The Lives of Undocumented Latina Migrants: An Intersectional Analysis of Gender, Nationality, and Migration Status in the United States

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THE LIVES OF UNDOCUMENTED LATINA MIGRANTS: AN INTERSECTIONAL
ANALYSIS OF GENDER, NATIONALITY, AND MIGRATION STATUS IN THE UNITED
STATES

SaraJane Renfroe

A Senior Honors Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements of the Honors Degree Program

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Faculty Sponsor: Nolan Kline

Rollins College
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This has most certainly taken a village. Thank you all.
ABSTRACT

Life for Latin American migrants\(^1\) in the United States has changed significantly in the past decade. Although the US has increasingly become a difficult place for Latinx migrants to live, migrants still come to the US to fill low-paying jobs, to escape dangerous home situations, or in seeking a better life for their children. Furthermore, women are affected in unique ways which increase their vulnerability to exploitation. Through collaborative research effort, I worked with immigrant-rights organizations in the greater Orlando area to conduct participant observation (including volunteer work, an internship, and a documentary project) and in-depth interviews with Latina migrants. This research examines the intersectionality of gender, race, and migration status in the US. I investigated women’s access to resources including work, health care, and education. Related research conducted in the past has approached this topic through examining the intersection of gender and migration through examining the family unit; my research adds to the understanding of gender and migration by examining women’s experiences. In this research, I show how migrant women are vulnerable due to gendered policy, limited access to jobs, and gendered expectations in the home; I demonstrate how US immigration policy must change to address this gap in access to civil society and human rights. I further describe the ways in which undocumented Latina migrants resist their oppression. Through this analysis, I address the need for understanding the women’s experiences by focusing on migration

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\(^1\) Importantly, when I reference Latin American identity in this thesis, I am limiting this title geographically to Central and South America because of fundamental differences for other Spanish-speaking migrants in the migration process to the United States. These differences are the result of a history of characteristics associated to Central and South Americans by American immigration policy, and American society as a whole. This is not to say that the Latin American identity is only within Central and South American countries; I am creating this limitation solely for the purpose of this thesis, to more effectively discuss the way this identity factor impacts the experience of migration.
from Latin American countries to the United States, and I examine how women are affected by the intersection of race, migration status, and gender.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It’s a sunny day – normal for Florida in the summertime – and I’m sitting in the passenger seat of Jasmine’s car as she knocks on the door of a mobile home. I peer through the cracked window, wishing that I’d opened it just a bit further before Jasmine turned the car off. The trailer door opens, and Jasmine is greeted by a woman wearing a calf-length cotton dress and a headscarf. They talk for a beat, and then Jasmine leans to wave at me, beckoning me toward them. The woman wears a guarded expression as she gazes at me, and I push myself out of the car. I put on my warmest smile, and hope that my face doesn’t betray the nerves I feel at beginning my first interview with this woman. Jasmine laughs and the women speak in Spanish, and I later learn that my nervousness was more than apparent. Yet the woman welcomes me into her home, and I am greeted by three young children milling around the interior of their home. I perch myself on the edge of the sofa directly across from the doorway, and, notebook and pen in hand, take a breath as Jasmine and the woman exchange small talk. I understand only a bit, and try to chime in, and my attempts are received in good humor. Finally, Jasmine looks at me expectantly. “What do you want to know?”

The story above describes the first time I met Tatiana, a migrant mother from rural Mexico. She is one of seven migrant women I interviewed during the summer of 2017, with fellow researcher Dr. Rachel Newcomb as part of a collaborative student-faculty research program through Rollins College. Our research was motivated by the following question: how do women experience migration differently from men?

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2 I have changed each of the women’s names to be pseudonyms in this thesis, in order to protect their identity. This has been necessary because of the current state of political turmoil around the undocumented status, and the aggressive deportation of undocumented immigrants living in the United States.
This thesis has developed from that initial research. During our interviews, we found that women attested to a very different experience of migration from their male family members and friends. Dr. Newcomb and I discovered that gender played an essential role in limiting migrant women’s access to civil institutions and political life. Women we interviewed described being unable to find jobs while their husbands were quickly employed. Single mothers had difficulty finding doctors for their children, born with physical abnormalities tied to pesticide exposure inherent in mostly female-held jobs, such as working in plant nurseries. Other women described sexual harassment or abuse in the workplace, or in their homes. Women reported that their male family members expected them to work publicly to increase the household income, but also care for the children and perform domestic labor, including cooking and cleaning. My thesis addresses this disparity in experiences between male and female migrants in the context of migration from Latin American countries to the United States.

My thesis research is guided by the following questions: Why is the migration experience gendered, and in what ways? What are the consequences of a gendered migration process?

Existing migration literature has addressed these questions, yet makes assumptions about women’s experiences while interviewing mainly men, with a few notable exceptions (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992). Furthermore, the existing literature does not analyze women’s experiences of migration using the framework of intersectionality, which is fundamental to the theoretical perspective of this thesis. Through this thesis, I address this lack of women’s perspectives and capture women’s gendered experiences of immigrating to the United States. I then describe in detail how and why their experiences are particularly unique through using the intersectionality framework, and then describe the consequences of this through analyzing Latina migrants’ access to work and social institutions.
In this thesis, I show how undocumented Latina migrant women have specific and unique migration experiences due to the intersection of their identity factors of being female, undocumented migrants, and Latin American. For these women, the migration experience is not empowering and instead leads to increased oppression; yet despite these significant and increased barriers, undocumented Latina migrant women resist oppression.
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

My thesis examines how the migration process from Latin American countries to the United States is gendered. I examine the ways in which constructions of gender affect migrant women throughout the migration process, from living in their original country, to the active movement across state borders, to living in the United States. I then analyze how U.S. policy and fear-based policing shapes female migrants’ experiences regarding access to healthcare, education, and work. I employ a multidisciplinary approach toward understanding gender and migration, drawing from cultural anthropology, medical anthropology, sociology, and geography. To accomplish this study, I used participant observation and formal and informal interviews to seek answers to my research questions, including:

1. Why is the migration experience gendered, and in what ways?
2. What are the consequences of a gendered migration process?

I conducted eight interviews averaging approximately one-hour with Latina migrants living in Central Florida. My research is further informed by approximately 300 hours of participant observation of the immigrant community in Central Florida, conducted intermittently over the span of four years. Participant observation included volunteering with the Farmworker Association of Florida (14 hours), tutoring at Hope CommUnity Center (74 hours), interning with Mi Familia Vota (100 hours), participating in three weekend-long immersions at Hope
CommUnity Center (108 hours), and attending a citizenship workshop at Hope CommUnity Center (4 hours).

**Applied Anthropology**

My research was conceived, conducted, and analyzed through the lens of applied anthropology. Applied anthropology, also called engaged or activist anthropology, requires that researchers work in a collaborative, reciprocal way with the community and people with whom they are conducting research. Research becomes a method of working toward social justice, with providing a product at the culmination of the project as a tool for growing the activist movement for the collaborating community/group. It is a way to “decolonize our research process” and create work which not only provides insight into a process and thus grows the overall body of knowledge, but is also valuable to future research, as well as being fundamentally more ethical (Speed 2006: 66).

Applied anthropology informed my research process because my “participant observation” included spending significant amounts of time with Latinx immigrants through Hope CommUnity Center, the Farmworker Association of Florida, and Mi Familia Vota. Although this work did greatly add to my understanding of the topic of my research, it was motivated by more than writing a research paper and submitting it for personal gain. This thesis is part of a longer project of working for social justice in collaboration with the Central Florida immigrant and ally community. In applying my skills as a student of anthropology, applied research provides an opportunity to address something important to the community – in this case, immigrant rights – and, through analysis, allows me to suggest potential solutions to the problem.
Summer student-faculty collaborative research

Much of my applied research occurred when I worked directly with anthropologist Dr. Rachel Newcomb through Rollins College’s student-faculty collaborative research program during the summer of 2017. We conducted a comparative study examining how migrant women experience life in their receiving countries; as our countries of comparison, we chose the United States and Spain. We worked specifically with Latina immigrants in the greater Orlando area of Florida, and with Moroccan migrant women in Barcelona, Spain.

In Orlando, we drew upon our previous connections within the immigration community (Dr. Newcomb had a long-established relationship with Hope CommUnity Center and the Farmworker Association of Florida) to find women who would be interested in speaking with us. We were given the opportunity to visit women’s homes in Apopka, Florida with the help of Jasmine, an AmeriCorps volunteer with Hope CommUnity. We also interviewed women at the Farmworker Association of Florida’s office in Apopka, Florida; in total, we interviewed seven Latina migrants. Concurrently, we volunteered with both organizations; we worked as tutors with Hope CommUnity Center, and helped at events, writing blog posts, and other tasks at the Farmworker Association of Florida. In Barcelona, we spent one month living in the Poblenou neighborhood. During this time, we connected with organizations working with Moroccan immigrants. We also conducted participant observation by taking the metro to El Raval almost every day; this was the neighborhood we identified as housing the most Moroccan migrants. We conducted four interviews with Moroccan migrant women, two of whom were working at NGOs we approached. We also interviewed three people who worked with the organizations but were not Moroccan migrants. We interviewed two academics whose research directly related to our own research. Our participant observation also involved attending an event to commemorate the
end of Ramadan. Through this process of comparing the experiences of migrant women in Spain and the United States we found that migrant women in Spain did not experience barriers to society to the same degree experienced by migrant women in the United States. In Spain, immigration policy allowed for migrant women to access their basic needs and better integrate into society, whereas migrants in the U.S. were barred from these because American immigration policy makes it extremely difficult for migrant women from Latin America to access legal documents, and furthermore criminalizes being an undocumented immigrant within U.S. borders. This research informed my understanding of the structures preventing Latina migrants from accessing society and social institutions in the United States. Our work was applied because we actively worked to give our time to the community, as community members gave us their time. In addition, although we did have interview questions, we consciously allowed the conversation during interviews to shift toward topics our subjects and collaborators preferred to emphasize. In this way, my thesis research was shaped by topics important to the immigrant community.

Participant observation: Mi Familia Vota

Another important aspect of my applied research was participant observation conducted with Mi Familia Vota. Mi Familia Vota (MFV) is a national advocacy organization which works toward greater access to civil and political rights for Latin Americans in the US. It brings together Latin American community members over topics such as healthcare and environmentalism with the goal to build the power of the Latinx\(^3\) population in the US. The organization facilitates citizenship workshops for individuals who are undocumented, or have

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\(^3\)“Latinx” is a term used by the Latin American immigrant community and allies to refer to the Latin American identity without explicitly stating gender (since “Latina” implies a woman, and “Latino” implies a man).
DACA\textsuperscript{4}, TPS\textsuperscript{5}, or have residency and are trying to obtain citizenship. Furthermore, MFV campaigns for the rights of these individuals, which is currently manifesting itself through a push to get the Orlando city government to encode in its legislature protections for undocumented, DACA, and TPS residents because of the fragility of these statuses under the Trump administration. This movement is a coordinated effort by many different activist organizations in Orlando who come together under the blanket organization title “Trust Orlando Coalition.” This coalition is lobbying the Orlando city government to pass a “Trust Act,” which would codify the city’s support of the human rights of immigrants by limiting its police force from collaborating with federal immigration authorities (Weiner 2017).

My understanding of this organization and its actions is informed by a one-semester long internship with MFV.\textsuperscript{6} Through working with MFV, I observed activism within the immigrant community in Central Florida, which gave nuance to my understanding of how Latinx migrants are resisting oppressive structures in the United States. Furthermore, this internship was part of applied research because I was able to not only learn about the community in the ways members wished to be represented, but also provide my skillset to creating the program at Freedom High School to give back to the community.

\textsuperscript{4} Stands for “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals,” and is an executive order under the Obama administration which allowed certain young undocumented immigrants to apply for temporary legalization. See “American Immigration Policy” chapter for more information. This policy is currently extremely fragile, because President Trump rescinded DACA in 2017, and there have been no major decisions in Congress regarding a policy to fill the need of these young immigrants.

\textsuperscript{5} Stands for “Temporary Protected Status,” and is a piece of legislation which grants some migrants temporary legalization if they are unable to return to their country of origin because it would be a risk to their lives (USCIS “Temporary Protected Status”). Under the Trump administration, this piece of legislation is at risk of not being renewed.

\textsuperscript{6} During this time, I developed a curriculum to work with Latinx high school students to discuss issues of environmentalism and climate change; to do so, I drove to Freedom High School bi-weekly with a fellow Rollins College student to discuss key issues such as ocean pollution, ice melt, and waste with the students. The students also began to develop “activist projects” about the parts of environmentalism which they felt were most important to address in their communities. The purpose of the project is to motivate Latinx students to act politically to enact change they view as necessary. In addition, I worked in the MFV office to help the organization prepare and carry out citizenship workshops, as well as helped with other projects within the organization. My supervisor, Esteban, also acted as an advisor for the documentary project in its early phases.
Participant observation: Hope CommUnity Center

My work with Hope CommUnity Center also represents applied research as both an informative research resource, and also as a way to work collaboratively with the community toward social justice. Hope CommUnity Center (Hope) was founded by four nuns who were assigned to humanitarian work in Apopka, Florida. These women spent years among the community and developed an understanding of the community’s needs. They built Hope CommUnity Center, and the organization now provides services including citizenship training for immigrants, English language classes, community-building classes for unaccompanied minors who have immigrated to the US, GED courses, parenting classes, and more. Hope works actively toward achieving equality for immigrants and other underserved communities in Central Florida. It is a vibrant and diverse organization, and has achieved a large degree of rapport in Orlando.

Hope has been extremely active in campaigning for the rights of individuals who are undocumented, or have TPS or DACA, even though this is not part of its original stated goals. Hope has held press conferences in support of the immigrant community, and has also sent groups of people to campaign for immigrant rights in Washington, D.C. It has a very strong activist aspect to its current work, which includes not only immigrants and Hope administration/staff, but also AmeriCorps Vista volunteers who work with the organization. My experiences at Hope\(^7\) heavily informed this thesis, through introducing me to the topics most

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\(^7\) I first interacted with Hope as part of an immersion program at Rollins College in 2015, then again in two subsequent immersions in the following years. I volunteered as a tutor with Hope, teaching English and GED math. Dr. Newcomb and I volunteered at Hope during our summer research; she taught English in a women’s English course, and I tutored elementary school-aged children as part of an after-school program. I attended a citizenship workshop at Hope which taught immigrants in the community about what to do if they or a family member are arrested, deported, or experience any other difficulties with the immigration system in the United States.
important to the immigrant community (social justice and immigrant rights), and how the community is resisting oppression and working toward equality in American society.

Participant observation with the Farmworker Association of Florida

Similarly to Hope CommUnity Center, my work with the Farmworker Association of Florida was a resource for understanding the immigrant community, and also an avenue to work collaboratively for social justice with the community. The Farmworker Association of Florida (FWAF) began with the goal to support and advocate for the rights and fair treatment of farmworkers in Apopka, Florida. The organization responded to the exploitation of these farmworkers during the time of heavy chemical and pesticide use in agriculture in Florida; many of the poorer communities who worked on farms experienced health issues due to the exposure to these harmful chemicals. Since then, farmland has been vastly reduced, but FWAF continues to work with communities in lower socioeconomic brackets. Many people served by FWAF work in plant nurseries or in construction, both jobs with little security, low pay, and a history of worker exploitation. FWAF provides connections with legal advice and food aid. FWAF is fundamentally oriented toward activism to change discriminatory policies which perpetuate poverty and marginalization within the communities which it serves.

During our summer research, Dr. Newcomb and I volunteered with FWAF at community events including a Mother’s Day event, and Veg Fest (an annual vegetarian festival in Orlando). We also volunteered in the office by writing blogs, doing research for the website, and doing other small tasks. We interviewed two women who work with FWAF at their office in Apopka, and spoke extensively about our research with Eugenia (Jeannie) Economos, a longtime activist with FWAF. In the fall after the collaborative research program concluded, I continued to
volunteer in this capacity with FWAF. Through discussing research findings with Jeannie and other women at FWAF, I was able to sustain the collaborative nature of my applied research, as well as continue to work toward my mutual goal with FWAF and the other organizations: to achieve equality for the immigrant community.

**Directing *Faces of Florida DREAMers***

As part of the process of applied anthropological research, I am invested in achieving the goal of equality for the immigrant community which is mutually held by the organizations with which I worked. This became especially difficult after the election of President Trump in 2016. Although the project is not complete because of necessary edits, this has been a fundamental part of the applied aspect of my thesis research. It has not only informed my research through participant observation during the process, but it has represented collaborative action to work toward equality and social justice.

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8 While I conducted my research, President Trump stated that he was considering rescinding DACA. In order to raise awareness, Jeannie Economos asked me to film an interview with a young woman, Yelena, who had DACA so that FWAF could share her story on their social media sites.

When we met at a coffee shop in Winter Springs, Yelena and I did not film an interview. Instead, we talked about the issues surrounding DACA, and what could be done about them. We conversed about how sharing her story could potentially create awareness about the possibility of President Trump rescinding DACA and the consequences therein; during this conversation, we decided that a documentary would be more effective than one short video. Thus began the documentary project.

In the weeks following, I met UCF film students who were eager to be involved, and found Rollins DACA recipients who were interested in being interviewed. Another Rollins student, Elexsa Perello, offered her skills as a video editor. Once gathered, this team met often between August of 2017 until April of 2018 to film interviews and b-roll (informally filmes clips of the lives of DACA recipients in their homes, workplaces, schools, etc.), to edit, and finally to show the film on Rollins College’s campus. During the early stages of the project, President Trump rescinded the DACA legislation (on September 5th, 2017). Amid the chaos of DACA recipients attempting to understand the consequences of Trump’s decision, and the sensationalism of DACA in American news media, which led to many misunderstandings about DACA and DACA recipients, our group determined that it was of even greater importance that we create a documentary to share the true stories of DACA recipients on college campuses.

We held a preliminary showing on April 5th, 2018 in the Suntrust Auditorium on Rollins College’s campus. The room was full, with the audience spilling into the aisles as well as filling the available seats. After the film played, several of the DACA recipients in the documentary sat on a panel and took questions from the audience.
CHAPTER 3: INTERSECTIONALITY

This thesis analyzes the experiences of migrants who are women, and are from Central or South American countries. I assert that individuals who share these three identity factors simultaneously experience the process of migration to the United States in a specific and unique way. Latina migrant women’s experiences are not only unique, though; they are characterized by increased difficulties in accessing social institutions in the U.S., as well as increased barriers to integrating into American society. Latina migrants experience oppression in the U.S. differently than any other individuals in the United States. Critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw created a framework for understanding how specific combinations of identity factors, as with Latina migrants, affect individuals in unique ways (1994). Her framework, “intersectionality,” provides a basis upon which to analyze how the combination of certain identity factors increases the vulnerability of certain demographics to oppression in the United States.

Crenshaw developed the framework of intersectionality in response to one black woman’s experience in seeking a job. This woman was denied a job she was well-qualified for without reason; she brought her case to a local court, where she argued that she did not get the job because she was both black, and a woman. The company hired black people and women, yet only hired black men and white women. To that company, the black woman did not qualify to fill either of these roles available. Thus, Crenshaw highlighted the importance of addressing the multiple identity factors individuals hold, which could be overlooked and create a space of oppression and exclusion from society (Ted Talk 2016).

A great deal of migration scholarship lacks an intersectional perspective. Existing literature typically analyzes Latinx migration in the United States, or the relationship between
gender and migration. Very little work has addressed how both being Latinx and a woman shape the migration experience, and how these identity factors work concordantly to shape migration in a unique way. One important exception to this is sociologist Giocanda Herrera, who extensively discusses the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity in migration (Herrera 2013: 472, 482). Yet my research includes one more identity factor which I assert is essential in understanding Latina women’s migratory experiences: having the undocumented immigration status.

**Latinx Nationality**

In order to best explain the intersectionality of identity factors which affect Latina migrants in the United States, I will first address nationality. Nationality shapes Latinx migrants’ experiences most prominently because the lives of Latinx immigrants in the United States are fundamentally shaped by immigration policies. These policies make statements about who can or cannot enter the U.S. legally, and this has far-reaching repercussions for immigrants who enter the country without approval by the government. Furthermore, American immigration policy has most recently criminalized the act of living undocumented in the United States. This especially affects Latinx immigrants because of the history of American companies (especially in agriculture) recruiting Latinx workers, and the historically exploitative nature of this work. American immigration policy is specifically discriminatory against Latinx migrants; furthermore, American immigration policies are gendered and the process is definitively easier for migrant men (Salcido and Menjívar 2013: 336). In order to demonstrate how the specific intersectionality of being Latinx and a woman create “interlocking systems of oppression” for Latina migrants in the United States (Crenshaw 1994), I trace the history of race in American immigration policies,
then explain how American immigration policies fundamentally shape the lives of Latinx migrants specifically.

Although race was never an explicit factor in determining how to formulate immigration policies, it has been an important aspect of policymaking because American policymakers had preconceptions about how they wanted America to develop, which were shaped by racism within American society (Armenta 2017). Immigration policies inherently make assertions about who is a “good immigrant” and who is a “bad immigrant,” and because the policies which were created circuitously made the immigration and legalization process easier for non-colored immigrants, “bad immigrants” took on a racist undertone (Armenta 2017: 16; Willen 2007: 338). Later in the history of U.S. immigration policy, The Asiatic Exclusion Laws (including the Chinese Exclusion Law, the Gentleman’s Agreement, and the Asiatic Barred Zone) were overtly racist and exclusionary for certain immigrant groups based on race. These policies were followed by the quota system in 1924, which was based on seeking “desirable” immigrants while excluding those deemed “undesirable” (Ly and Weil 2010; Armenta 2017: 16). Undesirable immigrants were those who were deemed to most likely need government assistance when they arrived, and illiterate immigrants; these classifications allowed for subjective racist determinations of which immigrant groups qualified as literate and self-supporting (Tichenor 2001; Armenta 2017: 19). Initially, racist immigration policies like these more greatly affected immigrants from Asia, Africa, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East; only later did American immigration policy specifically affect Latinx migrants (Chishti et al. 2015).

Immigrants from Latin America did not originally face the discrimination that they do today; in its first installments toward specifically Mexican migrants, American immigration policy motivated migration to the United States. The Bracero Program of 1942 actively drew
Mexican immigrants, especially men, to the United States to work “low-skilled” positions in agriculture, construction, and on the railroads (UCLA Labor Center). In 1964, though, the program was canceled in reaction to activism by farmworker groups mainly led by Cesar Chavez, which exposed the horrific conditions of some migrant farmworkers and the human rights abuses inherent in the guestworker program. With the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 (also known as the Immigration and Nationality Act, or the INA), the previously highly limited quotas for immigration opened up, and immigration vastly increased, especially from Latin American countries to the United States (Chishti et al. 2015). Because of the INA, migrant workers were able to petition to bring their families to the United States (History). In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) catalyzed the criminalization of immigration in the United States (Boston University Human Resources). This act made it illegal to work in the U.S. without legal documents, yet did nothing to reduce the economic factors pulling Latinx immigrants into the U.S., including companies sending recruiters to draw undocumented Latinx workers because they would work for less pay, and in worse conditions. Only ten years later, the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act made it illegal to exist in the United States without legal documents. This law also created a monitoring body to seek individuals with fraudulent documents or no documents, and also made it more difficult for undocumented immigrants to access government aid (Cornell Legal Information Institute).9 These policies have shaped the way that Latinx immigrants are able to gain legal status in the United States, and fundamentally how Americans perceive Latinx migrants, in terms of race.

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9 Although IRCA did have these negative impacts, this piece of legislation had very positive effects as well within the immigrant community. It provided legalization for approximately 3 million migrants, which increased these migrants’ access to education and greatly decreased their rates of poverty. IRCA thus included some aspects of positive immigration policy reform, yet its effects were limited to agricultural workers (Waslin 2011).
Gender

In addition to nationality, gender is an essential factor which shapes the way individuals experience migration. In order to explain the intersectionality of identity factors for Latina migrant women, I first explain the impact of gender on migration, then describe how gender and nationality act concordantly to shape Latina migrant women’s experiences.

According to sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, “women and men do not enter the migration process equally” (1992: 394). The cause of this inequality is patriarchal structures. Regardless of their origin, migrant women entering the United States encounter patriarchy in society; the intersectionality of gender and nationality for migrant women from Central and South America is especially problematic because these women experience the overlapping impacts of patriarchal structures in both Latin American culture and American culture. In analyzing migration from Central and South America to the United States, patriarchy in these societies both shapes women’s experiences before migration and during the decision-to-migrate process, and also in their lives in the United States. The effect of these culturally-overlapping patriarchal structures is that instead of migration to the United States being a process of empowerment for migrant women, as put forth by migration theorists in the past, it increases gendered oppression. To explain how this process works, I first analyze how patriarchy in Central and South American societies affects migrant women, then I explain the consequences of patriarchy within American immigration policy.

Patriarchy in Central and South American countries is evident in the construction of gender norms and gendered characteristics. In Latin American Catholicism, the Virgin of Guadalupe represents the ideal woman and mother (Dreby 2006: 35).\(^\text{10}\) She exhibits qualities of self-negation and martyrdom for the betterment of the family, and her role is that of a caregiver.

\(^\text{10}\) Catholicism remains the predominant religion in Latin America (Pew Research Center 2014).
She is defined by her place in the family (Dreby 2006: 35). Sacrifice is a key characteristic of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and is thus an aspect of cultural gender norms for women in Latin America (Dreby 2006: 35). These are thus important characterizations of the ideal woman and mother in Central and South American countries. Women are perceived as the caregivers of the family, which is viewed as an active role within the household yet relegates Latina women to a passive role in society as “recipients of state policy” and not as “agents, claims-makers or active citizens” (Goldring 2001: 504, 519). Because women are characterized as being passive outside of domestic life, women lack the power to decide whether to migrate, when, to where, and every other aspect of the decision-making processes regarding migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992: 394-395; De Jong 2000: 307; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992: 399). Because of patriarchal gender norms, women have significantly less power in shaping the migration process compared to male migrants. Fundamentally, patriarchal gender norms in Central and South America limit the ways in which women are able to exert power in the political sphere, which is extremely problematic for Latina women who migrate to the United States and face additional layers of patriarchal policies and gender ideologies.

American immigration policies have created a gender imbalance for migrants coming from Central and South American countries. Anthropologist Maria Olivia Salcido and sociologist Cecilia Menjívar assert that “gender hierarchies are embedded in the formulation, interpretation, and implementation of immigration laws, as experienced by immigrants” (2013: 336). Because of gendered immigration policies, migrant women encounter increased barriers to legalizing their immigration status; it is thus far more difficult for migrant women to access American society and social institutions, such as education and healthcare. Women who migrate to the United States further encounter the long history of American denial of women’s civil and political
rights, such as voting rights, their right to own property, and other basic rights to personhood (Salcido and Menjívar 2013: 339). Because of gendered limitations imposed upon migrant women through American immigration policies because of patriarchal structures in American society, it is important to analyze the factor of gender as well as nationality within immigration policies.

As Salcido and Menjívar argued, gender is an inherent factor in immigration policies; to explain the intersectionality of gender and Latinx identity for Latina migrant women, I will explain how gender works within those immigration policies which specifically address Latinx immigration to the United States. The original piece of American immigration policy meant to address specifically Latinx immigration was the Bracero Program, which created a pathway for Mexican immigrant men to legally migrate to the U.S. for work (Salcido and Menjívar 2013: 341). The successive amendments to the INA made it possible for men to petition for their wives and children (2013: 341). This initial program created a disparity in men’s and women’s access to legalization of their immigration status in the U.S., because women were consequently dependent upon their male family members to petition for them. This disparity in ability to independently acquire immigration legalization has continued due to gender norms both within Latin American and American culture, which characterize women as passive in political life. In addition, to obtain legalization in the United States immigrants must be able to show a “paper trail” to prove their residency in the U.S., which requires documents from legally working in the U.S., paying bills, or ownership of a property or business (Salcido and Menjívar 2013: 349). Yet many women arrive in the U.S. to live with their husbands or other male family members, who then put these bills and ownership documents in their name. Migrant women, then, are unable to
demonstrate a paper trail because they are unable to prove their residency through ownership documents.

Gendered labor norms are also problematic for women’s acquisition of legal immigration documents. Globalization has resulted in a shift in labor forces, especially for traditional women’s work, including childcare, cleaning, and other domestic jobs. As part of the process of globalization, many women now migrate from countries in the Global South to the Global North to fill care positions which opened up with the entrance of women into the workforce within the Global North. This system is called the “global care chain” to demonstrate how domestic work is distributed globally and based on gender (Herrera 2013: 478). Care work is often one of the only types of work, if not the only type, available for migrant women, because the domestic sphere is traditionally a space reserved for female laborers; this process of perpetuating gender norms on a global scale has the consequence of strengthening oppressive patriarchal norms throughout the globalized world (Herrera 2013: 478; Okongu and Mencher 2000: 114). This is fundamentally problematic for Latina migrants in the United States because these women are already in an extremely vulnerable position due to gendered American immigration policy; migrant women who do care work are faced with an added layer of vulnerability because they are working in patriarchal conditions where their agency is further limited. In addition, both care work and domestic labor are markets in which women experience more exploitation and mistreatment (De Casanova 2013). This kind of labor is extremely low-paying because of an international “race-to-the-bottom” in which large international corporations dictate the wages for care and domestic work, and there are always undocumented migrants who will work the same job for less pay (Okongu and Mencher 2000: 110-111). International labor norms have, through the process of globalization, affected migrant women negatively by reestablishing and perpetuating oppressive
patriarchal gender roles, decreasing women’s access to labor options, decreasing the wage value of women’s labor, and increasing migrant women’s vulnerability to exploitation in the workplace. In addition, because this work is typically informal and thus does not require women to report their work to the government, women are again left without legal documents to demonstrate working in the United States. The effect of this process is to greatly increase migrant women’s dependency on male relatives. In this way, American immigration policy reflects and perpetuates gender hierarchies for migrant women from the Global South (Salcido and Menjívar 2013: 343). Gender is a central factor in determining how immigrants are able to access citizenship, and all of its associated social, cultural, and political institutions.

Gender fundamentally shapes migration. The patriarchal gender hierarchy in American society, evident in the history of women’s rights in the U.S., means that any woman who immigrates to the United States is already at a disadvantage compared to male migrants. Gender also acts intersectionally with the Latinx identity to further increase difficulties faced by women migrating from Central and South America. Because of the differences in patriarchal structures between Central and South American countries and the United States, migration does offer an opportunity for a change, this shift is not inherently liberating or empowering, but instead simply reorganizes gender relations under a new patriarchal structure (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992: 410). Migrant women specifically coming from Central and South America not only encounter patriarchy in the U.S., but also come up against U.S. immigration policy which highly limits their ability to legalize their status independently, affectively perpetuating women’s dependency on male family members. The intersectionality of the identities of being a woman, and being Latina, create a unique set of barriers which these migrant women must face and surmount in order to live in the United States.
Migration Status

In addition to the identity factors of gender and nationality intersecting to affect Latina migrants in unique ways, having an undocumented immigration status acts upon these factors. Latina migrants who are undocumented not only have specific and unique experiences, but are further vulnerable to oppression in the United States because of the interaction of these three factors. In order to explain how being undocumented further limits and oppresses migrants, I describe how being undocumented affects migrants, how it is associated with conceptions of deservingness and personhood, and its effects of fear among migrant populations in the United States. This exists in relevant literature, yet its implications in intersectionality with both gender and nationality have not been explored; I analyze this in my discussion section. In this section, I explain that because the undocumented status is criminalized in the United States, undocumented migrants are treated as subhuman and barred from their basic human rights in the United States.

Effects of criminalization of the undocumented status: Through criminalizing the state of being undocumented, American immigration policy relegates undocumented immigrants to an extremely vulnerable position. Undocumented immigrants have highly limited access to American society and social institutions like education, jobs, and healthcare. Furthermore, because it is illegal in the U.S. to exist undocumented, these migrants are subject to deportation at any time. Two specific pieces of legislation have focused on increasing the “deportability” of undocumented immigrants in the U.S.: the Secure Communities Program, and section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1996 (Kline 2016). These laws increased the power of local police to act as immigration enforcement agents, making it possible for them to be deputized into acting as ICE agents. This means that any police officer who finds an
undocumented immigrant may arrest and detain them until a true ICE agent arrives and the migrant can be deported. By increasing the deportability of immigrants regardless of their geographic location within the U.S., the metaphorical border between the US and Latin America is moved into the intimate lives of Latinx immigrants in the United States (Kline 2017: 397; Coleman 2007; Silvey 2007). In this way, the danger of the border, which is extremely traumatic for many immigrants because of its militarization and dehumanization of Latinx immigrants, moves into the daily spaces of migrants living in the United States (Silvey 2007: 76). This border also represents a boundary between American society and outside states, and thus its metaphorical extension into the daily lives of immigrants represents their exclusion from American society even though they already crossed the state boundary (Silvey 2007: 76).

Because of the trauma of moving the border inward and through increasing the deportability of undocumented Latinx migrants, immigration policies create an atmosphere of fear for these communities. Through this process, American immigration policy effectively “attacks every aspect of an illegal’s life” (Armenta, quoting an anti-immigration lawyer, 2017: 34). Through criminalizing the very act of living undocumented in the United States, American immigration policy creates a context of fear and exclusion for undocumented Latinx immigrants.

One useful paradigm to understand the reasoning behind this process of dehumanization is through analyzing Michel Foucault’s theory of biopolitics. Biopolitics describes the processes by which governments control all aspects of the lives of those it governs over (Kline 2016: 399). In this way, governments use divisive identity categories like race to separate groups within the state and thus more easily exert control over the population. Biopolitics directly relate to immigration policy because these laws shape the demographic makeup of the United States and the ways in which groups interact within U.S. borders by constructing how they self-identify and
view each other (Armenta 2017: 34). Immigration policy fundamentally affects the value
associated with certain immigrant groups, and because of the racist nature of American
immigration policy, this is extremely problematic. Latinx immigrants are affected because not
only is it more difficult for Latinx migrants to legalize their status (Gomberg-Muñoz 2017), but
because of this, they are determined to be “undeserving” of access to society and social
institutions and are dehumanized by the American government and society.

Assertions of deservingness and personhood: Because of racist and criminalizing
immigration policies in the United States, Latinx migrants in the U.S. are viewed as being
undeserving of the rights bestowed to American citizens (Willen 2007: 332). This occurs through
a process of homogenizing Latin American immigrants as “Mexican,” associating these
individuals with being undocumented, and the subsequent criminalization of the undocumented
status. Consequently, Latinx individuals in the U.S. are viewed as outsiders and non-American
(Kline 2016: 339). This process of constructing “deservingness,” or non-deservingness, for
Latinx immigrants occurs simultaneously with the construction of “policy narratives” which act
upon American societal hegemony and thus shape the way the average American views Latinx
immigrants (Fernandez 2013). Because of the racism within American immigration policies and
the way this interacts with American society, Latinx immigrants are viewed as undeserving of
access to society and social institutions. “Legality” and “illegality” in conversation about
migration thus incur an immense amount of hidden meaning, with illegality (in reference to
undocumented status) meaning a lack of deservingness (Newton 2008; Willen 338; Salcido and
Menjívar 2013: 347). A major consequence of asserting that Latinx immigrants are undeserving
of access to American society and social institutions is the dehumanization of Latinx immigrants
in the United States, which then allows for such human rights abuses as racial profiling of Latinx individuals and undue detainment, arresting Latinx individuals as “collateral” during ICE raids of factories and businesses, and society-wide discrimination (Lopez et al. 2016: 2; Kline 2016: 399). The consequence of being undocumented as well as Latinx is to be determined undeserving of basic human rights in the United States, and thus subhuman.

Immigrant Policing: Because Latinx migrants are viewed as subhuman in the United States, fear-based policing tactics are viewed as just by the U.S. government and American citizens.¹¹ The door is open for human rights abuses in the immigrant policing system. Once undocumented, immigrants are faced with the force of the powerful U.S. government body for controlling illegal immigration, titled Immigration Control and Enforcement (ICE). ICE polices illegal immigration by actively pursuing undocumented immigrants as criminals. Immigration enforcement in the United States operates as a fear-based policing system. Not only does fear-based policing apply to the intersectionality of being Latinx and undocumented, but women face even greater consequences of fear-based policing.

Certain policies have made this possible, including the INA and IRCA as the most foundational pieces. Other policies are aimed at immigrants working in certain sectors, like the National Labor Relations Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act; these laws exempt agricultural workers from mandatory overtime pay and other securities (National Farmworker Ministry). The Affordable Care Act of 2010 prevents undocumented immigrants from accessing health

¹¹ One study found that Americans are more likely to condone punishment of Mexican immigrants than Canadian immigrants, no matter their legal status (Mukherjee et al. 2013). This is extremely problematic for Latinx immigrants because Americans often homogenize Latin American ethnicities, colloquially referring to anyone who appears Latin American as “Mexican.” By drawing Latinx immigrants are faced with increased barriers to accessing citizenship because of these determinations of “Americanness,” as evident through racist quota limits, and exclusionary policies. It is more difficult for Latinx immigrants to be granted visas, refugee status, or citizenship, and far more easy for Latinx immigrants to slip into the “undocumented” status.
insurance (Zavella 2016: 36; De León 2015). Other immigration policies like these are part of a “multilevel and aggressive immigration regime” (Kline 2016: 396). This policing regime is based on utilizing fear to control the population of non-desirable immigrants in the United States, where desirability is drawn in racial lines; the use of fear is a biopolitical maneuver to exert control on such immigrants (DeLeón 2017). Through using fear, the American state attempts to deter Latinx immigration by actively barring individuals from their basic needs; through utilizing fear-based policing on Latinx immigrants within the United States, the American government tries to drive migrants to “self-deport” (Kline 2016: 397). Through the use of fear-based policing, made possible through criminalizing the act of being undocumented in the United States, the U.S. government creates an intensely negative and stress-filled atmosphere for undocumented Latinx immigrants living in the United States as a tactic to force them to leave, or even to turn them away at the border.

Women especially feel the negative consequences of fear-based immigrant policing in the United States. These consequences are evident in the embodied effects of immigrant policing for migrant women. Immigration policy affects migrant women’s health by preventing their access through exclusionary healthcare policies and making it illegal for undocumented immigrants to drive without a license. These criminalizing policies have specifically negative effects on migrant women, which is evident in health impacts and women’s inability to access healthcare services and escape situations of domestic violence.

The negative effects of fear-based immigrant policing are especially felt by immigrant women, since women are typically responsible for orchestrating the healthcare of children (Doering-White et al. 2014); obtaining healthcare for their children and themselves requires being able to access transportation to the clinic or healthcare office, which is often difficult
without driving a car. Women also feel the effects of fear-based policing in stress-related health complications, which have been documented through analyzing the effects of immigration raids upon migrant communities in the United States (Seelye 2017; Novak, Geronimus, and Martinez-Cardoso 2017; Lopez et al. 2017: 4). The impacts of stress are especially embodied by women, as demonstrated by higher rates of low birthweight (LBW) children born to Latina after immigration raids; LBW births is a direct consequence of the impact of stress on a mother’s body (Novak, Geronimus, and Martinez-Cardoso 2017). Another danger to migrant women’s bodies occurs due to the same immigrant policing system which simultaneously creates anxiety and fear among immigrant communities as well as prevents their access to healthcare to address this negative psychological state. Women feel the consequences of this most acutely because high levels of anxiety and fear lead to increased aggression in humans, which has been demonstrated to increase rates of domestic and spousal violence/abuse (Neuman et al. 2010; National Council Against Domestic Violence; Martin and Bronon 2017). Migrant women then lack access to mental health services because they cannot pay for the services without health insurance, and cannot drive to clinics or health offices because they cannot obtain a driver’s license (Kline 2017: 12,13). Women in the United States are supposed to have access to services to leave domestic abuse situations regardless of immigration status, though, yet there are flaws within this social safety-net (Salcido and Menjívar 2013). The policy meant to provide aid to these women, titled the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), is heteropatriarchal because it prioritizes heterosexual women’s cases, as well as those for women who perform normalized gender roles (such as housework or domestic tasks only) (Salcido and Menjívar 2013: 349). Through this system, not only has fear-based policing increased migrant women’s vulnerability to negative health effects and increased the likelihood of domestic abuse, but when these women seek
recourse, they are unintentionally part of a system which perpetuates the patriarchal forces of their own oppression. Being undocumented has the consequence of heavily limiting access to healthcare, and thus when women are the victims of physical abuse, or experience fear-related health problems during pregnancy, many undocumented Latina women are unable to access healthcare.

Being an undocumented immigrant in the United States is problematic because it is not only an illegal status in the U.S., but it is also criminalized and heavily policed. This is especially so for Latinx migrants because of racism, exemplified in racial profiling by law enforcement officers. Furthermore, undocumented women are especially vulnerable because of the effects of fear in migrant communities; these include not only health issues in pregnancy, but also increasing rates of gender-based violence. These are made worse by a lack of accessible support for undocumented women to leave dangerous and unsafe situations, and to get access to healthcare. This is just one way in which being a woman, from Central or South America, and undocumented fundamentally shape the lives of Latina migrant women when they migrate to the United States.

My research uses this paradigm of intersectionality to analyze the structural forces shaping the lives of undocumented Latina migrant women living in the United States. Relevant literature demonstrates how each of these identity factors alone creates oppression for individuals living in the United States, and demonstrates how these identity factors are interrelated. For example, being a woman is important to migration because of patriarchal norms in the U.S., but this is also related to the Latin American identity because of similar, yet unique patriarchal gender norms in Central and South America which interact with those in the U.S. through the migration process. One consequence is migrant women’s increased dependency on male family
members, which is also a consequence of Latina migrant women being undocumented; in addition, being both undocumented and a Latina migrant increases this dependency because it is easier for male migrants to access legalization of their immigration status. In the following sections, I further outline how the women I worked with through interviews and participant observation described this intersectional impact of the identity factors of gender, nationality, and the undocumented immigration status affected them in unique ways.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Through interviews and participant observation, I found that the lives of Latina migrant women living in Central Florida were fundamentally shaped by the consequences of the intersectionality of gender, nationality, and their undocumented status. As existing literature demonstrates, each of these identity factors has specific consequences for migrants living in the United States which act independently; these identity factors also have interrelated effects which increase the oppression of migrant women from Central and South American countries. Concurrently, I discovered that Latina migrants in the U.S. found ways around the oppressive structures in their lives by accessing American social institutions in unique ways. Despite the immense barriers which Latina migrant women face daily, I found that women resist in small yet meaningful ways through the simple act of accessing their basic human rights. I will discuss how the intersectionality of nationality, gender, and the undocumented migration status affected women’s lives by discussing undocumented Latina migrants’ access to work, education, and healthcare. In each of these sections, I will not only describe how they relate to the intersectionality of these women’s identities, but also how women resist the oppressive consequences of this intersection.
Women’s Work

In accordance with the relevant literature, undocumented Latina migrants in Central Florida expressed the limitations to the types of work available to them in the United States. Because they were undocumented, the women were unable to work anyplace which asked for a social security number; this meant that the types of labor available to them were generally informal, and thus rife with exploitation including withholding of pay, overworking the women, failing to warn of the dangers of direct contact with agricultural chemicals, and more. Women I interviewed worked for close-to-minimum wage, because they were unable to obtain higher-paying jobs because of their undocumented status, and also because of a lack of education. One woman, Isabella, also explained that it is much easier for men to find work, and that men receive better wages for the same labor in the United States. Thus, the forces shaping the way in which these women’s labor was limited are consequences of the intersectionality of gender, migration status, and nationality. In order to demonstrate the breadth of the effects of this intersectionality, I will first describe which jobs the women I interviewed worked, then explain why they were limited to these jobs, and finally describe the effects of working these types of jobs. To conclude, I will analyze how women’s access to certain types of labor is shaped by the intersectionality of their identities as women, Latina, and undocumented.

Of the women I interviewed, many worked in their sending country as well as in the United States. Often the types of work they engaged in were similar in both places, despite the fact that many women explained how they migrated to the U.S. to find better work. The fact that migrant women were still limited to similar types of labor is a consequence of the globalization of care labor (Herrera 2013: 478; Okongu and Mencher 2000: 114). Because of this, migrant women from the Global South are limited to these types of jobs, while women from the Global
North are engaging in the jobs which provide better pay, opportunities for advancement, etc. To describe how this process works, I include a table demonstrating the work women did before migrating to the U.S., and the work they engaged in within the U.S.:
Yelena was able to work as a nurse only after she applied for, and received, DACA and was therefore given a social security number.

Laura was able to work as an accountant assistant because she studied at technical school for accounting while she worked full-time in Mexico. She obtained a certification for accounting in Mexico.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sending country</th>
<th>Work in sending country</th>
<th>Work in the United States (chronologically)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Farm labor</td>
<td>Door factory&lt;br&gt;Plant nursery&lt;br&gt;Trash/recycling company&lt;br&gt;Cleaning hotels&lt;br&gt;Mixing chemicals for a plant nursery&lt;br&gt;Currently: Receptionist at FWAF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celia</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Picking tobacco and peanuts</td>
<td>Cleaning dishes during the day, cleaning offices at night&lt;br&gt;Waitressing at a Mexican restaurant&lt;br&gt;Currently: Domestic labor (unpaid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatiana</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Factory&lt;br&gt;Currently: Domestic labor (unpaid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosalita</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Fruit packing&lt;br&gt;Currently: Domestic labor (unpaid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisa</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Farm labor&lt;br&gt;Landscaping&lt;br&gt;Currently: Cleaning houses (paid in cash)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelena</td>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>(too young)</td>
<td>Chik-fil-a&lt;br&gt;Nursing 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Nanny&lt;br&gt;Cleaning offices&lt;br&gt;Accountant assistant 13</td>
<td>Cleaning houses&lt;br&gt;Waitressing at a Mexican restaurant&lt;br&gt;Currently: Domestic labor (unpaid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Cleaning houses</td>
<td>Currently: Domestic labor (unpaid)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 Yelena was able to work as a nurse only after she applied for, and received, DACA and was therefore given a social security number.

13 Laura was able to work as an accountant assistant because she studied at technical school for accounting while she worked full-time in Mexico. She obtained a certification for accounting in Mexico.
The table above demonstrates how Latina migrant women in Central Florida are predominantly limited to the types of labor outlined by Herrera, Okongu and Mencher as being part of the global care chain. These women generally worked in domestic labor, childcare, or agricultural labor – all types of work which provide very little pay and are often informal. Women were limited to these jobs because of their gender and also because they were undocumented; women were only able to access work which did not require a social security number. The most obvious exceptions were Yelena and Isabella, whose stories represent how difficult it was for them to escape the limitations of accessible labor in the United States. In order to best explain these processes, I will first tell Celia Laura’s stories to explain the effects of intersectional oppression for Latina migrants in the United States. I will then share the stories of Isabella and Yelena, to demonstrate how they escaped the limitations of work generally available to undocumented Latina migrants in the United States. After these stories I will analyze the forces which shaped these women’s experiences in the workforce, and how Isabella and Yelena were able to find better work.

_Celia_: Celia’s home was a small trailer house in an Apopka neighborhood. I met her there, with Dr. Newcomb and Jasmine, who translated for us. Celeste was quiet, but welcomed us into her home. As our interview commenced, her daughter, Raquel, twirled around the gathered chairs and couch, repeatedly showing us her _Frozen_-themed toys and calling, “Anna, Anna!”

Celia came from an impoverished family in the countryside of Guatemala, where she worked all day picking tobacco and peanuts with her whole family. Her father migrated to the U.S. first to attempt to make more money and send it back to her family, yet his remittances were
not enough. Her uncle decided that the oldest children must also migrate to work in the U.S. for the survival of her family, so she and her older brother traveled with a chain of coyotes with her uncle. This experience was extremely difficult for Celia, because she was unable to get sleep during the three days they traveled atop a train from Mexico to the United States, nor could she eat because there was no food available for such travelers as herself.

After this traumatic experience, Celia found herself in California, where she worked cleaning dishes during the day, and cleaning offices and schools at night. She lived with her uncle, who was very strict about what Celia wore and did – she had to go to Church with him, and wear only dresses. He also insisted that all of her phone calls must be on speaker, so that he could hear what was said. Celia realized she needed to leave this uncle, so she soon left to live with her other uncle living in the United States. This uncle, though, was a drunkard and held parties at his house often, despite the fact that her sleeping space was the couch in the main room; she felt that he was “selling” her to men he invited to these parties, because she “owed” him for living in his house, and he pushed her to socialize with his friends during the parties. Celia left this situation to live with the first uncle, but when she did, the second uncle threw her belongings away, including all of her documents from Guatemala and the false passport she bought, which had been very expensive. During this entire experience, she was still working two jobs, and not sleeping because she worked one at night, and one during the day.

Her only recourse was to contact her father, who found a service which would drive her across the country from California to Florida. The service cost her approximately $2,000. When she had finally saved up the money, she traveled to Florida and moved in with her father and seven other men living in the house. When she explained this to us, Celia spread her hands to demonstrate that the trailer in which we were sitting was the same place she had lived with eight
men. I was astounded; it was a small space, and I couldn’t imagine living in such cramped quarters with eight men, especially being the only woman.

Celia continued her story, describing how she was automatically responsible for cooking for the men because of her gender. They developed a system where the men bought the groceries, and Celia cooked them dinner each day. She was without other work during this time because she couldn’t find anywhere which would hire her, so she went with the men to their roofing job and helped out of boredom. Yet she became known in the community as a good cook, which finally led to her finding work at a Mexican restaurant. She liked this job, and met her husband there one year after she began working there. Yet her husband quickly grew jealous of her interactions with other men, and insisted that she stop working. She wanted to keep working, but he would not allow it.

Now, Celia cooks, cleans, and takes care of their daughter Raquel. She sometimes brings her daughter to Orlando City soccer games and to Disney World, but she feels bored because these are the only activities her husband allows her to do. She feels lonely because she doesn’t know many other women in her community, but when she can, she goes to Hope CommUnity Center to meet other Latina migrants.

**Laura:** I met Laura at FWAF. She walked in shyly, her long hair moving lightly as she sat down at the table. She spoke lightly and slowly enough so that Dr. Newcomb and I were able to pick up most of what she said, although Angel still translated for us. Laura was from Mexico, and although she migrated with two of her siblings to California, most of her family remains across the border. She began working in care labor (still in Mexico) when she was only fifteen years old as a nanny, and began cleaning as well when she was seventeen. She applied for a visa
to work in the U.S., but was denied because she could not demonstrate enough proof of wealth. She immigrated to the United States with similar goals to Isabella’s; she wanted to work just one year in the U.S., then return with savings to her family in Mexico. Yet when she arrived in California she had an enormous debt to pay the coyote for facilitating her border crossing, so she was forced to remain until she had paid that debt. At first, she tried to get a job at a small vegetable market, but the owner refused since, being undocumented, she did not have a social security number. She became desperate for a job, and so she decided to clean houses in San Antonio. The work was hard – she did not get breaks, and it was physically intense labor – but she continued because she had no other options.

When Laura’s father called from Florida with an opportunity for her to be driven to the state, she accepted. In Florida, she recommenced her search for work, specifically in plant nurseries, but she could not find any openings. She finally found a job as a waitress in a Mexican waitress, which is culturally viewed as demeaning for women. As she recounted this part of her story, she halted every few words; Angel picked his words carefully to translate. Laura had been sexually assaulted. “She had to do what they told her to do,” Angel spoke, slowly. After this, Laura tried to find another job at one of the many plant nurseries in Apopka, yet again had no success. Her escape arrived through marriage, when she met her would-be husband at the restaurant and, after their marriage and her succeeding pregnancy, quit her job. Now, she stays at home while her husband works as a cook in an Italian restaurant. She takes care of their two children, and does the cooking, cleaning, and other forms of domestic labor in their household. She also volunteers at Hope CommUnity Center in her free time.
Isabella: I met Isabella at FWAF, in a wide-open room meant for events – I knew this because I had drawn crayon trees and flowers with children at the long table positioned in the room, during FWAF’s Mother’s Day event. I sat at that same table, with Dr. Newcomb to my left and our translator, Angel, across from me, when Isabella walked into the room. She was petite and wearing a pink v-neck and jeans, and she had a fierce look in her eyes. I could see her strength manifested physically as she sat down, and looked at us expectantly.

As the interview proceeded, Isabella explained to us that she never meant to permanently immigrate to the U.S.; instead, she had planned to work for one year because she’d heard that the wages were better in the U.S. She wanted to save up enough money to return to her home in Mexico and build a house for her family. This plan was subverted, though, by the surprisingly high cost of living Isabella found upon arriving in the United States. She originally worked at her brother-in-law’s door factory during the night shift, but after her grandmother died, she shifted to working at a plant nursery. She left this job for a seemingly better job at a trash and recycling company, yet this job was very difficult for her and she disliked the work. She cleaned hotels next, but could not work enough hours to make a living, so switched back to working at a plant nursery. Despite switching jobs so many times, she could find no position which allowed her to fulfill her original goal and save enough money because the lack of efficient public transportation in Central Florida necessitated the purchase of a car. Rent was higher than she had anticipated as well. As Isabella continued to work at the plant nursery, she became aware of the potential dangers of working with the pesticides and chemicals she handled for her job. When she found that she was pregnant (she had migrated to the U.S. with her husband), Isabella quit her job because she was worried about the effects of those chemicals on her unborn child. Indeed, her daughter was born with skull problems and had to get surgery when she was only
four months old, and wear a helmet for eight subsequent months. The surgery was difficult for Isabella and her husband; Isabella was forced to remain unemployed in order to care for her daughter, yet she needed more financial income because she could not get health insurance as an undocumented person, and the cost of her daughter’s treatment and care was extremely high. She and her husband got a divorce, for reasons Isabella did not explain, and she found herself in the position of being undocumented, with no income and a single mother whose daughter’s medical treatments were costing her heavily. Finally, Isabella found a part-time receptionist position at FWAF. This job paid her a living wage, and she was able to make it a full-time position after two years.

Yet Isabella’s plan didn’t work out. As many women attested, life in the United States was not as they had expected. Isabella worked in a plant nursery when she moved to Florida, with long hours and intense heat, and direct exposure to chemicals and pesticides; actually, her job at the nursery was to mix those dangerous chemicals. When she became pregnant, Isabella quit the job because she was worried about the possible effects of those chemicals on her unborn child. Indeed, her daughter was born with skull problems and had to get surgery when she was only four months old, and wear a helmet for eight subsequent months. The surgery was difficult for Isabella’s family, because she was forced to remain unemployed and take care of her daughter, and she had no health insurance. She had difficulty even finding a specialist who would treat her daughter, because, as she told me, she has no documentation. Yet she finally found a part-time receptionist position at the Farmworker Association of Florida, which she made full-time after two years.
Yelena: Yelena and I had agreed to meet at the café in Winter Springs to film her interview for FWAF in the early afternoon. I arrived early, finding an outside table and ordering my coffee. I spent extra time working on my thesis, and when Yelena found me at the table, she looked curiously at my eclectically multi-colored coded interviews. I explained my thesis topic, and as she sat down, she nodded. “I’m not ready to film today anyways because I didn’t put on my makeup, so let’s just talk.” I looked at her in surprise – she is a beautiful young woman in her late twenties, and looked elegant, with her long, straightened hair gleaming in the afternoon sunlight, dark jeans and a UCF polo shirt that suited her well. I consented to meet again to film, and so we spent the next hour in a semi-interview, in which I asked a few questions, but mainly Yelena told her story.

She was a child, as was her younger sister, when her parents emigrated from Panama to the United States. She grew up undocumented, working at Chik-fil-a because the hiring manager didn’t ask for her social security number. She drove to work because she had no other options, and each day that she did, she was afraid of being pulled over. After a while, her father found someone to give her a fake driver’s license, but the county in which she got the license somehow found out and put a warrant out for her arrest. ICE agents went to her home and barraged her father with questions. “He didn’t know his rights,” Yelena explained, and so he told the agents where she worked.

The ICE agents arrested her publicly at the Chik-fil-a and brought her to a detention center. They demanded that she tell them how she arrived in the U.S., and where her immigration documents were, but she didn’t know because she was only three years old when her family immigrated. She was put in a room with white cement walls, no windows, and one other cellmate who was a young Mexican woman who didn’t understand English. As soon as her family found
out, they hired both an immigration and a criminal attorney. The process cost her family thousands of dollars, but she was acquitted of the felonies by applying for DACA. With DACA, she was free from the trauma of the detention center, and free from the fear of driving because she could now get a license. She was able to get a job with her college degree from UCF. “DACA gives you power,” she told me, “because now you can survive. You can work, and feed yourself good food. You have choice and freedom in what you want to do. You have a way to do something with your life, legally. Before, I didn’t feel like a person.”

Analysis: Through analyzing these four women’s stories, it is evident that these women’s lives are fundamentally shaped by those structural forces which are consequences of the intersectionality of gender, nationality, and migration status. Each woman’s life is impacted similarly, yet one important aspect which I have derived from these stories is how women apply their own agency despite these immense restrictions. This is evident through the simple fact that each of these four women have succeeded in resisting structural oppression in different ways, and to different degrees.

Celia’s story fully demonstrates the power of the oppressive forces faced by Latina migrant women in the United States. Gender shaped her experience because the network available to her was predominantly male: she migrated because her uncle decided that she must, and once in the United States, her only available living situations were with male family members. She was subject to these men’s rules and expectations, and this heavily impacted her life in a negative way. Furthermore she was undocumented, so atop the stresses of living with strict and even abusive men, the only jobs she could access were in cleaning and cooking and because of the low pay of this labor, she was forced to work throughout the day and night. This
represents the intersectionality of oppressive patriarchal norms in the U.S. and her home country of Guatemala, thus demonstrating the consequence of the intersectionality of her nationality, gender, and undocumented status. Because of these three overlapping identity factors, Celia faced immense barriers to building a sustainable and happy life for herself. She finally found work that she liked, though, when she waitressed at a Mexican restaurant; yet this lasted for only a year because her husband forced her to stop working because of his jealousy. Celia’s story represents the vastness and complexity of the oppression which many undocumented Latina migrants face in life in the United States.

Similarly to Celia’s story, Laura’s story demonstrates the pervasive consequences of the intersectional identities of her gender, nationality, and undocumented status. She was only able to access traditional women’s labor as part of the global care chain, until her father sent a driver to bring her from California to Florida. She was utterly dependent on him, a man, as a pathway out of her low-paying job, where she was not treated well. Her reason for migrating to the United States was to obtain work with better wages and conditions, yet what she found was the same limitations she had experienced in Mexico; in the U.S., she only qualified for low-valued labor. Her options for work were so limited that she was forced to remain employed at the restaurant where she faced sexual assault because she could find no other work. “There was no money in Mexico,” she explained, “but it felt better there, even though the U.S. is supposed to be better.” Although Laura had expected to gain independence and a better quality of life through immigrating to the United States, she found patriarchal structures which only furthered her oppression.

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14 As translated by Miguel, who works at FWAF and acted as Dr. Newcomb and my translator during our interviews at the FWAF office in Apopka
Unlike both Celia and Laura, Isabella did escape the limitations for the types of work available to most Latina migrants in the United States. She did so despite being a single mother to a child whose hospital bills were most likely the product of a birth problem from Isabella working directly with dangerous pesticides and chemicals in the plant nursery while pregnant. Isabella worked at the plant nursery in the first place because it was the only job available to her which at least allowed for her daily survival, despite the fact that it still wasn’t enough to save up and return to Mexico as she had originally hoped. These restrictions on job availability were a result of her gender and her undocumented status, which as I have pointed out repeatedly, are interrelated with her nationality. Isabella finally found a job outside of these restrictions when she obtained a part-time position as a receptionist at FWAF, which became a full-time position after two years. She is still undocumented and has no pathway toward legalizing her status, yet she was able to obtain this job as a receptionist because of the nature of FWAF as an organization; FWAF is dedicated to improving the rights of farmworkers in Central Florida, and through this work, is active in both the immigrant and black communities in Central Florida. Thus, despite the immensity of the oppressive structures Isabella experiences in her daily life, she has successfully obtained a job with a living wage, even as a single mother, through accessing FWAF. Furthermore, because of the activist nature of FWAF in working toward the human rights of underserved populations in Central Florida, Isabella’s work is not only a method of sustaining her family in the U.S., but is also a form of resisting her intersectional oppression and working to change the context of her oppression.

Yelena also escaped the labor limitations otherwise experienced by Latina migrant women, and in doing so, she found a sense of power and a freedom of choice. Differently from Isabella, though, Yelena’s ability to access a better job occurred as a direct result of obtaining
legalization of her immigration status. Before she had DACA she did not have access to work outside of her low-paying job at Chik-fil-a, despite having obtained a college degree in nursing. Yet with DACA and the legalization of her immigration status, Yelena was able to work in her field of study, which offered higher pay, benefits, and importantly, fulfill her personal goal of working as a nurse. Yelena associated her ability to work as a nurse with power, independence, and a way to integrate into American society far more fully than was possible before she obtained DACA.15 With DACA, Yelena no longer faced the oppressive consequences of the intersectionality of nationality, gender, and an undocumented status, but instead faced only those consequences of being a woman and Latina. With the ability to gain a legal status, Yelena’s life was fundamentally changed. Yelena’s story demonstrates that having an undocumented status is an essential aspect of Latina migrants’ oppression, and thus it is of tantamount importance to address the structural factors which make it more difficult for immigrants from Central and South America, and even more so for women from these areas, to gain legalization of their immigration status (Salcido and Menjívar 2013: 339).

As demonstrated in Laura and Celia’s stories, many Latina migrants remain undocumented, and thus face immense barriers to making a sustainable living in the United States. They are fundamentally limited in the kinds of jobs they can do because of limitations associated with the intersection of their gender, nationality, and undocumented status. These limitations were set in place by the globalization of patriarchal gender norms, gendered

15 As mentioned previously in this thesis, DACA is currently an extremely precarious piece of immigration legislation. Although DACA was rescinded by President Trump in 2017, it has been contested by two federal judges and its future is uncertain. Because our original purpose for meeting was to discuss DACA, Yelena and I talked extensively about what she will do if she is unable to reapply once her DACA ends (recipients must reapply every two years). Yelena is very worried about returning to that state of powerlessness which she experienced until she obtained DACA, especially since she has returned to the University of Central Florida for a second degree in biomedicine and hopes to go to medical school afterward. If she returns to being undocumented, although she will be able to study for the degree, there is no chance that she would be able to work as a doctor, nor even in her current position as a nurse.
American immigration policies, and fear-based immigrant policing, which bar migrant women from the types of work available to other people in the U.S., and as a consequence, other social institutions; Latina migrants are essentially excluded from accessing their basic legal rights (Zavella 2016: 36). As well as limitations to types of work, I found that other consequences of the intersectionality of these women’s identity factors included limiting their access to education, healthcare, and a community of other women. In the following sections, I will explain how Latina women described their access to these social institutions, which was shaped by the types of labor they had access to, as a consequence of the oppressive structural forces women faced.

**Healthcare**

I found that Latina migrants’ access to healthcare was directly affected by the limitations related to the intersectionality of being Latinx, a woman, and undocumented in the United States. Access to healthcare was irrevocably interwoven with access to other institutions, most prominently, types of labor as addressed above. Yet despite these immense barriers to women accessing their own wellbeing and good health, I found that many women still found ways to access affordable healthcare, demonstrating how these women resist the oppressive structures they face in the United States. To describe the process of how the intersectionality of women’s identity factors affects their health and access to health, I will first explain the negative health impacts felt by Latina migrants, then describe how these women interacted with health institutions to access health services for themselves and their families. For both of these sections, I will analyze women’s experiences through the framework of intersectionality.
Negative health impacts of identity: Undocumented Latina migrants experience negative health impacts because of the structural limitations they face in their lives in the United States as associated with the intersectionality of their gender, nationality, and undocumented status. Since undocumented Latina migrants are generally limited to informal jobs, they are often unable to obtain health insurance; furthermore, women are unable to get worker’s compensation for injuries and negative health impacts at the workplace because their supervisors know they are undocumented, and so can report them if they attempt to get compensation (Horton 2016). I found that undocumented women in Central Florida can even experience increased health risks in their work, as exemplified by Isabella’s daughter, who was born with skull complications related to Isabella’s direct contact with chemicals and pesticides at the plant nursery. In addition to this risk, studies have demonstrated that being undocumented and female in the U.S. is associated with negative health consequences because of the embodied impacts of stress on women’s bodies (Seelye 2017; Novak, Geronimus, and Martinez-Cardoso 2017; Lopez et al. 2017: 4). These consequences specifically affect women because they are most obvious during pregnancy; thus women like Isabella face the dual health risks of a dangerous work environment plus the physiological effects of fear and stress. Isabella actually discussed this fear in our interview; she stated that she is afraid because people in her community know that there is a constant threat of ICE agents showing up at their door to deport family members; the fear of deportation has become omnipresent in the lives of Isabella and others in her community. Other women spoke of their fear as well; similarly to Isabella, Yelena told me that she was afraid because she had heard of people in her community being caught without identity documents and subsequently deported. She explained that this impacted her social life; she was afraid to become too familiar with other people her age because she could not be sure if she could trust them. In
addition to these women, Celia, Laura, and Elisa also told me that they experienced fear of deportation in their daily lives. This fear, atop the negative health consequences of the labor Latina migrants could access, are factors which increase Latina migrants’ structural vulnerability to health issues in the United States in a unique and specific way. This vulnerability is the direct consequence of the intersectionality of gender, migration status, and nationality which shape the types of work available to Latina migrants, as well as the context of fear in which they exist in the United States.

**Barriers to accessing health services:** In my research I found that not only did Latina migrant women experience increased health problems, but they also encountered immense barriers in accessing health services in the United States. I found that this was true specifically for undocumented Latina migrants because of their undocumented status, and also because of their gender. To explain how these barriers existed specifically for undocumented Latina women, I will outline the barriers to accessing healthcare as described by women in our interviews:

For Isabella, healthcare was an immense challenge in her life because of her daughter’s skull problems. She told me that she experienced difficulty in obtaining a specialist for her daughter’s particular problem, and when she finally did, the costs of her daughter’s healthcare was very expensive. In addition, Isabella found it very difficult to find transportation to her daughter’s doctor appointments because Isabella cannot drive, since she is undocumented.

Laura also mentioned facing difficulty in finding transportation to health services. If she needed to go to a clinic or hospital, she explained that she would ask her friend, yet this friend was only available to drive her on a limited basis. Laura experienced discrimination at a hospital in Central Florida, where she brought her daughter when she noticed asthmatic symptoms.
Despite the hospital care providers seeing her daughter multiple times, they did not catch her daughter’s pre-diabetic symptoms for seven years. Instead, when her daughter complained of symptoms which should have been obviously pre-diabetic, the doctor recommended for Laura to simply reduce her daughter’s portion of food, and gave her medicine which did not help. After this experience, Laura stopped seeking health services at the hospital and switched to Apopka Community Health, which she said is far better than the hospital.

Patricia also went to a clinic in Apopka, yet chose the clinic for different reasons than Laura; Patricia has had negative experiences at the clinic, yet continued to seek healthcare there because it was far cheaper than the larger health centers. She pointed out abuses she noticed in the clinic with doctors and staff who sometimes refuse to serve certain individuals, or make it extremely difficult for these individuals to obtain healthcare. Patricia felt that the staff tried to coerce her into signing paperwork in English, which she couldn’t read. She related these abuses to her migration status, explaining that the staff and doctors knew she was undocumented.

The barriers which Isabella, Laura, and Patricia addressed in their interviews were directly related to the intersectionality of their identities as women, Latina, and undocumented migrants. Isabella’s daughter’s skull condition was a consequence of her work with pesticides, which was necessary because she could find no other labor; her labor limitations are the consequence of the intersectionality of her undocumented migration status, her Latina identity, and her gender, since undocumented Latina women are paid less and have less access to jobs. Her life was then shaped by the costs of her daughter’s healthcare, which were far higher since Isabella did not have health insurance, as a product of the informal nature of her work (Zavella 2016). In addition, Laura and Patricia were unable to obtain good healthcare outside of community clinics, which, although more affordable, are also spaces where undocumented
women face discrimination and abuse. These barriers to women’s accessing healthcare are consequences of discrimination and stigma associated with the undocumented migration status. Even more fundamentally to their accessing health services, undocumented migrant women face difficulty in even getting to health centers because of a lack of legal and efficient transportation. Yet these women did access health services for themselves and their families as acts of resisting the oppressive structures otherwise barring them from such services, and they did so by seeking more informal health centers in the community clinics in Apopka. Furthermore, when women were unable to drive themselves, they found other ways to get to health centers, as exemplified by Isabella, who would ask her friend to transport her. Thus despite the immense barriers undocumented Latina migrants faced, they found ways around these barriers to obtain health services they needed.

Education

Education played an important part in shaping how the women I interviewed were able to navigate life in the United States. It shaped how women interacted with American social institutions, as exemplified in Patricia’s story of her interactions with staff at a health clinic in Apopka; because she could not read English, she was vulnerable to certain types of abuse and exploitation. Yet education not only affected how undocumented Latina migrants interacted with these institutions, but it also represented a barrier between undocumented Latina migrants and the rest of American society as a whole. These women’s levels of education were fundamentally shaped by gender norms in their home context, and they were also unable to access education in the United States because of limitations due to the intersectionality of their identities as undocumented, women, and Latina. I will explain first how this intersectionality shaped
women’s levels of and access to education, then how the resulting lack of education for these women impacted their lives in the United States. Finally, I will describe how these women identified the problem of their lack of education, and then found ways to circumvent the barriers to their education and thus resist their oppression.

*Structures shaping women’s access to education:* Education is a factor which heavily affects the kinds of jobs available to an individual. As I discussed in the data section about labor, the jobs women I interviewed were able to access fundamentally shaped their lives, especially since these types of work were mainly informal and required the majority of women’s time to make a survivable wage. As I also explained in that section, two women, Isabella and Yelena, were able to access better jobs than the other women. Isabella obtained her position with FWAF through connecting with the organization and working as a receptionist; I assert that she was able to break through the structural oppression otherwise limiting undocumented Latina women because of the immigrant rights-oriented nature of FWAF as an organization. Yet Yelena was able to access a professional career in nursing, and was working toward a medical degree to then become a doctor; her success in obtaining a job which would be completely unavailable to her otherwise was a direct product of her ability to access education. To describe the structural forces barring the other women I interviewed from the same opportunities, I will compare Yelena’s experiences to the other women’s and explain the impact of this difference.

Yelena was able to access education in the first place because she was only a child when her family migrated to the U.S. from Panama. She grew up in Central Florida, and thus learned to speak fluent English by the time she was a teenager. She attended college at the University of Central Florida despite being undocumented and obtained her degree in nursing, yet was only
able to work as a nurse when she applied or, and received, DACA once it became available in 2012.

The other migrant women I interviewed were adults when they immigrated to the U.S., and most spoke limited English. English literacy is an important factor in accessing education in the United States; this is an important irony, since English literacy is also a skill gained from accessing education in the United States. Furthermore, other migrant women I interviewed were unable to study in the U.S. because they needed to spend their time working in order to support their families; extra time was filled with household chores and childcare. Yelena’s situation was different because she was not responsible for any children, nor her household, and thus she was free to study at the University. Finally, Yelena’s migration status change upon her reception of DACA allowed her to be hired to work as a professional nurse, which fundamentally changed her life in the United States; she stated that it gave her “power” and “freedom of choice.” This is a major difference between Yelena’s situation and that of the other migrant women I interviewed, because they were not eligible for DACA due to the age restrictions for applicants, and thus even if they were able to obtain a college degree as Yelena did, they would be unable to work professionally. This comparison demonstrates that gender, nationality, and migration status interacted intersectionally for the undocumented Latina migrants to increase their oppression; with even one change – the legalization of her migration status – Yelena was able to access far better work opportunities. Furthermore, because she was of the younger generation of migrants, Yelena was not limited to the same degree as the other migrant women by patriarchal gender norms in Latin American culture. She was able to obtain an education and legalization of her status, which allowed her a pathway out of the structural limitations for the other migrant women.
Impact of lack of education: As Yelena explained, her life changed because she was able to access education, and thus a professional career. She felt empowered, and that she was better able to apply her own agency in her life. Education is thus an important factor in how Latina migrants are able to not only survive, but also obtain a higher quality of life. Rosalita phrased this perfectly during our interview, as we sat outside of her mobile home in Apopka. She told me about the biggest hindrance faced by undocumented Latina women is their inability to get an education. She lamented that American women (who are citizens) do not understand how privileged we are to study in colleges and universities, because we are then able to get jobs that not only pay well, but that we actually enjoy working. Rosalita directly related the ability to achieve education with self-confidence and respect within society.

How women resisted these barriers: In addition to Rosalita, other women identified the importance of education; yet these women described education as fundamental to the betterment of the lives of their children. Celia wanted to teach her daughter, Raquel, the meaning of education because Celia wanted her daughter to have as many opportunities as possible. Celia explained that in order for this to happen, Raquel would have to learn how to work hard for her own education. Tatiana echoed Celia’s words, explaining that she left Mexico so that her children would have access to education. In Mexico, she explained, school costs too much because parents must also pay for lunches during the school day, as well as for their children’s uniforms. Patricia also said that despite missing her life in Mexico, she chose to remain in the U.S. to provide her children with a good education, and thus better career options. Throughout my interviews, this theme arose: migrant women knew the importance of education. They
realized that their own lives would be better if they obtained education, yet also understood the limitations to obtaining higher education personally. I assert that the women I interviewed resisted their own oppression in the United States by making sure to provide their children with access to education, and thus better opportunities in their lives.

Women also resisted the oppressive structures barring them from education by accessing courses offered at Hope CommUnity Center and other NGOs in Central Florida, including English language courses, classes in parenting, GED subjects, and more. Laura and Elisa specifically discussed engaging in these courses as a way to empower themselves as mothers and women. Laura told me that she attended an English language course and parenting course at Hope CommUnity Center to be an advocate for her children as they grow up in the United States. She explained that these courses gave her courage, as well as the ability to help other migrant women in her community. Elisa, who spoke English extremely well during our interview, explained that she learned English through taking courses at Rose Literacy\textsuperscript{16} and Hope CommUnity Center; she also obtained her GED after studying through these courses. Her motivation was to be able to speak with her son’s teachers, and be more involved in his life as he interacts with American institutions and society. Through obtaining education despite the oppression associated with the intersectionality of their gender, nationality, and undocumented status, these women demonstrated their ability to resist such oppression by reclaiming aspects of their gender, and finding power in motherhood and a community of women.

\textsuperscript{16} This organization no longer operates in Central Florida, but from what I gathered in our interview, it was an NGO which offered free English language courses for immigrants in the community.
Community Organizations & Resistance

In my analysis of undocumented Latina migrants’ access to work, healthcare, and education, I assert that the oppression faced by these women is consistent with the relevant literature. Yet I also found that migrant women resist this oppression through accessing these institutions despite oppressive structures. The most consistent way in which women resisted their oppression was by connecting with organizations in Central Florida which provided services for undocumented immigrants; these organizations most prominently included Hope CommUnity Center and the Farmworker Association of Florida.

Relevant research indicates that such organizations are indeed an important mechanism to addressing the needs of oppressed migrant populations, and are often able to facilitate the integration of migrants into the culture and society of the United States (Dwyer 2003: 104-105; Blackwell 2015: 146). Hope CommUnity Center provides these services to the immigrant community in the greater Orlando area through its citizenship workshops, English language classes, GED courses, parenting classes, and community-building events. Hope also provides a means of collective empowerment for migrant women like Laura and Elisa. Other ethnographers who have worked with immigrant-rights organizations in other contexts have also attested to their success in immigrant communities. Scholar and activist Maylei Blackwell states that such organizations have the power to “reduce institutional, cultural, linguistic, and economic barriers” for migrant women (2015: 146). Migrant women use these kinds of NGOs to build their social networks and empower each other; multiple case studies have documented migrant women also utilizing these organizations to build power for their own activist movements (Hernandez 2017; Gannett News Service 1993). I observed this occurring at Hope CommUnity Center, where there is a powerful group of immigrants and allies led mainly by one undocumented woman; this
group has repeatedly campaigned for immigrant rights in Washington, D.C. as well as conducted community events and campaigns in Central Florida. Through my observations and those of a few other researchers, organizations such as Hope CommUnity Center and FWAF are immensely powerful tools for oppressed migrants to resist the structures of their oppression.

Limitations

My thesis research was limited by my positionality as a Caucasian American citizen. As such, my life does not often intersect with that of the undocumented immigrant community; I was able to access this community through long-term volunteer work, and because of the positive rapport of my co-researchers and translators. Another limitation of my research was my lack of Spanish language skills. If I were fluent in Spanish, I would have been able to conduct the interviews in a more conversational manner, and understand more about the lives of the women I interviewed. Lastly, my research was limited by time, because it was conducted during my fourth year of undergraduate education.

Next Steps

Future research should address the role of civil organizations in actively growing the power of undocumented Latinx immigrant communities, and especially for women in these communities. This research should seek to discover what aspects of these organizations are beneficial, and what are not. In my research I worked with extremely positive organizations, yet not all civil society organizations are so; further research must interrogate how civil society can work to bridge the gap in access to human rights for undocumented Latina migrant women. Furthermore, researchers should address how American immigration policy can be changed to
increase these women’s access to their human rights in the United States. This research should be culturally informed, and should be mindful of the timely need for a solution to the problems within the American immigration system.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Through this thesis, I assert that undocumented Latina migrants face systemic oppression in the United States in a unique way, due to the intersectionality of their identities as women, undocumented, and Latina. Because of this oppression, women face exclusion from American social institutions including healthcare and education, and are extremely limited in which types of labor in which they can engage. My research is of paramount importance because the patriarchal forces of their oppression “tear at the fabric of US society,” since they exclude an entire demographic from participating fully in American society and culture (Lopez et al. 2016: 4). The oppression of undocumented Latina migrants represents a massive social cost to American society as a whole. Yet I assert that migrant women resist this oppression by pushing against the barriers they face in the United States, and accessing social institutions despite their oppression. I found that women utilized community organizations as a means to resist their oppression, and future research should consider what aspects of such organizations are most functional as tools for women to access their own power and agency. In addition, further research should be devoted to studying the activist movements within these organizations such as that I witnessed within Hope CommUnity Center, in order to assess how American immigration policy should be changed to reduce the oppression of undocumented Latina migrants. During the formulation of this thesis, activists at Hope, Mi Familia Vota, and FWAF campaigned for a “Clean DREAM Act” which would provide a pathway for undocumented immigrants to legalize their immigration status. Through my research, I found that the undocumented status itself is a powerful force of oppression and a huge barrier between migrant women and social institutions. With that finding, I assert that American immigration policies should move toward creating
opportunities for undocumented migrants to legalize their status, and specifically address the intersectional identity of undocumented Latina migrants, because of the specific and interrelated oppressive structures which only these individuals face. As Kimberlé Crenshaw asserted in her seminal work on intersectionality, this paradigm is necessary to address the specific interlocking systems of oppression faced by certain demographics. My research demonstrates that undocumented Latina migrants in the United States are just such a demographic. In conclusion, I call for immigration policies which address this oppression and increase Latina migrants’ ability to legalize their status, and so enter equally into American society with the dignity inherently deserved by all human beings.
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