"AGUANTAMOS PORQUE NO NOS QUEDA DE OTRA" (WE HOLD UP BECAUSE WE HAVE NO OTHER OPTION): EVERYDAY RESISTANCE IN THE LIVES OF LATINA IMMIGRANT U.S. HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY WORKERS

by

Alonso Rafael Reyna Rivarola

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Approved:

Dr. Julie Stewart / Supervisor, Department of Sociology

Dr. Dolores Delgado Bernal / Supervisor, Department of Education Culture and Society

Dr. Kim Korinek / Chair, Department of Sociology

Dr. Heather Melton / Honors Advisor, Department of Sociology

Dr. Sylvia D. Torti / Dean, Honors College

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ABSTRACT

Latina immigrant workers in the United States are often rendered invisible by mainstream society. These women, especially when fulfilling service occupations, such as hotel housekeeping jobs, are expected to work in silence and in deference to those in “higher” positions of power (e.g. supervisors and customers) (Romero 1992; Villenas 2006). What many fail to recognize is that Latina immigrant hospitality workers are a resilient population, enduring mundane, repetitive and dangerous labor that has been deemed “low-skill” by the capitalist industrial complex and a patriarchal society (Romero 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007). In this study I present the testimonio of Sofia, a Latina immigrant worker who has worked for some time as a housekeeper in the hotel industry. My analysis explores some of the ways in which Sofia resists and survives social oppression in the United States hospitality industry. In her testimonio, Sofia speaks to the creation of spaces of oppositional culture (Mitchell & Feagin 1995) in what Erving Goffman (1959) theorized as the “backstage” of social establishments. Utilizing a Chicana/Latina feminist theoretical lens and analytical tools, particularly humor casero mujerista (womanist humor of the home) (Carrillo 2006) and pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal 2006) I examine how some Latina immigrant workers, like Sofia, create spaces of oppositional culture in the U.S. hospitality industry to resist and survive oppression. Sofia pays significant attention to her mother’s informal teachings and pedagogies of the home, and it is these “seeds of resistance” that Sofia will transplant to the United States to fashion her own forms of everyday resistance within the U.S. hospitality industry.
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INTRODUCTION

Also, I always remember and will always remember, because we didn’t have money my mom would fry tortillas, beans and spread the beans [on the tortillas] with a little bit of salsa she would make from a small tomato she could find. And I’m still very curious—or I don’t understand how my mother with one tomato would make sauce, or salsa, for all of us. She would make it last. How did my mother make one tomato last for everyone?)

Like many Latina immigrants in the United States, Sofia1 reflects upon her mother’s teachings and life experiences with reverence and awe. Sofia’s mother’s wisdom has played a critical role in Sofia’s emotional and economic survival in the United States. Time and time again, Sofia turns to her mother’s informal teachings—or teachings that occur thru behavior—to resist and survive the social oppression she faces as a Latina immigrant working in the United States hospitality industry. In this study I present Sofía’s testimonio, which she kindly shared with me via a series of interviews I conducted with her over the course of a year. Sofía’s testimonio explores her experiences as a Latina immigrant worker in the U.S. hospitality industry, and additionally highlights her experiences with her mother and resistance on both sides of the US-Mexican border. Sofía’s testimonio sheds light on the ways some Latina immigrant workers, like Sofía, create spaces of resistance in the United States and draw from teachings of the home to resist and survive oppression in the United States hospitality industry.

1 All study respondent names were changed to protect the identity of the participants.
The findings of this study expand on Erving Goffman’s (1959) theory of dramaturgy—viewing social interaction as a type or form of performance—by complicating his view of “backstage” behavior and “impression management.” Sofia’s testimonio suggests a theoretical evaluation and reconceptualization of the backstage of the U.S. hospitality industry. Through Sofia’s testimonio and ethnographic observation of the break room, I argue that marginalized groups in social establishments, in this very case Latina immigrant workers, do not necessarily “prepare for social interaction,” but rather create a space of oppositional culture, or culture of resistance (Mitchel and Feagin 1995) within the social establishment to resist oppression and exploitative working conditions. Furthermore, I utilize Chicana/Latina feminist theories to discuss what happens in these backstage spaces, and contrast it with the works of Rosario Carrillo’s (2006) in humor casero mujerista (womanist humor of the home) and Dolores Delgado Bernal’s pedagogies of the home.

Lastly but equally important, throughout different sections of this study I weave in Sofia’s testimonio to emphasize her experience, as the experiences of one Latina immigrant worker in the U.S. hospitality industry. Although her testimonio is not representative of all Latina immigrant U.S. hospitality workers, Sofia’s testimonio is a narrative that is resonant with the lives of many Latina immigrants I have had the privilege to meet yet was unable to include in this research. Moreover, Sofia’s testimonio resonates with the literature that demonstrates how Latina immigrant U.S. hospitality workers are part of a resilient population, which continues to endure disproportionate rates of mundane, repetitive, and dangerous labor in the United States (Eggerth et al. 2012). As part of this U.S. worker population, Sofia reflects on her work conditions and
focuses on the ways in which she engages in everyday forms of resistance. With the help of Sofía’s insights, I introduce a new analytical framework in this paper, “seeds of resistance,” as a way of conceptualizing the ways in which some Latina immigrant workers informally and formally learn to resist and survive oppression by drawing on their mothers’ teachings. In Sofía’s case, her mother’s teachings help her to fashion her own forms of everyday resistance within a racially stratified and patriarchal working environment in the U.S. hospitality industry (Romero 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Gurrier and Adib 2000).

WORKING OPPRESSION: LATINA IMMIGRANTS IN THE U.S. LABOR MARKET

A los ocho días de llegar [a los Estados Unidos] comencé a trabajar [en housekeeping]. Cuando me dieron jabones [químicos] y un carrito para trabajar, se me hizo poco difícil... a veces resulta asqueroso lavar un toilet. Encima nos daban un papelito con 16 a 17 cuartos para limpiar. Y teníamos la preocupación y el tiempo encima—cuidándonos de las supervisoras que revisaban los cuartos y el tiempo por miedo de no terminar [de limpiar los cuartos]. El estrés de que “no voy a terminar,” o que si “va a revisar la supervisora,” que si “¿deje esto bien? ¿Y que si deje esto mal?” Y siempre con el miedo. El miedo que si no lo hago [el trabajo] bien me van a correr, ¿y qué voy hacer? (Sofía)

(Eight days after arriving [to the United States] I began working [in housekeeping]. When they gave me soaps [chemicals] and a pushcart to work, it was somewhat difficult for me... sometimes it’s gross cleaning a toilet. They would give us a sheet of paper with 16 to 17 guestrooms to clean. And we were under pressure and working against the clock—always watching out for the supervisors who would check the guestrooms, and [watching for] time fearing we would not finish [cleaning the guestrooms]. The stress of “I’m not going to finish,” or “the supervisor is going to check,” or “did I leave this thing clean? Or did I forget to clean that?” Fearful always. Fear that if I did do it [my work] well they will fire me, and what would I do then?)

Sociologists have for some time studied the oppressive working conditions Latina immigrants face in the U.S. labor market. These studies have particularly focused on the domestic and garment industries, highlighting the complex day-to-day lives of Latina immigrants workers different sectors of the U.S. economy (see: Romero 1992;

María Soldatenko (1999) conducted a study of the U.S. garment industry and its oppressive working conditions which included the lived experiences of Latina workers to highlight racial and gendered inequities in the workplace. Soldatenko exposed the labor conditions these women were subject to and compared them to “Third world working conditions.” Soldatenko argued that their treatment in the workplace was not only a consequence of being women of color, but also immigrant workers. Mary Romero (1992) captured the complex gendered and racialized history of the U.S. domestic service industry in her book *Maid in the U.S.A.* Romero was one of the first Latina scholars in sociology to bring forward her personal experiences as the daughter of a domestic service worker and a temporary domestic service laborer herself. In this way, Romero framed an analysis bridging her lived experience and the academy (Delgado Bernal et al. 2009).

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila (1997) expanded on the literature about Latina immigrant workers, focusing on the experiences of Latina immigrant mothers working in the U.S. domestic service industry. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila framed their analysis around transnational mothering, arguing that transnational mothering is a direct outcome of an imperialist and capitalist industrial complex, which essentially forces women to migrate to the United States for economic survival, particularly women of color from Mexico and Central America. Their study further complicated what had been written about the lives of these women not only as workers, but also as complex human beings. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) continued her work on the experiences of Latina immigrant workers by exploring the lives of various
women in *Doméstica: Immigrant workers cleaning and caring in the shadows of affluence*. Hondagneu-Sotelo sought the lived experiences of Latina immigrant workers both inside and beyond the boundaries of their occupation (2001/2007).

Even more relevant to the present study, is scholarship on Latina immigrant workers within the U.S. hospitality industry, an oppressive enterprise hidden behind a mask of luxuries and amenities. As Sofia relates in her *testimonio*, the hospitality industry instills “miedo” (fear) in its workers to maintain control and a hierarchical leadership structure between supervisors, customers, and employees. Michel Foucault (1977) would argue the hospitality industry engages in “carceral” or surveillance practices to create top-down discipline and control among the industry employees. Housekeepers alongside laundresses, “housemen,” kitchen staff, waiters and waitresses, bussers, and banquet servers are among the most affected by the inequities of the hospitality industry. In particular, hotel housekeepers are considered to be at the bottom of the “occupational hierarchy” of the hospitality industry because they perform labor that has historically been gendered and racialized by the capitalist industrial complex and a patriarchal society (de Volo 2013; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001/2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Eggerth et al. 2012). Feminist sociologists and scholars additionally maintain that similar to domestic service occupations (i.e. maids, babysitters, and live-in “domestics”), hotel housekeeping labor is considered “women’s work” and “low-skill,” which consequently leads to exploitative working conditions at low pay rates for hotel housekeeping workers in the United States (Romero 1992; Dill 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Gurrier and Adib 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Eggerth et al. 2012; de Volo 2013).
Current research on the U.S. hospitality industry suggests Latina immigrant workers are increasingly becoming affected by the inequalities of the workplace. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007) argues that the influx of Latina/o immigration in the United States has a parallel impact on Latina immigrant workers entering the hospitality industry (also see Eggerth et al. 2012). The disproportionate increase of this population in the U.S. hospitality industry is especially noticeable in fast-growing urban cities like Salt Lake City, Utah. In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau determined that although only 3.5% of the entire working population in Salt Lake was Latina (women), 40.2% constituted the “maid and housekeeping cleaning” workforce. The overrepresentation of Latina workers in the U.S. hospitality industry suggests multiple levels of ongoing social stratification, including racial, class, gender, and immigration status discrimination (Johnson 1998; Gannagé 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001/2007).

A clear example of the stratification these women face in the hospitality industry is reflected in the disproportionate number of Latina immigrant workers that are injured annually in the workplace. Medical and career development research suggests that Latina immigrants today are disproportionately affected by work-related injuries and mortalities in comparison to their U.S.-born Latina and “non-Latina” counterparts (Eggerth et al. 2012; Dong and Platner 2004; also see: Loh and Richardson 2004; Richardson, Ruser and Suarez 2003). The significantly higher rates of work-related injuries and mortalities Latina immigrant workers experience are understood to “arise from [Latina] immigrants having fewer employment alternatives, thereby needing to accept poorer working conditions and more dangerous jobs,” such as housekeeping labor in the United States (Eggerth et al. 2012:14; Orrenius and Zavodny 2009).
The scholarship produced by Chicana/Latina sociologists like Mary Romero, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Ernestine Avila, and María Soldatenko prompted me to think differently about the experiences of Latina immigrant workers in the U.S. hospitality industry. In what follows, I present the theoretical frameworks that I consider best suited to contextualize the interactions Latina immigrant workers face in the U.S. hospitality industry, as well as the theoretical frameworks best useful to interpreting and understanding the insights Sofia shared with me in her testimonio.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS: LATINAS AT THE CENTER

A hegemonic observation of Latinas immigrant labor in the U.S. hospitality industry would insist that Latina immigrants experience labor oppression with little or virtually no critique of social oppression. However, Latina immigrant workers do not experience subjugation and labor inequality in silence. Many fail to be aware or recognize that parallel realities exist within social establishments. This is due to socially constructed norms and expectations of labor, and physical divisions that exist within the patriarchal capitalist industrial complex. Such is the case with the U.S. hospitality industry (Goffman 1995; Romero 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007). It is obvious that dominant realities of social establishments, especially of profit-centered enterprises, are centered on and for costumers, not workers. However, a parallel reality exists inside social establishments like the U.S. hospitality industry.

In this section of the study I utilize three separate theoretical frameworks to help frame an understanding of how Latina immigrant U.S. hospitality workers engage and survive social oppression and exploitative working conditions in the U.S. hospitality industry. Erving Goffman’s (1959) theory of dramaturgy would suggest that the U.S.
hospitality industry could be viewed through a dramaturgical lens, that is, the workplace would become a stage in which Latina immigrant workers are actors engaging in distinct “front stage” and “backstage” interactions. In addition, Goffman introduces us to “impression management” which is a tool by which actors influence their audiences—in this case, impression management conducted by supervisors in the hospitality industry is subverted by Latina immigrant housekeeping staff. Bonnie Mitchell and Joe Feagin’s (1995) theory of oppositional culture would suggest that that marginalized groups create counter hegemonic spaces of oppositional culture within the hotel industry to resist and survive domination and oppression. Finally, Chicana/Latina feminist theory, particularly Rosario Carrillo’s (2006) *humor casero mujerista* (womanist humor of the home) and Dolores Delgado Bernal’s (2006) pedagogies of the home, are analytical tools that speak to some of the ways in which Sofia, the informant in the study, learned and utilized forms of resistance to survive oppression in the U.S. hospitality industry.

**Dramaturgy: Labor as Performance**

In 1959, sociologist Erving Goffman argued that social interactions ought to be seen as performances and analyzed through the lens of a dramatic stage play—or what he called, dramaturgy (1959: 341). Goffman maintained that, “[W]ithin the walls of a social establishment we find a team of performers who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation” (1959: 341). Goffman’s dramaturgical lens allows us to conceptualize and analyze social interactions as if they were a performance with at least three key components: one or more performer(s), an audience, and a stage. Moreover, Goffman argued that since social interaction is like a performance, so naturally there exists a “front stage” and “backstage” in social establishments. He maintained the
backstage is the location where actors and actresses prepare themselves for their performance, and the front stage is where the performance is given (Goffman 1959; Farganis 2008:332). Finally, Goffman held that actors within social establishments use a tool called “impression management” to literally “manage” the presentation of the self in any given social milieu. Impression management for Goffman implies influencing the perception of given audiences by framing information as needed. As a social establishment, the U.S. hospitality industry is no exception to Goffman’s dramaturgical view of social interaction.

Following in the tradition of Goffman’s dramaturgical understandings of social interaction, I conceptualize the U.S. hospitality and its labor as a dramatic stage-play. Through this lens we can see Latina immigrant hotel housekeeping workers as the performers of labor (or labor performers); the hotel guests as the audience, and last but not least, the public spaces where all the components of the dramatic stage-play meet (i.e. lobby, halls, rooms, swimming pools, guest bathrooms, etc.) as the stage. However, while Goffman (1959) suggested impression management as a tool performers use to influence audiences, my work complicates this notion particularly with regard to issues of inequity and privilege. In the U.S. hospitality industry, the labor performers are controlled by hotel managers and supervisors. It is these actors who compel performances from Latina immigrant hotel housekeeping staff on the stage of hotel hospitality. In this sense “impression management” is about an exploitative group maintaining order and controlling the behavior of an oppressed group within the U.S. hospitality industry. Goffman argued that workers—or those performing labor—are supervised by managerial staff to preserve “assumptions concerning the ethos that is to be maintained by rules of
politeness and decorum” (1959 as quoted in Farganis 2008:341). This idea of dramaturgy and “impression management” then reinforces what hotel guests as the audience expect to see and how most interact with Latina immigrant hotel housekeeping workers.

Moreover, Goffman (1959) explored the way in which in dramaturgy the backstage becomes a location for performers to prepare for social interactions. He argued, “we often find a division [between the front region, and] back region, [the latter] where the performance of a routine is prepared” (Goffman 1959 as quoted in Farganis 2008:341). Unfortunately, Goffman only offered one mode of viewing and explaining the backstage of social establishments, for example the backstage in the U.S. hospitality industry. In what I am about to present, I complicate Goffman’s theoretical interpretation of the backstage by suggesting an alternative view. That is, I suggest that in the backstage of social establishments, performers of labor—in this case Latina immigrant workers—create a space of resistance and oppositional culture in their time backstage, a space for _desahogarse_ (relieve stress, anxiety and worries) (Mitchell and Feagin 1995).

**Oppositional Culture: Creating Spaces of Resistance**

Sociologists Bonnie Mitchell and Joe Feagin (1995) argue that when underrepresented groups are marginalized they will turn to their own culture to resist and survive oppression (Martínez, 2005). Mitchel and Feagin assert that oppressed groups of people will create spaces of “oppositional culture,” or “culture of resistance,” to validate “a coherent set of values, beliefs, and practices which mitigates the effects of oppression and reaffirms that which is distinct from the majority...” (Mitchell and Feagin 1995:68 as quoted in Martínez 2005:541). Whether marginalized communities consciously or unconsciously create and engage in these spaces of oppositional culture, people of color
in the United States have for centuries resisted and survived oppression by creating and engaging in these spaces of oppositional culture, or culture of resistance (Mitchell and Feagin 1995; Martínez 2005). A prime example of oppositional culture, or culture of resistance, is art and music and the significance of how these transform space (Martínez 2005; Mitchell and Feagin 1995; see also Collins 1991:10 and Collins 2000). For example in 2000 Patricia Hill Collins contended, “Black rap music can be seen as a creative response to racism by Black urban youth who have been written off by U.S. Society” (Collins: 85; see also Rose 1994; Kelley 1997:43-77).

Additionally, Mitchell and Feagin (1995) argue that subjugated groups of people subscribe to a vast range of oppositional culture (Martínez 2005). In her article, “Making Oppositional Culture, Making Standpoint: A Journey into Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands,” Theresa A. Martínez (2005) explains that the engagement and creation can range from “… the creation and expansion of kinship networks that survive in the face of harsh economic realities, to the organization of civil rights movements” (Martínez 2005: 541; see also Mitchell and Feagin 1995). As Martínez argues, the “creation and expansion of kinship networks” is significant to the forms of resistance and modes of survival subjugated communities create and engage in to resist and survive oppression in marginalizing spaces and situations (Martínez 2005:541; Mitchell and Feagin 1995).

Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory: Chicanas/Latinas at the Center

Chicana/Latina feminist theory draws from a tradition of *feminist, mujerista* (Latina womanist), Chicana, Xicana and Mexicana theoretical understandings that create a critical framework for examining the realities Chicanas and Latinas experience (see: Castillo 1994; Fregoso 2003; Hurtado 1998; Pérez 1999; Sandoval 2000). Chicana/Latina
feminist theory pivots the center of analysis to the lives of *mujeres*, to highlight “Latina ways of knowing” (Carrillo 2006), but also to create what some have theorized as a Chicana/Latina feminist standpoint (Martinez 2005; also see: Collins 2000; Flores Carmona 2010). Chicana/Latina ways of knowing and a Chicana/Latina feminist standpoint also provides us analytical tools, which become particularly useful when examining the lives of Latina workers in the U.S. hospitality industry. For example, Sofia Villenas, Francisca Godinez, Dolores Delgado Bernal and Alejandra Elenes (2006) share insights on this theoretical lens.

...[As Chicana/Latina scholars,] We are concerned with how the knowledge and worldviews emerging from Chicana/Latinas’ unique experiences of oppression and survival from a theory, method, and praxis for building solidarities across diverse peoples in order to transform our world for the better (see Sandoval, 2000). (p. 1)

Chicana/Latina feminist theory provides us on one hand with analytical tools to examine the conditions of struggle, resistance and survival of Latinas and Chicanas in the world. On the other hand, it provides us with a unique framework to create bridges between Chicana/Latina communities and the academy (Delgado Bernal, et al. 2012). In what follows I outline *humor casero mujerista* (womanist humor of the home) (Carrillo 2006) and pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal 2006) as useful Chicana/Latina feminist theory analytical tools to examine Sofia’s *testimonio* of resistance and survival in the U.S. hospitality industry.

**Humor Casero Mujerista (womanist humor of the home)**

Rosario Carrillo (2006) utilizes humor as a lens to explore resistance and the Latina engagement with resistance, particularly within the context of the Untied States. Carrillo draws from Latina/o and Mexicana/o popular culture of humor to explore the everyday ways in which Latinas utilize humor to cope with and resist oppression. She
observes a collective of women in Detroit and organizers of UVA, a unión de viejitas arguenteras (collective of wise women), to explore humor as a tool for resistance (Carrillo, 2006). Carrillo relates the various ways in which the women at UVA utilize everyday humor regardless of their socially-disadvantages; she sustains humor casero mujerista acknowledges and refashions “the existing social order that oppresses [Latinas] among race, class, and gender lines” (2006: 181). Carrillo argues that humor casero mujerista is found in everyday life and it is manifested through forms of burla (ridicule), designated titles (nicknames), (re)articulation of self, and humor negro (black humor). What is highly significant about humor casero is that they reveal “exemplary counter, educative ways of knowing, behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and reading (Gee, 1996) that can transgress inequitable social relations” (Carillo 2006: 193).

Pedagogies of the Home

Dolores Delgado Bernal (2006) maintains that Latina mothers teach their children “family and community knowledge” through informal methods such as “legends, corridos, storytelling and behavior” (2006: 114, my own emphasis underlined). These methods of teaching and learning are significant and entrenched in cultural ways of knowing passed down from mothers to daughters through what Delgado Bernal calls pedagogies of the home. The concept of pedagogies of the home emerges from what critical feminista scholars have called, “Chicana feminist pedagogies” (Elenes, Delgado Bernal, González, Trinidad and Villenas 2000). These forms of Chicana feminist pedagogies refer to “culturally specific” ways of knowing, teaching and learning that occur in informal settings, such as the home (Delgado Bernal 2006: 114). Pedagogies of
the home bring vast significance to the issues of resistance and survival for Latina immigrants in the United States. This form of learning, which occurs in the home, does not only teach Latina immigrant workers cultural forms of validation, but also carries tools that can be drawn and utilized to resist and survive social oppression.

Dramaturgy (Goffman 1959), oppositional culture (Mitchell and Feagin 1995), and Chicana/Latina feminist theory, provide us with a basic understanding of some of the ways in which sociologists and critical scholars of color have theorized about (a) social interaction, (b) resistance of communities of color, and (c) Chicana/Latina everyday forms of resistance. I will utilize each of the theories and analytical frameworks presented as tools for discussing Sofia’s testamento.

WHERE I ENTER: PLACE, PEOPLE, POSITION, AND METHODS

... [Theory in the flesh] is a tool that allows us to theorize from our intersectionalities or, the “physical realities” we inhabit, our experiential knowledge construction that is created from a need to challenge and inscribe ourselves into dominant discourses (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). (Pérez Huber and Cueva 2012)

Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) argued that our physical realities and experiential knowledge(s) are as valid as objectivity in research. Moraga and Anzaldúa’s understandings of social research and the world have been critical in impacting the various ways many scholars of color, particularly women scholars of color think about research (Pérez Huber and Cueva 2012). Following in the tradition of theory in the flesh, in this section I present a methodology of physical realities and experiential knowledge. I start by providing (a) an explanation of why I entered this research and my positionality within the research, I continue by introducing (b) testamento as a methodological tool for exploring the experiences of Latina immigrant U.S. hospitality workers, and I finally
present (c) the research design, data collection and data analysis processes employed in this study.

**Negotiating Entry/Positionality**

The personal and the academic are deeply entrenched in my life. Consequently, I deliberately chose to be explicit about my position within my research. My interest in exploring the ways Latina immigrant U.S. hospitality workers resist and survive oppression in the U.S. hospitality industry originated with my mother. When my mother came to Salt Lake City, Utah in the 2000s, she began working at a hotel to provide for my brother and me. Today, 12 years later, she continues to work at the hotel to support us.

Gloría Anzaldúa argued that we are walking contradictions and that research for people of color is sometimes "messy" (Anzaldúa 1987). My research is nothing short of messy—witness the irony that in this study I am critiquing a system that has fed my family and myself for the last decade. At the same time, I feel it is profoundly important and absolutely necessary to expose the exploitative nature of a workplace common to my mother, my brother, Sofia, and myself.

Five years ago I started working at the hotel. There, I met Sofia, with whom I have worked in close proximity until February 2013. Over the course of five years, Sofia and I bonded through everyday *pláticas* (casual conversations) and working closely together. We built a genuine friendship. To me this was crucial and establishing *confianza* (trust) became very important at the time I conducted interviews, when Sofia shared her experiences with me. Throughout this research project I have also remained conscious of my position in the study. I am constantly checking my male privilege, along with other forms of privilege such as my position as a university student and a Latino
immigrant who currently benefits from having legal status in the United States. Furthermore, this research holds deep importance to me, because most weekends during the last five years I have worked with Sofia and 16 other Latina/o co-workers who have influenced my life in very unique ways.

**Testimonios**

In this study I employ the use of *testimonio* in to unveil the silences of Sofia’s experiences in the U.S. hospitality industry. *Testimonios* are narratives of political urgency, often told by the “subaltern,” or marginalized (Beverly 2005). To me, the political urgency of this study is not only to expose the complex physical realities and lived experiences of Latina immigrant U.S. hospitality workers, but also to provide a space in academia for the voice of at least one Latina immigrant U.S. hospitality worker to be heard.

*Testimonios* are often utilized to reveal silences, *el misterio* (the mystery) of the lives of those who experience of oppression (Flores Carmona 2010). *Testimonios* are written narratives that have a long tradition in Latin America (Beverly 2005), and are particularly useful in narrating the experiences of marginalized populations, like Latina immigrant workers, because they “document experiences of struggle, survival, and resistance within the context of oppressive institutional structures and interpersonal events” (Pérez Huber and Cueva 2012; see also Benmayor 1988, 2008; Cruz 2006; Delgado Bernal et al. 2009; Delgado Bernal et al. 2012; Flores Carmona 2010; Latina Feminist Group 2001). Scholars of color, particularly women of color scholars, utilize *testimonio* to document these experiences from an explicitly feminist standpoint (Collins 1991; Pérez Huber and Cueva 2012).
Although I don’t seek to generalize Sofia’s *testimonio* as the experience(s) of all Latina immigrant workers laboring in the U.S hospitality industry, I do want to emphasize that Sofia’s *testimonio* is resonant with the lives of many Latina women working in the U.S. hospitality industry, especially her co-workers, whom I also had the privilege of knowing, however, did not have the opportunity to include in this study.

I will disclose that in the analysis section of the study I have chosen to keep some of the insights Sofia shared with me secret. Because I hold Sofia and her co-workers dearly, I feel that publicly disclosing detailed descriptions of all the interactions that occur in the backstage of the U.S. hospitality industry could be of risk to Sofia and her co-workers.

**Data Gathering and Analysis**

I collected Sofia’s *testimonio* over a series of three interviews. All the interviews were conducted in Spanish, our native language. I first interviewed Sofia for a pilot study in November 2012. Following the study, I refocused my research question after analyzing Sofia’s interview and finding outstanding patterns of resistance, resilience, family (i.e. her mother), and joy. This was a critical moment for me, because I soon learned that what was truly significant to Sofia was not the oppression she faced, but rather the happiness she experiences, or her resistance. After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval initially in 2012 for the pilot study and exemption from further review in March 2013, I interviewed Sofia twice more to finalize her *testimonio*. After each interview, I transcribed everything Sofia shared with me in Spanish. Then, I would piece together and edit her *testimonios* in Spanish, which I would later translate into English for content. As it is customary with *testimonios* and critical oral histories, I would check with Sofia at the
beginning of each subsequent interview to make sure her *testimonio* accurately reflected her experiences (Benmayor 2012). After the check-ins with Sofía, I created overarching themes for the interviews. These themes divided into two areas I had not foreseen. In what follows, I will present Sofía’s *testimonio*, introduce “seeds of resistance” and “the break room.”

**SOFÍA: TELLING TO LIVE**

_Nunca olvidaré la decisión que tomo mi papá esa tarde de 1993. “Ya no va ir a la escuela; no la mandes,” le dijo mi papá a mi mamá. “Cómo no la voy a mandar si ya le compro los útiles, los zapatos,” replicó mi mamá, “ya tiene todo.” “No, ya no va ir,” repitió mi papá, “porque las mujeres no sirven para estudiar, nomás sirven para casarse y tener hijos.”_

_Yo sabía que la discusión se trataba de mí, pero no dije nada. No repelé. La decisión fue tomada entre mis padres y la seguipaso a paso como me enseñaron: a respetar sus decisiones sin cuestionarlas._

_Naci en Magdalena, Puebla, México en 1982 y viví ahí continuamente hasta los 16 años de edad cuando emigré por primera vez a los Estados Unidos. Solo tenía 10 años de edad cuando mi papá tomo la decisión de que yo ya no regresaría a estudiar a la escuela primaria. Desde entonces, me dediqué a las labores de la casa. Durante seis años ayudé a mi mamá hacer los quehaceres del hogar: ir al molino; limpiar la casa; ayudarle a lavar la ropa; a veces a cocinar—a echar tortillas; limpiar los cuartos de la casa; barrer el patio; y otras cosas del día a día. Admito que era un poco conformista y no me quejaba de la decisión de mi papá. Pero sí me daba vergüenza haber dejado la escuela, especialmente cuando veía a una amiguita de la escuela pasar por la casa. Me avergonzaba mucho verla porque sabía que yo ya no iba a la escuela y ella sí. Recuerdo que para no verla, todos los días después de la hora que mis excompañeras salían de la escuela, me encerraba adentro de la casa para no salir._

_El coraje que tenía mi papá contra la educación de sus hijas mujeres tenía dos raíces: primero que todo, porque en México la vida es diferente. La mentalidad de la gente en mi pueblo es que a los 12 años de edad si uno es un hombrecito se va a trabajar, y si una es mujercita se va a la casa a hacer los quehaceres del hogar. Segundo, y lo que más le dolió a mi papá, fue lo que pasó con mi hermana mayor, Eleida. A los 12 años de edad Eleida no terminó la escuela primaria por la culpa [falta de interés] de los maestros, y por eso mi papá la mandó a estudiar corte y confección. Cuatro años más tarde, Eleida se fue de la casa sin decir nada y se casó con su novio. Eso le dio mucho coraje a mi papá; como era posible que_
Le haya dado a mi hermana mayor un estudio de profesión, y aun así ella se
terminó yendo de la casa para casarse. Fue una perdida para mi padre.

(I will never forget the decision my father made that afternoon of 1993. “She will
not return to school; do not send her,” said my father to my mother. “What do you
mean she is not going to go back to school? I already bought her school supplies;
shoes,” said my mother, “she has everything ready.” “She will not return to
school” my father replied, “Because women are not meant to study, they can only
get married and have children.”

I knew the decision that was being made was about me, but I didn’t say anything.
I didn’t argue. The decision was made between my parents and I followed it step-
by-step the way they had taught me: to respect their decisions without questioning
them.

I was born in Magdalena, Puebla, Mexico in 1982 and lived there continuously
until the age of 16, when I migrated for the first time to the United States. I was
only 10 years old when my dad made the decision I would no longer return to
elementary school. From that moment onward, I dedicated myself to the
responsibilities of the home: going to the mill; cleaning the house; helping wash
clothes; once in a while cook—make tortillas; clean the bedrooms; sweep the
outside patio; and other day-to-day household responsibilities. I admit that I was a
conformist, and dealt with my father’s decision with little complain. However, I
was embarrassed to see a friend from school walk by the house. I would be really
embarrassed because she knew I no longer attended school and she did. I
remember to not see her every day after my schoolmates got out of school I would
lock myself inside the house to not be seen.

My father’s rage against his daughters pursuing education had two motives: first
of all, because in Mexico life is different. The mentality of the people in my town
is that at 12 years of age if one is a young man, he has to go work, and if one is a
young woman, she has to go home to fulfill the responsibilities of the home.
Secondly, what disappointed my father the most was what had happened with my
eldest sister, Eleida. At the age of 12, Eleida did not complete elementary school
because of the [lack of interest of] teachers, and so my father sent her to study
cosmetology. Four years later, Eleida left our house without saying anything and
married her boyfriend. That is what caused my father’s rage; how was it that after
giving my eldest sister professional studies, she still ended up leaving the house to
get married. She was a loss to my father[‘s investment].)

Sofía begins her testimonio by sharing her experiences growing up in a patriarchal
household in Mexico. She relates the gender “normative” roles women and men are
expected to perform when they become of age, “...si uno es un hombrecito se va a
trabajar, y si una es mujercita se va a la casa a hacer los quehaceres del hogar” (…if
one is a young man, he has to go work, and if one is a young woman, she has to go home
to fulfill the responsibilities of the home). At barely the age of ten, Sofia’s education was
cut short due to her father’s dissatisfaction with the school system and the patriarchal
expectations he had for women. Leaving school at such young age brought negative
social consequences for Sofia, as she knew she was no longer receiving a formal
education, which impacted the way she related to her old school friends. However, it was
through the same act of Sofia leaving the physical/formal educational spaces, that she got
the opportunity spend more time with her mother, helping her around the house. Little did
Sofia know the lessons she would learn from her mother would become invaluable to her
and her survival across the border in the United States.

Seeds of Resistance

Patricia Hill Collins (1991) suggests that when we place Black women at the
center of our analysis, a revolutionary standpoint emerges, one grounded in the lived
experience of Black women. My analysis seeks to place Sofia’s voice at the center. In
this regard I found Veronica Perez’s (2010) painting, “Seeds of Resistance,” a key
inspiration in pivoting the center. Perez writes of her work,

“Seeds of Resistance” portrays Yum Kaax, keeper of the corn and cacao. He is planting seeds of
maiz, symbols of love, strength, resistance and knowledge, that sprouts into two strong Zapatistas.
The woman holds in her hands two forms of resistance and change. On our left, a strong spiral of
light and energy represent her actions, her words, her love, and her strength. On our right, the child
represents the continual acquiring and sharing of knowledge. Sharing our traditions and educating
our youth in one of the strongest forms of love and resistance. (Perez 2010)
In like manner, the seeds of resistance Latina mothers carefully plant and tend in their daughters are part of the education that occurs in these informal spaces such as the home (Delgado Bernal 2006). These seeds of resistance are an essential form of oppositional culture to resist and survive oppression when Latina immigrants face systemic inequalities, as in Sofia’s case from crossing geopolitical borders.

I learned early where Sofia’s oppositional consciousness was grounded. In her testimonio she focused on her mother’s informal teachings and it became evident that from her mother’s experiences Sofia draws not only an understanding and critique of patriarchal oppression, but also a sense of economic survival and resistance. In this way, Sofia’s words mark the importance and value of her mother’s teachings in her life.
Pedagogies of the home carry in them the wisdom of resistance. Sofia’s mother’s teachings in the home are not only important because of the sharing of “family and community” knowledge (Delgado Bernal 2006), but also because through these pedagogies of the home her mother carefully planted in Sofia the seeds of resistance she relies on to survive oppression in a patriarchal economic system. As we engage in plática, Sofia shares,

A: ¿Qué es lo que recuerdas más de tu mamá?

S: Lo que más me acuerdo de mi mamá es el sufrimiento de todo lo que pasó. Como momentos felices, pues no tengo muchos grabados, son más los sufrimientos que pasó. El no tener dinero, o el llegar di me papá y darle poco dinero y siempre mi mamá hacerlo rendir. Lo que tengo más grabado de eso, te digo, cuando no teníamos dinero—no teníamos ni para cerillos, ni para comer, y ella no sé, siempre que encontraba una monedita recuerdo que la ponía así en la [las grietas de la] pared. O un cerillito. Ya el día que llegaba que no teníamos ni para comer ni para cerillos mi mamá buscaba siempre en las paredes—siempre, siempre buscando en la pared, encontrado el cerillito, encontrando la monedita. Eso es lo que más recuerdo de ella.

(A: What do you remember most about your mother?

S: What I remember most about my mother is her suffering of all the things she went through. Happy moments, I have don’t have many recorded in my memory; it’s mostly all the suffering of the things she went through. Not having enough money or my dad coming and giving her little money and her always making it last. That is what I mostly remember—I tell you, when we did not have money, we didn’t have money for matches, nor to eat, and I don’t know how she, every time she would find a coin I remember she would hide it in between the cracks of the wall. Or a match. And when the day would come that we didn’t even have money to eat, or for matches, my mom would always search on the walls—always, always searching on the wall, finding the match, or the coin she had tucked away. That is what I mostly remember about her.)

Delgado Bernal (2006) suggests that pedagogies of the home occur via informal methods of teaching, such as behavior and music. These teachings happen spontaneously and also over the course of time. Yet, they are always adopted and adapted by the student in her own manner and are always informed by the pedagogue—in this case Sofia’s mother.
Seeds of resistance are reflected in the actions mothers and women take to defend what is right and to resist what is oppressive. Sofía’s testimonio shares various examples of the actions her mother took on behalf of her family—unstated acts of resistance.

Mi mamá siempre buscaba la manera de darnos de comer [a mis hermanas/os y a mí]. Cuando mi papá se llegaba de viaje, le daba tanto dinero, pero el llegaba a tomar. Y mi mamá—digamos un miércoles, miércoles de plaza—iba y compraba carne, y se supone que era para todos. Pero no. Siempre teníamos que esperar hasta que el [mi papá] llegara [a la casa]. Y si llegaba, pero llegaba con los amigos, y teníamos que darles de comer. ¿Qué hacía mi mamá? Lo que había hecho de comer, hacerlo rendir más para que, para darle de comer a los amigos de mi papá. Y ya a mi papá no le importaba si nosotros habíamos comido o no. Siempre.

(My mom would always find a way to feed us [my brothers, sisters and me]. When my dad would come from a business trip, he would give a set amount of money to my mom. Then he would drink. And my mom—let’s say on a farmers market Wednesday—she would buy meat, for all of us. However, that was not the case. We would always wait until he [my dad] would come home. And he would come, but with his friends and we would have to feed them also. So what did my mom do? What she cooked for that day, she would make it last so she could feed my father’s friends. And my dad would not care if we had eaten, or not. Always.)

While Sofía’s mother was finding active and creative ways of ensuring her and her children’s survival, Sofía was taking mental notes of her mother’s behavior. The lessons became seeds of resistance for Sofía, which she would then use in her own time of need and survival across the border in the United States. For Sofía, facing social and economic oppression while laboring in the U.S. hospitality industry triggered her seeds of resistance to bloom.

The Work Itself

(They are really pressuring the housekeeping employees. They are giving us more rooms each day, and they want everything perfect. But we have all arrived at the same conclusions, “we are working for necessity, who would want to work for fun? No one.” It is a necessity to be here.)

As discussed earlier, Latina immigrant workers struggle with grueling work days and other forms of labor exploitation, caught up in a matrix of domination along several axes including race, gender, class, linguistic and equally significant, immigration status oppression. Sofía’s testimonio reflects just such a matrix of exploitation when she contends that housekeeping, “es trabajo duro” (it is difficult work) and that “a [las mujeres Latinas inmigrantes] a veces nos tienen limpiando entre 18 a 22 cuartos, cuando solo nos deben dar 15” (Sometimes they have us [Latina immigrant women] cleaning between 18 to 22 guestrooms, when we should only be cleaning 15). Moreover, she states that differential employee treatment is usually based on immigration status. Sofía shares,

En el trabajo, hay mucha diferencia entre tener papeles y no tener papeles. Porque hay una muchacha nueva que es Latina me parece, pero tiene papeles, y solo hace seis cuartos para las ocho horas. Lo que hacen los jefes es dividir los cuartos entre todas las demás. Por ejemplo el otro día como dijo, Mónica, “yo sí me encabroné cuando la supervisora me dijo que vaya a hacer dos cuartos y la mandó la nueva a aspirar los pasillos—yo le dije que no era mi culpa que no sepa trabajar.”

(At work, there is a lot of difference between having and not having papers. Because there is a new housekeeper, she’s Latina I believe, but she has papers and she only does six guestrooms working eight hours. What the managers do is divide the rooms between all of us left. For example the other day Mónica said, “I did get pissed when the supervisor told me to go clean two more rooms and she sent the new housekeeper to vacuum the hallways—I told her it was not my fault that she does not know how to work.”)

Because of her immigration status Sofía sometimes feels unable to speak up about the inequalities in the workplace. She and other undocumented Latina immigrant workers fear losing their jobs and not being able to feed their families. Immigration status
oppression is a reality many Latina immigrant U.S. hospitality workers face, even when they have proper documentation in the United States.

*Por ejemplo, Doña Clara tiene papeles, pero igual [los managers] la tratan mal. Creo que es también por que no habla bien inglés y relacionan una cosa con la otra.*

(For example, Doña Clara has papers, but they still treat her bad. I think it is because she does not speak English that well, and they relate the two together.)

Yet another more telling factor also comes into play when the work itself is described. While interviewing Sofía, she related to something a co-worker had said, “*aguantamos porque no nos queda de otra*” (we put up with it because we have no other option). In this regard, Sofía is stating for the record and unequivocally that there are no real options for Latina immigrants to the U.S. Domestic work and hospitality work are the jobs of “choice” for individuals with little to no choice.

Although Sofía faces exploitative working conditions, along with other Latina immigrant workers, she demonstrates an awareness of her own privilege in this regard, recognizing that some do not even have any work at all. Sofía shares,

*Pobrecitas porque venimos a limpiar cuantos cuartos, tan feos que están—tal vez no nos pagan lo suficiente—por ese lado sí, pobrecitas. Pero gracias a Dios tenemos trabajo, tenemos dinero para nuestras cosas, para todo. Como te digo, para no negarles nada a nuestros hijos.*

(Pity us because we come to clean so many rooms, how dirty they are left by guests—and they do not pay us enough to get by—on that aspect, yes, pity us. However, thank God we have a job; we have money for our things, for everything. Like I tell you, we have enough money to not deprive our children of anything they may need.)

Sofía helps us see that labor inequality is in the eye of the beholder. She acknowledges that the inequalities of the work place become obstacles for material access. However, Sofía is willing to surpass and deal with the inequalities of the
workplace to provide for herself and her son. Similarly to her mother, Sofia’s economic survival is no longer about her; it is about her son, Ángel.

The Break Room: A Break in Performance

Applying a dramaturgical lens (1959) to Sofia’s testimonio, I found fascinating glimpses of the “break room” which became any backstage negotiated space where the “performers” take a break from performance within a context of oppression. Moreover, the “break room” implies that behavior outside the “break room” is coerced by spouses as well as hotel supervisors who compel “impression management” of wives and housekeeping staff. We can theorize the “break room” as a space where Latinas whether as wives, mothers, or immigrant hospitality workers—the performers—not only take a break from gender roles or labor, but also a break from “putting on” for spouses, supervisors, or guests. In Sofia’s testimonio, learning how to negotiate the “break room” becomes a space where Latinas coped with the inequalities and oppression they experience in the private and the public spheres of home and workplace. In the “break room,” Latinas have created backstage spaces of oppositional culture related to pedagogies of the home (Mitchell and Feagin 1995; Delgado Bernal 2006) which they use desahogarse (or relieve stress and anxiety) through tools such as humor. Sofia’s testimonio grants us a brief backstage pass to viewing these backstage interactions.

Sofia relates that when her father was absent from the home on business trips, Sofia’s mother would take charge of the space and make it her own. Carceral, or methods of patriarchal surveillance were absent from the daily interactions of the home when Sofia’s father, a very machista (patriarchal) figure, was not present in the space. In the following quote, Sofia describes a direct correspondence between her mother’s position
in the home in relation to her father, and her own position in the hotel in relation to her supervisors. In both cases, the actors' performance is managed by the coercion of someone in a position of power. Sofía recognized that her mother did not appreciate having to snap to obedience—cleaning, cooking, etc.—when her husband was at home, and here she clearly sees it as a one-to-one correspondence with how she feels when her manager is present.

A: Ves tu alguna similitud en como actúas tú en presencia de un manager, o un jefe, y como tu mamá navegaba el hogar cuando tu papá estaba y tú—

S: Si, que es muy—ajá—cuando estaba mi papá era levantarse temprano, echar tortillas, mantener la casa limpia, y siempre mi mamá preocupándose por la comida—en cambio cuando no estaba mi papá era un poco más relajado—"hoy no echamos tortillas." Y nos sentábamos en el patio en la calorcita...

(A: Do you see a similarity between the your way of acting in front of a manager, or your employers, and how your mom navigated the home when your dad was there

S: Yes, that it is very—hum—when my father was there we had to wake up early, make tortillas, maintain the house clean and my mother would always be worrying about food—however, when my father was not present, it was a little more relaxed—"today we are not going to make tortillas." And we would go sit in the patio in the warm weather.)

For Sofía’s mother, then, the absence of her spouse created a backstage or “break room” of sorts where she need not fulfill the gender role performance required by her husband, and her children need not fulfill the role performances required of them. Sofía’s mother was able instead to create a private sphere based on her own “staging” of what “home” could embody for herself and her children. Moreover, home became an oppositional space from that of her husband’s domain—a culture of resistance while the spouse was away. Sofía’s mother no longer felt the yoke of her husband’s patriarchal “impression management” and home rule, nor did her children. Further, Sofía learned
from her mother that such a space was not only possible but much more livable than her father’s patriarchal model for the home. This “seed of resistance” was taken across the border where Sofia would model her mother’s oppositional culture of resistance when she found the need for another more literal “break room.”

In a similar manner Latina immigrant workers, like Sofia, also enliven and enrich the space of their own “break room” within the domain of the hospitality industry where they no longer have to perform for guests or other hotel administration or staff—resisting the “impression management” of those who would compel their behavior. This “break room” space or backstage space is redolent with oppositional culture (Mitchell and Feagin 1995) where new and different roles come into play and the women create their own backstage space of desahogarse (to relieve stress and anxiety) through humor and other forms of behavior. Sofia shares

*En el break room cada quien agarra su grupito de tres o cuatro personas y empieza uno a platicar de todo. Es un desahogo. Es un desahogo por que llegas, te sientas, comes, disfrutas de tu comida, y empiezan a platicar—empiezan a reírse a veces aunque estas en esta mesa, pero la mesa de allá está escuchando y entonces empiezan a reírse todos. Pero como te digo, ahora todas las muchachas están estresadas por [terminar] los cuartos, “ya pasaron 21 minutos, vámonos.” Por el miedo a no terminar. No sé cómo hacen pero los terminan.*

(In the break room, everyone creates their own group of three or four individuals and begins to chat about everything. It’s a relief. It’s a relief because you get there, and you sit down, and you eat and enjoy your food, and begin to chat with everyone—you laugh and although you may be sitting at one table, the folks at the next table are also listening and everyone begins to laugh. But like I say, these days the girls are so stressed for time and trying to finish their rooms, “it’s been 21 minutes, get going!” They only have 21 minutes and they are fearful for their jobs, so much so that they hurry up. I don’t know how they do it, but they get everything done.)

Humor also has a significant place in the backstage space of the “break room”. In the following brief quote, Sofia mentions the critical place of humor which she states is not
only indicative of her own cultural milieu as a Mexicana, but as uncannily revealing—
without humor there would be little recourse in the face of oppression. That is, Sofia
cites humor as a redeeming element in an otherwise bleak climate. In this sense, humor
becomes a wise liberatory act (Carillo 2006: 193).

Algo que tenemos los mexicanos, es por mas mala que sean las cosas le
encontramos un sentido del humor.

(Something about us Mexicanos, no matter how bad it gets, we always find a
sense of humor about it.)

The “break room” plays an extremely important function in the lives of Latina
immigrant hospitality workers, as witnessed by Sofia. Moreover the “break room” is a
carry-over from the lived experiences of their mothers who were creating backstage
passes for the “break room” when their daughters were only small girls. It seems “break
rooms” are essential to survival in any situation of oppression and Goffman heralds this
potential when he discusses the need for a backstage and a break from performance.
Still, Sofia’s testimonio expands on this theoretical notion by recognizing the complexity
of the backstage when it comes to issues of race/class/gender and immigration status
oppression. In this regard, the backstage becomes a negotiated space that leads to the
“break room” and derives from the strength of kinship ties that speak of oppositional
culture and resistance in the face of oppression.

CONCLUSION

Envisioning the U.S. hospitality industry as a stage-play, where performances
occur, helps put into perspective the agency and value of each performer as well as their
backstage performances which become oppositional stances within an oppressive
environment. Sofia, like other Latina immigrant hospitality workers, helped create a
unique backstage space of opposition in the face of race/class/gender and immigration status oppression. This oppositional stance was passed on through informal teachings as seeds of resistance that Sofia received in the home from her mother through day-to-day interactions, sharing, and behavior (Delgado Bernal 2006), which were later reproduced across the border to ensure Sofia’s ongoing economic survival in the United States. Sofia helped create an oppositional culture (Mitchell and Feagin 1995; Martínez 2005) within the backstage of her working environment which allowed sharing and relief from the drudgery of hospitality work—the “break room.”

It is in the “break room” that true beauty is achieved. It is here where the chatting, laughter, and humor provide a glimpse of humanity in an otherwise disheartening environment. The beauty that occurs in the oppositional spaces created by these women is moving and transformative. In these spaces of oppositional culture “family and community knowledge” and the lived experiences of these hard-working mujeres are understood and validated (Mitchell and Feagin 1995; Delgado Bernal 2006; González, Moll, Tenery, Rivera, Redón, González and Amanti 1995; Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992).
REFERENCES


