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**“¿Por qué Migrar? Porque Quise Correr y Volar”:
An Exploration of Women’s Motivations for Mexico-U.S. Migration**

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Abstract

The migration of Mexican women has historically been dependent on male relatives and partners due to multiple socio-economic factors. The creation of gender specific work programs, cultural stigma against migration of single women, and economic disparities created lack of channels for women to migrate in the same way as men. The lack of emphasis on gender within migration theory suggests that women migrate to the will of male partners and relatives, situating family reunification as women's main focus for migration. This thesis is interested in exploring to what degree family reunification is a motivation for women's migration to the United States, what other motivations exist, and how gender influences those motivations. In order to investigate this question, I carried out in-depth interviews with ten migrant women in Portland, Oregon whose migrations spanned the 1970s - 2000s. While the evidence is not significant, the interviews provided insight into the multiple decision-making points for women's migration and offered in depth exploration on the extent family reunification was a motivation for these women. What came out from this rich, albeit limited, data is that *how* women migrate does not reflect reasons *why* women migrate, and the need for distinguishing to be made between family reunification as the initiation of women's migration process and the motivation of women's migration.

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated with love and admiration
to my mother Berenice Jacqueline Marin.

And to all immigrant mothers
that clipped their wings, so that their children could take flight.

Introduction

Mexico-U.S. migration theory has predominantly focused on male migrants. Women are often incorporated in studies and literature through their association with male partners and relatives; for example, literature acknowledges that women can travel independently of husbands, but the focus on women's migration is family reunification¹. Little explanation is given on *why* family reunification is the prominent pattern for women's migration, and the role that gender has on women's migration and decision making. The lack of emphasis of gender and migration suggests that women migrate to the will of male partners and relatives, situating family reunification as women's main motivation of migration². This leaves out other motives that exist, and on a macro-level focus of migration, how gender shapes socioeconomic factors that shape women's decision making and motivations.

Research centering women migrants has shown the complexity of women's decision making, and the impact of intersectionality of identities on all aspects of migration³. This thesis is interested in exploring to what degree family reunification is a motivation for women's migration to the United States, what other motivations exist, and how gender influences those motivations.

¹ Douglas S. Massey and Kristin E. Espinosa, "What's Driving Mexico-U.S. Migration? A Theoretical, Empirical, and Policy Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no. 4 (1997): 939–99.:

² Tracy J Andrews, Vickie D Ybarra, and Teresa Miramontes, "Negotiating Survival: Undocumented Mexican Immigrant Women in the Pacific Northwest," *The Social Science Journal* 39, no. 3 (January 1, 2002): 431–49, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0362-3319\(02\)00202-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0362-3319(02)00202-1).

³ In Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions : Mexican Experiences of Immigration* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, c1994). Gender is explored through ethnographies of a migrant neighborhood. While both men and women are interviewed, Hondagneu explores women's migration in great depths.

In order to investigate this question, I carried out in-depth interviews with ten migrant women in Portland, Oregon whose migration spanned from the 1970s-2000s. While the evidence is not significant, the interviews provide rich insight into the multiple decision-making points for women's migration and offers in depth exploration on the extent family reunification was a motivation for these women. This is not possible with large quantitative studies, and this research aims to provide more detailed material. Portland, Oregon was chosen because the state is one of the top five new destination sites for undocumented Mexican migration⁴, ranks 19th in the nation for total Hispanic population⁵, but yet is an understudied location for Mexican migration.

In order to best explore this question, this thesis is structured as follows; section one provides theory behind family reunification, and migrant decision making. Section two, looks at the creation of gendered migration streams in the United States, and Mexican migration to Portland. Section three lays out the dominate motivations for migration and socioeconomic structures that women identified as affecting decision making. The motivations include escaping violence, better economic opportunities, and family reunification. Descriptions of integration in the United States is included to because women articulated a shift in their understanding of motivations for migration once in the United States. Lastly the paper concludes within discussions and findings based on the interviews conducted with the women.

⁴ Douglas S. Massey, Jacob S. Rugh, and Karen A. Pren, "The Geography of Undocumented Mexican Migration," *Mexican Studies = Estudios Mexicanos* 26, no. 1 (2010): 129–52, <https://doi.org/10.1525/msem.2010.26.1.129>.

⁵ "Demographic and Economic Profiles of Hispanics by State and County, 2014 | Pew Research Center," accessed February 26, 2018, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/states/state/or/>.

Methodology

This research question was answered using a qualitative approach. Ten hour-long interviews were conducted with Mexican women in Portland, Oregon from December 2017 through January 2018. The excerpts used in the thesis are quotes from the translated transcriptions made from the recorded interviews. The women are all foreign-born Mexicans living in Portland or the surrounding areas of Gresham, Sandy, and Fairview, Oregon. The women's migration journeys span the 1970s through 2000s. While multiple women interviewed had taken one or more trips to the United States as children or teenagers, those trips were largely for leisure or work, and lasted less than a year in almost all cases. The interviews were conducted in-person and in Spanish, the questions asked, covered women's migration as holistically as possible, including; background information on family and life in Mexico, time frame of migrations, mode of entry, and motivations for migrating to Portland, Oregon. The questions strived to cover multiple decision-making points and socioeconomic factors to better extrapolate if and how family reunification motivated their migration to Portland, Oregon.

Portland, Oregon was chosen as the site of research because of the budding Mexican migrant population. Portland, Oregon is one of the top five new destination sites of undocumented Mexican migration⁶ and ranks 19th in the nation for total Hispanic population⁷. Oregon's drastic increase of the Mexican immigrant population began in the 1980s and early 1990s, in conjunction with the rise of new destination sites for Mexican migrants nationally. Oregon's is positioned in the West Coast and relatively close to other top destination states

⁶ Massey, Rugh, and Pren, "The Geography of Undocumented Mexican Migration."

⁷ "Demographic and Economic Profiles of Hispanics by State and County, 2014 | Pew Research Center."

including Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and Texas, but has not garnished the same level of attention from migration researchers.

The timeframe of the 1970s through the 2000s has been chosen because it covers modern peaks of Mexican migration. This time frame also covers the succeeding group in the Mexican Migration Project, one of the most comprehensive studies of Mexican migrants.

Limitations of Research

This paper sought to explore if family reunification was the dominate motivation for the ten Mexican women interviewed. While this study offered profound responses, the sample size is too small to offer any definitive conclusions, and a more comprehensive sample size is necessary to extrapolate definitive answers.

The scope of research looked at gender and migration but did not offer an intersectional look at migration that included other identities that people hold. While this study had a diverse set of respondents in terms of communities of origin, the women mostly came from urban communities, and self-identified as working poor in Mexico. Additionally, aside from one respondent who is a transwoman, all the women identified as cis-heterosexual women. If the women identified as queer, and or gender queer, the motivations for migration might have dramatically changed.

Lastly many of the women offered up examples of greater freedoms that they gained through migration. Attributing culture within the United States as the key reason for greater liberations. This may be true for these women, but a larger sample might also include opinions that differ from this, dependent on the other identities held by women that are not found within this group including religion, age, and sexual orientation.

Demographics of Women Interviewed

The ten women interviewed live in Portland and the adjacent towns of Gresham, Sandy and Fairview, Oregon all within Multnomah County. All the women either work or live in Portland, mostly East and South East both areas with large pockets of Latino populations.

Some key information about the women interviewed:

- Eight out the Ten women spent their childhoods and most of their adolescents in Mexico.
- Five women came to the United States as teenagers and young adults before their settlement. None came to Oregon on these firsts visits.
- Two women lived in Oregon from the ages of 7-16, and 11-18 before returning to Mexico.
- In Mexico the self-identified socioeconomic status of the women was poor to working poor.
- The highest level of education that was attained by any woman in Mexico was completion of high school.

Entry into the United States

- Four women had B-2 tourist visas that they used to enter to the United States.
- One woman entered the country unaccompanied by family or friends.
- Two women were single when entering but migrated with relatives.
- Four women migrated with children and a partner.
- One woman migrated only with their children without a partner.

- Two women migrated with children and reunited with a partner in the U.S.

Life in the United States:

- Five women have been enrolled in some sort of educational program while in the U.S., including high school equivalency degree programs, aesthetician program, and bachelor's degree.
- Nine out of ten women have been married.
- Six of the women are now divorced or separated from the partner they migrated with.
- Six of the women are single moms or co-parenting with new partners.
- Four women are still married to the same partner.
- Nine out of ten women have at least one child.
- The self-identified socioeconomic status of the women in the United States is working class to lower middle class

See Appendix, Table 1. for List of Women Interviewed and Table 2. For a map of origin communities of women.

Part I

1.1 Immigration and Gender Theory

Traditional neoclassical economic theory has shaped popular explanations of motivations, means, and decision-making for migrants. This theory of migration explains decision making through a micro-economic model, where individuals from low wage countries move to high wage countries, and make decisions for themselves, through a cost-benefit analysis. Researchers however, note the incompleteness of this theory⁸, and suggest that decision making does not simply come down to an individual, but that the individual's preferences, characteristics, and constraints which are all involved with decision making, are influenced by structures within their immediate socioeconomic environment⁹. This new economic of labor theory stresses the interconnectedness of people and maps out the importance of migrant networks and social capital, both aspects that aid international migration. This theory introduces family reunification as the byproduct of network ties and social capital which create circular causation streams of migration. Research recognizes that migrant networks aid every step of migration, and generally work similar for men and women, lowering risks involved in migration. For example, before migration occurs network ties provide examples to people in communities of origin on the possible goods that exist in the United States, such as better wages or safety. They also provide information on the journey, including the safest routes to take, trusted coyotes, and dangers that may await. Once in the United States, network ties offer connections to jobs and provide

⁸See: Massey and Espinosa, "What's Driving Mexico-U.S. Migration?"; Douglas S. Massey et al., "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal," *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 3 (1993): 431–66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938462>; Douglas S. Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors : Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, c2002).

⁹ Douglas S. Massey, "Social Structure, Household Strategies, and the Cumulative Causation of Migration," *Population Index* 56, no. 1 (1990): 3–26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3644186>.

housing, childcare, and information on accessing resources Network ties also offer comfort and emotional support, easing culture shock and providing a semblance of ‘home’ through celebrations of holidays, gatherings, language and culture¹⁰.

In the U.S., men have predominated in many periods of U.S.- bound Mexican migration due to economic and cultural factors, thus men are often the first to migrate and assist others in migrating, often times their wives and children. This has postulated women’s migration as a factor of male migration, where, women are incorporated into the analyses of international migration through family reunification, which is seen as part of a strategy of household survival¹¹. However, feminists scholars like Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo in her book *Gendered Transitions*, argue that simply adding women to studies through association of male migration does little in examining how gender relations facilitate or constraint both women and men’s migration and settlement¹². By not examining gender and more specifically patriarchy that is expressed and contested in social networks and families, the socioeconomic environment impacting migrants is uninvestigated¹³.

Given this framework of theory, this question explores not just the motivations of migration, but how gender impacts those motivations.

¹⁰ Massey.

¹¹ Massey and Espinosa, “What’s Driving Mexico-U.S. Migration?”

¹² Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions*.

¹³ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo.

Part II

2.1 The Creation of Modern Gendered Migration Streams

Migration streams from Mexico are highly gendered, with men generally migrating at higher rates than women. The Mexican Migration Project which tracked migrant trips from 1965 to 1985 found that 2/3 of all migrants at the time were men¹⁴. The high rate of male migration is due to multiple social and cultural factors, including labor program incentives, immigration policy in the United States, and culture of migration. The combination of these factors has helped create the current demographics of migration.

Mexican migration in the first half of the 21st century was cyclical, and more diverse in demographics due to the feasibility of return migration. In the 1920s while men accounted for 65 to 70 percent of the Mexican immigrants who legally entered the U.S., wives and who families would often join these trips diversifying the migration stream¹⁵. In the 1930s a wave on nativism swept the country, at this time the the Chinese exclusion act and the Gentleman's Agreement with Japan brought Asian immigration to a halt, which ironically caused a surge of Mexican migration to occur due to industries being desperate for workers, the U.S. lured in Mexican immigrants to work in the fields and railroads, this produced large waves of Mexican male migration¹⁶.

The end of the depression era saw the revival of labor needs in agriculture, which created the Bracero Program. The program brought nearly 5 million temporary labor workers to the agricultural sector between 1942 and 1964, these contracts virtually all went exclusively to

¹⁴ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*.

¹⁵ Sara R. Curran and Estela Rivero-Fuentes, "Engendering Migrant Networks: The Case of Mexican Migration," *Demography* 40, no. 2 (2003): 289–307, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3180802>.

¹⁶ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*.

men¹⁷, once again creating a channel exclusively for men to legally migrate to the United States. The seasonal work rotations allowed for men to go back and reunite with their families, removing the need for family reunification, especially as conditions at the farms that men worked in were not suitable for families. The end of the Bracero Program as an outcome of pressure applied during the civil rights era had various impacts on migration to the United States, many which were unforeseen. Contrary to the intent, the end of the program did not eliminate the need for labor, but created greater numbers of undocumented migration, and the need for farm owners to seek out pathways for legal migration for agricultural workers. The creation of labor certification allowed Braceros to become documented, with almost all Braceros being men, this meant men were the first people in families to become documented. This documentation generated the reunification of families, and the commencement of social networks that then facilitated the future migration of family and friends¹⁸. The resistance to the Bracero Program was paralleled with various policies restricting migration of Mexicans that had come to be seen as drains on public goods and stealing employment opportunities of Americans. In 1965 an amendment capped visas for countries in the western hemisphere to 20,000 and the creation of the family reunification preference system. Paradoxically, with the tightening of migration and public outcry for stricter border enforcement, the dependency of Mexican labor persisted. Men began to migrate more frequently and stay longer in the U.S. and began sending for wives and children. The U.S., labor markets dependency on Mexican workers created a steep rise in undocumented migration, because workers lacked the inability to enter through a legal channel. The period known as the “migration regime”¹⁹ which began in 1965 and lasted until 1986 created

¹⁷ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions*.

¹⁸ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*.

¹⁹ Massey.

new systems to halt migration and stop the cycle of the “revolving door” that the U.S. immigration system became known for. The government began seeing the “revolving door” of undocumented Mexican migration as an area of concern and a weakness politically, but it had the interests of agriculture, governmental agencies, and the general public to balance. Various tactics were employed, including the technique known as “prevention through deterrence” in the 1980s, which had its roots in a strategy carried out by Silvestre Reyes, the Border Patrol Chief in El Paso. Rey’s technique had proved to be both extremely favorable with constituents, and effective in deterring migration through the post of El Paso, a major entry site of undocumented migration. This technique rerouted migration making it seem as if it was halting undocumented migration, when in fact it was not. That strategy was replicated and put into effect in San Diego, and again while there was a slowing down of traffic by migrants through San Diego it did not deter undocumented migration as a whole. What that strategy actually did was push migrants to cross through more dangerous channels in order to avoid being stopped. This technique halted return migration and affected demographics of those migrating. As less men began returning to Mexico, wary of the hurdles they would have to overcome on their return, the mostly male workers began sending for wives and children changing the composition and demographics of migration²⁰. In 1986, Senator Alan Simpson (R- WY) and Representative Peter Rodino (D- N.J.) brought together a negotiated compromise of the interested parties to life with the Immigration Reform Control Act (IRCA). The bill was signed into law under Republican president Ronald Reagan and took effect on January 1, 1987, legalizing millions of Mexicans, and marking the start of the current migration era in the United States.

²⁰ Douglas S. Massey, ed., *New Faces in New Places: The Changing Geography of American Immigration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008).

The effects of IRCA created wide spread changes in legal and undocumented migration to the United States. The wave of legalization between 1986 and 1990 was followed by an increase in the odds of female undocumented migration. Experts suggest that post IRCA, women may even compose a majority of the Mexican undocumented immigrant population, post IRCA 1/3 of the undocumented population are women compared to 1/4 before IRCA²¹. The legalization of a mass number of immigrants of which 2/3 were male, caused the migration of women to occur through the process of family reunification which had been in the making for years, but codified into law more explicitly through IRCA.

²¹ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*.

2.2 The City of Portland in Context of Migration

Situating Oregon within the context of national migration is important because women's migration to Oregon is an example of micro and macro factors influencing decisions making and motivations. Also, while discussing motivations to migrate to the United States for the women the migrated directly to Oregon, the decision to migrate was seen as the decision to migrate to Oregon specifically, for this reason it's important to review the formation of Oregon as a destination site for Mexican migrants.

In the last twenty years, destination sites for the Mexican immigrant population underwent a dramatic shift. Once populating a handful of states (California, Illinois, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico²²) beginning in the 1980s Mexican migrants began settling to states outside of the traditional destination sites²³. By the 1990s demographers began reporting sizable Mexican migrant populations in states like Georgia, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Louisiana, Arkansas and Missouri²⁴, and a noticeable increase in various other mountainous states like Oregon, within the span of a decade.

Oregon's political climate is somewhat unique, while generally seen as a liberal blue state within the democratic West Coast, this is largely attributed to Portland and Multnomah County, the largest county in the state. The county is an outlier in a mostly Republican state. Oregon has also introduced multiple anti-immigrant legislation, and an active and highly funded anti-immigrant organization, that received national attention for their campaign against the 2014 ballot initiative to give access to driver's cards to all Oregonians.

²² Johnston, Karageorgis, and Light, "Mexican Population Growth in New US Destinations."

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Portland's Mexican community has been understudied compared to other emerging destination sites but has an increasingly growing population of foreign-born and native-born Latinos, the majority being of Mexican decent. Portland is a growing metropolitan, the largest city in the state of Oregon, and the second largest in the region, after Seattle²⁵. It has seen incredible growth in communities of color, especially of Latino population which experienced the most rapid growth in the last few decades of any other minority ethnic group. The state's population is now 12 percent the Latino, compared to 8 percent in 2000²⁶. The Latino population continues to grow and is now the largest minority group in the state.

The growth of this population began following trends of other new destination sites, between 1980 and 1990, when the Latino population increased by 71 percent. This growth continued, and from 1990- 2000, the population increased by an astounding 144 percent. In the last decade, the Latino population increased by 64 percent, the slowest in a three-decade period, but more than five times the non-Hispanic population increase²⁷. Even with the growing population, Oregon is one of the least diverse states in the nation and began building infrastructure to aid migrants in the last two decades. The state's first direct service provider for the Latino community PCUN (Pinos y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste/ Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United) was founded in Woodburn, Oregon in 1985. CAUSA, the state's largest immigrant rights organization based in Southwest Portland was founded in 1995

²⁵ "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Oregon," accessed March 23, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/OR/BZA210215>.

²⁶ "Latinos in Oregon: Trends and Opportunities in a Changing State" (The Oregon Community Foundation, August 2016), https://www.oregoncf.org/Templates/media/files/reports/latinos_in_oregon_report_2016.pdf.

²⁷ Kanhaiya L. Vaidya, "Oregon's Demographic Trends: Office of Economic Analysis Department of Administrative Services State of Oregon," December 2012, http://www.oregon.gov/das/OEA/Documents/OR_pop_trend2012.pdf.

and a year later, The Mexican Consulate was officially established in Portland²⁸. The institutionalizing of various organizations and services is a reflection of the growing demographics of the state, and the community's acknowledgment of the growing population.

The women interviewed expressed their motivation to migrate to Oregon as mostly due to networks in the state, better economic opportunities, and access to driver's licenses. Marisol who arrived in 2003 with her husband, had siblings in California but her 'compadres' who had moved from California to Portland due to better financial opportunities, offered to loan the couple money to come to Oregon. Marisol and her husband came to the U.S. for a year without their children and saved up enough money to migrate with their two small children. Marisol and her family came back to Portland due to her job and has stayed despite all her family and friends moving back to California or Mexico, because of better job opportunities for women migrants.

"We came back to Portland because we were familiar with it. To go somewhere new, we would have to ask ourselves things like, where do we work? And here in Portland, I had talked to my boss before leaving and he said, 'when you're back, I'll let you work, just don't be gone too long.' In California my family said we could work in the field, but I said "where would I keep my kids, take them to school?" I said no it was not a good place for my family, so we came back to Portland."

Portland's less perceived policing of immigrant communities, and access to identification cards and drivers licenses was a key reason for migrating to the state for some women. Viviana who arrived in 2004, felt isolation in Oregon due to lack of a Mexican community, but refused to move due to her experiences in California, and the policing of immigrant communities she had seen in her weekly trips to San Diego while living in Mexico.

"Well, here [Portland] they say it's a castle for Hispanics, because here they don't bother you much, cops or anything. I've never been stopped just because. Here they respect more, unlike in California, I use to see how for anything they would stop you. They would have the babies child-seats on the ground, they would take the cars from the mothers, and leave them with

²⁸ Nancy Nusz and Gabriella Ricciardi, "Oregon Voices: Our Ways: History and Culture of Mexicans in Oregon," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 104, no. 1 (2003): 110–23.

the car seat when they didn't have a license. Back then they didn't have license but now they do, so you don't see it as often.”

Oregon gave licenses to undocumented immigrants until the passage of the REAL ID Act in 2008. Before that, many immigrants from California came to Oregon to get a license.

Penelope was one of the immigrants that moved to Oregon in the mid 2000s in order to get a license and access better opportunities that often required an ID, which she could not get in California due to being undocumented.

“Ten years back we decided to come here because in California they didn't give us drivers licenses, and here they did, so we made the decision to get our license, and to be better off, get around better, and work better jobs because in jobs, they you know, they ask for legal identification.” Said Penelope when asked why she and her husband moved to Oregon despite having no family. Penelope saw better economic opportunities in Portland, and while it was a difficult adjustment for her, since in California she enjoyed living close to siblings, she saw Portland as a better place to raise her two children and saw it as a sacrifice she needed to make for her children. “Here you don't pay taxes, so that was better. I mean you're going to stay where it better for you, and your family and well we got used to it. You get used to not paying taxes, seeing money go a little further, and I began meeting people and now I feel more comfortable. My kids have a better future here.”

For other women, like Brenda, Carina, and Julieta, Oregon was the only place they knew. They had nothing to compare it to, and in the case of Brenda and Carina who have extensive roots and connections to the state, their desire to migrate back to Oregon was always present, and when given the opportunity as seen in part III, decided to act on it.

Part III

The following sections present dominant motivations for migration described by the ten women interviewed. Throughout the interviews motivations were tracked, and patterns of shared motivations tracked. This section is a presentation of the most commonly shared dominant motivations for migration. Dominant motivations varied from woman to woman, but the following three motivations became the prominent motivations heard throughout the study. This list is not comprehensive of motivations or cover all the decision-making points of migration but provides magnificent insight on motivations to migrate.

3.1 Escaping Violence as a Motivation for Migration

Half of the women interviewed discussed surviving some form of interpersonal violence in Mexico. The women endured sexual, physical, and domestic violence at the hands of partners and family members. While violence against women plagues every country, Mexico struggles to curb violence towards women which has become endemic to Mexican society on an interpersonal, systemic, and institutional level. Migration for these women was seen as an opportunity to both physically and mentally distance themselves from violence and the perpetrators of that violence. Of the women that experienced trauma, two women in particular, openly discussed the impact that their abuse which began in at the hands of family members in Mexico had on their migration. They identified abuse as the motivator and cause of their migration as adults, and the key motivator to not return. Both women came to the United States with partners but had no family in Oregon or the U.S. at the time. The women described their journey to Oregon as a clandestine escape of the sexual and domestic violence they experienced, and as examples on how gender indirectly shaped their migration.

Viviana arrived to Oregon in 2003 with her partner and two young daughters. When asked about her decision to migrate, she quickly recalled the abuse she survived at the hands of her stepfather as a significant motivation to leave and never return to Mexico.

Viviana is the seventh of thirteen children, she and her six sisters share the same father, but had little contact with him since he left to the United States before her birth and visited the family twice a year, before finally stopping after her mother remarried. Her mother had six children with Viviana's step father, shortly after moving in, her father began abusing her and her sisters. Viviana recounted her abuse which began as a child and continued until she was sent to live with her aunt at the age of eleven as the beginning of the feeling to need to escape.

“It started when I was five, I told my mom when I was older. Me and my sister told my mom. My sister was dating a guy, and one day the guy told my sister, “if you stay [at home] it's because you like getting touched by your stepfather.” My sister was eleven and I was ten, so we told her, but you know mothers back then they didn't believe you.

Viviana was sent to live with her aunt but had frequent contact with her mother and step father due to working alongside her mother cleaning houses, and often taking care of her younger siblings. At fifteen she married an older man from her town, which Viviana admits marrying out of desperation, seeing it as the only way to avoid abuse at the hands of her stepfather. Her husband was economically better off, and often travelled abroad for work, and made trips to the United States frequently. Viviana was able to access a tourist visa through her ex-husband. One day while her husband was away for business, Viviana filled out an application for a tourist visa which she asked her husband to file. Viviana began using her visa to make weekly trips as a house cleaner to San Diego, this allowed her to have stable employment and better wages. After the birth of her second daughter, Viviana separated from her husband, but continued cleaning houses. Although she had the opportunity of permanent work in San Diego at a hotel managed by a friend, she did not want to be separated from her daughters and decided to continue

commuting. Viviana did not think about migration until her partner at the time lost his job, his mother who had been living in Oregon since the 1990s offered to help him come to Oregon. He agreed, and Viviana decided to go with him. She had never met his family and she had no relatives or friends in Portland. When asked why she had made this decision, Viviana credits seeing this move as an opportunity of letting go of her past.

“Life since I was young has always treated me harshly, so coming all the way here didn’t seem so hard. I think I maybe wanted to escape from something. I don’t know... I saw my stepfather abuse two of my sisters, those are the things I wanted to leave behind, that was one of the principle things that made me want to come over here. I just didn’t want to know anything about Mexico. After everything that has happened to me, I think I was running from my problems with my family, my ex. I wanted to run way and I wanted to be far from everything that brought me bad memories.”

Lina, the other woman that suffered ongoing sexual abuse, was also prompted to migrate by partner, but feels that her abuse drove her decision to migrate. Lina migrated to Oregon at the age of seventeen, her husband without ever discussing migration with Lina told her the day before their departure to pack, say goodbye to family, and be ready to take the bus the next morning to the border. When asked how she felt about the lack of consultation of deciding to migrate, Lina noted that she did not say anything, because deep down she wanted to get away from the ongoing sexual abuse at the hands of her brother. Lina like Viviana comes from a large family, she is the eighteenth out of nineteen children and the second youngest girl. As the second youngest girl in her family, Lina was expected to help her older siblings with their households. After the death of the wife of her older brother, she was taken out of school and told to take care of her nephew. Lina recognized school as a way to access a better life but felt bound to duties placed on her due to being a woman. “I dropped out of school when I was twelve, because my older brother was a widow and had a child and I had to take care of him, I didn’t stop taking care

of him until I was married. From thirteen until fifteen, for three years that I took care of my nephew, I was raped by my brother.”

Lina was given land by her father and began to harvest crops as a way to avoid her brother. She was able to spend more time away from her brother by making trips into town and avoiding being in the home as much as possible, however, at fourteen Lina became pregnant. She had a miscarriage, but the pregnancy marked her with a deep resentment at being a woman

“I remember when I was fourteen my stomach was growing, and I didn't know why, I didn't have a lot of friends, I was a loner, so I didn't know what was happening, I had no one to ask. I said, ‘am I pregnant?’ I prayed to god I wasn't. One day I just bled and bled, and I didn't know what happened, that was all. I just wanted to be a man, I went to work in the field. I wanted to be a man, so I went to the field. Economically I was okay, I was good, poverty wasn't the reason I left. I would go sell my maize sell my crops. When I didn't have money to pay people to help me sow, I would work for my dad and brothers to pay them to help me sow. I would pay them with a day of work. I worked the land like the men, but I was still expected to clean and cook. I was still treated like a woman by my brother.”

Much like Viviana, Lina saw marriage as the only way to leave her household for good. Lina believes that if it had not been for the sexual abuse she endured at the hands of her brother, she would never have left Mexico as she enjoyed working in the field, and the economic freedom that came from it. “I wouldn't have come if it wasn't due to violence. I don't think I would have come if I wouldn't have met my ex-husband. I was still a girl back then, I didn't think back then. If I had another way of life I wouldn't have come.”

Both Lina and Viviana tried to tell their mothers about their abuse but articulated the financial and cultural constraints their mothers were under that stopped them from being able to intervene. Viviana, does not blame her mother who she has regular contact with, and instead cites poverty as the reason why she had to endure sexual abuse without her mother intervening.

“poverty takes you to those measures... my mom used to have to steal cereal to feed us, she raised us, I know that's not an excuse but... I forgive her, she had six kids from my stepfather, so I put myself in her place and think, maybe I would have done the same thing, how are you going to take care of so many kids alone.”

Lina holds a similar relationship with her mother whom has never admitted to knowing about the abuse, but which Lina affirms isn't true. "My mom noticed I was getting rape, she just didn't want to say anything. It happens a lot back there, but no one says anything, because of our culture, women are told to stay quiet, stay hushed, to be embarrassed".

The abuse suffered by the women interviewed is not uncommon in Mexico. The country repeatedly ranks among G20's, 'Worst Countries to Be a Woman In' due to the high numbers of murders, rapes, and the cultural and systematic apathy towards violence against women. Sex based crimes especially seem to have reached an unreal degree, with on average a woman or girl being raped every four minutes in Mexico²⁹. Interfamilial and inter-community violence has become a normalized experience for many women, especially within vulnerable populations (such as girls, indigenous women, and sex workers). According to the 2011 report by the Mexican National Institute for Women, in Mexico 5 out of 10 women aged 15 years or older have been victims of domestic violence³⁰. Impunity runs rampant in many communities within Mexico; lack of action by the police and corruption by State officials creates a culture of silencing and complacency, with a lack of resolution for many survivors. Many families are still awaiting justice for the mothers, daughters, sisters, and lives lost in years passed in the killings in Juarez, the rising cartel violence, and domestic violence cases. The relative lack of government intervention into the brutal killings and disappearances of women has created the appearance (arguably, the creation) of a government of indifference, aggressors made brazen by the lack of punishment of all forms of violence against women including sexual assault, domestic violence,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "OHCHR | A Case of Domestic Violence in Mexico: Grettels Quest for Justice."

and discrimination. Within the United States, the lack of asylum processes to women migrating due to domestic and sexual violence further continues to marginalize women in Mexican society. Additionally, the extraordinary high level of violence towards women in Mexico has become a normalized aspect of Mexican society, a morose element of existing as a woman. This has allowed for lawmakers and people in power to fall back on claims of inadequacy and apathy brought up by activist, and international NGOs alike. While it would be simple to reduce trends of violence to inherent misogyny within a culture seen as ultra-machista, or a consequence of poverty in a developing country, both of those conclusions do nothing to soften the reality that this is no longer a trend, but a staple of Mexican society for some communities. Women and girls in Mexico, especially vulnerable women, have been reduced to second-class citizenship, which has lasting impacts on Mexico.

For Carina and Brenda violence wasn't their dominant motivation, but the dominant motivation for their mother's migration to the United States, which led to them migrating to reunite with her as children. Carina, the eldest sister has two children, and six grandchildren in Oregon. She and her children are undocumented, a fact she attributes to her mom's decision of sending her back to Mexico right before the amnesty in 1986. Carina admits to having a complicated relationship with her mother, and often feels resentment for decisions made by her mother throughout her life which she sees as the reason she got married in Mexico and had to endure domestic violence and isolation key motivators to migrate. Brenda who is much closer to her mother, described her mom's choices at length and how little decision-making power her mother had in her own life, and the impact that had on her own life and migration.

“When she was little she lost her dad, and when she was fourteen she lost her mom, and she had a to make a decision. She was fourteen her mom had died, her sisters most of them were married, and she was living with her brother, who was never there. She was alone most of the time. She knew my dad and decided to get married because she was alone. She didn't have a

good life with him, he would beat her, and he would get drunk and wouldn't have money for food. She started to make ends meet by selling things at a flea market, but a lot of times my dad would find out and take the money from her. She thought, 'I am never going to have anything, I am never going to be able to take care of my kids like this'. One night without telling anybody, she told my oldest brother to take care of us and help his aunt take care of us, she decided to leave everything and come over here. She got in touch with her sister, who was going to help her come into the United States and left. Her plan was to make some money and go back, and be able to do something with her life, because she was just not seeing anything, you know, not seeing a future for us."

Brenda and Carina both experienced abuse by relatives in Mexico while their mother was away. Carina and Brenda did not talk about it as openly as Lina and Viviana, but both women attribute that abuse to the lack of closeness to family in Mexico as adults, and a reason why they both returned to the U.S as adults. Brenda was sent back to Mexico at sixteen with her sister Carina, by her mother because she was deemed too rebellious. She returned to Oregon for good after the birth of her daughter but spent nearly four years going back and forth between the Pacific Northwest, California, and Mexico. When asked about her motivations for returning, she stated that she felt that Mexico was not home, which was highlighted by the lack of relationships she had with family. This she admits is also due to sexual abuse that occurred by an undisclosed family member.

"I know my family in Mexico, but I never had a relationship with them, my cousins, uncles, never had a relationship. Still when I think about some bad things that happened to my sister and me, I still never really want to go back to any of that. Just some bad memories."

Carina similarly described the isolation she felt in Mexico as a key motivation for returning that was partially caused her abuse she endured and then exasperated through her abusive marriage. She began feeling this isolation more so when her husband began verbally abusing her. Carina stayed in Mexico until her eldest son was seven, but as the verbal abuse and constant monitoring of her husband intensified she decided to ask for help to migrate back to the

U.S., “It was the best path for my kids, I ran from a life of violence, and I ran from that sadness in Mexico.” Carina was able to migrate with the help of her brothers who paid for her trip, she was able to convince her husband to let her migrate with her children under the guise of going first to save money for him to cross. Her husband, who was twenty years older did not feel capable of crossing with them at the time and agreed.

“I took the decision to come over here, because it was a way to rescue them [her children] as much as to rescue myself. I told my husband one day that I was going, and in six months I’d help him cross, which was all a lie, because I didn’t want him with me. I didn’t want him to take the kids and keep me there through them, so I left with them and once here, I called him and said I didn’t want anything to do with him. He was a really possessive person and aggressive and I didn’t want my kids to see that.”

Migration was fueled by a mix of motivations for Viviana, Linda, Brenda and Carina but for what was expressed by the woman was that the abuse they suffered was a dominant motivation to migrate, and that abuse they attribute to being woman, and the culture that is built around the sexual violence of women in Mexico, and internationally.

3.2 Motivations of Single Mexican Women

Out of the ten women interviewed just two women came to the United States as single women. Amairani and Tamara both came as eighteen-year olds, in the mid 1990s and early 2000s respectively. Like the married women, Amairani and Tamara relied heavily on networks in Mexico and the United States to help them migrate to the United States. Amairani's father obtained a tourist visa for her when she was younger which she used to get into the United States, he also paid for her bus trip from Mexico City to Tijuana, where alongside her brother, sister in law, niece and nephew she crossed into the United States. Tamara, similarly had family in Los Angeles that facilitated her passage logistically and financially. Both women migrated through family but both cited their motivations of migration as financial. "I came to the United States because I had a dream, back then my dream was to stay six months only, buy myself some skates, a jacket and save up \$600 and go back" said Amairani, who laughs because she has never owned a pair of skates to this day. Both women saw migration to the United States as a great short-term opportunity to be able to earn dollars and buy luxuries out of reach in Mexico. "I came because here you earn dollars, more than Mexico. There I worked to buy clothes, but not enough to buy a house," said Tamara. Amairani and Tamara did not view migration as a pathway for long term financial security but as a freedom afforded to them as single woman.

Tamara's motivations were closely tied to her gender in a different way than the rest of the woman. Due to her being a transwoman and transitioning in Oregon, her motivations for migration changed drastically between her first migration and second migration. Tamara, had no family in Oregon, and only planned on staying the time it took for her to get a license, which in California she was unable to obtain. The process took more time than expected, and she got a job at a seafood processing site. This eventually lead to her developing a supportive circle of friends

which convinced her to stay. Tamara returned to Mexico in 2013, wanting to stay and develop apartments on the land she bought as a way to provide for her parents, which she solely supports. In Mexico, Tamara felt in danger due to her identity as transwoman and did not feel safely living as a transwoman in her small town. Tamara's negotiation of the presentation of her gender while in Mexico was a source of discomfort. She struggled to find acceptance, or have her gender affirmed by those around her in Mexico in the same ways she had found with chosen family in Oregon, and so she decided to return, acknowledging that living as a transwoman is not truly easy anywhere.

As a single young woman Amariani felt stuck in Mexico, due to her limited economic opportunities. She expressed feeling too attached to her mother and father and feared she would never leave their house if she did not migrate when given the opportunity. In the first months in Oregon she looked after her niece and nephew while her brother and sister in law worked. After three months she began working to try and save up and eventually go back to Mexico, as she had become disillusioned on being able to make money. She convinced her brother to help her get a job where he was working, and soon she began working seven days a week trying to save money and go back to Mexico. This proved to be a source of stress for the siblings, and Amariani felt stifled by her brother.

“After 3 months I started working, because I had to pay for things, I started working, my brother got me a job where he was working, first in taco bell, and then where he worked, and I went to work, so I worked at one job from 11pm-7am, and on my days off from 10am-8pm.” While Amairani worked two jobs, she was not allowed to keep her money, handing her paychecks over to her brother, “I would get my check and he would say, ‘I’ll save them, I’ll save them’, so one day I got mad and I said, ‘I need my money because I need my money’, but he got a little mad, and said ‘yes I’ll give you the money but you can't stay here, you'll have to go back to Mexico’, he called my dad to tell him I was being rebellious and needed to go back, simply because I had a boyfriend, but it wasn't true, I was just rebellious because I asked for my money. So, my dad said ‘no, she won't leave’. So, I went and rented a room somewhere else.”

Amairani moved out and rented a room with a coworker, since she lived on the other side of town, she had to learn how to get around to and from work using public transportation. She began dating an Argentinian, and he helped her obtain a bank account and introduced her to a broader network of support. Later that year her brother in-law came to the United States, he was opposed to her living alone far away from the family, so he and a cousin that had just arrived decided to stay with her.

Amairani's sister joined her husband early the next year, and her brother in-law moved in with her brother into a two-bedroom apartment. Amairani decided to stay in her rented room, until her sister convinced her to move back in with them. The two families lived in the bedrooms while Amairani slept in the living room. Tension continued because while she was able to afford her own room, it was not approved of by her siblings, that saw that as another rebellion.

“I slept in the living room for a few months, but that lasted a short while because they soon started saying that I was rebelling. That rebellion, was due to becoming Lorenzo's girlfriend. He would invite me over to eat, he helped me open a bank account, he would pick me up and drop me off at work, he was my boyfriend. That was my rebellion. Just because I wasn't married and went out. They always asked “Why are you are going out? Why do you have a boyfriend?””

As a single woman Amairani she was governed by the same social norms and social roles from Mexico, but in the United States she had access to an array of freedoms that the married women around her did not. Being unmarried and without children allowed her to save enough money to buy a car and spend money on what she wanted, giving her a sense of liberation.

“At that point I felt liberated and independent. When I lived with my sister she would get frustrated due to her job, the kids, everything, but me for, well for example I didn't have kids, so I could do what I wanted. Like on Saturdays when I would go out with my little group of friends, we would go dancing salsa and come back at 7 or 8 am. My brother would want to tell me what to do even, but I was independent, I supported myself, I paid for everything.”

Her independence proved to be beneficial to the women around her. She learned how to drive and got a license, and eventually purchased a car from her brother. That car allowed her to get to and from work without depending on public transportation, which had cost her a job due to

being tardy once. “I bought a car, 86 Toyota, I learned how to drive studied for a month got my permit, then my license, and by learning to drive my brother in law didn't have to drop us off, and then I taught my sister how to drive, and we would go to work together.”

Amairani felt that her brother and sisters constant monitoring was largely due to their own frustrations on their inability to enjoy the freedoms of not having a family. She also credits the cultural norms of being the youngest sister as what allowed for siblings to be able to control her.

“I think they told me what to do because sometimes it was a little bit of a reflection on their frustrations, subconsciously they were saying, ‘why can she do that but not me?’ Were also usually brought up thinking older siblings have the rights to decide what sister do, but once you become independent, who are they to tell me what you can and can't do.”

Ironically, like many of the women interviewed, Amairani felt that the only way she would be able to escape this policing and gain more freedoms would be through marriage.

“I felt free when I got married. I laugh thinking about how one day my sister and I started arguing about the frustrations my sister had, since I was pregnant I slept a lot, but Steve didn't tell me to wake up, or anything like that. In our argument my sister said, ‘even if you're pregnant I'll still yell at you, I don't care.’ that's when I said it's time for me to find my own place and take reign over my own life. I was married and living with my sister because Steve went to school. But while Steve was in school I looked for an apartment and I went to live there.”

Through her marriage Amairani was able to obtain citizenship in 2006 which helped her buy a house, and gain access to better jobs. Now divorced, Amairani has been able to buy a second house, and as a single mom feels proud of her ability to sustain a household on her own.

“I feel really proud of everything I've done. because, one as a single mom I might not be economically solvent, but just to have the responsibility to run household alot of people fear that, but I didn't. I said I can do this, just like I was able to learn English, buy a car, migrate by myself. Nothing will stop me from progressing.”

Amairani in many ways did seem to “rebel’ against the expectations that her brothers and sister held about what a woman could and could not do. Gender is central in decisions around migration and settlement in part because those decisions are shaped to a large extent by cultural

beliefs and traditional values about the roles of women and men in families³¹. Amairani's behavior of going out, having a boyfriend, buying herself what she pleased, and living alone have been seen acceptable for men to do, but not women. Amairani and Tamara toppled the expectations of womanhood and motherhood through single parenting, owners of land, and becoming head of households, assuming roles assigned to men.

³¹ Katharine M. Donato, "Current Trends and Patterns of Female Migration: Evidence from Mexico," *The International Migration Review* 27, no. 4 (1993): 748–71, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2546911>.

3.3 Economic Independence and Expressions of Greater Freedoms

Carina, Brenda, Norma and Amairani are all family, Brenda and Carina are sisters, and Norma and Amairani's brother is married to Brenda. In conversations with the family a pattern became visible that was seen with the other women interviewed. For the women that had experienced life in the United States as young women, the gaining of greater freedoms was not always articulated as the dominant motivation for their migration but was cited as reminder of what was possible for women in the U.S., an aspect that proved enticing for women that often felt oppressed within their relationships and culture.

Norma like Brenda had migrated several times to the United States as a teenager. She convinced her husband to come to the United States with the help of her brother and sister in law a year after Brenda's families migration. Norma had lived in New York in the early 90s and had been able to do factory work there as a teenager, she used her tourist visa to work for short periods of time in New York and California. After a yearlong stay in New York, she returned to Mexico in 1991 due to an unplanned pregnancy and the fallout of her relationship. In Mexico she met her husband a year later, and her desire to come back to the United States stopped as her focus became building a life in Mexico. Her husband came from an upper middleclass household and had never been to the United States, her husband began working and left his studies as an engineering student which helped the family economically. Due to a high-risk pregnancy two years later, Norma was forced to quit her job and the family fell onto financial hardships due to her husband's underemployment at the car manufacturing plant where he worked. Similar to what was expressed by other women throughout the study, Norma felt pushed into marriage for the security it seemed to offer, but she soon found herself facing poverty that left her feeling helpless, and soon saw marriage as a liability instead of an avenue for stability.

“It was hard, Mexico is patriarchal but in reality, you live in a matriarch, you see that mothers are the ones that take the brunt of the work. you notice that unfortunately-although, some of us have broken that cycle with our own daughters- you are taught that once you were done dealing with one person- an irresponsible person, you need to get into a relationship with another irresponsible person. You assume responsibilities that aren't yours because you need to be married.”

Norma shared an especially telling moment that helped her make up her mind that she would convince her husband to leave for the United States or she herself would leave alone because of how dire the families economic circumstances got.

“One day my son got so sick, he almost died, I had to put him in the hospital and they told me, “he is so weak he could have a heart attack.” I stayed with him in the hospital, my sister in-law had to say it was her son, because I couldn't even afford the doctor. That was poverty. That was what made me say, I'm done. My brother was in the U.S., it was his third or fourth time going, and he called me and said, ‘tell your husband to come here, we'll help him out, so come.’ I had made up my mind that if he didn't go I would go. They loaned us the money, my mom, my mom's sisters, my father, and he went. Again, I stayed alone working here and there, but I was done. I didn't want a big house or a car, I just wanted to eat, have some money for my children. Meet their basic needs. My husband left and he began sending me money, to pay back the loan, to sustain ourselves. I began saving, I was so desperate I had my tourist visa and I told my dad ‘I'm going to go, I'll leave my kids’ and my dad said, ‘no, without your kids you're not leaving’’. I thank my dad now, back then it was so frustrating because it was a dream of mine to be here, but my dad helped me get my daughter her visa, even with his poverty he helped me as much as he could. I brought my kids with me, and once I came, I said, I am not leaving. if he wants to go back he can go back.”

Carina and Brenda were the initial connections to Oregon for their families, and while in Norma's case her husband migrated first, without her ties in Portland he would not have been able to find employment nor the financial and emotional support needed to be able to settle in Portland and help finance her trip. Norma articulated, that while she and Brenda were living under their husbands “control”, both women were influential in migration decisions. Brenda gave

an example of the negotiation she made of her desire for better economic opportunities and being back home in Oregon, with her husband's comfort which kept them in Mexico.

"I did not decide to stay [in Mexico], he just got comfortable, because he was with his family. But I always told him I wanted to go back, and he always said, 'but I have a good job' and he did have a good job, because he knew English, and everything. He got comfortable, but I couldn't... how can I put this, he was a Mexican guy, a macho guy, so I couldn't really tell him what to do. I would always have to do whatever he said. But I knew my kids would have a better life in the United States, so when his job started doing things he didn't really like, I got my brother to call him, and talk to him about the jobs in Oregon."

Both women describe now having a certain amount of decision making not present in their earlier ages, an expressed feeling pride in their role in getting their families to the United States.

"I recognize more than ever the courage we have as women, the value we played in coming here, and pushing our families to rise from the ashes because we come with nothing here" voiced Norma. Brenda, similarly expressed being an equal in her household, noting that her husband doesn't make decisions for her anymore.

Like Norma, Julieta, Lina and Penelope voiced the progression of "freedoms" they have gained in the U.S. as results of migration. These women did not migrate in the hopes of gaining freedoms, but now recognize it as a key reason for deciding to stay even after separating from their spouses and enduring extreme financial and emotional hardships while in the United States.

Julieta came to the United States at eighteen to join her husband. She described feeling oppressed as soon as she arrived, due to her inability to speak English, lack of friends and family, and having to live with her husband's father and cousin, which led her to feel "caged in".

Although, Julieta had been working in the city in her hometown of Cancun since the age of thirteen, and had migrated alone through the desert, her husband refused to let her work outside of the home, claiming it was too dangerous. Like other women, Julieta identified her inability to make decisions due to gender roles and expectations of wives.

“Back then you would do what your husband says. I would say, ‘why do I have to do everything you say?’ My husband was authoritarian, and he would say, ‘I support you and I brought you here, so you’ll do what I say’ all the time it was the same thing, ‘I brought you here, I support you and you’ll do as I say’. I would say, ‘you’re my husband not my owner’. But he refused to listen, always treated me as if I belonged to him.”

Julieta began working without her husband knowing a year into her stay. She worked in a plant nursery and used her neighbors phone number and address so her husband would not find out. One day when her husband came home sick he noticed she was gone and called to find out where she was, she told him the truth, and prepared to get hit when she arrived home, but instead he agreed to let her work, placing the condition that he would be responsible for her paychecks.

“It was difficult because when he knew I worked, he did what the majority of husbands do, he took half my paycheck, you know they say, ‘you have to pay a bill, you have to pay this and that’. I got angry, because I worked to send money back to my mother who was still renting a house in Mexico and had to move often. But, I knew that’s what it took and from then on, I said, ‘ok well if I have to pay I have to pay.’” Though she gave half her paycheck to her husband, Julieta was able to save enough money to help build her mom a house in Mexico, and finance the migration of her older brother, two areas of immense pride for Julieta.

Julieta stopped working after the birth of her child in 2008, she then mostly stayed at home, and soon welcomed their second child which erased any hope of returning to work. A few years after, without announcement, while recovering in the hospital from the birth of their third child, who was born with a rare genetic condition that requires around the clock supervision, Julieta’s husband left to Mexico. At the hospital she learned that her husband had been accused of raping their next-door neighbor and was wanted by the police. Julieta has to assumed the role of both mom and dad and became the head of household rushing to find work again. Julieta is extremely proud of how far she has come, but she regrets the time she wasted “listening to him” because that’s what she was taught to do as a wife and woman. In Oregon she has suffered

traumas that include robbery at gun point, harassment by police due to her husband leaving to Mexico, and eviction but she feels free in ways she thinks would have been unlikely with her husband.

Single motherhood also propelled other women into roles they had not been allowed to take on, this left the women with greater independence but at the cost of extreme financial hardships. Lina unlike Julieta began working immediately to help with expenses, but her husband was in charge of the finances, and would take her check often leaving her with no money. She expresses not speaking up due to the physical abuse that had become normalized in early on in the marriage. Like Julieta her husbands departed one day without announcement.

“Back then when I believed in marriage, I would give him all my money for him to pay the bills, but I knew he was with other women and that’s what he was using it for. One day he said he was leaving and he left me \$75 for the rent, and he left that day. They were going to evict me from the apartment, and I went and asked this organization for help, and they really helped, they paid six months’ rent for me. It was so hard emotionally, for six months I went and drank, I think I was depressed. I began drinking, but I always worked, always paid the rent for my children.”

Lina did not consider herself financially competent, but soon took charge of the finances and became empowered in other areas of her life. “I was a girl back then, I didn’t know about money, I didn’t know about anything, but now, I am impulsive and frank, because everything I’ve been through. It’s not easy. I decided to not stay silent. If you’re hushed, the things you want to say come out but in ways you don’t want.” Lina proudly told the story of the day she was able to confront her brother on his abuse, and the cathartic experience of that phone call. A call she credits to her life in the United States.

“One time I talked to my brother, because I have a brother in California and he went there, and they got in a fight, and I got angry because as women obviously we have to unite, and the men have to unite, and so I called him and I said, ‘I think it’s time that you cut that thread of beating up on people, we lived in Mexico like animals, we never saw that our mom or dad gave us care, but it’s time that we cut that thread.’ He started telling me that I thought I was something because I was in the north, and I said, ‘no it’s just that here there’s another way to be raised, I think to be beaten up and to beat up is over.’ I started telling him my truths very politically, and

he hung up. I said, 'I'll leave it' ... I used to hate him a lot, but I said, 'no, he'll pay for what he did' in what way I don't know, but he'll pay."

Penelope migrated to the United States due to the possibility of better economic opportunities. As a teenager she saw the possibilities possible for her and her family, and here knew things were different in the U.S. for women. "Here, women aren't like in Mexico. Here they have rights." In Oregon she recalls growing angry seeing how her husband found his "liberties", often going out drinking with friends all weekend, which she stayed and raised her children. She decided to leave him after the birth of their last child five years ago and cites her divorce for helping her gain independence.

"I came here with the ideas that your parents teach you, more when you come from a small town, my parents taught me that family was first. Since divorcing I feel different, because like I told you, all these years I dedicated myself to my home and when we got divorced I took responsibility of my home, alone, with my kids, so I feel different. I feel independent. Back then he did practically everything, or I had to be after him to see what I could do. Now I make my own decisions, I am free, for example if I want to buy something I'll buy it, when I was with him, it was always dependent on if he was on board. Those liberties I have now like going out with my friends, that was a thing I stopped doing since I was a young. I feel liberated."

The women described their divorce and separations as a positive consequence of their migration. They expressed that in Mexico divorce is still stigmatized, and many women lacked the financial stability to be able to divorce or separate from partners that often head of households. In the U.S., due to lack of family many of the women felt less stigmatized in their decision and began crating extensive support systems that helped them navigate single parenthood and did not stigmatize the women's decisions of divorce. When Lina and Penelope decided to divorce, Norma's daughter who was in college at the time helped them file their divorce papers and attend family court. Julieta after her divorce helped a coworker flee from domestic violence by offering her a room in her small apartment. Lina credits getting help with her alcoholism due to help she received form co-workers. The women expressed seeing divorce as an avenue that granted them various freedoms. Divorce for these immigrant women impacted

the gender roles allotted to women and gave them the economic tools to be able to enjoy greater liberties.

Part IV

4.1 Discussion and Conclusion

The migration of Mexican women has historically been dependent on male relatives and partners due to multiple socio-economic factors. The creation of gender specific work programs, cultural stigma against migration of single women, and economic disparities created a lack of channels for women to migrate in the same way as men, and thus, prominent research sees women as factors of male migration. What came out from this rich, albeit limited, data is that *how* women migrate does not reflect reasons *why* women migrate, and a distinguishing should be made on the initiation of women migration process and motives behind women's migration.

The women interviewed offered a nuanced look into the multiple factors impacting decision-making. Some of the factors were byproducts of policy, and economic markets, and others of patriarchal constructions of gender, including limitations and burdens of womanhood.

Gender based violence at multiple levels greatly limited women's safety and economic opportunities in Mexico which affected their decision making around migration. While the migration experts debate the extent of true decision-making migrants have, an area complicated by the multiple clandestine aspects involved in migration, research on the effects of gender on socioeconomic environments for both men and women, explores the level of autonomy given to men and women, and provides critical analysis on the disparities that exist

Also, while family reunification was often a motivation for women, and means for women's migration as a result of spouses and relative migrating, the women played important roles and held multiple motivations for their migration. Furthermore, the women in this study often used their social networks not their husbands to facilitate the migration of male partners, and their families, and secure jobs and housing. It also pointed out women's emotional labor

within the migratory process. Women had to navigate their partners needs and wants around migration, with what they deemed was best for their families. They were tasked with maintaining traditional gender roles i.e. raising children and maintaining a household in Oregon, while in some cases, having to financially contribute. The emotional toll women pay is an under researched and undervalued area of study of migration, but one that has significant effects on migration.

This small macro-level study of gender and migration considers the effects of structural factors on an individual and household level in motivations for migration. But, further macro-level factors also largely impact these decisions. Macro and micro level approaches of socioeconomic structures through a gendered lens would provide insight on existing gaps within migration, which as migration becomes more feminized is relevant and timely.

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Appendixes

Table 1. Demographics of Mexican Women Interviewed in Portland, Oregon

Name	Year of Departure	State of Origin	Years in U.S.	Age	Educational Attainment	Occupation	Number of Children	Marital Status
Viviana	2004	Tijuana, Baja California	13	57	Some Grade School	House Cleaning	2	Seperated
Marisol	2002, 2004	Tutepec, Oxaca	14	44	Some High School	Restaurant Worker	3	Married
Carina	1975, 1998	Gudalajara, Jalisco	29	53	Some High School	House Cleaning	2	Seperated
Penelope	1992, 1993	Tala, Jalisco	25	43	High School	House Cleaning	3	Divorced
Julieta	1999	Cancun, Yucatan	19	38	Middle School	House Cleaning	3	Seperated
Tamara	2003, 2015	Perdraanales, Michocan	12	33	Middle School	Seafood Processing Site	0	Never Married
Brenda	1975, 1989	Gudalajara, Jalisco	37	49	Some High School	Unemployed	2	Married
Norma	1987, 1997	Puebla, Mexico	25	46	Some College	Human Resources	4	Married
Amairani	1994, 1996	Puebla, Mexico	22	40	Some College	Field Manager	2	Divorced
Lina	2000	Gudalajara, Jalisco	18	35	Some Grade School	House Cleaning	3	Divorced

Table 2. State of Origin of Women Interviewed

