Participant will choose day, time, and place)

If the person says no, I will thank her for her time.

Information that social service providers will tell potential participants about the study

Hello, this is (name of service provider). Angelica Reina is a graduate student from ISU and she is doing a study about Latinas’ experiences in (name of town), Iowa. She told me to help her to recruit potential participants who may be willing to participate in her research. Since you fit the criteria of participation I thought it was a good idea to contact you and ask you to participate. Let me explain what her research is about. The purpose of her study is to identify the life challenges associated with being an immigrant in (name of town). Specifically, she wants to investigate how Latinas deal with and overcome life challenges. Also, she wants to explore what are the factors at the individual, family, community, and cultural level that promote resilience among these women. She would like to conduct 3-4 interviews with you. You will choose the place and time you feel more convenient. Once all interviews are done, Angelica will invite to participate in a second research stage, which entails 3-4 participant observations. Angelica will conduct observations of 2-3 community experiences that will be chosen by you (e.g., running earns,
shopping, school meetings, doctor visits). More than conducting observations, she will be spending time with you at local community sites. In this stage, she will take part in your activities or experiences with other community members, services providers, and family members. During those observations you folks will be talking and she will ask questions related to the subject matter when needed. To compensate you for your time participating in this study, Angelica will offer you a $10.00 gift card after each interview and participant observation. Please be aware that the total visits (interviews and observations) will be 6 to 8 times. The last two meetings will be arranged depending on further comments or additional information you may want to share, and to discus with Angelica about the transcriptions obtained from field notes and tape records. You will be compensated with a $10.00 gift card the first 7 visits. The last visit (visit #8) you will receive a $4.99 gift card. Your participation in this study will be completely voluntary and you can refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. The information you will say and hear in the interviews and participant observations will be kept confidential. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Would you be interested in participating in the study?

If the person says yes, the service provider will ask her:

Can I give her your name and phone number so Angelica can contact you?

If the person says no, the service provider will thank her for her time.
Flyer

The immigrant life of Latinas in a rural area of the Midwest United States
…. I want to learn about your life

I am conducting interviews and participant observations to learn about the life challenges associated with being an immigrant Latina in a rural area of the Midwest United States, and explore the factors that might help these women to recuperate from stressful life events.

You will receive six to seven $10.00 gift cards if you are eligible to participate and complete 3-4 interviews and 3-4 participant observations. A $4.99 gift card will be offered if a final additional meeting is needed.

To learn more about the study please call at 515 451 5038 or email areina@iastate.edu.

This study seeks to inform social and family workers who work directly with Latinas and who are responsible for helping them achieve emotional wellbeing.
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: A Bioecological Analysis of Resilience among Latina Immigrants

Investigators: Angelica Reina
              Dr. Brenda Lohman

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to identify the life challenges experienced by immigrant Latinas in a rural area of the Midwest United States, and study the aspects that might help them to recuperate from stressful life events. Specifically, this study will investigate how Latinas deal with and overcome such challenging situations. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a Latina immigrant who has low income, with at least one child between the ages of 2 and 5, and have lived in the US more than 2 years and less than 8. You should not participate if you are under age 25 or older than 40, do not have any children age between 2 and 5, have lived in the US less than 2 years and/or more than 8 years, or do not have a lower income.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in three individual interviews (60 minutes each). Interviews will take place in three different dates at a place(s) and time(s) more convenient for you. During the first interview you will be asked to respond questions related to your background for example the reasons for moving to the US, and your life as an immigrant mother. You will also be asked about the individual strengths that you think have helped you to overcome life challenges. During the second interview you will be asked to respond questions related to the family, community and culture strengths that have helped you to deal with a life problem. Then, in the third interview you will respond questions about the life challenges you have faced after moving to the US, and the things you have done and/or resources you have used to overcome those life events. Other questions that might be addressed during the second and third phase of interviews will be determined on the basis of the information you provide in the first interview (they will be follow up questions). Once the interviews are completed, you will be invited to participate in a second stage of the study, that requires participant observation. I will set up three additional meetings with you, in which we will spend one day running errands or doing what you usually do in a day. You will choose the times we will start and finish the day. In those meetings, I will be observing the things you regularly do, and we will be talking about your daily life and your interactions with your family, friends, and other community members. For that reason, I might ask you to spend time with me in days in which you have to go to visit a friend, do shopping, go to a school meeting or a doctor office. Please be aware that the total visits (interviews and observations) will be 6 to 8 times. The last two meetings will be arranged depending on further comments or additional information you may want to share, and to discuss about the transcriptions obtained from field notes and tape records.
The identity of the researcher will be kept confidential to the third party participants (in this case the clerk office, doctor, school teacher, or people whom you may interact with during the observations) since the goal of this study is to explore how these people naturally behave and interact with you. If you feel you need to reveal the researcher’s identity with certain people (e.g., friends or family) you will be encouraged to doing so. During those meetings, you will be asked to respond questions about your perceptions about those places and people, and how they have helped you (or not) to overcome challenging situations. During those meetings we will spend more time together and you will choose the date and places for those meetings. Dates and time spent conducting observations at each place or activity will depend on the activity and your availability. Field notes (notes writing in a notebook) will be taken during participant observations. The interviews and conversations that may take place during participant observations will be audiotaped, transcribed in a word document, and translated into English. No names or personal information that would identify you in interviews or field notes will be included in the transcription.

RISKS
I do not anticipate that you will experience any physical or emotional risks from participating in this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any point of the research process, you will be able to leave the study, decline to answer any question or stop the interview or day visit at any point if needed.

BENEFITS
If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by informing social and family workers who work directly with Latinas and who are responsible for helping them to improve their emotional wellbeing. In addition, the information resulting from this research will generate knowledge about the different factors that might lessen the effects of life challenges on the emotional suffering among Latinas.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION
You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will be compensated for participating in this study by being offered a $10.00 gift card to a local store. You will receive the gift card after each interview and participant observation (total of seven visits). The last visit (visit #8) you will receive a $4.99 gift card. Compensation will be provided at the end of each visit. You will need to complete a form to receive payment. Please know that payments may be subject to tax withholding requirements, which vary depending upon whether you are a legal resident of the U.S. or another country. If required, taxes will be withheld from the payment you receive.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interviews or participant observations.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Records that identify participants will be kept confidential as far as permitted by valid laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may examine and/or copy your records for quality verification and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: Participants will be assigned a unique numeric code and this code will be used on the tapes and transcriptions instead of their names. Only the lead investigator (Angelica Reina) and the professor Brenda Lohman will have access to the study records. The study records will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the lead’s investigator’s house. The tape-recorded data will be transcribed within three weeks following the interview then will be destroyed within two weeks after the transcription. The lead investigator will keep the transcriptions in a locked desk in her home until the completion of this study (May 2013).

Interviews and field notes from participant observations will keep participants names off the record. If the results are published in a journal or presented in a conference or seminar, your identity and the names of community places and people (friends, family members, services providers or community members) will remain confidential. The names of the rural town, places in that town, and individuals will be changed to maintain the secrecy/privacy of all participants and to prevent the identification of the town. Your name, the names of other individuals, and places will be replaced by pseudonyms. Information and details about you, your life, or families that would make you/ them identifiable will not be used. Once transcriptions are finalized, I will invite you to meet (or we will talk over the phone) so you can review the transcripts. Only the information you agree to leave on record will be kept and use for publishing purposes.

Although the researchers plan to keep the information you share confidential, there are limits to this confidentiality. In the event you provide information about the neglect or abuse of a minor or dependent adult or the imminent harm to yourself or others, the researchers may break confidentiality and inform the appropriate authorities (e.g., local police, Department of Human Services, etc.).

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

• For further information about the study contact Angelica Reina, 515-451-5038 or areina@iastate.edu and Dr. Brenda Lohman, 515-294-6230 or blohman@iastate.edu.

• If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

******************************************************************************

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ________________________________________________

________________________________________________ (Participant’s Signature)     (Date)

Spanish Version

DOCUMENTO DE INFORMACIÓN Y CONSENTIMIENTO

Título del estudio: Análisis bio-ecologico de resiliencia de latinas inmigrantes

Investigador: Angélica Reina
Dr. Brenda Lohman

Este es un proyecto de investigación. Por favor, tómese su tiempo para decidir si le gustaría participar. Por favor, no dude en hacer preguntas en cualquier momento.

INTRODUCCIÓN

El propósito del estudio es identificar los retos o dificultades de la vida que afrontan las mujeres latinas inmigrantes en un área rural del medio-este en los estados unidos, y estudiar los aspectos que pueden ayudarlas a recuperarse o sobrepasar estos estresantes momentos de la vida. Especificamente, este estudio examinará cómo hacen las mujeres latinas para enfrentar y sobrepasar estas situaciones difíciles. Usted está siendo invitada a participar en este estudio porque usted es latina inmigrante quien tiene ingresos económicos limitados, tiene por lo menos un hijo entre los 2 y 5 años, ha vivido en los Estados Unidos más de dos años y menos de 8. Usted no debería participar si usted es menor de 25 años o mayor de 40, no tiene ningún hijo entre 2 y 5 años, ha vivido en EEUU menos de 2 años o más de 8, o no tiene ingresos económicos bajos.

DESCRIPCION DE LOS PROCEDIMIENTOS

Si usted está de acuerdo en participar en este estudio yo la contactaré para fijar dos etapas de visitas.
La primera etapa de visitas incluye tres entrevistas que serán grabadas (60 minutos cada una). Las entrevistas se realizarán en tres fechas diferentes en lugares y horas que sean más convenientes para usted.
• Durante la primera entrevista yo le preguntaré acerca de su vida por ejemplo las razones por las cuales se vino a los EEUU y su vida como madre inmigrante. También le preguntaré acerca de las fortalezas que usted tiene que la han ayudado a superar las dificultades de la vida.
• Durante la segunda visita, le preguntaré acerca de cómo su familia, comunidad y cultura la han ayudado a superar los problemas de la vida.

• Luego, en la tercera entrevista usted responderá preguntas acerca de los retos o dificultades de la vida a los que se ha enfrentado después de mudarse a EEUU, y las cosas que ha hecho o los recursos que ha usado que le han facilitado superar estas dificultades. Habrán preguntas adicionales en la segunda o tercera entrevista pero se basarán en lo que hablemos durante la primera entrevista (estas serán preguntas de seguimiento).

Una vez las entrevistas terminen, la invitaré a participar en la segunda etapa del estudio, la cual requiere que yo la observe en su vida diaria tres días diferentes. Fijaré tres reuniones adicionales con usted, en las cuales pasaremos tiempo juntas mientras usted hace sus diligencias o las cosas que suele hacer diariamente.

• Usted escogerá la hora para empezar y terminar la visita del día. En estas visitas, yo voy a observar las cosas que usted hace regularmente, y también hablaremos acerca de su vida diaria y sus relaciones con su familia, amigos y otros miembros de la comunidad. Por esta razón, le pediré que pase tiempo conmigo en días que usted tenga que visitar a algún amigo, ir de compras, ir a la escuela o visitar a su médico.

• Es necesario que entienda que el numero de visitas en esta etapa sería entre 3 y 5 veces. Tres de estas visitas implicarán que pase todo un día con usted como su compañera.

• Las ultimas dos visitas se harán dependiendo de si usted tiene más comentarios o más cosas que quiera compartir conmigo, y también para que revise las transcripciones que yo haré de los audios que grabe y de las notas que vaya tomando durante el estudio.

• Durante las visitas de observación, mi identidad como investigadora se mantendrá en secreto a terceras personas que prestan servicios (en el caso de empleado publico, doctor, maestro, o personas con las cuales usted interactúe durante las observaciones) ya que el propósito de este estudio es saber como estas personas actúan naturalmente con usted. Si usted quiere o necesita revelar mi identidad con ciertas personas (por ejemplo con sus amigos o familia) usted podrá hacerlo sin ningún problema. Yo tomaré notas solo (en un cuaderno) durante las observaciones.

• Después de estas visitas, le preguntaré acerca de sus percepciones acerca de esos lugares y personas, y como estos la han ayudado (o no) a superar momentos difíciles. Le preguntaré si nos podemos reunir 1 o 2 veces después de las observaciones para poder hablar más y para que usted revise las transcripción conmigo. Las entrevistas y conversaciones se pasarán a papel y luego se traducirán al inglés. Ni su nombre ni
información personal que la identifique a usted o alguna otra persona se incluirán en las transcripciones.

RIESGOS
Durante el estudio usted no sentirá incomodidad física o emocional. Sin embargo, si usted se siente incomoda en algún momento del estudio, usted podrá renunciar a participar, no responder preguntas, o parar alguna entrevista u observación durante las visitas.

BENEFICIOS
Si usted decide participar en esta investigación no habría ningún beneficio directo para usted. Sin embargo, el estudio beneficiaría a la sociedad porque estará desarrollando información para trabajadores sociales o personas que trabajan directamente con latinas y que las ayudan a mejorar su bienestar emocional. Además, la información que se obtenga de este estudio generará conocimiento acerca de los factores que disminuyen los efectos negativos que tienen las dificultades de la vida en el estado emocional de las latinas.

COSTOS Y COMPENSACIONES
Su participación en el estudio no representará ningún costo para usted. Usted será recompensada por su participación en este estudio con una tarjeta de regalo de $10 de una tienda local. Usted recibirá la tarjeta después de cada entrevista y cada visita de observación (un total de 7 visitas). En la última visita usted recibirá una tarjeta de $4.99. Se le entregarán las tarjetas después de cada visita. Usted tendrá que escribir su nombre y firmar un formulario en el que indica que ha recibido una tarjeta de regalo como forma de pago.

DERECHOS DEL PARTICIPANTE
Su participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria y usted podrá rehusarse a participar o dejar la investigación en cualquier momento. La información que usted dé o que yo escuche se mantendrá confidencial. Si usted decide no participar o dejar la investigación antes de su término, no tendrá ninguna penalidad y no perderá los beneficios a los cuáles usted tendría derecho. Usted podrá negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta que se le haga durante las entrevistas o visitas de observación.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD
Documentos que identifiquen a los participantes se mantendrán en secreto de acuerdo a las leyes y regulaciones que apliquen y no estarán disponibles al público. Sin embargo las agencias reguladoras del gobierno federal y la junta institucional de revisión (un comité que revisa y aprueba las investigaciones sobre individuos), examinarían y copiarían documentos con su información para asegurar la calidad y el análisis de la información. Estos documentos podrían contener información privada.

Para asegurar la confidencialidad permitida por la ley, serán tomadas las siguientes medidas: Un código numérico será designado para los sujetos y será usado en los casetes y las transcripciones en lugar de los nombres. Las identidades serán destruidas dos horas después de conducida la entrevista. Solo la investigadora principal (Angélica Reina) y la profesora (Brenda Lohman)
APPENDIX E: CONTACT SUMMARY FORM

_____________________________________________________

Participant____________

Contact type:

Visit ______ Site/place: ______________
Phone _____ Contact date: ____________

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact?

2. Summarize the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact.

   Question           Information

3. Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

4. What new (or remaining target questions do you have in considering the next contact with this site/individual?

*This contact summary form was borrowed and modified from Miles and Huberman’s (1994) book *An Expanded Sourcebook: Qualitative Data Analysis*. 
APPENDIX F: MATRICES FOR DATA DISPLAY

Unordered list of salient issues and illustrations related to ayuda, defenderse y superarse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview 1</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constraints</td>
<td>Feelings related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways she is trying to be strong</td>
<td>Feelings related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways she names her suffering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is she feeling herself to be? Describing herself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools she names that work as a support for her</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ayuda (Help)</th>
<th>Defenderse (to defend oneself)</th>
<th>Salir Adelante (to get ahead/to move forward)</th>
<th>Superarse (to better oneself)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANTS’ SOCIORETIONS

Sociogram of Elizabeth
Sociogram of Patricia

Social Relationships of Patricia: Challenges and Resources (sources of help) of Relationships
Sociogram of Gloria

Social relationships of Gloria: Challenges and Resources (sources of help) of Relationships

- **Resources**
  - Medical treatment for her kids
  - Connect with social services
  - Prenatal classes
  - Spend time with families
  - Educational classes and programs (parenting, computer)
  - Lead her to a car or gives her rides
  - Support and company

- **Challenges**
  - Lack of training for interpreters
  - Racism
  - Epidemic
  - Gossip

- **Social World of Gloria**
  - Nurses and Interpreters
  - Doctors
  - Social services
  - WIC Service Providers
  - Lawyer
  - Catholic Church
  - Mother
  - In-laws
  - Partner
  - Daughters
  - Two Latina friends

- **Family members**
  - Rita
  - Acquaintances
  - Elderly

- **Economic support**
  - Health maintenance
  - Opportunity to work as volunteer
  - Emotional support
  - Financial support

- **Going to mass**
  - Program for daughter
  - Help with marital issues

- **Challenges**
  - Doesn't go often; doesn't understand the mission
  - Dealing with asthma
  - Not time to take care of her
  - Her strength
  - Help her to keep going
  - Tells everything to her mother

- **Resources**
  - Emotional support
  - Financial support
  - Taking care of children

- **Partner’s grandparents**
  - Give her rides when needed
  - Paying bills, goes food shopping

- **Resources**
  - Emotional/material support
  - Helps her with child-related issues

- **Women**
  - Men
  - Mixed/institutions
Sociogram of Silvia

Social relationships of Silvia: Challenges and Resources (sources of help) of Relationships

- **Resources**: Medical treatment for herself and her kids
- **Challenges**: Discrimination; doesn’t trust (gossip)

- **Nurses and Interviewers**
  - Resources: Medical treatment for herself and her kids
  - Challenges: Discrimination; doesn’t trust (gossip)

- **Doctors**
  - Resources: Medical treatment for her kids
  - Challenges: Do not meet their medical needs

- **Social services**
  - Resources: Education
  - Challenges: Indifference with her son; lack of communication with her son

- **Agriculture Work**
  - Resources: Economic aid
  - Challenges: Racism; discrimination; post conditions

- **Transportation service**
  - Resources: Emotional support
  - Challenges: Wants to know all and want to get involved in everything (mother in law specialty)

- **Community Members**
  - Resources: Give her rides to run errands
  - Challenges: Conflicts with in-law

- **School teacher**
  - Resources: Emotional support
  - Challenges: Discrimination

- **Parent**
  - Resources: Personal fulfillment as mother

- **Family members**
  - Resources: Ant. Godmother
  - Challenges: Conflicts with him; doesn’t help at home

- **Acquaintances**
  - Resources: Counselor; rules; social support

- **Neighbors**
  - Resources: Gives her rides to work or run errands
  - Challenges: Racism; discrimination

- **Evangelicals**
  - Resources: Conflicts in relationships

- **Latina friends**
  - Resources: No specific information

- **Julia**
  - Resources: Contacts her with SS
  - Challenges: Program for mothers (deliver care for mother)

- **Mariana**
  - Resources: Home visits to help child with behavior
  - Challenges: Connects her with SS

- **WE-SS**
  - Resources: Material support

- **In-laws**
  - Resources: Materiel support

- **Women**
  - Resources: Economic and emotional support

- **Men**
  - Resources: No specific information

- **Mixed institutions**
Sociogram of Bridgett
REFERENCES


Baker, P. L. (2004). “It is the only way I can survive”: Gender paradox among recent Mexicana Immigrants to Iowa. Sociological Perspectives, 47, 393-408.


