UNDERSTANDING PROCESS OF LEARNING THAT IMMIGRANT COLOMBIAN
WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES UNDERGO DURING THEIR SOCIAL
INTEGRATION EXPERIENCES

by

MONICA ARBOLEDA

(Under the Direction of Aliki Nicolaides)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe and to understand the social integrations
experiences, and the learning that occurs for adult immigrant Colombian women in the
United States. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand
   their social integration experiences in the United States?

2. What types of learning, if any, take place during the social integration
   experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States
   and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change?

The epistemological frames that informed this study were experiential learning,
transformational learning, postcolonial feminist theory, social integration, and
feminization of migration. The study used a basic interpretative qualitative research
design as the methodology of inquiry and the epistemological paradigm was the
interpretive-constructive stance. Data were collected through interviews and documents.
For the analysis of the data, I used two methods. First, the holistic-contend and the constant comparative analysis method. Data analysis revealed two main findings:

First, women who participated in the study have not developed a sense of belonging to the United States regardless of time in the country or immigration status, communicating that it is necessary to develop a sense of biculturalism, more social mobility and being active citizens in order to fulfill their integration process. Acquisition of the language, understanding the culture, and isolation were the most unanticipated challenges experienced by participants. Participants began to describe their social integration experiences from the moment when they made the decision to migrate and expressed that the first two or three years after their arrival, were the most critical time for their integration process.

The second main finding was that all eight women participated in both formal and non-formal educational programs prior to and upon arrival in the United States. From the analysis emerged learning from experience as an integral type of learning during the social integration experiences. The analysis of the data also revealed a process of learning from experience that included two components: Instrumental learning (practical day-to-day learning), transformative learning (self-reflective, dialogic learning and women’s making meaning of new self).

INDEX WORDS: Adult Education, Learning from the Experience, Transformative Learning, Postcolonial Feminist Theory, Social Integration, Immigrants, Latina immigrants, Immigrant Adult Colombian Women, Refugees, Colombian Refugees, Women’s Experience, Forced Migration, Qualitative Research
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Dean of the Graduate School
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May, 2014
DEDICATION

To my mother, Martha Lucia Giraldo Valencia

To my daughter, Manuela Arboleda Giraldo

To my wife, Lisa J. Millisor

To my father, Hernando Arboleda Hecheverry

To the Colombian women here and there

Thank you all for your precious gifts. Thanks for being here in your unique ways.

This is also yours.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey would not have been possible without the support, generosity, commitment, and trust of numerous souls. I am deeply grateful to the members of my committee for their influence and contribution to my research. Dr. Aliki Nicolaides -the Chair of my committee, for providing guidance, encouragement, challenge, for your careful reading which was vital to this dissertation, and helped me to find my own voice anew. Her acute academic sensitivity was exceptional. Dr. Bradly Courtenay, for believing in me before my arrival in the United States, for his guidance, and being there with his wisdom and humor through my entire journey in the graduate studies. Dr. Diane Napier, for making this adventure, a pleasant journey through the complexities of post-colonialism, immigration and their vicissitudes. Dr. Janette Hill, for her insight into the dissertation journey. Dr. Robert J. Hill, for his wise input at the early stages of this study, and his professional guidance during my doctoral program. Each member has uniquely contributed to my study, helping me make it to this day.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Coming from somewhere else, from ‘there’, not from ‘here’, and finding oneself, therefore, simultaneously ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of a given situation, is to live in the intersections of histories and memories, experiencing both their preliminary dispersion and its subsequent translation into new vaster stipulations along unknown roads. It is a drama that is seldom chosen freely.”

Ian Chambers, Migrancy, Culture, and Identity (1994).

Colombia has suffered a long-standing internal armed conflict for over more than 50 years encompassing guerrilla, paramilitaries, military, drug-related violence, and engendering a context of violence, corruption, fear, political instability and blatant disregard for norms of international law (Riaño-Alcalá, Colorado, & Villa-Martínez, 2008; Riaño-Alcalá, Villa Martinez, & Jaramillo, 2008). The internal armed conflict is considered one of the three longest-lived conflicts in the world (the others being the Israeli-Palestinian and India-Pakistan conflicts). The impact of the armed conflict has fallen heavily upon vulnerable groups of the population: peasants, women, children, Afro, and indigenous communities. Women, in particular, have shouldered a disproportionate burden in the conflict as they suffer specific risks and confront unique vulnerabilities because of their gender (Arboleda-Giraldo, 2006; Meertens, 2006, 2010; Meertens et al., 2006; La Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado - Network of Women and Armed Conflict – NWAC, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2009, Riaño-Alcalá et al., 2008).
In Colombia, internal displacement and immigration are directly linked to the armed conflict, in addition to the environment of poverty and exclusion in which people are unable to find neither safe conditions nor a means of subsistence that allows them to live with dignity (Meertens, D. et al, 2006; Riaño-Alcalá, 2008). Consequently, Colombia is considered the principal source of forced migration in the Americas, and ranks second in the world with internally displaced persons (Aber, 2009; IDMC, 2014; UNHCR, 2014). Whether for economic or political reasons, people from all over Colombia have come to settle in the United States in search of opportunities absent in their homeland. The United States has been one of the important host countries for Colombian immigrants since the 50s’ (Gamarra, 2003).

Although Colombians have been coming to the United States since the 50s and represent the largest groups of immigrants from South America (Madrigal, 2008; Brown & Patten, 2013), there are very limited studies concerning the experiences of Colombians as immigrants in the United States (Madrigal, 2008; Sanchez, 2003). In studying the experiences of immigrants, integration is a broad term that describes the settlement experiences and participation of immigrants in the country of adoption and encompasses many different dimensions (Hyman, Meinhard & Shields, 2011; Kymlicka, 2010). Social integration is one dimension, which involves the processes of inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the core institutions, relationships, and positions of the host country. It is an interactive process between immigrants and the host society (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). For this research, social integration is the phenomenon of study and is conceptualized overall, as a learning and socialization process (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006).
Learning and education are central to the experiences of social integration of immigrants in their host countries. Morrice (2007) argued that, “for immigrants to become integrated and members of society, it is necessary to shift away from the present focus on formal and individualized education” (p.155). At the same time, in a study about transnational migration, social capital and lifelong learning in the U.S.A., Alfred (2010) concluded that “in order to understand how immigrants construct knowledge from their interactions with social networks and ties, it is necessary to broaden our view of learning to one that goes beyond formal, and institutional learning” (p.232). However, there is very limited research that chronicles and relates adult learning theories with the social integration experiences of immigrants from a holistic perspective. Based on the statements of Morrice (2007) and Alfred (2010) regarding the integration and the learning of immigrants, this qualitative interview study aims at helping to understand the social integration experiences of eight immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States with a focus on the learning that takes place during these experiences.

**Background of the Study**

Scholars, researchers, and practitioners from different disciplines (Castles & Miller, 1998, 2003, 2009; Cuban, 2010; Donato & Patterson, 2005; Morrice 2007; Pearce, 2006) have approached migration as an emerging and complex field of research. Borkert, Martín Pérez, Scott and De Tona (2006) explained that in “the 70s the international economic crisis marked a political and academic watershed” (Borkert et al., 2006, Para. 4) producing a change around immigrants, and subsequently, a shift in immigration policies and studies. In their words, “migrants were no longer considered to
be just workers, but as people actually inhabiting cities, with families, often with young school-aged children and using public services… Most notably, there was concern with issues of social equality, economic integration, and cultural assimilation” (Para. 5). For research, this shift marked the beginning of critical engagement with migration as a complex and political phenomena. The question is no longer how many immigrants there are or were; the question has moved to address migration with more complex approaches in which the characteristics of different immigrants groups, countries of origin, immigration processes and conditions in the host countries are taken into consideration for the understanding of their experiences and their social integration in hosting countries.

Therefore, this study focuses on the social integration experiences of women immigrants in the United States from Colombia and the learning that takes place during these experiences. Despite the similitudes of Colombia with other Latin American countries, the undeclared and ongoing civil war of more than 50 years coupled with high poverty levels has produced a multifaceted exodus of Colombians to other countries (Riaño-Alcalá, Colorado, Díaz & Osorio, 2008). Currently, there are between 4,900,000 and 5,500,000 internally displaced persons (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2013), approximately 394,007 Colombians living as refugees in Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, United States, Canada, Spain, and Switzerland (UNHCR, 2014), and approximately another 5 million Colombians have migrated to others countries -70% of them left Colombia during the last ten years (Colombian National Census, 2005). Therefore, complex approach is required that encompasses the context of the sending and receiving countries as well as the unique conditions and characteristics of the people who
are migrating. Ribas Mateos (2004) emphasized the need to address migrant studies through more complex and sensitive approaches, which take into account that global political changes and the advancement of globalization have added further complexity to the phenomenon of international migration and, in particular, the migration of women in both the cultural and economic spheres.

In addition to Ribas Mateo’s view, Donato, Wagner, and Patterson (2011) argued that the participation of men and women in international migration “reflects the interaction of diverse systems of gender [in sending and receiving societies] and international migration streams” (p. 497). These interactions are complex, occurring to different degrees and at different times in different countries and regions, leading to “regionally distinct gendered migration patterns” (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013 p. 509). In the case of Colombian immigrants, it is important to highlight two features that led to women immigrants being the focus of this study.

First, the impact of the armed conflict and violence differs between urban and rural areas. While urban areas mostly suffer from soaring homicide rates, kidnappings and selective assassinations, the rural population endures armed confrontations, massacres, and forced displacements (Ibañez & Vélez, 2007; Meertens & Zambrano, 2010). Second, the armed conflict has had a considerable and disproportionate impact on women. Some examples are forced displacement in conditions of marital abandonment or widowhood (leading to an increasing number of women-headed households in displaced populations), gender-based violence; especially sexual violence by armed actors as a weapon of war, imposition of patriarchal models of social control by local power holders, and the historical lack of recognition of women’s rights that has facilitated
their dispossession and the violent seizure of their land (Jubilut & Pereira, 2011; Meertens, 2006, 2010, 2012). As a result of these differences, the conditions under which women leave the country as well as the conditions in which they experience their social integration in the host country (in this case the United States), may differ.

Postcolonial feminist theory (Anzaldúa, 2007; Harding 1998; Mohanty, 1984, 2013; Spivak, 1987; Oyewumi, 1997) emerges from the critiques of women of color challenging Western and white feminist discourses. This view is “a unique epistemology to explore the cross-cultural and transnational dimensions of women’s struggles. In the context of globalization, postcolonial feminist theories provide great insights in interpreting and informing women’s transnational organizing and providing a theoretical basis for alternative development” (Ly, 2008, p. 2-3). Scholars (Harris, 2003; Ly, 2008; Sandoval, 2000; Villenas, 2006; Young, 2001) argued that current international hierarchies, relations of power and geographical boundaries are determined by relationships characteristic of colonialism. Therefore, colonialism is one of the central aspects of immigrant studies because of its role in creating push factors at the macro level. In other words, some of the reasons why people migrate to other countries are the consequences of colonialism. Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) postulated that postcolonial feminist attempts to build theory from/with the embodied perspectives of women of color, of the global South. From this perspective, the main source of knowledge for this study is women’s understanding of their own social integration experiences, looking specifically at three categories: 1) Opportunities and spaces: referring to relationships with networks, groups and/or organizations for socializations, and sense of belonging, 2) Women and families: which includes structure of the family,
ties with relatives in the sending country, dynamics, customs, and values, and 3) Labor market: making reference to the economic and labor stability (Bacca, 2006). A more in-depth analysis of postcolonial feminist theory and social integration will be discussed in the literature review chapter.

Feminization of migration is a central concept for this study. Feminization of migration embraces the complexity requires for approaching women’s migration and simultaneously, embraces the premises of postcolonial feminist theory. This concept has been widely used during the last decade in the field of immigrant studies, gradually acknowledging issues related to gender differences before, during and post international migration processes (Castles & Miller, 1998, 2003, 2009; Cuban, 2010; Donato & Patterson, 2005; Pearce, 2006; Piper, 2003, 2008a, 2008b). Research on gendered migration had concluded that most, if not all, aspects of migration affect men and women differently (Knight, 2011; Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Cuban, 2010; Rudnick, 2009; Piper, 2008a). In Piper’s words, “the notion of ‘feminization’ is linked to the issue of gender and the differences between female and male migrants’ experiences” (Piper, 2008a, p. 1287).

In recent years, research on feminization of migration has increased and consequently, its definition, features, and its implications have expanded within the field of migrant studies. Scholars and international organizations have incorporated a qualitative perspective in their research presenting the relevance of the processes of migration, the contexts and conditions, push and pull factors and categories like nationality, race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation – among others- as units of study (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Cuban, 2010; Knight, 2011; Engle, 2004; Piper, 2003, 2008a;
In other words, the new research on feminization and gendered immigration make evident the intricacy of the current international flows of women, uncovering how there has been a change in the ways women immigrants move, in what capacity and the purpose of it during the last decades (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Cuban, 2010; Knight, 2011; Engle, 2004; Piper, 2003, 2008a). Overall, in order to understand the social integration experiences of adult Colombian women and the learning that takes place during these experiences, it is crucial to understand women’s immigration processes taking into account social and cultural elements such as class, race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation in addition to the political context of the sending and receiving countries.

Up to this point, I have presented some features of the socio-political context of Colombia and its relation to migration, specifically women’s migration. I have also presented the importance of complex and sensitive approaches in studies about migration. Finally, I have introduced postcolonial feminist theory and the concept of feminization of migration as lenses for the understanding of the social integration experiences of adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States. In what follows, I present quantitative data related to the situation of Colombia immigrants in the United Stated in general, and immigrant adult Colombian women in particular; followed by a brief section concerning the Colombian diaspora in the United States. This demographic information and the description of Colombia diaspora serves in two purposes: First, to enhance the understanding of data present in chapters 4 and 5 regarding the experiences of the social integration of the participants, and second, highlight the relevance of studying immigrants Colombian women.
Colombian Immigrants in the United States

According to Humes, Jones, and Ramirez (2011) “in 2010, 309.3 million people lived in the United States, including 40.0 million foreign born (13 percent of the total population)… The number of foreign born from Latin America and the Caribbean has increased rapidly, from less than 1 million in 1930 to 21.2 million in 2010” (Humes, Jones & Ramirez, 2011, p. 1), representing over half (53 percent) of all foreign-born U.S. residents in 2010.

As stated by the Immigration Policy Center –IPC- (2012), there were 18.9 million immigrant women and girls in the United States in 2008 and Mexico was reported as the single largest country of origin for women immigrants followed by China and the Philippines in 2008. Since 2008, Colombians have been the largest South American immigrant group in the United States, accounting for 30% of all South Americans in the country and 2.65 percent of all documented immigrants (Motel & Patten, 2012).

Since 2007, Latinos/as has been the largest minority group in the United States. By 2011, Latinos/as represented 51.9 million of the total population (Motel & Patten, 2013). In reference to Colombian’s immigrants, Brown and Patten (2013) stated that there were 989 thousand immigrant Colombians in the United States of which 549 thousand were women by 2011. However, Conexión Colombia (2005) reports that 5 million Colombians were living abroad and one-half of these were living in the United States. Regarding the discrepancy between the Colombian and U.S. governments’ figures, Collier and Gamarra (2001), Madrigal and Mayadas (2006), Reimers, (2005), Sanchez, (2003) agreed that it is difficult to determinate the exact number of Colombians in the United States because of the official statistics do not capture undocumented people.
Despite the discrepancies about the number of Colombian immigrants in host countries, recent studies identify the United States as the first country of destination with 35.4%, followed by Spain with 23.4%, and Venezuela with 18.5% (Collier & Gamarra, 2001; Madrigal & Mayadas, 2006; Posso-Quinceno & Urrea-Giraldo, 2007; Reimers, 2005; Sanchez, 2003; and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – OECD-, 2010).

**Education.** Many immigrants adult Latinas do not have high education levels and are less likely to have professional degrees than native-born Latinas. Gonzales (2008) explains that 49% of immigrants Latinas have not completed high school; 46% of native-born Latinas have at least some college education while only 24% of immigrant Latinas do. These dismal numbers make Latinas/os the least-educated minority group in the United States (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003).

Brown and Patten (2013) stated Colombians have higher levels of education than the Latino population overall and slightly higher levels than the U.S. population overall. “Some 31% of Colombians ages 25 and older—compared with 13% of all U.S. Hispanics and 29% among the entire U.S. population—have obtained at least a bachelor’s degree” (Motel & Patten, 2013).

**Employment and poverty.** As far as labor force characteristics, immigrant adult Latinas are employed mainly in domestic services and factories, where they experience wage inequity. “Median weekly earnings for Hispanic women who are employed full time are $460 per week … [While for] non-Hispanic women, $615, or 34% higher. Native-born Hispanic women earn more than immigrant Hispanic women” (Gonzales, 2008, p. 12). Overall, immigrant women earn less than native-born women: “In 2003,
61.7 percent of foreign-born women earned less than $25,000, compared to 54.4 percent of native-born women and 47.8 percent of foreign-born men” (Pearce, 2006, p. 2).

In the case of Colombian immigrants, Brown, and Patten’s (2013) document reported, “the median annual personal earnings for Colombians ages 16 and older were $24,000 in the year 2010” (p. 2). The same authors stated that the share of Colombians who live in poverty is 13%, which is slightly lower than the general U.S. population (16% and lower than the rate for Latinos 26%.

Figure 1

*Distribution of Colombian Immigrants by Activity in Main Destinations*

In Figure 1, OECD (2010) presents the distribution of Colombian immigrants according to their main destination countries by gender. We can observe that, among males, construction and agriculture are the main activities for Colombians in Spain and
Venezuela, while domestic service is the main source of employment for Colombian women. In the United States, Colombian immigrants appear in more skilled sectors such as personal services, healthcare, manufacturing, and trade. According to the author, “these differences in occupational profile are consistent with the levels of educational attainment in these groups. One of the features of Colombian emigration to the United States is its high levels of education” (p. 227).

**Colombia Diaspora to the United States**

International immigration from Colombia has been driven by economic, social and political factors. Between 1996 and 2002 the Administrative Department of Security (DAS), which is in charge of migration control in Colombia, registered 1.6 million Colombians who left the country and did not return; nearly half of them migrated between 1999 and 2001. Guarnizo and Díaz’s study (1999) presented how migration has become one of the three most urgent issues for the Colombian government for the next decades, along with drug trafficking and environmental degradation. According to the last Colombian national census - 2005 - there are 5 million Colombians living in other countries and 70% of them left Colombia between 1997 and 2005.

The primary factors that have attracted Colombians to the United States throughout their migratory patterns include "the promise of jobs, peace, and stability… these immigrants have sought to escape the political violence, while searching for economic opportunities" (Collier & Gamarra, 2001, p. 4). Sanchez (2003) added that, besides the economic incentives, there is also a cultural attraction to the United States. Collier’s (2001) study about Colombian immigrants in the South of Florida presented other reasons why Colombians have migrated to the U.S. The four main reasons were “afraid of
general violence in Colombia - 83%, feel could live more securely in the U.S. – 81%, feel no solutions for Colombian’s problems - 54%, Violence in Colombia touched you or your family – 50% (Collier, 2001, p. 10).

According to Collier and Gamarra (2003), Colombian immigration to the United States can be characterized in three periods or inter-related waves:

The first wave of Colombians to the United States was in the 1950s’. This corresponds to a period in Colombian history known as “La Violencia” characterized by a political war between Conservative and Liberal political parties. This initial wave continued after the end of La Violencia until the late-1970s. They come from all socio-economic classes, but the majority was from the lower and lower-middle classes. Immigrants in this period were primarily young male adults who were either accompanied by or later joined by their families. The immigrants from this period come from the main cities of Colombia – Bogotá, Medellín, and Calí (Collier & Gamarra, 2003). The authors described New York City as the main site for Colombian migration during the first wave.

The second wave began in the late-1970s and ran through the mid-1990s. All socio-economic classes were still involved, but there was an increase in the number of middle, upper-middle, and upper class migrants. Most migrants during this period were still primarily young male adults and their families. According to the authors, a unique characteristic of this wave was the presence of migrants associated with the growing international drug trade, generating a negative stereotype of all Colombians being considered drug-traffickers. This reduced the trust within the Colombian migrant community and kept Colombians from associating with other Colombians. Immigrants
from this period come from the “Colombian coffee region in the west-central section and the north coast city of Barranquilla” (Collier & Gamarra, 2003, p. 3).

The third wave began in the mid-1990s and continued to the present. There is a drastic increase in the number of middle, upper-middle, and upper class professionals. Collier and Gamarra (2003) identified as the main push factor, Colombia’s political and criminal violence problems, as well as a deep economic recession in the late-1990s. The third wave has seen a shift of migrants from primarily young adults to a combination of both young and old. In this wave, immigrants are coming from throughout Colombia, with an increasing number from the smaller cities in predominantly rural areas.

The third wave is of especially importance for the study, because during this time, there is a significant increase in the number of women who migrated to the United States during the 2000s. As I indicated before, the internal armed conflict in Colombia has been undeclared by the Colombian government. In other words, the internal armed conflict has been not recognized by either the government or society, making the applicability of international Laws, protections for “especial groups” and humanitarian assistance difficult (Aberat, 2009; Riaño-Alcala et al., 2008). This has made it more difficult for Colombians and particularly, Colombian women to find international protection because of the impact –direct or indirect – of the armed conflict. Currently, there are 394,007 Colombians living as refugees in Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, United States, Canada, Spain and Switzerland (UNHCR, 2014) and approximately 500,000 to 750,000 Colombians are seeking refugee status in Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela and Costa Rica (Aberat, 2009 and UNHCR, 2014). According to Aberat (2009), Riaño-Alcala (2008), Stoney, Batalova and Russell (2013) Colombian refugees have been called the “world’s
Invisible refugees. In their host countries, “Colombians are often not formally recognized by host governments as refugees and thus receive little attention and humanitarian assistance” (Aberat, 2009, p. 1).

Stoney, Batalova and Russell (2013) stated that fewer than 50 South American nationals - all from Colombia - arrived in the United States as refugees in 2011. Historically, relatively few South Americans have ever entered as refugees. Between 2002 and 2011, a total of 1,569 South Americans have entered as refugees, accounting for less than half of a percent of the 515,350 persons who entered the United States as refugees. During this period, the highest number of South Americans admitted as refugees was 579 in 2004; those, 577 were nationals of Colombia.

**Statement of the Problem**

Latinos/as make up the largest minority group in the United States, representing more than 50 million of the total population; of that number 52% are immigrant adult Latinas. However, according to the report titled 2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (2005),

there is a lack of education and communication programmes to inform migrant women of their rights and responsibilities, and the need of research and data collection, disaggregated by sex and age, that improve understanding of the causes of female migration and its impact on women, their countries of origin and their countries of destination in order to provide a solid basis for the formulation of appropriate policies and programmes. (p. V)

Although Colombians have been migrating to the United States since the early twentieth century and represent the largest groups of immigrants from South America
(Guarnizo, Sanchez, & Roach, 1999; Reimers, 2005; Sanchez, 2003), research studies available about them are limited. Sanchez (2003) stated "Colombians constitute an important wave of immigrants: nonetheless, they are an understudied ethnic group" (p. 367). Moreover, there is an absence of scholarly attention regarding how different immigrant communities understand their social integration experiences, the learning that takes place during these experiences, and the relationship between social integration and learning. In the same vein, Black (2004) emphasizes that most immigrant-receiving countries do not consider the gender implications of their immigration policies and programs; in fact, most migration literature to date has been gender indifferent, or has been given a male bias.

According to Morrice (2007), for immigrants to become integrated and members of the society in the U.S, requires a shift away from the present focus on formal, individualized education provisions to a greater recognition of experiential and social learning opportunities. Cuban (2010) and Stromquist (2006) stated the need for a more ‘integrative’ theory that illuminates the processes in which immigrant women learn during their transition period in the host countries, and that encompass the complexity of the international migrations from a feminist perspective.

In the same vein, Morrice (2012) and Taylor (2007) stated how much of the empirical research has focused on the individual, “while tending to ignore contextual factors and the social space in which individuals are living and learning” (Morrice, 2012, p. 254). Other studies (Cuban, 2010; Gibb & Hamdon, 2010; Jackson, 2010; Morrice, 2007, 2012) focused on the role of education for immigrant women in developed countries calling for further research regarding the multiple ways of knowing of
immigrant women from a feminist perspective, in different settings other than formal education (Morrice, 2012; Taylor, 2007).

Hence, this qualitative study is ultimately designed to describe and to understand the social integration experiences and the learning that occurs for adult immigrant Colombian women in United States during their social integration experiences. To date, there have been no studies conducted that explore how adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States understand their social integration experiences and identify the learning that takes place.

Overall, this study attempts to contribute to close the gap between adult learning theories, women’s immigrant understanding of their social integration experiences and the learning that takes place during such experiences. This study integrates literature from different fields (adult education, migration studies, and gender studies) and at different levels (theoretical and practical). Table 1 summarizes the problems identified from the different bodies of knowledge at the theoretical and practitioner level.

Table 1

*Problems Identified at the Theoretical and Practitioner Level*

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<th>Theoretical Level</th>
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<td>• Questions have arisen concerning learning theories, educational programs,</td>
<td>Lack of education and communication programs to inform migrant women of their</td>
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<td>social integration processes and experiences of immigrant adult women from a</td>
<td>rights and responsibilities in their destination countries (UN, 2005).</td>
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<td>feminist perspective (Cuban &amp; Stromquist, 2009; Cuban, 2010).</td>
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<td>• For “immigrants to become integrated and members of a society requires a shift</td>
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<td>away from the present focus on formal, individualized education to a</td>
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• Need for research and data collection, disaggregated by sex and age that improve understanding of the causes of female migration and its impact on women, their countries of origin and destination (UN, 2005).
• “Colombian’s Immigrants in the U.S. are an understudied ethnic group” (Sanchez, 2006).

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**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and to understand the social integrations experiences, and the learning that occurs for adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States. The questions that guide the study are:

1. How do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand their social integration experiences in the United States?
2. What types of learning, if any, take place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change?

**Significance of the Study**

By understanding the social integration experiences of adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States, I expect better understand how immigrant women describe and understand their social integration experiences, how they learn to survive, to transition and to integrate in their receiving country: the United Stated. I hope to unveil the relationship between social integration experiences, learning, and meaning making within the participants from and within this specific context. This study is also
important because it generates information for practitioners, NGOs, and educational institutions that are interested in working with immigrant adult Latinas in general.

Cuban (2010) affirmed that “folding the feminization of migration into adult education calls attention to conditions of quality and access to further and higher education for women, as well as a multidimensional, gendered notion of social equity” (p. 1870). In addition to what Cuban expresses, identifying the learning that takes place during the social integration experiences also gives information regarding the type of education – formal and/or non-formal - that immigrant women encounter during their social integration process. This is valuable information for the field of adult education regarding learning theories and practices. This study brings new information that interconnects foundational concepts of adult education and incorporates new perspectives in a context of high levels of diversity. In addition, this study generates relevant information regarding the need to work in conjunction with other bodies of knowledge, in this case, immigrant studies. In this study, I present the voice of Colombian immigrant women as political actors, with a unique voice unveiling the complex situation of Colombia. Overall, this research brings an understanding of immigrant adult Colombian women’ experiences and extends the perception of immigrant adult Colombian women in their complexities without rendering them as passive-oppressed subjects.

Definitions

Feminization of Migration: A concept used in immigrant studies that can refer to a number of different social, cultural, economic, and political issues regarding international female migration. Feminization of migration brings to light the hows and
whys of female immigration and their experiences as different from males’ experiences of migration.

**Immigrants:** Understood as people who are not U.S. citizens at birth; in other words, individuals born outside the United States, Puerto Rico, or other U.S. territories, and do not have a U.S. citizen parent. In this study, I will look at female immigrants only for academic and personal reasons. The academic reason is related to the situation of immigrant adult Colombian women, and the need for more studies that help to develop educational programs and policies for immigrant women. The personal reason is based on my own experiences as an immigrant and Colombian woman.

**Immigrant Adult Colombian Women:** Women who are at least 21 years of age, were born in Colombia, have crossed into the United States and have made the decision to live in the United States.

**Latinas:** Women who were born in Mexico, the countries of Central, and South America or the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

**Social Integration:** For this study, it is understood as the inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the core institutions, relationships, and positions of the host society. Integration is an interactive process between immigrants and the host society. For the immigrants, integration means the process of learning a new culture, acquiring rights and obligations, gaining access to positions and social status, building personal relationships with members of the host society and forming a feeling of belonging to, and identification with, that society. For the host society, integration means opening up institutions and granting equal opportunities to immigrants. In this interaction, however, the host society has more power and more prestige (Boswick &
Heckmann, 2006, p. 11). This concept is central to my research and is further elaborated upon in the literature review section.

**Refugees:** Understood as someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, sexual orientation, or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are some of the leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - UNHCR, 2014).

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented a brief introduction of the study followed by the background of the study. In this chapter, I offered the work of numerous scholars regarding the topic of immigration, the socio-political context of Colombia, the importance of the concept of feminization of migration, and an overview of the situation of immigrant adult Latinas and Colombian women in the U.S. I provided to the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study and research questions, as well as the significance of the study at the theoretical and practical level for the field of adult education. The chapter ended with definitions of the main concepts used during the study. In the following chapter, I turn to review of the literature that undergirds this study. In the following chapter, I review the literature that undergirds this study.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to describe and to understand the social integrations experiences, and the learning that occurs for adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States.

The questions that guide the study are:

1. How do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand their social integration experiences in the United States?

2. What types of learning, if any, take place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change?

As a result of the data analysis, I adjusted the initial literature review. Therefore I present in this chapter, the pertinent adult learning theories, concepts from immigration, and gender studies that hence the understanding of the data analysis. In this section, I make connections between multiple bodies of literature and, ultimately, make claims concerning the two research questions of the study. Key words of search social integration, experiential, and instrumental and transformative learning, feminization of migration, immigrant women, and Colombian immigrants led to the foundation of the present review. Databases including ERIC, Education Full Text, Academic, Search Premier, PsycINFO, Dissertation Abstracts, Social Abstracts, Social Work Abstract,
Google Scholar, and Women’s Studies International were searched to compile this review.

The chapter is divided into three major sections. In the first section, I offer a description of the Post-colonial feminist theory as one of the epistemological frameworks for this study with focus on the concept of feminization of immigration in relation to Colombian immigrant women and on social integration with its history, definitions, and characteristics. In the second section, I present a review of learning from the experience, instrumental learning, and transformational learning as a framework for adult learning theories; and their relation with adult women as learners. I conclude this chapter with a discussion regarding the different topics presented within the chapter and their connection to the purpose of the study. At the end, the reader finds a summary of the chapter.

**Postcolonial Feminist Theory**

As is the case with other theories, it is difficult to find a unified definition of postcolonial theory. However, in an attempt to do this, Young (2003) pointed out that postcolonial theory comprises a “related set of perspectives which are juxtaposed against one another, on occasion contradictorily. It involves issues... [having] to do with the position of women, of development, of ecology, [and] of social justice in its broadest sense” (pp.6-7). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2008) explained that postcolonial theory has existed for a long time and “involves discussion about the experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being” (p. 2).
Defining postcolonialism is difficult for two additional reasons. First, to naively consider postcolonialism simply as that which happens after colonialism is to miss the current and evolving effects of colonialism on once-colonized countries and their subjects. Second, defining postcolonialism as a socio-political condition that affects once-colonized countries is inadequate due to the divergent material conditions and consequences of colonialism. Hence, Loomba (2005) suggested that the term “postcolonial” can be used to “refer to a process of disengagement from the whole colonial worlds syndrome which takes many forms and is probably inescapable for all those whose worlds have been marked by that set of phenomena” (p. 21).

“Postcolonial theory is concerned to analyze and theorize the enduring nineteen-century European colonialism, both on those countries … which were colonized and in those,… which colonized and… with the present-day legacy of imperialism which is the fundamental focus” (Mills, 1998, p. 98). Postcolonial theory critically analyzes the assumptions that the colonizers have vis-à-vis the colonized, and seeks to uncover the damaging effects of such ideas on both the self-identity of the colonized and the instability of the conceptual underpinnings of the colonizers. I anticipate demonstrating that these elements provide a framework to understand the experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States regarding their “identity dimensions as women” (Napier, 2010, p. 2). It is vital to make visible that the effects of dominant groups, discourses, and apparatuses do not have necessarily the same impact on all Colombians, given their diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, language, religion, education level, and culture.
Postcolonialism, according to Loomba (1998) is a word that needs to be “used with caution and qualification”. Loomba compares it to patriarchy in feminist thought where it is “applicable only to the extent that it indicated male domination over women. But the ideology and practices of male domination are historically, geographically, and culturally variable” (p. 18). This distinction is important in the case of immigrant adult Colombian women in the U.S. because the reasons and ways in which Latinas and Colombian women immigrate are not uniform. In addition, the conditions in which they live in the United States change according to with whom they move or live, the time in which their movements occur, and the state in which they live.

According to Mills (1998) postcolonial theory challenges the meta-narratives of Western civilization and the discursive/representational construction of the “West and its others”. The writings of Edward Said constituted a decisive impetus for the growth and proliferation of postcolonialism as an intellectual project. Said’s Orientalism (1978) discussed the manner in which the West has represented the Orient, or the “Other”, and exposes the relations of power and domination inherent in this construction. Said’s (1978) work explained how the Orient is seen and assimilated as ‘feminine’, that is as a submissive object of possession, in opposition to the West which is perceived as ‘masculine’, with features of activity and domination. The Orient is ‘degenerate’, or lazy, weak, lustful and peopled by criminals and shady immoral characters. In short, the East is everything morally negative in comparison to the West’s moral superiority. Said (1978) also showed how orientalist forms of representation construct crude racial and sexual stereotypes. Said’s Orientalism is equated to the concept of “Global South-Global North” of Mohanty (2013), and it is related to the discussion of the geopolitics of
knowledge from Escobar (2007). Both authors claimed that analytical categories have different rationalities depending on place. Escobar (2007) said that reality had been colonized by the discourse of development, and those who were dissatisfied with this state of affairs had to struggle within the same discursive for portions of freedom, with the hope for a different reality in the future. Said, Mohanty, and Escobar’s – among others- support the deconstruction of knowledge about women from “the Third World” which is produced by measures and categories from the West and Global North.

Homi Bhabha (1994; 1995), one of the most cited postcolonial theorists, held that the colonial encounter between the colonial power and the colonized is inherently ambivalent. Mostly studying postcolonial fictions, Bhabha searched for the contamination of imperial authority and hybrid identities to emphasize the subaltern’s resistance (Bhabha, 1994). Moreover, Bhabha (1994) saw postcolonial critique as emerging from colonial experiences. He argued:

Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of “minorities” within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic “normality” to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities, peoples. (p. 437)

In that sense, postcolonial theory formulates its critique around the social histories, cultural differences, and political discrimination that are practiced and normalized by colonial and imperial machineries. According to Romero (1995) a postcolonial approach would better serve studies of the U.S. Such an approach would
demonstrate first "how diverse [domestic] identities cohere, fragment, and change in relation to one another and to ideologies of nationhood through the crucible of international power relations" (Kaplan, cited by Romero, 1995, p. 796), and second "how, conversely, imperialism as a political or economic process abroad is inseparable from the social relations and cultural discourses of race, gender, ethnicity, and class at home” (Kaplan cited by Romero, 1995, p. 796).

These two aspects are fundamental at the moment of interpreting and understanding the study’s data; and this, in two senses: First, they are the foundation for different levels of analyses according to the focus given by the researcher. In other words, these two elements - contained in postcolonial theory- provide a way to analyze the links between macro, meso, micro, individual and self-levels in the situation of immigrants adult Colombian women in the U.S. Second, these two elements allow the researcher to identify - from the data- the different expressions of four of the categories illustrated by Napier (2010), namely: (a) “trailing spouse, mother, daughter” etc. - when the primary reason for emigration is for the woman to follow the husband, father, etc.; (b) “emigration/immigration for a better life” – when the primary reason for moving is for the woman to pursue her own interests as she defined them, (c) identity dimension of women, and (d) exploitation and subordination.

Postcolonial theory has developed a set of concepts distinctive of its theoretical framework. Prominent among them is the concept of ‘transnationalism.’ According to Bauböck (2003) transnationalism “applies to human activities and social institutions that extend across national borders” (p.701). Portes (2001) suggested, “Transnational activities would be those initiated and sustained by noninstitutional actors, be they
organized groups or networks of individuals across national borders. They represent goal-oriented initiatives that require coordination across national borders by members of civil society” (p. 186). In other words, transnational activities are assumed by individuals on their own behalf, rather than on behalf of the State or other kinds of institutions. Keeping in mind this definition, transnationalism becomes a key concept in this study, for the reason that immigrant adult Colombian women perform transnational activities and configure transnational families and communities. Because of the origins, characteristics, complexity and development of this concept, transnationalism brings together various aspects of the theories used in this study, and links these with issues like exploitation, subordination, violence, identity and the isolation faced by immigrant adult Colombian women in the U.S. Therefore, this link is bound to enhance the understanding and interpretation of the data.

Overall, the criteria based on which I chose these theoretical perspectives were: First, they seek to reinstate the marginalized in face of the dominant by not just questioning norms and social structures, but more importantly, through “the unmasking of the spuriously authoritative on which such canonical constructions are founded” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2008, p. 233). Second, these theories work “in conversation with the voices of the educational actors… who hail from diverse backgrounds and experiences but who enunciate complex and fleeting ‘de/colonizing’ identities and ways of acting in the world” (Villenas, 2006, p. 660). Thirdly, these theories discuss agency and meaning-creation in the context of simultaneous and interlocking structures of oppression, through concepts such as “double colonization” (Oyewumi, 1997), nomad woman (Braidotti, 2004), New Mestiza (Anzaldúa, 2007) the
subaltern (Spivak, 1987) among others. Finally, their epistemological premises, the type of issues they address, their concepts, and their political implications for unrepresented groups in the current socio, economic, cultural and political context of the U.S. make these theories relevant for the understanding of the challenges faced by immigrant adult Colombian women.

In the following section, I introduce Latina/Chicana feminist thought as part of postcolonial feminist theory. These bodies of knowledge help to understand and interpret the data gathered to carry out this study. The selected issues presented are based on a group of issue categories pertaining to immigrants, migrants, and refugees formulated by Napier (2010). These categories provide a compelling description of different issues that are interconnected with the characteristics of movement processes, push/pull factors, and levels of analysis – macro, meso, micro, individual, and self.

**Latina/Chicana Feminist Thought**

Feminism is one of the most visible social movements of the late twentieth century. Although the early feminists—who were mostly, White, middle class women (hooks, 2000)—worked hard for social and economic equality between women and men, they did not integrate the issues of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and class into an analysis of the multiple social structures of oppression. However, with the growth of contemporary feminist thought, Latina/Chicana feminists and transnational feminist scholars like Leila Ahmand (1992), Linda Alcafot (2000), Chanda Talpade Mohanty (1984), Amrita Basu (1995), Gloria Anzaldua (2007), Sonia Villenas (2006), not only challenged the use of gender as a category of analysis, but introduced the intricacy of gender when intersected by race, class, ethnicity, location, religion, sexual orientation,
community and nation. Since these subject positions are inter-related with, and influence and inform each other, contemporary transnational and other forms of feminist thought call for analysis across all the subject positions and their effects on the material conditions of women’s lives.

Latina/Chicana feminist theory ascribed itself as part of the post-colonial feminist theory. This theory emerges “from women’s everyday embodiments of and interventions in patriarchy, sexism, heteronormativity, and transnational labor abuses in the midst of unrelenting nationalisms and citizenship policing … [it] entail[s] revisiting and interrogating the colonial past while remarking on the persistent neocolonial, patriarchal, and heteronormative relations within the new world order” (Villenas, 2006, p. 660). Most importantly, “Latina/Chicana feminist thought is about excavating resilience, sobrevivencia (survival), knowledge, and acts of improvisation for outlasting domination” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 7).

Latinas/Chicanas feminist thought speaks up about oppressions, discriminations, challenges, barriers, and violence that are part of the system. It also examines “agency and meaning-making in the context of simultaneous and interlocking structures of oppression” (Villenas, 2006, p. 661). Because Latinas/Chicanas feminist thought refuses the discourses of victim, it presents and seeks the interconnections between oppression, agency, and solidarity at the local and global level.

In order to make visible the struggles and resistance of “Third world/ south women” it is essential to work on a common feminist political project based on a “vision of feminist solidarity across borders” (Mohanty, 2002, p.502). Mohanty (2002) defined solidarity in terms of
Mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here – to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances. (p.7)

Hence, a vision of feminist solidarity across borders implies the consideration and analysis of the micropolitics of everyday life, and the macropolitics of global economic and political processes. The analysis must address the differences and particularities to see the connections and commonalities. According to Mohanty (2002) it is at this point – making visible the connections and commonalities - when women of different communities and identities could build coalitions and solidarities across borders.

Keeping in mind Mohanty’s words, Villenas (2006) stated that:

Latinas/Chicanas have maintained an intensely rigorous and intellectually bold commitment to centering the local/global complexities and simultaneity of identities and oppressions. In a similar way, global solidarity has meant activism and theory that has worked against political, economic, cultural, gender and homophobic violence not only at home but also abroad. (p. 661)

Flores and Garcia (2009) stated that one of the aspects that feminist women of color have questioned is “gender essentialism”. Harris (2003) uses the term “gender essentialism” to “describe the notion that there is a ‘monolithic women’s experience’ that can be described independently of other facets of experience, like race, class, and sexual orientation” (p. 34). Essentialism is convenient because it allows us to ignore the chaos
of our complexities — even within groups and specifically among Latinas. Essentialism is ingrained in us because it is less complex to essentialize, than to understand our deeply seated differences (Harris 2003). In the social sciences, race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation are sometimes thought of as essentialist qualities. In particular, theories about these categories are considered essentialist “when they claim that these social distinctions have deeply rooted biological underpinnings, that they are historically invariant and culturally universal, or that their boundaries are sharp and not susceptible to sociocultural shaping” (Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000, p. 114). Therefore, essentialism is the belief in an underlying, unchangeable essence that defines a person, category, or thing.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty has been one of the main scholars in the field of feminist and postcolonial feminist theory. Mohanty (2002) criticized Western feminist methodological practices. Using women as a stable category of analysis and calling on struggles based on universal sisterhood has ironically produced ethnocentric universalism. Mohanty (2002) situated Western feminist writings “in the context of global hegemony of Western scholarship” (p. 501) to show how particularistic and un-reflexive institutionalized knowledge can be. She argues for the idea of feminist cross-national solidarity based on a “common context of struggle” (p. 518), choosing the term “Third World women,” which is used interchangeably with “women of color” as an analytical and political category that implies oppositional agency, rather than an essentialist notion of biological, cultural or even sociological alliance. The relationship and connections between oppression and solidarity is considered one important aspect in Mohanty’s point of view (2002). Thus, this author stated that:
Activists and scholars must also identify and re-envision forms of collective resistance that women, especially in their different communities, enact in their everyday lives. It is their particular exploitation at this time, their potential epistemic privilege, as well as their particular forms of solidarity that can be the basis for reimagining a liberatory politics for the start of this century. (pp.515 – 516)

The term “Third-World women” or “women of color” in the frame exposed by Mohanty is of special importance to this study for several reasons. First, it makes visible the diversity and differences among Latinas, second, it helps to bring out their voices and the specificity of their realities, resistances and needs. Third, it reveals and uncovers the productions and re-productions of the stereotypes and images associated with Latinas, and last, it makes visible the history of Latinas in the U.S., but also the history of immigration movements across Latin American and the North. The concept of Third-World women, in connection with the elements of Latina/Chicano thought, leads to a rich and detailed understanding and interpretation of the study’s data in conjunction with the categories described by Napier (2010). All these elements help the researcher to outline and present the productions and reproductions of situations of oppression, which are interconnected among them, and to show how this impacts on the social integration of this particular group.

Villenas (2006) situated Latina/Chicana feminist thought as a perspective framed by postcolonial and Third World feminist projects. For the author, Latina/Chicana scholars have exploded dualisms that trap and continue to limit the lives of Latinas. Villenas (2006) enunciated how scholars have worked on “break[ing] down dichotomies
of colonized/colonizer, tradition/change, citizen/illegal, as well as complicated static notions of *la familia* (the family), nation and borders” (p. 665). In order to reject dualisms, it is necessary to embrace an acceptance of ambiguity. Anzaldúa (2007) illustrated how La Mestiza (female mestizo) consciousness is born of the specific histories and daily experiences resulting from living borderland lives. La mestiza straddles cultures, races, languages, nations, sexualities and spiritualities where none of the parts is thrown away. “This tolerance for ambiguity and the breaking down of dualisms is the way of the future” (Villenas, 2006, p. 665).

Anzaldúa (2007) speaking as a Chicana-Tejana-lesbian-feminist writer, juxtaposes the temporality of ancient indigenous myths with her postcolonial North American existence. In her writing, she shifts from English to Spanish to Nahuatl. This represents not just shifts in languages, but also in temporalities of perception and consciousness. According to Schutte (1998), these pluri-cultural temporalities “create a disjunctive tension with the linear temporality of modernity governing the identities of producers and consumers in advanced capitalist societies… [And] create a displacement in the relation between self and other, allowing the recognition of alterity both inside and outside the self” (p. 57). In her text, she illustrates how these pluri-cultural temporalities are presented on Latinas identities and lives:

*Latina casts me in a recognizable category, through which the meaning of my difference is delimited according to whatever set of associations this term may evoke. Latina is not simply a descriptive term referring to someone with a Latin American or Iberian ancestry currently residing in the United States. It is a signifier that both masks and evokes a range of associations-hot- blooded,*
temperamental, submissive, defiant, illegal or illicit, sexually repressed or sexually overactive, oppressed, exploited, and so on. However, the thread that draws together all the stereotypical associations is one of invisibility as a producer of culture. Latinas in the United States are also invisible as producers of culture because the term Latina lacks a specific national reference and, in the mind of Western modernity, nation and culture are still tightly interrelated. As a concept, Latina exceeds the category of the national. (pp. 57-58)

Overall, Latina/Chicana feminist thought helps to identify and understand the situations, issues, resistances, and formations of new identities of immigrant adult Colombian women both at the individual and at the collective level. As I introduce each of the bodies of literature that frame this study, I will be presenting a progressive figure that illustrates the relationships among theories and the phenomena of study. In Figure 2, presents postcolonial feminist theory in conjunction with Latina Chicano feminist theory as one of the main theoretical frames that will inform this study.
Several authors (Ashcroft, 2008, Brah, 1996, Clifford, 1994, Donato & Patterson 2005, Memmi, 2006, Mishra, 1996, Said, 1984) have studied the processes of migration and Diasporas, identifying causes, dynamics, consequences, their relationship with political, economic, and social policies, as well as their impact on women and men who are part of this global phenomenon. Memmi (2006) pointed out that immigration is not a unique consequence and/or specific to decolonization. It is the result of “poverty and fear, hunger and frustration, an apparently hopeless future” (p. 73). The author added, “immigration is one of the additional signs of the inability of young nations to resolve their internal problems, primarily to feed their population and provide them with a minimum of comfort and freedom” (pp. 77-78).
It is important to look at migrations (national and international) as processes, which implies a study in the context of the political, social, economic, geographic, and cultural aspects of each specific process. In other words, global and local analyses are required to identify how categories like gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class interact and play different roles in these processes.

According to different academic studies (Castles & Miller, 1998, 2003, 2009; Cuban, 2010; Donato & Patterson, 2005; Pearce, 2006; Piper, 2003, 2008a, 2008b; Rudnick, 2009), and reports from international organizations (Boyd, 2006; Engle, 2004; Knight, 2011; International Organization of Migration - IOM, 2009; Omelaniuk, 2005; United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women - INSTRAW, 2007), feminization of migration has been a term widely used during the last decade in the field of immigrant studies, gradually acknowledging issues related to gender differences before, during, and post international migration processes. Literature found on gendered migration studies (Knight, 2011; Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Cuban, 2010; Rudnick, 2009; and Piper, 2008a) has demonstrated that most, if not all, aspects of migration affect men and women differently. In Piper’s words, “the notion of ‘feminization’ is linked to the issue of gender and the differences between female and male migrants’ experiences” (2008a, p. 1287).

The term feminization of migration was initially developed by Castles and Miller (1998), followed by Engle (2004) and Lipszyc (2004, 2006). According to Cuban (2010), the feminization of migration “refutes the binary notion that women move either permanently to countries in order to settle or they come temporarily” (p. 180). Cuban explains how women may enter into two different kinds of migrations: ‘circular
migration’ in which they maintain strong ties to a sending country or the case of ‘onward migration’ in which women go to another country different than their sending country. This permanent state of transition leaves immigrant women in states of permanent dislocation “never nowhere but always somewhere simultaneously here and there” (p. 180). Dislocation is a term used to describe the experience of “transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2007, p. 65). In most recent immigrant studies, dislocation has been applied to describe the personal and psychological experiences of immigrant communities regardless of whether they were formed by forced or voluntary movements (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2007).

The initial definition of feminization of migration was “the gradual increases in the percentages of migrants that are female” (Boyd, 2006, p. 3) which give rise to debates regarding its implications, constrains and on the appropriateness of its use. A report by Engle (2004) noted that a definition based on the increases of percentages or numbers of immigrant women across the world often generates an interpretation of this phenomenon in a quantitative sense. Yinger (2007) stated that international quantitative data of migratory movements must be understood in context:

Most data are collected by governments, which often use differing definitions of who is a migrant and who is a citizen…. In addition, many immigrant populations are undercounted because they include a large number of undocumented immigrants fearful of stepping forward for censuses and surveys. (Para. 3)
Regarding quantitative data around the number of female international migratory movements, several scholars have pointed out that women have always represented a significant share of migratory movements through history. Omelaniuk (2005) describes how the general perception of international migration is that it was predominantly a male phenomenon during the large labor movements of the 60s and 70s in Europe and the US, with women and children following in secondary waves of family reunification in the 1980s and 1990s. However, during the 1990s, women migrated in higher numbers, both as family members and independently, voluntarily or involuntarily.

Another aspect related to the visibility of women immigrants in official statistics is the fact that women now move around more independently and no longer in relation to their family position or under a man’s authority (Cuban, 2010; Engle, 2004; Lipszyc, 2004; Parrenas, 2001; Piper, 2003, 2008a). Knight’s (2011) report stated that a clear characteristic of the current female migratory movements is the overwhelming number of young, single women involved in international migratory movements, seen as one of the consequences of “the labour and services of single women has become a highly valued commodity in transnational economic activities” (Engle, 2004, p. 20). Knight (2011) described how the last decades have seen an increase in women autonomous migration as “the main economic providers or ‘breadwinners’ for their families” (p. 2). In the same line, Piper (2008a) affirmed that official statistics often capture “only formalized jobs under temporary contract or any other legal schemes. Women are mainly represented in these temporary contract schemes as domestic workers although they also migrate in other, albeit often informal, streams which are not captured by official statistic” (p. 1292).
Scholars and international organizations studying this phenomena have incorporated a qualitative perspective in their research presenting the relevance of the processes of migration, the contexts and conditions, push and pull factors and categories like nationality, race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation – among others – as units of analysis (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Cuban, 2010; Knight, 2011; Engle, 2004; Piper, 2003, 2008a; Trinidad Requena, 2011). In other words, new research on feminization and gendered immigration have made evident the complexity of the current international flows of women, uncovering how there has been a change in the ways women immigrants move, in what capacity and the purpose of it during the last decades (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Cuban, 2010; Knight, 2011; Engle, 2004; Piper, 2003, 2008a). Buckley (2013) highlighted that while frequently discussed, the feminization of migration remains among the least understood trends in migration literature. Existing research links feminization of migration to socioeconomic change in migrant origin countries, changes in destination-country labor markets structural factors, and changing social attitudes. However, “questions of how the feminization of migration begins and how it becomes socially institutionalized remain largely unanswered” (p. 508).

At this point, it is imperative to remember what Mohanty (1984) has questioned with regard to “the” category of women as a universal group in which the process of homogenization and systematization make invisible and deny; not just the differences between the Western woman and the “Third world woman,” but also the multiple differentiations inside of what is understood as The Western woman and The Third world woman. Along with this reflection, it is crucial to make visible how categories like race,
class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender generate diverse experiences and meanings inside of particular groups.

In this logic and going back to our case of interest, feminization of migration, the document of United Nations- INSTRAW (2007) illustrates how female immigration affects particular women of a specific race, class, and countries of birth. For example, Spain and Switzerland “freely providing visas to women willing to work as cabaret dancers and entertainers, Switzerland recruited a large number of Dominican women to work in the sex trade, who then faced numerous restrictions to move into other occupations or to obtain legal papers” (p. 3).

This case highlights two important aspects to be considered when the topic of immigration is addressed: First, the specificity of each situation, keeping in mind who is in the process and what the impact is of variables such as race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity and gender. Second, it is important to analyze the immigration policy of the countries of destination, which plays an important role “not only by directly or indirectly promoting the immigration of particular groups according to the requirements of their labor markets, but also through laws and policies that restrict labor mobility, deny or complicate migrant’s access to legal status, and restrict their access to basic social and labor rights” (United Nations- INSTRAW, 2007, p. 3).

New studies in feminization of migration are approaching the phenomenon of international movements beyond simple differences in migration behavior between men and women and are examining the inequalities underlying those differences besides the direct and indirect influence with other social and individual elements. In other words, feminization of migration looks at how women and men are shaped by the social and
cultural contexts of the individual, and the influence that membership of social groups; economic and political conditions can have on decisions about migration (Engle, 2004; Piper, 2008). As an example, Zuhal Yesilyurt Gunduz (2013) underlined that when husbands migrate; women take over the roles of mother and father. However, when wives migrate, fathers frequently let female relatives care for their kids.

Feminization of migration requires both quantitative and qualitative inquiries that reflect the complexity of the process and contexts. Quantitative data must be studied and analyzed according to the context (Yinger, 2007). According to Piper (2008a), recent studies have pointed out the increasing diversification which means differences within a specific nationality group as well as across nationality groups; and polarization understood as differences regarding skilled versus less skilled of the various migration streams, rendering migration a highly stratified phenomenon. The author explains that the notion of ‘stratification’ “emphasizes the combined effects of gender, ethnicity, legal status, skill level, and mode of entry or exit, with the result of women’s migration(s) emerging as highly stratified” (p. 1288).

Cuban and Stromquist (2009) identified as one the main characteristics of the current international migrations of women “the autonomous pattern of women migrating from low-income to high-income countries” (p. 159). They argued that while women may benefit from it and some male immigrants lose out, feminization of migration is connected to the feminization of poverty in the receiving countries because women “often get caught in a pattern of migration to escape poor working conditions in developing countries only to end up working in the low-paying service sector in advanced economies” (p. 159). Engle (2004) stated that women immigrants are considered “the
distributes of the service” because the demand for low-cost labor and profits leads to a growth in feminized vocations like domestic service, and health care, among others. According to Bjork (2002), women are in high demand for service work because of employers’ perceptions that they are flexible, can work long hours, are temporary residents, and will not demand high salaries. Two studies (Bauer, 2006; and Clifford & Pearce, 2004) about the work conditions of immigrant women in the U.S. found that regardless of with whom women migrate, they are more likely to work in low-paying jobs and be vulnerable to gender, class and racial discrimination.

Sassen (2002) had developed the notion of *feminization of survival*. The author bases the explanation of this notion on the systematic links between the growth of ‘alternative circuits for survival’, for profit-making and for hard-currency earnings and major conditions in developing countries that are associated with economic globalization. Circuits of survival are understood as the growing presence of women in a variety of cross-border circuits. The most important circuits mentioned by Sassen (2002) are:

- The illegal trafficking in women for prostitution as well as for regular work, organized exports of women as brides, nurses, and domestic servants, and the remittances sent back to their home countries by an increasingly female emigrant workforce. Some of these circuits operate partly or wholly in the shadow economy. (p. 508)

Later in her explanation, Sassen emphasized that feminization of survival refers to households and communities that are dependent on women for their survival, but also to the fact that “governments are dependent on women’s earnings in these various circuits, and so are types of enterprises whose ways of profit-making exist at the margins of the
‘licit’ economy” (p. 509). Keeping in mind the connection between feminization of migration and feminization of poverty, as well as the notion of feminization of survival, I argue that it is possible to establish a connection among these three notions creating a circle that traps women in a situation from which it is difficult to escape.

As it has been stated throughout this document, while there are similarities among immigrant females, there are also differences regarding ethnicity, class, race, legal status, nationalities, and educational levels that must be taken into account when studies and programs are developed with this particular group. In that sense, scholars have made the distinction between women immigrants who are forced -refugees, asylum seekers, trafficked- and those who are voluntary - economic migrants, entrepreneurs- (Castles & Loughna, 2002; Rutter, 2006). Mahler and Pessar (2006) pointed out that many factors play a role in women’s decision to migrate, including the psychological and social, which calls into question labels such as ‘economic migrant.’ Issues of geography and historical ties also play important roles in women’s migration as well as language and culture (Cox, 2006; Sassen, 2002). Overall, the factors for their migration are complex and are part of the global political, and economy of social reproductive work (Yeates, 2009).

An example of this is the situation of many Colombians immigrants. As it has been reported by different scholars (Bacca, 2006; Colliers & Gamarra, 2001; Reimers, 2005; Sanchez, 2001; Tazi, 2004), many Colombian immigrants were witnesses to mass murders and the killings of their family members, neighbors, and communities, and many were victims of threats, kidnappings, and assaults (Colliers & Gamarra, 2001; Reimers, 2005; Sanchez, 2001; Tazi, 2004). Tazi (2004) reported that armed groups (including guerrillas, the army, and paramilitaries) “continue to torment villages with their violence,
while family members in Colombia and the United States mourn helplessly” (p. 236). It is unknown how many immigrants continue to be affected by the memory of the gruesome events they suffered, causing them to still worry and fear for their lives, which in turn disrupts their everyday life (Madrigal & Mayadas, 2006). According to Gerow (1997), after such trauma as reported by Colombians—threats, abductions, torture, and murder in their families—painful symptoms arise as a consequence. Bacca (2006) noted that the situation of immigrant Colombian women in Sweden merits special attention. Several participants reported post-traumatic stress disorder because of the violence they endured in Colombia, generating problems in maintaining jobs and integrating with the host society. Bacca (2006) also stated that most of the women who reported post-traumatic stress disorder have not requested asylum as a result of lack of knowledge of women’s and immigrant’s rights.

As previously stated, the reasons for women’s migration are complex. Scholars (Bacca, 2006; Cuban, 2010; and Yeates, 2009) and organizations working on migrant issues use the term _Forced Migration_ in order to describe “a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes” (OIM, 2004, p. 25). According to the Forced Migration Online (FMO, 2013) and the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM, 2013) there are three types of forced migration which are categorized according to their causal factors: (a) conflict, (b) development policies, and (c) projects and disasters. Because of these categorizations, there are various terms, which have been adopted to describe groups affected by forced migration: Refugees, asylum seekers,
internally displaced persons, development displaces, environmental and disaster displaces, smuggled people, and trafficked people (FMO, 2013).

Some authors (Castles & Lougheha, 2002 and Cuban, 2010) questioned the categorization and distinction between forced immigrant and those who are “voluntary” immigrants (economic migrants, gap-year students, entrepreneurs). They argued that conceiving migration as a continuum rather than as dichotomous with, for example, some economic migrants having more in common with refugees, may yield more robust explanations for reasons and experiences of migration; push factors, particularly, conflict issues in sending countries, are salient factors for both economic and forced migrants. This debate as well as the definition of forced migration, the types of forced migration and types of forced immigrants, is pivotal for this study taking into account the Colombian context and the characterization of the international migration for Colombians to the United States.

In this section, I introduced the concept of feminization of migration, its origins, and the importance of qualitative research in order to capture and to understand the migratory movements of women as multifaceted processes. As important elements for the understanding of feminization of migration, I presented the terms of transnational, dislocation, feminization of survival, and feminization of poverty as crucial concepts for the understanding of the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States. Figure 3 illustrates feminization of migration as a second lens that intersects with postcolonial feminist theory, and is part of the theoretical framework of this study. Postcolonial feminist theory and especially, Latina Chicano feminist thought, and feminization of migration will aid in understanding the specificities
of the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States.

Figure 3

*Theoretical Framework – Two Lenses*

**Postcolonial Theory**
- Latina Chicano Feminist Theory

**Feminization of Migration**
- Transnationalism
- Dislocation
- Feminization of Poverty and Survival
- Forced Migration
Social Integration

Social integration was defined to speak about face-to-face interactions. It involves the inclusion of individuals in a system, the creation of relationship among individuals and their attitudes towards the society. “It is the result of the conscious and motivated interactions and cooperation of individuals and groups” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 2). Depending on whether focusing on functional subsystems or social actors, one uses system integration or social integration respectively (Lockwood, 1964). According to Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) and Cruz-Saco (2008) social integration is overall a learning and socialization process. Keeping in mind the purpose, research questions, and the interests in focusing on the processes of immigrant adult Colombian women, this study uses social integration as one of its main concepts.

In what follows, I present other concepts associated with social integration within the field of immigrant studies, along with the definition that this study adopts and its dimensions, and I finish with some hided assumptions, which will enhance the analysis of the data.

Migration and integration research, as a sociological discipline, began in the 1920s with the Chicago school. Other concepts related to social integration in sociology and migration studies have been:

Assimilation

According to Bosswick and Heckman (2006), this concept has been understood as “a one-sided process, in which immigrants and their descendants give up culture and adapt completely to the society they have migrated to” (p. 4). The authors stated that with the rise of nationalism in European societies in the late 19th and early 20th century,
“this concept was seen as an attempt to create homogenous nations and has been associated with ethnocentrism, cultural suppression and use of violence to force minorities to conform” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 4). Brubakeer (2001), Bade and Bommes (2004) and Esser (2004) from Europe; and Alba and Nee (2004) from the United States called attention to its uses clarifying that assimilation “does not necessarily imply the suppression of ethnic culture” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 4). For Alba and Nee (1999), and Esser (2004), this concept means the lessening of social difference between groups.

It is important to clarify that given how this concept has been exercised and used in some political and academic instances for the privilege of the host society, and the homogenization of particular systems, I will not use assimilation as one of the theoretical concepts for the study. Two examples that illustrate this statement are, first, the ban imposed on Muslim women for wearing full-face veil in France (Fekete, 2006), and second, the movement called “Just English” in the U.S. (Cummins, 1992).

Acculturation or Socialization

According to the classical definition, acculturation “comprehend those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). Boswick and Heckmann (2006) defined acculturation as “the process by which an individual acquires the knowledge and competencies needed to interact successfully in a society” (p. 3). Berry (1997) stated that acculturation is a neutral term in principle, but in practice, acculturation “tends to induce more change in one of the groups than in the other” (p. 7).
The concepts of acculturation or socialization will be part of the dimensions incorporated within the definition of social integration, which explain latter in this section.

**Definition of Social Integration**

Jeannotte (2008) stated, “Social integration is one of a constellation of ‘social’ terms” (Jeannotte, 2008, p.7) used in contemporary policy development. Scholars (Boswick & Heckmann, 2006; Delhey, 2004; Hewitt, 1994; Jeannotte, 2008) have described the term as a complex idea that means different things to different people. Hewitt (1994) mentioned the existence of three ways of understanding social integration:

1. Social integration as an inclusionary goal implying equal opportunities and rights for all human beings (p. 3). In this logic, the opposite of social integration is exclusion. Becoming more integrated implies improving life chances.

2. Social integration as a negative connotation conjuring up the image of an unwanted imposition of uniformity” (p. 3).

3. Social integration as a term that does not necessarily imply either a positive or a negative state. It is seen as a way of describing the patterns of human relations of a specific society (Hewitt, 1994).

In a quantitative study regarding immigrants’ social integration in Australia (Rubin, Watt & Ramelli, 2011), social integration is defined as “the quantity and quality of social connections and interactions that people have with others” (p. 1). From this definition, the authors used three variables in order to measure the levels of integration: 1) Quantity of participants’ social relationships with Australians, 2) feelings of social inclusion in terms of an outsider in social gatherings, and 3) participants’ satisfaction
with their immigrant life in terms of employment, accommodation and life in general in Australia. In my opinion, the definition of social integration used in the study of Rubin, Watt, and Ramelli (2011) is too narrow in its content because it omits the analysis of important components of social integration processes, its stages, and dynamics.

After the review of the literature and analysis of different definitions of social integration (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Delhey, 2006; Domingues, 2000; Esser, 2004; and Lockwood, 1964 among others), the definition that this study adopts is:

The inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the core institutions, relationships, and positions of a host society. Integration is an interactive process between immigrants and the host society. For the immigrants, integration means the process of learning a new culture, acquiring rights and obligations, gaining access to positions and social status, building personal relationships with members of the host society and forming a feeling of belonging to, and identification with, that society. For the host society, integration means opening up institutions and granting equal opportunities to immigrants. In this interaction, however, the host society has more power and more prestige. (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 11)

Overall, social integration is a complex concept, learning, and socialization process that speaks and demonstrates the multifaceted process in which immigrants position themselves in new lands with the expectations of increasing their life standards. Social integration “can be considered to be antonym to social exclusion, which is broader than poverty and deprivation and which neglects people’s rights” (Cruz-Saco, 2008, p.2). It is important that the definition informs about the actors, interactions, and roles that play
those in the social integration processes. Therefore, the definition made by Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) is the only one that includes the meanings, roles, and responsibilities of the host society in this process. In my view, this enables that the analysis of data and situations become more holistic, revealing the complexity of situation and processes, and at the same time reducing the risk of essentialisms and reductionism.

Integration in immigrant studies is considered in general terms “the incorporation of new elements (immigrant) into an existing social system” (Snel, Engbersen & Leerkes, 2006, p. 267). Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) described integration “as the process of inclusion of immigrant in the institution and relationships of the host society” (p. 1). From the sociological perspective, integration refers to stable, cooperative relations within a clearly defined social system. It is seen as a process (Boswick & Heckmann, 2006) and a multi-dimensional concept. Snel et al. (2006) bring out two dimensions of integration used in Dutch migration literature: First, structural integration, which refers “to the social position of migrants in the host society, particularly in terms of their level of education and position in the labor market” (p. 267). Second, social, and cultural integration imply the “informal social contacts of immigrant with native people [and] the extent to which immigrants endorse the host society’s prevailing moral standards and values” (p. 267). According to Odé (2002), structural and social cultural dimensions of integration are strongly related. Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) offered four basic dimensions of social integration:
**Structural dimension.** Social integration implies the process and “acquisition of rights and the access to position and status in the core institutions of the host society” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 9) as well as full political citizenship, access to housing market and welfare state institutions. According to the authors, an alternative to participation in the core institutions of the host country is to belong in an ‘ethnic colony’ and participate in “transnational systems on the basis of internationally extended rights” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 9). The ethnic colony helps and support immigrants in their first years of residency on their host country and at the same time can easily become a “mobility trap” (p.9) due to the lack of integration within the host society.

**Cultural dimension.** This kind of integration has as a premise that immigrants can only claim rights and assume positions in their new society “if they acquire the core competences of that culture and society” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 9). Here integration relates to an individual’s cognitive, behavioral and attitudinal change. The authors clarify that cultural integration does not imply that immigrant communities give up their culture. “Bicultural competencies and personalities are an asset for both the individual and for the host society” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 10). For the authors, cultural integration is the same acculturation or socialization that was described previously.

**Interactive dimension.** The interactive dimension means the recognition and inclusion of immigrants in the primary relationships and social networks of the host society. The authors pointed out that in the first phase of the integration process, interactive integration with the ethnic colony helps immigrants. However, it can become
a barrier to the immigrant at the time to create links with the host society and in acquiring the social and cultural capital necessary (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006).

**Indentificational dimension.** This indentificational dimension refers to the identification and participation process with the goals of the core institutions from the host society and implies to develop a feeling of belonging to the host society (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). The authors clarified that it is possible to participate without identifying without developing a feeling of belonging or identification; however, it is not possible to participate without having first acquired the cultural competences by which the core institutions function (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006).

Given the purpose of the study and the research questions, the dimensions of social integration explained above constitute pivotal elements to incorporate into the research instrument and analysis of the data. From my perspective, these four dimensions of social integration and the relationship among them will bring a deeper understating of the social integration of the participants into the Unites States as a host country. At the same time, I incorporate the categories used by Bacca (2006) in his qualitative study regarding the social integration of Colombian immigrants in Sweden. The author used three categories in order to explore and understand the phenomenon of social integration: First, opportunities and spaces: referring to relationships with networks, groups and/or organizations for social socializations, and sense of belonging. Second, women, and families, which includes structure of the family, ties with relatives in the sending country, dynamics, and customs, and values, and third, labor market which makes reference to employment, work conditions, income, and labor stability in the host country.
Overall, social integration is a complex concept that speaks and makes visible the multifaceted process in which immigrants position themselves in new lands with the expectations of increasing their life standards. In that sense, it is important that the definition informs about actors, interactions, and roles that plays those in the social integration processes. Therefore, the definition made by Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) is the only one that includes the meanings, roles, and responsibilities of the host society in this process. In my view, this facilitates that the analysis of data and situations become more holistic, making visible the complexity of situation and processes, and at the same time it reduces the risk of essentialisms and reductionism.

In their analysis about the concept of social integration, Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) elucidate some hidden assumptions of its goal. As the authors explained, the visibility and enunciation of these assumptions are important in order to avoid possible polarizations and actions that will be in contradiction with the meaning itself of social integration.

1. “If not thought out, a call for greater inclusion in the benefits of development can be made without questioning the nature of the current process of development itself” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 6). The authors explain that it is easy to assume that problems of poverty and injustice can be improved through including people formerly excluded. Yet in many cases, the current prototype of development may be economically and ecologically unsustainable, or politically repressive. “Therefore it is always necessary to
ask inclusion in what and on what terms?” (Boswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 6).

2. “A problem can also arise when social integration is sought without giving sufficient attention to the need for cultural diversity within most societies” (Boswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 7). Excluded communities can be included in ways that promote homogeneity. Therefore, social integration becomes synonymous with the imposition of uniformity. “The issue of how to assure equal rights and opportunities for all, while respecting diversity, is one of the central policy questions of the twentieth century. It is also one of the most complexes” (Boswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 7).

3. When the main goal of social integration is to bring the excluded into “national society” there is a tendency to forget that they have their own ways and forms of social organizations. Groups and communities excluded or not, always have forms of social organizations. “Good policy cannot be made if it fails to take the real world of the disadvantaged into account” (Boswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 7).

4. “There is a risk that narrow concentration on the normative goal of social integration will make undesirable disintegration by definition” (Boswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 7). In some instances, it is necessary disintegration, in order to progress toward a more just and equitable society (Boswick & Heckmann, 2006).

These assumptions were presented during the study as important elements for enhancing the analysis and to avoid possible polarization of the research.
Although there are many similarities among immigrant females, it is important to situate them in their specific contexts in order to make evident the spaces from where they move and particularly, to identify the impacts, ruptures and transformations they produce not only in themselves but also in such spaces. It is time to make visible the immigrant woman. The woman that is hardly named, studied, or quantified; the refugee, the elderly, the lesbian, the professional, the mother, the lover, the wife. Those who have an affective, professional, and/or political immigration project; and also, those who are living a migratory process they did not desire.

In this section, I have presented the definition of social integration that will be used in this study as well as its different dimensions along with some hidden assumptions that I, as the researcher, should pay close attention to at the time of the data analysis. In the Figure 4, I illustrate how social integration relates to the two previous bodies of literature and concepts presented earlier in this chapter. In the following section, I will be introducing the adult learning theories pertinent to the study, its purpose and research questions.
Figure 4

*Theoretical Framework – Two lenses and the Phenomenon*

- **Postcolonial Theory**
  - Latina Chicano Feminist Theory
- **Feminization of Migration**
  - Transnationalism
  - Dislocation
  - Feminization of Poverty and Survival
  - Forced Migration

Learning during Social Integration Experiences
Adult Learning Theories

Recommendations from studies regarding adult immigrants in the education system in the United States focused on the urgency of new pedagogies and teaching dynamics. From that perspective, Rodriguez (2008) pointed out that it is necessary to move beyond traditional teaching pedagogies and to develop educational programs that embrace problems and characteristics of the popular culture and community. In the same vein, Morrice (2007) conducted a study about lifelong learning issues for refugees and asylum seekers in the U.K. The author states that “often it is through informal and non-formal learning opportunities that these implicit rules [social engagement rules], norms and tacit knowledge are picked up and developed” (p. 159). Cuban (2010) called attention on the need of further exploration about the meaning making process of immigrant women in other settings than formal education. In that sense, experiential, and transformative learning constitute other educational options for migrants groups given the characteristics, objectives, and philosophy of these learning approaches that can illuminate the understanding of the social integration of immigrants. At the same time, they may enhance the social integration process of immigrants in the host society and culture.

In the following paragraphs, I offer an overview of informal, experiential and transformational learning, women’s meaning making which include their models, main premises and characteristics followed by a section about the literature on adult women and adult learning.
Learning from the Experience

According to Fenwick (2006), the term “‘experiential learning’ is often used both to distinguish ongoing meaning-making from theory, and non-directed ‘informal’ life experience from ‘formal’ education” (Para. 6). Experiential learning was often understood to be radical and associated with learner empowerment. Educational interest in experiential learning has typically championed recognition and valuing of the learner’s personal practical knowledge and informal or incidental experience. As Fiona Reeve and Jim Gallacher (1999) argued, “taking experience as the starting point for learning has the potential at least to erode traditional boundaries between knowledge and skills, vocational and academic learning, and between disciplines” (p. 127).

According to Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007), John Dewey (1938) “made some of the most thoughtful observations about the connections between life experiences and learning” (p. 162). In John Dewey’s (1938) perspective, everything occurs within a social environment. Knowledge is socially constructed and based on experiences. Two of the main premises of Dewey’s theory are the existence of an “organic connection between education and personal experience” (p. 12), and that “all genuine education comes about through experience” (p. 13). Education should be based on “learning by doing” keeping in mind that not “all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other” (p. 13) and some experiences may “mis-educate” which “has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 13). He described experience as “a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into” (p.31). In
that sense, it is problematic to realize the value of every experience in terms of producing learning until it generates some concrete changes.

In order for learning to occur through experience, Dewey argued that the experience must demonstrate the simultaneous dynamics of continuity and interaction, which become major principles of his perspective. The principle of continuity explains that learning is produced only when learners connect what they have learned from existing experiences to those in the past and its implication for the future. In other words, continuity describes the dynamic of reflection on experience (Dewey, 1938). The principle of interaction describes that “an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (p. 41). Interactivity defines the dynamic of learning from experience. These two principles and dynamics work simultaneous and provide the basis for experiential learning. According to Brookfield (1995, 2006) and Dewey (1938), these two principles need to be present in order to learn from experience. The dynamic of interactivity is more difficult to understand because it is situated at the same time in the experience of the person and in the relationships with that particular experience (Elias & Merriam, 1995).

For Dewey (1938), the “educational experience involves above all, continuity and interaction between the learner and what is learned. The true learning situation, then, has longitudinal and lateral dimensions. It is both historical and social. It is orderly and dynamic” (p. XI). Dewey also stressed the role of reflection, which means, “to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences” (p. 110). He considered reflection as the
heart of the disciplined mind in dealing with experience. At another time, Dewey (1933) defined reflection as “assessing the grounds of one’s belief” (p. 9). For Dewey, reflection is the process of rational examination of one’s assumptions.

Another scholar focusing on experiential learning is Fenwick. Fenwick (2000) pointed out that “experiential learning means a process of human cognition. The root of the word cognition in fact means ‘to learn’…Experience embraces reflective as well as kinesthetic activity, conscious and unconscious dynamics, and all manner of interactions among subjects, texts, and contexts” (p. 244-245). From this point, Fenwick tried to break with traditional notions of experiential learning by conceptualizing and questioning five theoretical approaches, which generate questions about “the nature of the experience” (Fenwick, 2003, p. 38).

Fenwick (2006) identified five perspectives of “the learning-in-experience” (Para. 4) regarding the role of educators in working with adults’ experience: (a) Interference—a psychoanalytic perspective illuminating desires and resistances emanating from unconscious dimensions of experiential learning; (b) Participation—a situational perspective emphasizing the connection between individuals and their communities of practice from a collective explanation of experiential learning; (c) Resistance—a critical cultural perspective focusing on how power and inequity structure experience and promote social transformation through experiential learning; (d) Co-emergence—an enactivist perspective: upholding an ecological system and understanding of experiential learning co-emerging in systems of human action, organization, cultures, and nature (Fenwick, 2000; 2001, 2006). According to the author, these dimensions are contained in five theoretical perspectives which are described below.
First, Fenwick (2001) pointed out that from a constructive perspective, the learner is the central and independent constructor of his/her own knowledge. The learner is assumed a stable and unitary self who is regulated by himself/herself. Rational reflection on experience is assumed, as is the learner’s capacity, motivation, and power to mobilize the reflective process. Through reflecting on life experience, the learner interprets and generalizes this experience and then forms mental structures. This process of knowledge construction is largely regarded as a conscious and rational process. Fenwick (2001, 2006) was critical of this perspective for not providing any understandings of the role of desire in learning, for denigrating bodily and intuitive experience, and for not attending to internal resistances in the learning process. Moreover, from constructivist perspectives, context is considered as important but separate from learners. A learner is still viewed as fundamentally autonomous from the surroundings.

Secondly, the psychoanalytic perspective views learning as interferences between conscious thought and unconscious psychic conflicts. Fenwick (2000) stated that

Our daily, disturbing inside-outside encounters are carried on at subtle levels, and we draw on many strategies to ignore them. But, when we truly attend these encounters, we enter the profound conflicts, which are involved in learning. The general learning process is crafting the self through everyday strategies of coping with and coming to understand what is suggested in these conflicts. (p. 251)

Jarvis (1987) and Jarvis et al (2003) pointed that potential learning may start when there is a disjunction between the learner’s biography and the social-cultural context. Thus, from a psychoanalytic perspective, educative conditions would promote interferences, troubling of the conscious mind, and interruptions of the sense of truth. In
Fenwick’s words (2001) “psychoanalytic learning theory attempts to map certain complex dimensions of this experience in which personal transformation can occur” (p. 30).

Thirdly, from a situational perspective or participative perspective, learning is rooted in the situation and the community in which a person participates. “Knowing and learning are defined as engaging in changing processes of human activity in a particular community. Knowledge is not a substance to be ingested and then transferred to a new situation but, instead, part of the very process of participation in the immediate situation” (Fenwick, 2001, p. 253). Individuals learn as they participate by interacting with the community, the tools at hand, and the moment’s activity. Knowledge flows in action and emerges as a result of these elements interacting. “The objective is to become a full participant in the community of practice, not to learn about the practice” (Fenwick, 2001, p. 34). From this perspective, knowledge is not judged in terms of what is true, false, and/or erroneous but “by what is relevant in this particular situation, what is worth knowing and doing, what is convenient from whom and what to do next” (Fenwick, 2006, pa. 10). Wilson (1992) stated, “Adults do not learn from experience, they learn in it” (p. 77). In that sense, “if we want to learn, we must become embedded in the culture in which the knowing and learning have meaning” (p. 77). According to the author, the critical cultural perspective challenges the a-political position of situated cognition. “Relations and practices related to dimensions of race, class, gender, and other cultural/personal complexities, apparently ignored by situative theorists, determine flows of power which in turn determines different individuals’ ability to participate meaningfully in particular practices of systems” (Fenwick, 2001, p. 38).
The fourth perspective is denominated ‘critical cultural perspective’ or resistance. Power is the core issue. From this view, in order to understand people’s learning, we have to “analyze the structures of dominance that express or govern the social relationships and competing forms of communication and cultural practices within that system” (Fenwick, 2001, p. 256). According to Fenwick (2000), critical cultural perspectives suggest that learning is shaped by “the discourses and their semiotics (sign, codes, and texts) that are most visible and accorded most authority by different groups. These discourses often create dualistic categories such as man/woman, reflection/action, learning/doing, and formal/informal, which determine unequal distribution of authority and resources” (Fenwick, 2000, p. 257). Such dualisms exclude people by representing norms and marking nonconformists as “other” to these norms. As Fenwick (2006) pointed out, under these perspectives, learners trace the politics and constraints of the contexts of their experiential learning. Learning is coming to critical awareness about one’s contexts. Educators’ roles are to help learners become more aware of themselves and of their roles in power relations and the production of meaning. In this perspective focus on social action experience. Fenwick (2006) pointed out that:

The actual knowledge people learn through social action experience, according to Foley, are self-confidence, critical understanding of how power works in society, and the resources and flexible process required in direct action. They learn the need to support each other, the nature of the stress involved, how action can polarize a community and reveal its structures, and how unsettling it is to challenge your own and others’ assumptions. (pa. 25)
The last theoretical perspective is the enactivist or Co-Emergence which focuses on the relationships binding experience together in a system level rather than on the components of experience. This perspective also focuses on how learning and environment become simultaneously enacted through experiential learning and assumes that learning depends on the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities embedded in a biology, psychological, cultural context. Under this perspective, the person and his/her context are inseparable in the system they enact. Moreover, Fenwick (2000) stated that

As actors are influenced by symbols and actions in which they participate, they adapt and learn. As they do so, their behaviors and thus their effects on the systems connected with them change. These complex systems shift with each change, changing their patterns of interaction and the individual identities of all actors enmeshed in them. Thus, the environment and the learner emerge together in the process of cognition. (p. 261)

Enactivism draws attention to the ‘background’, and examines myriad fluctuations, subtle interactions, imaginings and intuitions, the invisible implied by the visible, and the series of consequences emerging from any single action. The focus of enactivism is not on the components of experience (which other perspectives might describe in fragmented terms: person, experience, tools, community, and activity) but on the relationships binding them together in complex systems.

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) identify different models of learning from experience keeping in mind theoretical orientations of those scholars. From the constructivist paradigm, the authors mention Javis (1987). Jarvis (1987; 1995)
and Jarvis, Holford, and Griffin (2003) define learning as the process of transforming experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, feelings, and so forth. The authors argue against the simplification of Kolb’s model. Jarvis (1987) believes that not only concrete experiences can produce learning, but “these experiences can be natural or artificially created, apprehended by one or any combination of the senses, the process of thought itself, a specific situation or abstract ideas, and be meaningful or meaningless” (Jarvis, 1987, p. 164). Like Dewey, Jarvis emphasized that experience is a product of the individual interacting with his/her environment. His model situated learning within a social context and started with the assumption of “not every experience results in learning, but experience itself is only a potential basis of learning” (p. 165).

By studying about 200 adults and continuously revising his model, in his latest modification, Jarvis et al. (2003) concluded that there were nine hierarchical types of response to an experience, which could be categorized into four groups with some subgroups respectively. They are non-learning (subgroups: presumption), non-learning or incidental self-learning (subgroups: non-consideration and rejection), non-reflective learning (subgroups: pre-conscious learning, skill learning, memorization), and reflective learning (contemplation, reflective cognitive learning, experimental/action learning). All these forms of learning can occur simultaneously and all the senses can be involved. Each of the reflective forms of learning can have two possible outcomes: conformity or change. Jarvis et al. (2003) stressed that except presumption, there was an emotional dimension to all of these forms of learning. In addition, he regarded reflective learning as the higher form of learning among other groups. In his model, the centrality is reflection and the starting point for a possible learning opportunity is the disjunction between one’s
biography (past experiences including the hidden and unconscious happenings) and the cultural-temporal world of one’s experiences (present encounter).

Jarvis (1987) described that in everyday life, adults often respond to their experiences in an automatic or unthinking manner and these kinds of experiences only can reinforce the stock of knowledge already held (e.g., more confident to conduct similar actions in the future). Only when an adult encounters a new experience but cannot get an automatic response from the stock of knowledge, he/she may have a sense of need to learn. Jarvis (1987) concluded that

Where there is no disjunction between individuals’ stock of knowledge and their perception of their socio-cultural temporal world, then action may be taken for granted and little or no reflection or learning occurs. But when disjunction occurs, reflection may follow, and then learning might occur and the self grow and develop” (p. 169).

He also pointed out that when individuals felt powerless then “experience is meaningless, reflection cannot occur, and learning may not result” (Jarvis, 1987, p. 171). So, based on this concept, Jarvis argued that Knowles’s assumption of “as people grow they accumulate an increasing reservoir of experience that becomes and increasingly rich resource for learning” was over simplified. He stressed that what adults accumulate is “an increasing stock of knowledge which results from interpreting and reflecting upon experiences. What is in the reservoir is the transformation of those experiences” (p. 172). In addition, Jarvis et al. (2003) suggest that secondary experiences (e.g., video presentation, class discussion, lectures, and other formats that adults learn from other’s experiences and interpretations) needed to be included in our consideration about
experiential learning. Furthermore, he stressed that under a social context, “experiences occur internally and are constructs… and the (experiential) learning is actually an internal process—one that is cognitive and physical, but also emotional” (p. 60).

Overall, most of the academic perspectives argue that experience is the most important foundation of adult learning but agree that not all experiences evoke learning. The foundations of experiential learning are context, experience, and reflection. Besides stressing the key influence of reflection on learning through/from/in experiences, Jarvis’s model gives a more detailed description of the complexities of experiential learning; it reminds us that reflection is not an absolute factor in experiential learning and emphasizes the importance of cognitive, physical, and emotional involvement during the processes. Fenwick’s proposal and review of the theoretical perspective provides a wider and alternative way to consider and understand experiential learning for adults. These two approaches of learning from the experience are important part of the data analysis. The theoretical perspectives agree that learning from experience is a complex and complicated process, and adults learn from experiences in diverse ways.

**Transformative Learning**

Exploration of the question of how adult learners process their experience and make meaning of it has led the adult learning research to the inner process of learning. Mezirow’s (1990, 1991, and 2000) transformative learning theory is one of the dominant explanations of adult learning process. Mezirow (1990) defines learning as “the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action” (p. 1). During this process, the author emphasized experience, transformation, action, and knowledge as outcomes of

Transformative Learning (TL), as a theory in adult education, was conceptualized in the 1970s. This adult learning theory has often been closely associated with Jack Mezirow (1991, 1996, 2000). TL, as Mezirow framed it, has been considered to be heavily cognitive-rational and instrumental in theoretical orientation. More broadly, there are additional perspectives and models of TL, including the frames of education and learning for social action (Freire, 2000) and deeper self-analysis (Boyd, 1991; Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1997, 1998). This broader theoretical scope reflects the different perspectives hold on issues of adult learning, self (ego), and society (Taylor, 1998). TL is an adult learning theory of how a person makes meaning of life experiences. Mezirow (2003) explained:

Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. Such frames of reference are better than others because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (pp. 58-59)

Transformational Learning is defined by Mezirow (2000) as “the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open,
emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide actions” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7). In the earliest writings on transformational learning, Mezirow (1981) developed the concepts of “meaning perspectives”, one's overall world-view, and “meaning schemes”, smaller components, which contain specific knowledge, values, and beliefs about one's experiences. A number of meaning schemes work together to generate one's meaning perspective. Meaning perspectives are acquired passively during childhood and youth, and are the target of the transformation that occurs through experience during adulthood. They operate as perceptual filters that determine how an individual will organize and interpret the meaning of his/her life's experiences.

Overall, transformative learning theory explores how this meaning perspective can be changed. Mezirow (2000) argued that only critical reflection on our meaning perspective makes transformative learning happen. While he acknowledged that the formation of meaning schemes is dependent on emotionally charged relationships, he emphasizes rational thinking as the only way to produce critical reflection. It is not easy to foster perspective transformation because our meaning perspective anchors our values and sense of self. Based on Habermas’ (1971) work on technical, communicative, and emancipatory knowledge, Mezirow (1985) incorporated instrumental learning (acquisition of new skills, and practices), dialogic learning (understanding values, concepts, and others’ points of view), and self-reflective learning as “being aware and critical of our subjective perceptions of knowledge and the constrains of social knowledge” (Cranton, 2006, p.12).
Meaning perspectives change and evolve in response to life experiences, especially those which induce powerful emotional responses in the individual. Often these life-changing events are personal crises. It is these meaning perspectives, which Mezirow saw as the raw material of the changes that occur in transformational learning. Mezirow (2000) defined meaning schemes as “sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments” (p. 18). They usually operate implicitly and arbitrarily and determine what we see and how we see it. Meaning schemes suggest a line of action that we tend to follow automatically constituting points of view which are expressed dimensions of a meaning perspectives or a frame of reference. Mezirow (2000) stated that a frame of reference ultimately enables us to make meaning out of experience:

A frame of reference is a “meaning perspective,” the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions. It involves cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions. It selectively shapes and delimits perception, cognition, feelings, and disposition by predisposing our intentions, expectations, and purposes. It provides the context for making meaning within which we choose what and how a sensory experience is to be construed and/or appropriated. (p. 16)

A meaning perspective provides a sense of stability, coherence, community, and identity. Furthermore, it is often grounded in strong emotion. So what challenges one’s meaning perspective is usually dismissed strongly by the learner. Mezirow (2000) suggested that the learner often tries to defend his or her point of view by ignoring challenges as “distorting, deceptive, ill-intentioned, or crazy” (p. 18). TL is often
referenced to explain the changes in adulthood when there are disorienting dilemmas caused by life crises. Mezirow argued that if we critically reflected on our existing meaning perspectives and explored alternatives to them, we could have more inclusive, integrative perspectives. By transforming our meaning perspectives, we can discover new meanings and roles, and act upon them. Further, frames of reference encompass cognitive, conative, and emotional components (Mezirow, 1997). Subsumed in frames of reference are two dimensions: habits of mind and points of view. Cranton (2006) succinctly captures the roles and functions of these two elements:

Habits of mind are the broad predispositions that we use to interpret experience. A habit of mind is expressed as a point of view. A point of view is a cluster of meaning schemes, and meaning schemes are habitual, implicit rules for interpreting experiences (p. 22)

Towards greater clarity in making distinctions between these three components (frames of reference, habits of mind, and points of view), it is propounded that frames of reference are typically developed in a person via an uncritical aggregation (internalization) of cultural beliefs as well as certain normative assumptions within particular contexts and domains of influence (Mezirow, 1997). Hierarchically, such frames of reference steer the habits of mind, which are more enduring than points of view. In other words, habits of mind (e.g., learning styles, moral norms, religious doctrine, personality traits, attitudes (Mezirow, 2000) are, more or less, tacit whereas points of view are “more accessible to awareness and to feedback from others” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 6).
Frames of reference (meaning perspectives) constrain and delimit how life experiences are understood by the adult learner. Taylor (1998) explained that “meaning perspectives operate as perceptual filters that organize the meaning of our experiences” (p. 7). When an experience is faced and the extant meaning perspective is unable to assimilate the event into a meaningful interpretation, the options for the learner are to either reject the event or accommodate one’s frame of reference to the reality of the new and challenging life experience. Such a provoking life event is called a disorienting dilemma and the change in the meaning perspective is what is known as perspective transformation. Regarding such dramatic changes, Mezirow (1997) acknowledged that some perspective transformations might be highly distressing and capable of disturbing an adult’s existential foundations. Indeed, in what was initially presented as a linear process (Baumgartner, 2001; Courtenay, Merriam, & Reeves, 1998), but is now viewed as a “more individualistic, fluid, and recursive, than originally thought” (Taylor, 2000, p. 292), Mezirow’s perspective of TL is a complex and multifaceted adult learning concept.

Three common themes characterized Mezirow's theory of transformational learning. First, adults live experiences and the commencement of TL begins with some of these life occurrences (Mezirow, 1995). Secondly, Mezirow (1990) asserted that “by far the most significant learning experiences in adulthood involve critical self-reflection – reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting” (p. 13). Moreover, Taylor (1998) confirmed “critical reflection, based on Habermas’ view of rationality and analysis, is considered by Mezirow the distinguishing characteristic of adult learning” (p. 9). Among the types of reflections referenced by Mezirow (1990) (i.e., content, process, premise),
only premise reflection is attributed the special connotation of critical reflection, which challenges the soundness or validity of presuppositions in earlier learning. Moreover, Cranton (2006) singles out premise reflection as having the particular “potential to lead people to the transformation of a habit of mind” (p. 35). Thirdly, rational discourse is attributed as being the “essential medium through which transformation is promoted and developed” (Taylor, 1998, p. 10).

Paulo Freire, “believing that education was for the purpose of liberation” (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 16), aimed at facilitating “conscientization” (Freire, 2000, p. 17) in adult learners towards the realization of “sociopolitical and economic contradictions in their world” (Taylor, 1998, p. 16) and acting against oppressive forces. Freire’s notion of *praxis* – “the moving back and forth in a critical way between reflecting and acting on the world” (Taylor, 1998, p. 17). Thus, unabashed emphasis on social and political activism is yet another distinguishing factor of TL from other adult learning theories.

Recent reviews note the roles of emotion, feeling, intuition, and spirituality in fostering perspective transformation (Baumgartner, 2001; Cranton, 2006; Dirkx, 1997, 2001; Taylor, 1997, 2000; Wiessner & Mezirow, 2000). Reviewing over ten years of research directly related to transformative learning theory, Taylor (1997) pointed out “the significance of intuition, affective learning, extra-rational influences, and the guiding force of feelings” (Taylor, 1997, p. 48). He suggested that transformative learning research “needs to be explored at a more in-depth level…the minimization of the role of critical reflection and increased role of other ways of knowing” (Taylor, 1997, p. 55). An image of the learner is reconstructed as one who can claim his extra-rational faculties -
such as bodily feeling, emotion, affection, spirituality, or intuition in the process of learning while still acknowledging rationality.

Mezirow (1997) emphasized that transformative learning is rooted in the way human beings communicate, and does not link it exclusively with significant life events of the learner. Through this combination of reflection and discourse, the student was able to make shifts in his/her worldview, which produced a more inclusive world-view. For Mezirow, one of the benefits of transformational learning was the development of greater autonomy as a person, a defining condition of adulthood (Mezirow, 1997).

In a literature review on transformative learning, Taylor (2007), highlighted the importance of be aware that transformative learning may not always have a positive outcomes for the individual stating the need to broaden the definition of outcomes of perspective transformation to include the possibility for a more negative impact on identity and conception of self. Taylor (2007) also drew attention to the lack of research into the sociocultural factors that shape the transformative experience. In a study about the transformative learning on refugees, Morrice (2012) concluded that:

The case study of refugees has underlined how transformative learning not only involves epistemological processes of changing ways of thinking and changes how the world is perceived, but it can also involve a more profound ontological process where individuals have to adjust their sense of who they are and what they can be in the world. It has demonstrated the importance of considering the social and cultural factors that shape the transformative experience and highlights the need for learning theories to recognize the potential disbenefits and negative outcomes of learning on identity and conceptions of self. (p. 267)
Looking for views that consider the social, political, and cultural factors that shape the transformative experience, Torres (2012) pointed out that the contributions of Freire regarding the process of construction of a democratic pedagogic subject, and the notion of crossing borders in education and learning processes are the foundations for a transformative social justice perspective. For Torres (2012) “transformative social justice learning is a teaching and learning model that calls on people to develop a process of social and individual conscientization” (p. 3) The author postulated that conscientization is not only a process of social transformation, but also “an invitation to self-learning and self-transformation in its mots spiritual and psychoanalytical meaning. A dynamic process which assumes that by rethinking our past, we can fundamental gain an understanding of the formation of our own self” (p. 3). According to the author, reclaiming conscientization as a method and substantive proposal for transformative social justice learning entails a model of social analysis and social change that challenges the most basic articulating principles of capitalism, including inequalities and inequities (Torres, 2012).

In the following section, the reader will find an overview of theoretical approaches regarding women as learners from the field of adult education and feminist theory.

**Adult Women and Meaning Making**

Feminist theory seeks to understand how society is structured, thus exposing the unequal power relationships based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. Overall, feminist theory is concerned with the situations of women worldwide. Its focus differs according to its units of analysis and/or whether the
perspective is individual or societal (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). From this lens, scholars have identified that for a long time our understandings about adult learning and adult learners have resulted from studies using men as participants, from men-specific learning theories and models written mainly by men. Women and their learning have been invisible.

Overall, adults have only been taught and trained to regard and pursue rational thought as an only and higher way of knowing. In the dichotomy of mind vs. body, emotion vs. intellect, women were categorized into the bodily, emotional, non-rational side. Gilligan’s (1982) studies and *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) have profoundly influenced much follow-up research and have brought scholars’ attention to women as learners. Although there still are debates, many studies have verified that women’s ego and identity development tends to put relationship and care in the center and tends toward increasing intimacy with others rather than toward autonomy (Caffarella & Olson, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; & Peck, 1986). The connection to others significantly affects women’s worldview, self-definitions, and behaviors in everyday life, including learning. Moreover, Belenky et al. (1986) found *connected knowing* was the style most often described by their diverse women interviewees. The authors found that knowing by receiving from others and as well as sharing knowledge with others was also prominent among women who participated in this study. Other elements that appear with some consistency in their interview was silence as a way of women’s knowing as well as subjective knowing and constructed knowing. The characteristic of connected knowing is embracing new ideas and seeking to understand different points of view rather than looking for flaws in logic and reasoning.
in new ideas. “For a connected knower, her procedures of knowing involve building a connection to the known and are based on empathy” (Taylor & Marienau, 1995, p. 9). Women’s presumed orientations toward relationships are linked to characterizations of women as reliant on intuitive, subjective, and affective ways of learning (Flannery, 2000).

According to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007), Tisdell “has moved feminist pedagogy by forming a synthesis of the liberatory and gender models that promotes both personal emancipation and public action” (p. 264). Tisdell (1996) stated that the liberatory model is strong on issues that relate to race, class, and gender. A criticism of this model is that “it focuses too much on structures, and do not account for the individual’s capacity of agency, the capacity of having some control outside of these social structure” (p. 310). Regarding the gender model, the author affirms it tends to emphasize the similitudes among women, not taking into account the differences among them. In other words, there is a unified woman’s experience.

Tisdell’s (1998) proposal uses four primary elements of post-structural feminist though as relevant in adult education. First, the importance of understanding gender and its significance with other structural systems of privilege and oppression such as race, class, and sexual orientation, but note the limitations of a focus only on social structure(s). According to the author, the intersections of gender with other systems of oppression and privilege are relevant to the construction of the self in feminist poststructuralism. It is at this point, where issues of positionality are visible and important. “The primary units of analysis in these post-structural feminist pedagogies could be conceived as the connections between the individual and the intersecting
structural systems of privilege and oppression that affect how participants construct knowledge, discuss their own experience, and interact in the classroom” (Para. 10).

Second, poststructural theories question and problematize the notion of ‘Truth.’ Third, poststructural theories highlight the notion of “constantly shifting identity” (Para. 11). Regarding adult learning environment and the connections between one's individual (constantly shifting) identity and social structures the author explains that “as learners examine the impact of social systems of privilege and oppression on their own identity, including their beliefs and values, the "discourse" is disrupted, thus shifting their identity, as well as increasing their capacity for agency” (Para. 11). The fourth element is the deconstruction of categories and binary opposite concepts what she calls “deconstruction of the ‘rational-affective’ dichotomy” (Para. 12). As an explanation of this, Tisdell affirmed that

Such a deconstruction bears in mind both the rational or cognitive aspects of affectivity, and the affective components of rationality. The unit of analysis—the connections between—is also relevant here. It asks what the connection is between our feelings and emotions and how they relate to what we can rationally know about the world. If an idea is too contrary to our belief system, to the way we have lived out our social roles, it may be too "scary" to even consider. The emotion of fear may not allow us to consider an alternative idea to that which we have held as truth. Conversely, the truth of a new idea might so resonate with us on an emotional level that it is just what we need to propel us forward to new ways of thinking and being in the world. Thus, rationality and affectivity are not
really such dichotomous categories, especially in a feminist poststructural understanding of the world. (Para. 12)

From a feminist perspective, Michelson (1996) argues that experiential learning from the reflective or constructivist view of development denigrates bodily and intuitive experience, advocating retreat into the loftier domains of rational thought from which ‘raw’ experience can be disciplined and controlled. She suggests that reflective theories of experiential learning dominating adult education have actually repressed possibilities of meaning, knowledge, and identity. Working from the ideas of Bakhtin (1981), she suggests that the notion of ‘carnival’ might help open our theories of experiential learning. Carnival is “a site for transgressing repressive, overdetermined meanings and creating knowledge within a wider play of possibilities . . . where we can welcome the excess of experience and with it, the contingent quality of both meaning and identity” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 145-46).

Her critique of educators is aligned with other feminist poststructuralists such as Mimi Orner (1992) and Elizabeth Tisdell (1999), who argue that the assumption of (distorted) ‘concrete experience’ leads to a mistaken educational orientation of freeing people from their misconceptions, ideologies, false consciousness, and colonized lifeworlds. Instead, argues Michelson (1999), educators should be assisting learners to explore the availability of meanings within our cultures and societies. We cannot deny people’s historically embedded subjectivity, or the boundaries of self. Instead, we should be committed to opening self “to the transgressive, oppositional Other within our own discourses and societies” (Michelson, 1999, p. 146).
As of today, there has not been studied how immigrant adult Colombian women in the U.S. know what they know and understand their social integration process in United States’ society. It is my belief that in order that immigrant adult Colombian women in particular, and Latinas in general, become integrated and members of the society in the U.S, scholars, practitioners and policies makers should have knowledge and understand the learning that takes place during these experiences and how women make sense of today’s U.S. context. In addition, it is important to keep in mind the demands of current times regarding the needs of learners, especially when the level of uncertainty is increasing due to the changes in the global economy, and the polarization of views on social issues.

Regarding education, “Neoliberal strategies have focused on economic purposes and the role of the market in delivery of educational services” (Mayo, 2005, p. 153). The dominant global view considers education as a service instead of a realization of it as a human right (Mayo, 2005). This has generated that countries and societies put a lot of resources and meanings in formal and accredited education, resisting importance to other types of learnings that are as an important as formal education in order to survive and ‘advance’ in a particular society. This condition affects immigrants in a strong way especially during the process of social integration. According to the Gonzales (2008), Dockterman (2011) and Arriaza (2004), poverty, constant mobility, income and political inequalities, plus lack of equality and attention to diversity in educational polices are some of the reasons for the low educational levels in adult Latinos/as immigrants in the U.S.
Latina/Chicano theory in conjunction with feminist theory embraces a holistic vision of educators, learners, learning processes, and the relationship between internal aspects of the learners and their contexts. These theoretical perspectives question power relationships and promote social change through the inclusion and analysis of social and cultural elements within them, such as class, gender, race, ethnicity, citizenship, and sexual orientation. In fact, these social and cultural factors are a fundamental part of their body of knowledge. The notions, aspects and premises of experiential and transformational learning make visible where and how learning can take place at the individual and collective level. This factor is vitally important for my research, because in order to understand immigrant adult Colombian women’s experiences and the learning takes place, it is necessary to study the individual and collective level and their constant interlocution. In Figure 5, I present the three theoretical lenses and their relationship with the phenomenon of study.
Figure 5

Theoretical Framework – Three lenses and the Phenomenon

Postcolonial Theory
- Latina Chicano Feminist Theory

Adult Learning Theories
- Learning from the Experience
- Transformative Learning
- Women's Meaning Making

Feminization of Migration
- Transnationalism
- Dislocation
- Feminization of Poverty and Survival
- Forced Migration

Learning during Social Integration Experiences
**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I described the main theoretical perspectives that are used in the study keeping in mind the purpose and research questions. The chapter was divided into four main sections. The first section covered the epistemological premises of postcolonial theory and Latina/Chicano feminist as a framework that will enhance the analysis of the study. The second segment discussed feminization of immigration, its relation to feminization of poverty and feminization of survival as well as the relation of feminization of migration with the situation of immigrant adult Colombian women. In the third section, I presented the evolution of the concept of social integration in the field of immigrant studies, its relation to the present research, main characteristics, and the different dimensions of social integration that are pertinent for this study. In the fourth section, I presented a review of learning from the experience, and transformative learning as adult learning theories that will inform this study. This sections ends with a review of women as a learners in adult education.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe and to understand the social integrations experiences, and the learning that occurs for adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States. The following research questions guided the study:

3. How do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand their social integration experiences in the United States?

4. What types of learning, if any, take place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change?

The sections in this chapter discuss the following aspects used in the methodology of the study: design of the study, participants’ selection, data collection and data analysis procedures and concludes with a discussion about the trustworthiness of the study, my subjectivity statement and a warning about the study’s limitations.

Design of the Study

The study used a basic interpretative qualitative research design (Merriam, 1998, 2002) as the methodology of inquiry. It aimed at in-depth exploration and understanding of the social integration experiences of eight adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States. In a basic interpretative qualitative study, the researcher “is interested in understanding the meaning of a phenomenon has for those involved” rather than focus on
culture, a single case, or theory-building (Merriam, 2002, p. 37). Data were collected through interviews, and document analysis. The analysis usually results in identification of recurrent patterns such as factors or categories and a description of these patterns. In addition, basic interpretative qualitative studies are not constrained in their format as they seek holistically to explore a given phenomenon (Merriam, 1998, 2002).

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative studies focus on in-depth understanding and description of meanings and processes of an experience or a phenomenon. According to Van Maanen (1979), qualitative research inquiry is “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 520). The crucial philosophical assumption underlying qualitative research is that meaning is created by individuals’ interactions with their world (Bonilla, 1997; Merriam, 1998, 2002, 2009; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). It assumes that reality does not exist outside researchers and research participants; instead, it exists within human interaction (Esterberg, 2002). Hence, qualitative research assumes that the meaning associated with an object or event can be different according to the individual’s perspective or situation. It explores the knowledge, meanings, experiences, interpretations, and values shared by individuals in a given space and temporal context (Bonilla, 1997; Merriam, 1998, 2002, 2009; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). The emphasis is on understanding and describing the individuals’ meaning making of their social circumstances, rather than trying to identify social facts (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Patton, 2002).
Qualitative research focuses on privileging the complexity of human behavior, taking into account the contexts of everyday interaction to understand social realities, perspectives, and the logics of research participants. Qualitative research assumes that each participant has unique meanings for the same object or event that are constructed by his or her interactions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Esterberg, 2002). This was a pivotal premise for the study because it facilitated visibility of the complexity of immigrant Colombian women in the United States and the connections between their making-meaning, current situations and learning experiences.

A basic interpretative qualitative design was appropriated for this study mainly because of these two reasons. First, the main goal of a qualitative research is to understand the meanings that participants construct and how it is related to the purpose of the study, and the research questions, especially when the focus is on identifying the types of learning with in a particular experience (Bonilla, 1997; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998, 2002). The second reason was the relationship between the purpose of the study, and the fact, that researchers conducting interpretative qualitative studies are interested in “1) how people interpret their experience, 2) how they construct their worlds, and 3) what meanings they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how they make sense of their lives and their experiences” (Merriam, 2002, p. 38).

Other elements taken into consideration for choosing qualitative research inquiry as a methodology were the importance of maintaining an inductive process in which participants are considered the experts (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Bonilla, 1997; Merriam 2009). Thus, researchers build the main concepts from the data where the data
are precisely the participants’ narrations rather than striving to test hypotheses developed through a review of literature (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Bonilla 1997; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998, 2009). Therefore, qualitative research is a humanistic process rich in description that does not reduce the words and acts of participants to statistical variables (Bonilla, 1997; Merriam, 2009). The researcher is the key instrument of data collection and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998, 2002, 2009) suggesting the associating of objectivity with the principle of inter-subjectivity, which states that researchers make accurate descriptions but their subjectivity can influence them (Bonilla, 1997; Connelly & Clandinin, 1995). The last aspect taken into consideration for choosing qualitative research was that the researcher must be alert in order to be “responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress” (Merriam, 2009, p. 16) which generates a flexible research design (Bonilla, 1997; Merriam 2009).

An “epistemology” is a framework or theory for specifying the constitution and generation of knowledge about the social world; that is, it concerns how to understand the nature of “reality”. A given epistemological framework specifies not only what “knowledge” is and how to recognize it, but who are the “knowers”, by what means someone becomes one, and also the means by which competing knowledge-claims are adjudicated and some rejected in favor of another/others (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 188). Therefore, the epistemological paradigm that support this study was the interpretive-constructivist stance, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and that is there is no single, observable reality that “Researchers do not ‘find’ knowledge, they construct it” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 8-9), and suggests different concepts to discern the degree of quality
within qualitative research. The constructive perspective enhanced this study due to its capability to contribute to the understanding of specific cases at any given time and within a particular context. The constructivist perspective strongly embraces people’s subjective aspects as a pathway into the understanding of human behaviors, processes, and beliefs.

The relationship between researcher and participant, or the subject – object of the study - has its major premise in the reconstruction of meaning: the generic object of comprehension is the human experience, represented in the oral and written tradition and in cultural expressions. The relationship between researcher and participant is of mutual interaction and co-construction through language. The purpose of the knowledge is the understanding of collective experiences in specific areas (space and time) and the acceptance of the difference and uniqueness of individuals and groups (Bonilla, 1997). This enriched the understanding of the narrations and experiences from the participants.

**Participants Selection**

Purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998), or “typical-case selection” (deMarrais, 2004) was adopted for this study. With this type of sampling, “the researcher sets out criteria that are typical of a person within a group” (deMarrais, 2004, p. 60). Participants are purposefully chosen based on those criteria in accordance with the purpose of the study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). This sampling technique uses the judgment of the researcher in selecting the cases, which are chosen with a specific purpose in mind. Neuman (1994) asserts that purposive sampling is only appropriate in three situations. First, a researcher may use this type of sampling method to select unique cases that prove to be particularly informative. Second,
use purposive sampling to select members of a difficult to contact, specialized population. Third, if a researcher wants to identify specific types of cases for in-depth investigation, purposive sampling is a good choice. The purpose is not so much to generalize to a larger population but to be able to gain a deeper understanding of the types of cases. It is a fact that in qualitative research, there are some studies that require that the researcher focus on either a small geographic area, or a limited population. In other words, the researcher has a strong purpose for this type of pinpoint selection (Hessler, 1992).

Based on the purpose of this study and its focus on immigrant adult Colombian women, the inclusion criteria to participate in the study were:

1) Immigrant adult Colombian women aged 21 and older.

2) Participants should have been in the United States a minimum of two years.

For this study, immigrants were understood as females who are not U.S. citizens at birth; in other words, who were born outside the United States, Puerto Rico, or other U.S. territories, and do not have a U.S. -citizen parent.

The rationality of imposing the condition of a two-year residence in the United States aimed at excluding from the pool of participants was based on “the honey moon” stage of their immigration experience (Oberg, 1954, Plessis, 2010). According to the authors, the ‘honey moon’ stage is the first of several phases that immigrants experience during their journey. This stage is also call the ‘tourist stage’ because there is an overwhelming feeling of excitement and willingness to experience what it is new. Oberg (1954) stated that the time of this phase varies according to each person, but usually is between six and eighteen months. Because the core concern in this study was to
understand, the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the U.S. and the learning that took place during such experiences, one year might not be enough for experiencing and reflecting through their social integration experiences.

Participants were recruited through three venues. First, I contacted different organizations working with Colombians and/or Latinos to identify potential participants who met the above criteria. Five participants were located this way. Second, I reached out to local restaurants owned by Colombians and asked if they could recommend any participants. Two other participants were identified through this method. Finally, three more participants were contacted through snowball sampling (Creswell, 1998) given the fact that I asked women who participated in the study if they could identify potential participants among their friends and family.

Every effort was made to follow ethical research practices during the implementation of this study. The study was approved by the University of Georgia’s Human Subjects Office before any data collection took place. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, and their participation was and will remain confidential. All documents given to the participants (e.g., the consent forms) were translated into Spanish (See Appendix A).

**Sampling Size**

Merriam (2009) explains that there is not an answer to the question of how many people do I need to interview?, She explains that it will depend on the questions to be asked, the data that is being generated along with the ongoing data analysis, as well as the resources allocated for the research. In addition, Patton (2002) posits that "there are no
rules for sample size in qualitative research" (p. 244), it is the data gathered in the study what determines how many participants need to be included in the study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that the number of interviews needed to continue, "Until the point of redundancy" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202) explaining that “in purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is concluded when no new information is forthcoming from new sample units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202). Therefore, I stopped collecting data when I felt confident that I had reached data saturation; that is, I started hearing repeatedly the same answers among participants. Overall, ten immigrant adult Colombian women were identified and interviewed but only the data of eight participants were included and used in the analysis of the study. Participants were originally from different areas of Colombia, backgrounds, educational and economical levels as well as immigration status.

**Biographical information of participants.** Eight immigrant adult Colombian women who were currently living in a Southeast State and have lived for a minimum of two years in the U.S. agreed to participate in the study. To prevent the findings from being influenced by geographic and other factors, this researcher interviewed immigrant adult Colombian women of diverse ages, education levels, and socio-economic backgrounds. Participants chose a pseudonym meaningful to them. The demographic details described in this chapter, are important given the diversity of participants in the study. At the same time, it sets the frame for understanding categories, relationships, results and analysis, which are presented in the next chapters.
Participants’ ages ranged from late 30s to late 50s. With regard to the number of years living in the U.S., four participants have lived here between 10 and 13 years; two between 7 and 8 years, and another two women 4 years. Table 2 shows each participant’s age, educational level, marital status, city of origin, years living in the U.S, socio-economic level, and race/ethnicity. Regarding the city of origin, three women (Juanita, Betty and Patricia) come from rural areas of Colombia, and five from urban areas and main Colombian cities - Bogotá, Medellin and Villavicencio (Diana, Eugenia, Liliana, Sandra and Yolanda). Figure 6, presents the place of origin of participants by Department (State).

Participants’ answers related to race/ethnicity and socio-economic levels represent how each woman self-identified herself respectively. In the column about socio-economic level, there are cases in which two different answers appear. This represents the distinction made by participants regarding their socio-economic level while living in Colombia and while living in the U.S. For example, in Eugenia’s case, she identified herself as being of high socio-economic means in Colombia, and medium socio-economic means in the U.S (See Table 2). In the case of participants who identified themselves in the same socio-economic level in Colombia and in the U.S. one answer appears as can be seen in Juanita’s case (See Table 2). Some data, not requested in the formal interview’s demographic component were additionally volunteered and are presented in column nine.
Figure 6

Place of Origin of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eugenia</td>
<td>Morroa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juanita</td>
<td>Timbiqui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Santander de Quilichao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>Villavicencio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liliana</td>
<td>Bogota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Bogota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>Rural area of Valle del Cauca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Medellin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Current immigration status for participants was as follows: Three were U.S. citizens, four were Legal Permanent Residents entering the country as refugees, and the remaining one was here on her work visa (See Table 2). Of the eight participants, five have graduate degrees and two have no formal education. When asked to describe their socio-economic level in Colombia in comparison to their current level in the U.S., four expressed a decline in their socio-economic level and five see no change.

Regarding language proficiency, Table 3 shows that six participants were literate in Spanish and English, two others spoke Spanish only and were illiterate in both languages one speaking Spanish only and illiterate in English, with fair levels of skill in both speaking and listening. This information is based on participants’ self-evaluations of their proficiency in both Spanish and English. More information about participants of the study is presented in Chapter 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>City of Origin</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years in U.S.</th>
<th>Socio-economic Level</th>
<th>Immigration Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Cali, Valle del Cauca</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>Mulata, Afro-Colombia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Medium - Low</td>
<td>Refugee/ Green Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Medellin</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Permanent resident / Green Card / U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugenia</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Morroa, Sucre</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>White, Latina</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>High-Medium</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juanita</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Timbiqui, Cauca</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Black, Latina</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Refugee / Green Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liliana</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bogota</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>High-Medium</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Santander de Quilichao</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Black, Latina</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Refugee/ Green Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Bogota</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>High-Medium</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Villavicencio</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>H1B Visa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Language Proficiency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugenia</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juanita</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liliana</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*G: Good, F: Fair, N: None.*

**Data Collection**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). When researchers collect and analyze the data, they can immediately respond and adapt to changing circumstances (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Interviews and documents are the main kinds of qualitative research methods (Merriam, 1998, 2002; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Patton, 2002). The chosen methods for this study were in-depth interviews, and document analysis.
**In-depth Interviews**

Interviewing is the method most frequently used in qualitative studies (Glense, 2006; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Merriam (1998) stated that interviews are conversations with a purpose to find out what is in someone else’s mind, while Patton (2002) pointed out that interviews enable researchers to gather data on a certain topic in detail within a limited time. This author argues that the ability of the interviewer determines the quality of the information; having an interest in and respect for the participant’s perspective are the most important factors in increasing the quality of the data obtained through interviews. Esterberg (2002), Merriam (2009), and Seidman (2006) indicated that during interviews, the researcher establishes a relationship with the interviewee, which makes the researcher’s interpersonal skills important. Merriam (1998) pointed out that a good interviewer needs to be “sensitive, and respectful of the respondent” (Merriam, 1998, p. 87).

Regarding an in-depth interview, Seidman (2006) suggested that it “provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. A basic assumption… is that meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 10).

I applied the model of “three interview series”, which is part of phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 2006). The first interview focuses on the life history of the participant. According to the author, “the interviewer’s task is to put the participant’s experience in context by asking her to tell as much as possible about herself in light of the topic up to the present time” (Seidman, 2006, p. 17). In that sense, participants
reconstructed their early experience in Colombia including the time of leaving the country and arriving in the U.S. The purpose of the second interview was “to concentrate on the concrete details of the participant’s present lived experience in the topic area of study” (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). Seidman (2006) recommended asking for details of participant’s experiences rather than opinions. Thus, details about the social integration experiences were gathered in this interview, beside questions regarding the learning that took place during these experiences. In the last interview, the researcher asked participants to reflect on the meaning of her or his experiences, this requires that “participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation” (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). The author asserted that this interview can be productive only if the foundation for it has been established in the first two. For the third interview “we focus on that question in the context of the two previous interviews and make that meaning making the center of our attention” (Seidman, 2006, p. 19). This interview method is also call The life story interview by Atkinson (1998, 2007), Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, (1998) and Cermák (2004).

Overall, the main objective of using in-depth interviews to gain in-depth knowledge of the women’s social integration experiences, uncover the learning that took place and the role of their making meaning in those experiences. By allowing the participants the freedom to tell their stories or to detail the accounts of their experiences as immigrant adult Colombian women in the U.S., I was be able to gain a deep understanding of their social integration experiences and the process of making meaning of such experiences. My interview questions (see Appendix B) were designed to elicit storytelling. I used a language familiar to the participants encouraging them to describe
their feelings about the experiences they choose to discuss. For this, I paid attention to
the words that participants used and incorporated them into how I framed the questions.
For example, during the interview conversations with Juanita, she referred to
International Rescue Committee (IRC) as “la fundación” – The foundation. Therefore, I
incorporate the term “la fundación” in questions that needed it. Another factor that
facilitated the use of a familiar language was my previous knowledge of regional dialects
from different parts of Colombia, and my experience working with women with different
educational levels.

I reviewed the content of each interview before conducting the next interview in
the sequence to identify if there were any points that needed to be clarified or expanded
upon in the consequent interview. Participants were able to choose the language (Spanish
or English) of the interview. After IRB approval on January 2013, I conducted the three-
set interviews over spring of 2013. All of the participants opted to conduct the interviews
in Spanish. Participants were also able to decide the time and place of the interviews.
Interviews were held in participants’ homes, public library and in a coffee shop.
Interviews lasted from 65 minutes to 150 minutes, with an average of approximately 90
minutes.

All of the interviews were digitally recorded. I personally transcribed verbatim
the recording of the interviews soon after the interview took place. After all revisions
were made and the transcripts were finalized, the voice recordings on my computer were
archived on a flash drive and deleted from the computer. Interview files were stored in
both my computer’s hard drive and on an external hard drive. The files on the computer
were protected by using a password and the external drive was kept in a safe locked
place. Additionally, data analysis started the moment the first interview was conducted; Merriam (2009), Ezzy (2002), and Patton (2002) encouraged the researcher to conduct data analysis simultaneously with data collection.

All study participants received a letter with details about participating in the study (see Appendix C). Each signed a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix D) and completed a brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E).

Documents

“Document is an umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). Merriam adds that documents are generally not produced for research unlike other types of data; however, they contribute valuable information. Documents can be either public or private records or research-generated (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Prior (2003) considers documents as “products produced by humankind in socially organized circumstances” (p.4). The same author advises to think about documents in terms of fields, frames, and networks of action because of the involvement of creators, users, and settings.

For this study, I used public and private documents. The public documents were provided by Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights (GLAHR), Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials (GALEO), and Georgia Immigrants and Refugees Rights Coalition (GIRRC). Those documents included reports about the situation of Latinos/as Immigrants in the United States, as well as reports regarding refugees in the United States and reports about educational programs developed for the immigrant Latino community in the Southeast. These documents added information about the role of the meaning
making in their social integration experiences. I analyzed these documents along with the other data that was collected during the research.

As I mentioned in Table 2 - Biographical Information of Participants -, three participants entered the country as refugees. In order to expand my understanding and comprehension of refugees, their processes in their sending and receiving countries, I was engaged in a four-month internship in the International Rescue Committee (IRC) during the summer of 2013. During this time, I worked directly with IRC’s case managers in the Resettlement Department, helping newly arrived refugees through all stages of resettlement and institutional documents were provided offering important information regarding the process of how a person is granted with the status of refugee and the role of institutions like IRC during refugees social integration process.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

According to Merriam (1998), data analysis “is an interactive process throughout that allows the investigator to produce believable and trustworthy findings” (p. 151). As in any qualitative study, an emergent design requires data to be analyzed as it is collected to help in further exploration. Hence, “data collection and analysis are recursive and dynamic” (p. 155). It “involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts; between inductive and deductive reasoning, between descriptions and interpretations” (p. 178) in order to avoid an unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming process.

In this logic, data analysis is the process of making meaning from data and is a complex process involving “consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning”
(Merriam, 2009, p. 176). As suggested by Merriam (1998, 2009) this process should begin at the moment the researcher starts collecting data.

For this study, I analyzed the interview transcripts in their original language (Spanish). Two methods were employed: the holistic-content and constant comparative method.

**Holistic-Content Method**

I first used holistic-content method to analyze the data. Atkinson (1998, 2007), Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, (1998) and Cermák (2004) set out that the story is considered as whole, which means that the researcher focuses on the entire story, especially on the content of the story.

To analyze data through the holistic-content method, the life story is read through in its entirety while the researcher looks for recurring patterns in the content. The researcher writes down his/her initial and global impressions of the story, noting the features that stand out. Then the researcher takes some of the themes and traces their development from the beginning to the end of the story. During this process, it is important to note where each theme emerges and where it ends, the context in which it appears; its prominence in the story, and the transitions between themes. It is also important to notice episodes that contradict the themes. The product is a discussion of the story globally and thematically (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998).

The results of the holistic-content method are presented in Chapter 4. I read the interviews in the order in which they had been conducted (i.e., life in Colombia, life in the U.S., reflection over the life span), and I read them as if they were a novel. That is, I engaged myself in the ongoing story line of each participant’s life. I recorded my overall
impressions in my research journal. Then, I returned to reading the interviews to construct the life history. This time I made notes on the key family, educational, and workplace experiences in the person’s life and I identified certain events as being key for the purposes of this study.

**Constant Comparative Method**

Some of the main scholars that have written about constant comparative method were Creswell (2005), Ezzy (2002), Glaser (1965, 1987), Glaser and Strauss (1967), Merriam (1998, 2009), and Strauss and Corbin (1998). In Merriam’s words (2009) this method “involves comparing one segment of data with another to determinate similarities and differences” (p. 18). This procedure is inductive and helps to develop and connect categories by comparing incidents in the data to different incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to different categories (Creswell, 2005). Through comparison, events that seemed unrelated at first may be categorized together under the same category, and events that seemed related may be grouped differently (Ezzy, 2002). The constant comparative method is used because it is “compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159).

Glaser (1965) was one of the first scholars studying and writing about this particular method. In one of Glaser’s first writings “The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis” (1965), the author described four stages as necessary for this method:

1) **Comparing Incidents Applicable to each Category**: At this stage, the researcher codes each incident in the “data in as many categories of analysis as possible” (Glaser, 1965, p. 439).
2) **Integrating Categories and their Properties:** In this step, memos become important to the process. Coding continues and “the constant comparative units change from comparison of incident with incident to incident with properties of the category which resulted from initial comparison of incidents” (Glaser, 1965, p. 440).

3) **Delimiting Theory:** Glaser (1965) describes this delimitation at two levels: theory and the original list of categories proposed for coding. In other words, it is the integration of details into broader categories and/or concepts.

4) **Writing the theory:** For this stage, the author makes emphasis on the use of the discussion in the memos which provide content for the categories (Glaser, 1965).

In recent studies and writings of constant comparative analysis methods, Harry, Sturges, and Klingner (2005) explained the procedures of constant comparison developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) underlining three important steps. In the first step, researchers name incidents and actions in the data and constantly compare them with one another. The next step is grouping separate codes to categories by reflecting commonalities among codes to develop theoretical properties of categories. In the third step, researchers try to figure out the relationships among various code clusters. Although this method is a continuous growth process-each stage after a time transforms itself into the next, previous stages remain in operation throughout the analysis and provide continuous development to the following stage until the analysis is terminated.
Description of Procedures

Data analysis began with open coding which was done through a close scrutiny of the data to identify key ideas. Each interview was analyzed for meanings, understandings, or concepts that illustrated the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, I open coded small paragraphs, sometimes a sentence, or a segment depending on the major idea that it resonated. As often as possible, I tried to use the same term that the participants used to describe the idea. New ideas had new codes while similar ideas were coded with the same labels. Table 4 gives an example of open coding of data from an interview transcript.

Table 4

Sample of Open Coding from the Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Code</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Interview No</th>
<th>Line Number</th>
<th>Data Segment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Loneliness kills you”</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28-30</td>
<td>When he went to work, I was left alone with my boy. Loneliness kills you very much! I remembered I called my husband and said &quot;come quick because the walls are falling over me&quot; I meant that literally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of the Most Difficult Times</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34-41</td>
<td>I was sitting in a rocking chair, nursing the baby and for that postpartum depression, I know how you call that. I felt that all the walls were falling over me. Literally coming over me. I was in a corner, holding the baby and I was crying because the walls were falling, I knew they were not, but I saw them and called my husband and said &quot;come, come, I am not Ok, the walls are falling over me and the little boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Code</td>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Interview No</td>
<td>Line Number</td>
<td>Data Segment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from the Husband</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42-45</td>
<td>is crying “he said “put the baby in the crib, take a bath and calm down and I will be right there”. That was horrible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I had to face life”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I knew there that here, I had to became a doctor, pediatrician and psychologist and I did it. I washed my head that everything was fine and that I had to face life as it was and that I have to take care of my boy and that is what I did. But those moments were horrible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When analyzing data using a constant comparative analysis method, the first step is to do a careful reading of each transcript, which served as an orientation to the data. I read the interview transcripts in chronological order for each participant. During these multiple readings, initial patterns, themes, concepts, and categories began to emerge, and the process of data reduction began. In this step, I read the interviews several times, searching for themes and patterns as well as noting dissenting voices along the way. I also created preliminary codes during these readings.

The next phase involved coding. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) bring out that “coding need not be viewed simply as reducing data to some general, common denominators. Rather, it can be used to expand, transform, and re-conceptualize data, opening up more diverse analytical possibilities” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 29). In the same vein, Charmaz (2006) identified focus coding as more conceptual arising from sifting, sorting synthesizing and integrating data using the most frequently found or
significant codes. Similar labels in open codes were clustered together to organize them into a bigger idea or a theme. In the next step I also noticed that although, two labels were similar sounding they fit better under different categories because their settings were different. From one level to another, codes were continuously compared and developed into bigger ideas and categories with the two research questions as the major frames.

Initially, I identified 65 codes to describe data that addressed the two research questions. Gradually these codes began to coalesce. After comparing and collapsing the themes, the number of codes was reduced to 28. Following this phase of reduction, interviews were reanalyzed and coded with the 28 codes. Data were sorted then cut and pasted into document files based on each theme under each research question. This process helped in listing characteristics or properties that define the categories and its subcategories. Simultaneously I also developed a reference list for each theme under respective research questions with good quotes that could serve as evidence. This final grouping of similarly coded data into categories was further analyzed and formulated into study findings.

I followed Merriam’s (2009) guidelines or criteria to develop relevant categories when using the constant comparative method of data analysis. These suggestions included:

1) categories should be responsive to the purpose of the research, they are the answer to the research questions; 2) categories should be exhaustive, all important data is placed in a category or subcategory; 3) categories should be mutually exclusive, do not fit the same data in multiple categories; 4) categories should be
sensitizing, the naming of the category needs to reflect the exact meaning of the data; and 5) categories should be conceptually congruent, apply the same level of abstraction or the same conceptual level to all the categories. (p. 186)

Categories were narrowed and refined to two general categories with several subcategories. This final number was more inclusive of concepts while at the same time conveying an understanding of the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women and the learning that took place in these experiences. Each interview provided the researcher with an opportunity to revise understandings of the similarities and differences among interviews. Simultaneously, I also maintained memos to keep track of thoughts, ideas, questions, or hunches as I engaged in analysis. Finally, all categories across all data sources were compared and collated as a single analysis. Table 4.1 presents a sample of final categories.

Table 4.1

Sample of development of Final Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Interview No</th>
<th>Line Number</th>
<th>Data Segment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28-30</td>
<td>When he went to work, I was left alone with my boy. Loneliness kills you very much!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I was sitting in a rocking chair, nursing the baby and for that postpartum depression, I know how you call that. I felt that all the walls were falling over me. Literally coming over me. I was in a corner, holding the baby, and I was crying because the walls were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant experiences prevailing during Social Integration</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34-41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experiences

I knew they were not, but I saw them and called my husband and said: "come, come, I am not Ok, the walls are falling over me and the little boy is crying," he said: "put the baby in the crib, take a bath and calm down and I will be right there". That was horrible.

Agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Interview No</th>
<th>Line Number</th>
<th>Data Segment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42-45</td>
<td>I knew there that here, I had to became a doctor, pediatrician and psychologist and I did it. I washed my head that everything was fine and that I had to face life as it was and that I have to take care of my boy and that is what I did. But those moments were horrible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An important part of this phase was to note patterned irregularities. At this stage, I relied on advice from Frye (1996): “Discovering patterns requires novel acts of attention” (1996, p. 40). Not only did I identify patterns and make connections across categories, but also I dutifully searched for irregularities in the data (e.g., dissenting voices, disconfirming evidence). That is, I asked the following questions of my data: Are there some data that do not fit? Do all of the data make sense? What stands out in the data as being different or strange? I attended to data that did not make sense and incorporated them into the data representation. By noting both pattern regularities and
irregularities in the data, I attempted to create a picture of what was going on with the data, remembering that this picture is always partial, limited, and situated.

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

I employed multiple strategies to accurately capture the social context and reality of this study. In qualitative research, readers evaluate research findings by using validity and reliability (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). *Internal validity* deals with the question of how research findings match reality (Merriam, 1998). This type of validity asks the question, “How congruent are my findings with reality?” Thus, in qualitative research, seeking internal validity means adequately and honestly describing participants’ interpretations of the world. Several strategies can be adopted to ensure internal validity. Triangulation is a strategy that involves using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings (Bonilla, 1997; Merriam, 2002, 2009; Patton, 2002). For this study, I used in-depth interviews, and documents as multiple methods of data sources to strengthen the internal validity of the study. According to Atkinson (1998, 2007), Seidman (2009), Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, Zilber, (1998), and Cermák (2004) using the three series interviews helps to incorporate features that enhance the accomplishment of validity.

A second strategy, “respondent validation,” means that “the researcher solicit[s] feedback on your emerging findings from some of the people that you interviewed” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). In this same strategy, the principal investigator could also ask colleagues to examine the data and comment on the plausibility of the emerging findings (Merriam, 1998, 2009). The assumption is that those colleagues may be more knowledgeable in the research process than the researcher and that she or he as the main
instrument for data collection could miss some important interpretations. Therefore, I employed peer/colleague examination and respondent validation to add another lens to the interpretation and to strengthen the internal validity of the study.

*External validity* or transferability is concerned with the extent to which people can apply research findings to other situations (Merriam, 1998, 2009). With the intention of showing generalizability, researchers need to establish that the samples in the research are representative of an entire population (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Nevertheless, in qualitative research, researchers choose a single or small purposeful sample because they are interested in understanding the particulars deeply, rather than exploring what is true of many (Merriam, 2009). Findings can be understood as working hypotheses, which “reflect situation-specific conditions in a particular context” (Merriam, 2009, p. 225). Among many ways of thinking about external validity in qualitative research, the concept of reader or user generalizability is the most commonly used (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). With this strategy people in various situations determine whether the findings are applicable to another setting (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). On the other hand, Auerbach, and Silverstein (2003) suggest the term transferability as theories developed in qualitative research can be transferred to other situations as abstractions. To enhance the external validity in my study, I provided detailed descriptions of the research and participants so that “readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211).

*Reliability* “refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 2009, p. 220). Reliability in the social sciences is problematic because human
behaviors are not static, and what is being studied is a reality in permanent flux, multifaceted, and highly contextual. Therefore, replication in the social sciences, which explores human behavior, is unlikely to produce the same results. Participants’ performances or perceptions toward the same phenomenon can vary over time and space. Because qualitative researchers try to understand participants’ multidimensional and contextual interpretations of the phenomenon, “achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible” (Merriam, 2009, p. 222).

In this frame, Merriam suggested using “dependability” or “consistency” in qualitative research. Qualitative research needs to explore the question of “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223) rather than whether the research findings can be replicated. Hence, I adapted the strategies of enhancing reliability suggested by Merriam (1998). First, in order to ensure that research findings are congruent with the data collected, I explained my assumptions about participants’ behaviors and perceptions, the context, and the data-analysis process. Second, I provided an “audit trail” — understood as a description and explanation of how I arrived at my results (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, I had colleagues who would walk me “through [my] audit trail periodically, raising questions when necessary” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 147).

Translations Issues

I anticipated that some participants would prefer to conduct the interview in Spanish and others in English or “Spanglish” – an informal, idiosyncratic combination of the two languages. This raised the challenge of ensuring that the participants’ language and meaning are accurately represented at all stages in the research process. For this, I
analyzed the data in the language in which was gathered the information. For the presentation of the findings, I included ample quotations to support them.

The question is, therefore, whether and how translation within the research process potentially introduces bias and how to ensure agreement on the translation of source data. Edwards (1998), argued critically techniques such as back translation used to ensure agreement of a ‘correct’ version of a text. Marín and Marín (1991) discussed the issue of translation in research, particularly in regards to the development of data collection instruments. They recommend procedures such as double translation to ensure translation accuracy. In this method, translator A would translate the Spanish text to English, and translator B would translate the English text back into Spanish. The Spanish translation is then compared to the original Spanish text, which allows for mistranslations to be identified. Therefore, I implemented the double translation in order to enhance the meaning of participant’s voice.

**Reflexivity**

*Reflexivity* is considered “a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world and for penetrating the representational exercise itself” (Macbeth, 2001, p. 35). According to Nightingale and Cromby (1999), reflexivity involves a level of consciousness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining “outside of” one's subject matter while conducting research” (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p. 228). In this logic, reflexivity appeals to explore the ways in which a researcher's participation in a study “influences, acts upon, and informs such research” (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p. 228). Willing (2001) described two kinds of
reflexivity: (a) personal reflexivity, which entails “reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life, and social identities have shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers” (Willing, 2001, p. 10); and (b) epistemological reflexivity, which refers to the process of reflecting upon “the assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research, and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings” (Willing, 2001, p. 10).

Previous research experience and subjectivity statement. I am a Latina woman, Colombian immigrant, lesbian, mother, whose role as an adult educator has been focused especially on non-formal education as a part of programs and projects in NGOs and social organizations -- mainly in social women’s issues. As a consequence of this, reflection on gender, sexual orientation, class, power and their interconnections have been constantly analyzed from a feminist critical perspective and historical and contextual view during the last 20 years.

During the fourth year of my bachelor’s degree in Psychology, I worked for a NGO in a presidential program in “La Guajira”, a Colombian State, in which I developed a mixed method research regarding the impact of presidential educational programs on the indigenous Wayu women in 1993. During this study, I lived with the community for six months and was able to experience and to reflect on the meaning of being in the middle of an armed conflict.

Due to the escalation of the armed conflict, human rights violations, and poverty levels in Colombia, I continued working on educational programs and projects related to
women’s issues, human rights, and conflict resolutions. In 1996, I participated in another mixed methods research about gender roles and stereotypes and the manifestations of violence with the Javeriana University, The GTZ (a German International Cooperation Organization) and a Colombian governmental institution. In 1997, I coordinated a participatory action research in Cundinamarca, a Colombian state; on the subject of the situation of women working in political spaces.

From 1999-2001, I was part of the Cyril O. Houle Scholar Program, which financed studies by emerging scholars in the areas of adult and continuing education in Africa, Latin America, and the U.S. During those two years, I conducted the study “contributions for strengthening and promoting processes of social women organizations with political processes” in Bogota, Colombia. In 2003, I did a specialization in Women and Human Rights at the Rosario University seeking more knowledge that would allow me to improve my professional participation in a context of war.

A Colombian female friend who worked on documenting cases of violence against women in this country and who disappeared, later found to be tortured, raped, and murdered used to say: “the drama of this country is that we never can go beyond from individual feelings to collective actions.” The need for more collective actions alongside my pervious educational and professional experience confirmed the need to return to academia looking for new epistemological foundations, and theoretical and methodological approaches associated with the topic. In fall 2006, my daughter and I flew to the U.S. in order to pursue my Master Degree.

Becoming conscious of my nationality, race, color, class, sexual orientation and immigration status has been difficult in this journey. Incorporating so many categories
and understanding the impact of them on my positionality and persona, has been more challenging at times than the task of accomplishing my studies. I am no longer part of the majority. To this day, it is—sometimes—difficult to speak the language of the majority.

Being an immigrant is like to be and not to be. You gain and lose at the same time. You constantly are looking for that space in which you belong. Your self is questioned daily while internal, painful, and transcendental questions remain in silence. I recognize myself as a nomad woman (Braidotti, 2004) and as New Mestiza (Anzaldúa, 2007). I recognize that this decision is not an escape, but a strategic choice to implement feminist proposals and researches about peace and education in different contexts and settings. This explains in some ways my relationship with participants. I am, too an immigrant adult Colombian woman, with questions, similar objectives but in a different position because of my level of education and sexual orientation that in some spaces remains in silence.

During the progress of this study, who I am, where I come from, past and present experiences were brought into life in an unexpected manner. Being aware of these stages, took me to moments of deep individual reflection that were shared with a dissertation group helping me to recognize, to balance, and to discuss such stages, distinguishing participant’s voices and experiences from mine. The holding environment created within this group was a key component during different stages of this study.

**My role as an insider.** Insider research refers to when researchers conduct research with populations of which they are also members (Kanuha, 2000) so that the researcher shares an identity, language, and experiential base with the study participants.
(Asselin, 2003). The complete membership role gives researchers a certain amount of legitimacy and/or stigma (Adler & Adler, 1987). This insider role status frequently allows researchers more rapid and more complete acceptance by their participants. In this study, I—the researcher, was an insider because I am too an adult immigrant Colombian women living in the United States. Having the cultural knowledge, the language, and my previous experiences working, and interviewing women from different parts of the country, different backgrounds, educational levels, and socio-economic status enhanced the interview conversations in terms of the trust that they had in me, and the special care that I used in interviewing them. In what follows, I illustrate these two aspects with examples.

Betty was the first participant interviewed. I did not share with her that I was from Colombian neither my immigration status nor any other personal detail. As I describe in more detail in chapter 4, during the first moments of our first encounter her answers were short, and her body language was tense. After four minutes into the conversation, Betty asked me “where are you from?” to which I said “Bogota” “ah, you are from Colombia, I was not sure about your accent” she replied to me. From that moment on, she asked me several questions in different moments, which led to a more open conversation and richer descriptions in Betty’s narrations. After my experience with Betty, I shared my place of origin and my immigration status with participants during the presentation of the study before the interview conversations took place. As a result, three women (Eugenia, Patricia, and Sandra) shared with me in different moments of the interviews that “I am telling you this because you are Colombian, I would not have said this to an American” (E). For this study, my insider status was valuable in the
process of data collection itself, such as in engendering trust or enhancing the researcher’s ability to display empathy (Gair, 2012). However, it was required on my part, to be alert for possible moments in which participants may assume that I understood where they came from, and therefore, there was no need for them to explain and/or to enunciate certain aspects or moments. For this, I was attuned to expressions like “you know how we are”, “you know what I am talking about”, or “you know how things are there”. In moments when these expressions were used, I solicited them further elaboration asking for an example or saying, “I am not sure if I know, would you please explain more that aspect”.

Women, immigrants, and refugees are vulnerable groups and special care is needed in order to minimize possible risks for the participants. For this, I implemented different strategies in order to ensure participants safety and their care during our interview conversations as well as the presentation of the findings.

First, given that three participants were illiterate in English and Spanish, I offered the option to them of being with someone who they trusted and was literate in Spanish during the explanation of the study and for the signature of the participants consent form. Therefore, one of the participants (Juanita) had her daughter read to her the consent form, and the other two women (Betty and Patricia) declined the option saying, “I trust you” (Patricia).

Second, I was respectful of participants’ decisions in terms of how much they wanted to share with me during our conversations, especially with sensitive questions regarding their immigration process, push, and pull factors as well as their previous experiences in Colombia. For the presentation of the findings, I made sure to delete any
possible information that may lead to the possible identification of participants. Because of the highly emotional content of some of the conversations, times of silence were respected and suggestions to take breaks were offered with regularity. From the perspective of the interviewer, it is important for me to be aware of the emotional impact the women’s narration had on me. My field notes and journal played an important role as well as my previous experiences working and interviewing women in contexts of armed conflicts.

Overall, my cultural knowledge, and my role as an insider enhanced the data collection, the understanding of the context and helped me to preserve a deep respect for the cultures that participants brought during the study.

Assumptions and Limitations

All researchers initiate a study with some assumptions. The following are my assumptions that can influence the study. Memmi (2006) points out; immigration is not a unique consequence and/or specific to decolonization. It is also the result of “poverty and fear, hunger and frustration, an apparently hopeless future” (Memmi, 2006, p. 73). The author emphasizes, “immigration is one of the additional signs of the inability of young nations to resolve their internal problems, primarily to feed their population and provide them with a minimum of comfort and freedom” (Memmi, 2006, p. 77-78). From this perspective and my own experiences as an immigrant, I strongly believe that decisions and processes to migrate to other countries encompass different elements such as collective and political, which are overlooked by the survival dimension of the phenomenon itself. In this logic, I see immigrants as political actors and not just as
passive-oppressed subjects. Therefore, I wish to clearly state that these beliefs may affect the data collection and analysis of the study.

My own experiences and observations as a director of non-formal educational programs, and research studies on women and human rights in Colombia have provided me with a deeper understanding of the subtle yet strong impact of an undeclared armed conflict, gender differences on women and their ways of knowing regardless of their educational levels and economic status. I am assuming that their ways of knowing do not apply to one learning theory and that the current adult learning theories may offer little scope for the holistic understanding of how immigrant adult Colombian women in the U.S. understand their social integration experiences and the learning that takes place during these experiences. I disclose that this assumption may affect the analysis of the study.

Overall, I openly disclose that from the selection of this research topic to the decisions on the research design, data collection, analysis, and how I presented the findings were choices shaped and motivated by my own positionality and living experiences. With this research, I set to bring to the forefront the lives of immigrant adult Colombian women in particular and immigrant Latinas in general. The lives of immigrant Latinas who are invisible from the scholarship of adult education —the lives of immigrant women who are transforming communities, and shaping realities in ways that theory still does not understand and recognize.

There are some limitations of this study. First, Immigrant adult Colombian women interviewed were identified using the purposeful sampling method and they were from only one of the nine Southeastern states; therefore, the study and findings are
confined to one state and cannot be generalizable to all immigrant adult Colombian women living in the Southeastern region at large. In terms of data collection, the study was limited to participants’ stories and documents. Adding observations as another method for data collection would have allowed me to observe the participants’ interactions between cultures, offering multiple perspectives of their experiences.

Chapter Summary

This chapter included a detailed description of the research design, conceptual framework, methods, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, reliability, validity, and reflexivity and translations issues of this study. It is a qualitative study design incorporating data gathered through in-depth-interviews and documents. I have detailed the research design, sample selection, data collection, and analysis methods. I used a qualitative case study design incorporating data gathered through interviews and documents. Data was analyzed using the constant comparison method. I also discussed strategies I used to establish validity and reliability as well as my assumptions that influenced the study.
CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANTS PROFILES

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and to understand the social integrations experiences, and the learning that occurs for adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States. The questions that guided the study were:

1. How do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand their social integration experiences in the United States?

2. What types of learning, if any, take place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change?

Presented in this chapter are the profile narratives of eight adult immigrant Colombian women who participated in this study. Each narrative consists of information collected from two sources: a demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) and data from the first interview conducted with each participant. Each profile narrative is the result of the data analyzed through the holistic-content method and elucidates aspects of the participants’ personal stories that do not emerge in chapter 5.

Each narrative included a brief description of each woman’s contexts, childhood, and life in Colombia, as well as some aspects of the immigration process to the United States. Each narrative incorporated a unique theme, which was prevalent in each participant’s story. I share these in combination with how I experienced each participant
during our conversations. For the purpose of ease, I present the participants in alphabetical order according to their chosen pseudonyms.

Betty (B)

Betty is a woman in her 50s who self-identified as a “Mulata”, “I am Mulata in Colombia: my father was black, and my mother was white. Here, [in the United States] I am black or Afro-Colombian” (B). Betty was contacted through another participant (Juanita) who I later knew is Betty’s best friend. The three interviews were conducted in her apartment early in the morning while her 14 month-old granddaughter was walking around us in the small living-dining room. “The land” – La tierra - was an element present throughout our interview conversations from her childhood to the future that she envisioned for herself and her family in the United States.

Betty grew up in a family from the rural area of Valle del Cauca, Department (State) located in the southwest of Colombia. The main source of income for Betty’s family was the products that her father cultivated on their land and sold at the Sunday market in the closest village. Because of the long distance-walk between her house and the school along with the need of another source of income for her family, Betty could not attend middle or high school.

I remember that one was free in the countryside and one could go wherever you wanted to go. We lived in the Valle del Cauca and if you wanted to go to the river, you just went. If one wanted to eat mango or guava, one just went to the tree because my dad planted all kinds of fruit. At that time, we were not in poverty because we had all the food that we wanted. I used to help my father selling his products in the market. This is how I learned math. He taught me
addition and subtraction. I could not finish my elementary because the school was too far away. I had to walk 3 hours each way and I had to help in my house with the animals. B

Since her teen years, Betty assumed responsibilities working with the land, selling products in the market and assuming domestic positions with families and companies in Cali, the capital of Valle del Cauca.

I remember that for 15 years, I lived in Cali because I was working in the cafeteria of a bank. You know, preparing the coffee for the doctors and those kinds of things. I really liked it there because people talk to you. My mind was busy and I did not have to think about what was happening in the countryside with my family. B

Betty shared with me how the land on which she “used to be and feel free” (B) turned into a battlefield caused by the incursion of drug trafficking. “When the drug arrived to the countryside everything got damaged and people started planting coca and growing marijuana… people were killing each other for that. The tranquility of everyone was gone” (B). Betty described the time that she and her family left their land fleeing to different towns and cities after the assassination of her father and nephew.

After they killed my father, my niece, my nephew and when my mom died – she did die because she was sick – and they took our land and our house, we had to run so quickly and without anything, everybody went different ways. At the beginning, we did not know who was alive or dead, or where the other members of the family were. There were guerrilla and paramilitaries everywhere. They
controlled towns, villages, and roads. They controlled where you could go and when, that was terrible, the land was full of blood. B

After a family reunification, Betty and her family embarked on a journey of several days traveling to Ecuador:

We traveled from Cali to Ecuador in different buses and we were very scared because we did not know if they would stop the bus and you know how it is!

Once they stop the bus, it is hard to get out alive. B

After two years living in Ecuador, Betty and her family were granted the status of refugees by UNHCR (The United Nations Refugee Agency) in 2007. “I do not want to remember too much about Ecuador. During that time, my son was killed, and I got shot” (B); this is how she started describing her time in Ecuador. She shared her pain for the loss of so many loved ones, and at the same time her tenacity and commitment to maintaining the unity of her family. “I had to continue, I still have my daughter and my brother. He is younger than me. We had to go to a peaceful place and be able to be together” (B).

In her narrations about her future, Betty shared with me her dream about better opportunities for the future of the next generations in her family. “In the future, I want to be able to buy a house with a lot, so the little ones will always have food and not struggle like we do now” (B). Betty described how she arrived with her daughter, niece, her brother, and brother’s family (wife and two children) in the U.S. in 2009 via IOM (International Organization for Migration) and IRC (International Rescue Committed) as the country that chose them.
From Ecuador to Miami, we traveled on a plane and we were very scared because many of us had never been on a plane. We enjoyed more our flight from Miami to our final destination and the people from IRC were waiting for us. B.

By the time of our last interview, Betty was living with her daughter, two granddaughters, and her son-in-law. Betty was dividing her days between taking care of her grandchildren, and working part time in a cleaning business.

My first impression of Betty was that she was a very soft-spoken woman with short answers, many silences, and no eye contact. These perceptions were varying through the course of our next two encounters. By the time of the last interview, Betty’s body movements were relaxed, her narrations were longer and rich while she maintained eye contact during our interview conversations. One of the dimensions that stood out during the course of the interviews was how she asked me personal questions during the interviews. At the same time that I was answering her questions, her stories were fuller with details, and the initial barriers transformed into a door that she opened to me, allowing me to know her better.

Diana (D)

Diana is a woman in her 40s who lives with her fiancé and baby boy. She self-identified as Latina. Diana is originally from Medellin, the capital of Antioquia, a Department (State) in the central northwestern part of Colombia. Our interview conversations took place in different coffee shops near her house at her request in order to be able to concentrate on the conversation, at the same time she expressed “also, it is an excuse to have some time just for me. Having a baby is really time consuming and I feel, I need some time to breathe” (D). I experienced Diana, as a calm, reflective, and
thoughtful woman with a dose of sarcasm that was used when she described previous beliefs, and perceptions about herself. She explained this aspect of her persona saying, “If we do not laugh at the life, the life is going to laugh at us” (D). A theme present during Diana’s narrations was the unknown realities of Colombia.

Diana grew up in a middle-class family and is the third of four girls and as she described:

I am very close with Alexandra, my youngest sister. We did everything together when we were kids and she is now my best friend. She is living in London with her husband and son. My other two sisters are in different cities of Colombia. D

Diana described herself as:

I am the one in the family that is “different”. I was the first one to choose a career that was not a ‘female career’, I was the first one to travel outside of Colombia alone, I was the first one to decide to live in another country and I was the first one to have a child without getting married at the age of 40 in my family. D

In describing her experience during her school years, Diana related this to “how Colombia works” (D) as a country:

“Growing up in Colombia was like being part of the craziest movie of Hollywood” (D) she stated while she remembered when she was a young adult in Colombia:

Because in the school where I did all school years, we used to go to help the poor people. Every year the school gave to a poor family a new house, totally furnished, and every grade was in charge of something. At the end of the academic year, there was a big celebration, like a party, where the family received
their new home and of course, we felt like ‘really good people’, but then we came back to our homes and we forgot about those ‘poor people.’ What I am trying to say here is that if you do not want to know or to see what it is happening in Colombia, it is really easy to do it. It is like two different worlds in one space and we – the people and the government- got really savvy in choosing what to ignore.

Diana earned a degree in civil engineering and taught for several years in a private university in Bogota. Her passion for teaching young people was visible when she expressed:

I remember those days as a professor at the university with extreme nostalgia. I love to take the passion, vitality, and confusion of the students and use those elements as tools for creation and thinking. Especially in a country like Colombia where there are so many things that can be done. Math is not just numbers and formulas; math is also realities and the desires of communities.

Diana participated in the student movement in Colombia during the late 80s and 90s, which contributed to expanding her knowledge about Colombia and its realities:

Being part of the student movement opened my eyes to other realities of Colombia; it gave me a more complex vision of the situation. I still do not understand all the things that are going on in our country and I am not sure if I want to. It is too painful, too scary, and too dangerous. I hope now it is different, but in the 80s and 90s to know and to think was suicidal.

Diana shared with me how her desire to serve inaccessible communities was confronted by the reality of the country:
I worked on a mega-project building roads that interconnected remote villages in the southwest of Colombia. I was so excited about the benefits for the communities. Once we started, we realized that we missed a big component: The social reality of the area. We hired a team expert in conflict resolution that negotiated with the guerrilla and paramilitaries because they controlled the area. After six months of conversations, the project was cancelled. The ultimate beneficiaries of that project were going to be the groups that controlled the area, not the communities. D

In a search for comprehension and cohesion between personal and professional life, Diana decided to expand her horizons:

After that experience, I saw the disconnection between what was happening in rural vs. urban areas and what I thought I knew. I decided to leave. We grew up listening to the expression ‘our country has been in a war since the 40s’, but we really do not know what that really means and honestly, I do not know how the country, and the people will react if we really know the atrocities that are happening in the rural areas. D

Diana traveled to the U.S. in 2000 and after studying English for a year, she enrolled in a Master in Civil Engineering program. In August of 2012, Diana gave birth to her son and currently she is living with her fiancé. “This is the beginning of a new beginning, 40 years old and here I am learning how to be a mother, a wife and in a bi-cultural relationship, nicely done Diana!” (D) She smiled.
Eugenia (E)

Eugenia, a woman in her middle 30s, is a civil engineer working as a paralegal in an immigration lawyer’s office in the United States. A lover of dance and a mother of two she shared with me how important the passing of her mother was: “I think the passing of my mother was what divided my life in two. I was 19. That was the beginning and the end. When she died, I grew up as a woman” (E). As the youngest child of her family, Eugenia was the caregiver of her mother during her long-term illness and with her passing, she was able to make her own decisions and to continue her studies without interruptions.

Since I was four, my mother was sick and the doctors told her that she had just three months to live. Because I was the youngest one, I was with her all the time; I took care of her throughout all her surgeries. I do not remember how many she had. I was 19 by the time of her last surgery. I was in the university in the mornings, and in the hospital during the afternoons with her, doing my homework on the floor of her room. This is how we spent her last 45 days, until she died. After she passed, I was able to concentrate on my studies and finally finished my degree. At that time, I started making my own decisions. E

Eugenia is originally from Morroa, a small village in the Department (State) of Sucre located at the north of Colombia on the Atlantic Coast. She self-identified as White, Latina in the U.S. clarifying that “in Colombia, I am Costeña” (E). Costeña is a term used to describe people who reside on the Atlantic Coast of Colombia. It also represents a specific culture, idiosyncrasies, customs, and folklore that distinguish them from the rest of the country.
She grew up in a traditional, conservative, well-known and high-income family of the village, which afforded her the opportunity to study in the city: “I am from a small town called Morroa. Morroa is 15 minutes from Sincelejo. My parents had a house in Sincelejo and another in Morroa… I studied in Sincelejo because the education in Morroa was not good” (E). The socio-economic position of her family allowed Eugenia to be part of social spaces that are for aristocratic families of the village:

Thank God, my family is slightly influential in Colombia. In my city and my Department (State) –Sucre- you are always somebody's daughter. If not, you are not recognized in any space or college. You have no identity. No one accepts the story that one came from poverty and one is someone now. That does not exist.

E

As a teen and young adult, Eugenia described herself as “spoiled” and a person who was always thinking about herself as “the center of the universe” (E):

When I was left alone with my dad, my aunt sent her maid with my lunch on a little tray every day. If I did not like it, I called my other aunt and asked her "what do you have for lunch today?” Sometimes, I had different things from different houses, a collection of food, like a buffet! (Laugh). Can you believe how spoiled I was? That was I! Totally spoiled. E

Shortly after her mother’s passing, and receiving her bachelor’s degree in engineering, she decided to migrate to the U.S. with her fiancé, now her husband, who is Colombian-American. “A woman cannot leave her parents’ home without getting married, that is what my father told me, but I did not believe that my life was defined by
that and I told him: ‘but I am not pregnant, I am leaving’” (E). Eugenia migrated to the U.S. at the beginning of 2000.

Eugenia got married three months after her arrival in the United States. While she remembered her first year of marriage in the United States, she also shared her desire for more in every aspect of her life and her expectations about the role of a wife and a husband. “How can I explain this…?” Eugenia enunciated followed by a long silence:

I am like so materialistic! I expected more from my husband, I was expecting that when I got here [to United States] I was going to find my apartment completely furnished. With chairs, table, dining chair, and everything! But, when I got here, I realized that he had bought the sofa at a yard sale as well as the TV and that someone had given him the bed. So I asked him, ‘is this the dumpster or what brother?’ It was very hard for me to realize that I would not get what I thought I deserved. It was assumed that women should let the husband make the decisions. I accepted my husband’s decisions for a year, until I said; ‘I do not care about the husband, I am the boss here.’ I thought I would have everything like my mom if I did as it is said in Colombia: ‘if you're a good woman and take care of your husband, he will give you everything you need’…The economic factor is very necessary for me. It is like my children: ‘I need it’ and this is what we are going to change in this family. E

Eugenia described herself a “perfectionist” (E), and how “nothing is enough” (E) giving examples with her children and her job:
For me nothing is enough, I always want more. When my husband gives me a blouse, I ask him; where are the shoes? My children are now learning to write, and when they make mistakes, I say to them ‘do it again from the beginning.’ In my job, I always request more documentation than is usual; this is why we have so much success. I know that this way of being is sometimes good and sometimes bad. E

Currently, Eugenia and her family are planning to start a new life under different circumstances. “Things are about to change in this family.” She stated with her habitual smile and strong tone:

My husband is going to quit his job and becoming a student. It is his time now; he wants to become a designer of wood furniture. Therefore, we are selling everything and we are going to live as students. We are going to be poor and we are going to learn to transform the ‘I want’ for ‘this is what I need’. E

“Is it not true that ‘caras vemos y corazones no sabemos?’ – we see faces but we do not know hearts?” (E), she inquired during our last interview conversation. “I know that people think that I am a strong, self-sufficient, and bad spoken Costeña. You see my face; you are able to know my heart now?” (E) Without time between her words, she continued her reflections about herself, her image, and a different set of values that she wants for her children.

I experienced Eugenia as a strong, direct, funny, and sarcastic woman who is also known in her neighborhood for the community actions around children. Our interview conversations were rich in details with plenty of Colombia’s proverbs. With words in Spanish and English in the same sentence, she said to me “I know that what we need is
not necessarily what we want” (E) embracing the change that her family is about to undertake.

Juanita (J)

From our first encounter, Juanita always welcomed me with her arms opened. At the time of our interview conversations, Juanita was a 48 years old who self-identified as Afro-Colombian “I am black [negra] regardless that one cannot say this word in this country” (J). Originally, from Timbiqui – A small village in the Department (State) of Cauca located in the southwest of Colombia. Her deep voice along with her grandiose movements concocted a savory recipe alongside the traditional Afro-Colombian music always playing in the background. Juanita was “honored” (J) to share her stories. This made our interview conversations feel spontaneous; they ebbed and flowed at a pace led by me but clearly directed by her at times. For instance, when she asked me “what is the next question?” (J).

She began by telling me about her life in Colombia, her job selling food along the street and riverside from the age of 13, her unconditional love for her neighbors, friends, and modest home in the village, and for her father who taught her how to write her name. She told me about her lack of education at which point she arched her body near the microphone:

I had no education… When my mother died, we were six children. My father was working and I was the oldest one. My sister, the last one, was one year old and the one behind me was six years old. I had to look after my brothers and sister, cook for them and everything. I did not know to sign my name. My father taught me. When I was 13, I had to leave my home
and go to work to help my father and my brothers and sisters. I could not study. 

Juanita shared with me how the holidays were special moments when she still was living in the countryside in Colombia:

I remember a lot the Decembers, those are really good memories from Colombia. We used to get together, I cooked on wood for everyone, for all the family, we used to laugh, to dance, to drink, I remember a lot all of that and this is why Decembers are now sad for me. 

Juanita described how she has mastered the instrumental activities of daily living allowing her to survive in different contexts:

When I learned to sign my name, and write and read a few things, I was about 25 years old. I had left the countryside and I was in the city. I always remember everything and even though I am already in an advanced age, I remember everything, canalize everything, I know how to answer questions and I know how to talk with anybody (J).

When you say, “I canalize everything” what do you mean?

That I understand. I understand. I understand everything that others speak in my language. I know my rights and my duties. I know how to count my money and I manage and administer my money. I very much need to learn how to read and write well. I sometimes pass by places and I want to know what is said. 

Speaking about her job, Juanita shared with me that:
I was a maid for many years in a family house. Then, I worked on my own selling food on the street. At the end of the day, I was really happy counting my money (J).

In 2007, Juanita fled from Colombia to Ecuador where she lived for two years as a refugee, a status granted by the UNHCR. In 2009, UNHCR and OIM informed Juanita that the U.S. accepted her and her daughter as refugees. She did not speak about the situation that prompted her to leave Colombia.

I had a terrible problem in Colombia. I almost got crazy after what happened. I cannot talk about that. I just can tell you that I rescued my daughter after being tortured and we ran to Ecuador. My sister and some of her children were with us, but they [UNHCR and OIM] took them to Spain. They are living there as refugees too. J

Despite the hardships that led her to become a refugee, Juanita carried within her a general calling for happiness and joy. This trait was even more prominent when she spoke of her only daughter. During the conversations about her child and her achievements in school, she leaned once more over the microphone.

After my problems in Colombia and several years of help from the psychologist, I stop crying. I am a happy woman despite that I am poor here and there (laugh). I learned to forgive, to smile, and to dream not too much. My daughter and her accomplishments in the school are enough. I am officially a happy woman. J

She told me in between laughs about her grocery adventures upon arriving in the U.S. “Well, I don’t know how to read! You see, I always bought the same things because I remember in detail what the packages look like. Well, imagine my confusion when I
realized the packaging companies were as different as the food!” (J). Her descriptive nature throughout our interview conversations was as humorously, charming and vivid as the adventures in the grocery store.

Juanita envisions a future in which she will be more independent and the unity of letters on a paper will make sense for her. She desires to understand very well her own finances and being able to be a first-time homeowner: “I want a house outside of the city with a lot of land. I want to work on this land, nurture it, care for it, I want to grow my fruits, and leave it for my daughter once I am gone” (J).

Currently, Juanita works in a chicken company from 5 pm to 3 am with a two hour commute each way. She identified herself as low income in both countries: Colombia and the U.S. In her own analysis of her experiences, she referred to the differences of “being poor there and here” (J).

Look, I am poor in Colombia and I am poor here and live well. Here for example, I have a car and in Colombia could never have a car. You are poor in Colombia and cannot buy your clothes or your shoes. I am poor here but I look for the sales and I can buy the same things that rich people buy but cheaper or used. So, what is the difference? You do not feel the poverty here. If you are a good worker, you can have the same things that rich people have. I feel great living here and I am happy. J

Despite her tenacity, Juanita’s body is exhausted. “I am afraid because something is wrong with my body. I cannot leave yet this world, my daughter needs me. I want to leave after I buy my house. Do you think I can have that?” (J). I met with Juanita one more time at the end of fall 2013, in order to clarify some information of our
interview conversations, during that encounter she shared that she and her daughter will be moving into their own home at the end of 2013.

Juanita’s life stories represent for me a complex paradox. A paradox that expresses itself when she smiles and claps her hands while she is telling me the most painful situations of her life and ends each sentence with a “Oh Dios Mí” (J) – “Oh my God” in a way of lament and/or singing. A paradox that describes her illiteracy, her need to “read and write well”, (J) and at the same time, she shares with pride how she knows her “rights and duties” (J).

As I left our final interview conversation, Juanita said to me “Adios mi niña, no se olvide de mi” – “Goodbye my child, do not forget about me.” It dawned on me that in our first encounter I was referred to as “Mi Doctora” – “My Doctor”.

Liliana (L)

Liliana, 41 years old, mother of two boys, self-identified as Latina and has been living in the United States for eight years at the time of our conversations. Liliana was born and raised in Bogota, a city where she lived with her older sister and mother until she decided to migrate to the United States. Liliana described herself as a “shallow, simple, and not too smart person” (L). She communicated to me early in our first interview expressing that “I am afraid that my answers are not going to help you too much for your research… I am a shallow person” (L).

Her first memories of Colombia were associated initially with her experiences in a private Catholic female school where she did her elementary, middle and high school: I spent all my childhood and teens years in the same school until I graduated at the age of 16. It was a private Catholic school just for girls. The nuns were like
any other nuns but the girls were terrible. I think that is the worse memory that I have of Colombia. After spending 12 years with the same friends or those who I once considered friends, I realized during the last two years of my high school that they were not really friends. After that, I was very depressed and lonely. L

After high school, Liliana continued her studies receiving a bachelor’s degree in graphic design. “I really enjoyed the university; and I do not know how I graduated because I never studied. I partied all the time and made many friends. I like the career but I think study is not my forte” (L).

Liliana’s father left her mother when Liliana was three years old. She shared with me that “I do not remember him, I have never had any contact with him and I do not miss him, maybe because I never knew what it means to have a father, so I cannot miss something that I do not know” (L). Liliana expressed having a close relationship with her mother who she described as:

My mother is one of the strongest women that I have ever met. Without a man at her side, she was able to gives us all what we needed and sometimes more than that. She worked in the fashion industry and had a small business… with her work; she brought us into adulthood without problems. My mom is why I am here. Once I finished in the university, she told me: ‘you are going to the U.S. to learn English because if at some point you find a job here, you are going to have more options with the English.’ I did not think twice about the offer or I should say her instruction [laugh] and three months later I was here [the United States] (L).
“I had a really good life in Colombia,” (L) Liliana said to me after sharing her memories about school and family in Colombia. “When I think about Colombia, I think about school, friends, family, and parties as simple as that” (L). Continuing with her reflection about Colombia, she stated:

I think I lived in a bubble for more than 30 years. We always heard about the violence in Colombia but I did not have any close experience with that. One gets use to listening to the news, the numbers of people dead, it is just numbers. I was in Bogota when all the bombing happened because of the narco-trafficking, and when the M-19 [a guerrilla group of the 80’s and 90’s] took over the Palace of Justice, but for whatever reason it was like if that was not with me. I think it was around 2007 or 2008, when people started talking about the massacres and mass graves; I was already here as well as my mother and my sister. I could not believe that so many things were happening in front of our eyes and nobody knew anything in Colombia or as I said before, I was in a bubble… It is hard to believe the news, the images, and the videos. I am going to tell the truth… I knew about those things because in the hospital [her workplace] another Colombian woman one day asked me ‘have you heard what they discovered in Colombia? (L)

After her narration about Colombia and her statement “I was in a bubble”, Liliana concluded saying:

A part of me felt stupid – sorry for the word- I asked myself how is it possible that nobody knew?... but also I do not know if I would have been able to resist living 30 something years in Colombia knowing that, so I appreciate the bubble… kind of selfish no? (L)
I experienced Liliana as a welcoming and introspective woman despite of her initial description as a “shallow person” and her concerns, expressed during our first interview, regarding the quality of her answers and their impact on my study. During our first encounter, she showed me her house and her “special room” where she has recreates Colombia with different artifacts from diverse regions of Colombia. While Liliana was studying English in the United States, she met her husband. Currently, she is working part time as an interpreter for a local hospital and supporting her children in their extracurricular activities.

Patricia (P)

Patricia was originally from Santander de Quilichao, a small village of the Department (State) of Cauca situated in the southwest of Colombia facing the Pacific Ocean. At the time of our interview conversations, Patricia was 36 years old and self-identified as a black or Afro-Colombian and as Latina in the United States. In her children - two girls and two boys- Patricia has found the strength needed to continue living despite all the adversities that she has encountered throughout her life. The main theme in Patricia’ story is this strength generated by the love for her children, as she explained to me: “My life has not been easy and I do not want my children to have the same experiences that I had. They already had scary moments but I will do anything in my power to keep them safe” (P).

Patricia grew up in a low-income family from a rural area close to the village called Santander de Quilichao. At the age of seven, Patricia’s father took Patricia to work as a maid in a house in Santander de Quilichao, she escaped that life at the age of 14.
My father did not love me because I was black. He used to say that he was not my father because I was black and he was white. One day after I was bringing wood to start cooking, he told me: ‘we are leaving, put your shoes on.’ I did not know where we were going, but my mom was crying. After walking almost all day, we got to Santander de Quilichao. It was my first time in that village. He took me to the house of this woman and told me: ‘now, you are going to do whatever she tells you and I do not want problems.’ I cooked for them, cleaned their house, I did everything for them and I had my own room and bed. When I was 14 or 15 years old, I do not remember well, I escaped because the oldest son of the lady molested me and I wanted to learn how to write and how to read. P

Patricia shared with me how after several unsuccessful attempts to come back to her home, she started a life in Santander de Quilichao working in a restaurant and selling the products that her mother and grandmother gave her “behind my father’s back” (P):

He [her father] almost killed me the last time that I tried to talk with my mom… because I know how to cook really well, I got a job in a small restaurant, and they paid me with food and room behind the restaurant. My mother and grandma used to give me some of the product that they grew so; I sold them at the Sunday market. P

“It was difficult,” Patricia said “but I started making friends, for the first time I had friends in my life” (P). Patricia continued describing her stories about survival as a teen and young adult, about the time in which she fell in love with the father of her children.
I was really in love. He had a big truck that he used to take the products to the main city and sell them to the big markets in the Capital [Cali]. His mom did not like me because I did not go to school. She used to tell me that I did not know even how to speak and to behave. We never got married because his family did not approve of it, but we had four children. I always lived with my children by myself because he was traveling all the time and because his family did not like me. He did recognize the children and they have his last name. P

With rich details, Patricia described how she wanted to improve the life conditions for her children and “I want that they read and write, not like me… I want that they speak well, not like me” (P) and how “the violence arrived to our town” (P).

After I had my last child, a girl, I never again saw their father. No one knows what happened to him, not even his mother and family. My father also disappeared and my mom took my sisters and brothers to another town because the people with the guns took their land and the house. That is when everything went very bad! P

In order to survive, Patricia related how she and her best friend worked together trying to provide the basic needs for Patricia’s children and the two of them.

When the people with guns took over the village, I lost the job in the restaurant because they closed it. Every day there were people dead on the streets and we were scared. At that time, my youngest child was -the girl- 5 months old and the oldest was the other girl. She was 12. The two boys were 6 and 7 years old. I did not have a place to live, so with my friend, we rented a room and all of us lived there in that room. The only way to find money and food was going to the
hamlets and buying products from the campesinos [Colombian farmer or farm laborer], and we sold them at the stores in the village. We had to leave the children in the room by themselves all day because we had to take the bus at 4am and we were coming back at 7pm or 8pm because the curfew was 9pm. The oldest girl had to take care of the other children; I always left them with food for the day. P

Patricia continued her story sharing with me how the two women continued helping each other for a period of four months:

One day we could not find products to buy, so we decided to go further to the countryside walking. We were sacred because we did not know that area well and people in the village said that in that area was where all the groups that killed people were. I was thinking about my kids and not having food for the next day and I was scared because it was getting dark… We got lost and I remember that the grass was so high that we could not see the soil... From nowhere the people with guns were yelling at us and they took us prisoners [silence]. P

Several days after that night, Patricia reunited with three of her four children and left the country to the United States through UNHCR, and IOM in 2002:

My friend was killed in front of me… with the help of some people from the area; I was able to go back to the village several days after that day. All the time I was just thinking about my children and not having food, I did want to die but my children kept me alive. They took me to the hospital and someone brought my children but my oldest daughter was not there. She was looking for me and for food. I did not want to leave, but people from UNHCR and IOM told me that my
children and I were in danger that I had to leave. I did not understand what was happening and why they kept asking so many questions. They promised me they were going to find my daughter and that we were going to be ok. After some weeks or months, I do not remember… I was pretty bad physically and emotionally… they took us to big cities and different places until one day they told me: ‘you are going to the United States as a refugee with your children.’

Patricia and her three children arrived in the United States on 2002. She and her oldest daughter were reunited a year later.

Patricia’s narrations were rich in details and descriptions. At the time of our interview conversations, she was working with a tutor on her Spanish and English. At the end of our last encounter, she said to me “my children are the only reason why I am here and no matter what I will make sure that they always have food” (P).

Sandra (S)

Sandra was a 43-year-old woman who was born and raised in Bogota, the capital of Colombia where she lived with her mother, father, and two older siblings and who self-identified as Latina. Being the youngest of the three, Sandra developed a sense of urgency in her life stemming from the brilliance of her older sister “she is a genius, her IQ is really high” (S) and the strict desire to “do the right thing” (S) in her brother’s view. She is a rebel in her own eyes, as well as the eyes of those who knew her in her younger years.

From the time that I was born, I was very open-minded, an example of this is the case that I have always supported homosexuality. I studied in Catholic schools. I studied in several schools and I was kicked out simply
because I did not go to mass. I did not believe in religion and in the way,
they taught me. However, in the 70s a little girl was not a rebel, so I was
very precocious. S

She described to me her battle against the norms and rules pushed upon her by her
parents, the system, the Colombian culture, and the many different schools she attended.
Her war, she said, was always:

The war of no; no, I do not want to do this. No, I will not do that. No, I do not
like this. No, I do not like that. I lost plenty of time in this battle. I never thought
about the yes and its possibilities, I lost many opportunities because of this. S

Despite her desire to be independent from her aristocratic elite upbringing,
Sandra’s gestures, diction, and grace reveal a touch of elegance carried by those “raised
to noble standards” (S). Sandra celebrated her ability to move “like a fish in the water”
(S) among the different socio-economic classes in Colombia and see the struggles and
potentials of each person regardless of economic position or education:

Due to my discipline problems in school, I studied with the wealthiest children in
Bogota, but also with those that did not have the means to even eat properly. My
best friends from Colombia do not really belong to ‘the high class.’ I can have
fun and enjoy the company of any person without really thinking to what
economic class she or he belongs. This generated many problems with my mom
who insisted on making the distinction saying ‘everybody has a place in society,
you do not mix.’ S
Sandra’s parents personal stories represented the internal battle that she was living as a young adult. Her mother comes from a wealthy family in Bogota while her father comes from a modest family in which higher education was not a real possibility.

I do not understand my mom. She married my father who did not have any money at that time. My mom helped him to study law. We are in this economic position because my father is one of the most recognized lawyers in the country and yes, he makes good money. We are part of the 1% in Colombia and a part of me feels sick saying this aloud. S

After finishing high school, Sandra enrolled in the most prestigious university of the country perusing a Law degree. “I did not finish in that university because I was a victim of sexual harassment by a respected professor who was my mentor and my father’s best friend. That was terrible and the scandal was worse” (S). Sandra continued her studies in another university, graduating from Law school in 2001.

Sandra did not describe herself as a thinker when she was young. However, she identified the contradiction of the Colombian Constitution known as one of the most advanced Constitutions in Latin America when “the reality of the country does not reflect what the Constitution promulgates. The gap between reality and the Law is enormous, and corruption and the intolerance for the difference are everywhere” (S). The intolerance for the difference was what Sandra explained as “the drop that overflowed the glass” (S) and without thinking twice she decided to travel to the U.S. In 2003, Sandra arrived in Miami, FL with no plans or arrangements made.

I was aware of the social problems in Colombia to some degree, but not much because I was always like in a bubble. When I saw how my friends had to
come here undocumented, work for six months picking tomatoes and then go back to their studies because their parents did not have money. I did not like that. In addition, I have a gay cousin, and I love him like a brother. He was almost killed in Colombia when everybody knew and had to leave the country. Now, he is living with his partner in Spain. All of these, plus my family, the educational system, corruption, violence and the Colombian culture of classism brought me here. S

With a smile in her face, Sandra explained:

I bought the ticket with my savings the same day that I made my decision to leave Colombia. I left the week after and I told my parents the day before I was leaving. They thought that I was not going to stay here too long because I did not have money and I did not ask them for it. S

Diversity, cultural differences, and respect for others are like “food for my soul” (S). “This is why I cannot live in Colombia,” she related with sadness, anger and some level of resignation. Her passion emerged when she evoked experiences of liberty, independence, and compassion for others.

Sandra’s narrations are rich in details, self-reflections, and with complex elaborations around money, power, liberty, independence, and respect. She was ready to share her story, thoughts, points of views, and feelings illustrating them with examples. Our conversations were from one-hour and a half to almost two hours. She drew a clear line that differentiates Sandra in her teens, as a young adult and Sandra now, in her 40s, single and searching for her path.
I am still looking for what I want to do and to be, but I have more clarity and better understanding of where I come from; the 1% of Colombia, but I am not the typical 1%. For me it is important to be in a place where there is respect for the spaces, for who I am, what I think love is, for what I choose to eat or to wear, that is important for me. If I am gay or not gay, Catholic or Christian, whatever as long as no one hurts others, that is essential for me. I could not have lived in Bogota because of that. I sometimes think to go back [to Bogota] because my parents are already very old, and I am the only one who has had the patience to understand and help them even though I am out of the country. However, Colombia does not have what is essential for my existence. My country is a chaos. S

I experienced Sandra’s narrations as the embodiment of a rebel in different stages and levels, with different fights and adversaries as time passed; she has been able to understand to some degree. Sandra’s love for inclusion, compassion; diversity and independence are the names of her battles at the social and personal levels. She presented herself as a highly social, extroverted person with the determination to embrace “whatever life wants to bring me”. (S) Her passion for inclusion goes hand in hand with the patience that she vocalized has grown over the years, and with the calmness in which she shared her life stories. Sandra is still “looking for…” while the rebel within her transforms her questions about life and the Being.
Yolanda (Y)

Yolanda, a 53-year-old woman, PhD candidate, single, originally from Villavicencio, the capital of the Department (State) of Meta located at center of the country to the east of the Andean Mountains, moved at the age of 10 with her family to Medellin, the capital of Antioquia. Yolanda identified herself as a Latina and middle class in both countries: Colombia and the United States. Our three interview conversations were conducted in a library close to Yolanda’s home.

Yolanda described herself as “a lover of education” (Y) and “a thinker” (Y). Those were the themes presented throughout our encounters. During our first conversation, she described her memories of a happy childhood in contrast to the violence present in Colombia:

I had a very happy childhood… and that is what Colombia represents for me, because if I think about the other part… it is really hard what we live in Colombia… I’m tearful today [laughing and crying] and with mixed feelings [crying and silence] to say that it was such a happy life in childhood and then so many things started… you could not believe that that was happening in Colombia. I think, that is one of the reasons why I have not been back to Colombia. I left Colombia in 99’ and I have been here [United States] 13 years, and every time I think to go back to Colombia, I watch the news and see the war that still exists because it is a country at war… I am like no… not really…. I am too much a pacifist for all that violence and aggressiveness. Y
As a child, Yolanda lived in Villavicencio with her three sisters, one brother, her mother, and her father. Education in Yolanda’s family has been an important aspect of their lives as she described:

My father was like a master for me. He was not a person with too much formal education. He was an autodidact. He always had the desire of learning about new things because he did not have the opportunity when he was a little boy but he still preserved that desire of learning all his life. I think that was something that he transmitted to all of us because everyone in my family has studied a lot. Y

Yolanda studied industrial engineering in Colombia, received an MBA from a university in Switzerland and M.Ed. from a university in the U.S., and currently is a Ph.D. Candidate in Early Childhood Education. All her siblings as well had masters and Ph.Ds. and “all of us ended up in the field of education regardless if our bachelor’s degrees were in totally different disciplines. All of us are now teachers or professors” Y

For Yolanda, her family and extended family are important elements in her life. Smiling, she described her vacations in her grandmother’s town “we were like 25 cousins and during vacation everybody was there in my grandma’s house. It was beautiful, I remember being really happy at that point of my life” (Y). At the age of 10, Yolanda and her family moved from Villavicencio to Medellin because “we were going to start high school and my mother wanted that we were living in a city with universities. As Colombians say ‘I do not leave money to my children but I do leave them education’” (Y)

Because of her first experience abroad, Yolanda shared with me the impact of this experience on her views about the political situation in Colombia:
I went to Switzerland for my MBA during the 80s, just at the time when the drug trafficking was at its peak. I experienced a peace and learned to respect so many things that I did not see in Colombia. That was the first time that I thought about the political situation in Colombia because I had the opportunity to stop and think. I came back [to Colombia] in 84’ and I found myself in the middle of the bombs and more things. That was painful [crying]… I am one of those supremely sensitive persons, so the effects of physical violence on me are terrible and one of the reasons why I decided to get out of Colombia was that. I was living in a privileged area, nevertheless every day I saw bombs, death, murders and that affected me too much [crying]. Y

“Heaven and hell” (Y) is the way Yolanda described Colombia, elaborating; “one of the aspects that I miss most from Colombia is the joy for living. Despite all the difficulties, people have an incredible joy, and that is admirable for me that capacity of resistance. The other fundamental aspect is the solidarity” (Y).

Yolanda shared with me that the relationship between education and values was a significant aspect learned from her own family and the schools that she attended:

Now that I think about what my education was, I realize that I had a privileged education because I had teachers and professors that taught me to think, to argue, and to make decisions by myself. I did not study to learn things by memory. It was an education of values, and principles. That was what I learned when I was little: solidarity, respect, and hospitality. The village where I was living had a very quiet environment. Although my mom used to tell us stories about the time of the “La Violencia” and she said that, it was terrible but at the same time, there
was solidarity among the people. When everyone knew that “Los liberals” were coming, conservatives and liberals went to the houses of liberals and vice versa. When “Los conversadores” were coming to the village, everyone went to the houses of conservatives. Y

After working for 15 years in a company and following her desire for education, Yolanda decided to improve her English “because my French was very good” (Y). After her student visa was approved, Yolanda traveled to the United States in 1999 for a “three month English course and that became a one year English course. Finally, I decided to enroll in a graduate program, and here I am, 13 years later after coming for a three month course” (Y).

At the time of our encounters, Yolanda was a teacher in a bilingual elementary school while she was working on the completion of her dissertation.

I have found here the area where I can work and contribute, because I do believe that I have much to contribute and I can work here with people as if I were in Colombia. I am working in a school where there are many Latino children and that is what I do: I teach and help Latino children in the school, and at the same time, I help their parents to understand the educational system in the United States. Y

I experienced Yolanda as a critical thinker of her own persona and of the countries where she has lived, and as a sensitive woman aware of her limitations and abilities. She shared with me the intensity of some of her memories and with this, the emotion that corresponds to those memories.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the eight women who participated in this study to the reader through their individual narratives. Each narrative presented information from a demographic questionnaire, and data from the first interview conducted. Each profile described participant’s memories in Colombia, childhood, and some of their experiences regarding their migration to the United States. I also offered a small description of how I experienced each of the participants.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and to understand the social integrations experiences, and the learning that occurs for adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States. The questions that guided the study were:

1. How do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand their social integration experiences in the United States?

2. What types of learning, if any, take place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change?

This chapter is divided into two sections: the first section will focus on descriptions and understanding of the social integration experiences as expressed by the participants. The second section will be focus on the types of learnings during the social integration experiences. In each section, I present and describe in detail each major theme related to the research questions that guided the study, using the words of participants, honoring their voices, and representing the commonalities as well as unique cases. The findings and data presented in this chapter convey the descriptions and understanding of the social integration experiences, as well as the types of learnings and meaning making that took place during the experiences of the participants. Table 5 illustrates the main themes and the associated findings for each research question that
emerged during the constant comparative analysis of the data collected during the interviews, in addition to private and public documents, and my research memos taken during the study. At the end of the chapter, I present a chapter summary with the main findings of the study.

Table 5

*Research Questions, Main Themes, and Findings*

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<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<td>Significant Experiences Prevailing during Social Integration Processes</td>
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<td>Previous Assumptions Held about the U.S.</td>
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<td>Building Social Network</td>
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<td>What type of learning, if any, takes place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change</td>
<td>Types of Learning during the Social Integration Experiences</td>
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Describing and Understanding the Social Integration Experiences

Under this section, I present the themes that help to answer the first research question (RQ) one, which is how do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand their social integration experiences in the United States? Participants described their social integration experiences based on five themes: significant experiences that prevailed during their social integration processes, previous stereotypes held about the U.S., participants’ expectations, unanticipated challenges, and building social networks. In Table 5.1, I present the findings regarding each of the themes related to the first research question.

Significant Experiences Prevailing during Social Integration Processes

In what follows, I present the description of the most significant experiences that prevailed during their social integration processes according to participant responses. Across the eight participants, their arrival in the United States, accomplishment of basic living skills, and changing their economic status were cited as having particular significance during their first two years of their social integration process. Upon reflection and especially during the second interview, participants discussed that understanding the culture, and the language, and their acquisition of education in the United States held greater significance as they deepened their social integration process.
Table 5.1

*Description and Understanding of Social Integration Experiences*

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<td><strong>Significant Experiences Prevailing during Social Integration Processes</strong></td>
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<td>Arrival to the U.S.</td>
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<td>Accomplish Basic Living Skills</td>
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<td>Changing Economic Status</td>
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<td>Acquisition of Education in U.S.</td>
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<td><strong>How do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand their social integration experiences in the United States?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Previous Assumptions Held about the U.S.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stereotypes</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Participants Expectations</strong></td>
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<td>Improving Economic Situation</td>
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<td>Become Independent</td>
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<td>Peace and Security</td>
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<td><strong>Unanticipated Challenges</strong></td>
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<td>Lack of physical Mobility</td>
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<td><strong>Building Social Network</strong></td>
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Arrival in the United States. All eight participants indicated that their arrival in the United States was a meaningful experience. Betty, Juanita and Patricia remembered their entrance to the country as a moment in which “I did not know what was going on, and I was really scared” (P) “I will never forget that moment; we [Betty and her family] were scared, sad and we also had curiosity about seeing our new place to live” (B).

For these participants, Betty, Patricia, and Juanita traveling to the U.S. was their first experience in an airport and with flying as Juanita illustrated in her narration:

I had never been to an airport or… on a plane before. I cried all the time at the airport, and I said ‘my God, where are these people going to take me? I do not know where I am going’. My little girl was happy, but I was not. When we got to Miami… a woman speaking Spanish called me by my name, and she told me ‘follow me’. That airport was huge… Before leaving Ecuador, they [IOM-international Organization of Migrations] gave us a little bag, and told us that we could not let it go, that just immigration could open it. They [Immigration officers] opened it, took what they needed, and I took the rest to [the city of final destination]. The plane was late, and it was 9p.m. but the sun was still in the sky, which was new to me… we got to [final destination] about 1a.m. and the people from the foundation [IRC- International Rescue Committee] were waiting for us... A man from the foundation [IRC] took us to my apartment; he opened the door and brought the suitcases up… I was still scared... the apartment was very nice, and they even had a roast chicken and Coca-Cola for us. Everything was very nice. For the first time, my daughter had her own bed and so did I. That moment, when everything finished and started, it is in my mind like yesterday. So many
things were happening at the same time, and I did not have time to think… it was too much information. The first two days I cried day and night. It was as if somebody else was doing everything for you… If they said sit, you sat, if they said sign here, you signed there…

As refugees, Betty, Juanita, and Patricia shared similar circumstances by which they traveled and arrived in the U.S. However, Patricia indicated with more persistence not understanding what was happening in her surroundings, as she described:

All that time I did not understand anything. I did not know where I was; I had my three smallest children, but I was worried about my oldest daughter. I remember clearly, when we got to Miami, and I was able to collect my suitcase. I had just one bag for the four of us, because I did not have too much… We were walking behind a woman who told me to go with her; we had to take the electric escalators, and I did not know how to do it that was my first time… I kept looking for my children, the plastic bag that they gave me, and my suitcase. Suddenly, my suitcase opened up, and a police got close to me to help me, but I did not know he was going to help me. I was scared of the uniform, and I started yelling ‘that is mine’. That was terrible. I thought he was going to take our clothes or my children. Another woman who spoke Spanish helped me. I told her ‘please, do not leave me. I do not know where I am going; I do not understand’ She gave water and some food to the children. She explained to me something about the fingerprints and then another plane. I started crying again. That was the first time of so many things that I did not know and did not understand. Now, I am not afraid of the electric escalators (Smile). P
Betty and Juanita arrived to their own apartments that IRC had previously found for them and their families inside of a city. Patricia spent her first six months in the United States living in a rural resettlement facility with her children, which she described as “beautiful… every refugee had their own house but we were living together. I liked it there… it was peaceful and outside the city. That is what I liked the most… the rural area” (P).

Diana, Eugenia, Liliana, Sandra, and Yolanda had previous experience traveling abroad and all of them had been in the United States before, but the emotions accompanying these memories were different for each of them. Each of these five participants traveled by themselves as Liliana explained:

I was in Florida several times before just for vacations. This time, I knew it would be two years because that was the length of the program [ESL]. I was happy thinking that I was going to have fun like in Colombia. My mom arranged everything for me. My sister was waiting for me in the airport because we were going to live together. She was studying too, but at that point she had already been here [the United States] for a year. We are like best friends so; I really thought this was my independence. I did not have any idea what I was getting into… this is why this moment is so important for me. It quickly became a contrast of emotions. I remember when we got to my sister’s apartment that night she told me: ‘this is your room, and that is your bed. We are going to share the bathroom, and it should be as it is now all the time. This is the kitchen, and you will find everything that you need for cooking there’. ‘Cooking?’ I asked her… I did not know how to cook. I had never cooked because we have someone to do
that in Colombia and my bed was not a bed it was an old futon. It was like a quick and strong landing without a seatbelt.

Florida and especially the areas of Orlando and Miami were places known to Diana, Liliana, Sandra, and Yolanda. However, “this time was different,” Eugenia stated, and she continued:

I put all my life in two suitcases, my hopes in one pocket, my fears in the other one, and let my tears run… Before I took the plane, I called my boyfriend, — future husband- and told him ‘I want to see you as soon as they open the doors of the plane, if you are not there; I will go back to Colombia on the same plane.’ He was there. A part of me was expecting that he would not be there. E

Yolanda shared with me that despite of her experiences living abroad, she remembers in “a special way” (Y), the last time that she left Colombia 13 years ago:

I left Colombia because I am a coward; I respect and honor the people that stay there, but at the same time, I needed to improve my English and to find my passion. My father was with me at the airport and said to me ‘you are going to fly high and find what you are looking for, and when you find it, everything is going to make sense.’ I cried the whole flight without really knowing why… I had traveled and lived abroad before, so there was no reason for my tears. I was very excited about the opportunity…That was the last time that I saw my father alive… maybe I knew without knowing. My cousin was waiting for me; I lived with them for about two or three months until I found my own place. Y

Diana and Sandra were the only participants who reported that there was nobody waiting for them at the airport. With a firm voice and in a way, a slow narrative, Diana
revealed, “I planned everything as much as I could. The planning, and getting everything ready took me almost a year” (D) and she continued saying:

I told my parents and family that I was going to study English, and I did. I looked for the school, paid for that, planned everything, but I also knew that I was not going back to Colombia. I did not know what I was going to do after the culmination of my English program, but I knew inside that I was not going back to Colombia. I never vocalized that to anybody, but I decided that I was going to remember every single detail of my last days there [Bogota]. In silence, I said my goodbyes and enjoyed every person, every space, every problem, and even those situations where we say ‘this happens just in Colombia’ and that was what I did. Actually, Bogota looked beautiful the last couple of days for me and even more beautiful from the airplane, all the different kinds of greens and the mountains. Nothing like the Andes! It was a peaceful and beautiful goodbye… I tried to maintain the same mental stage when I arrived, but 10 minutes after leaving the plane, I realized I was totally lost in the airport so, I said to myself: ‘Diana, time to be alert and move quickly’… I took a taxi to the room that I had rented in advance. I lived there for the first six months. D

The difference between Diana and Sandra was “I did not plan anything” Sandra enunciated:

I bought my ticket the day after I made the decision and left the following week… when I arrived in Miami, I sat in a chair at the airport like for two hours just thinking. I was afraid, and I was asking myself ‘what did I just do?’ I bought something to eat and when I saw the price, I thought, ‘the money that I have is not
enough’. I had thought about going to a hotel and staying there for two or three weeks, to give myself time to figure it out. You know how we are in Colombia. Well, after that expensive and terrible food at the airport, I called my sister. I was not going to call my parents because I needed to demonstrate to them and myself that I did not need their money. I called my sister, and she gave me the number of a friend of hers that was living in Miami… I lived on the couch of this wonderful woman for almost a year. It was at that moment, on that chair, where I felt my world was over and at the same time, it was the beginning for me. Those feelings were with me during the first two years. S

As the different participant’s narrations illustrated, the eight immigrant women described and expressed that their *arrival in the United States* was part of their significant experiences during their social integration process. All of them expressed a level of uncertainty and with the exception of Diana; the other participants shared the feeling of being afraid. Betty, Juanita, Patricia, and Diana were the only participants that communicated knowing they were not going back to Colombia. However, the level of understanding and control over the situation were different.

**Accomplishing basic living skills.** Accomplishing successfully independent day-to-day activities was significant for Betty, Patricia, and Juanita. They mentioned activities such as getting groceries, doing laundry, and cooking, as well as getting their driver’s license or their permit:

For me, it was important buying just what I needed when I was going to the supermarket.
The first time, people from the foundation [IRC] took us to a store, but I did not recognize more than half of the things that were there. We spent a lot of money, and we did not use half of what we bought, the half that was canned food tasted badly. Another Colombian refugee took me to the farmers market… that was different. You see the fresh products; you can touch them and not through bags. Sometimes even, you can smell the soil on them. That is real food; it is like having a piece of Colombia in my kitchen. B

Juanita, on the other hand, shared with me that how proud she was at the time she passed her driving test despite of her illiteracy levels in Spanish and English:

Other thing that I remember a lot and I feel proud of myself is getting my driver’s license. I took one test in English and the other one in Spanish, I do not know how to read or write in either English or Spanish. However, I studied for 3 weeks, and went, and sat at the computer; I had never sat in front of a computer and passed my test… I Thank God! J

As Betty’s, Juanita’s, and Patricia’s narrations described, accomplishing basic living skills held great importance for the three of them, given the new factors incorporate in day-to-day activities.

**Changing economic status.** Betty, Eugenia, Liliana, and Sandra conveyed they experienced a change in their economic status during the first two years after their arrival in the United States as I presented in chapter 3, under demographic information. In this segment, I present how participants described and experienced this change. These four participants reported a better economic situation while they were living in Colombia.
Despite the fact that Sandra affirmed that her current economic situation is better here than in Colombia, she shared with me that was not her case during her first two years:

I never in my wildest dreams or nightmares imagined working in a Jewish temple as a server. Not because it is bad, but because I was always so comfortable and everything was so easy for me, I did not even know how to serve a glass of water. I knew that when I came here without financial support from my parents, I had to duck down and do what you have to do, but I never imagined I would be serving drinks, changing diapers, making beds, cleaning baths and houses because one cannot imagine, just until you are here. There were times I was out of tears and saying "but what am I doing here, if I can be lying in bed scratching my belly? But then, I thought and said "No, I must continue.” S

In Betty’s case, she described the importance and value of being a landowner and the difference with her current situation:

We were rich in Colombia because we had our land, and our house. Here, we do not have land and this apartment really does not belong to us. We pay rent. Here [the United States], we are poor. We have to buy food, and we had all the food that we wanted in Colombia because we grew our own food. It is not about the number of televisions in your house… it is about… I do not know the word… Do you understand what I am saying? B

Eugenia, Liliana, and Sandra, on the other hand, described being upper class in Colombia, and middle class in the United States. “That was really difficult for me” Liliana shared with me:
I never paid too much attention to how I spent the money in Colombia. I always had money with me or I just went to my mom, and asked her. I knew I was able to go to any restaurant or to buy the clothes that I wanted. Here it was different because you think that $500 is a lot and it is not, but that amount is a lot in Colombia. I had a car in Colombia, and having a car over there was not a necessity but a luxury, and here, where it is a necessity, I did not have a car for the first year, and there is practically no public transportation. I never had money for anything during the first two years here [the United States]. Those were the strongest experiences during my first two years because I also realized how disconnected I was from reality. My bubble was ‘crystal clear’ at that point in regards to my economic situation here and there.

Diana and Yolanda did not mention any change in their economic status. Both participants stated they were middle class in both Colombia and the United States. However, Diana clarified that “I think during my first two or three years I was low-income class in the United States, let me explain this to you” (D,) she declared:

According to my income in Colombia as well as the ‘social class,’ I was middle class in my country all the time. That never changed and I do not think it would change in the future. Now, when I arrived to the United States I literally did not have anything, my savings of 5 years disappeared in the United States six months after my arrival. The first two or three years were extremely difficult trying to study, and to survive. I think what you do in those first years as an immigrant here; it is key for your future. I have seen a lot of Colombians, and people from other Latin American countries – but especially Colombians, and Argentinians –
that go back to their countries after being here for two or three years because they just cannot tolerate the situation anymore. The problem is that in order to come here they sell almost everything in Colombia, and then, they return to their countries with no money or anything in their countries. I lived for 30 something years in Colombia, and my economic status never changed but after living here for almost three or four years my economic situation improved working in jobs that do not have anything to do with civil engineering. What does that tell you? D

As the narrations of Betty, Eugenia, Liliana, and Sandra showed, changing economic status was an experience that held a special meaning in their social integration experiences. Despite the fact that Diana and Yolanda did not report any change in their economic status, they described the difference between the middle class in Colombia and the middle class in the United States.

**Acquisition of Education in the United States.** Diana and Yolanda mentioned that obtaining education in the United States was a meaningful experience during their social integration process. Both participants referred to their graduate experience as:

An opportunity that just a hand full of Colombians can have. Doing a master in Colombia is almost impossible first because there are not too many programs and second because there is not financial aid or the amount of scholarships like in the United States. D

Yolanda added that it has been “eye opening for understanding the United States as a country” (Y). Both of them shared the opinion that “if you as an immigrant understand how the educational system works in this country, it would be easier to
understand other aspects related to the government and the system as a whole” (D). With the same idea, Yolanda explained that:

For international students and immigrants, it is key to have a good advisor that can guide the student about the culture of the Department, College, and University and as a result, the country. I do believe that the dynamics in the classroom are replica of the dynamic of society. Therefore, if you are a student from Colombia and you are in the South of the United States, you had better understand quickly that politics are not discussed in the classroom and if so, it would be superficial, most probably. This is my experience as a student and listening to the comments of other Latinos and Colombian students here. Y

Diana and Yolanda described the opportunity of acquisition of education in the United States as one of their significant experiences during their social integration process for two main reasons: an opportunity that was not possible in Colombia and their experience as graduate students brought knowledge and understanding regarding the culture of the United States.

**Previous Assumptions Held about the United States**

During the first interview, I invited participants to discuss what if any previous knowledge or ideas they had about the United States and its culture. In the next section, I offer the participants responses in three sub-themes that help to illuminate their previously held assumptions of the U.S. and the impact they had on their social integration process: Stereotypes, no previous knowledge, and some knowledge.
**Stereotypes.** The United States is one of “the richest countries in the world” (L) and having a “capitalistic system” (Y) were the basis for the main stereotypes that participants expressed during their narrations.

Sandra, for example, described her previous beliefs about Americans as “spoiled, slimy, and querulous” as she explained:

I had a lot of anger toward the United States because I met so many U.S. people, who went to Colombia in exchange programs at my school. They were very spoiled, and slimy, and they complained about everything. I used to say ‘how is that possible if they have everything – house, car and education – and their parents send them here [Colombia], and they are still complaining?’ That made me angry and I had the idea that ‘the gringos’ complained a lot. S

Having an influence “from the left” was the basis for Yolanda’s beliefs about the United States:

When I thought about coming to the U.S, I was thinking initially just three months for my English classes. I did not want to live in the U.S. because the left had a lot of influence on me during the university years, and one sees things like ‘capitalistic gringos who exploit others’. However, the gringos who exploit others here are the same as powerful Colombians in Colombia. That is global. That is not only in the U.S… I was more from the left so I used to think ‘what am I going to do in that country?’ Y
Eugenia shared with me that “I had this notion that the gringos were uncomplicated and funny people but you cannot joke with them because it is not polite, or at least they do not have the Colombian sarcasm, and humor”. In the same line, Liliana narrated that:

I was surprised when I started seeing Americans like… like so ‘square’ and so formal. When my boyfriend introduced me to his parents, I was nervous as I would be in this kind of situation, but I was even more nervous this time because I was not sure how to behave. I had been in that situation before in Colombia with my ex-boyfriends and I never felt so stiff, and I think it was because all the formality and all the things that I should not mention at the table. I really cannot find an adjective to describe that feeling of being ‘square’. I guess rigid… Because the image that I had of the Americans was that, they were more like… ok, ‘let’s go with the flow’. L

Juanita shared with me her reaction as soon as OIM informed her that the United States chose her and her daughter and they were leaving soon:

I told them [OIM] ‘I am not going to the U.S.’ and they said ‘Why are you going to say that? What is wrong with you?’ I told them [OIM], ‘I do know that country is in crisis with the swine flu and that is going to kill us for sure’, and the psychologist said, ‘Juanita, you do not have to worry about it. They are going to give you money… they will get you a job, and you will be able to work and be stable with your daughter… I was afraid of that swine flu because I saw that in the news. J
Throughout the narrations of their social integration experiences presented above, Juanita, Liliana, Sandra, and Liliana illustrated their *stereotypes* held about the United States and Americans before their arrival. Some of these were “the richest country in the world,” Americans seen as “very complainers” “square” and “who exploit others”

**No previous knowledge.** Patricia and Eugenia reported that they did not have any knowledge about the United States. Eugenia shared with me that she did not have any information about the United States and she did not inform herself before her travels:

I came with no information. I did not know anything. If you would have told me that [the State of destination] was close to Canada, I would have believed you, because I did not know where the hell it was. I just knew Mickey Mouse, and that Miami was like Barranquilla and Cartagena together. He [boyfriend] told me that [the State of destination] was more gringo… Yes, I came with zero information.

Zero research. E

Patricia described that she heard about the United States in her village as “the country with more money in the world” (P), and the place where “all my friends and people from my village wanted to live” (P), but:

I did not know anything about this country. Maybe the only thing was that here, they [Americans] did not speak Spanish. I think I did not know anything because I never went to school and I lived in the same village all my life. P

Eugenia and Patricia stated not having *any knowledge* about the United States before their arrival with exception of Patricia who stated that the U.S. is country where “they do not speak Spanish.”
Some previous knowledge. Juanita and Betty expressed that they had some information about the United States because the video that is presented by OIM to refugees before departing to their host countries:

They [OIM] present a video about the city… They showed you the apartments where you are going to live… all of that before coming here. What they show you was all true because the video was very complete. I saw the apartment inside and the kitchen, and the factories where they are going to find you jobs… you can see the people dressing in the same way, with their hats, and everyone in a line… it looked pretty. So, I did have some information, but if it was not for that video, I just knew about that flu going on here. J

Despite Eugenia mentioning not having any information about the United States, she mentioned that she had more knowledge about the day to day because:

My husband told me about the dishwasher in the apartment, and I was like wow! Because he came first, so he was telling me about the public transportation, and he explained to me that one must take the bus at certain times or the bus leaves you. I knew the routine things because he was explaining that to me, but not about the interaction with people ... that he did not explain to me. E

Yolanda affirmed having knowledge about the politics of the United States as a result of her previous studies in Colombia and Switzerland, besides the constant conversations with her father who worked for several years in the United Nations:

I knew about the notion of the United States’ politics and about the advance of capitalism. I learned that in geopolitics in Switzerland and in Colombia… so I have always had a lot of prevention... Here [the U.S.] one sees the unbridled
capitalism and lives it every day. What happens here is that the marketing is overpowering, which is what brain washes… you have to have very strong foundations in order to avoid the brain washing. Other factors that contributed to my knowledge about the U.S. was the numerous, and long conversations that I had with my father. He retired from the United Nations and he had the opportunity to travel around the world and to know many things, so his stories were always extremely interesting and that gave more information and knowledge about other countries.

Diana and Liliana cited their years of school as part of their information and knowledge about the United States. Liliana shared with me that:

What I knew about the United States was what I learned at my school in what we called worldwide geography and history. So, I would say the basic information and what was on the news at that point, because the U.S. is always in the news of Colombia. I did not know anything about the south, and the differences between the south and the north.

Besides the information and knowledge learned during high school, Diana referred to her university years:

Because of my field and my job as a professor at a university in Colombia, I tried all the time to keep up with the advances in terms of infrastructure, materials, programs, technology, and in general new developments here in the United States and Europe, especially Germany. My interest has been always transportation, so I was constantly in search on that specific topic and of course, the United States was a country where I was looking constantly for information. Coming from
Colombia, I was always fascinated by the roads of this country [the United States]. I did not have too much knowledge about how the government works. I had the basics. D

As the narrations of the participants illustrated, they presented their social integration experiences through the description of previous assumptions held about the United States. For a better understanding of their assumptions, I divided the above section into previous perceptions, no knowledge, and some knowledge that participants held before their arrival in the United States.

**Participants Expectations**

This theme emerged during the narrations of participants about their social integration experiences in the first and second interviews. The main expectations were improving economic status, becoming independent, finding more opportunities in different aspects of participants’ lives, and participants looking for peace and security. In what follows, I present each of these themes according to the responses of participants.

**Improving economic situation.** Eugenia was the only participant who mentioned hoping to improve her economic situation in the United States:

If I had gotten a job in Colombia after we graduated, we would be living there, but there was nothing there. My only expectation when we finally decided to come to the United States was to find a job that allows us to improve our economic situation especially as a couple just married. At that point, there was nothing to do in Colombia.

**Becoming independent.** Liliana and Sandra mentioned, as one of their expectations for living in the United Stated was to become independent and self-
sufficient persons. “I was practically sent here by my mom. She told me about studying English, but I think she wanted that I grow up and become an adult,” Liliana said, and explained to me that:

I was able to see that clearly after three months of being here. Therefore, I decided that besides studying English, I wanted to be independent in all levels of life. Liliana’s bubble was destroyed during those first three months. I wanted to be sure that I was able to build my life and pursue whatever objectives I decided were important for me. L

“The most important thing for me when I decided to come to the United States was to be able to live without the help of my parents’ money,” Sandra stated:

That was my main objective, I wanted to demonstrate to my parents and myself that I did not need their money and at the same time, I was able to make my own decisions. In a few words, I wanted to become independent, and I knew that I was not going to do that in Colombia, close to my parents. Because of what I knew and I had heard about the United States I thought here it was possible. It was far away from my parents but not too much! After almost 13 years, I can say that I did it. They did help by paying for my English classes but that was it. In some way, I felt that I achieved what I was looking for in this country. S

Finding more opportunities. Diana, Sandra, and Yolanda described that they were expecting to find “my passion” (S) “signals about what to do” (D) and “my mission in this world” (Y). These three participants were foreseeing to uncover answers about their own personal journey of life in the United States:
Reflecting on her own immigration process, Yolanda shared with me that “I was doing all kind of things in Colombia and I had my own small business but I was not feeling complete. I knew inside of me that my destiny was different but did not know what it was, when I said destiny, I do not mean place but like the mission of my life. I was hoping that my journey in the United States would provide me with some insight and it did. It is like the poem of Antonio Machado ‘Wanderer, the only way is your footsteps, there is no other. Wanderer, there is no way; you make the way as you go. As you go, you make the way and stopping to look behind; you see the path that your feet will never travel again. Wanderer, there is no way— only foam trails in the sea’. Y

Diana shared with me that moving to the United States was part of a “deep existential crisis”. She described that:

I did want to study English, but I used it as an excuse for something deeper that I was experiencing. It was a time of big reflection… the big human questions that do not have a correct answer. Colombia, its contradictions, the social expectations, and the family all of that had an exclamation point for me. A friend of mine told me ‘do you think that if you go away your questions are going away too? I knew that the questions were going to be there but I knew that it was a different scenario and I was hoping that the new scenario would give some signals about what to do with that… Diana

“Besides being independent, I wanted to find my passion,” Sandra said to me and she continued describing that:
I was living in a superficial and almost fake environment. I was tired of the social expectations and pressure from my family. Money and last names are not everything in life. My friends or the people that I was hanging around with were so superficial and the conversations were so vain… the corruption in Colombia… I do not know… when I started taking my life seriously and seeing the big difference among people’s living conditions in Colombia, the feeling that I was born in the wrong place was bigger and bigger. I was just doing what was expected from me and it did not feel right. I needed to find my passion and I thought coming here was a good idea for that too. I am still looking for that but at least I feel that at this point I have some idea, I just need to go deeper. S

**Peace and security.** Betty, Diana, Juanita, Patricia, Sandra, and Yolanda mentioned peace and security as important aspects they were expecting to encounter in the United States.

Patricia shared with me that “the only thing that I wanted was to know that I was able to breath without thinking that someone is going to hurt me again or hurt my children”. For Patricia it was difficult to fulfill her desire until “they [OIM] brought my daughter, after that I had other problems and it has been difficult to recuperate from what happened to me in Colombia. I get really sad, desperate, and depressed”. Betty shared a similar experience saying that:

When we finally got here, I thank God because I saw this as the big opportunity to live in peace with my family. In some ways, that has happened, but you have memories, you know? And… that is difficult. I know here nobody is going to kill us but it is as if these memories were my demons and it is so painful. B
Juanita described to me that:

I remember when I was on the plane that I was crying and at the same time I was relieved because I kept hearing the voice of the psychologist from Ecuador saying ‘Juanita, you and your daughter are going to be safe there’ and that is what I was hoping to find here. I can tell you my girl that I do have that here. Around the second year, I started feeling content, secure and in peace. For example, I got from work here around 3am or 4am at first, I know that nobody is going to break into the apartment and do something to my child. Second, I am not scared to walk here. Here it is safe and you see the police all the time. I have never had to call the police and thanks, God I have never had any problem.

Yolanda shared with me another example about her experience of looking for peace:

One of the aspects that I was looking for when I decided to come to the U.S. was peace. A few days ago, I was speaking with a friend and I said ‘I have neither the courage nor the bravery of those who remain in Colombia’ I was expecting to find some peace and I think I found it because I am no longer worried that someone was going to steal me... (Laughs) when I was getting out of my car, I always locked the car doors, and I made sure that all the windows were closed properly. My cousin’s husband who is American, used to tell me ‘Yolanda do not worry there is no one behind searching to steal anything’... I was living in a small town and suddenly I realized that I was not afraid all the time. I was experiencing peace... I was walking around 11pm by myself, it was dark, full of trees, and I was not afraid that I would be attacked at the next light... For me that
was like so strange because there was a time in Medellín that at 7pm everyone was sleeping or watching TV… I could not believe that I could leave at 12 at night alone, and walk in the village.... I could not believe it! That is so invaluable to me! Y

Diana and Sandra expressed as well encountering peace in the United States.

Diana shared with me that:

I was sick and tired of Colombia. People said that we [Colombians] are not tolerant, and I disagree. I think one of our problems is that we are too tolerant, and with time, that tolerance became blindness, and so that was happening to me. I wanted to feel again. I wanted to feel and to think about my country within a safe space. I, personally, was not able to do that inside Colombia. I wanted to find a safe space among other things in the United States…

As the participants’ narrations illustrated, they described their social integration experiences through their *expectations* built before arrival in the United States. Participants were envisaging improving their economic situation, becoming independent, having more opportunities to develop themselves, and hoping to find peace and security.

**Unanticipated Challenges and Difficulties**

During Participants’ narrations about their social integration experiences, they shared with me their challenges and the most difficult aspects of living in the U.S. The different types of challenges were: Not understanding of the language and the culture, lack of physical mobility, the current immigration policy in the United States, the impact of previous upbringing on their current lives, and isolation. Below, I present each of these subthemes using participants’ narrations.
Not understanding language and culture. Regardless of the literacy levels in Spanish and/or English, all eight participants mentioned language and the culture as a major challenge or difficulty in different aspects and elements of their life in the United States.

Betty, Juanita, and Patricia described how the absence of English makes “everything more difficult” (B), and “anything that you want to do takes more time” (J) or “sometimes I do not go to places that I have to because the English” (P).

In the following narration, Betty illustrated the impact of the absence of English on her life:

Because I do not speak the language, everything is more difficult here... I cannot ask anything if everybody speaks English and I have not been able to learn that English, then everything becomes more difficult. Because here there are many things you need to know and support that one might have but without the English it is impossible. For example, a friend told me there is a place where you can go, and if you need clothes, they help you. Right now, I am trying to send clothes to a niece who is having a baby in Colombia and she has no money for the baby… But I cannot go to that place because they just speak English… that is a church… but I have to do everything possible to go because I have no money even to send them used clothing, so I have go there and get something to send them… but I have to speak English or bring someone who speaks. B

Juanita also described different experiences in which her literacy levels impacted her daily activities. Among those experiences, she shared with me that:

I understand now a little bit of English when the person speaks to me slow... I have learned to say for example ‘good morning’, ‘how are you’, and ‘I do not
speak English just Spanish’. When I said that, they said... Ah! And sometimes they look for someone that speaks Spanish. Anything that you want to do takes more time, but I cannot just be here, lamenting that I do know how to read and write in English nor Spanish. If they do not understand me, I started making signs or I look for the way to say what I need. J

Patricia said to me:

I feel bad because I do not know what people are telling me and I cannot say anything. Sometimes I have to go to places but I do not go because of the English. This happens a lot with the schools. I can call and ask for an interpreter but sometimes they do not have one, so I do not go and then, I have no idea what is happening with them [her children] there [school]. P

Diana, Eugenia, Liliana, Sandra, and Yolanda expressed how frustrating it is having a conversation in English and you asking: ‘would you please slow down?’ or just smile and reply ‘hmm how interesting is that!’ without really understanding what the other person had said” (S). Learning a language “is like becoming an adult again”, Eugenia stated and “you can get discouraged really quick” Diana mentioned, continuing with her narration:

I had finished my English classes but that did not mean that my English was good. I had problems speaking and with my pronunciation. During the first year of my master program here in the U.S., I was working on a project with another student for a class. One day, in the middle of our work session, my cellphone rang and it was from Colombia. I excused myself and answered it. After I finished my conversation – obviously in Spanish – the other student said to me, kind of
smiling and with a face of surprise. ‘Oh Diana, you can speak at normal spend’ I was so furious! People take for granted too many things… they do not have any idea about the amount of energy that this takes, and how frustrating it is having thousands of ideas, and opinions in your brain, and not being able to transmit your ideas in a coherent way or at the appropriate moment. D

Diana continued telling different stories as a graduate student when she suddenly stopped and added, “there is another important moment for me related to language but not the English language it is the body language” she enunciated, describing a “tense” (D) conversation with one of her professors:

After having some problems with my pronunciation, and because in my field one needs to be so precise, we started talking about that. Initially I was ok, open to his feedback but when he asked me, ‘I do not understand why you have these problems if the Asian, Indian, and even the African students speak good English’… I forgot that I was in the U.S… I did all the things that you supposedly should not do here because ‘it is not polite’. I used my body language, moved my arms like in Colombia, used my regular tone of voice with all my passion, and anger, and told him ‘I can see why you do not understand because you are putting oil and water in the same glass… We are all immigrants but different, some of those students come from countries that have dialects but the official language is English and other students did their middle and high school in bilingual schools in their own countries. Have you thought about that? How many countries have you been in besides your own? How many languages
do you speak besides English?’ He said to me ‘you made your point’, I replied ‘good, about time’, and I left. D

In her reflection about this situation, Diana shared with me:

After that incident, I started thinking about the impact of my body language on that situation. I do not think that without the movements of my arms, the tone of my voice, and me standing up, and decreasing ‘the personal space’ between him and I, I would have had any impact on him…. he apologized to me two semesters later. I did not use my body language consciously at that point, but that was a breaking point for me… I began to understand more their culture; I started being aware of what I bring and how the culture and what I bring shock sometimes and others not. D

Diana, Sandra, and Yolanda expressed how the understanding of the language and the culture went together during their experiences of social integration. “If you do not understand the culture, you do not learn correctly the language” Yolanda stated, adding that “a language is more than just words and meanings” (Y). In order to illustrate this, Yolanda shared with me that “one of the times I had difficulty in the University was when a professor told me that I did not know how to read… that I could not read!” (Y), explaining that:

Because I understood things backwards (laughing), I understood things differently than ‘the American way’... with my Latina mind, and my different mindset the message I received was different from what his was reading. Everything was because of the interpretation. For me, that was very painful and he even bought a book for me on how to learn to read. He was a verbal abuser, a tyrant. I had to
face him. I faced him, and confronted him. Finally, I dropped that class after talking with my advisor and the head of the Department. He argued that I did not have the skills that he wanted, and my argument was that I did not have that structured logic mentality. My mind is different or was at the time. That was at the beginning, and there were many things I did not understand. He did not have a cultural background that helped him either. He did not understand where I was coming from with my interpretations. He was a linear thinking, and he did not have experience learning a language other than English. He was monolingual. He had no conception of what it means to be bilingual.

With the exception of Patricia, all the other participants reported that understanding the culture was difficult for them during their social integration experiences.

Betty described her initial confusion regarding expected behaviors from parents to their children saying, “there is here [the United States] strong rules about how you raise your children and you cannot hit them because you go to jail.” Betty considered that:

How I raise my children is my business… but the psychologist explained to me why it is not good to do that to the children, and she taught us how you can talk to them… we are doing that now with my granddaughter.

“There is one thing that I do not like of this country” Betty enunciated, giving a description of the use of guns.

I do not understand why it is so important for Americans having guns all the time with them. In Colombia that is not allowed. The only ones who have guns are the army, the guerrilla, and the paramilitaries. Here you see all the time how they
have their guns in their cars or houses. I was cleaning a house one day, I saw a big box with glass at the top, and there were three pistols there. I got scared, and I think the lady of the house saw me, because she told me in her Spanish ‘do not worry, those are my husband’s and it is just in case of emergency’. I never come back to that house. B

Juanita described her understanding of the United States as a country with a culture for respect, and well-educated people.

Here [the United States] everyone is in their position… nobody gets into your business; Americans are very lonely people so they can avoid trouble, and in that way everybody respects everybody. Here nobody bothers anybody, and that is what I started doing after I understood that. That was important for me because I started feeling safe and happy. J

Liliana and Eugenia expressed having big difficulties understanding the culture, social protocols, and norms to the point of it affecting their emotions and re-thinking their decision. “I started feeling that there were more things that I could not do, than things that I was able to do here, and it was not because of the English, it was because there are rules for everything” Eugenia stated and explained to me that “I started getting mad at the country and myself for coming here. There is not freedom here, what you find is there are a lot of people with fear of being sued”.

“There was a point that I did not want to get out” Liliana told me:

I felt so socially incompetent during the first two years! I knew, and know that I am not the smartest person in the room, but also I knew and know that I am a highly social person with good manners. For example, when you are introduced
to another person in Colombia, you give your hand and a kiss regardless if there is a woman or a man. If the person is older, you know that we give the hand in a different way as a sign of respect. Well, doing that here was wrong. That is a simple example, but when even the simplest things that one does are wrong and you do not have how to understand why, it is terrible. When I started dating my husband, he is American; he was the first person that started explaining to me the whys. That was important to me, finally when he told me the whys and the reasons even if the reason was ‘because you can get sued’ I started feeling better.

Juanita described to me some of the elements of the culture that were difficult to understand during her social integration experiences.

For me it was difficult the language and the customs. One has to learn simple things like for example, you cannot hit the children or anything like that. Those are different customs, and rules, if one does not pay attention, one can go to jail and I had a hard time understanding why you can go to jail for those things. If you drive without a license, you can go to jail even as a refugee. You have to learn to respect the neighbors because one neighbor can sue you or you also can sue your neighbors and call the police. You have to learn to live like people! When one does not have education like people in my country and other countries, you can have problems in this country. If you have your education in your home country and come to live here, you will carry yourself as people and you will not be affected by these customs and rules, because you already have it, no? You have it. You know you cannot put the stereo at full volume, like in my country.
where from outside you can hear what kind of music your neighbors are listening to in their ranchos or homes because they are almost falling down but they have good stereos to start the party! If you do something like that here, you will have problems. Here, there are many things that cannot be done and that was difficult... I cannot live without music and here I have to listen to the music in a low volume.

Diana, Sandra, and Yolanda related their struggle with understanding the language and their comprehension of some elements of the culture as the situation that Sandra described for me:

One of the most difficult things for me here is to make oneself be understood as one does in Spanish. I have been thinking that the problem is that one as a Latina/o, one is super passionate, and one cries, and yells and you go through all possible states when one is telling a story, the American does not. That happens to me a lot with my boss... I take my costumers to the doctors’ appointments. One of them is a Mexican man and we have become friends... because you have to wait always in the doctor’s office, he starts to tell me all kind of stories after I had fight with the doctor’s office because we had being waiting for more than two hours. When I come back to my office, my boss asked, “What happened? I tell him that we had to wait, that I had to fight in order that the doctor sees him, and I tell him the stories that the client told me. My boss just stares at me and tells me: ‘In conclusion, the doctor saw him and he has his new medicine and he is ok?’ I said... well, yes! At the end, I went to my desk and I sat like an idiot... because the problem is more than if I say the correct words or how I pronounced them...
the problem is communication but that is cultural. What is important for me is, maybe, not relevant for him. S

In this section, I presented the data regarding the lack of understanding of the language and culture as one of the unanticipated challenges during their social integration experiences described by participants. They illustrated how language, social norms, ways of communication, and customs were understood after some time in the United States and how the comprehension of the language and the culture go hand in hand during their social integration process.

**Lack of physical mobility.** Lack of physical mobility is “a constant problem for me” Betty stated. She shared that because of her English and literacy levels she has not passed the driving tests and:

... With the new law, now the entire tests are in English, so I cannot drive and I had to use the buses or trains and that is terrible. The buses I can take them now without a problem, but the trains are terrible. I always get lost... If everything is ok, it takes me two hours to get where I work... Sometimes my daughter takes me because she does have a car. When she takes me, it is only 20 minutes... During the weekends, I would like to go to places but the situation is the same... if there is not a car, you cannot go anywhere because the schedule is different. Last month, they changed the schedule again and the stop that we had two blocks from my apartment they moved far away. I get bored here because there is no place to go or how to go... I cannot move. B

In a similar situation, Patricia explained to me that:
For me it is important to go to church and now that we are living in a different apartment, my church is far away and there are not buses that take me there. There is a woman at the church that when she can, she picks us up and takes us to the mass but she cannot do that always so I just stay here without going out. This is not like in Colombia where you can go everywhere even if you do not have a car. I had never had a car in my life. My oldest daughter sometimes also takes me out because her boyfriend has a car. I have to wait that always someone takes me. The apartment starts to feel like a prison sometimes.

As Betty and Patricia described above, the lack of transportation and physical mobility is experienced is very confining and as continuous, challenges they face due to the absence of a car, and a deficient public transportation system.

**U.S. immigration policy.** Sandra, Yolanda, and Diana shared with me how U.S. immigration policy has affected their lives in ways that they never expected.

Yolanda expressed that one of the aspects that she regrets was having her visa expire and the unintended consequences of this as she illustrated in her narration:

I came here on an F1 visa, which is the student visa. When I finished my English classes and enrolled for my master, I continued with F1 and the University gave me another I-20 for two more years. After my first semester, my visa on my passport was going to expire. I had two options stay here with the new I-20 until I finish my studies or go to Colombia and request another visa. The recommendation from everyone, including the lawyer was to stay here because the rates of denied visas by the U.S. Embassy in Colombia were extremely high. I stayed. During all this time, I had multiple extensions of the I-20 and now I am
on a H1B visa. During all these years, I have not been in Colombia and the saddest of all of this is that my father passed away and I could not go to Colombia. We had a long conversation before his condition was critical and he made me promise him that I will not go to Colombia no matter what would happen to him. That was a difficult time for me. A lot of people, friends, and relatives have died and I have not been able to go. Y

As Yolanda, Diana was not able to visit Colombia for 6 years until she was granted a green card becoming a legal permanent resident. In her reflection about this process, Diana shared with me that:

Those years were difficult and painful. You know that you have one foot here and one there and at the same time in nowhere. I missed funerals, marriages, births in the family, parties and all kind of reunions that mean a lot to me. My nephews and nieces did not recognize me even though I used to speak with them over the phone, but that is not the same... they are just kids. The process of my green card took 5 years and they gave a parole permit [permission to leave and reentry the country] but I know more than one case in which the immigration officer denied entry in the airport for no reason at all. During that time, I felt that I had no control over my life and the only thing that you can do is sit and wait. Given the technology and intelligence programs that this country has, all those processes should be reviewed quicker. I think that the politics and other kind of interests is what end up being more important, and people’s lives get caught in the middle. I do not know how undocumented people can make it here; it is difficult for me to understand from where they get the strength to continue living under those circumstances. D
The current immigration policy of the United States was described by Sandra, Yolanda, and Diana as an unanticipated challenge experienced during their social integration process. As their descriptions presented, participants spent numerous years without visiting their country, and loved ones. During their narrations, some of the participants reflected on the differences between the different immigration status and the implications for immigrants’ lives as in the case of undocumented immigrants.

**Previous upbringing.** As part of participants’ narrations of their experiences during their social integration process, Eugenia, Liliana, and Sandra, described and shared different situations in which their previous upbringing was perceived as a factor that “does not make things easier” (E) and “does not promote the understanding of the culture of this country” (S)

Eugenia explicated to me how the traditional female role in which she was raised and some of the Colombian customs did not contribute to understanding the culture of the United States:

I was raised with the idea that you, as a woman and wife, you need to take care of your husband. The story that you have to do the cooking and you have to have ironed his shirts… but in Colombia, we have domestic help, the wife delegates the job but she does not do that job. That is the way I grew up and how I saw my mother doing things. Someone was going to do that job for me… I was going to be the wife, the mother of the children but the little ones would come with a babysitter. In Colombia, everything was more monitored… ‘Less hands on.’ Here, everything is ‘do it yourself.’ That was terrible for me. Now, I joke about it but I cried too many times because of that… I did not know how to use the
washer and dryer because the only one who knew how to use that apparatus was the woman that helped us in the house. The first time I washed my own clothes was here in the United States and the first time that I cleaned a bathroom I was working in a house... that is life, I thought I was going to have domestic help, well; I was the domestic help of others... I thought I was going to have a babysitter; I was the babysitter for other moms... E

Liliana’s narrations also presented a component of her previous upbringing that she experienced as a challenge during her social integration experiences:

In my house, my mom always inculcated in us good manners, the importance of being aware of social protocols and ‘being always well presented.’ Here, I do not think I quite understand the manners, social protocols and I feel out of place most of time about my concept of being ‘well presented.’ I have been to different graduations of my husband’s nephews and I could not hide my surprise when I saw the kids wearing tennis shoes and jeans. That is very inacceptable in Colombia. Situations like that made me think about if we as a country put too much importance on superficial aspects. When I am invited to an event or party, I try to get a sense first of the expectations in terms of dress code, but only on a few occasions, have I felt that I am wearing ‘the correct style.’ I know that this is somewhat silly but for me it is important. I do not know if we [Colombians] are too complicated or Americans are the other extreme. Dressing correctly is a form to show respect of the situation and the people involved in that. That is what my mom used to tell us and I think it is an important aspect to think about it. A similar situation happens with the manners at the table... Oh God! I remember
that even at the school we had a class where they taught us all these kind of things. I mentioned these because now that I am raising my children they keep telling me for example ‘but in the school the other kids do not eat like that or they use their hands to eat’ that is a no, no, no…

Participants illustrated how the influenced of previous upbringing and the different social expectations between Colombia and the United States were experienced as unanticipated challenges during their social integration experiences.

Isolation. Betty, Juanita, and Eugenia mentioned loneliness and lack of family support during their descriptions. During Eugenia’s interviews, the theme of isolation and loneliness was persistent as she illustrated in the next examples:

After the language the hardest things for me was being alone. You know you have nowhere to go. The confinement, that is hard because you do not even have where to look… I need a place with open views and not the situation that if I look to my right the only thing is the wall of the next apartment. The isolation, the isolation…. In addition, the confinement… you cannot go out because it is cold or because it is too hot and if you fight with your husband, where do you go? To the balcony and look at the roofs of the other houses or apartments because there is not more to look at. I come from a town where we lived free. Doors, and windows open, fresh air all the time and not this artificial air… Now with Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp is different, but in 2000, there was nothing, just a $5 phone card and you were able to talk for fifteen minutes… the international phone calls were expensive. Therefore, that lack of communication, not feeling
my family support and the loneliness… all of that made the situation very hard... so hard that I almost went back to Colombia. E

Juanita shared with me another experience where isolation became a challenge for her during her social integration experiences

I cried a lot because I did not understand English and I wanted to go out and to talk with anybody, I had no one to talk to, and I suffered too much. I was happy when my daughter came home from school so; I was able to talk to her. One day a man from the foundation [IRC] came and he told me there was another refugee, a man who spoke Spanish in the same complex, but ‘Juanita, he lives with two more men and you are two women’. I told him, I do not care, bring me the man I need to talk to someone, I do not care. J

In her reflection about her experience of isolation, Juanita explained to me that: This feeling of being alone it depends on the immigration status because those who do not have papers there is always someone from the family waiting here for them and you are going to be in the house with your family. You have with whom to share things. You have friends or family telling you how to do things, but in my case no. You understand me? The Mexicans, for example when they come, they always have more brothers, cousins, or friends, then they will support each other and they do not feel so alone. That is different. Now, there are more Colombian refugees coming to the United States and that is good. J

*Isolation* was the last *unanticipated challenge* mentioned by participants during their social integration experiences as it was presented below in Juanita and Eugenia’s narration.
Building Social Network

I invited participants to tell me about their experiences building social network during the second interview. According to the narrations of participants, three themes emerged. First, institutions and/or organizations like universities, IRC, and churches. Second, informal groups like ‘the Latinas’ group, and ‘the moms’ groups. Third, individuals like family members, friends, and volunteers from organizations. The data also showed that informal groups helped participants in their experiences.

Institutions and organizations. Betty, Juanita, Patricia, and Yolanda identified some institutions that had a special meaning for them during their social integration experiences. Betty, and Juanita, mentioned the organization International Rescue Committee (IRC) as an organization that offered support during the initial moments of their arrival in the United States.

IRC helped us a lot the first four months. They found for us the first apartment and helped us with some money and they found you a job. That is good because when we got here we did not have anybody. B

The foundation [IRC] is important for me because they helped with doctors, and the first things that I had were because of them. They have classes there and you can go to learn English and computer. With money, they help you the first three months and then you have to find a job. During the first year, I got sick, I had to have surgery, and I could not work for almost three weeks. The people from the apartment complex were going to kick me out because I could not pay the rent that month. IRC helped with one month. They were important also because of with their classes I understood better the rules and customs of this country. J
Patricia shared with me that the Catholic Church has been important during these years because:

The church has helped me to be a better mother. When I had health problems, I called a woman that is the director of a group there and she always takes me to the hospital. The most important part is that when I go to the church I feel like in Colombia because everybody is Latino so we speak Spanish. The other thing is that I feel in peace there. I pray and give thanks to God because he has been good to me in the middle of everything that happened. When I am in crisis because I do not have my medicine, Rosita, the woman from the church comes to my apartment and she talks to me and to the children. P

In Yolanda’s case, the university has played an important role during her social integration experiences as she described to me in the next example:

I say that Universities in the United States are like mothers that give you everything you need. The university has helped me a lot… if you need a doctor, they have the health center, if you need a dentist, they have one, if you need a counselor, there are several, if you need help finding work … you work there … and they have also groups, for example groups of international students… I have taken all the opportunities while I am there. I did everything I needed to keep me well, happy, and I made friends. I found scholarships and found everything I needed. I adore the University because to me it was like my mom. I told my advisor ‘I think, it has taken me so long to graduate because I did not want to leave my mom. Y
In informal groups, Diana, Yolanda, and Eugenia reported that informal groups had contributed to their integration and understanding of the culture of the United States. The three participants mentioned Latino groups where “we meet almost twice a month because we have always something to celebrate. “We are couples from different countries of South America, so we dance, laugh, and eat well!” Diana stated. Eugenia described her Latino group, as

We are seven couples and all are from Colombia and from the coast. We are the group of the costeños… it is interesting because if something happens here immediately in Colombia everyone knows. We are not from the same town but we are from the same region and you know how that goes… As my mom would say ‘small town, big hell’ we celebrate birthdays, first communions, divorces, everything, trying to have the same things like in our area. During the summer, we plan activities together for the children and divide responsibilities for houses. Summers are busiest here. I am telling you that if I did not have this group, I would have left this country a long time ago. I am in another group but that is from the school of my children. It is called ‘the mothers group’ that is more institutional and formal… I am part of that just because of the children. E

Yolanda shared with me that ten Latina women from different parts of Latin America form the group that she is part of. They meet once a month to read poetry and have conversations about the political situation of different Latin American countries; she stated, “It helps me to keep myself grounded” Y.
Individuals. All eight participants mentioned different individuals who have been key during their social integration process in the United States. Diana, Eugenia, and Liliana stated that their husbands and extended families were important. Diana described her situation as:

Jonathan and his family have introduced new elements for my understanding of the American culture. Both of his parents speak fluent Spanish because they lived in Peru several years. The conversations with Jonathan’s father help a lot because he is a professor of Latin American studies. Sometimes he speaks with Jonathan because my husband does not have the cultural knowledge of his parents. He has not been in South America and does not speak the language. D

Liliana described a similar situation saying:

My husband and his family are from the southern United States and none of them speaks Spanish nor have they been in any Latin American country. At the beginning, it was extremely difficult but I think that sometimes the love makes us open our hearts and head to new realities; I think that happened to me. L

Juanita shared with me how important and significant a volunteer was that she met in IRC. She described how as part of their programs, the organization assigned a volunteer that helps refuges during the first stages of their life in the United States. Juanita said:

She was like a piece of love. She helped during my first two years in this country and then she went to New York. She took me for the first time to my daughter’s school and explained to me where the classrooms were and what I had to do if I wanted to talk with my daughter’s teachers. She also taught me how to ask for a
doctor’s appointment and helped in finding doctors that speak Spanish. She was my guardian angel and sometimes she took me to try new food of others countries. Some spicy food! I love her and miss her so much. J

Eugenia mentioned to me how Oma and Opa, an African couple, become her family in the United States since her arrival:

Oma and Opa are an African family that was living below my apartment. They have two little girls who are their granddaughters. Their son and daughter in law were living with them too. The girls, Morgan and Annie, played with my son all the time and he spent more time with them than with us. They helped to take care of him because we were working. Oma and Opa are my son’s grandparents and for them he is their grandson. At that point, I began to feel like I had company. Oma and Opa gave me the support I was looking for in a family… My life changed. That was in 2003 and when we bought this house in 2005, they also bought a house a mile from here. I am telling you… they are like my Colombian family. When my son started speaking, his first words were in African not in Spanish. They are still the grandparents 100% active. E

As it was presented in the previous paragraphs, participants described their social integration process through their experiences in building social networks and support. According to participants’ narrations, organizations, informal groups, and individuals play an important role during their social integration process.

In this section, I offered the descriptions of themes supported by data that helped illuminate the findings for the first research question, which was how do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand their social integration experiences in the
United States? Women’s narrations of their social integration experiences provided rich descriptive data that upon analysis yielded the following significant findings. First, participants describe and understand their social integration process through their meaningful events that prevailed during their experiences; changing their previous assumptions held about the United States, confronting their expectations after their arrival, encountering unanticipated challenges as well as the importance of their social network and social support. Second, for the women who participated in this study, understanding the culture, and therefore the English language, and isolation were the elements more frequently mentioned as constant challenges in order to fulfill their social integration experiences.

In what follows, I present the data that supports the themes regarding the types of learning that took place during the social integrations experiences of the participants.

**Learning during the Social Integration Experiences**

In this section, I present the data, and themes that illuminated the findings for the second research question, which was what types of learning, if any, take place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States, and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change? All eight women who took part in the study described having participated in both formal and non-formal educational programs prior and upon arrival to the United States. According to the data, rich descriptions of learning from the experience emerged as an integral part of the social integration experiences of participants from the time of their arrival in the United States until the moment of the interview conversations. The data analysis revealed a process of learning from experience that included three components: Instrumental learning (practical
day-to-day learning), transformative learning (self-reflective and dialogic learning), and new meaning making (women’s ways of knowing). Table 5.2 presented the themes and findings regarding the types of learning that took place during the social integration experiences of the participants.

Table 5.2

*Types of Learning during Social Integration Experiences*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Categories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning within the Experience</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instrumental</strong></td>
<td>Day to Day Living Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during Social Integration Process</td>
<td>Acquisition of practical knowledge to meet</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>current demands of a new world</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Past and Present</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Past and Present</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Development of Professional Skills</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Transformative Learning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Self-Reflective Learning</strong></td>
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<td>Fundamentally transforming one way of</td>
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<td>being, knowing, and doing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Past, Present and Future</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- revision of a worldview</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Dialogic Learning leading to a New Worldview</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Women's Making Meaning of a new self</strong></td>
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**Instrumental “day-to-day” Learning within Learning from the Experience**

In this section, I present the findings relating to instrumental types of learning and practical knowledge acquisition that participants reported during their narrations. The instrumental and yet vital aspects of learning’s participants identified were described as day-to-day living skills, government assistance programs, financial knowledge, development of professional skills, and acquisition of languages as Table 5.2.1 shows.

Table 5.2.1

*Instrumental Learning within Learning from the Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sub-Categories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning from the Experience during the Social Integration Process</td>
<td><strong>Instrumental &quot;day-to-day&quot; Learning</strong></td>
<td>Day to day Living Skills</td>
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<td>Moving Around the City</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational System</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acquisition of practical knowledge to meet current demands of a new world</td>
<td>Government Assistance Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Past and Present</td>
<td>Basic Financial Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Hiring Process</td>
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<td>Work Conditions</td>
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<td>Development of Professional Skills</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Acquisition of Language (English and Spanish)</td>
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**Day-to-day living skills.** All eight participants reported to have learned new day-to-day living skills in order to survive and begin to understand their new surroundings. According to their narrations, this was one of the first types of learning taking place during their social integration experiences. The areas of day-to-day learning were the development of domestic skills, how to move around their city or town, understanding of the educational system, and taking care of themselves and their families.

**Developing domestic skills.** Eugenia, Liliana, and Sandra described how as soon as they arrived in the United States the learning started in the simplest aspects of their lives. Liliana described to me what happened after her sister showed her the apartment. I thought she was kidding when she told me ‘all what you need for cooking is there.’ She left the apartment and went to work until late that night. After I organized my room and everything for the next day because I had to go to the college where I was going to take the ESL classes, I got hungry and opened the refrigerator… there was nothing ready to eat. I prepared a sandwich for myself and I ate sandwiches that first week, day and night waiting that my sister to do something. One day I said, ‘I am tired of this food.’ she replayed ‘I image, what you are going to do? I am neither your mother nor the domestic help. What are you going to do? I look at her with no words… I realized that I was waiting for her to fix my situation. So, I started looking for simple recipes, and started learning how to cook, how to do laundry, how to clean the bathroom of the apartment. L

Eugenia shared with me that her first job in the United States was cleaning some offices during the night shift.
I was with other three women, two from Mexico, and one from San Salvador. I told them ‘I have never done this kind of job’ and they said ‘this is easy but you need to do it fast, and do it well because we do not to do it twice.’ Simple, no? Ha! That was the first time that I used those chemicals. I did not know English at that point, and they did not tell me about the care with those chemicals or the amounts. My eyes were itching, the skin of my hands was red, and burning, the smell was so strong that I started coughing, and then they were too. They were furious with me and I was with them. I think I got intoxicated with those chemicals because finally when I got home, my chest hurt and I got sick. They never called me again to work with them… the first year but especially the first six months were about learning English and also about cooking, washing, and cleaning my apartment and the houses of other people. E

Moving around the city. All eight participants shared that different day-to-day learning occurred around their mobility in the city or town where they were living. Some of the aspects learned were how to drive, passing a driving test, making sense of the public transportation system as well as the city streets. Betty described her anguish when for the first time she needed to use the train in order to get to her workplace:

The foundation [IRC] found us a job in a factory packing vegetables but it was far away from our house and nobody was able to drive us there. In IRC, they made us a map with the buses and trains we had to take to get there. We had to be there at 2pm and we left home around 8am. Everything was perfect until we got to the trains. We were not sure on what side to take the train and there was nothing in Spanish… that happened a month after we got here, and my daughter did not
know English yet. We took the first train, because we have to take two and after that, two more buses. I never knew if we passed the station where we had to leave the train, or if we were in the wrong side. After an hour or so, we did not have any idea where we were and we did not have how to ask because the English. When you get here as a refugee, IRC gives you a cellular, so we decided to call IRC, they had sometimes translators there. I felt so miserable because it is so simple but so complicated. I felt like a baby, not even like a child because they know how to speak. I could not speak on the phone, so my daughter spoke with the translator at IRC and they gave her explanations. She hang up the phone and told me ‘mom, I did not understand what they said’ I took the piece of paper with the map and the address, and started running behind a police that was in the station. I showed him the piece of paper and said ‘please.’

Juanita shared with me details about learning to drive and passing the driving test:

I needed to learn how to drive. I had a friend who took me to get groceries once a week and I kept asking questions about the car. Like, why you pushed that button, why you used that or this. I asked her everything that I saw in the car, what means that light. After I stopped asking, I just pay attention on what she was doing, where she put her legs but I never said anything. One day, I asked if I could drive… I told my friend, ‘I will do what you tell me to do, if not, you correct me… I did what she told me… I did exactly what she did and at the end she said, "Juanita, you did well" I made several laps around the neighborhood with her, and at that time I still had no license and I said to myself, ‘next time I sit in a car I have to have license and in my car.’
Juanita continued with her narration about how she studied for the driving test:
At that time, I was working during the day and my work was an hour away from my home, I spent all that time looking at all signals along the way. All the signals and I also looked in the book and I already knew the name. I learned just a bit of the name in English. This is called "Stop", this is called "Do not enter"... I learned them and when I saw them on the computer, I just looked for the letter that I knew…. This is ‘not enter’ and ahh. I learned all of that looking at the streets and my piece of paper, because my daughter and my friends drew the signals on a piece of paper.

**Educational system.** Juanita, Eugenia, Diana, Liliana, Patricia, and Yolanda mentioned day-to-day learnings about their understanding of the educational system in the United States. Juanita, Eugenia, Liliana, and Patricia shared learnings that took place during their interactions with elementary and middle schools for their children while Diana and Yolanda made references of their learning in the setting of higher education.

Patricia shared with me that the first time she was inside of a school was the day that she needed to register her children. “The people of IRC took me there and I was with my children and a volunteer from IRC who spoke Spanish” (P). Patricia described in detail how she was introduced to different people in the school but “everything was so quick that at the end, I did not know who was who” (P) she continued saying:

They told me about the rules of the school; they gave a phone number to call them if the children cannot go to school. They told me about the free lunch and breakfast at the school. I had to sign some papers, but because I do not how to write, the woman from IRC put a P for me. I did not understand well about how
each class was with a different teacher and how they grade but I did not ask because I did not want to appear as a stupid. After some weeks, my youngest daughter explained it to me. Now, I feel better if I have to go to the school because most of the time there are people who speak Spanish, but I always got confused because I cannot speak with the same person always. Sometimes, I have to do things on the computer because the teachers let me know the grades in the computer… the parent portal… I did not know what that was and then I did not how to open that but Maria, my youngest one taught me all about computers. I was scared of going to the school of my children and I was not the student, but now I know how the school works and about the parents’ teacher conferences and what to do if I need to talk with somebody at the school. P

“At the beginning it was complicated because you are studying and at the same time trying to figure out the rules, who is who, what professors are expecting, and learning how to relate with others” Diana described:

Two aspects were difficult for me the first semester of my master. First, I had to learn that here a syllabus is something that as a student you must check constantly and plan since the beginning of the semester your work. In Colombia, we have something similar, but we know that the readings can change as well as the due dates. The syllabus is flexible in Colombia, but here, it is everything. For my first project as I student, I was late a week because of the syllabus. Second, the technology… Wow… I was so impressed about the classrooms, even all the toys that students have and I had a laptop that looked more than a pc (Laugh). I was so impressed that it intimidated me. Some professors expected you to know how to
manage the programs but in most of the universities here, they have different
departments that help and support students with different issues, not just for
international students, but also for everybody. I was shocked about the amount of
resources on campus… there is so much than even some times you do not have
the information or it is not used because it becomes too much. The other aspect
that I learned was the high levels of competition among student and professors. I
did not see or experience that in Colombia. D

Eugenia mentioned to me how she learned about advanced classes in hers son
school, and the misunderstanding that created in her family as well as the pressure:

When I started hearing about the advanced classes I asked all the time, how can I
put my son in those classes? Some people told me that it is not going to happen;
it is difficult because he is Latino. I said; what? The school kept telling me that
he needed to improve his grades in order to be placed in those classes but I got
other information outside of the school and the ‘tracking system’ of the schools.
Well, I said, ‘not with my son.’ That is when I started getting involved at the
school, meeting teachers, going to any activity that the school had, and of course
paying attention to my son’s academic performance. I was so disappointed about
all that tracking system… it is disgusting to me… Those classes really were
almost all white students and I do not know if the content is different or it is
because in the other classes kids are simply not taught anything. It took almost
two years, but my son is now in advanced classes. E
“Taking care of my family and I.” Juanita, Betty, and Patricia discussed how they had to learn about the day-to-day learning regarding health and what to do in case of emergencies during their first month after their arrival through IRC.

Juanita explained to me how this process was:

When you get here [the United States], IRC has classes that are called ‘living skills’ and it is mandatory to go to the classes. If you do not go, they do not help you with money. That is during the first month. In those classes, I learn a lot about this country and they taught me how I can take care if my family and myself for example, sometimes in Colombia you cannot bathe yourself every day because we do not have water in the countryside, but here there is no excuse for that. So those things, personal hygiene, the system of 911 but just for emergencies and they take you to the doctors. At the beginning, they made the appointments for you… They do a lot of thing for you at the beginning and you need to pay attention because after three months you do not have any help from them. I asked them to write me the phones numbers where I can call in Spanish and my friend, the volunteer in IRC explained to me about the book where all the doctors are. She underlined my doctors with different colors so I knew, ok... This is my daughter’s doctors and the red one is mine, and the pink is for women’s doctor. J

In this section, I presented the day-to-day learning about living skills that all participants reported during the narrations of their social integration experiences. The themes of this learning were developing domestic skills, learning how to move around the
city, understanding of the educational system, and learning how “to take care of my family and I”.

**Government assistance programs.** With the exception of Liliana, participants expressed the day-to-day learning about different government assistance programs. For Betty, Juanita, and Patricia, the learning took place initially through IRC and through personal experiences latter in their process.

For Eugenia, Diana, Sandra, and Yolanda, the knowledge about government assistance programs was acquired during classes in higher educational institutions or self-taught. None of these participants reported having used any of these programs.

Migrants cannot participate in any of the government assistance programs. That is just for U.S. citizen with exception of refugees and those seeking asylum. The other reason is that I really had not been in a position to need them. Maybe during the first six months when I literally did not have food some days. E

**Food and health care.** Juanita mentioned how “your manager fills out your application and two weeks after you get here, you have your card to buy food and to go to the doctors”. These three participants reported learning “really how that works” (B) three or four months after their arrival when IRC “left us alone” (P). The three women described that every three months the family needed to apply and show their current income. In Betty’s, and Juanita’s cases:

They cancelled my food stamps and the Medicaid like seven months after I got here because I was making too much money. Going to those offices is terrible. Now they have people who speak Spanish but before they were not always there. I did not know how to apply, and they communicated to you in the mail so we did
not pay attention to that. We went to that office several times and tried to get back the food stamps and the Medicaid because I was sick but we could not. I do not understand how there are some families that still have that help and they have been longer here. B

Juanita told me:

IRC should have taught us how to deal with those institutions and what the rules are of those programs because sometimes that creates problems among the families. You know envy. How you have this and I do not? We do not know all the programs and you can learn, go, and ask but at the same time, we need to work and we cannot spend a day or two on those things. One day, I went because they took away the food stamps and the Medicaid. I think they were tired of me asking and asking… After four hours a women from Cuba sat with me and explained to me that the amount is different according to the number of people in your family, the number of children, and how many people were working in your family. She explained all of that and I understood. J

As the narrations illustrated, participants acquired *day-to-day learning of government assistance programs*. For Patricia, Juanita, and Betty, this instrumental learning took place through their direct experience as beneficiaries of some government assistance programs. For the other participants, the learning attained during classes or was self-taught.
**Financial knowledge.** All eight participants shared with me they had learned and developed some day-to-day financial skills. Betty, Juanita, and Patricia received basic financial knowledge through IRC. In the case of the other participants, their learning was through the experience of “having to deal with it” (S).

**Banking system.** Opening an account, writing a check, depositing money, using the ATM and making payments by phone or the Internet was new for Betty, Juanita, and Patricia. Betty explained, “IRC had some classes but the teacher did not speak Spanish, I went to one class and never went back because for me that was a waste of time” B. “I had to learn that because the factory put my money in the bank,” Juanita mentioned to me:

> When I started working in the first factory, they asked my account number to put my money there and I told them, no, I want my money with me not in a bank. I thought the banks were just for saving money and I needed that money. I asked the volunteer of IRC to help me and she took me and explained everything. She was telling what to do and I was doing what she was saying. In the same way, I have explained to other refugees that get here. For example, I know that Bank of America takes a lot of money from you. It is better a local bank… see how I speak now! I know… For example, I did not know how a check looks like. We use checks but my daughter writes them for me and because I know how to sign, I do it… my friend for IRC also told me about the importance of your credit and how you need to build yours if you want to buy a house. This is way I always pay everything every month because I want to buy a house. All of that is important to
know, everything I have learned in this country is important so I can live better and give to my daughter a better life. J

Eugenia, Diana, Sandra, and Yolanda mentioned how they learned about the credit score. “Your credit score is everything in this country,” Yolanda stated. Diana also shared that:

There are many factors interfering with your credit but people do not know. I have a little bit of understanding first, because I like numbers so I guess it is easy for me, and second, because I started doing research and looking in internet. People tell you different things, at the end, one is more confused than when one asked. D

“Because money matters.” Betty, Eugenia, Juanita, Liliana, and Sandra shared with me how they learned to manage their money.

When we you get here as a refugee, there is something call ‘Matching Grant’ and it is certain amount of money that you get according to how many people is in your family. It is for the first three months, they paid your rent, and you get the rest. Everybody in IRC tell us all the time ’please, save that money because after the three months what are you going to do if you have not found a job? When I heard that I got scared… we tried with my daughter, save as much as we can and look that it was a blessing because by the fourth month, neither she nor I had a job. So, we paid with that money and did groceries. Thanks God, my daughter found full time job, I found part time job, and we decided to buy a car with the rest of the money of the matching grant. We still have the same car. Old but works. B
Eugenia described for me that:

It is easy to go crazy because the amount of credit cards that is offered to you and something that was difficult for me was getting used to the conversion. I went to the stores I said just $20 this pants, that is cheap and my husband ‘what? That is not cheap. Eugenia, it is not 20 pesos, remember that will be 40,000 Colombian pesos and the ‘money matters’ as the gringos say that is what he kept telling me at the beginning. E

Juanita described to me how she learned about the difference between the value of the dollar in Ecuador and in the United States and the process of renting an apartment.

When you get here IRC has ready an apartment for you, but during the first week, one has to sign the contract. I did not want to sign that contract because the only thing that I was thinking was how I am going to pay the rent… it was a lot of money, I cried, and I did not want to sign the contract… I paid $60 in Ecuador and I would pay $550 here. I did not have the money and the people of the foundation [IRC] told me ‘Juanita, do not to worry that you will work and they will pay you hourly’… They explained to me that I could not compare dollars from Ecuador with the dollars from the United States because the value was different and that they will find me a job. J

Liliana described her day-to-day learning experience about managing money as difficult and “eye opening because I learned also about appreciation”. She shared with me that:

After trying to cook for a month, I decided to eat outside time to time. Well, my money for the month was gone by the middle of the month. As always, I called
my Mom, tell her the situation and she said to me; ‘Dear Lilianita, you are spending in U.S. dollars and I am here making money in Colombian pesos. I cannot send you more money this month. I will suggest you find a job like your sister.’ When I hear that, it was as if my world was over. As the spoilt girl that I was, I said to her, ‘mom, I want to go back to Colombia’ and at this point, I was in tears and making a show as a teen. My Mom’s response was, ‘Did you notice that I bought a one-way ticket? I am sure you did not. You are welcome here, so let me know when you have the ticket and I will pick you up at the airport.’ I could not believe what I was hearing. In one last attempt, I asked my Mom if she can loan me money for the ticket and her calm disappeared saying, ‘do you think that here [Colombia] it is raining money?’ this is the end of the conversation and let me know what you are going to do. I love you’ and she hung up the phone.

After crying and feeling pity for me, I understood. It was not easy but I learned my lesson about many things in that situation. L

All Participants’ narrations illustrated that day-to-day learning about basic financial skills took place during their social integration experiences as one of the types of instrumental learning that women who participated in the study acquired in order to meet the demands of their new surroundings.

Development of professional skills. All the participants, with the exception of Patricia, described experiences that presented different levels of day-to-day learning about the development of professional skills including the hiring process, and work conditions.
**Hiring process.** Juanita, Eugenia, and Diana describing

Eugenia shared her experience regarding her first job interview, and how she learned that she just needed to be herself.

…A friend of a friend called me and asked, are you busy right now? Because she called at 7pm and of course, I was bathing my son. She said, ‘It is for a job interview’ and I said ‘it is ok, continue.’ She said, ‘no, if you are busy now, we can set another time’ and I told her ‘no, I am multitasking while we are talking, I will be cooking dinner and bathing the boy.’ ‘Are you sure?’ she asked me, ‘Yes, sure’ ‘you are sure you can do all that at the same time’ and I told her ‘yes, go on with the interview. I already said that yes’ and then she said ‘well then, you are hired, just speak a little bit in English’ ‘ok, enough that I do not need English, I need Spanish’ that is how I got my first job here. My first interview was to probe that I know how to multitask. The other thing was that I was really busy making all those things at the same time so I did not think twice on what I was saying. I was just myself and that is my golden law for jobs interviews. That I learned that day. E

Juanita related to me how she learned about the importance of “showing that you can be working in the same place for more than six months that was what IRC told us”. She continued describing that:

IRC finds your first job for you and they do not like that people change from one job to another one. They insisted a lot that we have to stay minimum six months so we can show consistency. IRC filled out the applications because we do not speak English. I just signed and one enters like a king in the factory because the
people from IRC speak with the bosses in the factory. I had never had an
interview. Some of my coworkers yes, they did. J

Diana described to me “I am surprised about the hiring process here in the U.S.”, because it is not different from her experience in Colombia. She shared that:

All the jobs that I had in Colombia and here have been because somebody knows
someone who needs someone. People tell you about the online sites in order to
look for jobs as a source, and they are sure it works. Well, not for me. I had
interviews from applications online but I have not been able to pass the second
interview. I do not know if I am doing something wrong or if at the end, here it is
just like in Colombia. The last experience that I had in an interview from one of
those online sites was terrible. It was a group interview and I was the only Latina
and the only woman. The levels of testosterone were asphyxiating as well as the
levels of competition. At some point, I decided to stop trying to talk… if like that
was the interview, I did not want to imagine the workplace. Then, they asked if I
wanted to say something, and I said, ‘Yes, thanks for your time. I am not any
longer interested in the position.’ I ran from that place. D

Work conditions. As a common denominator, all the participants agreed that “no
matter what kind of job you have in the United States, they are going to treat you well,
value your job and as a person” Eugenia stated. Diana expressed that “When I worked
cleaning houses and as a babysitter people was nice to me and showed their appreciation
for my work. Not like in Colombia where if they can they put the dishes in your face if
they wanted to.” Liliana also narrated:
I have learned here more respect for all kinds of jobs than in Colombia. Maybe because I have done all kinds of jobs here that, I never thought and Americans show all the time respect for you and your work. I have never seen here, the situation that I saw in Colombia. L

Betty was the only participant who manifested discontent with the working conditions and with me that:

Here they treat you well but the shifts are too long, you have to be in conditions that are not healthy and they pay you just seven dollars per hour. That is nothing. People are nice with you but the salary and the work place are not good. My daughter works in laundry, almost all the people that work there, are Latinas. They have these carts, like those that you see in the stores and when they move the clothes from the washer to the dryer, they get all wet and that is heavy. My daughter maintains with back pain and a lot of pain in her belly because all the time they are wet. B

Yolanda also spoke about her job at the school and shared with me how she was feeling about it:

I am really happy with my job. I love my school; the atmosphere at work is amazing. I had never been working in such a good environment, and I see that I have a mission. I am doing my job and I feel very happy. Y

In the previous section, I presented the day-to-day learning about development of professional skills that participants described during their social integration experiences. The themes of these types of instrumental learning were hiring process and work conditions.
Acquisition of language. All eight participants reported having studied English at some point in the United States. “You never stop learning English” Sandra commented emphasizing “it is not just taking the classes but the constant interaction with the culture” (S). All of them described how difficult it has been to learn another language as adults. Betty, Juanita, and Patricia cannot speak, write or read English although “I can understand a little bit if they speak really slowly” Juanita enunciated.

English as a second language. All eight participants took ESL classes as soon as their arrival in the United Stated and describe their learning experience as “you have to have a lot of patience” (Y), because “the classes look like classes for children and that can be discouraging and really boring for adults” (D). The good thing is “that everybody in the class is learning and you find people from all over the world, we laughed with each other to make things easier” (S).

Juanita described her short experience taking some classes soon after her arrival in the United States:

After I came here and spoke no English, my manager sent me to study. I went every day to study at IRC. I had a terrific teacher and I learned to say good morning. One day I saw a woman who said to the other when they were living the class... ‘see you later’ and I thought, this is when I should say ‘see you later’ and so it was that I began to understand little words and I started feeling happy and seeing what the teacher wrote. He had a picture of the whole family, and began to write in Spanish and in English the words husband, father, mother, and I learned… I learned to say good morning, and how are you? Where is your
family? From there I began to review a CD he gave me and I could hear conversations. 

Patricia shared with me that she participated just two weeks in the classes that IRC offers for refugees but:

I stop going there because you first need to know how to write. I could not do the exercises and could not write what he was telling me. I felt lost and stupid. I friend of mine they told me that at the community college they were teaching English. She took me there and I enrolled in the classes but that was worse than the classes in IRC. People made fun of me and I was always crying. I attended just three classes. My psychologist put me in a mentor program. I like that. They assigned you a mentor for the family and he comes twice a week. One day is for the children, they go out and play, he helps them with their homework, and the other day is just for me. He is teaching me to learn both languages. He is gringo but speaks really good Spanish and he has been in Colombia. Now, I know more numbers, and I stared writing short words in both languages. He is really good to me and to my family. 

Yolanda described with me how her previous experience in learning French helped her to overcome “issues that you usually see in adults who are learning for first time a second language”. She stated that:

I did not feel discriminated this time or bad because I did not know the language because I had already had previous experience of learning another language. I already had the experience of learning French, and those hard and painful experiences that people have when they get here, I had those learning French. I
felt less inhibited to talk and if people did not understand me, I made signs or whatever was necessary to make them understand. I already had that experience; it is the experience that teaches a lot. Y

“Mommy, it is sugar not shugar.” Eugenia and Yolanda shared with me that they participated in classes for reducing the accent and improving the pronunciation.

Yolanda expressed that:

I wanted to improve my pronunciation and I decided to take speech therapy. I took the classes for almost a semester and that helped me with my self-confidence and my pronunciation. Those classes are difficult for one as an adult because during the first classes you are aware of all the mistakes that one makes at the moment of speaking. I learned a lot of patience besides improving my pronunciation.

Eugenia participated in classes for reducing the accent as solicitude for her boss. She described the classes as difficult and painful:

My boss sent to me to some classes for reduction of the accent. At the end of those classes, I was always crying because they were terrible. I could not say strawberry, and I could not pronounce many words. I could not say sugar, and my son who was five years old told to me ‘mommy, it is sugar not shugar’. I said, ‘how is possible that my son is teaching me to speak’ I was in those classes for two months trying to reduce my accent. In the office, they say I reduced my accent a lot and my pronunciation improved. E

In the previous section, I presented the data and themes that upon analysis yield to the finding of the different types of instrumental day-to-day learning as an acquisition of
practical knowledge that helped participants to meet the demands of their new country of residency. The instrumental day-to-day learning is the first finding related to the second research question, which is what type of learning, if any, takes place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change? The different types of instrumental day-to-day learning identified during the social integration experiences of participants were day-to-day living skills, government assistance programs, basic financial knowledge, development of professional skills, and acquisition of language (English and Spanish). In what follows, I introduce the themes and data that illuminated the transformative learning as the second finding for the second research question.

**Transformative Learning within Learning from the Experience**

As was enunciated early, the findings of this section aim to answer the second research question, which was what type of learning, if any, takes place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States, and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change? The data analysis unveiled a process of learning from experience that integrated three different components: Instrumental learning (practical day-to-day learning), transformative learning (self-reflective, dialogic learning, and women’s making meaning of a new self). I inquired participants about the learnings that took place during their social integration experiences as well as I explored with them their meanings of previously narrated experiences, and invited them to reflect on possible transformations that occurred during their time in the United States. All eight participants conveyed having experienced some transformation of their self and worldview. In what follows, I present transformative learning as a
second finding for the second research question in participants’ narrations according to the themes found during the analysis of the data. Table 5.2.2 shows a summary of the findings and subthemes for dialogic and self-reflective learning within learning from experience.

Table 5.2.2

*Transformative Learning within Learning from the Experience*

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<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sub-Categories</th>
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<td>Learning from the Experience during the Social Integration Process</td>
<td>Self -Reflective Learning - revising frames of mind</td>
<td>&quot;I was born a new&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;The answers are within me&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I do not like this, but I become racist in this country&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transformative Learning</td>
<td>Dialogic Learning leading to a New Worldview</td>
<td>&quot;Diversity is the Beauty of this Country&quot;</td>
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<td>Past, Present and Future - reframing a world view</td>
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<td>&quot;Put yourself into the shoes of the Other&quot;</td>
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<td>Women's Making Meaning of a new self</td>
<td>&quot;A foot here and the other there&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Being an Active Bicultural Citizen&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Being always Colombian&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;A Woman with no Country&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Just 90%&quot;</td>
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<td>Being Successful</td>
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Self-Reflective learning. All eight participants expressed having experienced internal and fundamental transformations in different dimensions of their ways of being. In the next section, I illustrated these transformations using participants’ words.

“I was born again”. Betty, Juanita, and Patricia affirmed have gained a sense of “control of my life” (B) and finding some level “of peace inside myself after what happened in Colombia” Juanita said to me, explaining that:

When I was living in Ecuador with all the other Colombian refugees, you have talks with them and a psychologist too. Over there, they told us we were victims of war in Colombia and that stuck with me, then we were refugees and we had to wait for a country that accepted us. I like the U.S but I did not have a choice, my sister did also not have a choice, and she is in Spain. The psychologist in Ecuador explained to me all about the refugees and when I got here [the United States], I had another psychologist, and then I was a survivor. Do you understand what I am saying? I did not understand at the beginning that word and I asked her once, Am I a victim, a refugee, or a survivor? Because, I do not get it… You know, I am Juanita that is it! It took me a while, may be two or three years, after I started feel good, and safe, and in peace that it is like it I went to sleep, I had a dream, and then I woke up. The dream was not a dream; it was my reality and a good reality. I was born a new here but I was born forty something years old. I was not a baby, not a refugee, not a victim, not a survivor. I am Juanita… a happy Juanita that wants her house for her daughter, and then this black woman can rest in peace. J
Betty’s story echoed of Juanita’s words:

I was talking with a friend on our break at work about my problem with the food stamps and that we had not been able to get those again. I was mad because is not fair that they bring you here and after three or four months there is no help. I was telling her that my sister who is a refugee in Switzerland, she could work until she learns the language, and they pay for the classes. I was telling her that is better there and I was complaining about my situation and she said to me; ‘why you complain so much if you have almost everything?’ I told her that I did not ask to come here, they brought me here. She said, ‘I did not say that. You have all the opportunities that everybody is looking for in this country. You can have your driver license; you have your social security, at least you have the option to apply for food stamps and if your family is without a job, you know they [the government] are going to help you. I know you are a refugee and terrible things happened to you, I do not have papers here; I left Guatemala because also terrible things happened to me, I am not a refugee, but what the difference is between you and me. You have options, legal options... I have to look for not so legal options to survive… you are my friend and I care about you, but you complain a lot. Stop Betty, you are not a victim.’ I was hurt for all those things she told and we got into a fight because of that. I did not speak to her for a week but I was thinking all the time and she was right. Her situation is much worse than mine is… I remember being a strong woman in Colombia, and here, I was a sea of tears all the time until my friend told me that. I am not a victim and now... I have learned
to survive in this country without the English for all these years and each breath means that I am alive… B

“I feel I am another woman now” is how Patricia initiated her narration about how she sees herself now.

I have friends from other countries and they do not speak Spanish and I do not speak English but we are friends. In Colombia, everybody speaks the same language and I did not have anybody, just my children, and my friend who was killed. The first year here [in the United States] I cried almost all the time, but after all the things that had happened to me, I am still alive and fighting for my children, and for that I am thankful to God and to this country. When I get depressed here, I do not think about what I do not have now, I try to remember how bad it was before and that I was able to survive, that helps me to continue walking even though sometimes I feel like if I am not moving. P

“The answers are within me.” During the reflections about themselves, all participants expressed having developed a sense of autonomy, an improvement in their self-confidence and independence after some time in the United States.

This country gives you a lot, but you have to move. You cannot just sit, and wait that people put things in your hands. When you are new here, and you do not know even where you are standing, you depend on people for everything. They drive you, they speak for you, and they buy things for you… One day, I had to buy some groceries because I did not have anything and… I knew there were not buses to that store, I was afraid of buy anything by myself. Close to my neighborhood, there is a Dollar store and I decided to go walking and buying
some food there. I was so nervous but I bought some things that I needed. I told myself… ‘See, Juanita, you can do it,’ people need people but we cannot depend on them, you see the difference? IRC does things for you, but they do not teach you and after four months, you see all these women crying because they do not have the help and for example, they do not know how to apply for the food stamps. I asked many questions when I have people who speak Spanish, and I observed a lot, then I try to do the same, but I cannot sit and cry. I need to move and moving I realized that I know some things. I do not know how to read and write in English, but it does not mean that I am stupid, I think and sometimes the answers are with me… just inside of me. J

Sandra shared with me her moment where she realized “I have learned a lot and I did not know how much”. She continued her story saying that:

No longer after I got here, I realized there were many things that were not as I imagined or what people told me. But when I started doing things that I never imaged because as my Mom says ‘you should not mix’, after I knew what means to be hungry and literally to not have money to buy food, after all of that, I realized I had learned humility and I liked it because my father speaks a lot about that. He is not like my mom. I realized I had the tools to deal with things I never knew and how to get money even though I had not studied here… I learned about independence, humility, and forgiveness in a hard way. After the second or third year, you know if you made it or not. Those years you are just surviving, learning a lot, and dealing with so many feelings and thoughts… after those years I started having some clarity of who Sandra is, I saw my past and present, and I did not
like Sandra in the past, so I decided to reconcile with others and myself... I wrote letters to my parents asking for forgiveness because all the pain that I caused in the past and I said, thank you for everything. I have learned a lot in the United States, not just because of the country itself but because I have stopped and think about myself. It is as if you see your past, present and future but the focus was on Sandra, Sandra in this world, not the world of Sandra. That is different and I found interesting and scary things. S

Liliana presented to me her story of transformation on a time line that denominated “Liliana, the shallow woman that was not so shallow”. She shared with me her difficulty to:

Accept that I am not the smartest in the room that I am a shallow person, nobody has said anything to me, but I can feel it. In simple conversations with people, the word that they used, I do not think this is a language problem, and I do not know if I want to know but I have learned here to manage that and be relatively happy with myself. When I knew about your research, I was not sure if I wanted to participate or not. My thought was, I do not have anything to say, but I took it as a challenge because for quite some time I have been trying to deal with that internal fear. After the first interview, I felt really good and that for me was just a final confirmation of what I have been working on all these years in this country. In the begging it was that, I needed to demonstrate to my mom that I can do this and I am an adult, and then it was about my own reflection on myself because I was being my worst enemy. Life is easy in this country but I was making my life miserable, at the end, it depended on me. Having the job as a translator in the
hospital helped me and also created contradictions for me, because it is a job
where you do not have a voice, your opinion does not count, you just pass what
one person said to the other one. One more time I said to myself, ‘well Liliana,
that depends on you’ I started helping people when I saw situations when I can
help. Especially about information, and how to deal with the hospital, or
resources outside of the hospital; like where you buy the least expensive
medicine. The kind of information that you learned in the hospitals but the staff
forgets to share. I feel more confident, more independent, and actually
independent before I was not independent. I am not talking just in regards to the
economic level; I am talking as a whole. Well, now that I am talking… (Silence)
May be, there is the possibility that I am not so shallow… (Silence) well, this
story is called ‘Liliana, the shallow woman that was not so shallow’ I need water
now... L

Diana described for me what she enunciated as her most important “knowledge
acquisition during my time in the United States” saying that:

As I have said in the others interviews, I knew the political situation was one of
the reasons why I left Colombia and when I made the first step into the airplane, I
knew that I was not coming back. One of the things that I was looking for in this
country was peace and now, I feel that I have it but it was not because I am living
here, that maybe contributed to it, but after the second or third year living in this
country, I realized that peace is not the absence of the war. There were no bombs,
or political massacres here. The wars of this country are always in other
countries, so you can breathe some peace but I was not feeling that. I had an
internal war and I did not know that until several conversations with a friend of mine who became Buddhist. She shared with me several of her learnings after almost six months that she spent in a temple in some part of the northern U.S. That was a painful process… I was in total denial because super Diana always had all the answers. A part of me was feeling as a traitor and I did even want to recognize that feeling. I wasted amounts of time looking outside for the reasons of my unhappiness and the answers were in front of my nose. Those reflection stages are painful and lonely… My denial process opened the door for a different way to see my actions and lack of actions in different aspects of my life and my relationship with others. Colombia is a society that puts too much weight on what ‘the other person think about you,’ ‘because the first impression is what counts.

Here it is not as bad as in Colombia and it has taken a lot of work for me to be conscious about all cultural aspects that form myself because the culture that I come from. D

“Do you know what is funny?” Betty asked before she started her story of intense healing in the company of her Iraqi friend and a garden:

I stopped crying the day that I started going to the garden. I was going to the psychologist and she gave to all women in therapy a small piece of land in a garden behind the building. I did not have a job, so I walked over to put water to the herbs and the plants every afternoon and I spent all afternoon there, just setting on the grass, touching the soil with my hands… it was so peaceful, so quiet, just me and the land. …And when I was seeing the land, how the land recuperated from terrible things, how the land is clean after the rain even if there
is blood on her, you can grow your food on her… I thought I wanted to be like that. I started cleaning myself and even though I have scars on my body that remains me every day what happened, I decided to change it. The psychologist helped also another woman refugee from Iraq. The psychologist sometimes did group sessions and even though just a few of us knew English, we communicated with pictures and other things. My friend from Iraq also had a piece of land in the same garden and because we could not talk, we drew on the land… I was determinate to be like the land, and to look my scars in another way… it feels better now… the garden helped me and I miss that a lot. B

Yolanda described her process of transformation with the following story:

Lately I have been working on making some little books for kids, and I have often thought about the transformation of the butterfly. I imagine the monarch butterfly, which comes here from Mexico to lay eggs. When I arrived here [the United States], I was like an egg, because I had to start a new life. This little egg was becoming a caterpillar and what do caterpillars do? Eat and eat all day. What did I do? I filled myself with knowledge, studied, and studied, and studied like crazy English. The caterpillar starts growing, but the skin of the caterpillar does not grow, it just splits and sheds. So that is what I have being doing? I finished the English course and the skin no longer served me, I had to do something else… I kept eating knowledge. While the caterpillar grows, she loses her skin up to four times in the process of transformation. The old skin comes off and under the old skin is the new skin, so that is the process I have been following; the process of the caterpillars. In my case, the other skin was ‘the skin
of the master,’ and when the master was not enough, that skin fell off and I enrolled in the doctorate. The caterpillar continues growing, and now I feel I am like a chrysalis, because the caterpillar goes into her shell and begins to transform into a butterfly. Then, when it is time, I will finish my PhD, and become a multicolored butterfly ready to fly; she is going start flying from flower to flower and will put her little seeds elsewhere. The Monarch butterfly may stay here or may fly, but not to Mexico, to Colombia.

“I do not like this, but I became racist in this country”. Betty, Juanita, Eugenia, and Sandra expressed during their narrations that their perception regarding some races and nationalities had changed during their experiences in the United States: Eugenia shared with me that:

I do not like this, but I become racist in this country… I do not know… that part about the African-American in the United States is very conflicting for me… I am talking about the Afro-American, born and raised here. It exacerbates me that story of their rights all the time, that ‘I cannot do it because my family was a slave’… We have friends in Colombia who are Chocoanos [designation for people who are from el Choco, Department of Colombia where 90% of its population is black] and their families were slaves, and they still live in very unfair conditions and they do not complain all the time like African-Americans here. Here [the United States] is the only part of the world where you still can see and feel slavery. In Colombia, you do not feel that. You say ‘negro’ to a black and there is not a problem, here one says ‘negro’ to an Afro-American and it is terrible. That, I do not understand… I think it is the cultural part, I feel that is
more ‘like love me with sorrow’ and that love me with regret annoys me. Poor
them that they do not have this and that, and they do not have a job but that it is
when I say, the Mexican who does not speak English, who runs because does not
have papers, gets a job, and the black who speaks the language, is stronger, and
has papers, cannot get anything?… I do not understand that…, they do not find a
job, or they do not want to work, which one is it here? E

Sandra mentioned to me that:

I do not consider myself a racist, I have had Afro-American boyfriends and have
friends Afro-American, but sometimes there are things of them that I do not
understand. When I initially got here [the United States], I was living in Miami, I
cleaned houses of white and black people and the two houses where they treated
me bad, and I felt humiliated were both houses of Afro-Americans. I do not
understand how when they speak about the times of the slavery and all the terrible
things that happened to them and then go to humiliate others because of the
English or nationality. I am not saying that every single Afro-American is like
that but there is a big percentage and there is a tension between Latinos and Afro-
Americans. That feeling that I have about that situation bothers me a lot because
one of the reasons why I am here is the diversity, and that feeling does not
necessarily embrace the whole meaning of that. I volunteer in the food bank
every time that I can and most of them are Afro-Americans, I have never seen a
Latino. S

Juanita described to me her relationship with some of her coworkers
In my work, everything is fine, but among Hispanics, the Mexicans are the worst people I have come to know. In my work, I have had the worst experience that I could have with the Mexicans because they... Look, you approach an American and he never will treat you like those Hispanics who are in there. Look, any race, African, Indian, Chinese, Nepal, Burmese, everyone treats you as a person; we are all brothers, less with the Hispanics, they are selfish, they are bad people. They laugh in your face… If you are not familiar with your work and ask them something they just say ‘I do not know’ they do not help the other Hispanics. Something similar happened to another Colombian refugee, but in her case, because she was new in the country and she did not know anything of English, the Mexicans gave her all the wrong information. The only Hispanics there were the Mexicans, her life was impossible and a month later, she quit. IRC keeps sending Colombian refuges there and they do not last more than a month, the Mexicans do not want us there. J

Through the stories of the participants, I illustrated in this section the self-reflective learning that took place during the social integration experiences of the women who participated in this study. Three of the themes identified in this finding: “I was born new”, “The answers are within me” and “I do not like this, but I become racist is this country”. All of the eight participants revealed a deep individual transformation in their ways of being, knowing, and doing.

**Dialogic learning leading to a new worldview.** In different ways, the women participants voiced a transformation of their worldview that includes acceptance of the difference, importance of diversity, and respect, value, understanding, and appreciation
for other cultures. Two were the themes expressed in participants’ narrations: “Diversity is the beauty of this country” and “putting yourself into the shoes of others.” Below, I present each of them.

“Diversity is the beauty of this country”. With the exception of Liliana, the other participants mentioned during their narrations that the different cultures represented in the United States has transformed their vision of the world into a more complex, rich, and sometimes, contradictory notion of living in a diverse society.

Juanita described to me how she encountered other cultures in her work environment and shared her understanding of this saying that:

In the factory, everyone speaks all kinds of languages because we are from different parts of the world. They do not discriminate because one cannot speak English. The supervisor teaches you what you have to do using signs and in that way, one learns what one has to do. There is almost no English over there. Because of the problem with the Mexicans, I always go to the line of the Chinese. They do not speak English but we understand each other, and I have learned things about other countries doing that for example the Chinese people do not give their hand when they are going to say hi. They put their little hands together like if you are praying, so I do the same. I learned to say good morning in Nepali and they are teaching me to say good night. See, I learned and they too because I say to them ‘Buenas noches’ and I taught them and we laugh a lot. You do not see that amount of different people in Colombia just the blacks, the Indians and white people, but a different white than here… I like it better here because when they invited me to their houses it is like going to their countries. You learn to
respect them, to respect their language and religion. In the factory, there are
several Muslims and during the night… at the beginning of the shift, they always
put a small carpet and pray. At the beginning, I asked because I thought they
were sick and something was wrong with them and needed helped. When people
explained to me and I said, ok… so, let’s be quiet… I do not like when I am
praying that people be screaming and jumping around me. That is respect… I do
not understand many things of what they do, but I would not like that, if I am
praying people laugh at me… One day this woman started working but she was
different, that was the second year after my arrival and thanks god the volunteer
of IRC still was here because she helped me to understand this. That woman just
looked like a man, and move like a man and I thought wow, people started saying
that she was a lesbian. I had never heard that word in my life, we call them
different in Colombia but I am not saying that word because now I know that is
not correct. When she explained to me the meaning of that, I said, “oh holy
blessed”. I was confused and asked myself how that is possible? She had a hard
time at work; she did speak English a little bit and all the men were terrible with
her. I do not know what they were saying to her, but even the Chinese who
understood English jumped to defend her and they do not do that often. At my
break time, I went to smoke a cigarette outside and she was there crying and
smoking too. I felt bad; really bad for her… she was not doing anything bad to
us… I wanted to say something to her but this English, so her cigarette was
almost over and I offered one to her. She took one and smiled… I did not care,
and I gave her a big hug, and told her in Spanish ‘do not worry, do not pay
attention to them’ and then she said to me ‘Gracias’ in Spanish! I was not expecting that. She had an accent. She worked there one more month but those men were terrible with her. So, she opened my eyes to another world and other sufferings… she was a really good person that is what counts to me, if she sleeps with women or men or with nobody is not my business. She is a good person. That is what this country had taught me, to respect people. I love this country! J

Betty and Patricia also narrated to me how “living with people from different parts of the world teaches you a lot” said Betty to me. “Things that were weird at the beginning now are not,” Patricia concluded after telling her story with her best friend “the African lady”, a refugee woman that lives in the same building.

We shared food every day, she prepared something for me and I do the same, we are single mothers and we need to help each other. She does not speak Spanish and I do not speak English but we understand we have our own language. In this building live a lot of people from different cultures and they have different ways to do things, I learned that I should not laugh at them because someone did that to me when I was doing something and that does not feel good. In this country, there is a lot of respect for people, and I like that, not like in my country where your life do not have any value. I did not have any value there. P

Sandra voiced to me the moment where she understood the importance of accepting and respecting the difference what became a part of her core values:

For me it is super important to live in a country where there is respect… a country that I can feel there is respect for everything. For the spaces, tastes, what I am, who I love, respect for what I eat, what I choose to wear, if I am gay or not gay,
Catholic or Christian, whatever. I accept all kinds of people in my world as long as you do not hurt another person that is super basic. I could not have lived in Bogota for that reason. Sometimes I think, I have to go back because my parents are already very old people and I am the only one who has had the patience to understand them and help them but I cannot imagine living in Colombia again, my country is in chaos. The last time I went for a month, but I got sick, I had to have surgery and had to stay for 4 months. As we say in Colombia, I almost hang myself from the ceiling with how desperate I was. All of this was learning and it took time… it is a process… I remember when I was taking my ESL classes and one day we were studying, the different kinds of foods from different countries and the teacher asked us what we think about American food. Immediately I said ‘it is disgusting’, she looked at me, smiling and in calm manner, she said to me; ‘no Sandra, it is not disgusting it is just different. One day you are going to understand that’ off course, I did not understand that in that moment. I was like ‘it is not different just disgusting and point’ with time, with my own reflection, I realized how we compared all the time and judged. The food is not bad or better, it is just different, as simple as that, just different. It took me almost a year to understand what that teacher told me, and if you want to live happy in the United States, one has to understand that because diversity is the beauty of this country.

S

Eugenia echoed Sandra’s experiences saying that:

For me it was not easy to understand how my language makes other people feel bad and that it is cultural. I put my foot in my mouth all the time and my son tells
me all the time ‘you do not say that.’ The other day all the kids were playing
soccer in front of the house and I told my son; ‘bring all your friends, including
the Chinese that come to the house that I made something to eat for everyone.’
He said to me ‘they are not Chinese, they are Asiatic, they do not like that people
call them like that, would you like that people called you Mexican?’ I was like…
he is right… so, I have to be very aware in how I say things because people can
get offended by how I say things. My son is the one who stops sometimes and
makes me think about the culture here. E

"Put yourself into the shoes of the Other". Diana, Eugenia, Liliana, Sandra, and
Yolanda used this expression in order to illustrate their learning about the importance of
understanding others and the significance of this in accepting difference. Yolanda
described her experience saying that:

I have learned a lot through all my experiences… when I worked at the university
helping teachers, they came and told me all their stories, and I tried to help them
see the other side of the coin. It is not only one vision and that is it, but seeing the
other side of the coin, the position of the other person. Then, when you put
yourself in the shoes of the other person, that is when you understand why people
react in a specific way, or why they say what they say, or because they do things
they do. That is when you will understand the culture, in understanding the whys,
the why that goes beyond the apparent. I learned that with the experience with
that professor at the University, my reading things in a different way than he did.
All the experiences make you think. Each person has a different vision of the
world… this is why there are cultural differences. I also learned through school,
if one says something to the parents, they could interpret it differently. When I need to talk with the parents is always in person because I see the reaction of the person and the face. I try to understand if the person is angry or how he is feeling then I try to step into the shoes of that other person to understand why the person reacts in that way. This is after many things that have happened to me. For me life is easier now in the school. In early years, there were many misunderstandings because there was not this cultural knowledge. The other aspect is how we use the language; I learned this from the gringo culture. For example, you do not say ‘no, I think that is not because such a thing’ the other way is to say, ‘I think that I am not understanding exactly what you want to tell me, please can you explain that again?, it is not you who is saying the wrong thing, but I am. I am not pointing to the person. ‘It is not you, it is me.’ That works here. One learns this after one has crashed many times. It is a social learning; learning that no one teaches you and one learns it in everyday relationships. Y

Sandra echoed Yolanda’s point of view and explained to me how:

One of the biggest learnings is learning to put myself into the shoes of the other person. I was self-centered, I was a Machiavellian person, I did not care about others, and I passed over people to get what I wanted. I did not care about putting myself into the shoes of the other person. You hear that a lot in Colombia, but I never stop to think the meaning of that. My father used to tell me that a lot … and when you stop, think, and try to do it, the exercise is not as simple as is presented it. For me that requires, open mind, without that, there is not breaths or Ohms that
help you. Open mind for me is that stage where you stop your mind, you quiet your mind, and really listing… because usually when the person is telling us something, we are thinking what we are going to answer and we do not listen. Our minds already won the conversation, while the mortal in front of us is trying to explain her/his self. I know that when I am in an open-minded stage, what I am going to have after listening to the person is questions, many questions and sometimes just silence because I am processing or because I cannot believe what I am hearing, you know… Doing this I have gotten to understand better American culture. For example, when people hear my accent the question is, ‘where are you from?’ ‘Colombia’ I say, and the common reactions are, ‘Pablo Escobar was from there, no?’ or ‘ah Columbia, I have been in South Carolina.’ I used to react saying, ‘it is not Columbia, is Colombia with O’ or something more elevated according to the comment. At the end, I understood that people here, at least in the south, -because when I lived in the north they do not ask that kind of questions and if they ask is because they are interested – here in the south people do not know. They think that Mexico is the only country south of the United States; they do not study universal history or geography like us in Colombia during the high school. My point is that if we stop, with open mind, we will be able to understand. Once I knew that people made those comments about Colombians or Colombia because they do not know, because the education or misinformation from the media, I stopped wasting my time reacting with those comments. If they asked me now, “so, you are from South Carolina”, I would say, yes, I am…. Who cares if I am from Colombia, India, or South Carolina? What difference that
makes? For me, putting yourself into the shoes of the other person in extremely important, you learn to value the person, to recognize their stories, to start seeing where they coming from – not their country or their religion – their thinking. That is when other cultures start making sense for you… that is the beauty of this country… you have people from all over the world, religions, and colors.

Learning this, you learn compassion because you sympathize with the pain of the other, it is not pity it is recognizing their journey. S

Diana described to me her own process of how she came to the understanding of putting yourself into the shoes of the other person:

Since the school, the nuns were telling us to learn to put ourselves into the shoes of the other person. I think, for them it was to recognize the dilemmas of other people and their contexts, their needs and from that compassion do something because we have a responsibility as part of belonging to the same society. For me the problem with the nuns and with any person that belongs to a Catholic congregation is the vow of poverty. They can tell you ‘I do not have a salary’ the point is not that, the point is how coherent is that vow of poverty with how they live. It is that double standard or moral… and I am afraid that something similar may be happening with putting yourself into the shoes of the others. In the United States, it is important to learn to put this into practice because there are people from all over the world. This country is like the perfect ‘laboratory’ to understand the world. Putting yourself into the shoes of others help me to recognize the difference and in doing so, to respect it. But, I do not think it takes us to real understanding. If the difference is too big in regards to who I am, I think it is
when you hear people saying ‘that is their way of being, and that is ok while they stay over there’ and this is extremely common in this country. Let me think of an example… For example, what happened with 911, after that, this country went into a war without the approval of the UN. They did not care about the rules, the international law, went to Iraq, and invaded the country because supposedly, ‘we have probes that show that’ and at the end, such probes did not exist and who or what country sanctioned the U.S.? How many times has the United States sanctioned other countries for invading other countries? Several, see what I am saying? That is kind of, what happened with the example that I gave you during the first interview and the nuns giving a house to the poor people, that bothered me a lot. Putting myself into the shoes of the other goes beyond to recognize the difference… this is difficult to explain because I feel that there is something bigger than that but I do not know what it is, here people just stop on that part. The comprehension of something, for me -the real, in capital letters- the real comprehension of something should lead us to action in pro to humanity; it is more than giving a house to a poor family and bye, it is time for my dinner in my not poor neighborhood. There is something bigger than ‘the compassion’ or ‘I see your pain and your journey.’ That is so American, so individualistic. Yes, there is an individual responsibility with our own journey and we must own it, but there are also collective responsibilities than go beyond paying the taxes or not stepping on the yard of the house next to me because ‘I am crossing the boundaries.’

As it was presented in this segment, dialogic learning took place during the social integration experiences of participants. Upon analysis, the themes supported by the data
were “diversity is the beauty of this country and “putting yourself into the shoes of the Other”. In the descriptions presented above, women illustrated the continuity of their individual transformations leading to a new worldview where acceptance and respect for other cultures were important components of their social integration experiences.

**Women's making meaning of a new self.** In this section, I present what participants expressed regarding their making meaning of their new identities and self during their social integration in the United States.

“A foot here and the other there”. Betty, Diana, Sandra, and Yolanda illustrated the presence of a duality component saying that because “you never stop being an immigrant even though you have citizenship” Sandra said. Yolanda added, “It is like having a foot here and a foot there” while Diana expressed that:

> It is like an eternal maybe when you can see unlimited possibilities but with an enormous amount of uncertainty. This gives a lot of color to the life and is as exhausting as climbing the Himalayas. I have never been there but I imagine it. This duality allows me to be creative because I have to continue living, knowing that I am in a country that reminds me every day that I am not from here. The sad and ironic side is that I do not consider myself from here but I distance myself, every day more and more, from Colombia. It feels sometimes like a strange country. It is as I am belonging to the two countries and none at the same time.

D

Betty shared with me that “it is simple, I am not from here, I never will be from here even if I get the citizenship, I am from Colombia, that is my country but I cannot come back to my country because I will be dead”.
Yolanda explained to me that:

that is one of the most complicated aspects of being an immigrant, because it is a duality all the time. It is as if you become two different people in one. First, I do not see the difference between being Colombian or Latina, Colombia is a country from Latin America. But in an honest exercise I would say I am almost from Colombia and the United States because I identified with aspect from these two countries. People who have traveled to Colombia after being here [the United States] said that they felt like strangers in their own country but here also they do not feel that belong here totally. I have not been in Colombia for 13 years, so I do not know how I am going to feel, but when I see the news, the Colombian television; it is hard to believe that that is my country… It is that duality or that nostalgia for what it was in the past and it is no longer there. Y

Yolanda continued saying that:

Because I can move between two worlds… It is much better, more fun, and more diverse than one life or world. I had to create my own dreams and their own worlds and I decide how I will be in those worlds. One is who has control over one’s worlds, not the worlds to have control over one. It is like having and putting in action the agency of each individual. It is my decision, and my actions in a country that I decided to move to… I live in two countries even though I have not been in one of them for 13 years. Y

Diana voiced that:

Being an immigrant means that I made a decision. I decided to migrate from my country to this one. It means that I have rights and responsibilities although this
country reminds you more of your responsibilities, it means that I can choose regardless of the situation and circumstance and because I can chose, it means I have possibilities and opportunities, that I have a path in front of me and if not, I can create it. D

“Being active bicultural citizens”. All participants elaborated on the meaning of becoming integrated. I present below the three main components enunciated by participants.

Diana, Sandra, and Yolanda made emphasis that being integrated is having a sense of biculturalism in order to understand and reconcile the different cultures brought into the personal experience of them as immigrants.

“As an immigrant” Sandra explained to me “The first thing that one does is to compare and criticize. That is not a healthy way because there is always going to be the good v. the bad. We need open minds in order to appreciate the difference, just that. I may disagree, but I can respect and understand” S

In the same view, Diana added:

We need to develop the ability to step into the shoes of the other person or culture, and understand why she/he acts in that way or why the culture sees or values certain things and not others. By understanding the other person or culture, I can analyze the why of reactions or behaviors and as a result, I will be more tolerant. Understanding is the basis of tolerance. If there is no understanding, there is no tolerance or respect. All of that is having an understating of biculturalism. D
Juanita, Sandra, and Yolanda enunciated active citizen and political participation as the ultimate stage necessary for a full integration described that becoming integrated means to be an active citizen, which according to Sandra implies:

Being aware of my rights and responsibilities inside of the society where I belong. In this case, it would be the United States and Colombia. The only way for this to happen is to be a citizen of the United States if we think about voting as the maximum expression of my rights, I have the right to participate in the election of the person I believe would be the best for my country. I am a citizen now, I was not for the last elections, and I am really looking forward to that moment. I have never voted in Colombia now that I think about it… Maybe because I have never felt part of Colombia, I love Colombia, but I am sure that I was born in the wrong place. Thinking about the integration process of immigrants, I do not know how important the right to vote is for the population of immigrants in general, for me, it is and a lot! I can tell you that the day I vote for the first time here, tears will be running off my face. S

Juanita shared with me that:

Look, I have three dreams in my life. One, that my daughter goes to University and not be like me, I want for her to be an educated person. The second is to buy a house for her and the third is to vote. I think that one [to vote] is more impossible than the house, because first I need to learn to write, to read, and to speak in English in order to pass the test for citizenship. I would like to vote if there is another Obama. I was so happy for seeing a black president. J
In Yolanda’s words, being active citizen means:

There are many mechanisms of integration. When the people are actively involved as citizens, is the moment when they feel fully integrated in a society. When you are a citizen, you can exercise your right to vote, and there is political participation in the community, which is the moment when you are fully integrated and you agree to all the social aspects. That is to be integrated or adapted… is there a difference? I think adapted is that you adapt even if you do not like it, right? Because to adapt is like I get here and I adapt. To integrate is when you are firm and believe everything about the culture in which you want to integrate. I think so… Y.

**Going beyond criticisms.** Diana, Eugenia, Yolanda, and Liliana expressed that understanding the culture is important in order to feel “part of”, but for this, “we need to go beyond the criticism stage where all the time we are comparing countries and cultures,” Yolanda stated. Eugenia said to me:

The truth is not The truth any longer… there is not one style of being American, as there is not one way to speak the language because there are multiples accents. I understood this with those classes to reduce my accent that I hated so much, but that teacher was really smart. She told me the second day after crying for 20 minutes in front of her ‘look, I am from Puerto Rico and you are from Colombia, you have your accent and I have mine, nobody is going to take your accent away because it is part of who you are and the same in my case, but that does not mean that we cannot pronounce correctly the words. If they still cannot understand us, that is not our problem, it is their problem, it is time for them to go and figure out
it, like we did when we could not understand them’ She told me that and when I heard that I felt like if an elephant was taken off of my back. It is not just my responsibility, they also have a part in this process, but all of us, immigrants and nonimmigrant need to stop criticizing, the problem is that there are big pockets of the population that do not want us here… they are afraid that we are too many now.

Echoing Eugenia and Sandra’s opinion, Yolanda added that:

Colombians, and not just Colombians but also any immigrant from any country, thinks that if things are not made in the way they are used to, it is because they are wrong or bad. It is difficult to receive things without prejudice and sometimes not to think too much… with that attitude, it would be almost impossible to understand any other culture and become bicultural in order to becoming totally integrated. Y

“Being always Colombian”. Betty, Eugenia, Juanita, Liliana, and Patricia stated that they do not feel that they belong to the United States. Betty shared with me “I will never feel that I belong to this country because the culture and the food are different, and I cannot speak the English” (B); Juanita described herself as “I am going to be always Colombian. I am thankful for this country but my country is my country, and my land is my land, I have Colombian blood, and a paper [green card] does not change it” (J).

Patricia tells me “I do not want to belong here, I would like to go back to Colombia, but I know I cannot. I am trying to go to Spain where my sister is living as a refugee too” (P).

Eugenia told me “In Colombia I born and in Colombia I will die... You know what that
is, do not you?” and Liliana expressed to me “I do not think so. All the time you are reminded here where you are from” (L).

“A woman with no country”. After a long silence, Diana responded to the question saying:

That is a difficult and painful question or better, the answer is difficult and painful. I think I am a woman with no country. I do not feel that I belong in either country, at least not all the time and in every aspect. I love Colombia, and I am thankful and respect this [the United States] country. I cannot imagine myself exercising the right to vote here. I think, I will be thinking all the time more of what candidate is better for Latin America and not thinking properly about the internal issues of the United States. I am from Colombia, I live in the United States, and my son was born here. I am trying to articulate an answer and the only thing is I am a woman with no country. D

“Just 90%” Sandra shared with me that:

Honestly, I feel that I identify myself more with the United States than with Colombia. Especially the culture and the principles that the Founders of this country had, that is beautiful. The diversity found in this country and what I learn from it, it is something that not even the best academic program can teach. I cannot say that I belong 100% to this country but maybe just 90%. There are still moments, spaces, and situations in which I do not fit because regardless of having U.S. citizenship, I am from Colombia, and I am Latina. S
“Being transnational”. Yolanda was the only participant to describe herself as transnational:

One is neither from here nor from there. One has to create one’s own world…
Everyone has an idea of what one wants in life, and then one is going to build it.
One has dreams and one builds them. My dream is to be a transnational. I live here with the conveniences and amenities that I have here, but I want to do a job there. I am trying to implement in my school and in my department of Antioquia a project teacher exchange. Teachers from Colombia come to teach Spanish here, and teachers from here go there to teach English, same with children from middle and high school, so everybody has a better understanding of cultures, languages.

Y

Being successful. All participants shared with me how they define being successful in the United States. Below I present their descriptions.

Having a piece of land. For Juanita, Betty, and Patricia being successful in the United States is “to have a house with a piece of land” (B) which means, “To live as if I were in Colombia”, Patricia said and continued sharing that

Having my own land, a small piece, I do not care, but a piece so I do not have to worry any longer if my children do not have anything to eat and when I died they can use it and grow what they like the most. I will be the happiest woman, and I can call United States home if I have land. P

Betty voiced how the land will be success and peace at the same time:

I hope someday I can have a piece of land. It can be small, but that is what I most want. I piece of land where I can grow vegetables and herbs for my family and
why not for friends and people who need and do not have. Being close to the land is peace for me. When I am working with the land, everything stops but also I can think clearly, because I feel safe. I will have success if I have land. B

*Being bilingual.* Betty, Juanita, and Patricia illustrated that being able to communicate, and understand the language will give them a sense of success in their lives in the United States. The three of them expressed more urgency regarding the ability to speak and understand than their ability to read and write it. Juanita shared that I am old and I know that I still can learn because I have learned too many things in this country that I never imagine, but it is most important that I can communicate with people well, that they can understand me and that I can understand them, like in Spanish. The ultimate dream would be to learn how to write and read in both languages but I have to be realistic. There is not time for that. J

*Having a dream.* Juanita and Eugenia mentioned that having a dream is part of achieving success in the United States. Juanita shares with me that Colombia is a country where you cannot dream. I had difficulties bringing food to my family or putting shoes on my daughter’s feet, how was I going to have the pleasure of having a dream? One day, the first Christmas in the United States my daughter asked for a Christmas tree and I said ok. We went and put the lights, and the little tree was beautiful in the living room. Then, my daughter asked me if for that Christmas she will be able to write a letter to the Baby Jesus, because in Colombia it is Baby Jesus not Santa Clause. She wrote the letter and a friend of mine read it to me. She was asking for two things. The first one, something new
to wear because she always had just used clothes in Colombia and the second one was, ‘I want, Baby Jesus, that my Mommy has dreams again.’ I cried all night after my friend read that letter, but I started thinking what could be my dream in this country. It was difficult because you feel like it is impossible or you do not deserve that. My first dream was to find peace and safety, and I was able to get those dreams. It does not matter what material thing I want, for me always having the possibility to dream would be a success; I do not want to lose that. Here dreams are unlimited, in Colombia it is not possible to dream. J

Like Juanita, for Eugenia having a dream is a key component for being successful.

Right now, in this moment of my life, having a dream is important for what it means to me to be successful. In this country, life is easy when you behave, pay your bills and stay out of troubles life is fairly easy, also it is really easy to lose the meaning of life or better the meaning of life becomes to have more and more things. It is not enough one TV; I need three for each room. It is not enough one computer; no, I need the pc, the laptop, the IPad, and in order to have all of that I need two jobs and maybe three because the list is growing faster than the money. I am the first to admit that I like money and I like being comfortable, but that is not the main aspect of the life and I do not want my children to internalize that. You have to work so many hours in order to satisfy ‘your needs’ and you do not have even time to enjoy the things that you supposedly ‘need.’ This is why I said that this country is not the United States of America but ‘the slaves united of working.’ People here work and work because they need more for more things
that they think they need. This is why, right now, for me being successful means to have a dream that is not, to buy things. E

Pass to my children the importance of family. Diana, Eugenia and Liliana mentioned that being successful in the United States means “my children feel and know the importance of the family, because this country can take your family apart” commented Eugenia. Liliana shared

In this country, it is fairly easy to possess material things. As a mother, is my desire not doing the same mistakes that my mom did. I will have success if my sons understand and experience the notion of family as we conceived in Colombia. I hope I will be able to transmit to them, that your family is first. I want that they feel united, the support that they know and feel that it does not matter what happens this family is going to be with them loving them and supporting them. I am afraid that they will be too American where family sometimes is seen as, this heavy bag on our backs that does not let us move. L

Appreciation for Colombia. Diana was the only woman who mentioned that in her vision, being successful means that her son, her family, and herself can appreciate Colombia because

Right now, it is difficult to appreciate it. I love Colombia, but it is difficult to appreciate, it is difficult to understand what is happening in Colombia and feel appreciation. I hope and want that everybody in Colombia can experience the peace that we feel in the United States. I want that my son knows the history of Colombia. Not the history of the books from the school, the history that is not told and at the same time he appreciates that. I do not know yet how I can do that
because right now I do not feel that. I hope that when he is 15 years old or so, I have the answer for this. That will be what I consider being a success in the United States that he is living here, feeling at peace and safe can appreciate the pain, injustice and love his country, because Colombia is his country too. D

Being transnational. Yolanda was the only participant who described being successful as being transnational. She shared with me that:

I think the hardest part for one as an immigrant is the feeling that you are not from here nor there. I identify with some aspects of the culture of the United States, and with other aspects of Colombia and I have option to choose and to pick which ones I want to incorporate in my identity or in my daily life. For me, that would mean having success here in the United States, being transnational in all the aspects. Y

Overall, I have provided rich descriptive data that yielded to the finding of transformative learning as the second type of learning occurred during the social integration experiences of participants. Transformative learning as a finding helped to address the second research question, which was what type of learning, if any, takes place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change? The types of transformative learning identified in women’s experiences were self-reflective, dialogic learning and women’s making meaning of a new revised self.
Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the main findings of the understanding of the social integration experiences of eight adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States. Women’s narrations provide descriptive data that upon a constant comparative analysis yield themes and the findings of the understanding of the social integration experiences, and identification of the types of learning, and learnings that led to deep individual transformations during the social integration experiences of participants. The two main findings of this study:

The first finding addresses the first research question, which was how do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand their social integration experiences in the United States? Women who participated in this study began describing their social integration experiences from the moment they made the decision to leave or the moment when they were forcibly displaced from Colombia. Participants described their social integration experiences through their significant moments prevailing during their social integration process, changing their previous assumptions held about the United States, confronting their expectations after their arrival, encountering unanticipated challenges as well as the importance of their social network and social support. For the women who participated in this study, understanding the culture, and therefore the English language, beside isolation were the elements more frequently mentioned as constant challenges in order to fulfill their social integration experiences. Regardless of participants’ immigration status and time living in the United States, none of the participants reported to have developed a sense of belonging in the United States conveying that, for this to happen, it is necessary to increase the sense of
biculturalism, social mobility, being active citizens and acquisition of the English language. From the women’s narrations, the first three years were the most critical time for the social integration into the host country.

The second finding addresses the second research question, which was what type of learning, if any, takes place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change? All the women who took part in the study reported having participated in both formal and non-formal educational programs prior to and upon arrival in the United States. Women’s narrations and data analysis suggests that learning from experience is an integral type of learning during the social integration process including two components:

The First component was instrumental “day-to-day” learning as the acquisition of practical knowledge where participants learned about day-to-day living skills, government assistance programs, basic financial knowledge, development of professional skills, and the acquisition of English language. The analysis suggests that instrumental learning occurred with more frequency during the first two or three years after their arrival; in this phase, women used past and present knowledge and information, in order to meet the current demands of their new world.

The second component of learning from experience suggested by data analysis was transformative learning, in which women presented fundamental changes in their ways of being, knowing, and doing. As types of transformative learning, self-reflective learning and dialogic learning occurred during participants’ experiences of their social integration process. All eight participants conveyed self-reflective learning, as they
revised different frames of mind incorporating new values and experiencing deep transformations of them. The data analysis also unveiled that during women’s social integration experiences, self-reflective and dialogic learning took place. Women’s narrations suggested continuity from their individual transformations leading to a new worldview where acceptance and respect for other cultures are important components of their process of re-framing a new world. During this process, data also suggest a new women’s making meaning of new self and identity that emerged during their individual processes. Data suggested the construction of new meanings and identities regarding the comprehension of participants about being Latinas, or Colombian immigrants, becoming integrated, being successful and belonging to the United States. Participants defined being Latina and Colombian immigrant as a stage of duality between two worlds. Women described their meaning making of becoming integrated as: the exercise of all the rights and responsibilities of an “active citizen” who “has a sense of biculturalism” can “be part of all spaces,” and “goes beyond criticisms”. Data also suggested that participants defined being successful in the United States in terms of owning land, being bilingual, having a dream, passing the importance of the family to their children, having appreciation for Colombia, and being transnational. Overall, women’s narration unveiled the incorporation of new points of view about their self in which new cultural and social categories are built into their reservoir for their new identities. Women in this study had learned to negotiate themselves, using it as strategy for their participation in different spaces. According to the data, the different types of learning may overlap, and nurture each other, contributing to their ability to engage and to continue with the process of social integration in the United States.
CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and to understand the social integrations experiences, and the learning that occurs for adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States. In Colombia, internal displacement and international migrations are associated with a long-term armed conflict, an environment of poverty and exclusion in which people are unable to find neither safe conditions nor a means of subsistence that allows them to live with dignity (Riaño-Alcalá & Villa-Martínez, 2008). Consequently, the principal source of forced migration in the Americas and the second one in the world with internally displaced personas is Colombia (UNHCR, 2014).

Whether for economic or political reasons, people from Colombia have migrated to the United States since the 50s, and although Colombians represented the largest group of immigrants from South America (Brown & Patten, 2013), there are very limited studies regarding the experiences of Colombian immigrants in the United States (Madrigal, 2008).

In studying the experiences of immigrants, social integration is an important process, which involves the inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the core institutions, relationships, and positions of a host country. It is an interactive process between immigrants and the host society (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006) with shared
rights and responsibilities. In conducting a study on transnational migration, social
capital and lifelong learning in the U.S.A., Alfred (2010) concluded that “in order to
understand how immigrants construct knowledge from their interactions with social
networks and ties, it is necessary to broaden our view of learning to one that goes beyond
formal, and institutional learning” (2010, p.232). However, little research has been
conducted on the relationship of adult learning theories with social integration
experiences of women immigrants. Therefore, this qualitative interview study aimed at
helping to understand the social integration experiences of eight immigrant adult
Colombian women in the United States. The questions guiding this study focused on the
description and understanding of the social integration experiences of adult immigrant
Colombian women in the United States, and the identification of the different kinds of
learning that took place during these experiences with a close look at kinds of the
learning leading to deep individual change.

The epistemological frames that informed this study were experiential learning
(Dewey, 1938 and Fenwick, 2001), transformational learning (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow,
Mohanty, 2002; Villenas, 2006), and the concept of feminization of migration (Castles &
Miller, 2009; Cuban, 2010; and Piper, 2008). The study used a basic interpretative
qualitative research design as the methodology of inquiry and the epistemological
paradigm was the interpretive-constructive stance. Data were collected through
interviews and documents. I applied the model of “three interview series”, which is part
of phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 2006) with each participant. Eight adult
immigrant Colombian women participated in the study between the ages of 35 and 56
years old, and who had lived in the United States from four to 13 years by the time of the interview conversations.

**Summary of the Findings**

For the analysis of the data, I used two methods. First, the holistic-contend method (Atkinson, 1998, 2007) which helped to construct a life history for each participant and second, the constant comparative analysis method (Creswell, 2005; Glaser, 1987; Glaser & Strauss; 1997) was implemented to look across the eight participants and to identify common themes according to the research questions.

Data analysis revealed two main findings: First, women who participated in the study reported to have not developed a sense of belonging to the United States regardless of time in the country or immigration status, communicating that it is necessary to develop a sense of biculturalism, more social mobility and being active citizens in order to fulfill their integration process. Acquisition of the language, understanding the culture, and isolation were the most unanticipated challenges experienced by participants.

Participants began to describe their social integration experiences from the moment when they made the decision to migrate and expressed that the first two or three years after their arrival, were the most critical time for their integration process.

The second main finding was that all eight women who took part in the study have participated in both formal and non-formal educational programs prior to and upon arrival in the United States. From the analysis emerged learning from experience as an integral type of learning during the social integration experiences of the participants starting with of participant’s arrival in the United States and continuing up to the point of the interview conversations. The analysis of the data also revealed a process of learning
from experience that included two phases: Instrumental learning (practical day-to-day learning), transformative learning (self-reflective, dialogic learning and women’s making meaning of a new self).

**Conclusion and Discussion**

The findings as described in Chapter 5 have led this researcher to draw one conclusion with two components. In this final chapter, I discuss the conclusion and its components, as well as relate them to the different bodies of knowledge presented in Chapter 2, and discuss practical and theoretical issues.

**Conclusion**

For women immigrants to become active citizens in their host country, it is essential that a mutual engagement in the social integration process takes place, for both immigrants and their host countries. For this to happen, transformations and learning must occur within individuals who immigrate and within the society of the host country. For immigrants, this implies that they must be willing to revise their frames of mind and to construct new worldviews combining integration and comprehension of other cultures. For the host countries, this implies creating inclusive policies and programs that reduces economic poverty and inequality, promotes greater intercultural understanding and exchange, increased participation and representation, and promotes leadership opportunities as well as guarantees equal rights, possibilities, and opportunities for all.

The two components of the conclusion are:

**Women’s actions.** Social integration is a complex, interactive, ambiguous, lengthy, and paradoxical process with the goal of creating inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the host society. The social integration into the United States’ culture
and society is experienced and understood by participants, as a primarily one-way process in which the level of participants’ social integration relies solely on the women’s actions, leaving the role of the United States as a host country, unclear within this process.

**Learning as core element.** Learning is a core element of social integration and a requisite for social integration to occur. During the social integration experiences of participants, different types of learning occur simultaneously and in the interconnectivity of these different types of learning and experiences is where women develop the capabilities necessary for their social integration. The types of learning that matter the most for participants were learning from the experience, instrumental learning, and transformative learning (self-reflective and dialogic learning, and women’s new meaning making).

**Discussion**

After the presentation of the conclusion of this study and its components, I offer a discussion section for each of the components, integrating them with literature review and the findings of the study.

**Women’s actions.** *Social integration is a complex, interactive, ambiguous, lengthy, and paradoxical process with the goal of creating inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the host society. The social integration into the United States’ culture and society is experienced and understood by participants, as a one-way process in which the level of participants’ social integration relies solely on the women’s actions leaving the role of the United States as a host country, unclear within this process.*
Scholars from postcolonial feminist theory (Ahmand, 1992; Alcafot, 2000; Mohanty, 1984; Amrita Basu, 1995), and Latina Chicana feminist thought, (Anzaldúa, 2007; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Villenas, 2006) have emphasized the importance of intersecting race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and location with the category of gender. According to Anzaldúa (2007), Mohanty (1984), and Villenas (2006), these subject positions are inter-related influencing and informing each other. Postcolonial feminist theory and Latina Chicana feminist thought call for analysis across these subject positions identifying the effect of these categories on women’s lives and experiences. In the same vein, feminization of migration, calls for the inclusion of these same categories paying particular attention to the conditions in which the immigration processes of women takes place, as an important unit of analysis (Cuban, 2010; Knight, 2011; Engle, 2004; Piper, 2003, 2008a; Trinidad Requena, 2011). Piper (2008a) and Knight (2011) stated that these categories and their intersection enhance the comprehension of women’s immigration processes, and living conditions in their host countries.

Taking into consideration the different units of analysis and subject positions, it is important to mention that Colombian immigrants who participated in this study, represented a diverse group of women in terms of education, place of origin, class, race, and ethnicity. Moreover, there were significant differences between push factors (women’s reasons to immigrate), and the conditions under women left the country. Three of the women participants (Betty, Juanita, and Patricia) came originally from rural areas of the southwest of Colombia, with no or minimal education, who identified as Mulata (Black and White) or Afro-Colombians, low-income class, and entered into the United States with refugee status. The other five women (Diana, Eugenia, Liliana, Sandra, and
Yolanda) originally coming from urban areas, with higher levels of education (undergraduate and graduate levels), and who identified as middle and upper class in Colombia, entered into the United States with student or tourist visas.

The difference in how women arrived in the United States is an expression of the current socio-political context of Colombia in which the long-standing internal armed conflict has fallen mainly upon vulnerable groups of the population, with a considerable and disproportionate impact on women. Some examples are: Forced displacement in conditions of marital abandonment or widowhood, gender-based violence and especially, sexual violence by armed actors as a weapon of war, the imposition of patriarchal models of social control by local power holders, and the historical lack of recognition of women’s rights that has facilitated their dispossession and violent seizure of their land (Meertens, 2006).

As Chapter 4 illustrated, before arriving in the United States, refugee women were internally displaced in Colombia, and immigrated initially to Ecuador where they lived for approximately three or four years in conditions of poverty, exploitation, vulnerability, and where they were granted refugee status by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The other five women traveled directly from Colombia to the United States. These different specificities about women’s lives, conditions in which women leave their country and arrival to the United States indeed impact their social integration, as a process, in the United States.

According to Cuban (2010) and Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007), the permanent state of transition or the experience of “transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing
or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2007, p. 65) is understood as dislocation. This term that has been applied in recent research to describe the personal and psychological experiences of immigrants’ communities regardless of the immigration process as voluntary or forced. This concept of dislocation serves to illustrate how complex and paradoxical the process of social integration is, as Cuban (2010) said, dislocation is a permanent stage in which women immigrants are “never nowhere but always somewhere simultaneously here and there” (p. 180). Participants shared this experience in different moments through their narrations, an example is when Diana said that I feel “like a woman with no country” (D).

There is a paradox surrounding the image of the host society or country that offers protection to the refugee and an opportunity to the immigrant. While a host society, like United States may provide the immigrants and refugees security from the threats and terror that forced flight from their country, it also represents what they lost and cannot achieve. For Betty, Juanita, and Patricia, that meant land, family in sending country, and citizenship are revealed as the most meaningful aspects lost during their social integration experiences, while at the same time, they are the most desirable and more difficult to obtain in the host country. For Diana, Eugenia, and Yolanda, the host country is a space for opportunities and possibilities, for advancing in their careers but also represents “losing my family, because my family is there [in Colombia]” (E) and the possibility of losing perspective about “what you really need in life and what you think you need that is created by the society” (D). Forced migration and immigration constituted a process and a continuum of events that reconfigured women’s expectations of the future and basic referents of place and location. Women reflected on this experience of dislocation, and
how their attempts to embrace the ‘here’ and the ‘now’ -as part of the reconstruction of their lives, are continuously disrupted by their memories of past events and their awareness of what they had left behind. Their relationship with their past operates as a disruptive force, as they attempt to ‘envision the future’ and explore opportunities for their children and for themselves in a new land.

According to Bosswick and Heckmann (2006), there are four main dimensions of social integration: Structural, cultural, interactive, and identificational. I describe these dimensions based on the findings of this study in order to illustrate, in a systematic way, a complex process that involves many aspects and elements of a person’s life, and of the host country.

**Cultural dimension.** Refers to an individual’s cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal changes reflected by the development of biculturalism and bilingualism in order for immigrants, to be able to claim their rights and assume positions in their new country (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). In order to participate in the new culture, it is necessary for immigrants to acquire the core competencies of the host society. The development of the capacities necessary for the cultural dimension does not mean that immigrants should give up the culture of their home country. According to the findings, all women expressed the need of developing a deeper understanding of the United States’ culture and expanding their sense of biculturalism. Looking at the individual level, Diana, Eugenia, Liliana, Sandra, and Yolanda gained more knowledge and understating of the American culture through the acquisition of the language permitting them to participate in different spaces and positions in the United States. Betty, Juanita, and Patricia encountered more challenges given their illiteracy in both Spanish and English.
Consequently, for this group of women it has become more difficult to advance in their social mobility.

Women’s narrations in chapter 5 made evident how during the first two or three years, all of the women worked in private houses, manufacturing or restaurants. While Diana, Eugenia, Liliana, Sandra, and Yolanda had advanced in their types of employment, Betty, and Juanita remain in the same industry, conditions, and salaries. Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) stated that “for those migrants and their children, who arrive with little education the degree of biculturalism and bilingualism required for adequate social mobility will be difficult to achieve” (p. 10). The authors concluded, “Bicultural competencies and personalities are an asset both for the individual and for the host society” (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 10). In this sense, for host countries economically and technologically developed, non-material resources gain importance. According to (Cruz-Saco, 2008), social integration and the competences that both individuals, and hosts countries develop during the integration process are non-material resources.

As I stated in chapter 3, I had the opportunity to do an internship in the international Rescue Committee (IRC) for four months. During that time, I observed what Betty, Juanita and Patricia shared during the interview conversations in relation to programs, assistance, and support offered to them during their initial stages after arrival in the U.S. In the course of the first four to six months (deepening of the case), refugees arriving to the United States though IRC, participate in different government assistance programs, and receive settlement services including financial (based on the number of members per family), medical assistance (Medicaid), and job allocation. After that time,
refugees are expected to be living independent of agency assistance, and if qualifying for government assistance, they are responsible of looking for the information, completions of application processes, and follow up in case of need.

This situation exemplifies an area in which the host country, in this case the United States, should enhance its engagement in the social integration process through the design and implementation of policies and programs that respond to the immediate and long term needs of the immigrant community intersecting variables such gender, age, race, ethnicity, immigration status and educational levels. Policies and programs that provide immigrants with opportunities to become bicultural making available diverse educational programs, and other avenues to help them to understand and participate in the American culture, while maintaining their own culture would be highly advantageous. In short, the cultural dimension is a mutual process in which the host society must learn new ways of “relating to immigrants and adapting to their needs” (Boswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 10).

Having programs that intersect the different units of analysis introduced above, help to avoid essentialisms and societal portrays of “The woman”. In the case of the immigrant women, it is common to find the portrayal “as constantly self-sacrificing for the well-being of their families, and their related idealization as reliable remitters, better managers of remittances, etc. not only feeds on this gendered construction of women, but can also lead to their instrumentalization by community development interventions that are often built around women’s role” (United Nations- - INSTRAW, 2007, p. 5).

Structural dimension. This dimension refers to the acquisition of rights and the access to participation in the core institution of immigrants host society (Boswick &
Heckmann, 2006). Participation in the core institutions implies the economic and labor market, education and housing system, welfare institution and full political citizenship in other words, being an active citizen. Participants recognized the importance of citizenship and being an active citizen in two ways. First, it means that they can be in their host country without the constant uncertainty of “what is going to happen” (D) or feeling “that you have one foot there and other here” (Y).

Second, having citizenship means for participants exercising their right to vote and participate actively in the political system. Three of the eight women are now U.S. citizens, and the women who entered as refugees are now “legal permanent resident” status. While all of them have the option of applying for citizenship, just Patricia was preparing for initiating the process at the time of the interview conversations. It is important to highlight that this process for the refugees implies to learn English since it requires passing a test and interview, which are conducted in English, at the same time; women have to acquire specific knowledge about the history of the United States.

Juanita’s situation is an example of other immigrant women’ situations where their current conditions do not promote the development of competences required for their social integration. She is a single mother; illiterate, who did not qualified for any of the government assistance programs, regardless of the fact she was working for minimum wage full time at a poultry factory at the time of our conversations.

It is in scenarios like Juanita’s situation in which the role of the United States as a host country is not clear. Four of the eight participants of this study included in their narrations the role of the host country during their social integration experiences. Three of them were the women (Betty, Juanita, and Patricia) who entered into the United States
as refugees and the fourth one was Yolanda. The refugees referred to the participation of the host country during the first years of their social integration experiences through their participation in government assistant programs. In Yolanda’s case, she mentioned the host country due to her graduate studies in a public university and the impact of those years on her social integration experiences. As to the other participants, there were no explicit references made to the role of the host country in the social integration process. In my opinion, the host country should design and implement integrated programs and resources that promote the development of the required skills and capabilities for immigrants to become integrated. From my view, the host country (the United States in this case) has a broader social and moral responsibility to the refugees than current policies and practices offer. Based on the analysis of data, the programs implemented by the government and assisting agencies for refugees perpetuate the cycle of poverty, dependency and do not offer integral and realistic programs for the development of basic skills, and competences that allow refugees to advance in their social integration and mobility.

**Interactive Dimension.** According to Boswick and Heckmann (2006), the interaction dimension of social integration means “the acceptance and inclusion of immigrants in the primary relationships and social networks of the host society” (p.20). Indicators of this dimension include social networks, friendships, partnerships, marriages, and membership in voluntary organizations (Boswick & Heckmann, 2006). For the women who participated in this study, with the exception of Liliana, their primary social and support networks are referred to by what the authors denominated the “ethnic colony”. Boswick and Heckmann (2006) stated that the ethnic colony is an important
element for support, solidarity, and sharing information in order to navigate the system and to develop basic skills and capabilities for the cultural dimension during the first stages of their social integration process.

Given the language difficulties for Betty, Juanita, and Patricia, the ethnic colony is still their only primary social network, while Diana, Eugenia, Sandra, and Yolanda have accomplished the oscillation between their ethnic colonies and individuals, organizations, and institutions from the United States. In Liliana’s case, there is no connection or relationships with her ethnic colony. As Boswick and Heckmann (2006) presented, the ethnic colony “may hinder the immigrant in creating a link with the host society” (p. 20). As Diana, Eugenia, Sandra, Yolanda, and Liliana participate in different spaces and core institutions of the host country like education, volunteer organizations, and different workplaces, they advance in their social mobility, acquiring skills and capabilities for the cultural and interactive dimensions. In other words, the establishment of new support networks and relationships, different to the ethnic colony help to acquire the cultural and social capital necessary to participate in the core institutions of the host society.

**Indentificational dimension.** According to Boswick and Heckmann (2006), this dimension speaks of the subjective level of the immigrants with respect to their host country, especially in relation to the feeling of belonging that is usually developed later in the process of integration as a result of participation. In some cases, it may take two or three generations (Boswick & Heckmann, 2006). The participation in the core institutions and activities of the host country is not indicative of identifying with the goals of those institutions. Regardless of participants’ immigration status, time living in the
United States and educational levels, none of the participants reported to have developed a sense of belonging in the United States as it was presented in chapter 5.

The feeling of belonging is directly related to how women immigrants deconstruct, appropriated, and negotiated their new world with their past and present experiences, knowledge, and culture in order to re-build their identities. Villenas (2009) stated that immigrant Latinas and immigrant women of color go through “complex negotiations of multiple identities and contexts and to privileging the interstitial moves for survival in all their contradictions, tensions, and ambiguities” (p. 668). Indeed, Latinas, like other Third World women, are positioned interstitially in every way—between nations, between linear categories of history (Eurocentric and male-dominated Chicano/Latino/Latin American history), and between the discursive spaces of ‘woman’.

As the number of immigrants and Latinas population grows, so does the importance of how they learn and the understanding of their social integration. Not all the Colombian immigrant women in the United States share the same beliefs or experiences neither do all the immigrant women. Despite of Colombian immigrant women being a very heterogeneous group, there is a set of cultural values common among them: centrality of family, messages received about gender roles, and a collective identity that emphasizes education and social responsibility.

As I discussed in the above section, social integration is a complex, interactive, ambiguous, lengthy, paradoxical process with the goal of creating inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the host society. Women who participated in this study reported the role of the United States during their social integration experiences in two instances. First, immigration policy, and second, support and assistance that refugees
received during their initial four to six months after their arrival in the U.S. Across women’s experiences and narrations, participants expressed different actions required from them in order to integrate into the United States’ culture and society, with no reference to the host society as part of the process. In the next section, I discuss the second aspect of the conclusion of the study.

**Learning as a core element.** *Learning is a core element of social integration and a requisite for social integration to occur. During the social integration experiences of participants, different types of learning occur simultaneously and in the interconnectivity of these different types of learning and experiences is where women develop the capabilities necessary for their social integration. The types of learning that matter the most for participants were learning from the experience, instrumental learning, and transformative learning (self-reflective and dialogic learning, and women’s making meaning of a new self).*

This study confirms and expands the findings of previous studies (Morrice, 2007, 2010; Alfred, 2012) regarding learning, experience, and immigrants. In a study about refugees, lifelong learning and social integration in the U.K., Morrice (2007) concluded that it is necessary for immigrants “a shift away from the present focus on formal, and individualized education provision to a greater recognition of informal and social learning opportunities” (p. 155). In a similar perspective, Alfred’s (2012) study about transnational migration, social capital and lifelong learning in the United States reported that “in order to understand how immigrants construct knowledge from their interactions with social networks and ties, it is necessary to broaden our view of learning to one that goes beyond formal, institutional learning” (p.232). Working in different contexts and
with different types of immigrants, these two studies agreed that in order to understand the learning taking place in immigrants, it is necessary to go beyond formal or institutional learning, and recognize the role of social and informal learning and other social learning opportunities.

Through the analysis of the narrations about the social integration experiences of the eight adult Colombian immigrants, I confirm indeed the importance of other types of learning outside formal and institutional learning as Morrice (2007) and Alfred (2012) concluded. I also state that different types of learning occurred during the social integration experiences of the participants. In order to understand the learning that took place during the social integration experiences of participants and if any learning lead to a deep individual change, I highlight the importance of two aspects.

First, in order to understand the types of learning, it is important to remember that social integration encompasses a long, complex, ambiguous, and interactive process in which each dimension has a unique contribution to the social integration as a whole. This same principle should be applied to understanding the learning that women encountered during the social integration experiences. In other words, I recommend approaching the understanding of these different types of learning as decisive components of a long, complex, ambiguous, and interactive process. The types of learning that women reported during their experiences were informal learning, learning from the experience, instrumental and transformative learning.

The second aspect is that social integration is not a linear process with defined phases, steps, or elements, nor are the types of learning that take place within this process. As I stated before, women reported diverse learning; the analysis suggests that
these types of learning happen simultaneously and it is in the intersection of these learnings that women develop the skills and capacities needed for their social integration process. As a result, there is not one adult learning theory that adequately explains the process on its own.

After the analysis of the data, I conclude that learning from experience emerged as an integral part of the social integration experiences of participants from the time of their arrival in the United States until the moment of the interview conversations. The data analysis revealed a process of learning from experience that included two components: First, instrumental “day-to-day” learning in which participants acquired practical knowledge using knowledge from the past and the present in order to meet the demands of their new world. Second, transformative learning (including self-reflective, dialogic learning and women’s making meaning of a new self) emerged during the social integration experiences of participants generating deep transformations in their way of being, knowing, and doing. It was during the intersection of the second and third component of the learning within the experience where most of the cultural and interactive dimensions of the social integration took place. Keeping in mind the two aspects stated before, I discuss, in what follows, the different types of learning identified during the social integration experiences of the participants based on the different dimensions of the social integration process as is illustrated in Table 6.

**Learning from the experience.** Fiona Reeve and Jim Gallacher (1999) argued, “taking experience as the starting point for learning has the potential at least to erode traditional boundaries between knowledge and skills, vocational and academic learning, and between disciplines” (p. 127). In this study, experience was the space in which
learning occurred and had indeed the potential to re-configure the boundaries between knowledge, skills, types of learning, and between disciplines. Learning from the experience emerged as an integral part of the social integration process of participants.
Table 6

*Taxonomy of Types of Learning during Social Integration Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Structural Dimension</th>
<th>Interactive Dimension</th>
<th>Cultural Dimension</th>
<th>Identificational Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Part. labor market, education and housing system, welfare institution and full political citizenship)</td>
<td>(Relationships with ethnic colony and social networks of host country)</td>
<td>(Cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal changes: Biculturalism and bilingualism)</td>
<td>(Feeling of Belonging)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuity and Interactivity present during Social Integration as a Process (Four Dimensions)</td>
<td>Disjunctions between Individual’s Knowledge and Socio-Cultural World</td>
<td>Ongoing Meaning-Making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning From the Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental Learning</td>
<td>Practical Knowledge - Task Oriented and Problem Solving</td>
<td>• Day to day Living Skills</td>
<td>• Social Norms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Government Assistance Programs</td>
<td>• Acquisition of Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Basic Financial Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Development of Professional Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative Learning</td>
<td>Being Active Citizen</td>
<td><em>Dialogic and Self-Reflective Learning</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Being Transnational”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Understanding American’ culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>“A woman with no country”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Un-learning previous assumptions hold about host country</td>
<td>Women’s Making meaning of a New Self</td>
<td>“Being always Colombian”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Being Bicultural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Being Minority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Being Latina Immigrant</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*(281)*
Considering social integration a process, learning from the experience is a transversal element during the experiences of women meaning that learning from the experience is what holds the assorted types of learning taking place during a complex and paradoxical process (social integration process), as Dewey (1938) said, the true learning situation, then, has longitudinal and lateral dimensions. It is both historical and social. It is orderly and dynamic” (p. XI).

According to Dewey (1938), knowledge is socially constructed and based on experiences. Experience from Dewey (1938) is conceptualized “as a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into” (p.31). In order for learning to occur through experience, Dewey (1938) argued that the experience must demonstrate the simultaneous dynamics of continuity and interaction, which become the major principles of his perspective. Women connected past and present experiences to learn what was required for their survival in their present, and projecting their future since the moment of their arrival in the United States until the moment of our interview conversations (principle of continuity), at the same time, there were continuous transactions between women and their context or environment (principle of interaction). These two principles were always interconnected, and worked together constituting the basis of the different types of learning that occurred during the different dimensions of women’s social integration experiences.

From different points of view, Fenwick (2006) and Jarvis (2003) break with traditional notions of learning from the experience. Fenwick (2003) incorporated new perspectives relating to the nature of the experience (reflection on concrete experiences, participating in a community of practice, getting in touch with unconscious desires and
fears, resisting dominant social norms, and the relationship between cognition and environment). With an exception of the relationship between cognition and environment, the other perspectives were identifiable during participants’ social integration processes. Since learning how to get groceries or where to take the bus, up to understanding the educational system in the United States, learning the language or making meaning about themselves as immigrants; participants engaged in experiences where consciousness, identity, action, interaction, and components of different individual and societal systems interacted producing a particular learning within the experience.

Jarvis (2003) model of experiential learning emphasized the role of the person’s life story and how the “psychological history” (p.52) affects the construction of the experience. In addition, the author stressed the importance of re-evaluating the role of reflection as not the only and absolute outcome of the process generating non-reflective or reflective learning. Participants approached their initial experiences after their arrival as “doing as if I was in Colombia” (L) or as they were told. With time, they expressed “you cannot do here [the United States] the same things as if you were in Colombia, here it is different, and one needs to understand that” (J). From instrumental day-to-day learning up to understanding of the social norms in different spaces, these women un-learned and learned- anew through constant interaction between previous knowledge, reflection on the outcomes of their current actions in the host country, and emerging perspectives of their future based on long or short-term goals.

Overall, women presented their social integration process as learning from the experience throughout women’s active participation in the process of transforming their experience in diverse spaces of the host country, and reflection on their existing needs,
previous knowledge, and perspectives of their future. In what follows, I discuss transformative learning including, instrumental, self-reflective and dialogic learning as types of learning identified within learning from the experience during women’s social integration process.

**Transformative learning.** As the narrations of women and the findings of this study have illustrated in previous chapters, women who participated in this study experienced deep and fundamental individual transformations of one’s ways of being, knowing, and doing. Mezirow (1990) defines learning as “the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action” (p. 1). During this process, the author emphasized experience, transformation, action, and knowledge as outcomes of learning. In 2000, Mezirow defined transformational learning as the process:

by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide actions. (p. 7)

Based on Habermas’ (1971) work on technical, communicative, and emancipatory knowledge, Mezirow (1985) incorporated instrumental learning (defined as new skills, practices), dialogic learning (understanding values, concepts, and others’ points of view), and self-reflection learning as “being aware and critical of our subjective perceptions of knowledge and the constrains of social knowledge” (Cranton, 2006, p.12). Together they lead to a change in worldview and behaviors.
In order to meet the demands of their new country, participants un-learned and learned- anew, different ways of doing day to day activities after these women’s arrival in the United States. In that sense, instrumental learning as acquisition of practical knowledge, took place within their social integration experiences. The eight participants described their initial time after their arrival as a period of “intense learning in all aspects” (Y) that was characterized as “becoming an adult again” (E), and a period in which women learned how to “control and manipulate the environment” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59) using past and present knowledge. According to the analysis, for Diana, Eugenia, Liliana, Sandra, and Yolanda, this period had a length of time between two or three years while in Betty’s, Juanita’s, and Patricia’ situation it was about three or four years. However, the last group of women still find themselves working their way through learning day-to-day activities due to the lack of acquisition of the English language.

Instrumental learning helped immigrant women to develop the skills and capabilities required for the structural, cultural, and interactive dimensions of the social integration process. Instrumental learning played a significant role in the structural dimension, because it allowed immigrant women to participate in the core institutions of the host country, which later in the process translate into the development of competences for the understanding of the culture or cultural dimension.

In some cases (Juanita, Eugenia, Liliana, and Sandra), instrumental learning lead to individual transformations of meaning perspectives. In Juanita’s case, learning to drive and passing the driving test was presented as a breaking point in her process of social integration. Given her illiteracy, Juanita illustrated through the reflection of these experiences a shift in the perception of herself, her surroundings, and her new roles acting
upon them. In the cases of Eugenia, Liliana, and Sandra, learning basic domestic skills and performing jobs out of their comfort zone lead to transformations in their worldview and understanding aspects of American culture. These examples suggest an overlap between personal growth and instrumental learning.

Critical self-reflection is one of the common themes that characterized Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning. Mezirow (1990) asserted that “by far the most significant learning experiences in adulthood involve critical self-reflection – reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation of perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting” (p. 13). Among the types of reflections referenced by Mezirow (1990) (content, process, premise), only premise reflection is attributed the special connotation of critical reflection, which challenges the soundness or validity of presuppositions in earlier learning. Moreover, Cranton (2006) singles out premise reflection as having the particular “potential to lead people to the transformation of a habit of mind” (p. 35).

In this vein, women who participated in the study, experienced self-reflective learning as “being aware and critical of our subjective perceptions of knowledge and the constrains of social knowledge” (Cranton, 2006, p.12). Regardless of their time in the host country, immigration status and the conditions under participants arrived to the United States; all women experienced a level of self-reflective, dialogic learning and new making meanings of a new self. Women used past, and present knowledge, and experiences, and envision a future leading to a new worldview. In women’s narrations, self-reflective learning was illustrated in transformations about themselves through the revision of frames of minds, generating new ways of being in their new world. In some
cases, the transformations lead to a greater independence, autonomy, and questioning binary concepts such victim/survival and immigrant/refugee and the impact of these social constructs on women’s life.

As Taylor (2007), highlighted, it is important to be aware that transformative learning may not always have positive outcomes for the individual stating the need to broaden the definition of outcomes of perspective transformation to include the possibility for a more negative impact on identity and conception of self. Taylor (2007) also drew attention to the lack of research into the sociocultural factors that shape the transformative experience. In this study, some transformations have led to contradictory or ambivalent transformations coexisting in the same time and area. An illustration of this is the case that all eight participants explained their view of the United States as a diverse country, recognizing the importance to understand and respect the difference. At the same time, Sandra, Eugenia, and Juanita, described how “I become racist in this country” (E). This outcome of their transformation in meaning perspectives through the social integration experiences confirmed Taylor’s (2007) statement regarding the need for more research about the role of sociocultural factors shaping the transformative experience and leading to new meaning perspectives that represent discriminatory positions against different groups of population because of their race or ethnicity. In the same view, Morrice’s (2012) study about transformative learning on refugees concluded that:

The case study of refugees has underlined how transformative learning not only involves epistemological processes of changing ways of thinking and changing how the world is perceived, but it can also involve a more profound ontological
process where individuals have to adjust their sense of who they are and what they can be in the world. It has demonstrated the importance of considering the social and cultural factors that shape the transformative experience and highlights the need for learning theories to recognize the potential benefits and negative outcomes of learning on identity and conceptions of self. (p. 267)

Keeping in mind that one of the competences of the cultural dimension of social integration is biculturalism; transformative learning must happen within the immigrant women in order to gain a greater and deeper understanding of the culture of the host country, which is the main competence of the cultural dimension. All the participants stated the need for better understanding of American culture pointing out that language, ways of communicating, and the logics of what and how they communicate are different from “the American way” (S). From this point, the cultural dimension as well as the identificational dimension may be the most challenging to achieve for immigrants.

Transformative learning also must happen within the host society in order to uphold social integration in immigrants. At this point, Freire’s perspective of learning for social action, and his concepts of conscientization and dialogue can be the starting point of a perspective that informs about collective social actions within a transformative learning perspective. Looking for views that consider the social, political, and cultural factors that shape the transformative experience, Torres (2012) pointed out that the contributions of Freire regarding the process of construction of a democratic pedagogic subject, and the notion of crossing borders in education and learning processes are the foundations of what he called transformative social justice perspective. For Torres (2012) “transformative social justice learning is a teaching and learning model that calls
on people to develop a process of social and individual conscientization” (p. 3) The author postulated that conscientization is not only a process of social transformation, but also “an invitation to self-learning and self-transformation” (p. 3). According to the author, reclaiming conscientization as a method and substantive proposal for transformative social justice learning entails a model of social analysis and social change that challenges the most basic articulating principles of capitalism, including inequalities and inequities (Torres, 2012). While Torres’ (2012) proposal of transformative social justice learning is “a theory in progress” (p.5) more approaches and deeper studies are needed in order to understand how to foster social and collective transformations.

The learning that immigrants and refugees encounter during their social integration experiences have led them to critically assess their assumptions, plan a course of action to deal with their new situation, and acquire new knowledge and skills in order to survive in their new country. Disjuncture or disharmony ultimately leads to greater cultural awareness, greater confidence, and competence in dealing with the new social context. It also fits with the intercultural competency literature of how, over time, individuals revise their frames of reference and develop greater cultural competency.

Up to this point, I have presented the different types of learning that took place during the social integration experiences of the participants and I have briefly discussed a few specific adult learning theories related to learning from experience to establish the point that current theories do not address and explain in a holistic way the process of social integration. Reality goes more rapidly than theory. Traditional adult learning theory responded to certain questions based on the needs of the past. As an illustration, immigration is well known as millenarian phenomenon. Nevertheless, immigration is
different than what it was 20 years ago; in addition, the requirements and demands by the host country to immigrant women in order to survive and to integrate are also different than the demands of 20 years ago. In the same way, the global community is questioning host societies to design and implement policies that are more inclusive. Therefore, further research that integrates a holistic adult learning theory approach is needed to account for complex and paradoxical phenomena in which logics from different cultures simultaneously were distinct and occupied one space.

As a result of the different learning and especially the transformative learning experienced by participants, a new self-identity emerged and can be looked at through the lens of women’s making meaning (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982). In sharing their meanings of being Latina and immigrants, and how they made sense of those social constructs within their experiences, I found that a form of “connected knowing” (Belenky et al., 1986) was the style most often used by the participants to muddle through and make sense of the culture and unfamiliar point of views. As an illustration, Juanita’s experience in the workplace (narrated in chapter 5), where she encounter herself in front of new cultures and sexual orientations that were disorienting to her and challenges her sense of identity. In order to understand, Juanita approached the situation asking questions as a gesture of sharing her way of knowing with others, in order to learn about new ways of knowing. Doing so, Juanita learned about other religions and sexual orientations.

Other illustrations were captured in the cases were Sandra and Yolanda described that they approached unknown or incomprehensible situations by asking, thinking, and reflecting in order to make new meaning of situations they did not know how to interpret.
or relate to. The characteristic of connected ways of knowing is embracing new ideas and seeking to understand different points of view rather than looking for flaws in logic and reasoning in new ideas. “For a connected knower, her procedures of knowing involve building a connection to the known and are based on empathy” (Taylor & Marienau, 1995, p. 9). Women’s presumed orientations toward relationships are linked to the characterizations of women reliant on intuitive, subjective, and affective ways of learning (Flannery, 2000).

Immigrant women in this study have learned to negotiate their identities between cultures through their social integration experiences in the Southeastern United States. These experiences have allowed immigrant women to create meaning or knowledge that was informed by being challenged and challenging others, questioning previous assumptions about the host country and the need of negotiating or shifting their multiple identities in each individual interaction. Hurtado (1996) explains that it is the “unique knowledge that can be gleaned from the interstices of multiple and stigmatized social identities” (p. 375). Furthermore, “all identities are socially constructed and therefore the outcome of context-specific relationships” (p. 376).

Given the complexity, and ambiguity of the social integration process, immigrant women in this study made sense of their experiences with high levels of duality. The tension was expressed in dichotomies or dualisms concepts and situations (citizen/illegal, victim/survivor, Colombian/not allowed to go there, refugee/immigrant, Latina/Colombian, and Black/White) and it was through the negotiations of these dualisms (duality) than women found their way to the future as well as through the development of high tolerance and acceptance for ambiguity. In some cases, participants
broke down these paradigms (Sandra, Juanita, Diana and Yolanda) by challenging traditional representations and incorporating new social constructs as it was the case with the meaning of “La familia” (the family). According to Villenas (2006) “to embrace wholeness requires an acceptance of ambiguity and reject dualisms… no longer can women’s lives be interpreted in normative counter-discourses from solely the lens of resistance. We can excavate Latina lives of contradictions, paradoxes, and ambiguities—lives often lived with deep concessions” (p. 666). Echoing Villenas (2006), we may ask very different questions about how we move in the world as educational actors engaging in creative cultural survival, because complexity and ambiguity are the spaces in which we, immigrants, intersect the tensions and solidarities turning the eye to a future where projects “erode theoretical divisions and binaries and allow for affinities of theory and practice as a differential consciousness” (p. 671).

In what follows, I present the implications for practice and areas for further research based on the findings and discussions presented.

**Implications for Practice**

This study makes specific contributions that can enhance the practices of adult education that can influence the field of immigrant studies to better prepare organizations (governmental, non-governmental organizations – NGOs and international agencies) to better work directly with immigrant Latinas regardless of their immigration status.

For educators, scholars, activists and policy makers, it is important to understand that for the analysis of social integration, inclusion (removal of all forms of discrimination and intolerance), creation of stable and productive employment, and reduction of poverty should be considered simultaneously. Understanding that there is a
close connection between the socio-political and economic spheres is easier than actually affecting cultural change. Fostering cultural change will influence the socio-political and economic spheres. Cultural transformation does take political will and implies a renewed educational vision to eradicate fear and prejudice. Therefore, it is time for scholars to take a more active role in developing programs to drive cultural change for diverse groups to lessen racial and ethnic discrimination, segregation, and xenophobia.

Educators have the professional and social responsibility to help and to inform professionals in social science and health fields to understand immigrants’ prior experiences and the relationship between immigrants’ social integration and his or her subsequent well-being. This will assist them in obtaining a new theoretical understanding of the implications of the social integration processes of different ethnic and cultural groups, which will lead to incorporating practices according to their audience. It will also help adult educator practitioners to understand, plan, and implement appropriate programs.

Institutions and organizations must design programs and actions that encompass the current and future skills required of immigrant communities, focusing on curricular development at all levels of the educational system, such as primary through secondary school, vocational training schools, technical institutes, and in the promotion of internships, apprenticeships, and training opportunities.

Practitioners, organizations, and policy makers in both origin and host countries should consider that promoting social integration must imply the design of policies that make space for the representation of the varied voices, interests, and direct participation of affected vulnerable persons, and groups locally, regionally, and nationally. An
inclusive policy and targeted programs that would better serve the needs of a diverse immigrant women community, clearly including the diverse and varied voices, identities, and experiences of women immigrants recognizing that they are many distinct women who deserve the dignity and respect of their singularity in the multiplicity of immigration guaranteeing equal rights, possibilities, and opportunities for all.

Given the complexity of both the social integration process and the learning that takes place during these experiences, I recommend that pedagogies, actions, programs, and policies be designed and implemented by interdisciplinary groups with representation by the targeted groups, or communities for example, refugees and other types of immigrants communities. It is a challenge for us, as adult educators, to think and create pedagogies that meet the complexity of the demands and take into account the most vulnerable cases as it is in the cases of refugees with no or minimal education. It is indispensable to generate more options and possibilities that go beyond the participation of this population in government assistance programs, with no more options other than working in the manufacturing or domestic services industries. In this vein, it is important to design programs that help them to develop and reach their maximum potentials opening the door for a possible advance in their social integration and social mobility in their host countries, in other words, to welcome them in the United States as their new home.

Finally, explore and design holistic programs keeping in mind, body, emotion, and spirit, offering new ways to move forward in their social integration process. The creation of links between literacy organizations, learning organizations and counseling organizations working in cooperation with grassroots organizations that challenge
violence supporting learners and educators leading to new platforms for welcoming women who forced migrated and/or are invited to come to the United States.

In Figure 6, I present the overall implications for practice that are derived from this study regarding immigrants and their social integration process. First, it is important to understand social integration as an inclusion and elimination of all forms of discrimination in studying and working with immigrants. Second, it is necessary to design and implement inclusive policies. Third, as educators we have the social responsibility to design holistic programs for immigrants that support their social integration process with focus on the development of skills needed immediately after their arrival and for their future. Fourth, for this to happen, it is urgent to develop new pedagogies taking into account new contexts and what the immigrants bring as a cultural reservoir.

Figure 6.

Implications for Practice in Working with Immigrants
Areas for Further Research

The importance of the findings for adult education is significant; this study confirmed that adult immigrant Colombian women in the United State engaged in a variety of types of learning to meet the demands of their social integration process. The findings have highlighted the necessity to conduct more empirical studies and theoretical work to document immigrants’ experiences in general and immigrant Latinas in particular. It is important to engage in a deep revision of adult learning theories with focus on social action, and the impact of cultural and social factors on transformative experiences in contexts of high levels of ambiguity, and contextualize them according to the current demands, phenomena, and needs. In sum, the adult education field should revisit and update their learning approaches and theoretical frameworks to include the learning experiences of immigrant women because of their lived and paradoxical experiences of coming to the United States and seeking hospitality for both reasons forced upon them or chosen by them.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is important to conduct additional research regarding the role of host countries during the social integration experiences of immigrants. As I have presented in this document, only four of eight participants made clear reference to the involvement of the host country during their social integration process. The development of research on this subject may lead to important information that illuminates the design of inclusive polices according to the needs of immigrants.

Additionally, I propose to expand the focus from Colombian immigrants to Latinas immigrants and other ethnic or underrepresented women immigrants in the
Southwestern U.S. An exploration of how other immigrant women learn during their social integration experiences can provide a valuable insight to promote better understanding of the process of social integration and the learning that takes place with focus on the learning that leads to a deep individual change. This would assist higher educational institutions, NGOs and other educational institutions to provide meaningful and relevant support during the social integration process. In this same perspective and based on the findings and conclusion of this study, I recommend expanding research learning theories and pedagogies that help to understand and promote mutual transformation.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter concludes this study, which explored the understanding of the social integration experiences of adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States. The questions that guide the study were: First, how do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand their social integration experiences in the United States? Second, what types of learning, if any, take place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change?

The conclusion of the study is that for women immigrants to become active citizens in their host country, it is essential that a mutual engagement in the social integration process takes place, for both immigrants and their hosts countries. For this to happen, transformations and learning must occur within individuals who immigrate and within the society of the host country. For immigrants, this implies to revise their frames of mind and to construct new worldviews combining integration and comprehension of
other cultures. For the host countries, this implies creating inclusive policies and programs that reduces economic poverty and inequality, promotes greater intercultural understanding and exchange, increased participation and representation, and promotes leadership opportunities as well as guarantees equal rights, possibilities, and opportunities for all. In this chapter, I discussed the conclusion based on the review of the literature presented in chapter 2 and stated implication for practices as well as further research in the field of adult education and immigrant studies. I close this document with the same words that I chose for its opening:

“Coming from somewhere else, from ‘there’, not from ‘here’, and finding oneself, therefore, simultaneously ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of a given situation, is to live in the intersections of histories and memories, experiencing both their preliminary dispersion and its subsequent translation into new vaster stipulations along unknown roads. It is a drama that is seldom chosen freely” Ian Chambers, Migrancy, Culture, and Identity (1994).
REFERENCES


www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/print.cfm?ID=106.


En: Déjame que te cuente. Barcelona, Spain: Laertes.


CARTA DE PRESENTACION

Monica Arboleda Giraldo
marboled@uga.edu

Fecha
Nombre del Participante
Dirección
Estimada (Nombre del participante),

Ha sido un placer hablar con usted el día de hoy sobre la disertación que estoy desarrollando por medio de la Universidad de Georgia. Como fue mencionado en nuestra conversación, estoy interesada en entender los procesos de aprendizaje y construcción de sentido durante las experiencias de integración social de las mujeres inmigrantes adultas de Colombia en Georgia. Durante la preparación de este estudio, yo he revisado literatura importante en las disciplinas de educación de adultos, estudios de inmigrantes y aprendizaje de adultos. He encontrado muy poca literatura sobre el aprendizaje en las experiencias de integración social de las mujeres adultas inmigrantes colombianas en Estados Unidos. Mi estudio ayudará a ampliar el conocimiento sobre los procesos de aprendizaje y construcción de significado durante las experiencias de integración social de las mujeres adultas inmigrantes colombianas en particular, y Latinas adultas inmigrantes en los Estados Unidos, en general. Las participantes en este estudio son mujeres inmigrantes adultas nacidas en Colombia y las cuales llegaron a Estados Unidos mínimo hace dos años y se encuentran actualmente viviendo en Georgia.

Su participación en este estudio incluye tres (3) entrevistas de 1 a 2 horas cada una, las cuales serán grabadas bajo su permiso y escribir o narrar una historia acerca de una experiencia significativa de integración social en los Estados Unidos. Si usted autoriza la grabación de las entrevistas, usted tendrá la oportunidad de revisar la transcripción de las mismas y podrá darme su opinión sobre los principales ejes como resultado de la investigación. Toda la información que usted comparta conmigo será confidencial. Le adjunto una carta de consentimiento formal de los participantes, el cual es requerido por el Comité de Supervisión institucional de la Universidad de Georgia. En este formulario, se da una descripción más detallada de las implicaciones de la investigación. Si usted decide participar, es necesario que firme este documento.

Mi objetivo es terminar este estudio en Abril del 2013. Yo me estaré comunicando con usted en los próximos 10 días para confirmar su participación. Si usted necesita ponerse en contacto conmigo puede contactarme en el número telefónico (404) 322-8699. Este estudio se está realizando bajo la dirección del Dr. Robert J. Hill, profesor del Departamento de Educación a Permanente, Administración y Política, el cual puede ser
contactado en el número (706) 542-4016. Gracias por su interés en participar en este estudio.

Cordialmente,
Mónica Arboleda Giraldo, M.Ed

CARTA DE CONSENTIMIENTO DEL PARTICIPANTE

Yo, _________________________________, acepto participar en el estudio de investigación llamado “LA COMPRENSIÓN DE LOS PROCESOS DE APRENDIZAJE Y LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE SENTIDO DURANTE LAS EXPERIENCIAS DE INTEGRACIÓN SOCIAL DE LAS MUJERES INMIGRANTES ADULTAS COLOMBIANAS EN GEORGIA” llevada a cabo por Mónica Arboleda Giraldo, del Departamento de Educación durante toda la vida, Administración y Política de la Universidad de Georgia (770-542-3343) bajo la dirección del Dr. Robert J. Hill, del mismo Departamento de la Universidad de Georgia (706-542-4016). Yo entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria. Puedo negarme a participar o dejar de formar parte sin dar ninguna razón, y sin penalización o perdida de los beneficios que tengo derecho. Yo puedo requerir que toda la información identificable acerca de mí sea devuelta, borrada de los registros de la investigación, o destruida.

El objetivo de la investigación es comprender los procesos de aprendizaje y de construcción de significado durante las experiencias de integración social de mujeres adultas inmigrantes colombianas en Georgia. De 8 a 15 mujeres adultas inmigrantes de Colombia que han estado en Estados Unidos mínimo 2 años y que actualmente están viviendo en Georgia participaran de esta investigación. Concretamente el estudio examinará:

1. ¿Cuáles son las experiencias de integración social de mujeres inmigrantes colombianas en los EE.UU.?
2. ¿Cómo las mujeres adultas inmigrantes colombianas en Georgia construyen sentido de sus experiencias de integración social?

Yo no me beneficiare directamente de esta investigación. Sin embargo, mi participación contribuirá al conocimiento sobre inmigrantes adultas Latinas como estudiantes, el desarrollo de adultos y sobre el aprendizaje de la experiencia en relación con los procesos de construcción de significados en las experiencias de integración social. Yo tendrá la oportunidad de compartir mis percepciones y opiniones sobre este tema. Durante el estudio, se predice mínimas molestias como resultado del mismo especialmente durante las entrevistas debido a memorias estresantes de situaciones dolorosas del pasado. Para reducir estas molestias, yo tengo el derecho de no responder las preguntas que me hagan sentir mal.
Si me ofrezco como voluntaria para participar en este estudio, se me pedirá mi participación en:

1) Tres (3) entrevistas sobre mis experiencias en Georgia, Estados Unidos, que tendrá una duración de 1 a 2 hora(s) cada una. Las entrevistas tendrán preguntas relacionadas con mis experiencias como mujer adulta inmigrante colombiana en los Estados Unidos. Si yo autorizo que la entrevista sea grabada en audio, esta será transcrita y yo voy a tener la oportunidad de revisar la exactitud e integridad de la transcripción. Los temas de las tres (3) entrevistas serán los siguientes:
   1.1) Introducción al estudio, recopilación de datos demográficos, preguntas generales acerca de las experiencias. El investigador proporcionará con anticipación preguntas generales que serán discutidas en la segunda entrevistas.
   1.2) Preguntas más profundas acerca de las experiencias como mujeres Colombianas inmigrantes adultas en los EE.UU.
   1.3) Yo tendré la oportunidad de discutir con el investigador acerca de los significados de las experiencias compartidas en las entrevistas anteriores.

2) Yo autorizo a la investigadora para:
   2.1) Grabar en audio las entrevistas  Si ___  No____
   2.2) Que la entrevistadora pueda tomar notas durante las entrevistas  Si ____  No____

3) Si yo doy permiso para grabar las entrevistas en audio, entiendo que tendré la oportunidad de revisar cada una de las transcripciones de las entrevistas para estar segura de su precisión y exactitud. Si yo doy permiso tomar notas durante las entrevistas, tendré la oportunidad de revisarlas para garantizar su precisión y exactitud.

4) Yo entiendo que seré contactada por la investigadora a través de correo electrónico y/o teléfono y me podrá pedir aclarar puntos, o dar mi opinión sobre algunos temas que surjan durante de la investigación. Esta actividad de seguimiento se estima que tomará aproximadamente una hora.

5) Entiendo que debo estar disponible para una entrevista de seguimiento si es necesario. Esta entrevista tendrá una duración de 30-60 minutos.

Yo entiendo que los datos recogidos en este estudio serán confidenciales y mi identidad no será revelada a nadie que no sea el investigador. No hay información acerca de mí, o proporcionada por mí durante la investigación, que será compartida con otras personas sin mi permiso previo y por escrito. Voy a tener la oportunidad de elegir un seudónimo que se utilizará para fines de la investigación. Todas las cintas de audio, transcripciones y documentos escritos se mantendrán en un archivador bajo llave y sólo el investigador y el Dr. Robert J. Hill, el profesor principal de la investigadora, tendrán acceso a estos materiales. Las cintas de audio serán tratados única y transcrita por el investigador. Los archivos de audio y las transcripciones se mantendrán por tres años para investigaciones futuras en los temas de mujeres adultas inmigrantes colombianos en Estados Unidos.
La investigadora, Mónica Arboleda Giraldo, responderá a las preguntas sobre la investigación, ahora o en el transcurso del proyecto. Usted la puede contactar por teléfono al (404) 322-8699 o por correo electrónico a marboled@uga.edu Dr. Robert Hill también está disponible a responder a sus preguntas en el teléfono 706-542-4016 o correo electrónico bobhill@uga.edu

Al firmar esta carta, acepto la participación en este proyecto de investigación y entiendo que recibiré una copia firmada de esta carta de consentimiento para tenerla en mis archivos.

Mónica Arboleda Giraldo __________________________________________________
Nombre del Investigador       Fecha de Firma
(404) 322-8699 marboled@uga.edu_____________________
Teléfono     E-mail

_______________________________________________________________________
Nombre del participante     Fecha Firma

Por favor, firmar las dos copias, mantenga una y devolver una para la investigadora.

Otras preguntas o problemas acerca de sus derechos como participante en la investigación debe ser dirigida a la Presidenta, Junta de Revisión Institucional de la Universidad de Georgia, 612 Boyd Estudios de Posgrado del Centro de Investigación, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411, teléfono (706) 542 a 3199, E-Correo IRB@uga.edu

Dirección

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM
Spanish Version

Por favor, responda a las siguientes preguntas de acuerdo a sus conocimientos. Si tiene alguna duda o pregunta por favor no dude en realizarla a la investigadora.

La información demográfica solicitada a continuación es para todos los participantes del estudio de investigación titulado "El papel del aprendizaje en la construcción de significado durante las experiencias de integración social de mujeres inmigrantes adultas colombianas en Georgia", realizado por Mónica Arboleda Giraldo, del Departamento de Educación para toda la vida, Administración y Política en la Universidad de Georgia (770-542-3343) bajo la dirección del Dr. Robert J. Hill, del Departamento de Educación para toda la vida, Administración y Políticas de la Universidad de Georgia (706-542-4016). Llenar este formulario es voluntario. Usted puede negarse a participar o dejar de participar en el estudio de investigación sin dar ninguna razón, y sin penalización. Usted puede pedir que toda la información identificable acerca de usted se le devuelva, sea eliminada de los registros de la investigación, o destruido.

Nombre____________________________________________

_____________________
____
Seudonimo escogido para la investigacion

Edad (Seleccione uno):
21 – 29  30 – 39  40 – 49  50 – 59  60 +

Estado Civil (check one):
Divorciada  Casada  Separada  Soltera  Viuda

Ciudad y Pais de Origen: ________________________

Que nivel de educación tiene usted? ________________________

Usted se identificaría como perteneciente a la clase social económica baja, media o alta?

Como se identifica usted, en términos de raza? _______________________________

Cuántos años ha estado viviendo en los Estados Unidos? _____________________

Conocimiento del idioma Ingles:
Hablarlo: Bueno  Regular  Poco
Leerlo: Bueno  Regular  Poco
Escucharlo: Bueno  Regular  Poco
Escribirlo: Bueno  Regular  Poco
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and to understand the social integrations experiences, and the learning that occurs for adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States. The questions that guide the study are:

1. How do adult immigrant Colombian women describe and understand their social integration experiences in the United States?
2. What types of learning, if any, take place during the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the United States and does the learning lead to a deeper individual change?

First Interview:

Objective: To reconstruct their early experience in Colombia including the time of leaving the country and arriving in the U.S.

At the beginning of this interview, each participant will fill out a demographic form which is described in Appendix F –English version – and Appendix G –Spanish version.  
1. I would like to explore with you times that held special meaning in your life in Colombia. Please describe several of these that come to mind? Aspects to follow up within during the interview:
   1.1. Please tell me about a time when education in Colombia had special meaning for you.
   1.2. Please tell me about a time when family relations in Colombia had special meaning for you.
   1.3. Please tell me about a time when employment in Colombia had special meaning for you.
   1.4. Please tell me about a time when something especially meaningful was learned by you in Colombia.
   1.5. Please tell me about a time when you felt a sense of belonging to Colombia.

2. Please tell me about any experience that prompted you to decide to migrate to the U.S. Aspects to follow up within during the interview:
   2.1. Please tell me the main reasons why you decided to leave Colombia
   2.2. Please, tell me the main reasons why you selected the United states as your destination after you decided to move
   2.3. What were key beliefs that you had U.S. previous to your arrival regarding culture, language, education, economics, immigration laws, and social issues?
2.4. When you recall your first two years in the U.S., what experiences immediately come to mind? (Aspects to focus: Language, employment, housing, support group and network, and values and customs).

3. What was the difference between your expectations and your experiences? Why were there disconnections between your expectations and your experiences? Detailed examples

**Second Interview:**
Objective: to gather concrete details of the participant’s present lived experiences regarding their social integration experiences in the U.S.

1. I would like to explore with you times that held special meaning in your life since you arrived in the United States. Please describe several of these that come to mind?
1.1. Please tell me about a time when education in the US has had special meaning for you.
1.2. Please tell me about a time when family relations in the US have had special meaning for you.
1.3. Please tell me about a time when employment in US has had special meaning for you (if they have found employment).
1.4. Please tell me about a time when social networking in US has had special meaning for you.
1.5. Please tell me about a time when something especially meaningful was learned by you since you arrived in the US.
1.6. Please tell me about a time when you felt a sense of belonging in the US.

2. How do you feel living in the U.S.?
4. What have been the most difficult aspects of living in the U.S.? Why?
5. At the end of these three first years considering what you learned, what did you do different in the subsequent years?
6. What are the main current challenges that you experience living in the U.S? Explain with some examples
7. How do you feel regarding your integration process in the U.S?
7.1. What institutions and/or individuals have had a great impact on your process? Why? Please give an example.
8. From your experience, what are the most important aspects for immigrants become integrate to US? Why?

**Third Interview:**
Objective: To gather information regarding the processes of making sense of their social integration experiences.
1. What does it mean to you to be living in the U.S.?
2. What does it mean to you to be part of the U.S. society? Examples
3. What does it mean to you to be an adult immigrant Colombian woman and an immigrant Latina in the U.S.? Is there any different between Colombian woman and Latina woman?
4. What means to you be successful in the U.S.? Would you please tell me about a time when you felt successful in the U.S.
5. In previous interviews you discussed some difficulties, (I will prompt them with data I have previously collected). Please describe how you overcame them.
6. Please give to me examples of times when it has been easy living in the U.S.
7. If you were to paint a picture or tell a story of yourself now in the US, what would the picture or story look like? What would you look like in the picture or story?
APPENDIX C
COVER LETTER – English Version

Monica Arboleda Giraldo
marboled@uga.edu
Date
Participant Name
Address
Dear (Participant Name),

It was a pleasure to speak to you today about the dissertation research I am conducting through the University of Georgia. As we discussed, I am interested in understanding the processes of learning and meaning making during social integration experiences of adult Colombian women in Georgia. In preparation for this study I reviewed relevant literature in the fields of adult education, immigrant studies, and adult learning. I found very little information about the role of learning during the social integration experiences of adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States. My study will help expand the knowledge base about the understanding of the processes of learning and making meaning during the social integration experiences of adult immigrant Colombian women in particular, and adult immigrant Latinas in general, in the U.S. Participants in this study are immigrant adult Colombian women – women who were born in Colombia, South America – and have been in the U.S. for a minimum two years and are currently living in Georgia.

Your participation in this study will include three (3) 1-2 hour audiotaped interviews about your social integration experiences in the United States. You will have an opportunity to review the transcript of the interviews and to give me feedback on themes that develop as a result of this research. All information you share with me will be confidential. I am enclosing a formal Participant Consent Form which is required by the University of Georgia’s Institutional Review Board. The form gives a more thorough description of what the research study entails. If you decide to participate, I will need you to sign this document.

It is my goal to complete this study by April 2013. I will call you within the next 10 days to follow up. In the meantime, if you need to reach me please call (404) 322-8699. This research study is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Robert J. Hill, a professor in the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy; he can be reached at (706) 542-4016.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

Sincerely,
Monica Arboleda Giraldo, M.Ed.
APPENDIX D
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, _________________________________, voluntary agree to participate in a research study titled "UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESSES OF LEARNING AND MAKING MEANING DURING THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANT ADULT COLOMBIAN WOMEN IN GEORGIA" conducted by Monica Arboleda Giraldo from the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy at the University of Georgia (770-542-3343) under the direction of Dr. Robert J. Hill, Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy, The University of Georgia (706-542-4016). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the identifiable information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to understand the processes of learning and making meaning during the social integration experiences of adult immigrant Colombian women in Georgia. 8-15 immigrant adult Colombian women – women who were born in Colombia, South America – and have been in the U.S. a minimum of two years and are currently living in Georgia will participate in this study. Specifically, the study will examine:

1. What are the social integration experiences of immigrant adult Colombian women in the U.S.?
2. How do immigrant adult Colombian women in Georgia make meaning of their social integration experiences?

I will not benefit directly from this research. However, my participation will contribute to the body of knowledge about adult immigrant Latinas as learners, adult development, and experiential learning regarding processes of making meaning in social integration experiences. I will also have an opportunity to share my perceptions and insights on this topic. No more than minimal foreseeable risks are expected as a result of this study. Minimal discomforts are anticipated during the interviews due to recall possible stressful situations from the past. In order to reduce possible discomforts, I have the right to skip any question that I am uncomfortable responding to.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1. Participate in three (3) interviews about my experiences of living in Georgia which will last 1-2 hour(s) each one. The topics of the three (3) interviews will be:
   1.1. Introduction to study, demographic data gathering, general questions about experiences. The researcher will provide the general questions for the second interview.
   1.2. Deeper questions regarding experiences as adult immigrant in the U.S.
   1.3. I will have the opportunity to discuss with the researcher about meanings of experiences shared in previous interviews.
2. I grant permission for:

2.1. The interview being audio recorded: Yes ____ No _____
2.2. The interviewer be able to take notes during the interview: Yes ____ No _____

3. If I grant permission for the interview to be audio recorded, I understand I will have an opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy and completeness. If I give consent for notes to be taken, I will have the opportunity to view and to discuss the notes with the researcher.

4. I will also be contacted by the researcher via email and/or telephone and asked to clarify points or provide input on themes that arise from the research. This follow-up activity is estimated to take approximately one hour.

5. Be available for a follow-up interview(s) if needed. These interviews will last 30-60 minutes.

I understand that the data collected in this study will be kept confidential and my identity will not be revealed to anyone other than the researcher. No information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my prior written permission. I will have an opportunity to choose a pseudonym to be used for research purposes. All audiotapes, transcripts, and written documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet and only the researcher and Dr. Robert J. Hill, the major professor of the researcher, will have access to these materials. The audiotapes will be handled and transcribed only by the researcher. The audio files and transcripts will be kept for 3 years to use for future research on the subject of adult immigrant Colombian women in the United States.

The researcher, Monica Arboleda Giraldo, will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by phone at (404) 322-8699 or via email at marboled@uga.edu Dr. Robert J. Hill also can be contact at 706-542-4016 or via email at bobhill@uga.edu

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.
Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

*Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu*
APPENDIX E
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

Please, answer the following questions as best as you can. If any of the questions in not clear, please feel free to ask the researcher clarification.

The demographic information below is being requested of all participants in the research study titled “The role of learning in making meaning during social integration of Immigrant Adult Colombian Women in the U.S” conducted by Monica Arboleda Giraldo from the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy at the University of Georgia (770-542-3343) under the direction of Dr. Robert J. Hill, Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy, The University of Georgia (706-542-4016). Your completion of this form is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or stop taking part in the research study without giving any reason, and without penalty. You can ask to have all of the identifiable information about you returned to you, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

Name
________________________________________________________________________

Pseudonym given for the research  ____________________________________________

Age Range (check one):
21 – 29  30 – 39  40 – 49  50 – 59  60 +

Marital Status (check one):
Divorced  Married  Separated  Single  Widowed

Country and City of Origin ________________

What is your level of education? _____________________________________________

Would you describe yourself economically as lower, middle, or upper class?________

How do you identify yourself in terms of race? __________________________________

How many years have you been living in the U.S.? ______________________________

English Language Proficiency:
Speaking:  Good  Fair  None
Reading:   Good  Fair  None
Listing:   Good  Fair  None
Writing:   Good  Fair  None