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El Que No Tranza, No Avanza: Exploring The Lived Experiences Of Mexican American Community College Students On The U.s.-Mexico Border In Becoming Philosophers

Manuela Alejandra Gomez
University of Texas at El Paso

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EL QUE NO TRANZA, NO AVANZA: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF
MEXICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS ON THE
U.S.-MEXICO BORDER IN BECOMING PHILOSOPHERS

MANUELA ALEJANDRA GOMEZ

Doctoral Program in Teaching, Learning, and Culture

APPROVED:

Char Ullman, Ph.D., Chair

Christina Convertino, Ph.D.

Maria Teresa de la Piedra, Ph.D.

Jules Simon, Ph.D.

Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

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Manuela Alejandra Gomez

2023

Dedication

This is dedicated to my father, Manuel Gómez Martínez; your love, wisdom, and continuous sacrifices got me here. Thank you for your courage, for instilling the value of education in me, and for being my best teacher. *Mamá, aunque nuestro encuentro fue corto, nuestro amor por siempre perdurará. Besos a todos mis ángeles en el cielo, los extraño y este logro es para ustedes. Esto también es para todos los atravesados, sigamos tranzando y avanzando.*

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by

MANUELA ALEJANDRA GOMEZ

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Teacher Education
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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of seven Mexican American community college philosophy students in their journeys to becoming philosophers in the U.S.-Mexico border, between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Philosophy is one of the least diverse academic fields in the United States (Jones, 2020) and often excludes women and people of color (Alcoff, 2013; Ferrer, 2012; Galea, 2017; Haslanger, 2013; Hutchinson & Jenkins, 2013; Leuschner, 2015; Saul, 2012; Wilson, 2012). Therefore, I examine what it means to be a philosopher to these seven Mexican American students and their processes of becoming philosophers in a transnational context between two nations, two cultures, and two languages. I consider the role of language and of their bilingualism through the use of *dichos* in their philosophical journeys. Additionally, I utilize Critical Race Theory (CRT), (Ladson-Billings et al., 1995; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000) particularly, Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), Intersectionality, (Crenshaw, 1991, 1993, 2011) and Figured Worlds (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007) to analyze their lived experiences and identities. I performed a content analysis of the phenomenological data I gathered through written and oral testimonios, observations of a philosophy club, and interviews. This study has implications for the fields of education and philosophy.

Keywords: Mexican Americans, Philosophy Education, Community College, U.S.-Mexico Border, Identities.

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1. Chapter I: Introduction

In this first chapter, I begin by providing some background of the problem I seek to analyze in my study, which is the serious underrepresentation of women and people of color, particularly Mexican Americans, in the field of philosophy (Alcoff, 2013; Ferrer, 2012; Galea, 2017; Haslanger, 2013; Hutchinson & Jenkins, 2013; Jones, 2020; Leuschner, 2015; Saul, 2012; Wilson, 2012). I then delineate the significance of my contribution in exploring the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students of philosophy on the U.S.-Mexico border to the fields of education and philosophy.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

I have taught philosophy at higher education institutions on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border for over 18 years. In 2021, I became the first woman in the over 50-year history of my Texas college to obtain tenure in the philosophy discipline. In 2006, I was the first Mexican American in the history of a prestigious Texas university established in 1876 to ever receive a graduate degree in philosophy. This means that for over 100 years, no one like me had such an educational opportunity. While these academic achievements allude to my hard work and perseverance, they also reveal the conditions of severe underrepresentation that exist in academic philosophy in the United States for women and minoritized individuals as both faculty and as students. Today, as a philosophy educator, as a doctoral candidate, and as a woman of color in the United States, I continue to prove myself and squeeze into spaces where traditionally people like me have not been welcomed.

Historically, academia, in general, has systematically excluded those deemed as outsiders (Baffoe et al., 2014). These outsiders include women and mostly people of color (Coté, 2009). Sadly, philosophy is one of the least diverse academic fields, not just in the United States but the

world and this ongoing problem is impeding its progress (Levine, 2016). When we think of philosophers, white European men with beards like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle come to mind. Rarely do we think of women, or people of color, much less of Mexican Americans, who unfortunately tend to be more often associated with manual labor than with intellectual work.

Haslanger (2013) found that less than 17 percent of all the philosophy educators in the United States are women, and of those, less than one percent are women of color. Additionally, in the latest report from the Society of Women in Philosophy in the UK, women only make up 25 percent of all philosophy professors in the United Kingdom and there is absolutely no distinction for their race or any other intersecting categories in the data they have collected that would allow us to understand these statistics further (Beebe & Saul, 2021). In another recent national study in Spain, González (2020) examined gender imbalance in philosophy using statistical analysis of philosophy professionals and philosophy students and found that among teaching and research personnel, women make up 25 percent as philosophy faculty and philosophy students, and that women full professors in philosophy only represent 12 percent in the entire country.

While my personal experience in the United States demonstrates that some progress has been made in recent decades, much work still needs to be done. Even though women have obtained more than half of all the PhDs awarded in the United States, fewer than 30 percent of doctorates in philosophy are awarded to women (Antony, 2012). According to the latest reports from the American Philosophy Association, there were 450 doctoral degrees awarded in philosophy in 2014, of these 450, just 30 degrees were awarded to women, and only three of these degrees were awarded to Hispanic women (APA Online, 2014). Women's involvement and visibility in philosophy have had virtually no significant gains since the 1990's (Schwitzgebel & Jennings,

2017). This matters because for a discipline that has the power to create knowledge and “claims to speak on behalf of humanity” its voice primarily has been composed of white, middle-class, and masculine sources (Hutchinson & Jenkins, 2013).

One of the primary theoretical lenses that have been used to examine the lack of diversity in philosophy is a gendered schema, in which the behavior of males and females is analyzed in relation to gender expectations of the culture in which they live. Antony (2012) not only uncovers the discrepancy in the fewer number of doctorates awarded to women in philosophy, but also reveals how at the professoriate level, women also fall behind in faculty positions because sexism is also transferred into the job realm. Unfortunately, for thousands of years, even the most canonical figures in philosophy, from Aristotle to Kant, have held exclusionary and derogatory views about women. Kant argued that women are incapable of philosophizing and engaging in abstract thought because their/our faculties of understanding are “beautiful” not “sublime” like men’s (Antony, 2012). This historically gendered environment makes women in philosophy feel unwelcome and unfit for philosophical debate (Holtzman, 2016). Ma et al. (2017) find that the more women view philosophy as masculine, the less they identify with it, and the more discouraged they feel about pursuing it academically and professionally.

The problem of exclusion and underrepresentation of women and minoritized faculty and students in philosophy is severe and enduring and this extends to their lack of epistemological power in scholarly publishing and in scholarly citations, which portends to be a measure of academic impact (Saul, 2013; Wilson, 2012). Jones (2020) states that the adversarial method of argumentation in philosophy that is often associated with masculinity (Holtzman, 2016) particularly with white men, and the excessive policing of what is considered “real” philosophy and what is not, could help explain the lack of minoritized people in philosophy. Furthermore,

Jones (2020) presents the problem of underrepresentation as multidimensional because it is not only about philosophy lacking diverse philosophers, but also about how “non-traditional” subdisciplines of philosophy, those mostly practiced by women and people of color, like feminism, critical race theory, Latin American philosophy, etc. are delegitimized and considered less prestigious than their more traditional counterparts.

To problematize this further, the limited existent research frames women in philosophy as a whole, and as separate from racially minoritized scholars (Haslanger, 2008). Women and people of color are presented in the literature as single homogenous groups, without unpacking their differences and cutting across crucial intersectional categories, leaving many of them, like Mexican Americans, invisible.

Moreover, current research that focuses on the underrepresentation in philosophy is predominantly quantitative and focused mostly just on gender (Dobbs, 2017). This means that quantitative research has done the initial job of identifying disparities in terms of numbers, but now we need to understand why and how these disparities continue. Through this qualitative study, I seek to explore why these disparities keep occurring, and hope to contribute to existing qualitative research to create meaningful change. Quantitative research is a good start, but by itself lacks important features about the unique lived experiences of women and people of color in their journeys of becoming and being philosophers and it also requires an intersectional approach.

Because I am one of the very few Mexican American women in academic philosophy in the United States and Mexico, I carry a distinctive responsibility to show others, especially Mexican American students that despite the many complex challenges they/we encounter, including poverty, discrimination, and language barriers, that education can open many new

doors for them/us to succeed. I am fortunate to work in the U.S.-Mexico border, between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua for an institution that serves over 28,000 students, the vast majority-more than 80 percent of them, Mexican American. Many students cross a physical bridge every day from Mexico to the United States and vice versa and endure the contestation of their identities on both sides of the border. Most of them navigate the challenges of both countries and cultures and have distinctive lived experiences of being on the front lines of international political debates that range from inhumane immigration policies to the deadly effects of racism.

On August 3rd of 2019, my border community fell victim to the deadliest massacre of Mexican Americans in modern U.S. history, when a white supremacist gunman killed 23 people at a Walmart located just a three-minute drive from my campus. He specifically targeted us because we are a “Hispanic community”, and he believed the white nationalist lie that “we had invaded Texas” (Brockell, 2019). This horrendous act forced many individuals impacted by this deadly racist ideology to become naturally philosophical. We had to try to find an answer to the question: Why would somebody drive over 600 miles to kill us just because of who we are?

In this qualitative study, I build upon a quantitative and gendered approach to understand the underrepresentation of Mexican Americans in philosophy, in order to help close the underrepresentation gap of women and people of color in philosophy. It is also my intention to honor Mexican American students of philosophy and inspire them to be proud of who we/they are. For me, philosophy has served as a mirror for self-reflection in examining and making sense of my contested U.S.-Mexico border identity. It has been a powerful tool for me to overcome and survive many of my life’s challenges. In many instances, it is precisely the exposure to the lived experiences of crime and injustices on the border like the one on August 3rd that has led some of

us into philosophy. I have discovered that individual and collective border suffering can sometimes encourage social reflections that reveal pivotal ethical, existential, metaphysical, and epistemological questions and the will to seek answers.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM: SOMETHING’S GOT TO CHANGE

Philosophy is one of the least diverse fields for minoritized individuals both as faculty and students in the humanities in the United States (Ferrer, 2012; Haslanger, 2013; Jones, 2020; Levine, 2016; Wilson, 2012) and the world (Beebe & Saul, 2021; González, 2020). This is because of the systemic racism and sexism that have served as gatekeeping mechanisms to exclude women and people of color from the field. The existing research mostly focuses on a gender gap that primarily examines white women as faculty and students (Antony, 2012; Dobbs, 2017) but does not consider intersectional identities like those of Mexican American philosophy students on the U.S.-Mexico border. Current literature gives us some insights about the sexism that has othered women in philosophy, but very little is known about the impact of racism in excluding people of color, particularly Mexican Americans. Therefore, in this study, I explore the phenomenological experiences of seven Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border in their journeys of becoming philosophers and about whom there is no research in the present educational literature except for previous work of mine (Gomez, 2018, 2020). I will also provide an intersectional perspective in understanding their complex hybrid identities within the phenomenon of their underrepresentation.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: IMPROVING REPRESENTATION AMONG FACULTY AND STUDENTS IN PHILOSOPHY

The purpose of this study is to understand how Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border become philosophers, what it means to them to be a

philosopher, and what their lived experiences are as they engage in this journey. My objective is to understand how they experience and interpret the phenomenon of becoming philosophers within a field that has historically and institutionally marginalized people like them. This is especially important within a transnational hybrid context like the U.S.-Mexico border. Study participants reveal meaningful philosophical insights about the process of becoming a philosopher through reflections on their lived experiences.

This study allows educational scholars and philosophers to better recognize and develop solutions to the problem of the underrepresentation of minoritized individuals in academic philosophy in the United States and perhaps beyond. I utilize Critical Race Theory (CRT), (Ladson-Billings et al., 1995; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000) particularly, Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), Intersectionality, (Crenshaw, 1991, 1993, 2011) and Figured Worlds (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007) to analyze the lived experiences and identities of Mexican American U.S.-Mexico border community college students of philosophy. These frameworks assisted me in better investigating the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, culture, language, educational institutions, and the impact of racism on minoritized individuals.

My goal in this dissertation is to analyze the multiple aspects of minoritized identities of Mexican American community college students in the U.S.-Mexico border and their particular lived experiences in becoming philosophers. Recent research (Antony, 2012; Aymelek, 2015; Dobbs, 2017; Kings, 2019; Paxton et al., 2012) does not look at the problem of underrepresentation in philosophy regarding multiple aspects of identity and intersectionality. Therefore, this study contributes to the current literature by providing an intersectional dimension to exploring underrepresented individuals' experiences in becoming philosophers. The methodology of phenomenology through the use of testimonios and observations also

contributes to the literature, as most of the literature on underrepresentation in academic philosophy is quantitative (Adleberg et al., 2014; Dobbs, 2017; Paxton et al., 2012).

Additionally, this study serves as a critique of the current state of academic philosophy in the United States by exposing the historic and systematic racism and sexism that has excluded the contributions of women and people of color. This work values the lived experiences and voices of those in groups that have been perpetually marginalized.

Finally, this phenomenological study utilizes testimonios as valid sources of legitimate knowledge. Testimonios are a critical Latin American oral and written practice that is contingent upon personal and communal lived experiences as important sources of knowledge in understanding one's place within political, social, and cultural contexts (Bernal et al., 2012). Testimonios allow participants to reflect and speak about their journeys in becoming philosophers and for some, this may be a means of healing and empowerment (Pérez Huber, 2009, 2010). Through testimonios, this study provides useful data on the intersection of educational research and philosophy. Testimonios might reveal ideas about how to make philosophy a more welcoming place for women and people of color and how to create substantive inclusion and incorporation of their epistemological insights. The more we understand their phenomenological lived experiences, the more measures we can take to end their underrepresentation. Overall, my work aims to change the perception of who a philosopher is, to be more inclusive.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that guide this study and allow me to explore the intersectional layers of the phenomenon of becoming a philosopher among a demographic that has been severely excluded are:

1. How do Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border become philosophers?
2. For Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border, what does it mean to be a philosopher?
3. What are the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border in relation to becoming a philosopher?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY: MORE THAN JUST A GENDER APPROACH

While there is significant scholarly research about the lack of women and minoritized people in academic fields such as STEM, (Convertino, 2020; Ong et al., 2011; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019) there has been less research about women and minoritized people as students and scholars in the humanities and the social sciences. Little is still known about the reality of their lived experiences, their exclusion (Bianco, 2016), and their invisibility (Settles et al., 2018) in these fields. Within the humanities, philosophy has been and continues to be, one of the least racially, ethnically, and gender-diverse academic fields (Ferrer, 2012; Haslanger, 2013; Jones, 2020; Wilson, 2012). Philosophy has long been plagued by a lack of diversity, due to social and cultural factors that have historically marginalized and excluded minoritized groups from fair educational and professional opportunities. This issue of underrepresentation is significant because philosophy has been dominated by a limited range of perspectives and experiences and because of this, underrepresented groups may find it harder to engage with philosophical ideas and academic careers due to this reduced access. Furthermore, this underrepresentation can also perpetuate and reinforce broader social inequalities, as these minoritized groups may be less likely to have their voices heard and their perspectives taken into account.

In my study, I analyze the lived experiences of seven Mexican American community college students of philosophy on the U.S.-Mexico border, which contributes to work on the exclusion and invisibility of minoritized people in the humanities and the social sciences (Settles et al., 2018). Academic philosophy is highly structured and theoretical and rarely acknowledges the importance of lived experiences. It has on many occasions delegitimized them as anecdotal and they have not been seen as valid sources of knowledge. My study challenges those perceptions.

Furthermore, the significance of this qualitative study is that it allows philosophers and educators to understand the depth of the underrepresentation of minoritized individuals in philosophy in the United States and create possibilities for change. It also contributes to scholarly understandings of Mexican American students' identities in the U.S.-Mexico border and the relevance of their journeys to become philosophers to the fields of philosophy and education.

1.6 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: U.S.-MEXICO BORDER, AQUI TODO, TODO ES DIFERENTE EN LA FRONTERA

More Latinos are going to college than ever before, and the majority begin their higher education at community colleges (Guzman, 2016). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2013) indicates that 46% of all Latinx students in U.S. higher education are enrolled at a community college. Section 1.8 of this dissertation under *Definition of Terms: The Trouble with Labels* addresses the different use of the terms: Latino/a/s, Latinx, Hispanic, etc. throughout the literature.

Latinx college students are enrolled in community colleges at higher rates than in four-year colleges (Hatch et al., 2015). This is because community colleges represent the opportunity for students of all ages and backgrounds to begin and continue their academic trajectory (Campa,

2013). Moreover, these institutions attract and illuminate higher educational pathways for all minoritized students, but in particular, for the largest student body, the Latinx community (Boswell & Wilson, 2004; Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003). Handel (2011) claims that community colleges are the main institutions in providing a pathway to bachelor's degrees to students of underserved groups, and Hernández (2017) contends that community colleges play a significant role in guiding pathways to postsecondary degrees for Latinx students. Therefore, analyzing the lived experiences of Mexican American students of philosophy in the context of community college allows me to trace their beginnings in their journeys to becoming philosophers.

The fact that the study was also conducted on the U.S.-Mexico border also adds another important layer of intersectionality in understanding other crucial dimensions to their lived experiences. This is because historically, the U.S.-Mexico border has been considered a place of persistent poverty (Beale & Gibbs, 2006) and educational disadvantage. In the 1980s, the underfunding of border higher education as taken up in court in the lawsuit *Lulac v. Richards*. This lawsuit maintained that border colleges and universities were not receiving their fair share of state funding because of racial and ethnic discrimination (Santiago, 2008). Although LULAC won that educational discrimination case in a lower court, when taken to the Texas Supreme Court on appeal, the lower court ruling was overturned in 1993, citing no evidence of intentional discrimination and that access to higher education was not a fundamental right protected by the Texas Constitution (Ullman et al., 2020.)

This means that for decades, Mexican American students on the U.S.-Mexico border have had to persevere in less-than-ideal educational conditions while navigating the complex transnational challenges they are exposed to. When exploring the U.S.-Mexico border and

notions of in-betweenness, it is impossible not to refer to Anzaldúa's work of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) in which she presents an analysis of her own multifaceted identity and narrates what it is like to be caught in between the different worlds she inhabits. She calls this being between the *intersticio*. Unfortunately, beyond the work of Anzaldúa, except for the exploration of defining borders and issues regarding sovereignty, territory, and security, (Heyman, 2012; Nail, 2016) we do not have much literature exploring the dynamic hybridity of border identities, much less in the context of education or in the field of philosophy.

Conducting this study in the context of El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua is an important scholarly contribution to work on the study of philosophy in the borderlands, since literature that focuses exclusively on Mexican Americans in philosophy, especially in the context of the U.S.-Mexico border is virtually non-existent, except for my own previous research, (Gomez, 2018, 2020) that addresses how philosophy textbooks are not representative of people of color and how it is hard for Mexican American students to relate to academic philosophy because it is so very Eurocentric and does not account for their lived experiences. To achieve a better understanding of their academic journeys, it is crucial that I conduct this study on the U.S.-Mexico border, with participants who identify as Mexican Americans, are students of philosophy, as well as their being enrolled and/or having been in a community college.

1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY: THE METHODS OF PHENOMENOLOGY AND TESTIMONIOS

In understanding the phenomenon of Mexican American students studying philosophy and becoming philosophers at the community college level in the U.S.-Mexico border, my larger methodological approach was a phenomenological one, and it included testimonios, both written and oral, and participant observation of a philosophy club. Testimonios allow participants to express themselves openly and share their life experiences. They also gave the opportunity to

those affected by racism, sexism, and classism to respond to oppression through their voiced lived experiences (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012).

This empirical phenomenological research approach focuses on what an experience means for the person who has had the experience. In the case of this study, it means examining the experience as they are still in the process of being and becoming, and it involves a return to previous parts of the experience. This allows us to attain comprehensive descriptions that form the basis for a reflective structural analysis—one that portrays the essences of that experience (Moustakas, 1994). Testimonios give us access to the complex lived experiences of Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border. Pérez Huber (2010) describes testimonio as a “journey of a witness who reflects and speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future” (p. 851). This becomes relevant when we realize that mainstream discourses about lived experiences and marginalization in academic philosophy fail to represent the voices of Mexican Americans and often ignore their contributions. I will expand on the connection between phenomenology and testimonios further in my methods chapter in sections 3.4 and 3.5.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS: THE TROUBLE WITH LABELS AND MORE

The title of my study begins with the Mexican *dicho*: “*el que no tranza, no avanza*”. This popular saying was shared by one of my participants when asked to pick a piece of everyday Mexican philosophy that he could relate to when I conducted the pilot study of this research in 2018. The same *dicho* came up again while conducting data for my dissertation. There is no accurate translation of “*el que no tranza, no avanza*” into English because *tranzar* is a slang

word that vaguely means to trick, to deviate, or to scam. The *dicho* roughly translates to *he/she/one who does not trick cannot move forward*.

I picked this *dicho* to be in the title of this study because in many ways it captures the essence of the lived experiences of Mexican American students on their journeys of becoming philosophers on the U.S.-Mexico border. Their path is not linear, they/we have had to find alternative routes, imagine different ways, and to a degree, *tranzar* within cultures and languages, and *atravesar* obstacles and institutions to keep moving forward. Coincidentally, this is also my personal favorite *dicho* and I use it in the title of my doctoral work as a way to honor my Mexican American identity and culture. The words *transar* and *tranzar* are both used interchangeably in the *dicho*. *Transar* with an *s* means to negotiate or come to an agreement, and *tranzar* with a *z*, means to cut across. The full implications of this *dicho* will be further explored in Chapter Four under the section 4.8 *Role of Language: Dichos y Tranzas con el Idioma*.

I use the term *minoritized* throughout my study to describe how people (students and faculty) of color, are racially, ethnically, and systemically defined as a smaller group; characterized to be different and othered from the dominant majority group and in many ways robbed of their power. Additionally, the term *people of color* in this study refers to people who are not white, in the sense that they do not benefit from whiteness in the United States. *Underrepresented* refers to those minoritized and marginalized within a specific group for which there is unequal representation and there is not enough of them in said group.

I also return again and again to the trouble with the labels, exploring terms such as *Mexican American*, *Hispanic*, *Latino/a*, *Latinx*, *Chican@*, and their variations, which are frequently used interchangeably throughout academic literature to describe a group of minoritized people. These common labels have changed through time, they may mean something

different depending on the geographic location of those who use them, and are used for, and can often be politically charged. Ultimately, these overlapping terms signify the absence of an in-depth understanding of the complex identities of each of these groups, and of minoritized people in general because they lack reference to important personal lived experiences that constitute those identities.

This semantic issue of categorization becomes relevant when we realize that minoritized groups are severely underrepresented, in all ways, but in particular in the academy in the United States. While I maintain the original use of the labels as found in the literature, while discussing the literature, I specifically refer to my participants in this study as Mexican Americans based on the fact that they are from the U.S.-Mexico border, and they mostly self-identify as such. However, a significant part of this study examines the implication of the *Mexican American* label as part of the participants' identities in section 4.2 *Mexican/American and Chicano Identities and Becoming in the U.S. Mexico Border* of Chapter Four. So, I am aware that even if categorized under the same label, differences matter and that the labels chosen by the participants are performed distinctively and individually. Additionally, *Mexican American philosophy students* does not refer to those who study Mexican American philosophy rather to Mexican American students who study philosophy.

I struggled with the use of the prepositions *in* and *on* the U.S.-Mexico border in my writing. You will find the use of both of them in this study because even though autocorrect would tell me to modify *in* into *on*, the use of *on*, at times felt superficial when trying to illustrate living inside and experiencing the depths of the border from within.

Finally, in this study, I use the term *us* in two different ways. The first refers to us as academics in education and/or philosophy, and the second way refers to *us* as those who identify

as Mexican Americans from the U.S.-Mexico border. I also use *we/they* and *our/their* for the same purpose. I will be specific with the meaning of the terms whenever I utilize them throughout this study to avoid confusion.

1.9 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Borders are different and not all Mexican Americans or people with Mexican and American roots have the same lived experiences. Therefore, this study is not intended as a monolithic representation of all Mexican American community college students of philosophy in the U.S.-Mexico border. The objective is to begin the exploration of a group that we know very little about, but who can offer valuable insights into their journeys of becoming philosophers in the geographical/cultural context of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Another limitation, but also an important finding of this dissertation, is that just like the literature documents a severe underrepresentation of women, referring to mostly white women in philosophy (Alcoff, 2013; Galea, 2017; Haslanger, 2008 Hutchinson & Jenkins, 2013; Leuschner, 2015; Saul, 2012; Wilson, 2012), the same unfortunate reality was reflected in this study as most of the participants, six out of the seven, are men. This is because of the difficulty of encountering Mexican American women in philosophy at all academic levels. Nonetheless, this lack of women further validates the literature and legitimizes the need for this type of qualitative inquiry about representation.

Furthermore, this study does not resolve the trouble with labels repeatedly addressed throughout this dissertation. In fact, it intends to problematize the issue even more and expose the many nuances of hybrid identities. In the U.S.-Mexico border, there are many ways of referring to people with both Mexican and American heritages. My study simply aims to narrow the discussion within the scope of those who fit in and around the label of Mexican American.

1.10 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER ONE

In this chapter, I explored the background and significance of this study and argued for the importance of exploring the community college and U.S.-Mexico border contexts. The next chapter looks at the relevant literature that justifies the urgent need for this study. It also situates the contributions of this study to both the fields of education and philosophy.

In my extensive review of the literature, which follows, I discuss the historical literature on institutional marginalization in academia, followed by an examination of the literature on microaggressions and exclusion of women of color and minoritized faculty and students in higher education. After that, I examine the research on philosophy and whiteness, which includes the exclusion of women in philosophy and the marginalization of Mexican American philosophers within the U.S. academy. This includes both empirical studies as well as philosophical commentary on the problem. I conclude my literature review by looking at the literature on Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border and the role of language— particularly bilingualism, as another dimension of their marginalization.

2. Chapter II: Literature Review

2.1 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER

This chapter vastly explores the relevant literature that establishes the crucial need for this qualitative study. I analyze existing debates on minoritized faculty and students in academia at large, with a particular emphasis on women and Mexican Americans in philosophy. I begin with a general approach to understanding the historical underrepresentation of minoritized people in academia as a whole and then build up to analyzing the underrepresentation of women and people of color, as faculty and students, particularly Mexican Americans, in the context of philosophy. This literature review sets the stage for me to address the research questions for my study. I revisit them here:

1. How do Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border become philosophers?
2. For Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border, what does it mean to be a philosopher?
3. What are the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border in relation to becoming a philosopher?

2.2 UNDERREPRESENTATION OF MINORITIZED GROUPS IN U.S. ACADEMIA IN GENERAL AND PHILOSOPHY IN PARTICULAR

Academia in the United States has marginalized the voices of those deemed as outsiders (Baffoe et al., 2014). These outsiders include women, people of color, indigenous people, those who are poor, disabled, LGBTQ+, and the elderly. But mostly, those who are excluded are people of color (Coté, 2009). Communities of color have been minoritized and disenfranchised in multiple ways and to various degrees. These include exclusion in intellectual discourses and

academic spaces to the devaluing of their ontological and epistemological contributions in their ways of being and knowing (Gomez, 2021).

Although there have been some institutional improvements in the educational achievements for minoritized communities in recent decades, like improved retention rates and the creation of diversity programs, oppressive systemic factors categorized by race, gender, class, sexuality, and immigration status still reflect the harsh reality of many communities of color (Díaz, 2019; Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015; Rodríguez, 2014). Deficit-based policies and practices continue to prevent opportunities and educational success for students of color, and those discriminatory policies influence the academic trajectories of students of color and later, faculty of color. Indeed, systemically (mis)informed institutional procedures unfairly affect student and faculty identities for minoritized people (Díaz, 2019; Flores et al., 1991; Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999).

For women of color, the exclusionary and disproportionate institutional challenges of social and academic exclusionary practices, as well as microaggressive acts against them in navigating white-male dominated institutions (Exum et al., 1984; Malcom et al., 1976; Ong et al., 2011; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019; Yosso et al., 2009), are much greater than they are for students and scholars with one minoritized identity, as they are frequently intersectionally invisible in higher education (Crenshaw, 1991; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019).

Despite institutional efforts toward inclusivity, women and people of color continue to be underrepresented in higher education in tenure and promotion, and these facts indicate ongoing systemic exclusion in higher education (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). When faculty are representative of a diverse student body, educators of color have the potential to bring new ideas to the fore, critique systems of power, represent and support minoritized students, and nourish a

culturally sustainable and compassionate community of students and scholars (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ginwright, 2010, 2016; Gregory, 2001; hooks, 1994; Kohli et al., 2019; Meacham, 2002; Mkandawire-Valhmu, Kako, & Stevens, 2010).

While there is significant scholarly research about the lack of women and minoritized people in academic fields such as STEM, (Ong et al., 2011; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019), the humanities and the social sciences have been fields in which there have been more women and minoritized students and faculty, but there has been less research about their experiences as students and scholars and their issues of exclusion (Bianco, 2016). Within the humanities, philosophy has been and continues to be historically, one of the least racially, ethnically, and gender-diverse academic fields (Ferrer, 2012).

2.3 INSTITUTIONAL MINORITIZATION

In this section, I survey research on the barriers minoritized faculty and students face in U.S. academia. Although the primary focus of the review is on the exclusion of women of color (WOC) and Mexican Americans in philosophy, understanding the exclusion of women and communities of color in higher education in a larger context is an important starting place.

By 2026, the enrollment percentage projections for minoritized children in U.S. primary and secondary public schools are expected to increase by 55% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). It is in these same primary and secondary institutions that scholars have expressed a deep concern for the inequitable and inadequate educational experiences of minoritized students and their communities (Fry, 2003; Harper, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Miron, 1996; Quinn, 2020; Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015; Swanson, 2004).

García Coll et al. (1996) proposed a new conceptual model called “An integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children” for the study of child

development in minoritized populations in the United States. This influential model introduced by García and colleagues over 20 years ago has assisted educators, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in understanding the developmental experiences of minoritized youth as mitigated by their social positions (i.e., race, class, gender, ethnicity) and socio-environmental factors (i.e., racism, prejudice, discrimination). Their model acknowledges the (in)direct influence of systemic oppressive forces in youth education that eventually manifest in the underrepresentation of minoritized populations in academia (García Coll et al., 1996; Valenzuela, 1999).

This work is the product of multidisciplinary collaboration among the authors who share a strong collective concern with the historical absence of appropriate conceptual models or frameworks for conducting research that addresses the diversity and strengths of minoritized populations. In their proposed conceptual framework, they incorporate and emphasize essential factors for understanding the growth and development of minoritized children and their families. They claim this is critical in addressing omissions in theoretical formulations and research. Their integrative theoretical model differs from previous socio-developmental frameworks in that it introduces considerations of both social position and social stratification constructs at the core rather than at the periphery of a theoretical formulation.

The framework for this model considered how social positional factors stratify and minoritize social hierarchies/dynamics in society, with an emphasis on children of color; factors considered included race, social class, ethnicity, and gender. Furthermore, the relationship between the major components of social stratification, social position, racism, and segregation affects the developmental processes of children of color (García Coll et al., 1996). They note that the interplay between these components directly influences the adaptive nature and culture of

minoritized children and their communities as dictated by the inequitable conditions of a stratified culture. They argue that traditionally, in education research, the interaction of social class, culture, ethnicity, and race has not been included at the core of mainstream theoretical formulations.

García Coll et al. (1996) claim that oppressive institutional forces have historically reflected in deficit-based research models that (mis)report the underachievement of minoritized youth, (García Coll et al., 2000; Marotz-Baden et al., 1979) while contextualizing academic barriers that underrepresent, exclude, and hinder academic success and progress (Menges & Exum, 1983). Described as a system of dysfunctional ecologies for minoritized students in PK-20+ (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Flecha, 1999; Migliarini, 2017; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015), whereby institutions undervalue minoritized students and by design, students of color experience racially disproportional and inequitable educational systems and spaces (Annamma & Morrison, 2018).

When we fast forward from García et al.'s research, we find that in higher education, the fields of academic teaching, research, and publication have traditionally been dominated by white academics (Baffoe et al., 2014). The historical and current epistemological consequences of this are that the creation, distribution, and reproduction of academic knowledge is mostly accomplished by white men (Phillips, 2017).

To further document this, using a Critical Race and Post-Colonial Theory framework for their interview-based study, Baffoe et al. (2014) explore the experiences of faculty of color in the academy in the U.K and North America. They sought to produce counternarratives that explore “racial discrimination and marginalization of non-whites in Western academia” (p. 14). They were specifically interested in understanding the barriers that academics of color face in terms of

publishing their scholarship, which is essential to attaining tenure in the “publish or perish” environment of Western academia.

The 30 participants in their study were 27 faculty of color who had been in the academy between 5 and 20 years, as well as three participants who were doctoral students at the time. All were at universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, and while Baffoe et al. (2014) did not share their sampling criteria, they noted that it was purposive. They queried participants’ reasons for pursuing academic positions, their experiences in terms of research and publication, and the challenges they had encountered in their fields. They also endeavored to present experiences in the participants’ own words, and not to produce a single narrative.

One participant who had been working in Canada for 12 years noted that he had produced ten manuscripts in his first five years in the academy, but none of them were published. Another who had been working in the United States for 10 years shared that it was only after seven years of manuscript rejection that she learned to send her work to journals that focus on “minority issues” (p. 22). Still another scholar with eight years of working in the United States discussed having analyzed the articles published in a particular journal that had rejected her work, noting that the major difference between her work and what was published was that the authors had “Western-sounding names” (p. 22).

A participant who had been working in the United Kingdom for fifteen years stated that most of their manuscripts were rejected because the journal editors said that they lacked “global jargon or global academic discourse or contained too much ethnic vocabulary, although they were accompanied by English translations” (p. 23). Many of the participants shared the language of rejection letters they had received, in which Western journal editors spoke of their work being too ethnically specific and therefore, not relevant to international audiences, or arguing that it

cannot be “comprehended globally” (p. 23). Baffoe et al. (2014) conclude their piece with a critique of academic publishing, support for open-access journals, and the creation of “a single, global archive of data and academic literature, overseen by an independent and genuine body of peer-reviewers” (p. 27). They also call for the number of publications and the prestige of the journals in which they appear to be reevaluated as criteria for tenure and promotion in the Western academy.

While they offer an excellent discussion of whiteness (pp. 14-18), they end up reproducing whiteness by referring to their participants as “non-white” rather than as academics of color or asking their participants to choose their own self-identifying labels. The label they use centers on whiteness. This may have to do with the study having been published in a European journal, as *people of color* is a term more commonly used in the United States. I also noted that they referred to academic publishers as “shylock publishing conglomerates” (p. 26), which in the United States, is a decidedly anti-Semitic term. They also described the inequities of the Western academy as being set up to “emasculate faculty” (p. 27), a critique that is sexist at its core. Both of these points, (i.e., anti-Semitism and sexism) perhaps point to the core of their argument: namely, that there are Western values that dominate much of what is considered high-quality scholarship in European and North American-based academic journals. I will explore the issue of exclusion and minoritization in publications and citations further in my literature review in the section *Who is Citing Whom?*

2.4 TROUBLE WITH LABELS REVISITED

Just like Baffoe et al. (2014) define the participants in their study as non-white, without exploring the implications of their representations, many other scholars also use a myriad of problematic labels that reveal a reoccurring issue with minoritized groups in academia and their

characterization. There are many issues of generalization and omission when labeling minoritized groups, however, one of them occurs when the various labels used to define diverse groups are often presented as monolithic, and they ignore the visibility of important distinctions. Other troubles include erasure of gender self-identification, and deletion of other features like nationality, culture, and language.

The adoption of particular labels has served varied roles in response to interests in self-identification, coalition building, marketing pressures, and government bureaucratic interests (Alcoff, 1999). However, for my research, I am concerned with exploring the implication of the labels used to categorize the population on the U.S.-Mexico border. U.S. and Latin American social identity categories are oftentimes unique, and products of different racial and social categories.

People of color generally struggle with labeling themselves and identifying with just one term. In the Southwest, many Mexican Americans do not consider themselves Chicano/a because they do not identify with the political connotations of the Chicano/a label. Whereas others do not identify as solely Mexican American because they prefer to hold on to the political implications of being Chicano/a (Cordova, 1998). Chicano/a is different from Mexican American because Chicano/a is an identity based in connection with the civil rights movements of the 1960s and '70s. Mexican American and Chicano/a labels are, for the most part, chosen by the individual. Despite the differences, they can sometimes go hand in hand, as both embrace Mexican culture and heritage, and both recognize that they are American. However, Hispanic and Latino/a, remain as umbrella labels that mostly group brown monolinguals and bilinguals together. Even when these are not all brown, nor do they all speak Spanish, nor do they all share a cultural background. These umbrella labels range from Hispanic to more recently Latinx.

Latinx emerged as a gender-inclusive label for Latino/a and Latin@. It is believed to disrupt traditional notions of inclusivity by replacing the letters *o* or *a* which signify masculine or feminine with *x* to erase gender (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). However, there is debate over the use of Latinx and criticism for it being imposed as a fashionable academic label created by outsiders looking in. While those who it refers to, do not use it or have even heard of the term. In fact, according to Bustamante et al. (2020), about one in four U.S. Hispanics have heard of the label Latinx, but less than 3% use it. Despite the controversy in the use of labels, there is agreement over the fact that all the commonly used terms lack reference to birthplace, legal status, culture, personal experiences, and many other important defining characteristics. The inaccurate labeling of minoritized groups erases significant individual features (Bustamante et al., 2020).

Others advocate for the use of the term Latin@ as an all-inclusive label instead of Latina/o to deemphasize the cisgendered “o/a” and uneven Hispanic terminology, which was administered by the United States Census Bureau under President Nixon regarding individuals of Latin American heritage. Many go as far as to confuse Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, etc. under the same bracket of assumptions by erasing their differences with terms like Latinx or Hispanic simply because these pan-ethnic labels make it easy to summarize and group these identities into one. As if sharing the same skin color, or language, meant all identities are performed the same way, ignoring that they can be formed, transformed, and are actively dynamic (Clammer, 2015).

García (2020) recognizes that the various terms—Hispanic, Latino/a, and Latinx refer to people of Latin American descent and from Spanish-speaking countries and to the fastest-growing group in the United States. On the other hand, Vila (2000) claims there are important distinctions between Mexican nationals, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos and that these labels

conceal significant differentiations that should make us (educators and people from the border) question the usefulness of these terms if we aim to understand their attitudes and behaviors on the U.S.-Mexico border, and most importantly, within the context of education. The trouble with labels becomes a bigger problem when we realize that minoritized groups remain amongst the most underrepresented students and faculty in the U.S. and therefore do not occupy critical academic spaces. It is important to note that the trouble with labels occurs with many other different groups. I will return to the trouble with labels in the context of faculty and students on the U.S.-Mexico border towards the end of this literature review, as this is vital to my study.

2.5 EXCLUSION IN ACADEMIA

When we set out to understand why minoritized people have been mislabeled and marginalized in academia, we discover that it has been this way for a long time. Historically, Coté (2009) argues that colonists needed to safeguard their whiteness by excluding people of color from educational institutions while at the same time, preserving and exerting their dominance. By its white supremacist origins and ideals, the American educational system demanded individuals assimilate to its institutional culture; a (racist) culture embedded in K-12 education (Stratton, 2016) and scaffolded into higher education.

According to Kubota's conceptual piece (2019), while racism is often conceptualized and analyzed in terms of individual and institutional injustices, we must also engage in a critical examination of epistemological racism. This is because racial inequalities influence our knowledge production and consumption in academia and epistemological racism marginalizes scholars of color and erases the knowledge produced by minoritized groups. Kubota (2019) claims that the institutional underrepresentation of racially minoritized groups is often a result of the underrecognition of the merit that minoritized groups demonstrate. To this effect, there is a

notable difference in people of color serving in faculty positions in higher education (Ware, 2000) and women of color comprise an even lower percentage.

For example, in 1996, the Faculty Work-Life Study, a qualitative and quantitative survey, was mailed to faculty who held at least half-time instructional appointments, had been at the university for one year, and/or held tenured (track) appointments at a large state university in the Great Lakes area. Over a thousand participants (1,167) engaged the survey (with a response rate of 44%) which included responses from Black, Latina, Asian, and Native American faculty women; women comprising almost one-third of respondents and 14% being WOC (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). WOC respondents cited instances of disrespect from their colleagues in matters of intellectual interests and they reported they were told to alter their research agendas to accommodate those of their associated departments. Furthermore, survey data confirmed that WOC were not informed or aware of the unwritten rules of the academy, which they are expected to follow, which speaks to the racial epistemological inequities raised by Kubota (2019) an ongoing issue for decades.

In chronicling institutional growth in the American higher (two-year, four-year, and university sectors) education since 1979, Finkelstein et al. (2016) found that although women tended to be proportionately better represented than men in baccalaureate and two-year institutions, women were less represented in doctoral and research university sectors. Furthermore, in documenting the distribution of female faculty by race/ethnicity and appointment type between 1993 and 2013, Finkelstein et al. (2016) found that overall proportionate numbers among all women faculty remain virtually unchanged over the two-decade period. African American women increased their proportionate presence (PP) among all full-time women faculty from 6.6 to 6.9% in two decades and their PP in full-time tenured

positions declined from 6.3 to 5.8%; Latinas increased their PP in the same brackets from 4.1 to 5.5%; Native-American women from 0.4 to 0.05%; Asian women doubled from 3.5 to 7.5%. Although growth for minoritized faculty WOC remains fractionally small, the dominance of white women in the two-decade period remains largely unchanged even though they are the vast majority.

To further contextualize PP growth, among 703,463 full-time instructional faculty from degree-granting institutions nationwide in 2007, only 17% were people of color (POC) (National Center for Educational Statistics et al., 2009) and in 2013, POC held 12.7% of faculty positions, up from 8.6% in 1993, and held 10.2% of tenured positions. Women held 49.2% of all faculty positions, up from 38.6% in the same year, with 37.6% of tenured positions (Finkelstein et al., 2016). Additionally, they found that the ratio of men to women in tenured ranks had been cut almost in half in twenty years, from 3.0 men for every woman in 1993 to 1.7 men for every woman in 2013.

Overall, women are more likely to be in entry and junior positions within higher education and are underrepresented in more prestigious positions; they are more likely than their male peers to be represented in nontenure faculty positions, lacking job security as well as efficient salaries (August & Waltman, 2004). Despite the efforts of increasing WOC particularly, their continued underrepresentation as faculty, particularly in STEM fields, for example, speak to ongoing systemic shortcomings in the recruiting and retention of minoritized WOC (Ong et al., 2011; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019).

In the next section, I will explore just some of the literature on the exclusion of minoritized people in STEM fields, as there is vast research in this area. However, a limitation is that most of

it focuses on gender as opposed to race, and the few studies that do explore race, focus mostly on Black Americans (Towns, 2010).

2.6 WHITENESS AND MALENESS OF STEM EDUCATION

In 2014, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx women represented only 5.34%, 5.24%, and 0.01% of doctoral recipients in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) respectively (National Science Foundation & National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2018; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). In a study conducted by Wilkins-Yel et al. (2019), data was collected from a nationwide sample of 176 graduate WOC enrolled in STEM doctoral programs. The data detailed acts of microaggressions through which members of the majority group delegitimized and discredited graduate WOC, interrogated their relationship (belonging) with STEM, overlooked their academic contributions, and exposed them to racially and gendered encounters. Participants were emailed recruitment letters containing a link to online surveys where participants were asked to anonymously respond to two open-ended questions that asked them to reflect on their graduate experiences as part of the survey. As a result, the study revealed eight themes, four of which described microaggressions faced by women of color in STEM graduate programs and three regarding recommended reflections on coping with microaggressive (intersectional) experiences. These themes are:

1. Delegitimization of skills & expertise
2. “You don’t belong here”
3. Ignored, dismissed, and rendered invisible
4. Racialized and gendered encounters
5. Support seeking and regaining control
6. Recall your strengths; remember, you have what it takes

7. Changing the field; the reason for your fight

The study also revealed that WOC in STEM were delegitimized by race, gender, and as scientists which rendered their microaggressive experiences both hypervisible and invisible, themes which I will go further in-depth about in the next section. Furthermore, WOC are raced and gendered by being othered and subject to exclusionary (institutional) acts which funnel/internalize microaggressive experiences in terms of race or gender. For women of color, being minoritized by gender impedes their institutional merits and success leading to a culture of exclusion and made to feel invisible (Berdahl et al., 2006; Jayakumar et al., 2009).

Additionally, in terms of faculty representation, Towns (2010) presents disaggregated data from 2017, specifically for underrepresented minoritized individuals-African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. This data reveals that the numbers of underrepresented women in each racial group compared with the total number of faculty in the United States is well below 1% and simultaneously much less than the percentage in the general population. Focusing on chemistry, in 2007 there were 8 African American, 13 Hispanic, and 1 Native American women faculty at the top 100 chemistry departments in the United States (Towns, 2010).

Estrada et al. (2016) claim that the United States' inability to achieve STEM workforce diversity goals has long been attributed to the failure of the academic "pipeline" to maintain a steady flow of underrepresented minority (URM) students. While there has been some improvement, national data continue to illustrate that the disparity in STEM degree attainment for URM students (i.e., African American, Hispanic or Latino/Latina, American Indian, and Alaska Natives) increases at each degree level, compared with white and Asian students.

Understanding the history of academic exclusion of minoritized communities is essential when exploring the issue of underrepresentation in education. In this section, I have touched on

just some of the literature on the extensive and reoccurring exclusion of women and people of color in STEM. While minoritized individuals and women are marginalized to the point of institutional extinction and invisibility, it is also important to recognize that intersectional invisibility tries to group minorities mostly by gender and/or race, rather than understanding that each individual is composed of a unique spectrum of features and experiences, and all these are also part of their identities. For instance, further classifications of women, beyond just white women would be beneficial in understanding women of color and the many dimensions of their identities as Latinas, Hispanas, Chicanas, Mexican Americans, etc.

There is a lot of literature on the exclusion of women in STEM among STEM faculty (Kahn & Ginther, 2017), but this usually means white women, and the work on the exclusion of people of color, usually refers to men (Estrada, et al., 2016). We still need more work on students of color that cuts across labels and that focuses on the factors that increase persistence and graduation in STEM and all other underrepresented academic fields.

In an interesting study about the dominant discourses of underrepresentation and gender differences, Convertino (2020) reveals that the field of computer science (CS) marks women as highly invisible and visible. Through narrative accounts from qualitative interviews and focus groups with women students of color enrolled in CS at a university located in the southwestern region of the US, they disclose how isolation, exclusion, and connection in CS are contextual, contingent, and intersectional experiences that cannot be collapsed into a single, monolithic meta-narrative, (Convertino, 2020).

Therefore, in the next section, I will explore this phenomenon of how minoritized POC are made to feel invisible by extension of exclusion and how others experience feeling hypervisible in spaces of work and academia through tokenism.

2.7 INVISIBILITY AND HYPERVISIBILITY

Although many universities are increasing diversification efforts to create inclusion and equity and have faculty who are representative of their student body, research indicates that faculty of color (FOC) remain inadequately represented (Settles et al., 2018). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (Department of Education, 2013), white faculty still held 75% of full-time faculty in the United States.

Drawing from interviews, Settles et al. (2018) revealed how Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, and American Indian faculty members at a single-research intensive, predominantly white institution (PWI), noted issues of (in)visibility at work. Participants of this study were 118 tenure-track FOC where 19% of undergraduates at the university were racial minorities, 17% of graduate students were racial minorities, and 24% of the faculty were racial minorities. In their findings, they detail six themes within the scopes of tokenism, exclusion, and (in)visibility where participants shared their experiences about issues/instances of (in)visibility. Their study revealed that minoritized faculty were tokenized and although faculty of color remained highly visible in academia, they were made to feel invisible.

Participants in their study detailed experiences of social and professional exclusion where they felt feelings of isolation, being ignored, excluded, invisible, and devalued. Minoritized faculty reported feeling hypervisible when they felt tokenized and used as examples of diversity within their institutions. Participants in this study also experienced varying levels of professional and epistemic exclusion, further informed by institutional misrepresentation and recognition of their scholarly contributions. Furthermore, despite scholarly achievements, epistemic exclusion was communicated through messages to and about faculty of color as a lack of comprehension of

their work or simply, and by not validating the importance of their contributions (Settles et al., (2018).

In a related study, guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) frameworks, Turner and González (2011) examined the experiences of faculty women of color at PWIs from all over the United States. Their study's central questions were, what are the lived experiences of faculty women of color in PWIs? And what are the implications of legal challenges to affirmative action for faculty women of color and their institutions? Fifty-one faculty women of color participated from a wide range of academic fields and disciplines. In terms of race and ethnicity, 21 self-identified as Black/African American, 13 Hispanic/Latina/Chicana, 11 as Asian/Asian Pacific American, 5 Native American/American Indian, and 1 Jewish woman. One main finding is that faculty women of color across three disciplinary areas (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics [STEM], Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences [SBE], and Humanities/Arts) experience a knowledge gap on the impact of public policies on their everyday lives.

Furthermore, faculty women of color, along with experiencing the typically documented conditions of tokenism, also report that communication about diversity initiatives and resources on their own campuses was extremely uneven and idiosyncratic. One consistent theme was also an awareness of living within contexts promoting the socially constructed, multiple myths of white male superiority. Faculty women of color described their frustrations with the often “invisible” racial and gendered assumptions of intellectual and professional competency and superiority automatically assigned to white men and women.

Exclusion to the point of invisibility, where an individual or a group is not recognized or validated, can weaken, and push toward the point of hypervisibility (Brighenti, 2007; Settles et

al., 2018; Simpson & Lewis, 2005). To be made hypervisible is to be othered (Ryland, 2013) where the influence of the dominant group determines the visibility and legitimacy of the marginalized group (Lewis & Simpson, 2010; Settles et al., 2018; Simpson & Lewis, 2005). Moreover, minoritized women are further impacted by the layered microaggressions from the very same institutions othering and micromanaging their validity (Block et al., 2019; Ryland, 2013; Settles et al., 2012).

McDonald and Harvey Wingfield (2009) posit that the experiences of minoritized college faculty offer insight into the (in)visibility challenges that may befall minoritized teachers in the United States. For their study, they employed focus-group data collected from a sample of administrators and faculty from elite K-12 independent (private) schools, an institution that admittedly has been slow to make a cultural change in its racial/ethnic ideologies and practices.

Their goal was to illuminate ways in which institutions may unwittingly facilitate (in)visibility through their organizational habitus. They provide further evidence of invisibility and visibility as real and commonly experienced psychosocial phenomena among minoritized individuals within predominantly white, institutional settings. Similar to Towns' 2010 findings, they argue that most of the research has focused on the experiences of African Americans (men) and women (white) as distinct groups. They conclude that most research and findings indicate that minoritized people are cast as peripheral partners made to feel invisible by the low expectations, unfavorable stereotypes, and the disrespect they encounter from non-minoritized colleagues and even from subordinates.

Exploring the paradox of invisibility and hypervisibility is essential in understanding how minoritized individuals in academia are marginalized to the point of exclusion. It is imperative to recognize that microaggressions are layered and affect individuals differently. Minoritized

individuals and faculty of color are often treated as tokens and as such, are highly visible within academia. However, paradoxically, it is that same tokenism that makes them feel simultaneously invisible, but most of the research on this phenomenon is not intersectional.

2.8 INCORPORATION AND MARGINALIZATION

Incorporation and marginalization are similar to invisibility and hypervisibility, but they are subtly different. Marginalization means exclusion and incorporation imply inclusion.

They are alike invisibility and hypervisibility in the sense that they act as extremes that reveal the tension of the push and pull that minoritized individuals experience. Invisibility and marginalization both erase and ignore important features of minoritized people's selves and academic work. However, there can be visibility without incorporation, and incorporation that is exploitation.

Turner (2003) documents a continuous underrepresentation of faculty of color entering academia and reveals that minoritized groups describe a simultaneous feeling of incorporation and marginalization. However, the underrepresentation of minoritized groups in academia also includes a gendered component; the double jeopardy of being a person of color and a woman (Berdahl et al., 2006). Exum et al., (1984) indicate that the small number of minoritized female faculty in tenured and tenure-track positions in elite research universities are not the result of racist and sexist institutional parameters, rather they represent the small number that has made it past institutional barriers.

Patton (2004) shares her reflections as a Black woman and professor in academia and examines the interdependence of racism and sexism in academia and critiques the institution's oppressive and hegemonic influence on minoritized communities. To frame her discussion, she relies on the theory of articulation coupled with hegemony. She recounts some of her

experiences in academia to explicate and illuminate issues of marginalization. Patton argues that although some academic spaces convey an inclusive and equitable campus as “open” or “liberal”, the language used is superficial and used to maintain hegemony and support exclusion of minoritized people (Patton, 2004). Patton’s experience as a Black scholar illuminates many of the marginalization issues in academia. She states that intentionally or not, institutions become complicit in racism and sexism (Patton, 2004). The significance of her personal analysis is that it increases awareness about interlocking systems of domination in academia at the microlevel, and in doing so, exposes important meanings of marginalization at the macrolevel.

In an analysis of feminism and experimental philosophy, Schwartzman (2012) determined that feminists and critical race theorists have long argued that racism and sexism are inherently systemic, however, they do not always engage with intentional or explicit discrimination. For instance, a white person may think of his or herself as antiracist and support programs designed to achieve racial equality, and yet still act in ways that reveal attitudes of fear, distrust, or discomfort with minoritized individuals. Similarly, one can envision a man who supports feminism, but interrupts women more often than men, and make assumptions and prescriptions about women and their gender roles in the personal and professional realms. Schwartzman (2012) claims that implicit bias and other forms of sexism and racism must be addressed through a critical examination of actual social structures and that this task is for philosophers and philosophical inquiry (Schwartzman, 2012, p. 315).

To add another dimension, according to a qualitative study through semi-structured interviews by Brooks-Immel and Murray (2017), white administrators and faculty did not feel their race was of any consequence at their institutions and thus unknowingly remained disengaged from equitable and inclusive campus efforts. Even women of color can relate and

identify with the gendered biases white women are impacted by. Minoritized women are almost tiered by levels of institutional validity which adds yet another layer of systemic oppression (Duncan, 2014; Harley, 2008; Turner, 2002). Whether minoritized women are made visible, hypervisible, or try to blend in (Stead, 2013), there is still the matter of being othered not just academically, but in general within society.

Settles et al. (2018) and Turner (2003) both reveal discriminatory phenomena that are related but performed differently. They expose how minoritized people navigate invisibility and hypervisibility through incorporation and/or marginalization. Exploring the history of institutional racism and sexism in academia allows us to realize that the underrepresentation of minoritized groups in academia also includes a gendered component that cannot be overlooked. It is not just racism that has excluded them, sexism has also marginalized women. Minoritized individuals in academia have felt discounted for years. Nearly 40 years ago, Menges and Exum (1983) argued that barriers to minoritized scholars succeeding in academia included ineffective implementation of affirmative action along with discrimination. Decades later, we are still discussing the significantly oppressive challenges that have othered women and minoritized individuals in academia. Racism and sexism have led to the academic underrepresentation and exclusion of minoritized individuals and have made them feel like outsiders who do not belong and in terms of labels, most agree that they are othered.

2.9 OTHERNESS

According to Johnsrud and Sadao (1998), the underlying similar experiences of ethnic and racially minoritized faculty members at PWIs are that faculty of color feel othered and minoritized faculty continuously experience discriminatory microaggressions while being systemically excluded at PWIs. This is an ongoing challenge and the most common form of

being othered. Their study identified the common experiences of minoritized faculty included: the bicultural stance they cultivated, the ethnocentrism they perceived, and the discriminatory behavior they experienced. Johnsrud and Sadao's (1998) findings suggest that minoritized faculty experience academia differently than their white counterparts. This is because participants reported instances of othering through racist and microaggressive acts and behaviors from white administrators and faculty.

Similarly, by employing critical race feminism, Sule (2011) explores how Black and Latina women faculty alter the teaching and learning environment at a PWI. This study examined how Black and Latina faculty navigate and contribute to the classroom environment at a premier public institution. The data was collected from interviews conducted by an interdisciplinary research team from the disciplines of sociology and education. After selecting the black female and Latina faculty in the social sciences and humanities, the study was comprised of five scholars in each area. Seven were black and three were Latina. The Latina faculty self-defined as Latina, Chicana, or Mexican, noting that these identity markers are not always mutually exclusive. Also, the Latina participants expressed that the label Latina or Hispanic does not signify a particular racial group. Rather, the term Latina represents an ethnicity comprised of an amalgamation of racial groups. The other participants identified as Black. The key findings from this qualitative study are that the participants navigate and contribute in two key ways: enacting legitimacy and employing equity-based pedagogy. Both strategies reflect oppositional positions, an awareness of being part of a socially marginalized group, combined with resistance against individual and collective subordination. Sule concludes that for minoritized women, acts of incivility, bullying, and disrespect, as well as degrading

forms of microaggressions are at a higher rate of occurrence and this leads them to feel othered (Sule, 2011).

De La Garza (2020) asserts that scholars of color in PWIs inhabit a zone of alterity where an individual is in limbo between performing whiteness and resisting white(ness) supremacy. Patton (2004) refers to this altered state as an “outsider-within” position, (p.185), as a non-Euro American working in academia. Through personal anecdotes, Rodríguez (2018) corroborates that academia is a racialized structure that silences and disrespects voices of color, especially those of women. She shares some of the personal experiences that she encountered as an othered Latina in academia. These instances include white faculty belittling her achievements by making comments like: “I don’t know how you did it, but congratulations.” Or asking stereotypical and offensive questions like “Can you teach a salsa dance workshop for us?” (p.37). Even though Rodríguez is a scholar and not a dance instructor.

Because of othering through invisibility, and sometimes hypervisibility, minoritized faculty are exploited by the very research praxis they consume; Rodríguez (2018) expresses the need to dismantle this oppressive academic system because there should be no merit in surviving an institution that does not want to see you succeed. Zambrana (2018) explores the toxicity of the ivory tower and finds that despite changing demographics of the U.S., percentages of Black and Hispanic faculty have only slightly increased, and the rates in obtaining tenure and/or promotions are stagnant. Furthermore, Zambrana (2018) indicates that as an added dimension in the discrimination of minoritized faculty, the level of stress from microaggressions impacts the health of many faculty of color.

Additionally, professors of color, particularly women, report receiving less respect in the classroom, earning less, and receiving worse student evaluations than their white counterparts

(Bavishi et al., 2010; Sule, 2011). While the percentage of women and people of color teaching in higher education have increased, these gains have occurred among temporary lecturer and visiting staff positions, rather than full-time faculty posts (Li & Koedel, 2017). Despite the social, physical, financial, and emotional microaggressive effects of academic exclusion and the underrepresentation of minoritized groups, their merits in research and scholarship are also affected by epistemological racism (Kubota, 2019). However, otherness occurs to more than just minoritized students and faculty.

In an online survey documenting racial microaggressions in academic libraries between minoritized and non-minoritized librarians, Alabi (2015) indicated that out of 41 minoritized participants, only 6 of them (14.6%) reported never having experienced any microaggressions of the twenty they were presented with. This study was used to collect data from both minoritized and non-minoritized academic librarians and sought to answer the following questions: 1) Are academic librarians of color experiencing racial microaggressions from their colleagues? 2) Do white academic librarians observe these derogatory exchanges directed at minoritized colleagues? The language of each survey item was modified to focus on librarian-to-librarian interactions and to gauge both experiences and observations of microaggressions, statements were used twice in participant experiences and participant observations. Data from this survey suggests that some librarians of color experience racial microaggressions from colleagues in their workplaces often and feel othered in various frequencies and degrees. On the other hand, white librarians are unlikely to recognize these disparaging exchanges.

Understanding the microaggressive effects of othering in education is a small step towards decolonizing the ivory tower that has excluded and disrespected minoritized individuals and women at all levels in academia. However, otherness is not experienced only within the

physical walls of institutions, the systems of oppression are also replicated in academic publications and citations. The next section explores how epistemological racism is manifested through the othering of minoritized works through their invisibility and marginalization in the publishing world.

2.10 WHO IS CITING WHOM?

A study by Hofstra et al. (2020) revealed that out of 1.2 million U.S. doctoral recipients between 1977 and 2015, underrepresented groups produced higher rates of scientific novelty, in the forms of conceptual discoveries, scientific and technological innovations, than did their white male peers. However, their contributions were consistently devalued and discounted in faculty hiring, research evaluation, and publication practices. They examined records of nearly all U.S. Ph.D. theses (i.e., dissertations) during this extended period, along with their metadata, including student names, advisors, institutions, thesis titles, abstracts, and disciplines.

This data enabled Hofstra et al. (2020) to consider students' rates of innovation at the very onset of their scholarly careers (i.e., the dissertation) and compare them to their academic trajectories afterward. They later made comparisons between their initial innovations and how those compared to the work they produced throughout their academic careers. They found that novel contributions by women and POC are taken up by other scholars at lower rates than novel contributions by white men. Equally impactful contributions of gendered and racially minoritized people are less likely to result in successful academic careers than for those from the dominant groups. These results suggest that it is likely that there is an unwarranted reproduction of stratification in academic careers that discounts the innovative contributions of women and POC. This partially explains the underrepresentation of some groups in academia as the continuous devaluing and discounting prevents women and POC to succeed.

Mott and Cockayne (2017) assert that citation practices support white hetero masculinity in both academic knowledge production and scholarship. Baffoe et al. (2014) support this assertion by arguing that “white codes” are circulated and identified in academic journals, magazines, and other literature and media in the Western World. As a result, academics of color have difficulty navigating the world of academic research. Therefore, publishing in journals, magazines, and other academic affiliated literature is dominated exclusively by white academics. Kranich (1999) states that scholarly collaborations are a complicated process that requires faculty to publish as part of advancing their tenure track or promotion and the current monopoly-like marketplace is dominated by large Western commercial conglomerates.

Burbules (2015) argues that citation systems in academia are used for epistemic validation, a self-serving practice for those in control of publishing. He claims that citations function as an empirical confirmation of knowledge and as tools of persuasion. While there is no way to intervene and prevent individuals from acting in self-interested ways, especially in the difficult academic marketplace facing most fields today, journal editors and responsible administrators should be mindful that their control over scarce and valuable opportunities and rewards gives them enormous power to shape individual behaviors (p. 726). Osterloh and Frey (2020) claim that publications in top journals influence academic careers where a majority of authors benefit from a skewed system of citation distributions. van Wesel (2016) just like Baffoe et al. (2014) agrees that academia is organized by a “publish or perish” maxim whereby academics must publish for the academy or else, leave. Even though rates of academic publications have increased, this is not indicative of the quality of productivity, rather it is the result of the pressure to publish (van Wesel, 2016).

Furthermore, there is also a gendered component in who is citing whom as there is a vast gender gap in academic citation practices because male authors tend to cite other men over women in their publications, whereas women working on their own, or with other women, are significantly more likely to cite work by women (Pells, 2018).

In a study analyzing all articles published from 2007–2016 in several journals, Dion et al. (2018) found strong evidence that there is a gender gap in citations across political science subfields and across methodological subfields within political science, sociology, and economics. They also explore the “Matthew effect” where men’s research is viewed as the most central and important within an academic field. This contrasts with the “Matilda effect” where women’s research is viewed as less important, or their ideas reduced or attributed to male scholars.

Flor (2017) suggests that to end discriminatory publication and citation practices, feminist scholars and faculty of color should not cite white scholars who promote heteronormative epistemologies. Conversely, Chang (2009) disagrees and states that minoritized professors, students, and scholars of color should expose the biases, omissions, and errors of white scholars. But this does not mean that minoritized scholars should replicate the practices of exclusion performed by white scholars and ignore what white scholars have to say. This would mean a shift in how minoritized scholars identify exclusionary practices of white scholars and thus, by exposing these, they would invalidate what white scholars say.

The literature clearly indicates that there is a problem of exclusion and underrepresentation of women and minoritized faculty in academia and that this extends into their lack of epistemological power of scholarly publishing and being cited. Research in this section indicates a correlation between the microaggressive nature of academic institutions (i.e.,

exclusion practices) and the marginalization and othering of people of color which is represented by an epistemological influence in academic publishing and citation practices. Nonetheless, literature in this section also frames women as separate from racially minoritized scholars. They are presented as single groups, without unpacking their differences and cutting across crucial categories, and leaving many of them invisible. The following section analyzes the problem in the context of academic philosophy in the U.S. Because women in philosophy are pushed to invisibility, I intentionally cite their first and last names.

2.11 PHILOSOPHY AND WHITENESS: EXCLUSION OF WOMEN AND MINORITIZED

INDIVIDUALS

Sally Haslanger (2008) reviewed philosophy journal entries from 2002 to 2007 in *Ethics*, *Journal of Philosophy*, *Mind*, *Nous Philosophical Review*, *Philosophy*, and *Public Affairs*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, which are some of the top academic journals in the field. She found that in the five years of her study, 898 of the authors published were men and only 111 were women. Additionally, she found that none of the journals published any content that had to do with feminism or race. This is because philosophy in the United States, just like the rest of academia is dominated by white men and the knowledge production remains in their control.

To confirm this, Robin Wilson (2012) claims that philosophy is one of the five fields with the largest gender gaps in publishing. The other fields are the hard sciences, law, history, and education. According to Wilson, the gender gap is revealed in data analyzed from the years 1665 to 2010 of academic papers from 2.7 million scholars archived in the JSTOR database, which shows that only 22 percent of all authors were female. Interestingly, the representation of female authors in scientific journals increases significantly when review procedures become anonymous

(Saul, 2013). Although the publication of the works by women and minoritized groups in philosophy is slowly rising, these numbers are increasing at a slower rate than other fields, so philosophy is still losing ground.

Linda Alcoff (2013), who was born in Panama and is one of the very few mainstream Latina philosophers in the U.S., believes there is something wrong with academic philosophy and it has to do with its lack of diversity. The underrepresentation of women and minoritized groups in the field of philosophy has become an issue of major concern and it is increasingly gaining attention within academia because the numbers are abysmal. Amy Ferrer (2012), the Executive Director of the American Philosophical Association states that philosophy is one of the least diverse fields in the humanities, and overall, one of the least diverse fields in all of academia, in terms of race, gender, and ethnicity. Furthermore, that philosophy has a reputation for not only lacking diverse representation, but also for an often-hostile climate for women and minoritized groups which includes racism and sexism (Ferrer, 2012; Haslanger, 2008).

Alcoff (2011), agrees with Haslanger and maintains that this discrimination is manifested by the aggressive and peremptory dismissal of women's contributions in academic philosophy seminars, along with the a priori rejections of feminist philosophy. She claims that women in philosophy are ignored, and many assume that affirmative action is the only reason they have been accepted into a program. Alcoff documents personal instances of nasty notes being put in her mailbox and under her door, including one that said "whore" in large letters.

There is no doubt that the same exclusionary issues found throughout academia of racism and sexism play large roles in the underrepresentation of women and minoritized groups in philosophy. For the very few women and minoritized people that get into this elitist academic field, the discriminatory conditions within make them feel alienated and push them to quit

philosophy (Haslanger, 2008). So, it is no surprise, that these days, most professional philosophers are men, in fact, white men (Haslanger, 2013).

In other countries, like Mexico, the situation is not any better, as most philosophers are also male (Sanchez & Sanchez, 2017) and the ones in the group considered the most prominent lack ethnic diversity; in other words, they are mostly Mestizo men who are more Spanish than Indigenous (Tovar, 2019). Globally, the primary voices in philosophy are, predictably like with the rest of academia, of white, middle-class men (Hutchinson & Jenkins, 2013).

Furthermore, empirical studies show that academia excludes the voices of minoritized groups. Anna Leuschner (2015) argues that this social exclusion works, at least partly, through the systematic disqualification of contributions from members of underrepresented social groups. This means that their academic work is discounted, similarly to the devaluation documented by Hofstra et al. (2020). Leuschner (2015) claims that the evaluation of contributions from women is biased in mainly two ways. The first is that contributions from women appear to be systematically disqualified as either thematically irrelevant or methodologically insufficient.

These biases exist because there is a common division in philosophy between “hard” and “soft” topics. The hard topics are epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language, which are mostly done by men, the soft include: ethics, applied ethics, social and political philosophy by women. This suggests that feminist approaches in philosophy are particularly devalued. Simone Galea (2017) just like Leuschner (2015) argues that women have been othered in philosophy and that their knowledge production has been limited, as they have been doing philosophy from the margins. An example of this is the journal *Hypatia*, which is a forum for cutting-edge work in feminist philosophy and one of the few publications that engage in the diverse experiences and situations of women, something that is lacking in mainstream

journals. Galea claims that women bring crucial ideas and perspectives to philosophical discourse, and these are particular to their lived experiences as feminine, feminized, and feminist subjects.

The discrimination against women and minoritized groups in philosophy is also present in academic spaces outside of institutional boundaries. For example, according to Jennifer Saul (2012), women are also less likely to be invited as speakers and have a hard time building an academic reputation via philosophy conferences. Saul (2012) argues that there is a great deal of evidence, a lot of it documented from personal experiences of the few women in the field of philosophy, indicating that they are likely to have a more difficult time building reputable academic reputations in philosophy conferences than men. This is because public behavior in these spaces requires argumentative quickness, which is when a speaker responds forcefully and decisively to objections and presents aggressive counterarguments that refute others' points. Saul (2012) claims that these "masculine" traits are perceived as impressive in the field. However, while there is no reason to suppose that women are less capable of acting this way, women are less likely to impress because they are less likely to be invited as speakers.

Additionally, Saul (2012) notes that women are less likely to accept invitations to conferences, in part because of lack of funding and conflicting personal and professional commitments. This becomes a bigger challenge for minoritized women philosophers because of the many other structural impediments that exclude POC from becoming professional philosophers. Importantly, just being in the minority is enough to trigger stereotype threat—which is generally the situation for women and POC at conferences. Stereotype threat is sometimes consciously felt but also sometimes unconscious, and it concerns ways that a person's awareness of their own group membership may negatively affect their performance. For women

in philosophy, implicit biases will be unconscious biases that affect the way they perceive the quality of a woman's work, leading them to evaluate it more negatively than it deserves; while stereotype threats may lead a woman to genuinely underperform in philosophy (Saul, 2012, p. 40). Therefore, as a result, women may feel less confident and less able to contribute to the field.

The sheer numbers prove the absence of their contributions in teaching positions also. According to Haslanger (2013), back in 2003, of the 16.6 percent of full-time women philosophy instructors in the U.S., zero of them were women of color. While Haslanger says that there were no women of color in the 16.6 percent of women in academic philosophy departments, I wonder what the criterion used to determine who counts as a woman of color was, given that some WOC philosophers like Angela Davis, Maria Lugones, Linda Alcoff, Ofelia Schutte, and others were employed academically at the time of these reported statistics. However, this list is still minute. The fact that Haslanger reported these statistics in 2013, and that these WOC were in their positions at this time, is further evidence of their invisibility. This is indicative of the underrepresentation of women of color but also reflects that efforts to collect crucial demographic data in philosophy have been difficult (Haslanger, 2013). Holtzman (2016) states that progress to resolve issues of representation in academic philosophy has been slow.

Haslanger (2013) argues that although in recent decades many departments have become committed to equal opportunity policies and have created small communities of feminist and antiracist activists, women remain minoritized in academia and are seriously underrepresented in many aspects of academic philosophy. To prove this, Schwitzgebel and Caroline Jennings (2017) performed several quantitative analyses of the prevalence and visibility of women in moral, political, and social philosophy compared to other areas of philosophy, and of how the situation has changed over time. They studied data from philosophy faculty lists from the Philosophical

Gourmet Report, Ph.D. job placement data from the Academic Placement Data and Analysis project, the National Science Foundation's Survey of Earned Doctorates, conference programs of the American Philosophical Association, authorship in elite philosophy journals, citation in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, and extended discussion in abstracts from the Philosopher's Index.

They reveal three important findings. The first is that gender disparity remains large in mainstream Anglophone philosophy. This includes the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. In the U.S., they analyzed 59 philosophy departments and of the 1104 analyzed faculty, only 25% (271) were women. The second, that the field of ethics includes more women than other fields of philosophy, and lastly, that women's involvement and visibility has had virtually no gains since the 1990s.

2.12 COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY STUDENTS AND THE GENDER PROBLEM

The problematic underrepresentation of minoritized groups in philosophy involves both faculty and students. This means that there is a lack of diversity not just with faculty, but also with those who choose to study philosophy. The issue of underrepresentation of minoritized groups is something that occurs at all levels of philosophy, including undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty (Paxton et al., 2012).

Helen De Cruz (2018) examines the role of prestige bias in shaping academic philosophy. She argues that prestige bias exacerbates the structural underrepresentation of minoritized groups in philosophy and that it works as a filter against philosophers of color, women philosophers, and philosophers of low socioeconomic status. She affirms that a main criterion for hiring appears to be the prestige of the department where candidates complete their degrees.

Moreover, Louise Antony (2012) finds that even though women have obtained more than half of the PhDs awarded in the U.S., fewer than 30 percent of doctorates in philosophy are awarded to women, and at the professoriate level, women also fall behind. She affirms that the familiar, unequal, gender roles and prescriptions in society are also transferred into the academic realm. As a discipline in the humanities, philosophy stands out as an outlier similar to STEM fields. This is because the retention of women in philosophy remains among the lowest of all disciplines within the humanities.

Of all academic disciplines, philosophy has a better gender ratio of Ph.D. recipients than only three STEM fields: computer science, engineering, and physics (Healy, 2011). Kings (2019) posits that frequent comparisons have been made between the numbers of women in philosophy and those in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). However, compared to some STEM fields that have traditionally been male-dominated, philosophy continues to perform badly. The physical sciences, engineering, and math have all seen a steady increase in the number of women gaining PhDs and working in these fields. Nonetheless, philosophy has not only underperformed concerning the number of women receiving PhDs, but it has also completely stagnated (Kings, 2019). On the other hand, the physical sciences and engineering continue to show some of the best improvements in terms of the number of women being awarded PhDs, with increases of 75 percent in 2003 to 125 percent in 2013 over the base point (National Science Foundation & National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2018).

According to the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, from 2015 to 2016, of the doctoral degrees in the field of philosophy and religious studies conferred to females, 181 were white, while only 19 were Hispanic, 21 were given to Blacks, 15 to Asians, 15 to Pacific

Islanders, and zero American Indians or Alaska Natives. From 2016 to 2017, the total number of doctor's degrees in philosophy and religious studies decreased. Of the recipients, 148 were white, while there were only 8 Hispanic females, 19 Blacks, 12 Asian, 12 Pacific Islanders, and again zero American Indians or Alaska Natives.

Crystal Aymelek (2015) presents research at the undergraduate level that suggests that male and female enrollment occurs in relatively proportionate numbers in introductory philosophy courses, but women's enrollment dramatically decreases with the progression to upper-division courses (Paxton et al., 2012). Aymelek's study consisted of in-depth interviews with women, who were either senior philosophy majors or had recently received a bachelor's degree in philosophy. The goal was to better understand what factors may contribute to the retention of women in the discipline. Out of 11 participants, 3 were first-generation college students and 8 were not, furthermore, 8 identified as white. Her findings suggest that women with non-traditional gender schemas may be more likely to continue to take courses in philosophy. She also provides insight into factors that may improve the representation of women, like exposure to philosophy before college, mentorship, the presence of female faculty, a supportive environment, and a strong sense of agency as a student.

Molly Paxton et al. (2012) claim that most existing empirical work that aims to analyze the gender gap in philosophy has focused mostly on the absence of women as philosophy faculty and women in graduate programs. However, their research focuses on gender representation in philosophy among undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty. They collected data from over 50 U.S. colleges and consulted the U.S. News and World Report rankings for liberal arts institutions. The data collected from information available online and through the registrar's offices indicated that the biggest drop in women's enrollment in philosophy occurs in

introductory philosophy courses, but more importantly, they discover that the drop is mitigated by the presence of more women philosophy faculty. Their most significant finding reveals a significant positive correlation between the proportion of philosophy majors who are female and the proportion of philosophy faculty who are female.

Additionally, they collected and analyzed data on the percentage of women within the ranks of professional philosophy as well. They found means and standard deviations for the percentage of women at each faculty level. The percentages for Full Professors were 19% (22%), for Associate Professors 23% (29%), Assistant Professors 43% (35%), and Adjunct Instructors 19% (36%). Their data is consistent with the hypothesis that representation matters and how more women professors might lead to more women majors.

Adleberg et al. (2014) challenge one of the few explanations that have focused on why women might leave philosophy at early stages, which is that women have different intuitions than men about philosophical thought experiments. They surveyed 136 participants of which 84 were females and 52 males, all undergraduate students at Georgia State University. Adleberg et al. (2014) do not detail any racial or ethnic information about the participants, other than they provided 23 different responses to 14 philosophy thought experiments. Their results do not indicate that women have different intuitions than men about this set of philosophical thought experiments. This means it is unlikely that gender differences in intuition play a significant role in driving women away from philosophy. They found that at Georgia State University, about 55% of students enrolled in an introduction to philosophy courses were women, but only 33% of philosophy majors were women. Furthermore, they document that at Rutgers University from 1999 to 2010, the percentage of women in philosophy courses dropped from 46.2% in introductory courses to 40.38% at the 200 level, 36.5% at the 300 level, 29.31% at the 400 level,

and 26.2% at higher levels. Nationally, the gender ratio of students receiving a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from 1993 to 2011, was relatively stable with women accounting for only about 30% of those who graduate.

The following figure illustrates the national percentages of philosophy bachelor’s degrees in the United States by gender from 1993 to 2011.

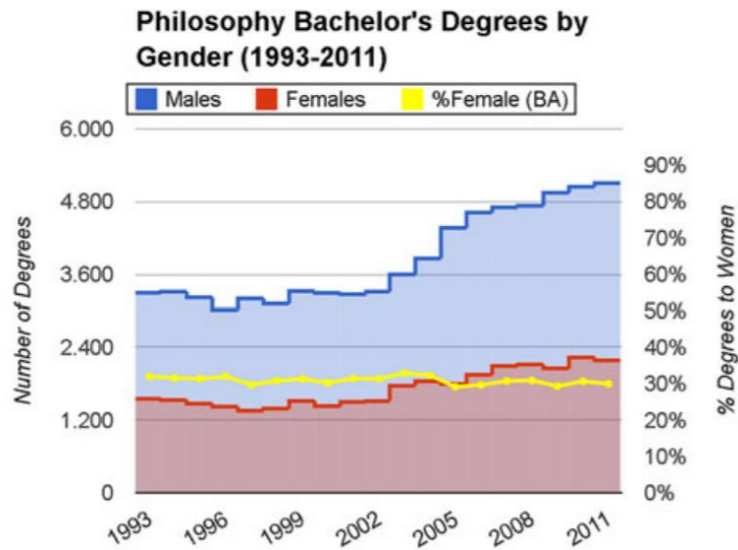


Figure 1. Philosophy bachelor’s degrees by gender (1993 –2011). Graph by Elena Spitzer (2013). Data from: National Center for Education Statistics.

On the other hand, Dobbs (2017) reports insightful results from a representative national dataset from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program. This research shows that significantly more men than women intend to major in philosophy at the high-school and pre-university levels. However, Kings (2019) contradicts this data and analyzes why given the relatively even male/female ratio at the undergraduate level, women are underrepresented at every level above this. Despite how many women intend to pursue philosophy, it is clear that women, more than men, appear to leave philosophy soon after first being introduced to it, which

obviously plays a significant role in the underrepresentation of women among philosophy graduate students and professors (Adeberg et, al., 2014).

It is possible to consider an explanation of a pipeline effect in which the way philosophy is being taught or perceived influences who studies and teaches it. Kings (2019) concludes that this marginalization is the result of systemic exclusionary practices typically found in philosophy. These include lack of representation, lack of flexible working hours, lack of workplace childcare, lack of paid maternity leave, among many other instances of discrimination and abuse. These practices have affected the number of women who choose to pursue academic philosophy. Justine McGill (2013) reveals that women who show an aptitude for philosophy abandon study or work in this field at markedly higher rates than men. McGill (2013) explores the hypothesis that philosophical speech acts performed by women are systematically liable to turn out ‘unhappily’ due to the effect of unexamined, prejudicial presuppositions that work to undermine their success. These prejudices are also tied to dichotomies in philosophy that reinforce a hyper-masculine worldview that encourages dangerous and limiting binaries, such as culture/nature, objectivity/ subjectivity, mind/body, masculine/feminine, supersensible/sensible, and rational/emotional, which also happen to “map onto gender dichotomies” (Haslanger, 2008).

Marilyn Friedman (2013) identifies some aspects of professional philosophy that seem relevant for explaining women’s low participation in the field. This includes a look at the way the philosophical activity is portrayed in some introductory philosophy textbooks and a reminder of the adversarial style that is common throughout philosophy. Friedman (2013) has categorized the issue of underrepresentation as two problems. The first one is that some philosophical gatekeepers, mostly white men in academic philosophy, who hold positions of power, devalue women and make it difficult for them to engage in philosophical work. The second is that some

features of philosophy might alienate women and prompt them to avoid the field. Some features are the dominance of abstract conceptual reasoning that excludes social ways of understandings. These features have historically been associated with men in philosophy. Friedman (2013) argues that men in philosophy, like many men everywhere, have historically not engaged respectfully and attentively in serious intellectual interchanges with women. This practice seems connected to the informally closed nature of philosophy and the way those already in the profession act as gatekeepers who determine who gets to enter and stay in the academic field, whose voices are heard in prestigious refereed publications, and so on.

Holtzman (2016) debunks claims that women are more likely than men to disagree with their philosophy professors and male peers. Additionally, that it is untrue that women are more sensitive to disagreements in the philosophy classroom than men are; and that the gender imbalance in philosophy is no worse than in many cognate disciplines. The effects of these diminishing stereotypes are manifested in multiple ways. For many women in academic philosophy inside and outside the classroom, even after many years in the profession, they report difficulty identifying as philosophers. Research shows that they habitually say *I teach philosophy* instead of *I am a philosopher* (Hutchinson & Jenkins, 2013). This is because they are seen and treated as outsiders who do not belong.

Related to this, research also suggests that academic philosophy is a gendered environment that is associated with masculinity. Ma et al. (2017) implicitly measured the extent to which individuals view philosophy as masculine and tested whether individual differences in this correspond with greater identification with philosophy. They implemented two separate Implicit Association Tests (IATs). The IATs were administered via computer and required participants to sort stimuli of words and pictures and make classifications. The data collection for

their study lasted one academic semester with 205 participants, all undergraduate students at California State University Northridge (CSUN). CSUN has been designated a Hispanic Serving Institution by the US Department of Education, so this is one of the few studies that have large Hispanic participation. 155 of the participants were female, 55 were male and their average age was 19. 33 of the participants were Asian, 11 Black, 122 Latino, 27 white, and 12 identified as other. We can see the trouble with labels as the terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably. At the time of data collection, only 61 students of the nearly 40,000 enrolled students at CSUN were declared philosophy majors, of the 61, only 14 were female.

Their findings suggest that the more women view philosophy as masculine, the less they identify with it, and the fewer women identify with philosophy, the less they want to major in it. Ma et al. (2017) also found that the opposite is true for men, meaning that their viewing philosophy as masculine did not correspond with their likelihood of majoring in it. Furthermore, they discovered that the typical student does not have a preconceived notion of philosophy as masculine. They do not explicitly define what typical student means but based on previous data of underrepresentation, it likely refers to white males. While there are many reasons why students do not major in philosophy or pursue academic careers in it after undergraduate school, this study suggests that students come to view philosophy as masculine the more they do it, which in turn supports the possibility that teaching philosophy differently may prevent students from conceiving it as masculine and therefore, possibly begin a path to reducing the gender disparity.

Thompson et al. (2016), administered a climate survey in 2013, to 1,540 undergraduates at Georgia State University enrolled in an introduction to philosophy course, of which 798 were women, 686 men, and 56 did not report gender. The questions were about their identification

with philosophy. The findings demonstrate that including more women in introductory syllabi did not, on its own, entice more women to major in philosophy. And that philosophy students already come to higher education with gendered preconceived notions of what a philosopher is, and that primarily students associated philosophy as masculine.

This gendered environment makes women in philosophy feel unfit for philosophical debate; the idea being that women in philosophy lack epistemic authority (Holtzman, 2016). Because of this, women who persist are considered “deviant” because the baseline for success in philosophy is masculine (Tripodi, 2015). Academic philosophy is characterized by a combative working environment, and women, being underrepresented in this scientific area, find themselves in a situation in which their performance attracts particular attention; their sheer isolation makes them feel observed and “deviant from the norm.” (Haslanger, 2008).

Frodeman (2013) offers a critique of academic philosophy based on the results of a survey sent to more than 500 philosophy departments across North America in the summer of 2010. Frodeman (2013) argues that academic philosophy “represents an aberration compared to the main tradition of two thousand years of Western philosophy.” The survey results show a perpetuation of the status quo rather than this being a time of innovation in teaching, research, or social involvement. The survey also demonstrates that university funding for philosophy does not appear to be in decline and there even appears to be a slight increase in the number of faculty positions in philosophy. Even though tenure is fading from academia generally, there was no decline in tenure positions in philosophy over the last 10 years. There is no discernable culture of curricular innovation or new types of philosophical engagement.

Adleberg et al. (2014) find that the underrepresentation of women in philosophy at all stages to be problematic for several reasons. First, it may be a reflection of unjust practices.

Second, even if students are not aware of explicit bias, research on implicit bias suggests that women may be discouraged from pursuing academic careers because their work is often undervalued, and finally, the underrepresentation of women in philosophy may lead women to underperform their potential.

Weinberg (2021) provides a glimpse of hope as he summarizes the latest reports from the British Philosophical Association (BPA) and the Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP) that describe the status of women in philosophy in the UK in 2011 and 2021. Weinberg (2021) states that within a decade, there has been an increase of 24% to 30% in permanent staff, an increase in professors with 19% to 24% but that unfortunately the decrease in women pursuing philosophy in postgraduate studies from undergraduate persists.

In an effort to theorize praxis in relation to philosophy and diversity, Elaine Swan (2017) draws on philosophers of race, and in particular, collective white ignorance, and argues for listening as a form of progressive white praxis. She argues that while praxis has been theorized in feminist theory about knowledge, standpoint, and bodies, literature neglects how whiteness structures the production of knowledge and praxis. Swan (2017) contends that an understanding of white praxis should also entail an examination of white epistemology, white ignorance, and encounters with the stranger or the other.

More recently, Elli Vintiadisi (2021) asks how women have contributed to the field of philosophy to understand gender inequality in philosophy demographics better. She asserts that excluding women from philosophy in tandem with practices that encourage the anonymization of women also removes epistemic qualities that arise precisely because of their social position (Vintiadisi, 2021). In so claiming, she is endorsing the view that the lack of diverse standpoints of women leads to a loss of knowledge in philosophy overall.

Often it is assumed that women need to change to fit existing institutions. But increasingly, there are those that argue that philosophy as an entire discipline needs to change, to accommodate and benefit from the important contribution of women (Hutchinson & Jenkins, 2013). There have been, in recent years, a few growing efforts to bring awareness to and address the lack of diversity in academic philosophy, including the creation of well-known blogs that have served as alternative academic spaces. Some of these are blogs like: *What is it like to be a woman in philosophy?* And *What we're doing about what it's like?* There are also campaigns like the *Gendered Conference Campaign* that aims to raise awareness of the prevalence of all-male philosophy conferences. Helen Beebee and Jennifer Saul (2021) present different ways of focusing on undergraduate and graduate women student experiences, such as more diversity and inclusion at the curriculum level, addressing the pay gap, and having students study women philosophers as ways to help remedy their underrepresentation and stop the drop-off rate. But while these are good efforts to counteract the prevalent issue of gender exclusion, there are not many other efforts, alternative spaces, or research that focus on the issue of racism. It is clear that women are underrepresented in philosophy, but the situation is even worse for people of color. For thousands of years, philosophy, as the mother of all disciplines has been seen as the one to create understandings about the universe and our humanity, but its main voices have been of white, middle-class men (Hutchinson & Jenkins, 2013).

I have demonstrated that the literature on the underrepresentation of women and minoritized groups in philosophy mostly focuses on gender, and while efforts to improve the climate for women in philosophy may help the situation for other underrepresented populations, there must be more focus on how to improve the climate specifically for people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and other minoritized groups. Blogs alone are just

a start, but not sufficient to bring radical change to philosophy. The phrase “women and minoritized groups” is used throughout the literature to mimic the inclusion of other groups, but there is virtually no real analysis of the phenomenon of academic exclusion in philosophy of minoritized groups, much less of further categories of other groups, like Mexican Americans.

Philosophers have mostly completed climate studies, but no in-depth qualitative research has been performed to obtain deeper understandings of the lived experiences of those marginalized in academia. There has been a continuous tension between philosophical methods and educational research. This might be related to the fact that most of the people that care about the lack of diversity in philosophy are minoritized individuals and therefore, perhaps are bound by the limits and expectations of philosophy and white epistemology. Another limitation that makes philosophy exclusionary is the hegemony of centering English in philosophy and philosophy in English.

2.13 LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY: HEGEMONY OF ENGLISH IN PHILOSOPHY

According to Searle (2003), the best philosophy departments in the United States are dominated by analytic philosophy. In turn, analytic philosophy is a branch and tradition of philosophy that approaches philosophical problems through analysis of the terms in which they are expressed. It is commonly associated with the Anglo-American philosophy of the early 20th century. It is very popular in the Western World, particularly in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Scandinavia (Analytic philosophy. Analytic Philosophy - By Movement / School - The Basics of Philosophy, 2008).

Analytic philosophy is characterized by an emphasis on language, and for its clarity and rigor in arguments. However, this is almost entirely in English. According to Moore (1999), the main practitioners of philosophy in the United States have been prominently and most notably

native-English speakers. For many decades, the parameters of what philosophy is and what is not have been very rigid and have excluded individuals not just by race and gender but also by its limiting language ideology that centers on English. This has also othered entire branches of philosophy as subordinate and devalued in importance to others, as is the case of Latin American philosophy and Mexican American philosophy.

2.14 LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

According to Stehn (2014), the term “Latin American philosophy” refers broadly to philosophy in, from, or about Latin America. However, the definitions of both “Latin America” and “philosophy” have been contested, and there has been disagreement about what geographical areas and languages it should encompass, but most importantly, the debate has surrounded what its purpose should be. Some of the interests it considers are postcolonial theory, metaphysics, epistemology, critical philosophy of race, philosophy of liberation, philosophy of language, metaphilosophy, continental philosophy, and critical theory. Some of its key themes include the analysis of identity, power, social justice, and the exploration of the economic and political struggles of Latin Americans, including racism and feminism.

For Gracia and Vargas (2018), Latin American philosophy has been both original and derivative. Derivative in the sense that it historically analyzed European philosophical figures and movements. Original in that it has produced important philosophers. Furthermore, it has had distinctive approaches to old philosophical problems, and formulations of new problems not already within the European philosophical tradition. In the last three to four decades, Latin American philosophy has engaged with a discourse on issues of race, ethnicity, nationality, and has considered the role of lived experience (Gracia & Vargas, 2018). However, as a field, it is still a very minuscule part of philosophy, especially in the United States.

2.15 MEXICAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHERS

As of 2018, the American Philosophical Association's demographic statistics reported that out of almost 5,000 members, 229 self-identified as Hispanic/Latino (Demographic statistics on the APA membership, 2018) and in the latest statistics as of 2020, out of 7,211 members, only 248, both male and female, were identified as Hispanic/Latino (Demographic statistics on the APA membership, 2020). These statistics are not broken up further to distinguish between those who identify as Mexican American. The label Hispanic/Latino is used as an umbrella term, proving that it is as far as the diversity distinctions go in academic philosophical associations, illustrating the need for more intersectional categories. The other categories for race and ethnicity are American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African- Hispanic/Latino, Pacific Islander, White/Caucasian something else, and prefer not to answer. The categories also included LGBTQ+, Disability, Employment, and Tenure status for which members could select more than one.

For Ofelia Schutte (2013), another one of the few Latina philosophers in the academy in the U.S., the dismally low representation confirms that given the current practices, standards, and teachers of philosophy, Latinos/as, including Mexican Americans, tend not to be attracted to the field because they see studying philosophy as a mark of social privilege. She claims that at best, they perceive philosophy as a protected space for asking unusually clever questions and at worst, a field reserved for exclusionary white privilege.

However, Sanchez and Sanchez (2017) argue that there is a growing tendency to take seriously the question of Mexican national identity as a philosophical question, especially given the complexities of Mexico's indigenous and European ancestries, a history of colonialism, and a growing dependency on foreign money and culture. They claim that Mexican culture and

philosophy are valuable and an urgent contribution to universal culture, which history and research equate mostly to only Western culture.

Vargas (2013) believes that Latinos, in general, are almost entirely invisible in the profession of philosophy. As Linda Alcoff puts it, the numbers suggest that it is especially unwelcoming to Latinos/as. Gracia and Vargas (2018) claim that accounting for the origins and parameters of Mexican American philosophy, just as with Latinx philosophy, has been a difficult business, both because of the messy, slowly emerging nature of academic fields and because of special challenges about how to characterize the field. This relates to the trouble with labels and to figuring out what these philosophies are supposed to do. First, there is a disagreement about whether “Latinx” ought to be understood expansively (as including both Latin Americans and U.S. Latinxs) or whether it ought to be understood narrowly (as focused on U.S. Latinxs). However, Vargas claims that over the past decade, there has been a marked increase in scholarly work by Mexican American philosophers. Along with this change has been increased attention in the idea of a specifically “Mexican American philosophy” (Vargas, 2013, p. 11).

According to Pappas (2021), over the last twenty years, scholars in both Latin American philosophy and American philosophy have produced original work on inter-American philosophy, which includes new work in Mexican American philosophy. These scholars include: José Medina, Carlos Sanchez, Eduardo Mendieta, Kim Diaz, Alex Stehn, José-Antonio Orosco, Chris Tirres, Manuela Gomez, Sergio Gallegos, Lara Trout, Albert Spencer, Jacoby Carter, Daniel Campos, Pablo Quintanilla, Alejandro Strong, Grant Silva, Andrea Pitts, Lee McBride, Jose Mendoza, Federico Penelas, Carlos Pereda, Stephanie Rivera, Paniel Reyes Cardenas, Mauricio Beuchot, Guillermo Hurtado, and Terrance MacMullan (Pappas, 2021).

While I am honored to be included in the list and this indicates some sign of progress, I agree with Orosco (2016), that Mexican Americans have been discriminated against and systematically oppressed within the United States, and that they have not lived under conditions in which they are free to develop their own authentic cultural or intellectual ideas. So as a result, Mexican Americans have not had philosophy until the last three decades. In other words, they have not been able to produce it, given unequal social, economic, and political circumstances. Therefore, the task of Mexican American philosophy might be to examine and articulate the experience of the Mexican American for the purpose of developing theories and strategies of resistance against their/our discrimination and oppression. Furthermore, it is also possible that this type of work has ended up in other fields such as ethnic studies, sociology, anthropology, but has not been categorized philosophically because it is continuously delegitimized.

Gallegos and Gallegos (2018) propose that Mexican American philosophy be a kind of philosophy that begins with the concerns and intuitions of the Mexican American community. They posit that Mexican American philosophy should be shaped by the experiences and relationships that are characteristic of those who identify as Mexican American. But for this, a sense of community is important for philosophers of color. Silva (2018) explains that the act of writing philosophy as a Mexican American often results in an alienating and existentially meaningless experience for many budding philosophers, particularly those who wish to think from their racialized and gendered identities in academic philosophy. Even when trying to highlight the work of other philosophers of color, many encounter resistances.

Ortega (2015) argues that the work of Latina feminists, including Mexican Americans, is a lot harder than men as they are not recognized or studied within the discipline of philosophy. She states that major figures commonly celebrated in other disciplines, like Gloria Anzaldúa and

Maria Lugones, are often overlooked in philosophical discourse and that there is a constant struggle to rediscover and incorporate forgotten philosophical figures of color into the academic world. Ortega (2015, 2016) claims that feeling comfortable in the world of philosophy has not been easy for her because the discipline forgets the contributions of those regarded as *others*, those include “people of color, immigrants, exiles, border dwellers, and those at the margins” (Ortega, 2015, p. 1). De Cruz (2018) argues that attempts to diversify philosophy, for instance, by introducing more minoritized authors into curriculum or syllabi, have been met with mixed success because there is still a lot of push back, devaluation, and othering of those who are perceived as different.

However, there has been some improvement in the diversification of academic philosophy. Like the creation of The *Society for Mexican American Philosophy* (SMAP) founded in 2016 (Orosco, 2016), and dedicated to the support and promotion of Mexican American philosophy in all its diverse manifestations. SMAP held its first-ever academic conference in 2017, I attended along with participants from all over the world, including Costa Rica, Colombia, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. Not all participants identified as Mexican American but all were interested in Mexican American philosophy. As of 2022, there are over 70 members in their mailing list. While the numbers of professional philosophers are increasing slowly, we must wonder if we are doing enough to encourage Mexican American students to pursue philosophy academically.

2.16 MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN PHILOSOPHY

To date, there is very little to no research on Mexican American students in philosophy. Some scholars hint at the importance of encouraging critical thinking, like Gonzalez (2001) who suggests we think of young Mexicanas as *pensadoras* who should be taught to interrogate the

social order, and who give meaning to learning, knowing, and power. But what about thinking about *filósofos* and *filósofas*? Are we successfully motivating young Mexicans and Mexican Americans to become philosophers?

I, Gomez (2018) shed some insight into how introduction to philosophy textbooks used in an 85% Mexican American community college student population, the same one of this study, can further marginalize students by not engaging them in a meaningful way that is relevant to their lives. Gomez (2018) claims that textbooks have the capacity to present information to students in a way that can be representative of their lived experiences or make them feel like outsiders and as excluded from the discourse, and less likely to learn to become active creators of philosophical epistemologies.

Gomez (2018) examines a popular introduction to philosophy textbook, *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas*, used with over 27,000 students in the U.S.-Mexico border and finds that the table of contents mentions a total of 78 male philosophers, of which 60 are white males and a total of 18 women philosophers, of which all, except one from Asia, are from Europe and the United States. In terms of region, Latin American philosophy received one page that briefly mentioned two philosophers. That is one single page out of a book that has 578 pages. The works presented by women philosophers are categorized in a section called “Other Voices,” demonstrating that otherness occurs at all levels even within student textbooks.

To end the underrepresentation of minoritized groups in academic philosophy, particularly of Mexican Americans, and to ensure diversification in academia, it is important for us to explore their lived experiences in higher education.

2.17 MEXICAN AMERICAN, HISPANIC, LATINO/A/, LATINX, CHICAN@ STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

This section reviews literature about what we know about Mexican American, Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx, Chican@ students in higher education, particularly in the context of community colleges. As you will see, we will encounter the trouble with labels, previously explored because various terms are all used interchangeably throughout the literature. The original use of the labels in the literature has been and will continue to be kept to demonstrate why we need to make distinctions in these categories.

Latino students are the nation's largest and most rapidly growing minoritized group (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Similarly, the Mexican American student population in the United States continues to rise in public schools and higher education (Ballón, 2015). By 2060, the Latinx population is expected to double (Colby & Ortman, 2015). The trouble with labels becomes relevant when we encounter the problem of grouping minoritized groups in education research (Pyne & Means, 2013). For instance, Bohon et al. (2006) set out to analyze the college aspirations and expectations among Latino adolescents in the United States and compared data from Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Mexican origin adolescents' experiences and their desire to attend college. Their findings are interesting and demonstrate that the weaker college aspirations between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are due to their low socioeconomic status and in some cases poor academic skills that are sometimes tied to their immigration status. Additionally, Bohon et al. (2006) state that findings from previous studies that document consistently low educational aspirations and expectations for Latinos (combined as a single group) are distorted by the disproportionate numbers of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the larger group, as well as the fact that Mexicans and Mexican Americans are disproportionately poor and the

children of poorly educated parents, compared to non-Latino whites. While they make an effort to illustrate distinctions, it is important to be cautious of the dangers of generalizations and stereotypes that group people of color as Latinos. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans are different, and these differences matter, and poverty do not always lead to low academic achievement or educational desires. Nonetheless, the findings are generalized despite mentioning some crucial cultural distinctions.

Another deficit-driven analysis is presented by Schneider et al. (2006) as they agree that there are many educational barriers for Hispanics in the United States and that their educational experience is one of communal disadvantage. They contend that many Hispanic students begin formalized schooling without the economic and social resources that many other students receive and that their disadvantages are also linked to socioeconomic status and their lack of knowledge about the U.S. education system.

On the other hand, despite these limitations, Guzman (2016) argues that today, more Latinos are going to college than ever before and that the majority of these begin their higher education at community colleges (Reyes del Real Viramontes & Urrieta, 2018, 2020). National Center for Education Statistics (2013) data shows that 46% of all Latinx students in U.S. higher education are enrolled at a community college. Hatch et al., (2015) performed a study that used descriptive statistics of Latina/o/x student college-going trends, and they found that Latina/o/x college students enrolled in community colleges at higher rates than four-year colleges. Community colleges represent the opportunity for students of all ages and backgrounds to begin and continue their academic trajectory (Campa, 2013). Moreover, these institutions attract and illuminate higher educational pathways for minoritized students and in particular, for the largest

student body, the Latinx community (Boswell & Wilson, 2004; Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003).

Handel (2011) highlights the importance of community colleges as they are the main institutions in providing a pathway to bachelor's degrees to students of underserved groups. Hernández (2017) contends that community colleges play a significant role in guiding pathways to postsecondary degrees for Latinx/a/o students. However once enrolled, students face institutional navigational challenges, which may influence their academic performance and in turn, nurture a self-defeating narrative. According to Díaz' (2019), investigation of seven students that identified as Indigenous and Mexican in their first year of community college, he found that students internalized self-defeating narratives (termed in his study as discrepancy narratives), which are stories about not being meant or belonging in college. Similarly, Martinez (2012) explores the experiences of undergraduate and graduate students that identify as Chican@ and finds that many of them encounter racism as they navigate higher education. Interestingly, through counterstory and as a Chican@ herself, she can analyze what it means to adapt to higher education. She reports the hypervisibility of being the only person of color in her rhetoric department, but at the same time, the invisibility of being marginalized and feeling unwelcomed. Martinez, just like Díaz (2019) finds that many Chican@ students engage with self-defeating narratives of not fitting in.

Long (2016) corroborates the effects of this rhetoric by revealing that nearly half of all incoming community college students drop out within twelve months of enrolling, with students of color and the economically disadvantaged as the most impacted. Furthermore, the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education (2011), determined Latinx transfer rates to four-year universities were disproportionately low among all transfer students (National Center for

Public Policy in Higher Education, 2011). More than 60% of Latinx students in postsecondary education begin their college careers in the community college, but fewer than 1% transfer to four-year colleges and universities, and far less than one percent ever graduate with a doctoral degree (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

Vega (2020) conducted ethnographic observations, focus group interviews, and data analysis of 133 young adults, mostly Mexican Americans in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas to understand “the multiple, overlapping, crisscrossing axes of inequality that both shape and fracture their experiences as U.S.-Mexico border residents.” She merges the theory of intersectionality with border studies scholarship to analyze how socioeconomic stratification, gender inequality, histories of racial discrimination, and generational differences map onto one another. Vega finds that these border residents live in a constant axis of inclusion and exclusion. Vega claims that multiple borders between the classes, genders, races, and generations demonstrate that the border is a representation of intersectionality. Vega’s findings also determined a link between substance (ab)use and incarceration of Mexican American men when placed in vulnerable situations, further detailing the complexity of generational poverty in the context of the border and providing insight into why they are not pursuing higher education. Something worrisome about this study is that it links border narco-culture with the influence of the drug cartels to permeate many features of young Mexican Americans’ identities and futures. This study exposes the challenges of young Mexican Americans who sometimes worry about survival first, before aspiring to higher education.

Just like Vega, Mendez (2020) provides interesting insights about first-generation Latinx college students on the U.S.-Mexico border. He claims Latinx students have statistically lower educational opportunities than other ethnic groups and in his qualitative study, through the use of

testimonios, reveals that educational success is tied to overcoming familial barriers. Some of these include students having to work a part-time job to pay for school-related expenses not covered by financial aid, in addition to taking on the responsibility to support their own families. Additionally, he illustrates that in many instances, Latinx students can obtain a higher education degree because of generational sacrifices, like the entire family moving to the U.S. or many of them pitching in to afford the costs of education. Unfortunately, these are challenges that are also often times carried onto graduate school (Ramirez, 2011, 2014).

Besides the fascinating finding of the negative discourses that Indigenous and Mexican students have about themselves in community college, Díaz (2019), reveals another dimension for us to consider, and that is that most of the stress and feelings of not belonging were found in bilingual classrooms. This leads to the question: “is it something about the way teachers teach or about the way students learn? that could help us understand who is at fault for the lack of success for minoritized students. If Mexican American students face unique challenges and language plays a role, it makes sense that we explore the notion of bilingualism in the context of the U.S.-Mexico border.

2.18 ROLE OF LANGUAGE: BILINGUALISM

U.S.-Mexico borders are naturally predominantly bilingual settings. The border is not limited to a geographical space, it represents complex hybridity in terms of nationalities, social classes, languages, and of overall constant navigation between two sides. However, the following research indicates that Spanish and bilingualism on the border are not valued as something that merits extra praise or compensation. On the contrary, in many cases, these linguistic abilities are perceived as a disadvantage. Alarcón and Heyman (2013) claim that the US-Mexico border setting provides a valuable opportunity to examine empirically what occurs with respect to

language use and language ideologies. In their research situated in the El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez border, the same site as my study, they conducted 39 interviews with call center operators and managers, and 12 translators and interpreters and they found that bilingual call centers mainly rely on uncompensated, socially provided language skills in Spanish, which in the city of El Paso is perceived to be a freely available 'heritage language' in the border setting. Furthermore, they conclude that bilingualism is used in the labor market as a sign of cheap and flexible labor, rather than as an economically and socially valued skill.

However, the perception of bilingualism as devalued is not exclusive to the labor market. In similar research of language ideologies in the context of education, Casesa (2013) finds that bilingualism is degraded and unappreciated in the education setting and that through time, many bilingual students become socialized to identify with the dominant culture and do everything possible to “fit in.” Research like this indicates that many students often hide their bilingualism, so they do not stand out or face discrimination.

Herrera-Rocha (2019) provides more insight into the language ideologies and identities of emergent bilinguals as constructed in a dual language (DL) program and a transitional bilingual education program (TBE) in the U.S.-Mexico border. This study connects language to identity formation. She finds that some students in TBE programs were exposed to the demeaned sense of bilingualism and were aware that being "bilingual" meant they were not proficient in the mainstream language and were still not "smart enough" to be in the "regular" classrooms. This indicates that bilingualism is devalued to an extent of being considered an academic deficiency and labeled outside the norm. Interestingly, this research reveals that most students identified with the label of "Mexican American" because they connected to both countries in different ways. Herrera-Rocha proposes that we embrace a multiplicity of identities rather than separating

them into the restrictive binaries of "American identity" and "Mexican identity." This embrace is significant in the context of the border, where its inhabitants constantly face contestation of their in-betweenness.

Furthermore, Herrera-Rocha and De la Piedra (2019) present additional evidence that suggests that the English language is valued over other languages in the classroom and that students internalize language ideologies. In a similar qualitative study in a transitional bilingual education (TBE) program located on the US-Mexico border, they investigate the experiences of 4th-grade students and find that some of them had appropriated monoglossic language ideologies. Likewise, students were able to display the use of their entire linguistic repertoires when communicating with friends and family outside of school. However, they discover that students often conceal their true identities to be perceived in socially acceptable ways. They conclude that the TBE program fosters a language ideology that portrays the English language as a critical element for success and that it is given a higher status than any other language, further proving that bilingualism is devalued in the context of education.

With bilingual communities comes the use of Spanglish (García, 2009). Reznicek-Parrado (2015) finds through a quantitative analysis of a judgment task completed by young heritage speakers of Spanish and qualitative analysis of short-answer surveys that even though participants reported high use of "Spanglish" they vehemently reject its use in the academic context. This exposes a strong disconnect between language ideologies and practices and presents interesting epistemological and pedagogical implications since the users themselves demean the value of Spanglish and serve as their own gatekeepers in its use.

2.19 SPANGLISH AS CONTROVERSIAL

So why are so many opposed to the use of Spanglish? To answer that, we must first understand what it is and the controversy surrounding its use. Bazán-Figueras and Figueras (2014) claim that Spanglish is a speech modality used by many Hispanics in the United States. As a lifelong border resident, I would add that its use is beyond the United States, as it is also found in many other parts of the world, particularly, in Mexican border towns like Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and its sister city of El Paso, Texas.

Bazán-Figueras and Figueras (2014) claim that Spanglish is a hybrid way of communication that mixes grammatical and lexical elements from both English and Spanish and is primarily used in oral communication, but its use has historically been highly disputed. Some common examples that they provide of Spanglish are *parquear*, used instead of the verb *estacionar*, and taken from the English verb "to park. They also refer to idiomatic expressions such as *llámame pa' trás* instead of *devuélveme la llamada*, literally translating the English idiom "call me back." In 2014, the Real Academia Española (RAE), considered by many, the Spanish language police, and the ultimate linguistic authority about the proper use of Spanish, legitimized some use of Spanglish. This was received with mixed emotions, and many were against the decision, especially language purists who uphold a dogmatic and static view of language. Since then, many other Spanglish words have already been added to the dictionary, particularly words related to technology and the Internet, like: *blog*, *chateo*, and *tableta*.

Moreover, the use of Spanglish has become increasingly popular in and outside the United States, extending outside its original domain, though it continues to raise much controversy among the Spanish-speaking community. Casielles-Suarez (2017) claims that the language practices of Latinos in the U.S. continue to attract attention from politicians, educators,

journalists, linguists, and the general Hispanic and non-Hispanic public. While monolingual speakers of English in the U.S. expect Hispanics to shift to English as other minority language speakers have done in the past, monolingual speakers of Spanish expect them to speak "pure" Spanish. Pure means not a hybrid like Spanglish. What is interesting is that Casielles-Suarez (2017) finds that even Spanish-English bilingual speakers criticize Latinos for mixing Spanish and English or speaking Spanglish. Similar to the Reznicek-Parrado (2015) finding of language gatekeeping within the same ethnocultural group.

Casielles-Suarez (2017) states that the term Spanglish has been rejected by some linguists who claim that it is technically flawed and only applies to casual oral registers. This is yet another metacontroversy as many cannot even agree on what constitutes as Spanglish. However, her analysis concludes that Latinos are using this hybrid, heteroglossic variety beyond casual oral registers. She suggests a broader perspective which not only considers the linguistic features of Spanglish but also the political, social, and cultural issues involved.

Furthermore, Stavans (2020) claims that Spanglish is a mestizo form that, although controversial, is increasingly recognized as a legitimate way of communication. He provides a powerful metaphor to represent the dilemma. He states that Spanglish is the elephant in the room, meaning that it does not cease to exist because one works hard at ignoring it. The truth is that it cannot be ignored because it is ubiquitous inside and outside classrooms all over the world in which bilinguals of Spanish and English are present. However, despite its contested use, the question educators are confronted with is how do we deal with language use of Spanglish? Should we legitimize its academic use, or should we reject it? Most importantly, on what grounds?

Caldas (2019) analyzes this specific question of to switch or not to switch in terms of translanguaging and the use of Spanglish in the context of education. Through an ethnographic study of Mexican American bilingual teachers, she explores how understanding different language ideological approaches to bilingualism and bilingual education through the use of translanguaging as the language of instruction push participants to examine their bilingual identities. Her findings reveal that all the participants agreed to use Spanglish in their future classrooms because they perceived the benefits of its use despite the controversies surrounding it.

Findings further show that all the participants agreed that they would use translanguaging as a language policy in their future classrooms. The agreement for its implementation stemmed from the participant's reflections of the socio-cultural and political contexts of schooling that emergent bilinguals in the United States face. The participants committed to fighting against repeating cycles of language marginalization. This marginalization of language has historically occurred when we are guided by discourses of language purity and appropriateness.

When we talk about the U.S.-Mexico border, we are referring to a largely Mexican American population. So, when we analyze the connection between language ideologies and race, it is impossible not to point towards the real racism that is embedded in language use and language expectations, especially in the academic context. Flores and Rosa (2015) highlight this connection perfectly as they explore the relationship between language and race. They examine raciolinguistic ideology and make a call to move away from discourses of appropriateness like those used against Spanglish.

Flores and Rosa (2015) challenge language ideologies about what language does, about what it should do, and overall assumptions about the nature of language. They explore the

question of who defines appropriateness? They claim it is an ideological process associated with the white speaking and white listening subject. In other words, appropriateness derives from whiteness. However, they find that raciolinguistic ideologies produce racialized speaking subjects who are constructed as linguistically deviant even when engaging in linguistic practices positioned as normative when produced by white subjects.

Herrera-Rocha and De la Piedra (2019) recommend professional development that informs teachers and staff about how Spanish-speakers experience linguistic racism and monoglossic language policies at schools by incorporating examples of how language ideologies are held by teachers and students shape students' linguistic and academic identities. In other words, there is complex racism embedded in these language practices. The good news is that as educators, we get to define and redefine language expectations and subvert the ways in which something prohibited and devalued like the use of bilingualism and language hybridity like Spanglish can turn into a pedagogical resource.

2.20 LANGUAGE HYBRIDITY AS A PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCE

Martínez (2010) reports findings from a qualitative study of Spanish-English code-switching or Spanglish among bilingual Latina/Latino sixth graders at a middle school in East Los Angeles. Even though the research is not conducted in the context of the border or higher education, his finds are relevant as he encounters that students displayed an impressive adeptness at shifting voices for different audiences and communicating subtle shades of meaning. He argues that this skillful use of Spanglish could potentially be leveraged as a resource for helping students to further cultivate related academic literacy skills. He concludes his research with a discussion of specific implications for how teachers might begin to utilize and influence the use of Spanglish

as a pedagogical resource by helping students to recognize, draw on, and extend the skills already embedded in their everyday use of language.

Additionally, Hornberger and Link (2012) drawing on ethnographic data from two different educational contexts, argue via a continuum of biliteracy lens that the welcoming of translanguaging in classrooms is not only necessary but desirable educational practice. They promote the recognition of the value of the communicative repertoires and translanguaging practices of students, their families, and communities. They argue against restrictive language policies in U.S. schooling that undermines bilingualism. They claim that as school populations become increasingly linguistically diverse, refusing to acknowledge the language resources of students and their families limits the possibilities for their educational achievement.

Furthermore, Ramos and Sayer (2017) present three distinct cases of English-Spanish bilinguals on the U.S.-Mexico border to illustrate how legitimate and authentic language use functions as forms of Bourdieu 's symbolic capital. They argue that because bilinguals have access to different forms of linguistic capital, in a highly bilingual context such as the U.S.-Mexico border, they develop differentiated strategies for employing language resources. They suggest that the translanguaging practices observed serve in efforts to obtain symbolic capital in the linguistic market.

Moreover, Caldas et al. (2019) engage in a case study that examines the pedagogical measures taken for Spanish development for a group of bilingual preservice teachers in a university-based teacher education program in the state of Texas. For this, classroom language policies were developed collaboratively and deliberately throughout the semester, which included discussion and negotiation between instructor and students about the language demands and expectations. The purpose of the study was to highlight explicit experiences integrating

content mastery and language development in a translanguaging university classroom. They reveal implications that expose the need for horizontal language policies that foster effective cross-linguistic and hybrid pedagogical choices.

Gutierrez et al. (1999) also focus on the use of hybridity as a method for organizing learning and for understanding diversity in an elementary classroom in the United States. They attempt to legitimize hybridity in the academic context as a theoretical lens and as a method to analyze and produce third spaces in education. These third spaces are essential in breaking limiting binaries and they are indispensable to housing notions of in-betweenness. In the context of language, third spaces allow for two or more languages to coexist. They argue that hybridity is a way to make sense of diversity and to be more inclusive. They also state that it can lead to more productive learning.

Finally, García (2009) presents fascinating arguments in defense of translanguaging and advocates for its epistemological and academic validation. A main way in which she differs from traditional views of language is that she does not see bilingualism as monolingualism times two. She argues for a dynamic model of bilingualism that does not assume that languages are experienced separately, but instead that they can be experienced simultaneously. García states that traditional views of language proficiency dismiss the gift of bilingual children and see them as a burden instead. García claims that translanguaging allows users to make use of full linguistic repertoire by utilizing all their resources to make meaning. Similarly, in Herrera-Rocha's (2019) research in the context of the U.S.-Mexico border, Mexican American students engage in translanguaging practices and for them, translanguaging helped them learn, "improvisar," and make meaning that allowed them to succeed academically.

This notion of improvisation becomes very relevant when we analyze the context of the U.S.-Mexico border and of Mexican American students who study philosophy. They are caught between dichotomies and constant navigation of in-betweenness without a clear direction of where to go and how to succeed academically in a field that has often contested their identities and contributions.

2.21 U.S.-MEXICO BORDER PHILOSOPHY

Tuana and Scott (2018) claim that it is time we reimagine borders and engage in a philosophical understanding that gives us bridges that provide thresholds beyond philosophy and its current state of academic exclusion and underrepresentation. Dussel (2013) argues that the U.S.-Mexico border is caught between the geopolitically dominating global North and the underdeveloped and exploited global South. Therefore, the critical nature of philosophy can play the role of a bridge in comparing and debating these two worlds. In particular, because Ciudad Juárez is in the midst of a world of terror, of femicide, of drugs, of daily crime, all of which result from being the *frontier* of two confronting worlds. Dussel (2013) sustains that to think from this perspective is a privilege not very many have.

Munter et al. (2012) recognize that the U.S.-Mexico border is filled with unprecedented violence for residents and students, and they present a case study that underlines the need for redefining identities on the border. While the study is conducted in a K-12 setting, they advocate for a universal peace education in which teachers care more about border students and engage in reflective practices. The purpose of this research project was to develop a deeper understanding of the educational strategies and techniques that have provided hope and vision for border

students. This study helps reveal the multiple challenges this population faces as these students experience daily dangerous obstacles as they navigate both sides of the border.

An interesting ethnographic study in relation to transnationalism and the physical act of crossing the border was conducted by Convertino (2018) on the U.S.-Mexico border. She explores 4 Latinx undergraduate students' experiences but focuses on 2 of whom crossed the border daily to attend college. These students were part of a pre-engineering freshman course and they built a Lego robot that they labeled "la migra". Although the study focuses on exploring mobility in transnational higher education, it sheds light on how the robot, rather than a public good, was actually symbolic of the uneven distribution of mobility. This study adds to the understudied significance of physical border crossing to mobility in the context of transnationalism.

Historically, the U.S.-Mexico border has been a place of disadvantage as stated that in the 1980s, the underfunding of border higher education was taken up in court in the famous *Lulac v. Richards* case. The suit shed light on the issue that border colleges and universities were not receiving fair state funding because of racial and ethnic discrimination (Santiago, 2008). Nonetheless, Mexican Americans on the U.S.-Mexico border are perseverant and unique in the sense that they live in a transnational space and often navigate and succeed by "improvising" between limiting experiences.

When exploring the border and notions of in-betweenness, we must point to Anzaldúa's work of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) in which she presents an analysis of her own complex identity and narrates what it is like to be caught in between the different worlds she inhabits. But, unfortunately, beyond the work of Anzaldúa, we do not have much literature exploring the dynamic hybridity of the border, especially in the context of philosophy.

I am one of the few philosophers and education researchers to focus on Mexican American philosophy and the underrepresentation of minoritized individuals as faculty and students in philosophy in the context of the U.S.-Mexico border. My scholarly work and research have sought to bridge a gap between education and philosophy through the creation of the Philosophy Club of El Paso Community College (EPCC). Even though philosophy has historically excluded the voices of women and people of color, the club is transforming this history by encouraging its members, 85% of them, Mexican Americans, to think critically and to take the courageous route of becoming philosophers. El Paso Community College serves more than 28,000 students and is located on the U.S.-Mexico border between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Most EPCC students navigate the challenges of both cultures and have the unique experiences of being on the front lines of international political debates that range from immigration policies to the deadly effects of racism. Many EPCC students cross a physical bridge every day from Mexico to the U.S. and vice versa and endure the contestation of their identities on both sides of the border. This phenomenon has led to very interesting philosophical conversations and projects inside and outside the classroom. One example is that the club was labeled 2020 Community Champions by the El Paso Community Foundation for its philanthropic work on both sides of the border community and were also featured by the American Philosophical Association blog for its unique pragmatic approach (Gomez, 2020). This indicates that Mexican American philosophy students on the border care about philosophy and are finding alternative methods to philosophize and create dialogue and social change. They are practicing a new radical way of philosophical praxis and producing philosophical knowledge from the U.S.-Mexico border. But we need more.

2.22 RESTATEMENT OF RESEARCH GAP

As I have shown, women and people of color are treated as one group in the literature about academic exclusion and underrepresentation. This occurs in academia as a whole, and philosophy in particular as a discipline. When minoritized groups are examined separately, they are treated as a monolithic category without important distinctions. Intersectional literature that focuses exclusively on understanding minoritized groups in philosophy, particularly on Mexican Americans, besides my research, is virtually non-existent. What this means is that the current literature is not intersectional, and it does not look at the problem of underrepresentation regarding multiple aspects of identity, i.e., ethnicity, gender, race, language, and so on. The current research on the underrepresentation in philosophy has focused, mostly on women as one single group.

Most of the literature about underrepresentation in academic philosophy is about women and the one that mentions minoritized groups, groups all in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and abilities. Paxton et al. (2012) claim that the focus of their study was women in philosophy, but that there is also obvious underrepresentation of other groups in philosophy. They do not know if the pattern of minority representation in philosophy is similar to the pattern for women and claim that it would certainly be beneficial to know and to be able to compare the two cases. However, to date, very little research has focused on the experiences of minoritized individuals in philosophy and even less at the undergraduate or community college level.

Moreover, the limited research on minoritized groups in philosophy is quantitative and lacks important qualitative features about their unique experiences (Dobbs, 2017). While quantitative studies are important, we need phenomenological approaches to understand the

experience of students and academics of color. The very small research available on demographic labels does not cut across important categories (Thompson, 2017). For instance, how the American Philosophical Association reports its demographic statistics like the number of Hispanic/Latino that are professionals in the U.S. (Demographic statistics on the APA membership, 2018, 2020). But does not distinguish between those who identify as Mexican American or something else. While it is clear that there is racism and sexism in academia, their effects remain as an under-researched area (Pilkington, 2011).

To date, as far as I know, my initial pilot study for this research that began in 2018 is the only one on Mexican American students who study philosophy in the U.S.-Mexico border. This current study will expand research on this topic by exploring student experiences in becoming philosophers as a step towards improving the representation of minoritized groups in academia and in philosophy.

2.23 CONCLUSION OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Ferrer (2012) claims that to increase diversity in philosophy we need a lot more data collection. While the collection of data is necessary for understanding the underrepresentation of women and minoritized groups in philosophy, numbers are not enough. We need more, we need their stories, their testimonios, their ideas about how to make philosophy a more welcoming place and to create substantive inclusion and incorporation of their epistemological insights. Quantitative accounts, while helpful, do not capture the negotiation or contestation of their identities and of the certain types of repression that underlie the numbers of minoritized groups in philosophy. Kings (2019) claims that the underrepresentation in philosophy is a fact, and

while more statistical and qualitative research would aid in our understanding of the problem, there is enough evidence right now to justify action.

This action can come in many forms. Leuschner (2015) believes we should implement mechanical changes in publication procedures: like alphabetical order in co-authored publications. Otherwise, it is likely that contributions from less prominent researchers remain marginalized (van Wesel, 2016). Also, that double-blind review procedures are helpful for women to get their work published. Another suggestion is the implementation of hiring quotas.

However, Frodeman (2013) argues that a merely disciplined philosophy, one that is still an elitist academic bubble where philosophers primarily work with and write for other philosophers, is, in the end, no philosophy at all and that philosophy needs an internal revolution. The literature indicates that this revolution is needed not just in philosophy, but in all of academia. Baffoe et al. (2014) conclude that there is a need to focus on the lived experiences of academics of color from all over the world to implement a new equitable academic order. They also claim that there is a desperate need for academics of color to tell their own stories to subvert the story that “whiteness” often tells about them.

From a pedagogical standpoint, Kings (2019) states that as educators, it is important to consider the intersectional nature of discrimination and the potential effects such intersections may have on students. If students do not see themselves reflected in their teachers or their curriculum, how do we expect them to enter academia and prevail? Simultaneously, as philosophers and educators, and in my case as both, we must take intersectionality seriously, especially when it comes to promoting diversity within the discipline. An intersectional analysis

and a culture of praxis will allow for the critical engagement with a multitude of inequalities and discrimination experienced by women and minoritized individuals in philosophy.

This literature review has sought to explore the underrepresentation of minoritized groups in academia in general and philosophy in particular and shed light on the importance of studying the lived experiences of Mexican American, U.S.-Mexico border community college students in becoming philosophers. The next chapter explores the theoretical frameworks and methodology that will assist me in this investigation.

3. Chapter III: Methods

This chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT), (Ladson-Billings et al., 1995; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000) particularly, Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), Intersectionality, (Crenshaw, 1991, 1993, 2011) and Figured Worlds (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007) and the methods of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990) and testimonios (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012) that I used to address the research questions of this study. I present my own positionality, explain the selection of the participants, the process of data collection, as well as the data analysis techniques I employed. I also provide information about a pilot study I conducted on this same research in 2018 to further position the continuation of this work. To understand the connection between my research questions, theoretical frameworks, and methods, I revisit my questions once again here:

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border become philosophers?
2. For Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border, what does it mean to be a philosopher?
3. What are the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border in relation to becoming a philosopher?

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: LATCRIT, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND FIGURED WORLDS

The focus of my phenomenological study is to understand intersectional Mexican American U.S.-Mexico border students' identities and their lived experiences in studying philosophy and becoming philosophers along the U.S.-Mexico border of El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez,

Chihuahua, Mexico. In my introduction and literature review, I explained how philosophy historically has been and continues to be one of the least racially, ethnically, and gender-diverse academic fields in the humanities for students and faculty. Therefore, the more scholars understand the lived experiences of the participants in this study, the more measures we can take to end their academic marginalization. For this project, I conducted written and oral testimonios with community college students who study philosophy on the U.S.-Mexico border and who identify mostly as Mexican American. This project also included observations of philosophy students in their activities related to philosophy outside the classroom, particularly at student club meetings and event gatherings. For my theoretical frameworks, I utilize Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the form of Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), Intersectionality through Intersectional Nepantla and Figured Worlds, as an identity theory to support my research.

3.2.1 CRITICAL RACE THEORY

As we consider the historical marginalization of people of color in academia documented in the literature review, Critical Race Theory (CRT) can help us better understand the intersection of race and institutions, and the impact of racism on minoritized individuals. It is important to view the origins of CRT also from a historical perspective to understand its current uses and to see how it is beneficial for this study. There is debate on the exact origin of CRT. Tate (1997) argues that although no identifiable date can be assigned to the conception of CRT, its foundation is linked to the development of African American thought in the post-civil rights era. CRT was developed by legal scholars who were initially part of critical legal studies (CLS) but who found that the research did not address racist discourse that affected the slow progress of civil rights legislation and the experiences of people of color in the judicial system (Tate, 1997).

In the mid-1990s, there was an evolution of CRT and educational researchers began applying it to their analyses of educational inequities, academic tracking, college admissions, critical pedagogy, racial microaggressions, and best practices (Ladson-Billings et al., 1995; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000). Due to this versatility in application, I am interested in the specific use of CRT in the analysis of Mexican American students of philosophy on the U.S.-Mexico border and their lived experiences of navigating higher education toward a degree in philosophy and their overall journeys toward becoming philosophers. However, it is essential to point out that, thoroughly understanding CRT and its uses is like trying to tightly grip sand that quickly falls through our fingers. This is because CRT is constantly moving and changing. Since its creation, it has never been static.

Crenshaw (2011) defines CRT as:

Not so much an intellectual unit filled with natural stuff—theories, themes, practices, and the like—but one that is dynamically constituted by a series of contestations and convergences pertaining to the ways that racial power is understood and articulated in the post-civil rights era (p. 1261).

Even though there are many forms of CRT in the context of education, its principles have been adapted through the years, Capper (2015) presents six main straightforward tenets of CRT as 1) Permanence of racism; 2) Whiteness as property; 3) Counter storytelling and majoritarian narratives; 4) Interest convergence; 5) Critique of liberalism, and 6) Intersectionality. I focus on two of these for my study, counter storytelling in the form of Mexican American students' testimonios and on intersectionality.

The first tenet of permanence of racism implies that rather than viewing racism as random and isolated, it should be perceived as always being pervasive in society (Tate, 1997).

Whiteness as property refers to U.S. history, in which property rights were and are more important than human rights (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), in the context of education, the tenet of whiteness as property is also linked in a literal way to property values and the connection between public school finances and local property taxes and how wealthier communities receive more funding than poor ones. Counter storytelling and majoritarian narratives address the importance of personal lived experiences shared via narratives of people of color and privileged individuals (Ladson-Billings et al., 1995; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000). Interest convergence means that any gains toward racial equality have only happened and can only happen when whites also benefit (Horsford, 2010; López, 2003). The tenet of critique of liberalism, questions ideas of color blindness and the ways liberal equity policies and practices can perpetuate racial oppression (Capper, 2015). Finally, intersectionality, examines the intersections of identities, in terms of race, social class, language, ability, sexuality, and gender identity/expression to reveal oppressions that are hidden when examining just racial identity (Crenshaw, 1988). In the context of education, it can help uncover the unique needs of students from specific demographics.

Overall, CRT acknowledges that race is socially constructed, forcefully, and unfairly manipulated by those in power, and it allows us to explore the common experiences shared by people of color in the United States (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Solórzano, 1998; Yosso, 2005).

3.2.2 LATCRIT THEORY

Critical Race Theory (CRT), particularly Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) provides a framework for understanding how race, language, culture, nationality, and immigration status, influence and inform minoritized individuals' trajectories and outcomes (Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). LatCrit examines the intersectionality between

racism and identity (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and provides an additional framework/narrative to further deepen our understanding of the Mexican American college experience (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Díaz, 2019; Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015). Furthermore, LatCrit makes it possible to challenge existing systems and dynamics of power by illuminating Mexican American voices and their lived experiences of resilience as a counternarrative to mainstream epistemologies (Beam-Conroy, 2013; Delgado, 1989; Díaz, 2019; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). LatCrit in education draws theoretically from Chicano/a/@/x studies and the civil rights literature (Gonzalez & Portillos, 2007) to address some of the educational inequalities experienced by minoritized students. LatCrit can help us better understand the intersectionality between the many dimensions of Latino/a/@/x identity and oppression (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

LatCrit theory allows us to have epistemic access to the many different types of intersectionalities that occur in Mexican American community college philosophy students on the border. This intersectionality is often ignored or intentionally erased in current education literature that labels Mexican American students as Latinx but does not focus on the unique intersectional lived experience of being on the border and becoming philosophers.

3.2.3 INTERSECTIONALITY

Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) developed the framework of intersectionality arguing that contemporary social discourses fail to recognize the numerous intersections of identities. She presents intersectionality as a way of framing the various interactions of race and gender in relation to power. She claims intersectionality is also a way to recognize the multidimensional overlaps for class, sexuality, language, religion, etc. within many systems of oppression. For this study, the main idea is to analyze the multiple aspects of minoritized

identities of Mexican American students in the U.S.-Mexico border and their lived experiences in becoming philosophers. Crenshaw (1993) affirms that identities are not monolithic and demonstrates how U.S. structures, such as the legal system, and discourses of resistance, like feminism and antiracism, often frame identities as isolated and mutually exclusive, resulting in the "theoretical erasure" of minoritized identities (Harris & Patton, 2019).

Crenshaw claims that being a person of color is not a homogenous experience. This becomes relevant when we dissect the labels of Latino/a/@/x, Hispanic, Chicano/a/@/x, Mexican American, etc. because even if labeled under the same categories, differences matter. This relates to the understanding of complex identities like those of Mexican American students on the intersections of the U.S.-Mexico border, who navigate transnational and transcultural spaces. Understanding the identities of Mexican American philosophy students in the U.S.-Mexico border grants us access to the many intersections of who they are. This permits us to uncover the factors that block their success and those that contribute to their persistence in a field that often neglects their identities and their contributions, and in many instances, their very existence.

When utilizing intersectionality for research, we must proceed with caution. A recent study by Harris and Patton (2019) found that intersectionality has become a buzzword within higher education research and that the majority of scholars who employed "intersectionality" in their research did so in a cursory manner. However, in this study, intersectionality will allow me to center the lived experiences of people of color that identify as Mexican American and examine how the intersections of two countries, two languages, and two cultures impact their lived experiences in becoming philosophers. The U.S.-Mexico border is an ideal site for the application of intersectional analysis.

3.2.4 U.S.-MEXICO BORDER INTERSTICIO

Anzaldúa's work of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) presents an analysis of her own complex identity and narrates what it is like to be caught in between the different worlds she inhabits. In this work, she claims, she is caught in between *los intersticios* of two worlds. Two years before Crenshaw coined "intersectionality", Anzaldúa was already using the Spanish version of the word to allude to overlapping and intersecting identities like hers. I want to honor this very important contribution and not add to the erasure and neglect of women of color in academia, like Anzaldúa, therefore, I utilize the notion of *intersticios* as part of my analysis.

To account for the complexity of intersections, Ranft (2013) proposes a new type of intersectionality called "Intersectional Nepantla" as a theoretical framework of analysis that may expand into various disciplines, including the realm of education, to interrogate identity-based oppressions. Intersectional Nepantla combines the theories of Crenshaw and Anzaldua to understand systemic discrimination. Ranft claims that the merging of these theories into a united theoretical framework involves the work of self-reflection and examination, as well as the difficult task of working through the pain and discomfort of internal resistance and oppression to then move to this work on collective levels. As a woman of color and philosopher from the U.S.-Mexico border, this theoretical blend resonates with me and this study.

Nepantla is a common metaphor for borders. On top of that, Nepantla requires that individuals come to terms with their own intersectional identities, politics, and subjectivities. In so doing, individuals move from inner, personal struggles to public acts. In this way, intersectional Nepantla allows from moving from the internal/personal to the external/societal system (p. 212). Anzaldúa (1987) affirmed that Nepantla is also a way for marginalized

populations to be rewired and gain a deeper understanding of the self and others. Nepantla is a liminal place in between worlds. Those who live in Nepantla are in a constant state of displacement in between different spaces. There is no place fuller of intersections that embodies Nepantla like the U.S.-Mexico border. Interestingly, my study is also situated in a unique *intersticio* between my attempt to make a significant contribution to educational research and at the same time for it to be relevant in the field of philosophy.

Throughout my analysis, I utilize Anzaldúa's influential work on identity and her ideas of Borderlands, Atravesados, Nepantla, and Mestizaje as a sub-framework for us to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the *intersticios* of race, gender, sexuality, class, language, and culture while being and becoming in the U.S.-Mexico border. She states that just as borders are often characterized by complexity, ambiguity, and fluidity, the same can be argued for our identities. Anzaldúa claimed our identities are not fixed or static. Therefore, our worlds and our ongoing interactions with them, especially on the U.S.-Mexico border are also in flux. For Anzaldúa, the border is constantly evolving and mutating our relationships with ourselves and others.

3.2.5 FIGURED WORLDS

The trouble with labels that appears repeatedly in my literature review is tied to multidimensional issues of identity and is also very present in this study. Since this investigation occurs in the context of the U.S.-Mexico border with participants who identify mostly as Mexican American and are on their journeys to becoming philosophers, it makes sense to explore identity and to analyze how the participants understand and label themselves.

Identity is a complex concept that is defined as the formation and understanding of the self that is often marked with socially constructed raced, gendered, classed, and sexual identity

“labels” (Holland, et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007). The figured world is a theoretical lens that seeks to understand identity as produced in local sites and mediated through various practices. Holland et al. (1998) developed the concept of the figured world as part of identity analyses that focus on identities produced in a non-deterministic process. Calhoun (1994) shares Holland et al. (1998) view that identities are constructed through activities situated and given meaning by figured worlds. Holland et al. (1998) define a figured world as “socially produced, culturally constituted activities” (pp. 40–41).

By figured world:

we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents (in the world of romance: attractive women, boyfriends, lovers, fiancés) who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of states (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52).

Holland and Lave (2001) and Martín and García (2015) describe a figured world's sense-making as the individual subjective experience in history or history-in-person. As a theoretical lens, figured worlds permit researchers to understand how ideas and artifacts allow individuals to develop new subjectivities. Roth (2017) states that a core element of figured worlds as a theoretical lens is an alternative to analyzing subjectivity through psychodynamic processes or deterministic social relations. The subjectivities analyzed with the figured worlds theoretical lens are relational. Relational identities "...have to do with behavior as indexical of claims to social relationships with others". (Holland et al., p. 127) Chang et al. (2017) state that this entails that an individual has the capability of participating in different cultural worlds within one's scripted social positions. Roth and Erstad (2015) characterize the scripted social positions as positional identities or the way that individuals are expected to participate in a community. The figured world theoretical lens has been used to analyze border experiences and Mexican American

identities and it has also been further utilized to understand how individuals become and take on these identities.

Chávez (2002) and Velasco (2016) state that Chicana/o identity is characterized as a struggle in unity with the community and against Anglo-U.S. racism. Chang et al. (2017) have used the figured world theoretical lens to find a similar identity of struggle with Latinx undocumented students. Their identities included political contestations of being undocumented and citizenship. Besides documenting this conflict, figured worlds has also been used to find how these identities are sustained and produced.

Fry (2004) and Urrieta (2007) have found that Chicana/o identities are created, and individuals are recruited into them through various experiences such as marginalization caused by racism. Furthermore, Urrieta (2007) used the figured worlds lens to understand how twenty-four Mexican Americans came to produce Chicana/o Activist Educator identities and found that exposure to Chicana/o activist figured worlds might not necessarily lead to identity production or recruitment into the Chicana/o figured world, and that some were even dissuaded from the view because of perceptions of its militancy. Hull and Greeno (2006) claim that the concept of positional identity in the theory allows for research into formal and informal learning spaces and the identities produced in them. Abes et al. (2007) and Peña-Talamantes and Abrahám (2013) find that individuals can exist in multiple figured worlds, and identities can be negotiated with others and in proximity to locations.

Using Holland et al. (1998) theory of identity and their concept of figured worlds, I will explore the participants' Mexican American identity production and identity comprehension in the process of becoming philosophers considering the social and cultural implications of being in the U.S.-Mexico border. Figured worlds, according to Holland et al. (1998) "rest upon people's

abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized ‘as if’ realms” (p. 49). This means we can explore identity, not just as if it were absolute, but also the possible selves that can potentially unfold in the process of becoming. These selves can be imagined in future scenarios influenced by the cultural norms, values, and expectations of the social contexts in which the participants live and interact in. Holland et al. (1988) argue that identities are formed dialectically and dialogically in these worlds. In the case of the participants, this happens between the U.S. and Mexico, English and Spanish, work and school, and many other interesting dichotomies. Therefore, we will see not only how the participants make sense of themselves currently in a present sense, but also how they perceive themselves, *mientras avanzan*, as they make progress in their journeys of becoming philosophers.

By using the above-mentioned frameworks, I plan to deepen my own understanding of the many dimensions of contested border identities of Mexican Americans, their lived experiences of resilience, and the challenges of living in the in-betweenness of two worlds.

3.3 QUALITATIVE STUDY

To best answer my research questions, I performed a qualitative study. According to Creswell (2013), philosophy and qualitative research are closely tied together because whether we are aware of it or not, as researchers, we inevitably bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our studies. Creswell outlines four philosophical assumptions that are present in qualitative research.

The first one is ontological assumptions about the nature of reality and its characteristics. The ultimate example of ontological assumptions may be found in phenomenology, when a researcher compiles a report about how individuals that participate in a study view their lived experiences similarly or differently (Moustakas, 1994). For my study, phenomenology will be

key in interpreting the uniqueness of the lived experiences of Mexican American philosophy students in the U.S.-Mexico border in becoming philosophers.

The second philosophical assumption is epistemological. Epistemology is concerned with truth and knowledge production, and in a qualitative approach, subjective evidence is put together based on individual views and this is how knowledge is known, and in some cases how truth is produced, through the subjective experiences of people, who in the case of my study, share their life stories through testimonios.

The third assumption is axiological, according to Creswell, all researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values known in a study. In some cases, the researcher's presence and values are present in the study and the voices of the participants may be a representation of the researcher.

The final assumption as listed by Creswell is methodological, this means that the process or methodology of qualitative research is inductive, as it is collected and shaped by the researcher's experiences from the ground up.

A qualitative research approach allowed me to recognize and engage with all four philosophical assumptions and gave me the tools for me to interpret the complexity of the rich data that I analyzed (Merriam, 2009). A phenomenological approach allowed me to explore the phenomenon of Mexican American philosophers in the process of becoming. This was a way for me to use the tools I have developed in my doctoral work to understand, to recognize and engage with all four philosophical assumptions. A qualitative approach allowed me to combine philosophy and education and provided me with the tools to understand the uniqueness of the lived experiences of Mexican American philosophy students in the U.S.-Mexico border in becoming philosophers and approach them as subjects and not objects. This means that

participants were able to demonstrate autonomy and authenticity in their contributions when talking about themselves and recollecting and sharing their lived experiences.

According to Ferrer (2012), the most powerful tool we have to improve the representation of minoritized individuals in philosophy is data collection. For that purpose, quantitative accounts have been a good start in identifying the severe problem of underrepresentation of minoritized faculty and students in philosophy, while quantitative research helps to identify the problem with numbers, it does not capture important aspects of their lived experiences, much less intersectional dimensions. Insight into the journeys of Mexican American students in becoming philosophers and moving through a historically unwelcoming academic field might provide specific clues about what needs to change. This is why a qualitative study was necessary because it is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible and in turn, hold the potential to transform the world (Creswell, 2013). This is essential to my study as my work intends to offer new illustrations about the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students in becoming philosophers that might serve as a step towards a remedy to their underrepresentation. Finally, a qualitative approach has allowed me to make use of both my personal and social knowledge to arrive at a better understanding of the reality of underrepresentation in philosophy with the use of phenomenology.

3.4 PHENOMENOLOGY

To understand the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students of philosophy in the U.S.-Mexico border in becoming philosophers, I will use phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology has deep philosophical roots, it aligns well with my

theoretical frameworks, and is viable for conducting qualitative studies in education, primarily because:

Traditionally, many branches of science and philosophy have sought truth by going beyond the subjective veil of human experience to an underlying, objectively true reality. Phenomenologists question this enterprise and are instead concerned with human experience before it is abstracted, reduced, and explained (Aagaard, 2016, p. 519).

This indicates that phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning that participants attribute to their everyday lived experiences (Husserl, 1970).

Phenomenology derives from the Greek *phainomenon*, which in its most basic sense means “that which shows itself from itself” (Heidegger, 1977). Phenomenology asks, "What is this or that kind of experience like?" It differs from almost every other type of research in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973).

In phenomenological studies, the investigator, as an observer, must abstain from making suppositions and focus on the topic freshly and naively without assuming answers to the questions (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, phenomenological questions are questions that deal with the meaning and significance of certain visible phenomena (Heidegger, 1977). Thus, phenomenology is not concerned with finding an ultimately correct single answer or a quantifiable result. It is not concerned with finding a solution, but rather problematizing a phenomenon that needs to be comprehended (Jurema et al., 2006). Throughout the research process, even though the researcher is expected to refrain from interpreting or bringing in any non-given or visible knowledge about the phenomenon to account for what he or she is trying to understand, subjectivity cannot always be avoided (Aagaard, 2016). Phenomenology requires a previous understanding of philosophical assumptions and introspective analysis. Sometimes, the

challenge of defining the essence of a phenomenon can become too subjective and contextual based on the researcher's personal understanding.

This is why the purpose of this phenomenological research approach is to determine what an experience means for the person who has had the experience (Moustakas, 1994), and it involves a return to the experience to attain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of that experience. For participants, the experience of becoming philosophers does not necessarily have a specific starting point or a final one. Phenomenology is perfect because it deals with the process of becoming and it allows me to understand the participant's own categorization and prioritization of their experiences in their journey.

van Manen (1990) posits that rather than rely on abstract generalizations and theories about students and education in the traditional sense, we should explore their everyday lived experiences through a phenomenological approach. Madjar (2020) agrees and claims that in education, it is common to hear that we need to close the gap between research and practice, and he suggests the application of phenomenological pedagogy since phenomenology can provide a way for teachers to reflect on their educational practices by prioritizing the meaning and significance of their students' lived experiences. According to Madjar, phenomenological research can bridge and inform policy.

According to Moustakas (1994), in phenomenological investigations, the researcher must establish and carry out a series of methods and procedures that lead to a structured systematic study. However, the process of the research of this study will follow a unique mode in gathering data through unstructured but genuine testimonios and observations. Moustakas also explains that the most fundamental task in phenomenological research is to discover a topic and research

questions rooted in autobiographical meanings and values, as well as involving social significance. This is where phenomenology as a research approach can be merged with testimonios as a method.

3.5 TESTIMONIOS

Testimonios are intrinsically phenomenological because they provide insights of how people perceive their lived experiences and the world around them. Testimonios are a critical Latin American oral and written practice that is contingent upon personal and communal lived experiences as important sources of knowledge in understanding one's place within political, social, and cultural contexts (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). Testimonios are "told in the first-person by a narrator who is the real protagonist or witness to the events she or he recounts" (Beverley, 2005, p. 547). Applying the Critical Race Theory's tenet of counternarrative, testimonios speak back to the dominant discourses about people of color and highlight their own stories about themselves with their own voices.

Testimonios, beyond having epistemological power, are also "a source of empowerment, and political strategy for claiming rights and bringing about social change" (Benmayor et al., 1997, p. 153). As a methodological approach, testimonios can be part of a phenomenological approach that allows participants to tell their life stories and those affected by racism, sexism, and classism to respond to oppression through their voiced and lived experiences (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). This is exactly what I aim to capture in this research. Having access to Mexican American community college student testimonios about the contestation of their hybrid border identities and their lived experiences allows us to understand and hopefully improve the numbers of minoritized groups in philosophy and the quality of their academic experiences.

Testimonios are a form of knowing and telling made possible by autobiographical narratives. "While autobiography has been traditionally utilized to convey western bourgeois narratives of the "self-made man," testimonio is firmly rooted in liberation struggles in the Global South" (DeRocher, 2018, p. 5).

Burciaga and Cruz Navarro (2015) suggest the use of educational testimonios that involve teachers and students as one approach to critical pedagogy. They claim that testimonios raise the voice of marginalized students and that they support students' development of aspirations beyond the context of the classroom. Testimonios of Mexican American community college students who study philosophy in the U.S.-Mexico border can provide the opportunity for critical self-reflection of their experiences and can work as an alternative epistemological tool (Bartow, 2005). What this means is that by allowing those minoritized students who persist in academic philosophy in the U.S.-Mexico border and who are on their journeys of becoming philosophers to express their experiences through their stories, we can understand the factors that contribute to their success in a field that has historically excluded voices like theirs.

Statistics about how many minoritized individuals study philosophy or teach philosophy in the United States are a start in understanding their marginalization, but they are not enough. We need more, we need their autobiographical stories, particularly their testimonios about their lived experiences in navigating one of the least diverse fields in academia. Testimonios give us access to their complex lived experiences, which in many cases are filled with struggle and experiences of oppression (Cervantes et al., 2018). This becomes relevant when we realize that mainstream discourses about lived experiences and marginalization in academic philosophy fail to represent the voices of Mexican Americans and often ignore their contributions.

DeRocher (2018) claims that *transnational testimonios* are a praxis that strategically performs epistemic translations by providing a textual bridge between practitioners and readers of very different social worlds. Whereas historically, traditional testimonios have primarily aimed at reaching a northern audience. Testimonios can take many forms, and my aim for this study is to not confine them to what they need or should be. They will be used as a tool of multiple possibilities to reveal critical dialogues, in which Mexican American students reflect on what it means to be a philosopher to them and what their lived experiences have been in becoming one. The questions asked to elucidate testimonios are about the students' lived experiences in their journeys towards becoming philosophers and their experiences in philosophy education. The testimonios collected for this study were both oral and written.

My research required sensitivity to the particularity of the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students in the U.S.-Mexico border who want to become philosophers. The process of becoming is ontological and deeply philosophical and phenomenology is the method to uncover the complex layers it entails. Testimonios are a way to practice the work of phenomenology. van Manen (1990) posits that:

From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to know the world, is profoundly to be in the world in a certain way, the act of researching- questioning-theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to become the world (p. 5).

This is why it is important that I share my positionality and reflect on how my lived experiences shape the direction of this study.

3.6 POSITIONALITY

I was born and raised in the U.S.-Mexico border of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad, Juárez, Chihuahua. The same place of my research. My entire life, I have navigated between two

cultures and two languages; English, and Spanish, and many times, I have been stuck in between limiting dichotomies. Therefore, my identity has been contested on both sides of the border. I have first-hand experience of what it is like to be a woman and a Mexican American in the context of academia and in philosophy as a student and as faculty. I have worked as a philosophy educator on the U.S.-Mexico border for over 18 years. This has made me understand that my unique positionality and the everlasting power of my experiences makes me subjective yet passionate about my study.

As a woman of color and as a philosophy educator, I inevitably see myself reflected in the literature of academic exclusion and discrimination. I have been othered and made to feel invisible. This research is difficult for me on a personal level, but necessary in an academic and existential level. I believe I have a unique ability to comprehend and appreciate these students' experiences because in many ways, it is like looking at myself in the mirror. Nonetheless, despite my own personal lived experiences, I have aimed to fairly represent the findings objectively by allowing the data to drive the direction of this research.

I am in a particular position where I have access to valuable insights about Mexican American students on the U.S.-Mexico border, and I ethically use it to empower and elevate their/our voices. While I have been denied epistemological access multiple times throughout my academic career, I have also entered prestigious academic spaces like Harvard and Yale University, through scholarships and academic presentations. Additionally, my philosophy work has been published in honorable journals, conferences, and mainstream books and magazines. In fact, in 2022, I was named Piper Professor for the entire state of Texas, one of the most prestigious teaching awards at the college level and the Texas House of Representatives created

and passed a congratulatory resolution in my honor. Despite these recognitions, I realize that not everyone shares the fortune of my lived experiences.

Nonetheless, my work aims to expose the same academic gatekeeping that has sometimes held me back and perhaps also find in the testimonios of others, paths of encouragement and persistence for myself and others who also see themselves reflected in this research. For me, it is important to recognize the challenges that Mexican American students of philosophy face, especially in the U.S.-Mexico border because I know from personal experience that the navigation of two worlds is twice as demanding and twice as oppressive. This study is a unique opportunity to utilize my privileged positionality as a philosophy professor and education researcher to help improve the severe underrepresentation of people like myself in academia in general and in philosophy in particular. To further situate myself in relation to this research, I have decided to also share some of my testimonio as part of this study and draw from my own experience as a self-identified Mexican American woman from the U.S.-Mexico border in my analysis.

3.7 SETTING OF THE STUDY

Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico is known for its infamous drug war violence and alarming femicide statistics. At one point, it was characterized as the most violent city in the world. As of 2022, the population was over 1,560,000 residents (Ciudad Juárez Population, 2022), and worldwide, it is one of the largest border cities (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2022). In 2021, over 60 percent of the population felt unsafe (Gonzalez, 2022).

On the other hand, El Paso has been labeled one of the safest cities in the United States. As of 2021, El Paso had a population of 867,947 people of which 82.9% are Hispanic, 11.6% are

white. 0.5% are American Indian or Alaska natives, 1.4% are Asian and 12.3% identified as more than one race. (United States Census Bureau Quick Facts, 2021) This unique polarizing dichotomy of cultures is what we encounter at the border of this unique demographic. Even though El Paso and Juárez are perceived to be very different in terms of safety, individuals from both sides of the border travel to the other side continuously. 60.30% percent of international bridge use is by Mexicans, while 39.7% use of the bridges is by individuals from the United States. 55.7% percent of U.S. international bridge users cross into Mexico for social reasons while 5.5% of total border crossers from Mexico attend for school-related reasons (COLEF, 2021). In this sense, one of the major differences between border crossers from Mexico and the United States is that Mexican border crossers cross to attend school. It is important to note that there are universities on both sides of the border, but community colleges only exist on the U.S. side. El Paso, Texas has one community college with five different campuses across the city.

The Mexican American community college students of philosophy who participated in this study were recruited on the American side of the U.S.-Mexico border of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, Texas. However, students at the community college are both from Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. Many of them cross back and forth and live on both sides of the border. Out of the total enrolled students in community college in Fall 2021, internal analytics documented that 20,189 are Hispanic, 86 are Native American, 1,125 are white, 363 are black, 153 are Asian, 51 are more than one race, 1,642 identified as unknown and 250 identified as a non-resident alien (El Paso Community College Fact Book, 2021). Something most students have in common is that many of them come from a high poverty background (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

This creates challenges like high dropout rates that lead to a lack of college completion (Orfield, 2004; Orfield et al., 2004). This also means that many students who do attend college, only

receive an associate's degree and very few consider majoring in fields like philosophy. In 2017, only three students declared philosophy as a major. In 2021, the number increased only to four (El Paso Community College Fact Book, 2017, 2021).

The community college factbook describes the first-time in college student population as consisting of 88.4% percent being Hispanic, 0.9% are Black, 4.1% are white, 1.4 % as identifying as other, 4.2% are unknown and 1.0 % percent identified as nonresidential aliens out of a total of 24,613 in Fall. (El Paso Community College Fact Book, 2021) Out of that total population, 40.5% of students are male and 58.5% percent of the students are female. 73% of these students attend part-time and 27% attend full-time. (El Paso Community College Fact Book Fall, 2021) The stated mission of the community college is to “ensure affordable, high-quality education, and career pathways from start to finish.” El Paso Community College Fact Book Fall, 2021) The community college is accessible to students from Ciudad Juárez because of its affordable prices.

3.8 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Since the objective of this study is very specific in understanding the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border and the phenomenon of them becoming philosophers, this study used purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). This means that I deliberately chose participants in virtue of who they are, in this case, Mexican American students of philosophy on the U.S.-Mexico border, who began their academic journeys at community college, and in virtue of the knowledge and lived experiences they possess, specifically their experiences in becoming philosophers. The purposive selection of participants is explained by Polkinghorne (2005) “as choosing people from which the researcher can substantially learn about the experience” (p. 140). This nonrandom selection allowed me to find

certain community college students of philosophy who identify as Mexican American and were willing and capable of sharing the testimonios of their lived experiences in their journeys to becoming philosophers.

3.9 RECRUITMENT

Participants for the study were recruited through email and in-person announcements in English. The invitation to participate in the research was sent through email-lists. Additionally, in-person announcements of the participation opportunity were also made at the El Paso Community College (EPCC) Campuses by colleagues in their various philosophy courses. Participants were allowed to ask questions about their research involvement and were provided with an informed consent document. Participants were given the option to provide contact information for potential follow-up questions.

I directly reached out to the three original pilot study participants through email and asked if they would be interested in continuing with their participation in this dissertation. They all agreed. All participants, original and new ones were asked for basic, non-identifiable demographic information before the start of the research meetings. Patel et al. (2003) have found that some participants take part in research with the hope that this will be beneficial to them and others, but that some might be hesitant to enroll in a study unless they can understand its relevance. Therefore, it was important for me to explain the significance of their contribution to what I consider to be a one-of-a-kind type of research.

3.10 PARTICIPANT SELECTION CRITERIA

For this research, I selected seven participants based on who they are and on their lived experiences of becoming philosophers. Out of the seven, six were men and one was a woman. Even though Creswell (2014) claims that there is ultimately no ideal number of participants for a

qualitative study, I specifically recruited seven participants. Due to the phenomenological nature of this study, this sample size was the most adequate to fully capture the richness of the participants' testimonios. According to Morse (2000), the more useable data are collected from each person, the fewer participants are needed. I figured that within the scope of this study, seven was a reasonable number of participants for me to genuinely interact with, but most importantly, for me to respectfully manage all the valuable data that was confided in me.

The participants for this study were all community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico and El Paso, Texas, United States at some point during the pilot study I conducted in 2018 and this current research. More information about the pilot study is shared in the data collection section 3.13. The criteria required that they be philosophy students who identify as Mexican American and were over the age of 18. No minors were allowed to participate. The seven participants ranged from 20 to 34 years of age. Participants were selected to take part in this research if they identified as Hispanic, Latin@/x, Chican@/x, or any other variation that alludes to having roots in the U.S.-Mexico border.

Defining who is a philosopher is complicated. Socrates, the father of philosophy, never studied philosophy nor held an academic degree. On the other hand, many women in philosophy after decades of being in the field and holding doctorates in philosophy, habitually say *I teach philosophy* instead of *I am a philosopher* (Hutchinson & Jenkins, 2013). This is because gatekeeping mechanisms have made it hard for women and people of color to identify as philosophers, yet this title has been loosely and vastly given to white men like Socrates and many others. This study is focused on U.S.-Mexico border Mexican American community college students' experiences in becoming philosophers and on what being a philosopher means to them. While we could argue that being a philosopher does not require any formal schooling,

and can happen outside of an academic context, like in the case of Socrates, the participants for this study had to have taken at least three philosophy college courses and/or have declared philosophy as their major for at least a year before the study. The participants took philosophy classes in the United States and started the process of *becoming* philosophers academically in community college.

Participants were also eligible to be part of the study if they had taken philosophy courses in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Although this was an option, all the participants began their academic journeys to becoming philosophers on the U.S. side, meaning they took philosophy classes in El Paso, Texas, at the community college level. While they still had strong social and familial connections to Ciudad Juárez, they studied philosophy formally in the United States. Furthermore, no current students of mine were allowed to participate, for ethical reasons. However, all of the participants were former students of mine.

Moreover, all of the participants were bilingual in English and Spanish. Due to the findings of my pilot study in 2018, and because this investigation is also in the context of the U.S.-Mexico border, the role of language, specifically bilingualism of English and Spanish, was analyzed in relation to identity formation and the lived experiences of participants in becoming philosophers. That is why I also explored the use of everyday Mexican *dichos* in Spanish as a type of philosophy because this study also analyzes the categorization of what is considered philosophical and what is not.

The following table illustrates the criteria for how participants were selected:

Table 1. *Participant Selection Criteria*

| Participant | Age | Gender | Nationality/ Ethnicity | Education/ Degree Seeking | Bilingual |
|-------------|-----|--------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
|-------------|-----|--------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Participants were Mexican Americans, or with Mexican and American roots and community college students of philosophy on the U.S.-Mexico border. | Participants were over the age of 18 years old. | Men and women and non-binary people. | Participants identified as Mexican American primarily or any other variation related to being Mexican and American or having roots in the U.S.-Mexico border. | Have declared philosophy as a major at community college. Or have taken at least three philosophy courses in U.S. or Mexico at the level of college. | Participants self-identified as bilingual in English and Spanish and were allowed to participate regardless of their level of bilingualism. |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|

As demonstrated earlier, the literature indicates a severe shortage of women in philosophy. For my previous pilot study in 2018, I collected the testimonios of three men philosophy students, who met the formerly outlined participant criteria, the same as this study. But I could not find any women for the pilot study who met the selection criteria. As much as I wanted to find the contributions of women, it was very difficult to find any.

The same three original male pilot participants are also part of this current study. While my overall research was not originally intentionally designed to be longitudinal, I had the unique opportunity to follow up with these same participants, obtain their testimonios more than once, observe their interactions in a philosophy club, and analyze their lived experiences within a three-year period. Fortunately, for this current study, I was able to recruit one woman student, which shows the reality of the severe underrepresentation I seek to highlight. Nonetheless, if we follow Morse's (2000) argument, the data that this woman participant shared was precious enough to make a powerful contribution to this study.

Additionally, the literature indicates a trouble with labels when identifying minoritized students, so I was flexible with the participant's self-identification of nationality and ethnicity, and I asked for clarification on the variations of how they identify as part of the data. All participants were asked to select pseudonyms to represent them for this study. The meaning and significance of their choice of pseudonym is the following:

1. **Charro:** Charro is his real-life nickname because when he sings, he has been told he sounds like a charro, and because his grandfather was the cousin of the famous singer Charro Avitia.
2. **Jaziz:** Jaziz chose this pseudonym because it is the name of a rapper that he likes.
3. **Burro:** This was his dad's nickname. So, the nickname is to honor his father, the person who got him into philosophy. Burro means donkey in Spanish, and he clarified that his pseudonym of Burro did not mean he identified as dumb or stupid. Burro is a common insult in Spanish given to those who are seen as ignorant or not doing well academically.
4. **Holden:** Holden chose the pseudonym because that is the original name of his car. Holden is an Australian subsidiary company of General Motors.
5. **Graffiti:** Graffiti is another real-life nickname from a high school friend, and it has been his gamer tag for a long time.
6. **Julio:** Julio did not want to use a pseudonym. He claimed that to recognize his true story, you must recognize his true name.
7. **Nena:** Nena has a younger sister and when she was a kid, she lost her two front teeth and could not pronounce Nena's name properly so that stayed as her real-life nickname also.

Interestingly, six of the seven participants had a double major and they all worked full-time, none of them were married or had children. This was a coincidence, not a requirement to

participate in this study and I noticed it after I collected and compared all the data. The implications will be of this will be further elaborated on in the findings section. The participants are presented in the following table in order of their participation.

Table 2. *Participants of Study*

| Participant Pseudonym | Age | Gender | Languages 1st and 2nd | Majors | Participated in Pilot |
|------------------------------|------------|---------------|--|--|------------------------------|
| Charro | 20/23* | Man | Spanish/English | Philosophy and Latin American and Border Studies | Yes |
| Jaziz | 31/34* | Man | Spanish/English | Philosophy and Spanish Literature | Yes |
| Burro | 29/32* | Man | English/Spanish | Philosophy and Latin American and Border Studies | Yes |
| Holden | 25 | Man | Spanish/English | Philosophy and Biology | No |
| Graffiti | 34 | Man | Spanish/English | Philosophy/Minor in Film | No |
| Julio | 22 | Man | English/Spanish | Philosophy and Journalism | No |
| Nena | 20 | Woman | Spanish/English | Philosophy and Accounting | No |

The asterisk for the ages for Charro, Jaziz, and Burro represent how old they were when they first participated in the pilot and then in the continuation of the research. The languages are listed in order of first and second level of competency.

3.11 UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis for this study was individuals and group members who are Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border on their journeys of becoming philosophers and have declared philosophy as their major or have taken at least three philosophy courses at the college level. My primary participants were philosophy students as individuals, who shared their testimonios, and my secondary participants were members of a philosophy club, as group members who were observed.

I observed the philosophy club because during the pilot study. It kept coming up in the data as two of the three participants repeatedly mentioned the same philosophy club as a physical and symbolic space of comfort and encouragement in their journeys to becoming philosophers. To be fully transparent, as stated in the previous section of this study under *U.S.-Mexico Border Philosophy*, I created the EPCC Philosophy Club in 2012. It began with five members and reached over 800 followers on Facebook by 2022. Before the Covid-19 Pandemic, each meeting hosted an average of 20 to 30 students. The meetings were usually held biweekly on campus on Friday nights. However, the meetings had to be held virtually through Zoom at the peak of the pandemic in the later part of 2020 and 2021. Most members of the club are considered non-traditional students who work full-time jobs. Many of them are first-generation college students, but membership to the club is not limited to students, as other members of the community also participate.

The club has received national and international recognition for putting philosophy into action with philanthropic efforts on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border community, some of the recognition includes being honored by the former Mayor of El Paso, Dee Margo (2017-2021), winning the 2017 Success Through Technology Education (STTE) Foundation Award for

using philosophy to solve real-world problems, being highlighted by the American Philosophical Association (APA) blog, and being selected as the 2020 Community Champions by the El Paso Community Foundation (Gomez, 2020).

In this current investigation, there was some overlap in the testimonios and observations, as six of the seven participants were also part of the philosophy club I observed. Being part of the club was not a requirement for participating in this study. The main purpose of the observations was for me to understand the social interactions and language use of the participants with other philosophy students and for me to further understand why and how the club served as a place for philosophical discussion, as well as comfort and encouragement.

3.12 DATA SOURCES

Data sources for this current study were conducted in two primary ways, testimonios (both written and oral) and observations. My main intention was to be open to analyzing artifacts. However, I did not encounter any relevant artifacts referred to during the testimonios or observations. For the pilot study conducted in 2018, I utilized semi-structured interviews.

3.13 DATA COLLECTION

After I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for my pilot study in December 2017, I began recruitment and then data collection in February 2018. The pilot research was conducted over a period of a month through semi-structured interviews with three male philosophy students, Charro, Jaziz, and Burro. They identified as Mexican American on the U.S. Mexico border and navigated between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Participants were specifically chosen for their experiences in academic philosophy and for identifying as Mexican American. All three pilot students began their philosophy education at community college and had advanced to complete a bachelor's degree in philosophy.

Furthermore, all three pilot participants were fully bilingual in English and Spanish. When meeting with the pilot participants, the general focus of the questions in the semi-structured interviews was about their initial exposure to philosophy and their experiences with philosophy education in both their personal and academic lives. The meetings were held in various coffee shops selected by the pilot participants and lasted approximately 90 minutes. There were no observations in the pilot study.

The continuation of this investigation for the purpose of this dissertation began after I received the second IRB approval in December 2021. Within the period 2017 to 2021, between my design of the pilot and the present study, there were many significant events that had a major impact on the U.S.-Mexico border and the outcome of my research. In 2017, the Trump administration came into power in the United States beginning a wave of hateful rhetoric against Mexicans and anti-immigrant policies. On the Mexican side, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador became president in 2018 pledging a transformation of the country after decades of one-party rule and rampant corruption, narco-violence, and femicides. In 2019, on August 3rd in El Paso, Texas, the largest massacre against Mexican Americans in modern history occurred, and then later in 2021, the global Covid-19 pandemic hit. These events played a role in the progress and outcome of this research and the implications of these are further analyzed in the findings section.

3.13.1 PILOT STUDY

It is important for me to briefly summarize the findings from the pilot study to further situate the growth of my investigation. The preliminary findings revealed many crucial factors that allowed Mexican American students on the U.S.-Mexico border to persist in their journeys of becoming philosophers and the factors that impeded their progress. These positive factors

ranged from the importance of family influence and support to the power of similar minoritized role models in philosophy. Some of the negative factors ranged from instances of racism and other types of discrimination to the delegitimization of Mexican and Mexican American philosophy in academia. The three main findings I discovered, which I will discuss below, created a backdrop for the development of this dissertation research and allowed me to expand into a larger pool of participants and a more refined scope of my overall investigation.

The first major finding dealt with philosophy as a tool for understanding the complexity of border identities. The second one was about the U.S.-Mexico border community philosophy club, mentioned earlier, made up of mostly minoritized philosophy students and minoritized philosophy faculty, that functions as a dynamic space for encouragement to practice philosophy. The third one explored the importance of Mexican and Mexican American philosophy as an instrument for transformation in relation to border identities and the importance of language that is familiar to them.

3.13.2 PHILOSOPHY AS A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITY OF BORDER IDENTITIES

All three participants in the pilot referred to the complexity and challenges of border identities, and they identified philosophy as being a powerful tool to further understand themselves and their community. All three reported feelings of inadequacy when having to identify themselves as Mexican, American, or both. This is because they see the border as a contested space that requires full allegiance to either side and with little room for an identity of in-betweenness. Some examples are that they felt pressured to speak both English and Spanish perfectly, depending on which side of the border they were on. They also stated that philosophy allowed them to learn about the problems of violence and injustice that are so prevalent on the

Mexican side of the border. A common experience in two of the three participants was that beyond studying academic philosophy, they had pursued an additional academic degree in Latin American and border studies. They cited philosophy as a tool that helped them make sense of themselves and others.

3.13.3 BORDER COMMUNITY PHILOSOPHY CLUB AS A DYNAMIC SPACE FOR ENCOURAGEMENT

Two of the three participants mentioned the community border philosophy club as a place where they felt comfortable and encouraged. They described it as a place with minoritized philosophy faculty and people of different backgrounds finding and creating new ways of doing philosophy. This community club was described as a safe space for border students. It is welcoming regardless of major, with bi-weekly meetings and discussions of philosophical issues. Ultimately, members put philosophy into action with philanthropic projects for both sides of the U.S.-Mexico community.

3.13.4 MEXICAN/MEXICAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR TRANSFORMATION AND THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

When asked about which part of Western philosophy they identified with, all three participants struggled to situate themselves in the traditional canonical philosophical discourse that they have encountered in their classes. However, when given the opportunity to identify themselves with “other forms of philosophy” they referred to Mexican or Mexican American philosophy and the use of Mexican *dichos* or popular philosophical sayings in Spanish that they personally related to philosophically. The *dichos* chosen by the participants talk about transformation, resilience, and a pragmatic approach to life.

3.13.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis was conducted in alignment with my theoretical frameworks. The first step in my analysis was to delineate the focus of the data collected to answer my research questions and begin not just identifying but interpreting the phenomena of Mexican American community college students on the U.S-Mexico border and their experiences in relation to becoming philosophers. While this was a phenomenological study that used written and oral testimonios and observations as a method, I performed a content analysis of my data. This means that once all the data was collected, I read it critically and scrutinized it as to reveal its structure and meaning (Von Eckartsberg, 1986). Content analysis allowed me to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within my data. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), content analysis is generally used with research that describes a phenomenon and it is usually appropriate when existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited. They claim that content analysis offers researchers “a flexible, pragmatic method for developing and extending knowledge of the human experience” (p. 1286), and that an advantage is gaining direct information from participants.

Throughout the collection of testimonio data, audio was recorded, and I then transcribed over 70 pages of text. As soon as testimonios and observations took place, the research data was logged into my laptop, typed in standard 12-point Times New Roman font, and saved as word documents categorized into different digital research folders. Even though it was very time-consuming, listening back to the audio recordings and typing along allowed me to submerge in the richness of the data and explore patterns while analyzing different interpretations and reflections (Merriam, 2009). I chose not to use any software for this. As someone who is also a

journalist, I preferred the process of listening to the recordings, stopping, rewinding and fast-forwarding as I typed and made handwritten notes.

3.13.6 CODING AND CONTENT ANALYSIS

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the first part content analysis is to read the data word by word to derive codes. Therefore, I performed coding of the data. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), “coding is the process of grouping evidence and labeling ideas so that they reflect increasingly broader perspectives” (p. 214). While Saldaña (2016) argues that there is no ultimate way to code and that the researcher knows best in terms of dealing with data, I decided to engage in an initial open coding that led me to create a list of codes and categories that helped with my content analysis and overall interpretation of the data. Even though I am software literate, I deliberately chose to complete my initial open coding manually. I wanted to code on hard-copy printouts first because I felt a disconnect doing it on my laptop monitor. I felt a closer connection to my research by having each transcript in my hands and being able to flip through the pages. It made me feel more human, since it was me and not something mechanical directly encountering and empathizing with my participants. As Graue and Walsh (1998) argue, when you touch the data, you get additional data out of memory and abstract information turns into concrete. I also color-coded the data using highlighters and sticky-notes. I eventually moved to coding electronically for the second cycle to reflect the same original hand notes and color coding digitally for uniformity.

The goal of my content analysis was to identify and analyze the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border in their journeys toward becoming philosophers supported by the examples from my data. Some of the codes I identified in the pilot study were *family influence*, *border*, *philosophy club*, *existentialism*,

racism, dichos, and resilience. I also had to engage in longitudinal coding and analyze the change in data from the pilot study to the continuation of this study.

I made detailed notes of my first impressions, thoughts, and initial analysis as suggested by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Content analysis allowed me to make inferences and create relationships between the data to interpret the characteristics and phenomena within the participants' lived experiences. Downe-Wamboldt (1992) notes that the goal of content analysis is to link the data to the context or to the environment in which it was produced, it is "a research method that provides a systematic and objective means to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data in order to describe and quantify specific phenomena" (p. 314). Therefore, it was important for me to perform a content analysis of the observation data as well.

For my observations, I took manual field notes in a notebook and then typed them. However, I also decided to print the typed version and make manual notes and highlight certain relevant data that related to my analysis. All the data gathered was analyzed in an inductive way (Saldaña, 2016). Throughout my analysis, I examined patterns of differences and similarities between the lived experiences shared via the written and oral testimonios and tried to identify any connections to what I observed. The result of content analysis is presented in Chapter Four.

3.14 CONTINUATION OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION OF TESTIMONIOS AND OBSERVATIONS

The findings from the pilot study helped me focus of this dissertation. The main differences are that I moved from semi-structured interviews to the use of testimonios for a more critical approach and that I recruited more Mexican American community college students of philosophy as participants. I also added observations of the philosophy club mentioned and expanded the literature review and scope of the study to include the role of language and the

particular use of *dichos* as philosophical tools. The preliminary findings, along with the findings of this dissertation, are expanded on in the findings section of Chapter Four.

I chose to incorporate the use of testimonios because the pilot findings gave me insights into the participants' encounters with racism and other forms of discrimination. According to Pérez Huber and Cueva (2012) testimonios in educational research can reveal both the oppression that exists within educational institutions and their surroundings and the powerful efforts in which students of color engage in to challenge and transform those spaces. Since the pilot participants kept mentioning philosophy as a tool for transformation, this seemed like an ideal route to pursue in terms of an updated methodology.

Reyes and Rodríguez (2012) claim that the objective of the testimonio is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action and that testimonio is different from the qualitative method of interviewing because the testimonio is intentional and political. Additionally, they argue that a “testimonio must include affirmation and empowerment” (p. 527) and that unlike empiricist research, testimonios provide both a methodology and a theory of liberation and hope (p. 532). For me, this was a crucial characteristic since I want the participants' testimonios to reflect their epistemological power. Furthermore, Reyes and Rodríguez (2012) also assert that testimonios can help construct a discourse of solidarity (p. 526) and that they have the power of individual and collective self-naming (p. 528). This is relevant in relation to the trouble with labels in self-identification that I repeatedly explore in my investigation.

It was important for me to allow the participants to express themselves and define parts of their identities in their own words so, in the continuation of this dissertation study, I gave them all the opportunity to write a portion of their testimonio. I followed Creswell's (2013)

suggestion that participants and researchers are co-constructors of knowledge and “In the process, the parties negotiate the meaning of the stories, adding a validation check to the analysis” (p. 75). Additionally, Polkinghorne (2007) explains that “...personal descriptions of life experiences, can serve to issue knowledge about neglected, but significant areas, of the human realm.” (p. 472).

The oral testimonios were held in various locations depending on the participants’ availability and preference. The duration of each oral testimonio was approximately 120 minutes. The participants were asked to email me their written testimonio after they had shared their oral one, the only guidance was for them to define themselves and tell their overall life story in relation to their journeys of becoming philosophers in whatever length they felt comfortable. Five of the seven participants chose to write their testimonios right after the oral testimonio. The other two sent it in a couple of days later.

For the observations, I observed five of the seven participants in their interactions within the philosophy club mentioned. There were a total of four observations over the course of one semester and they lasted about 60 to 90 minutes each. They were held during various off-campus events including a student awards banquet, a philosophy lecture held at a university museum where a renowned Mexican American philosopher presented, a visit to an art exhibit, and a Christmas party. These observations were meant to examine the participants’ interactions with each other and to explore how these might reveal insights into their social worlds, and language use, all in relation to their testimonios. My role as the researcher was to observe and document philosophical discussions, comments, and student interactions with their peers and mentors, both individually and collectively.

Testimonios helped me answer all three of the research questions for this study. Observations allowed me to see how the participants exercise their identities in relation to becoming philosophers in social interactions in questions one and question three.

1. How do Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border become philosophers?
2. For Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border, what does it mean to be a philosopher?
3. What are the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border in relation to becoming a philosopher?

3.15 ANALYTIC MEMOS

Additionally, I wrote analytic memos to reflect on my content analysis and to further evaluate the data (Saldaña, 2016). These memos served as notes to me about what was relevant for me to go back to. Some of the questions I tried to answer in the analytic memos were, what do I see going on here in terms of the bigger picture? Since the pilot study, I immediately began perceiving interesting patterns and overlaps in the participants' testimonios. Some correlations were the influence of family in their initial exposure to philosophy, gifting of philosophy books before college, and the mention of phenomenology and existentialism as aspects of philosophy that are appealing in their journeys. What was surprising was that all participants shared feelings of neglect and discrimination in academic philosophy in general, as they recalled instances of feeling like outsiders that did not belong. In the pilot study, two of the three participants had mentioned the EPCC Philosophy Club specifically, as a space where they felt comfortable being themselves as Mexican American students of philosophy. For this dissertation, the same overlap in coding occurred when three additional participants besides the ones from the pilot also

mentioned the same club. This meant that six out of seven participants shared that overlap. Overall, I wrote in my analytic memos that I was very surprised by the sophistication of the testimonios, both written and oral. The participants were very introspective and deeply philosophical in their contributions. Their testimonios were very vivid, and their honesty and vulnerability made me feel the profound obligation to represent their data in an ethical way.

3.16 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The primary practical ethical considerations for this study included the confidentiality of participants and data, and the risks and benefits to participants as covered in the (IRB) approval process. Informed consent documents were provided to participants when they expressed interest in being a part of this project. Participants were asked to sign the appropriate consent forms before engaging in any testimonios or observations. I securely kept the signed consent forms. In fact, for the qualitative data, all digital records, including the digital audio files of the testimonios were kept on a password-secured removable hard drive. Additionally, all printed data along with digital data was locked in a secure cabinet inside a locked room. Only I, as the primary investigator, had access to the qualitative data.

The confidentiality of participants was protected through the use of pseudonyms in all contexts other than the informed consent documents, which were kept separate from the data in which pseudonyms were used. One participant asked to use his real name for this research, he claimed that his testimonio would have more power if he could be directly related to his name and that he was proud to be associated with this research. I explained the implications of this, and we came to a middle ground of just using his first name instead of a pseudonym since I did not feel comfortable displaying his full identity. I asked that he sign a document stating that this was his preference and that we agreed to use only his first name. If at any time before, during, or

after the testimonio, a participant wished to skip a question or stop participation in the research altogether, they were free to do so.

Furthermore, to elevate the trustworthiness of my study, I engaged in peer-reviewing in collaboration with one of my committee members, Dr. Convertino and dissertation chair, Dr. Ullman who helped me design and develop this study at all stages, including the pilot, through written and oral feedback. To further ensure the credibility of my results, I also relied on member checking to confirm that I had an adequate representation of each participant's testimonio. Since a big portion of this study deals with identity formation and identity analysis, I believe that the co-authoring of the testimonios added an extra level of trustworthiness to this study. By allowing participants to share their testimonios orally in their meetings with me and, then giving them the power to have an active role in writing their own version of the testimonios they sent me, I had a more holistic and authentic representation of their overall contribution to this study. After I had a draft of their testimonios, I sent them to the participants for member-checking. I also kept a reflective journal so that I could become aware of my own biases and influences in examining the data.

In this chapter, I have presented the methods, data collection, and data analysis for this study. I have justified how my research approach of utilizing phenomenology and testimonios as the main method supplemented by observations allowed me to best answer my research questions. Finally, I have disclosed the ethical considerations that ensured the trustworthiness of my study. This next chapter explains the findings of this research.

4. Chapter IV: Findings

In this findings chapter, I present responses to my research questions:

1. How do Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border become philosophers?
2. For Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border, what does it mean to be a philosopher?
3. What are the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border in relation to becoming a philosopher?

I begin by sharing the written testimonios of Charro, Jaziz, Burro, Holden, Graffiti, Julio, and Nena. Traditionally, writing within the social sciences has been construed as an activity that transparently records research findings and writing authored by participants allows them to reflect introspectively and share who they are and what they want to say authentically in their own words (Elizabeth, 2008). In these findings, I valued and maintained the participants' genuine voices as much as possible, precisely because in the literature review for this dissertation, I extensively documented how academia historically has ignored and distorted the contributions of minoritized individuals. So, it was important to me that the participants coauthored the knowledge presented in this research and that I asserted their epistemological power by giving them a space to do so. After their written testimonios, I also present the participants' rich and nuanced oral testimonios.

I categorized the overall findings into different topics and in the order of the participants' contributions to this study. I chose to organize their participation in this order in an effort to be objective and straightforward with the data. The findings of my research organized into the following central topics based on the data I collected.

1. Participants' Written Testimonios
2. Mexican/American and Chicano Identities and Becoming in the U.S. Mexico Border
3. Border Suffering
4. What Does it Mean to be a Philosopher?
5. The Only Mexican American Woman in Philosophy
6. EPCC Philosophy Club
7. The Spiderman Meme Comes to Life
8. Role of language: *Dichos y Tranzas* con el Idioma

According to Unamuno (1954):

Philosophic systems are presented to us as if growing out of one another spontaneously, and their authors, the philosophers, appear only as mere pretexts. The inner biography of the philosophers, of the men who philosophized, occupies only a secondary place. And yet it is precisely this inner biography that explains for us most things (p. 2).

Unamuno makes a metaphilosophical claim about the nature of philosophy by stating that the inner biographies of philosophers are essential starting points in understanding their ideas and their philosophical contributions. For Ortega (2015), there is epistemological weight in paying attention to the particularities of those at the margins, especially between borders, through their told stories and lived experiences. She claims their narratives are like “gifts” to philosophy (p. 1.) and they are important for the development of richer philosophical theories. Therefore, it makes sense that if we are to understand the journeys of those in the process of becoming philosophers, we begin with their biographies as testimonios.

Storytelling and speaking one's truth publicly are powerful ways to challenge and disrupt mainstream discourses that have historically neglected the contributions of minoritized voices (Gonzalez, 2018). Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCRit) use counterstories and testimonios to permit the sense-making of ourselves, our lived experiences,

and our worlds (Delgado, 1989; Ladson Billings, 1998; Solórzano, 1997). Pérez Huber and Cueva (2012) claim that testimonios enable participants and researchers to enter themselves, and their positionalities, and transform them into theory, research, reflection, and teaching. As a researcher, philosopher, and educator, from the same U.S.-Mexico border as my participants, it was critical for me that they were actively involved and given the opportunity to co-construct the knowledge presented in this study.

I was inspired by the work of Flores (2018), whose qualitative study of a writing workshop called *Somos Escritores/We are Writers* in which Latinx mothers and fathers, and their adolescent daughters demonstrated that writing practices are a powerful way to center lived experiences. Following Flores (2018), I asked my participants to introspectively enter themselves and share their inner biographies through their very own written testimonios. Flores (2018) claims that we can access unique cultural and linguistic resources through sharing of collective stories in writing and that with LatCrit theories we can go beyond the binaries of oppression and oppressor and further understand gendered and racialized subordinations that exist at the intersections of race, language, and immigrant status. In this way, these testimonios allow for the contestation of oppressing structures and grant us access to the epistemic content of their intersectional experiences.

In Chapter Three, I established that testimonios have the power to decolonize academic research by transgressing the vast hegemony found in education, something I extensively documented in the literature review part of my dissertation. Therefore, I present the written testimonios of each of the seven participants as they were written by them. Their first-person accounts highlight their lived experiences and the peculiarities of being and living on the border (Prieto, 2015) and how these apply to their philosophical interests and understandings. Their

written testimonios will allow us to become more familiar with who the participants are, beyond just being subjects of this study, and serve as a platform for their oral testimonios.

We will get to see what they chose to accentuate as representative of themselves and their humanity. They write briefly but frankly about their existence and their written testimonios give us an introduction to their identities and their figured worlds. They are a quick glimpse into the intersectional realities of being Mexican Americans on the U.S.-Mexico border on their journeys toward becoming philosophers. Here, LatCrit theory, intersectionality, and figured worlds together provide a solid foundation that centers their narratives and values the ways of being and knowing of these participants. According to Delgado (1989), it is through our stories that we construct and reconstruct our realities and in many ways figure out who we are in the world. Espino (2012) adds that these stories also have the power to create truth.

Moreover, Lopez (2023) argues that the stories people tell about themselves are important to understanding the ways in which their narratives are developed and that what they choose to highlight and leave out. This kind of analysis allows us to understand whether they take the role of heroes, victims, or neither. Lopez notes that stories are more than mere chronicles of lives, but that they are also a way of assembling people's own epistemologies. Delgado (1989) also notes that historically, women and men from marginalized groups have written, told, and shared stories of their personal experiences as a form of resistance (Fernandez, 2002), liberation, and survival and that their stories matter because they tend to be different than those in the mainstream (Delgado, 1990).

From a phenomenological standpoint, the goal is to determine what these stories say about people's lived experiences, and what they mean for those who have had the experiences. The phenomenon in question is the process of becoming a philosopher for Mexican American

community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border. The only modification to these testimonios is the replacement of the participants' names with their chosen pseudonyms. These are their self-aware narratives in their words:

4.1 PARTICIPANTS' WRITTEN TESTIMONIOS

Charro

I was named *Charro* after my Mexican parents migrated to the United States of America two decades ago. As a first-generation undergraduate student and the first of my siblings to pursue two college degrees, which statistically speaking, are not typical, especially as a U.S. citizen of Hispanic descent, I am proud to say that I graduated with both a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and in Latin American & Border Studies. I am particularly interested in the ontological and epistemological dimensions of borderland phenomena as means to adequately assemble practical, creative, and ethical multiplicities of possibilities for care and empowerment towards migrants and border communities. One of the methods I explore is phenomenology in the context of the historical and hermeneutical documentation of the U.S.-Mexico borderland and its Latin American dimension. Besides my formal education, I am very passionate about music. I play guitar, flute, and sing (all as a form of strategic and creative liberation). Swimming is my favorite sports therapy, and I am bilingual in both English and Spanish. Furthermore, when the opportunity presents itself, I consume moderate doses of coffee and sunflower seeds. Without harmful limits, I also enjoy conversations with people and am open to new ideas and spaces.

Jaziz

As far as my autobiography goes, I was named *Jaziz* after the Brazilian singer that my mom used to love when I was born. She has always been a great dancer and a person with a unique sensibility. She started working in the maquiladora industry at the age of sixteen, and with her first paycheck, she threw herself her very first birthday party and bought an unforgettable red skirt as she remembers so vividly. My father was a baker (*panadero*) on both sides of the border. He was a person with a profound sense of humor and a strong will. He had limitless creativity that allowed him to survive in this capitalist system. Thanks to them, I was never hungry or homeless and thanks to them, I was able to go to college and get a double bachelor's degree in English literature and Philosophy. Even though school was never my thing, I was able to graduate school through self-taught methods and of course, with the inspiration and support of my teachers and classmates at community college, especially within the El Paso Community College Philosophy Club, a space for dialogue and critical thinking with a local praxis. I just finished my master's degree in Spanish with a thesis about the life and work of the Mexican writer Nellie Campobello. Hopefully next year, I am able to pursue a Ph.D. somewhere.

Burro

My name is *Burro*, I was born and raised in this U.S.-Mexico border region known as El Paso, Texas. I am a 32-year-old male. I have a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy; I also have a graduate degree. I am a second-generation Chicano. My grandparents on both sides “migrated” to the U.S. at a very young age. I am a first-generation college graduate, and I am extremely proud of that.

Holden

My name is *Holden*, I am the president of the El Paso Community College Philosophy Club and the vice-president of the Collegiate Double T Health Professions Honors Society at Paul L. Foster School of Medicine. I am originally from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico where I grew up around construction workers, plumbers, and a lot of outdoor activities. I used to spend most of my time shoveling cement, and I can’t express how much I complained about it. Naturally, my grandfather gave me a lesson; he told me, “As you can tell, a shovel weighs a lot more than a pencil, that’s why I want you to study, and stay focused in school”. He is the reason why I love school so much. After he passed away, my family moved to El Paso, Texas where I was introduced to medicine. During my senior year of high school, I volunteered at an emergency room, it was here that I saw a patient die from a heart attack; this marked the beginning of my career path. Soon after this experience, at the age of 17, I decided to move out of my parent’s house, to attend Sul Ross State University in Alpine, Texas. In 2018, I graduated with a bachelor’s in Biology and a minor in Chemistry. As an undergraduate, I spent most of my time in the lab, doing research in chemistry, microbiology, histology, physics, and other areas. I also worked with medical programs around Texas as well as internationally in Mexico. During my free time in school, I became a certified welder, and a butcher, I played intramural softball and participated in multiple clubs. It was after I graduated, that I was introduced to philosophy, through my younger brother who took Ethics. Right away, the class blew my mind, its complexity amazed me. It was such a difficult class for me, that I started attending the EPCC philosophy club for extra credit. It took less than an hour, and I was hooked. Now I find myself reading philosophy books with my mentors on the weekends. My laboratory experience provided me with a rough background in teamwork, but the amazing support I have received from the club, the mentorship, and the amazing friendships I have made, have been way more than what I could ever ask for, or even deserved in my lifetime. I am very proud of all the work we have done; however, we understand that we are barely scratching the surface of the club’s potential, and the overwhelming amount of help our border community needs, keeps us motivated to help, regardless of race, religion, skin color, and sexual orientation.

Graffiti

My name is *Graffiti*. Currently, I am a philosophy student at El Paso Community College. I was born in Texas and raised in Mexico along with my two sisters. I am the middle child. I like to say that my life has always been backward. As I attended school in Juárez, Mexico, I was living in El Paso, Texas; and when my family and I moved to Juárez, I attended high school in El Paso. After graduating high school, I attended the University of Texas at El Paso for two years and my major was theatre. Afterward, I moved to Los Angeles, California to pursue a career in film and television. It was during this period that I decided to travel abroad to Southeast Asia, Indonesia, and Vietnam, it was solo travel and required a lot of courage, which was one of my biggest personal goals in life. After nearly ten years in California, I returned to El Paso to be closer to my family and friends. It was a few years after my return that I shifted my sights and goals to

philosophy and, if all goes according to plan, will be on receiving my associate degree in philosophy soon.

Julio

I'm *Julio*. When it comes to describing the events that have molded me into becoming a philosopher, I strongly emphasize that I would not be, or think the way I do now, if it was not for being born within a Mexican American family. The fact that there is a high correlation with the amount of questions one develops from a young age, just from being born on the other side; and of course, I'm referring to the notions that one formulates, as to why we alienate certain people based on their nationality, race, class, language, wealth, etc.... I for one was born and raised in El Paso, TX, but because my father was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, and my mother in El Paso, TX; that makes me a Mexican American. It is because of this unique path that has led me to acquire a philosophical mind, and of course question many metaphysical, ethical, logical, and existential questions regarding how humans should and interact with the world itself. A constant occurrence that leads me into acquiring a humanistic perspective on reality; is the fact that I for one have dealt with alienation for not being Mexican enough and of course for not being American enough. I believe that it is because of this metaphysical force that molds Mexican Americans into becoming philosophers, it is the notions that one formulates, as a Mexican American that can help separate themselves from the social construct; thus, allowing them to examine and change the world for the better.

Nena

My pseudonym *Nena* comes from my little sister being unable to say my name correctly and pronouncing my full name as Nena instead of the original way. In my immediate family, there are seven of us, those being my two sisters, two brothers, my parents, and me. I have always preferred my math and dance classes over any other that I was required to take, but science was always a close call. I am currently finishing my associate's degree in philosophy, and I already have my associates in accounting. After receiving my degree, I will transfer to UTEP* and complete my double major in both philosophy and accounting. Afterward, I plan on becoming an accountant or CPA and then transferring to a financial analyst, for which my philosophy degree would help in. I enjoy various types of art forms ranging from drawings to body movement. Currently, my favorite types of art include acrylic painting, ballet, and contortion. During my limited free time, I like to go to the gym, read a book, or just hang around with my puppy Kai. In my entire family, there is a running joke about me not having emotions because I am very bad at expressing emotions, however when I am anywhere around puppies or animals in general, it really makes my heart melt and changes me into a completely different person. *University of Texas at El Paso.

We can see that being from the U.S.-Mexico border plays a significant role in the participants' understanding of themselves and their identity production. They mention the migration of their parents, the influence of family, and the contestation of who they are as they

are accused of not being Mexican enough or American enough—all of which comprise the various pieces of the puzzle of who they are.

Anzaldúa's work of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) paves the way for a philosophical reflection of intersectional and multifaceted identities, just as these participants do. Anzaldúa describes what it is like to be caught in between the two different worlds she inhabits, the United States and Mexico. She calls this being between the *intersticio*. The *intersticio* of the participants is immediately apparent. It is not just geographical; in terms of being from/in El Paso or Juárez, it is also ontological and existential as far as labeling themselves as Mexican or American, both, and neither, and also in the construction of their experiences as meaningful. Like Anzaldúa, the participants are negotiating who they are as they navigate their intricate hybridity and the intersections in the many borders surrounding them.

Crenshaw (1991) argues that complex identities need to be analyzed within the framework of intersectionality because even though there may be some overlaps in certain groups, being part of a group is not a homogenous experience. So, even if categorized under the same label, differences matter. For instance, being Mexican American has an infinite number of meanings and interpretations, yet these are often grouped into one, even when the labels are performed distinctively and individually. In many instances of that in-betweenness, those from the border, like the participants and myself, must validate being Mexican in Mexico and American in the U.S. to prove our full belonging to both worlds, betraying our true selves, which naturally navigate between cultures and languages. A true self implies necessary awareness of these layers and a recognition of the authenticity of being in between.

Ranft (2013) states that intersectionality is a practical theoretical lens utilized to approach and assess personal and systemic oppressions but is aimed mostly at criminal justice. While

Anzaldúa's theory of *Nepantla*, and the recognition of *intersticios*, is a process that individuals experience that involves confronting internalized oppression, as well as personal understandings of the self and others, and contributes to the process of self-individuation, which means constructing themselves as individuals. Ranft (2013) characterizes Anzaldúa's theory of *Nepantla* as encompassing concepts of gender, racial identity, and sexuality but also focusing on personal, internalized experiences and oppressions for people of color. *Nepantla* is a Nahuatl word that means "in-between space" (Keating, 2006, p. 9). It allows us to understand existences that reside between two or more physical and metaphysical worlds.

Although the participants disclose different lived experiences in their written testimonios, there is an interesting similarity among them as they perceive themselves in between two worlds beyond the U.S. and Mexico. They hint at a normal and a deviant path. They see themselves as being deviant from the norm, not just because they are from the border, but because they have defied the odds and not followed a "conventional or traditional" path forward expected of them or fulfilled standards outside of them. For instance, Charro is proud to note that he pursued two college degrees, which he claims, "statistically speaking, are not typical, especially of a U.S. citizen of Hispanic descent." For Jaziz, he stated that even though "school was never his thing," he was still able to graduate with two degrees through self-taught methods. Burro is the first one in his family to graduate college. Holden grew up around construction workers and plumbers and he became a welder and a butcher before encountering philosophy and wanting to combine it with medicine, and despite the complexity and difficulty of this, he feels that "he already has more than he could ever ask for, or even deserved in his lifetime." Graffiti described "living his life backward". Additionally, Julio attributed his passion for philosophy to being born within a Mexican American family and "being born on the other side." Nena used her pseudonym in real

life and mentions that her little sister was unable to say her name correctly and pronounced her full name as Nena instead of the “original way.” The participants see themselves as “not typical, as the first in their families, as “living life backward” and moving forward despite “being born on the other side” and not following the “original way.”

According to Anzaldúa borders are set up to distinguish “us” from “them” and she names those living in-between worlds “*los atravesados*.”

Los atravesados live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead, short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal.” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25)

By this definition, it seems that by these brief written testimonios, the participants hint at going through the confines of the normal. This next section explores how the participants figure out their identities at the U.S.-Mexico border and how they label themselves.

4.2 MEXICAN/AMERICAN AND CHICANO IDENTITIES AND BECOMING IN THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

Identity is an arrangement or series of clusters, a kind of stacking or layering of selves, horizontal and vertical layers, the geography of selves made up of the different communities you inhabit (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 238).

The findings from my pilot study in 2018 revealed that philosophy is a powerful tool for Mexican American community college philosophy students for understanding the complexity of their U.S.-Mexico border identities. Participants shared that philosophy could help us resolve the trouble with labels that have repeatedly been explored in this study and that relate to the problem of finding “the correct term” to define those that are from the U.S.-Mexico border and have Mexican and American roots. Furthermore, the pilot study unveiled how philosophy can serve as an instrument for self-reflection to understand the many dimensions of the self and how it relates

to the distinctive sociopolitical challenges of being and living in between two countries. For all the participants of this study, the U.S.-Mexico border is a place that has been central to their lives. It is a place that is familiar and foreign at the same time.

One of the many benefits of using philosophy as a tool for introspective analysis is that it leads one to contemplate the meaning of the self. Not always in the sense of who others are, but at the very least, in the sense of who one is. This personal understanding of the self is never final or absolute. In other words, if we believe in freedom of choice, then we are bound to never find an ultimate answer since the self is always changing as we choose our paths. It is unfolding with every act, so the answer is in the recognition of the process of becoming and an examination of what we have become and what we aim to be. In this search, inevitably we encounter some answers presented to us in the form of labels like Latino/a/@/x, Hispanic, Chicano/a/@/x, Mexican American, etc. These labels are meant to identify individuals, to group them into social categories that carry ethical, political, and aesthetic connotations. However, they also tend to confine and condemn, not as descriptions of who individuals are, but more problematically, as normative prescriptions of who they should be and how their identities must be performed. These labels also have the power to shape and narrow lived experiences.

I have been searching for answers about my own identity before my pilot study and before my interest in this research. Since a young age, I have kept adding labels to my description. These labels are phenomenologically grounded and necessary constituents of my personal experience. Many of my labels, I have chosen, and others have been imposed on me by others. It is important to point out that not all individuals have the power to choose their labels. Many are simply born and categorized with oppressive labels. As these labels accumulate, I often wonder, am I a self that houses multiple identities, or is it just one? Do I make the labels or do

the labels make me? What influence do social powers have on me? Furthermore, what is the role of all these labels? With time, I have realized that I am not like the Mexicans I grew up with in Mexico, and not like the Americans I now live around in the United States. I recognize that I am a Mexican American woman. Even though, I have yet to fully understand what this means, at best, the label Mexican American identifies me and my *mestizaje* with the classical group of “*ni de aquí, ni de allá*” individuals who struggle to find a sense of belonging but want to maintain a connection to both sides.

In this navigation of in-betweenness, of being *atravesada*, as Anzaldúa argues, by living on the U.S.-Mexico border, and of speaking two languages, I have not settled for an incomplete account of who I am. I do not consider my complex hybrid identity to be fractured because it does not solely fit into one group or category. Quite the opposite, I have discovered the importance of recognizing the many layers of my intersectional identity. This is because the labels keep adding up and there is more to my identity than the place I once belonged to or the place I live in now.

Alvarez (2021) claims that historically, *mestizaje*—the notion that people of Latin American descent are neither Indigenous nor European, but a “species midway”—*una especie atravesada*, has and continues to serve as an ideological tool that at most times is oppressive to the majority of Latin American communities, because it makes them abstract and invisible, and at fewer times, is also a superficial tool for liberation. According to Alvarez (2021), we need the development of new paradigms and labels that can address who we are as people and figure out how to be in the world. Therefore, as part of this research, it was imperative that I also challenged participants with the same task of figuring and refiguring out who they are and reflecting critically on the process of becoming and being in the world as themselves and as

philosophers. LatCrit theory allows us to explore the common experiences shared by people of color in the United States (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Solórzano, 1998; Yosso, 2005) and in this case, we can analyze if there are similarities between the participants and how they interpret the phenomenon of their self-identification in the border.

Identity is sort of like a river. It's one and it's flowing and it's a process. By giving different names to different parts of a single mountain range or different parts of a river we're doing that entity a disservice. We are fragmenting it. I'm struggling with how to name without cutting up (Anzaldúa, 2000, pp. 132-133).

Even Anzaldúa grappled with the trouble with labels. She claims it is hard to articulate a specific label because of our hybridity and multiple intersections and Alcoff (2006) agrees.

We are part European, part Indigenous, culturally a mix between the legacy of colonial aggression and colonial oppression, neither Latin Americans nor U.S. Latinos, so we have problematic relationships to the question of culture, identity, race, ethnicity, or even liberation (Alcoff, 2006).

The vision of the new mestiza that Anzaldúa (2000) advocates for is a mixture of identities that have the ability and flexibility to add new labels or names which would mix with the others and would also be malleable. Similarly, Holland et al. (1998) argue that figured worlds are encountered in day-to-day social activity and lived through practices and activities. Identities are therefore formed in the processes of participating in activities organized by figured worlds. In the case of the participants, the two geographical worlds they inhabit and participate in are the U.S. and Mexico, and the border plays a crucial role in who they are and how they figure themselves.

According to Cervantes-Soon and Carrillo (2016), testimonios in the borderlands provide an opportunity to generate decolonizing knowledge. Additionally, by recognizing “border thinking,” (Mignolo, 2000) the subaltern knowledge created from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system, we can reposition people on the margins as creators, thinkers, and

knowers. Furthermore, in the realm of philosophy, according to Socrates, one must “know thyself” first before we are dedicated to the exploration of knowing anything else. Therefore, I asked participants to define their thoughts on themselves and their border identities through their oral testimonios which I present below.

Charro

I definitely think that I identify myself as someone who has been exposed to both Mexican and American culture, if, generally speaking, they are to be reduced because I know Mexican culture, whatever that is, and know that Mexico has multiple identities and ways of being so, I mean, I guess, popular culture has definitely influenced my way of being. You know, the jokes that I say, and perhaps some values that I have inherited from my parents, who were both born in Mexico. So, after they migrated to the United States two decades ago, I was born here in El Paso at the border, a very historical space that connects multiple routes, so I consider myself Mexican American.

For Charro, the influence of his Mexican parents and their migration to the United States allows him to recognize the uniqueness and multiplicity of the border. It also permits him to distinguish the differences between Mexican and American cultures through popular culture. He hints at the mystery of understanding Mexican culture, as a whole, but in the process of his reflection, he is also constructing it. Because he is able to recognize and embrace the differences between his two worlds, he figures himself as a Mexican American. Furthermore, Jaziz sees himself as a Mexico-Norteamericano. He chose to share his oral testimonio of his identity in English and Spanish to further illustrate the hybridity of his identity and language use.

Jaziz

Me identifico como Mexico-Norteamericano y lo hago específicamente por una cuestión, no tanto geográfica, sino lingüística y de sobre la lengua y bueno no es que uno habita su lengua, yo no sé, uno por medio en el que uno alcanza al otro es por la lengua y más ahorita que tengo el proyecto artístico con el cual trabajo específicamente con las palabras. Es como me construyo a mí mismo dentro de ese proyecto y ese proyecto es un proyecto pues podíamos llamar bilingüe, en el que también de acuerdo mi recepción o sea soy, y soy escuchado, y soy leído como un Mexico-Norteamericano. Es importante el dialogo interno de MexicanoAmericanos y Afroamericanos en lo musical, cultural y artístico. En la línea que yo trabajo y como yo construyo mi identidad como rapero.

My translation: I identify as Mexico-NorthAmerican and I do so specifically because of an issue, not so much geographic, but linguistic, and about language, and well it's not like we inhabit our language, I don't know, if how we reach others is through language, and even more so now that I have the artistic project, for which I specifically work with words. That's how I construct myself within this project, and we could call this a bilingual project, which also according to my reception, means I am, and I am being listened to, and I am read as a Mexico-NorthAmerican. The internal dialogue of music culture and art between Mexican Americans and Afro-Americans is important in the line I work I am in and how I construct my identity as a rapper.

For Jaziz, his identity is not constructed so much by his geographical location but by the role of language in his life and his aspiration to be a philosophical rapper. His musical project is to create a border rap. "Hago un rap de la frontera y estoy en esa frontera lingüística." He stated, that he is on a linguistic borderland because his lyrics are deep, with long verses and "non-conventional" structures. As a result, the act of being heard entails the production of his identity. For Jaziz, being heard and having a reception in both languages, English and Spanish led him to the construction of the fusion of his Mexico-NorthAmerican identity. He continues:

Claro que la lengua y mi identidad nacional me han dicho que soy mexicano y debería estudiar a mexicanos. Debido a mi educación eurocéntrica, no tome mucho tiempo para pensar en la filosofía desde mi mexicanidad. Soy nacido en Juárez y naturalizado Americano ya en mis veintes.

Jaziz stated that his language and national identity make him Mexican and that because of this he should study Mexicans. However, due to his Eurocentric education, he has not had much time to think about philosophy from the standpoint of his Mexicanness. He was born in Juárez and was naturalized as an American in his twenties. For Burro, the label of Mexican American is not enough to capture how he sees himself.

Burro

I do not identify as Mexican American. I identify as a Chicano identity because it has more social, philosophical, and political implications to that identity. But I guess in just simple terms, a Chicano is a Mexican American with a deeper philosophical meaning.

Vila (2000) notes that there are important distinctions between Mexican nationals, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos and that these labels conceal significant differentiations. Alarcon (1990) claims that the label Chicano is not something men or women are born with, as is often the case with the labels Mexican or Mexican American. The label Chicano is carefully, consciously, and critically adopted and it serves as a point of redeparture for the dismantling of “historical conjunctures of crisis, confusion, political and ideological conflict and contradictions” (Alarcon, 1990, p. 250). For Burro, this distinction is important, and he connects the Chicano label to also have a philosophical dimension.

For Holden, growing up in Mexico and speaking Spanish as a first language is significant in reflecting on how he labels himself.

Holden

Most definitely, I identify as a Mexican American, I completely identify I mean. I grew up in Ciudad Juárez. I went to school there up until 6th grade. I was born in the U.S. but went to school over there, all of my grandparents, my family, and everyone is Hispanic, so I grew up speaking Spanish and I had to learn English as a second language. So, my culture, everything of me, who I am, and how I think, always comes back to my roots. I want to be consistent with my community that’s why I volunteer in Juárez and El Paso. Also, I have lived in Houston, El Paso, Alpine, and Juárez which are Mexican American communities.

Holden stated that everything about himself always takes him back to his cultural roots. He also claimed philosophy has helped him “understand the border and how we have two nations, but we are one because of how close we are. Philosophy has been a very useful tool in understanding that.” In contrast, Graffiti chose to separate the label Mexican American into Mexican and American to define himself because even though his “blood comes from Mexico,” he was born in the United States.

Graffiti

I do not identify as a Mexican American, the reason being is that I see is a difference between, how could you say it? How do you say the difference between nationality and then, I forgot the word, culture? Not heritage exactly. So, I see a difference between nationality and heritage so, with that question, I don't like to refer to myself as Mexican American. I like to refer to myself as American because I was born here in the U.S. and I live here and I pay taxes here. I work here. I'm all of the above and everything that makes me an American basically, however, I would say that my heritage is Mexican. My blood does come from Mexico, I guess. But, I am no longer Mexican, I am American. My Mexican part is as it relates to my heritage. So, I'm Mexican and I am American.

Graffiti captures that there is a difference between demographical identification and culture, he expresses the tension of identifying one with the other. This tension is exacerbated by the flux present in his figured world of being in between both. This is a perfect example of Anzaldúa's *Nepantla*. On the other hand, for Julio, his identity is closely related to that of his parents and their lived experiences within Mexican culture.

Julio

I identify as a Mexican American and the reason for that is because my dad was born in Mexico and because he was able to get his citizenship as an American which makes me a Mexican American.

As part of his oral testimonio, Julio revealed that his figured world is organized by his familial relations. He shares that he was "an accident" and shows a hint of what it means to be a philosopher for him by using his father as an example.

I was not supposed to be born because my parents were forced to be married because of Mexican culture. They were forced because of me. My mom was 18 and my dad was 20. They fought about money, that's why I'm interested in exploring capitalism. My dad didn't graduate high school. He was a *travieso*, that's what he was labeled as, he was told he wouldn't amount to anything, but I think he was a philosopher. He now gets paid \$50 an hour working in the oil industry. My mom was very feminist, she never relied on a man to support her. She has a degree in health care administration.

The word *travieso* as Julio's father was labeled has a similar connotation to Anzaldúa's concept of *atravesado*. It has to do with, again, traversing the norms and typical expectations of society. There are several translations of the word *travieso* into English, they range from

mischievous to bright and clever, but the verb *atravieso/atravesar*, which shares etymological connections to *travieso* means to cross and to break through. It is also related to the word transgress, such as overcoming boundaries and norms.

Julio also shares an interesting reflection about capitalism very similar to Jaziz that reveals another layer of who they are. In his written testimonio presented earlier, Jaziz proudly remembers his father, who was a baker (*panadero*), which is typically a low-paying profession in Mexico and the United States and he mentions that his father worked on both sides of the border, and because of his strong will and creativity, “he was able to survive this capitalist system.” Julio’s philosophical interest in capitalism also stems from experiencing poverty and money problems with his parents and being aware of this since his childhood. This recognition of themselves in connection to others resonates with Anzaldúa’s theory of *Nepantla*, and the identification of *intersticios*, which is a process that individuals experience and that requires a personal understanding of the self and others. This means that the participants figure who they are in relation to their families.

For Nena, the label Mexican American has to do with where her family came from, the immigrant status of her parents, and the places she has lived.

Nena

I’m Mexican American. My whole family originated from Mexico, so I am the child of immigrant parents, and I haven’t really been anywhere outside of El Paso for an extended period of time, like I’ve only gone to San Antonio and other cities in Texas, but I’ve never actually lived or gone somewhere else outside of El Paso.

Like Jaziz and Julio, Nena also shares the difficulty of living in poverty in a crowded home and the challenges that she has witnessed her young mother go through.

I live in a house of 14 people. It’s my mom, my cousins, my sisters, and my nieces. My mom went through things that I never want to experience. She thinks it’s too late to go back to college.

I disagree. She says for her it's too late because she is already a mom. She first got pregnant at 16. She once took an English class, and I could tell she had fun. So, my mom only speaks Spanish, and her boss only English, and somehow they make it work.

Nena shares that her journey as a Mexican American woman has not been easy, but like her mother, she “somehow makes it work.”

As a woman, a Mexican American woman, sometimes I feel discriminated against. I'm not immediately offended, but you see a lot of men get a lot of unequal opportunities and that's when you see it. When you think of lawyers you think of men, and I could have been a lawyer, to show that women can do it too, but then that applies to all careers. And there are not many women in accounting or philosophy and that's what I'm doing. I'm hoping to change those fields.

Nena reveals the intersection of gender in figuring her identity and how she has experienced the disadvantages of not just being a woman, but as being a Mexican American woman as she further labels herself. Anzaldúa states that when visually representing her own identity, she “would use a stick figure con un pie en un mundo y otro pie en otro mundo y todos estos mundos overlap” (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 238). She explained that she would visually represent herself with one foot in one world and the other in another world and that all the worlds overlap. Anzaldúa argues there is a constant flux and shapeshifting in the navigation of this overlap and *intersticios*.

There is an interesting play on words in relating Anzaldúa's account of identity to figured worlds. For the participants of this study, if they were also to use stick figures, I could imagine that they would also have their feet in the dichotomizing worlds of the United States and Mexico, but also of work and school, English and Spanish, being victims of capitalism or surviving it, being defeated by suffering or being transformed by it, or in many instances simply being *atravesados*, or in-between. This next section elaborates on the difficulties encountered by the participants and how a part of the construction of their identities often includes encountering and negotiating the meaning of suffering.

4.3 BORDER SUFFERING

Racism and discrimination were experienced by all three participants of the pilot study I conducted in 2018. Furthermore, all seven of the participants in this current study also disclosed several instances of racism, discrimination, sexism, pain, injustice, and suffering in their testimonios of becoming philosophers on the U.S.-Mexico border. Fry (2004) and Urrieta (2007) found that identities are created, and individuals are recruited into them, through various experiences such as marginalization and racism. For Anzaldúa (1987), the border is an open wound, *una herida abierta*. She describes it as a place where the third world, referring to Mexico, grates against the first world, referring to the United States, and bleeds. Before a scab can be formed, it hemorrhages again and the lifeblood of two worlds merging forms a border culture.

She claims border culture is analogous to the scab that barely forms and bleeds again. Border suffering is very present in this study as participants shared how they construct their identities in relation to the violence and injustice they have witnessed on the border. Ciudad Juárez, Mexico has been labeled as one of the most violent cities worldwide for its ongoing drug war and organized crime. It also has alarming statistics for femicides and violence against women (Vilalta, 2013). On the other side, El Paso, Texas had been categorized as one of the safest cities in the U.S. until August 3rd of 2019, when the most horrific white-supremacy motivated mass shooting targeting Mexican Americans occurred. However, it has been precisely some of the participants' experiences of border suffering that have led some of them to become philosophers.

Charro

Charro attributes his philosophical interest to a particular incident with police brutality in El Paso, Texas back in 2016, when he was wrongfully shot at and could have been killed but survived.

There was my experience with a state trooper who almost ended my life back in 2016 and all of the experiences that came after that. Having to contact a lawyer and being disappointed by the lawyer and having to meet multiple individuals and encountering certain forms of injustice if you want to call it that. That really made me more critical or rather more aware of social structures and practices in a philosophical way. Basically, in short, phenomena such as “femicidios”, police brutality, and so on and so forth, these types of phenomena are found within my community, which for me includes not only El Paso but also Las Cruces and Cd. Juárez, and perhaps all over the world and has really questioned me, or it has really made me question rather the structure of society and how fragile we can be.

Charro explains that it is possible that his incident of police brutality was racially motivated, but that it may have also been driven by other dominant forces that overcame the state trooper “like power, entitlement, and adrenaline.” And that the state trooper may have desired to be the “hero” of the night, but regardless of motivation, Charro affirms it was an abuse of power.

The state trooper tried to justify his motivation for the shooting. That night, when it was just him and me waiting for the person who was going to “inspect the situation”, the state trooper told me he was “sorry” and that he “didn’t know what happened” that he “may have tripped over a rock or something and that’s why he pulled the trigger.

In addition to the traumatic experience with police brutality, Charro also shared other painful experiences that were pivotal to his philosophical development, such as his parents’ divorce and dealing with mental illness in his family.

My mother has schizophrenia, and my sister does too. She got triggered. Her thoughts are difficult. This forced me to think about how people reason. There are major contradictions in how she reasons and the way she reacted, which was at least on a philosophical level, valuable. She was struggling. She couldn’t trust herself anymore.

Charro claimed this experience forced him to think introspectively and consider whether these thoughts could also be in his own genetics and whether he would eventually become “triggered” in the future. The fear is constantly in the back of his head.

I wonder if I can get triggered and the *me* that everyone knew was just going to be a radically different one, and just questions like this have influenced my thoughts growing up. Today, I have come to terms with a lot of these questions but nonetheless, they were very significant for my philosophical interests.

Charro feels that the self he has constructed could change from one day to the next without warning because of his genetics and that losing himself in that sense has caused anxiety, but that it has also allowed him to explore how philosophy can help him.

Jaziz

For Jaziz, the death of his father forced him to become more “existential” and to think about life. “Una experiencia que me marco fue el fallecimiento de mi padre, la experiencia de la muerte. Entonces eso trajo un peso más existencialista en mi modo de filosofar y eso se ve reflejado en mi música.” He claimed he was marked by the experience of death and that the result of those reflections is now found in his music. He adds that it has been this same exposure to violence and injustice on the border that has led him to want to be more like Latin American philosopher Paulo Freire.

Yo como ciudadano de la frontera y de Juárez quiero como Freire lo hacía escribir y experimentar tu realidad. Entonces no puedes apartar y teorizar, tienes que vivir la violencia y vivir injusticia y a la vez estarla pensando. My translation: I, as a border citizen and from Juárez, want, like Freire used to, to write and experience my reality. Therefore, you cannot separate yourself and theorize about it. You need to live the violence and injustice and at the same time, be thinking about it.

Jaziz used the analogy of boxing to describe his life. “In this sport, you are trained to deal with the punches, society hits you, but you become used to it, so you do not become disillusioned, or feel like a failure, you just become more critical of who you are.” Despite life’s punches, Jaziz sees value in being close to the violence and suffering that occurs in the border because, to him, that allows us (those close to it) to theorize from the vantage point of lived experience.

Burro

What was originally meant to be a form of punishment and suffering for Burro, for misbehaving, ended up being the beginning of his philosophical journey. Recalling his first encounter with philosophy was a bittersweet memory for him.

I would say that my first interest in philosophy was around the age of 13 or 14. I think I was in eighth grade. My father's method of punishment one day when I got in a fight with my brother was that he made me read a chapter in one of his philosophy textbooks. He was going to school at the time, and he made us read a chapter on Socrates and we had to interpret it in our own words. So, I would read the text over and over and it wasn't until I finished that I went to go explain to him what I thought it meant and he was like "no no, go read it again; this is not what it means." So, I went to go reread it and about an hour later I went to go explain to him what my interpretation and he was like "yep, that's what it means". So little by little, I started getting an infatuation with philosophy. Especially with political philosophy. At the time, George Bush, the Iraqi war, and the 2001 terrorist attacks had just happened, so I was forced to think about those things philosophically.

Burro recalls that his father's main motivation to read philosophy was that his father was often the neglected child and in many ways the "black sheep" of the family, "who related to Nietzsche and the existentialists to derive meaning out of his own life." Burro's father never finished college, but philosophy was an escape, a shelter, that he later passed on to Burro. Like Jaziz, the death of Burro's father also left an imprint on him. "My father was a big impact in mentoring me through this journey before he passed away." He misses that mentorship because he has felt discriminated against at the university level. "I remember being in one class where an older white philosophy professor and I were going to present at a conference, and he went over my paper, and he straight out told me that I wasn't a very good philosopher." Additionally, he notes that the September 11th terrorist attack and the Iraqi war compelled him to critically reflect on sociopolitical issues and philosophy because, at the time, there were many military repercussions and enhanced security that affected life on both sides of the border.

Jaziz and Burro both mentioned existentialism explicitly as they recounted some of their life's challenges. Existentialism is a philosophical realm that deals with an individual's existence

in relation to suffering, their lack of purpose or meaning, loss of connectedness to others, thoughts about dying and death, struggles around the state of being, difficulty in finding a sense of self, loss of hope, loss of autonomy, and loss of temporality (Bates, 2016). Burro mentions that existentialism is his favorite type of philosophy but that it is incomplete. “Existentialism is missing the phenomenological aspects of many people of color and poor people who don’t have the ability to reflect on their suffering,” he stated.

Holden

Holden shared that he has also experienced multiple levels of discrimination and of feeling that he does not belong in the fields of medicine and philosophy.

I have had challenges based on race, I mean I'm in the field already where most of the doctors are white or Asian, so there are very few Hispanics. So, when we look, there are some challenges, but I don't see any difficulties being a philosopher, I am always speaking my mind and always fighting for what's right. I'm always going to stand on top of the list of my priorities, so I'm not concerned with how people see me, it has little worth or value because I want to become a philosopher.

Holden aspires to combine medicine and philosophy. He added that he once encountered a patient who was a woman and did not share the same religious and moral beliefs he did, but that philosophy offered a reconciling perspective and allowed him to distinguish between his personal and professional understandings. Holden grew up Catholic, and the woman decided to have an abortion, which is forbidden in his religion.

Philosophy helped me see that it was a choice that people make, and we're under the freedom to make those decisions. I am nobody to use what I was raised with and judge another person's decision or even give an appraisal on who they are as a person. I mean philosophy taught me to get over those obstacles to not judge people based on their decisions. There's so much more to a human being, that it is just something we know on the surface of how much people live and how much they experience. So, philosophy just helped me notice that we're all different. We have to appreciate those differences and also it has helped me give a better clinical write-up when I present to the attending physician and also to other people. I mean it is medical history that is important, and I cannot mix my beliefs or give a bad label to that person.

Holden was aware of the challenges of being minoritized in both the fields of medicine and philosophy, but he feels optimistic in his journey. He shares a similarity to Julio's experience as far as growing up on the intersections of being Mexican American and Catholic and having to deal with the moral implications of this, but Holden understood that he had to separate his religious beliefs from professional expectations in the field of medicine. He claimed that philosophy has been very helpful for this.

Graffiti

Although Graffiti has also encountered racism on the border, he felt it to be a different kind of racism because he "does not look Mexican."

I haven't really encountered like direct racism. I feel like that's because I'm a white-skinned Mexican. So, it's easy to not pay attention to me. People are surprised when I tell them that I'm Mexican. For the most part, they get surprised when they hear me speaking Spanish for the first time. People just assume that I'm not Mexican and that I don't speak Spanish. It doesn't affect me negatively. The only direct experience of racism that has happened to me was actually here in El Paso. I was crossing the street and a truck at the stop sign was trying to pass. He barely slowed down and not that he like almost hit me or anything like that. He was never going to hit me, but I was like "hey I'm walking here" and I said that in Spanish and then that guy just said "get the fuck out of here, you Mexican" so, I was like oh wow, like I mean that's never happened to me, so I guess that's the only real moment of racism that I've experienced.

Fry (2004) and Urrieta (2007) argue that identities are created through experiences like racism. For Graffiti, it was difficult to understand this racist incident because it happened at the border, in El Paso, where for him, this community is one and what is supposed .

One of the best ways that I could explain this border is that it is a melting pot between Mexico and the United States. Most people that live here, don't consider Juárez and El Paso different. They don't consider them different cities, but it's all one to them. It's just home. So, El Paso wouldn't be El Paso without Juárez and Juárez wouldn't be Juárez without El Paso, so it's just so interconnected over here, I think, a lot more than a lot of other places.

It is crucial to note that border suffering is not necessarily suffering that happens exclusively in a spatial sense *at* the border but because it happens to those *from the* border and

in-between. An example is Julio's experience with racism outside of the border in Texas because he is Mexican American.

Julio

An experience that I associate myself as far as sparking my philosophical interest would be a time when my flag football team was able to compete in the Texas championship in College Station, Texas and it is there where we experienced racism. We went in 2012, I was 12 years old, and we were the first Mexican American team ever. So, starting during registration they were looking at us weird because they were all white. During the three days, we were called *wet backs*, *beaners*, and *spics*—the parents, the kids, the refs, and everyone. Of course, this came out when we were winning. We were fast and we made a good team, they weren't expecting that. Sports shouldn't be about skin; it should be about skill. We won, we were the first El Paso team to win, and most of us were Mexican American.

Julio went on to share that although the incident happened far away from El Paso, there is also a particular "alienation that happens at the border. There is this notion of the other that is automatic. It leads to a lot of racism and discrimination." Julio expanded by stating that he was intrigued with the idea of alienation by comparing his experience on the U.S.-Mexico border to what Greek philosophers lived in ancient times. "The way the Greek and Romans interacted was different. Here, at the border we have a physical wall and metaphysical elements of corruption and discrimination. I always wonder what happens on the other side of the wall." Here, Julio refers to the other physical side of the wall, which is Juárez and the metaphysical side, which are those who alienate and perpetuate the othering on both sides.

Nena

Nena lives in a house with 14 people, including her parents, her siblings, her aunt and uncle, and her cousins from Veracruz, who are "hoping to get jobs at bakeries or in construction." She must work a full-time job at a convenience store as she completes her double major in philosophy and accounting to help her family financially. She expressed the difficulty

of the demands of her work and school schedules and explained how she has questioned her work situation in a philosophical way.

It's really hard to think about why we have to work from nine to five every day. So many hours in our work schedule, instead of, you know, sitting, and having more breaks in between, and when you ask someone that, they say: oh, that's how it's always been instead of explaining why. I work at a convenience store and it's just me, I don't really have a lunch break all day, so I have to eat as fast as I can while looking at all the cameras and then get back to work.

Nena was also concerned with “racial injustice and abuse in the police force nowadays and the dehumanization of immigrants on the U.S.-Mexico border.” She was particularly concerned with how immigrants and people of Mexican descent have been portrayed in the media. She added: “Not everyone here is like the former president said, they’re not rapists, they are not criminals, and they are not all bad people.”

Charro and Nena explicitly mentioned the effects of Trump’s hateful rhetoric. Similarly, to Nena, Charro shared:

Trump is in a position of authority to make strong claims about the nature of the border, and he has made claims that are not true. He’s so concerned with making America great again and he wants to keep that identity alive, but he’s not considering our identity here. It’s just very complex.

Nena is a volunteer for the Border Network for Human Rights. She is proud to have helped in their annual event “Hugs not Walls,” which allows birder families separated for many years by migration issues to have 4-minute encounters to hug and kiss each other.

It seems short but it is the best time of their lives. It is very emotional. I was assigned to be the leader of the perimeter. So, kind of like a security guard. The people in El Paso were wearing yellow shirts, and the people on the other side in Juárez were wearing red. This was for us all to know which side we belonged to.

We can see that for the participants, suffering is not only tied to their philosophical interests and understandings, but it also goes back to the meaning of their identities and to being and living in the U.S.-Mexico border and the challenges that come with it. They must figure

themselves in painful and unwelcoming worlds. Exploring this finding for me was like poking the *herida abierta*, the open wound that Anzaldúa describes because it forced me to trace my own lived experiences and connect my personal border suffering in relation to my own philosophical journey.

In 1988, my mother and grandmother were murdered by a Mexican drug cartel in Ciudad Juárez. My father survived the attack. My mother was a journalist, she was six-months pregnant, and the news was so shocking that it was reported by the *New York Times*. I was six years-old at the time and I wanted to know where my mother was. Where did she go? How can people just disappear? What is the purpose of life and what are we supposed to do with so much pain? Very early in my life, I was forced to face the notion of suffering and injustice. For my safety, I had to move to the United States and experience being different on the other side of the border not knowing how to speak or write English properly. That is why I studied philosophy. It became my shelter.

My father, who was also a Mexican journalist, but did not speak a word of English could not get used to not being able to communicate or assimilate to American culture, so after only a year in the United States, we moved back to Mexico. I came back to the United States at the age of 18 to study in a foreign world. The participants' pain resonates with mine and how it has influenced me to become a philosopher. It is a brutal mirror that reveals the role of tragedy and suffering in our critical minds and a very powerful phenomenon of transformation in our shared lived experiences. In the next section, I analyze the process of becoming a philosopher in more detail and the meaning of being a philosopher for the participants.

4.4 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PHILOSOPHER?

The typical definition of *philosophy* stems from its Greek roots which mean “love of wisdom.” This is straightforward. *Philo* means love, and *sophos* means wisdom. However, defining a filósofo/a, a philosopher is a lot more challenging. Two of the central research questions of this study focus on understanding the process by which Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border become philosophers and what it means to them to be a philosopher. The literature indicates a severe underrepresentation of women and people of color in academic philosophy, so it is valuable to acknowledge the voices of these seven students and what a philosopher is to them. Phenomenologically, the focus is on their process of becoming a philosopher and of understanding the nature and significance of their everyday lived experiences as they relate to this process.

Charro

Charro realized he wanted to study philosophy academically during his first encounter with other philosophers in the El Paso Community College Philosophy Club. He claimed that a particular encounter really brought a form of orientation to his academic pursuits because he had been highly influenced by music all his life, and he wanted to study music in a very technical way. His original goal was to record music and become an audio engineer, but then he realized that most of his deeper interests were related to philosophical thinking.

My experience studying philosophy has been as difficult as it has been rewarding, precisely because reading certain books, certain philosophers, or perhaps engaging in certain practices made me realize that perhaps philosophy was not the best thing for me to pursue based on my considered capabilities. But speaking with certain mentors, they all really encouraged me to trust the process, to keep reading, keep putting in the work, keep putting in the practice of philosophy and being patient with it, and now years have passed, and I truly know that there has been significant growth in my capabilities and skills and epistemic horizon to put it that way. I feel more aware of myself and of my surroundings, not in totality, of course, but this is a becoming process, right?

Charro implies that his “considered capabilities” relate to the limitations he perceived he had, such as being a first-generation college student, speaking English as a second language, and being aware of the lack of diversity in philosophy dissuaded him from pursuing philosophy. However, he now believes that philosophy “gives you liberation in multiple forms.” He sees his journey towards becoming a philosopher as a dichotomy, a difficult and rewarding process, a process of becoming, but he goes back to the role of suffering once again, in particular to what he calls “our tragedies,” in answering what it means to be a philosopher. This is compelling because Charro has an implicit understanding of a shared suffering experienced by Mexican Americans.

What does it mean to be a philosopher to Charro?

It’s a process. It means to be like Fanon and Mbembe. I want my voice to be harsh, I don’t want it to be beautiful. Only a voice torn, through and through can understand humanity. This could also relate to being Mexican American philosophers in a way that by capturing our lived experiences it is inevitable not to capture our tragedies. How do you capture that on paper? You do it by the power of the voice. In this case individuals, their voices also must be torn, it’s the methodological necessity to capture their phenomenological essence. We must allow ourselves to be affected by others and accept and recognize our vulnerability.

Charro makes an important distinction between being a philosopher and being a Mexican American philosopher by claiming that the Mexican American experience is filled with tragedies and different obstacles. He says that sometimes “it is all too overwhelming. As a full-time employee, I work 12 hours a day, five days a week, that’s over 60 hours a week. At the end of the day, I’m too tired.” This exhaustion is similar to what Nena experienced with the demands of her full-time job at the gas station and the fact that she barely has any time to eat.

Jaziz

Jaziz recalled a specific incident from his childhood, he was about 10 years old and he asked his mother if he “could live only in his mind and if everything that occurred around him

was only something he perceived.” In retrospect, he claimed that this “was his first encounter with philosophy through solipsism.”

Jaziz began his journey of higher education later in life, when he was almost 30 years old, and it was not until he took his first philosophy class at El Paso Community College that he formally decided to declare philosophy as his major. He described the process of becoming a philosopher as “lleno de muchos retos y mucha valentía intelectual” a journey full of challenges and a lot of intellectual courage. He claimed “you must also abandon certain prejudices to let go of old beliefs.” He labeled the process “difficult,” the same word used by Charro, because “it requires time and integrity.” Nonetheless, Jaziz claimed the overall experience is “well-rounded, as Fitzgerald would say.”

What does it mean to be a philosopher to Jaziz?

“Para mí ser un ser un filósofo, significa ser como Unamuno, filo filósofo, ósea un amante de los amantes de la filosofía. Es alcanzar otro tipo de otroriedades. Pero, no es un estado que alcanzas. Es un ímpetu que tienes de nunca dejar de aprender y de nunca dejar de buscar ser una persona pues un poco más well-rounded que tiene autodisciplina y valentía.”

My translation: “For me being a philosopher means being like Unamuno, a philo philosopher, which is a lover of the lovers of philosophy. It means achieving another type of othernesses. But it is not a state you achieve. It is an impetus that you have of never ceasing to learn and never ceasing to become a well-rounded person who is self-disciplined and has courage.”

He claimed that there is a main difference between wanting to be a philosopher and pursuing other professions or fields, that becoming a philosopher is a “search that never ends.” Jaziz said he keeps quoting Unamuno because, “he was a philosopher that wrote in his language (Spanish) and because he is continuing the existential philosophy of Kierkegaard.” In fact, Jaziz claimed them as his two favorite philosophers in that order. “Their ideas are about a concrete human being who lives and suffers and speaks out against certain ideologies and do so being embedded within philosophy.”

Jaziz said the biggest impediment in his journey has been language because he learned English in his twenties. The second biggest impediment was crossing the border from Juárez to El Paso periodically because he has family on both sides. When he would stay in El Paso, he would stay in government housing. “Irónicamente mi casa en Juárez, donde crecí esta paralela a UTEP, pero no hay un puente por ahí, tenía que rodear toda la ciudad y entrar por el puente.” Ironically, the house where he grew up in Juárez, in an area called Anapra, considered the poorest area of Juárez, is 100 feet on the other side of the University of Texas at El Paso, a multimillion-dollar campus on the American side of El Paso. Even though there are multiple bridges on both sides, there is no bridge that connects both dichotomizing worlds where there is this stark difference. So even though Jaziz was in such physical proximity that he could almost touch the border, he had to travel all day to go all around the city just to get to the closest bridge.

Like Charro, Jaziz also had musical inclinations before philosophy. “There is a connection between the philosopher and music, philosophers are not only tied to poets, but they are also tied to musicians.” Jaziz stated that his genre is introspective rap and that it is imperative for music to include self-examination. That is why he uses philosophers in his lyrics. Jaziz mixes English and Spanish in his rap songs. “Ahora te lo traigo clean, no más producto en bruto, al igual que Kierkegaard, soy un incognito al servicio de lo absoluto.” This line in one of his songs roughly translates to “I bring it to you clean, no more brute product, just like Kierkegaard, I am incognito at the service of the absolute.”

Jaziz’ philosophical journey involves transforming the meaning of suffering through a musical production that is tied to his linguistic and community roots.

Burro

Just like Jaziz, Burro decided he formally wanted to study philosophy after taking a philosophy course at the same community college.

I first realized that I wanted to study philosophy academically when I took an intro to philosophy course at El Paso Community College. I took this course, and I was fascinated with the subject and that's when I decided I wanted to continue studying this field. The thing that fascinated me about this specific course was that it talked about issues that I was very concerned with. For example, politics, sociology, and psychology and we analyzed the current events that were going on at that time philosophically, instead of just studying the fundamental readings of an intro to philosophy course and that's when I found out that philosophy could be applied to study everything more deeply.

Burro said that the best part of studying philosophy has been that he has really gotten to understand who he is, and his community, “most importantly you have the tools to just deeply analyze where you come from and how you can apply these tools to not only better yourself but your community as well.”

What does it mean to be a philosopher to Burro?

To me, I think the meaning of being a philosopher is to really understand the way things work, what functions and what doesn't, and to apply your lived experiences and what you know to improve your conditions and those around you.

Burro described his experience of studying philosophy as “awesome,” and that he feels mostly identified with “Latin American philosophy because it is the type of philosophy that can be applied to the border accurately and authentically.” He claimed the hardest part of his journey of studying philosophy has been that “many professional and academic conferences lack a good representation of Latino, Mexican American or Chicano philosophers.” He noted that many of these voices are often left out of the philosophical canon and that priority is always given to “Socrates, Plato, and the Europeans.” He added that he has struggled to feel like his work as a Chicano is taken seriously because “very often, Anglo professors have been dismissive.”

Burro seeks to apply philosophy to his understanding and amelioration of the border, but so far, he has encountered institutional resistance and a lack of support.

Holden

Holden was introduced to philosophy when he was studying for his undergraduate degree in biology with the hopes of becoming a medical doctor. He had read some philosophy here and there on his own, but as he was studying for his MCAT, he was told by a rhetoric professor that the best way to improve his reading skills was to read philosophy or to take a class in philosophy. His brother, who was studying to be a nurse, suggested that he take an ethics class because it had been very helpful. Holden already had his bachelor's degree from a university when he took his first philosophy course and followed his brother's advice.

I realized I wanted to study philosophy academically, probably during the first week of taking ethics at El Paso Community College. I started to realize that there's more to just being a human. I mean you have to think about things that are going on around you, be conscious and mindful of the government's interactions between people, between governments, there's so much going on that you have to pay attention to and consider every interaction every day.

For Holden, the combination of medicine and philosophy was immediately apparent even in ordinary everyday interactions at the hospital where he volunteered.

Even just saying hi to somebody in the hospital that you see often walking down the aisles, that person might be having a kid at that moment of their life, another person could have just lost a family member, and being a philosopher definitely gives you that understanding and keeps that into perspective; that everyone is going through a different path and a different situation.

Holden described his experience of studying philosophy as “very rewarding and fulfilling” because philosophy has allowed him to pay more attention to what he reads and how he listens to others, but more than anything, it has helped him understand patients better.

When I talk to a patient, for example, and their beliefs do not line up with mine, I understand that we all come from different backgrounds and different ideologies. So, philosophy helped me get through that prejudice. Philosophy changed just the way I approach conversations and live my

life and talk to my patients, even how I read my books, it just helps me to think if my books are right, I mean science is consistently changing, so it gives me a different perspective and a unique appreciation to everything. Philosophy has changed everything.

What does it mean to be a philosopher to Holden?

It means probably not having a lot of friends haha. Being a philosopher means just keeping an eye out for the people that you are representing. It has been very different coming from a background like biology, where everything is laid out, and this is how the body works, and this is how cells were produced, and everything is just a pattern. This is how you ought to do it, but you hardly ever find a field that tells you or asks you, who you are, who? That's what philosophers do.

When asked to clarify whom he is representing, Holden claimed, "my family, my ideals, and my culture." He added:

When we had the Covid-19 vaccines that had to be implemented, I was one of the people that stood up and said that it had to be optional for students to volunteer at the clinic, if not everyone was vaccinated. Being a philosopher just means pointing out the things that we are overlooking and making those situational decisions. Giving a remedy and a solution. So being a philosopher just means keeping an eye out for everyone, making sure that what we do is right. It is difficult to study philosophy not just because of the introspection, but also seeing people and the decisions they are making. Political systems make it difficult, and you get a better grasp on how difficult it is just to be alive.

Holden uses philosophy to examine himself and reenvision his community. He says he relates to the stoics "because they take one day at a time and keep things as simple as possible." Even though his life is anything but simple. Holden currently has three jobs, he works at a clinic, at a factory, and at a daycare while going to school to finish his second degree in philosophy and is in the process of applying to medical school. He says he is a philosopher by reading the theories and also trying to apply them to what he is living right now. He says "going into medicine and philosophy is something of prestige" and considers his three jobs "a blessing."

Graffiti

Graffiti says he has had an interest in philosophy ever since he was in high school, and he has enjoyed reading it since, but for a while, he did not really consider it as an academic option.

Just like Charro, who did not think, he belonged in philosophy because of “his considered capabilities” referring to certain limitations he perceived, Graffiti also felt insecure.

I would romanticize philosophy, but for me, it was something completely unattainable, you know? It was something only for smart people and I didn't consider myself smart. I didn't really put it on the table until maybe a couple of years ago when I started the radiography program. I decided that after I finished my technical degree, I would go back to school to study philosophy but as I took the radiography classes, I realized that actually was not for me at all, and I just decided to go with that and just jump over straight to philosophy from there.

Unfortunately, even though Graffiti made the jump into philosophy, he still doubts himself.

Everything I write now for every other class before I submit it, I always say, I'm an idiot, like this makes no sense, and well not that it doesn't make sense like it makes sense to me, but I feel like nobody else is going to understand you know? That makes me feel stupid, but I try not to pay attention to that voice.

Graffiti says that philosophy is slowly helping him overcome that voice because philosophy is helpful in tearing things apart and to learn from different perspectives, “it just changes your view completely on the world.” He has been impacted by the philosophy of Dennett because “we are all animals and evolution applies to everything. I love what Dennet did, he related evolution to religion. Religion didn't just drop from the sky. Nothing is one day to the next, it's all continuous and it relates to the natural world.” Graffiti relates his experience of studying philosophy as continuous and similar to Plato's allegory of the cave and to the specific moment of becoming blind by the light that enters the darkness.

Everything new that I learned is blinding. Sometimes you have to put the book down because it's just too much at times. It feels like after processing a little bit every new idea, that's when you can go back to it, but blinding is not always a bad thing, you know? It's a really good thing. It's a really good feeling to me, to just open your mind to so much.

What does it mean to be a philosopher to Graffiti?

I mean for me, at least right now the only real answer that I personally can give is that I don't know. I don't know what it means. I know what it means to me, personally. I'm trying to know as much as I can about the universe before I'm not here anymore.

The hardest part in this journey for Graffiti has been the heavy reading required in his philosophy courses. He tries to set aside at least three hours a day to read, but even though this has been difficult, he is starting to see the benefits. "It's getting better for me, right now I don't suffer as much as I used to a year ago or a year and a half ago." He said he has been thinking a lot about he will do with his degree in philosophy. He is considering a master's degree in philosophy.

Julio

Julio believes that growing up as an only child contributed to his thinking philosophically because he felt "isolated and the alone time led him to see different perspectives." He says that also forced him to assume gender roles because as a little boy he was expected to carry a house key and he had a phone in the second grade. Even though he received a lot of material gifts to compensate for not having siblings, he posits that made him reflect on the difference between the material and non-material existence and that made him wonder about reality and metaphysics.

He described his experience of studying philosophy "like no other" and one that has made him "see the world differently." But claimed that has also been part of the challenge.

I believe the hardest part about studying philosophy is the fact that you understand that the world needs change, and you understand how bad the world is. As far as ethics, and as far as how we treat the world, nature, human beings, and other things, such as animals. I believe that's one of the hardest parts because you have to live with knowing constantly, every day, that the world is not perfect.

However, this is worth it because Julio stated that the best part of studying philosophy and becoming a philosopher is that "you are able to liberate your mind, yourself, and escape from capitalism, racism, and discrimination." Julio claimed that he feels a "bit more logical and

wiser in the world” because of philosophy. Like Charro and Jaziz, music plays a big role in Julio’s life, as he is a DJ and is interested in uncovering the Black roots of electronic dance music and exploring how capitalism has hurt the music scene. Like Charro, Julio believes in the power of philosophy to liberate the self. He repeats his concern about capitalism in his journey to becoming a philosopher and beginning his higher education at a community college.

I believe that capitalism has played a major role in my philosophical journey, and it has been, I would say at this point, negative because I am on the side of the proletariat right now and because there is a difference in the separation in class from lower class to high class. This leads Latin American philosophers like me starting off in a community college to think that because I am not at a high-class university, my education will not be high class, but it has also given me the mindset and the experience to understand that that is not the case and because of that, it has led me to be more optimistic as far as where you can acquire an education.

Scholars note that more than 60 percent of Latinx students in postsecondary education begin their college careers in a community college, and that fewer than one percent transfer to four-year colleges and universities (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Historically, students like Julio have been imagined through a deficit lens (Valencia, 1997). Subtractive schooling, which refers to the assimilationist practices and policies that subtract Mexican students’ language and culture in U.S. public schools (Valenzuela, 1999) has also complicated their academic success.

What does it mean to be a philosopher to Julio?

I think the meaning of being a philosopher is simply to examine the world. I'm just saying that it needs changing but changing for the better and not for the worse. But being a Mexican American philosopher in an epistemological way, it’s different because our lived experiences are so unique in Mexico and the U.S. Do African Americans get contested in Africa? Are they criticized like we do? We are not good enough there and we are not good enough here. That’s the issue *también*.

Just like Charro, Julio also sees a distinction between being a philosopher and being a Mexican American philosopher because of the/our unique lived experiences on the U.S.-Mexico border. “As Mexican American philosophers, we need to fight the notion that we are lazy and

irrational. They will always find a way to discredit us.” Julio claimed a “good philosopher is passionate, compassionate, open-minded, philanthropic, eccentric, creative, and analytical.” For Charro and Julio, philosophy has a liberatory potential and allows them to envision new ways of being and living on the border. Because of philosophy, Julio also has a broader worldview and is able to compare his experience to what others might be living in Africa. Julio also said that becoming a philosopher was a combination of “randomness and meant to be” saying that philosophers “end up in philosophy” because their characters demand to “know why” and always engage in wonder. He defined the journey as “complex because it’s not like getting from point A to point B.” He added that we must remain vigilant.

Philosophy is Eurocentric and it’s not a divine truth. In Latin American philosophy, we find our truth through our path of alienation, racism, struggle, and discrimination. That path separates us from the rest of the philosophers. That’s why these testimonios are the best thing because it’s our lived experience. Our paths are giving you the answer through our path-guided way. We need to understand our roots and understand that there needs to be change. You need to be a feminist too, especially in our Mexican American culture.

For Julio, being a Mexican American philosopher also requires that we contest Mexican and Mexican American machismo that undermines women. He is proud to call himself a feminist.

Nena

Similarly, to Jaziz, Burro, and Holden, Nena also decided to formally study philosophy after taking a philosophy course at the same community college.

It was when I took my first philosophy class at El Paso Community College that I thought more about considering philosophy as a major because I really like getting into debates with my dad, especially in the car when we’re driving, we talk about politics, and we get so into heated debates.

Nena claimed her experience of studying philosophy has been “very challenging” and that the hardest part has been writing essays. Like Jaziz, Nena has also experienced the trouble of having to write academically in English.

I can think everything out and then say it verbally, but then when I try to put it into words that's when I find myself going back and contradicting everything that I say, and then maybe an hour later, I changed my mind and I go and change that again. Spanish is my first language and that plays a role in making it difficult to write.

Luckily, Nena has experienced the benefits of being able to argue philosophically. She stated it's a great feeling when “you don't have to back down and you are able to get answers.” Like Charro and Julio, she has also explored the philosophical implications of being and living on the U.S.-Mexico border.

A lot of us go to Juarez and then come back, we have two hometowns. You can't say that philosophy is just for white people. We are right next door, but we have been through different things and have had a different kind of life, we are in a deeper state, deeper than the United States.

Nena is referring to Mexicans and Mexican Americans dealing with more profound challenges like, “poverty, racism, and sexism.”

What does it mean to be a philosopher to Nena?

It means that we can question ourselves and we can make other people question themselves and sometimes in an irritating manner, at least that's what I've heard from my sister. It means that we can think more critically about something instead of just taking an answer straight out of the book or instead of just taking an order. We can question why, who, what, when, where, and why and we can make our own solutions and we can find another way, another solution instead of just going by the book.

We can see that the process of becoming a philosopher is not linear, it is about “finding other ways,” as Nena stated, to move forward, and there are multiple definitions for what it means to be a philosopher for the participants. The path to becoming a philosopher is full of crossroads, dead ends, and unexpected turns. However, for all the participants, philosophy is a

pragmatic and transformative tool for themselves and their community. As Charro claimed, “being a philosopher basically means understanding the world more only to make it better.” Not only are the participants in the process of figuring out themselves as philosophers, but they are also imagining a better world in which philosophy could help others.

Hutchinson and Jenkins (2013), whose work I discussed in Chapter Two, indicate that many women in academic philosophy have difficulty identifying as philosophers. They also note that women tend to habitually say *I teach philosophy*, or *I study philosophy* instead of saying, *I am a philosopher*. This is because women experience their journeys of becoming a philosopher as a process of insecurities and exclusion. Sadly, the same result was seen in the outcome of this study. When asked whether they considered themselves philosophers, all six male participants said yes, and the only woman participant said no.

Do Participants Consider Themselves Philosophers Table

Table 3. *Do Participants Consider Themselves Philosophers?*

| Participant | Do You Consider Yourself a Philosopher? |
|--------------------|--|
| Charro | Yes |
| Jaziz | Yes |
| Burro | Yes |
| Holden | Yes |
| Graffiti | Yes |
| Julio | Yes |
| Nena | No |

4.5 THE ONLY MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMAN IN PHILOSOPHY

The literature clearly demonstrates that academic philosophy is a gendered environment that is associated with masculinity and whiteness (Ferrer, 2012; Haslanger, 2013; Wilson, 2012). So far, the findings of this study have been presented in the order of the participants' contributions. Ironically, Nena was the last participant I found for this study and the only woman. However, in an effort to value the intersection of her gender and of being the only Mexican American woman from the U.S.-Mexico border in this research, I dedicate an entirely separate section to her experiences to further explore her journey of becoming a philosopher. Since many women in philosophy are often ignored (Alcoff, 2011), in this section, I aim to give her testimonio more visibility.

We have learned that Nena is a 20-year-old Mexican American woman who is double majoring in philosophy and accounting. She works a full-time job at a convenience store and lives in a crowded small house with 14 people. Her mother got pregnant at 16 and both of her parents are immigrants from Mexico, who only speak Spanish and do not have a college education. Nena's mother is a housekeeper, and her father works in agriculture. Nena is the first one in her family to go to college. What many do not know is that women like Nena must endure the complex discrimination of not just racism but also sexism, classicism, and linguisticism. Studies show that women, more than men, appear to leave philosophy soon after first being introduced to it because of the constant marginalization they experience (Adeberg et al., 2014).

Nena has already experienced some of that in her philosophy courses. She recalls an instance where a philosophy professor was making misogynistic jokes during the lecture.

I have noticed that there have been more males instead of females in my philosophy classes and something that particularly stood out to me was that one of my teachers made a comment in a philosophy class, well he made a joke about his wife, and we knew that it was a joke, but there was still someone that took offense to it. I was also offended, and that person got in trouble.

In her testimonio, Nena shared that she did not feel like she would belong in the field of philosophy and that the first thought that came to mind was that she would “be an outsider.”

I thought, oh it's a bunch of white old men and I didn't really think that there were many female philosophers that were praised as well as Aristotle or Plato and that's basically like all I knew about philosophy. We just need to bring women philosophers to light and praise them some more and then show them more to other people.

Nena says that she was not comfortable with how women philosophers were immediately associated with feminism. Not because she is against feminism, she considers herself a feminist, but because she perceives that as an attempt to undermine their work. “I noticed that women philosophers were all labeled as feminists. It felt weird because they were labeled like that. They didn't appreciate any of their other philosophical contributions.”

Nena's concern with the representation of women philosophers as feminist philosophers has been noted also in textbook publishing and curricular content as some of the works presented by women philosophers are often disconnected or categorized in sections called “Other Voices,” and many have failed to make a distinction between being female and being a feminist and vice versa (Gomez, 2018). One issue with this type of separation and labeling is not only that it leaves marginalized voices out, and/or others them, but it also has negative consequences for mainstream students because it reinforces their false sense of superiority and epistemic power (Banks, 1989).

Despite the labeling issue, Nena's philosophical interests have to do with feminist philosophy and education. She uses her own personal experience of refusing to be pushed into STEM by her own parents to encourage little girls to pursue whatever they are interested in.

We need to educate kids, little girls mostly, to go into life and to think whatever they want to think about. Like what courses they want to take, instead of just pushing them into a single degree or a specific course because with me, my parents always wanted me to go into math and engineering, specifically because I was good at science and math. So, I took that into consideration for the most part of high school, but then when I thought for my own, I considered going into forensics or criminology and then accounting, which still has to do with math, but at least I know that studying philosophy now is my own choice as opposed to what my parents wanted from me.

Nena volunteers at a local organization made up of women for the empowerment of women, especially young girls. The organization is open to all women but most of them are Hispanic. They have workshops on education and pop-up shops that sell merchandise, and the money goes to scholarships to help girls graduate high school and go to college to pursue their own paths.

Nena knows that not all women, especially the ones on the U.S.-Mexico border, have that kind of educational opportunity. She conceives philosophy as a tool and expression of her own autonomy. Even though her mother has not pursued a formal education, Nena believes that “she can become anything she wants to later on in life.” Nena says that finding support has not been easy but that her mom “will be fine” as long as Nena graduates from college and accomplishes what Nena wants.

Burro, Julio, and Nena all share a similar experience of being born to teenage mothers. Anzaldúa argues that for women in Mexican American culture there used to be only three directions in their journeys. The first one was to turn to the church and become a nun. The second to the streets as a prostitute, and the third, to home to become a mother. However, Anzaldúa argues that there is now a fourth choice, which is to enter the world by way of education and a career and to become a self-autonomous person (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 39). Despite

the odds, Nena seems to have chosen the fourth path, and even though she is not comfortable calling herself a philosopher just yet, there is a lot of hope that she will.

I don't think I'm a philosopher yet. I will become a philosopher when I can have my own answers instead of relying on other philosophers. In class, I'm still learning right now. I'm reading Rawls and Nozick. I want my own answers and to figure out my own way of saying this is what I think instead of quoting Socrates or Aristotle. Philosophy is helping me with my own voice. I think I will one day get to the point where I finally say: this is what I think because I am a philosopher.”

Unfortunately, Nena still has many obstacles ahead once she graduates from community college. “I haven't thought about what is next. It's hard for me to go to college because I don't have financial aid. When I get to the next step I will consider where I will go next.”

4.6 PHILOSOPHY CLUB

Luckily, Nena can rely on her family and the local women's organization for support. Similarly, two of the three participants, Charro and Burro, mentioned the El Paso Community College Philosophy Club specifically in the pilot study, as a dynamic space that “fostered mentorship and encouragement”(Fieldnotes, February, 9, 2018) in their journeys to becoming philosophers. They claimed this club allowed them to learn philosophy and made them feel comfortable being themselves as Mexican American students of philosophy. They described it as a place with “people of different backgrounds finding new ways of doing philosophy.” In the development of this research, Charro and Burro were still part of the club and the identical overlap occurred when three participants also mentioned the same club as a special space where their ideas are welcome and where they felt safe. This means that six out of seven participants shared this intersection. As stated before, being part of the club was not a requirement to participate in this study, so it was very surprising to see this coincidence unfold and become part of the findings.

The club has been around for more than 10 years and has members who are current students of all majors, former students, faculty, and community constituents. Since it is located on the U.S.-Mexico border, between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, most of the members are Mexican Americans and bilingual in English and Spanish. There are no membership fees to join the club. It is recognized as an official club of El Paso Community College, which means it has a formal structure of an advisor, officers, and members. The only requirements to join are to have an interest in philosophy and to be respectful of others. There are about 20 to 30 active members each semester and many of the original members are still active. Despite the club being founded and led by a woman, me, just like with the rest of academic philosophy, there are more men than women, about 3 to 1 in the club, and the members' ages vary between 18 to 45 years old. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, club meetings were held bi-weekly on campus and at various local coffee shops and restaurants. During the peak of the pandemic, the meetings were virtual, and in 2022, the meetings and events slowly began to be held face-to-face.

The topics to be discussed at the meetings are chosen democratically. They range from immigration issues to the ethical implications of artificial intelligence. Members put their desired topics into a box and then they are randomly selected from there. Once the topic is chosen, the members are given time to prepare for the next meeting and the club advisors suggest readings or movies that relate to the topic. There are also a lot of social elements to the club, which means there are activities like museum visits, and trips to places like Athens, Greece, the birthplace of Western philosophy, New York City, and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico to attend philosophy conferences and to visit exhibits and shows that relate to philosophy. For instance, the club attended the Broadway show *Lion King* and visited the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2021 for activities and philosophical discussions related to aesthetics. There are also movie

nights, dinners, and celebrations of major holidays like Halloween and Christmas and member birthdays. It is important to note that the club has institutional commitment and support from the EPCC office of Student Leadership and Campus Life, which often provides funding and marketing for the philosophy club's activities. The club members also fundraise on their own with bake sales, and garage sales to support their travel-related activities.

The club also has significant community involvement by participating in philanthropic projects. In 2017, the club was recognized by the Success Through Technology Education Foundation (STTE) for demonstrating that philosophy can be a tool for students who care about their community to gather together in order to solve real-world problems. This award is usually granted in the STEM field, but the philanthropic contributions of the club caught the attention of this technology foundation. The foundation recognized the club's effort to donate over 100 brand new blankets to families in Juarez during the winter for several years and for volunteering and donating items to homeless and migrant shelters on both sides of the border. In 2020, the club was named Community Champions by the El Paso Community Foundation for sewing more than 2,500 reusable face masks for migrant and homeless members of the community and distributing them on both sides of the border. They also collected over 800 toys for Indigenous children in Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, Mexico and remodeled the playground of the local shelter for women and children. The club has received national and international recognition for various other awards and media articles for its community impact. Perhaps one of the most important acknowledgments has come from the American Philosophical Association blog, which featured the club for its unique pragmatic approach of combining philosophy and action (Gomez, 2020).

Charro

During the pilot study, Charro had recently discovered the club, which is advertised on social media and through campus flyers, designed by students, and he claimed it was exactly what he was looking for, “a place of solidarity, comfort, and growth” and that being a part of it made him feel “more confident.”

The club is full of powerful people, and I mean powerful because they are people who are not afraid to have a voice, we all have a voice, but they just let it out. Seeing a lot of older women and men, I know they’re from Hispanic backgrounds. One of my teachers grew up in Mexico and now she’s teaching philosophy and she’s very inspiring. I feel comfortable because I am from a Hispanic background and grew up here at the border also, so, I just feel that I’m not alone.

Just like Nena, Charro also associates philosophy with the use of his voice. During the continuation of this research, Charro was still a club member. He has been a part of the club for several years, and he served as the club president for over a year. Even after graduating from community college with his philosophy degree, he said that he feels “free” when he is in the club because he is not concerned about his language use.

I just feel more comfortable raising specific questions and not being so careful with the way in which I speak. I feel free because I feel that sometimes, especially in the field of philosophy, one word can kill me. I have to be very careful with what I say and how I say it. It is amusing to go to the philosophy club meetings because everybody just speaks their thoughts.

Jaziz

Jaziz did not mention the philosophy club in the pilot study, even though he is a founding member. However, in this current dissertation research, he credited it as being a place for “inspiration” and a “space for dialogue and critical thinking with a local praxis.” Jaziz recognized the club as one of the main sources of support and inspiration in his academic journey.

The philosophy club at EPCC allowed me to meet other people with the same interests and provided a space to philosophize and talk about our current issues and local issues and seeing

many people like me, whom many identified as the way I identify. That allowed me to continue with the study of philosophy.

Jaziz still considers himself part of the club and even though he has also graduated from community college, he attends meetings and events and follows the club's social media to keep up with news. He has also met and developed friendships with some of the new members.

Burro

Burro has been part of the club for several years and has seen it grow. He said he had been part of other philosophy clubs that were "very institutionalized and exclusive" and that meant the environment was intimidating and made it difficult to feel like he "fit in."

The EPCC Philosophy Club was very open, you had a lot of people with different backgrounds and studying different subjects who would go and were able to philosophize without any hardcore requirements such as reading an entire book before the next meeting for discussion.

Burro described the club "as full of minorities" with whom he identifies with and as a "more comfortable environment" than other clubs. He claimed, "there are amazing people in it and I'm happy to have met them." He stated that the best part is to "go get dinner or coffee after the meetings and interact with the members." Ultimately, for Burro "being part of the club has made the whole pursuit of philosophy less fearful."

I was able to find a space to learn more about philosophy, philosophize, and meet friends. This was a welcoming space that allowed for philosophical and intellectual dialogue without the elitist and racist validations of professors. It made my whole college experience better.

Another factor that has made Burro's journey easier is that he claimed the teachers and mentors at community college were "more caring." Specifically, the mentors of the philosophy club.

Holden

Holden began attending the club meetings for extra credit because his ethics class was hard, and he needed the extra points. He claimed that after an hour he “was hooked” and he is grateful for the mentorship and “amazing support.” He described the experience of being the club president for two years and vice president for one year as “very challenging” because he was in charge of “very ambitious projects.”

The club has given me guidance with my personal life and interpreting what life means. You realize that philosophy transcends so many fields. Being in the club is not just reading philosophy, it’s doing philosophy, like traveling to New York to see how the Lion King and MOMA relate to aesthetics and race relations, and it means being very involved with fundraising and donations.

While Holden was president, the club fundraised over \$10,000 dollars for philanthropic efforts to help migrants on both sides of the border and Indigenous children.

Julio

Julio is also a club member. He considers himself a new member after discovering the club during the pandemic and experiencing the virtual to face-to-face transition. In his testimonio, he described the club as “a unified family and their mission is to bring forward positivity and philosophy into action within their community by utilizing proper ethics and logic.”

Nena

Nena is not a member of the club because she has not attended any meetings nor has met any members. However, in her testimonio, she mentioned being aware of some of the work that the club has been doing and “being inspired by it.”

I found out about some of the projects with the EPCC Philosophy Club and then learned about other philosophers that were women, and that's when it started enlightening me more about how there can be more female philosophers.

Nena credited the club for showing her some representation of not just women in philosophy, but “Mexican American women in philosophy.” Graffiti did not mention the club in his testimonio, but he participated in some of the observations as he attended some of the club meetings during this research. The other participants repeatedly referred to the importance of role models and representation in terms of there being minoritized faculty and students who are a part of the club. Charro, Jaziz, and Burro claimed that seeing themselves reflected in other people, made them feel comfortable. The club allows them to feel identified with others who are also minoritized, but who are in positions of power within academic philosophy. This made them feel like they have a philosophical voice that matters. We can also witness that despite the instances of discrimination they have encountered in their lived experiences, they have found this club to be an alternative space to feel secure, philosophize, create meaningful dialogue, and improve their border community through specific philanthropic projects.

We can see that the participants’ identities are shaped beyond the impact of being and becoming in the U.S.-Mexico border. Their identities are also shaped by their lived experiences of suffering and their aspirations to ameliorate their conditions. As participants with Mexican and American roots, their encounters with racism and sexism have formed who they are, and informed who they will become amidst their fears, expectations, and resilience. In understanding the process of becoming, the role of voice is crucial. We are able to witness how for the participants, philosophy has elevated their voices and given them the confidence to express themselves and their desires as a significant part of their identities. Despite the many challenges in their journeys, philosophy has served as an empowering and transformative tool. For instance, Charro claimed that he wants his voice “to be harsh” because only a voice “that is torn” can understand humanity. In this sense, he is acknowledging his pain and the power of empathy that

comes with it. On the other hand, Graffiti recognized multiple voices when he claims that philosophy is slowly helping him overcome the voice that tells him “he’s stupid” and he cannot write well and he prefers to listen to the other voice that tells him that he can. Similarly, Nena stated that she did not want to only quote philosophers, she wanted to have her own ideas and that philosophy was helping her with her own voice.

The EPCC Philosophy Club, particularly, is an ideal site for participants to construct and deconstruct their beliefs about themselves, their voices, and their figured worlds and imagine better versions of who they could be. This club is a space of becoming because members are free to engage with different ideas and possibilities without the risk of feeling constrained. As Charro stated, “The club is full of powerful people, and I mean powerful because they are people who are not afraid to have a voice, we all have a voice, but they just let it out.”

The club makes it possible to understand how institutional culture plays a part in the fabric of a student’s identity, in and outside of the classroom. Participants’ testimonios draw attention to the challenges, transitions, and applications of their academic, community, and future selves. Club member reflections also highlighted the supportive nature and tutelage of the philosophy club, citing the sincere passion of instructors as a guiding and driving force in their becoming philosophers. The club reflects a caring and mentoring pedagogy that is created, taught, and lived by committed border educators.

4.7 THE SPIDERMAN MEME COMES TO LIFE

Charro claimed that he chose to become a philosopher because of the impact of the EPCC Philosophy Club. For him, this has been a space for philosophical reflections and community building. "I cannot think of other spaces like this in El Paso. Institutions can regulate and influence people, like in a classroom, but to me, that's not the same as being outside the

classroom and intentionally wanting to be there, surrounded by philosophy and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable like in the club" he said. (All the quotes in this section are from my field notes.)

Because Charro and other participants mentioned the club repeatedly in their written and oral testimonios, and the same was true in the pilot study, it was vital for me to add observations to the continuation of this research. I observed the club over a period of six months in activities related to philosophy. Adding observations is something I debated because I created this club over a decade ago and have been the main advisor ever since. I was aware that one disadvantage was that it would be challenging for me to be a participant observer when the expectation is for me to constantly lead and actively supervise and engage in the club's interactions. However, an advantage was that as opposed to being an outsider, I would be able to observe participants and the authentic phenomena of their exchanges in their most natural settings. Therefore, I was diligent in reflecting continually on my own bias during data collection and made sure the participants remained relatively unaffected by my presence in my capacity as a researcher by carrying on with the club's interactions as usual. I made sure to explain that there would/should be no difference in the research period in comparison to any other time the club got together. My presence as a researcher was not obvious since I participated in the club's exchanges as I normally do in my capacity as advisor. I was very sure to check in with the comfort of the participants I observed and with the members that were aware of the research as to not to disrupt their trust and their feeling safe within the club.

All the participants gave consent to being observed within various club activities like Charro said, "outside the classroom" which tend to be "the most fun and interactive" and they were given the choice to meet the other participants of the study. The participants observed

included Charro, Burro, Holden, Graffiti, and Julio. Charro said “he was eager to be involved.” Jaziz and Nena mentioned the club in their testimonios but did not participate in the observations. They all knew that other participants were philosophy students from the U.S.-Mexico border but did not know much more beyond that. I first told Charro about the observations and the possibility of meeting some of the participants, and he immediately said “when you observe us and we meet, it’s going to be like the Spiderman meme come to life. The one where the three of them encounter each other to find that they are a reflection of themselves.” He said it would be “exciting to meet someone like him.”

As I explored the social interactions among philosophy club members, I noticed that the participants continuously talked about the challenges of their bilingualism. This led me to observe their language use in the space of the philosophy club, and to try to understand the role of language use in relation to the participants’ philosophical development. My observations were meant to examine the participants’ interactions with each other and to explore how these might reveal insights into their journeys of becoming philosophers. I observed and documented their exchanges, philosophical discussions, comments, and actions, both individually and collectively within a student award banquet, a museum lecture, an art exhibit, and a Christmas party.

During a student banquet sponsored by the EPCC Student Government Association, the participants present were Charro, Burro, Holden, and Julio. Their being dressed up in suits and ties for this special occasion was unusual, as they dress casually in jeans and T-shirts for the philosophy club meetings. These four club members attended the event because their club was recognized by the institution for being one of the most active in extracurricular projects out of all 42 campus clubs.

The philosophy club engaged in community service with veterans and people experiencing homelessness. They gathered more canned food and toiletry items than any other group for the campus community pantry. I asked the participants to meet with me in the lobby of the hotel ballroom to introduce themselves to each other before the ceremony. It was not really an introduction, but more like a revelation, because up until this point, they had all known each other from previous club meetings, but none of them knew they were also participants of this research project. They had all consented to meet the other participants, and when they were together, Charro told them how the encounter was like the Spiderman meme (See Figure 2), and they all started laughing. When asked to explain the meme Charro said, “in this situation, you introduced us to a mirror-like effect where we can recognize ourselves and our positions with others in a similar journey. This is helpful because it makes us realize we are not alone. It's about solidarity and sticking together.” Julio’s previous comment about the club being “like a family” immediately came to my mind, because he started calling the other members, *brothers*. “*Hey, brother*” to each one. Charro added, “I was late because I have been working 60 hours a week and no one complained. On the contrary, I felt welcome.”



Figure 2. *Spiderman meme [Digital image]. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/tom-holland-andrew-garfield-and-tobey-maguire-recreate-spider-man-pointing-meme>*

Julio added, “I had not met some of the club members in person, I had only seen them virtually or seen them on campus.” After Charro laughed and mimicked the Spiderman poses, they kept joking about the meme, and then the participants joined the banquet ceremony upstairs.

The awards are given annually and the EPCC Philosophy Club has been recognized for several years in a row for being the best club, having the best advisor, best co-advisor and winning multiple fundraising contests. While waiting for the ceremony to begin, Holden joked, “We know everyone hates us because we always win. We always set the bar and people look at us, as we are the ones that get it done.” Other members laughed and agreed. During the ceremony, 12 philosophy club members were present, and they all sat together in the same table. There were more than 150 students, faculty and staff present in the event, and it is organized so that there are no acceptance speeches. The clubs simply receive their trophies and certificates and continue the celebration. The ceremony lasted for an hour and was followed by dinner and dancing that lasted for another two hours.

With music that ranged from pop to electronic music, the musical selections prompted a conversation between Holden and Julio, Holden asked Julio what it was like to be a DJ, and Julio responded, “It’s awesome because music brings people together.” Holden replied, “I am amazed at how you once said that you can listen to music and see the colors in music.” Julio added, “it’s very similar to this when you compare it to being in a rave, nobody’s forcing you to be here, but we are here for the same reason, hoping to find something bigger than ourselves.”

Since it was the first face-to-face event since the peak of the pandemic, it was a great opportunity for the members to socialize by taking photos with each other in the lobby, away

from the loud music. They talked about how they had survived their quarantine experiences and showed each other photos of their pets and different TV shows they had been watching on their phones. I asked Charro why it was so important to constantly take photos while being in the club and his answer surprised me. He said:

Whenever I think of pictures I remember when I visited you during office hours several years ago, and you showed me your tenure binder and the value of documenting everything. Documenting our achievements makes people remember what we do, and it encourages us to do more and validates our work. There are parasites that discredit what we do, but this is our evidence. We can self-affirm. We don't need others to validate us, but honestly, taking pictures is fun. It makes you feel nostalgic and good. It generates a sense of meaning personally and professionally.

As the club members were still talking to each other in the lobby, I witnessed their conversations about the challenges they were experiencing in terms of finding jobs. Burro told Julio about some different positions he knew about on campus. Burro also explained, “There are a lot of work-study jobs. And don’t forget to check the club chat. Someone is always sharing job postings.” Additionally, Charro and Burro talked about what classes to take at the university level and which to avoid, based on what they knew about the professors. Burro told Charro, “Just be careful with the professors who consider themselves the authority, especially the white professors who are teaching about the border and who are not even from here.” Burro was referring to the racist experiences he has had in his own academic journey and the delegitimization of his work that he has endured. Towards the end of the event, while members were getting ready to leave, Holden added, “I can’t believe that despite the distance of the pandemic, we have this strength and unity. And I am super happy because distance didn’t matter, we always stuck together. We all click with each other. It’s incredible chemistry.”

Weeks later, the club members attended an art exhibit titled, *Mexico Crisis and Uprising* in conjunction with a philosophy lecture at a local museum. They met a renowned Mexican

American philosopher, Dr. Carlos Sanchez, who was invited from out of town to talk about the importance of philosophy everywhere and for everyone. I was part of the panel of Mexican American philosophers, which also included Dr. Noell Birondo from the University of Texas at El Paso, and the talk was aligned with an art exhibit about Mexican culture and the challenges of violence in Mexico. The art installation was designed to teach us to recognize each other despite the physical and metaphysical walls. It was meant to be an artistic bridge that unites two societies, referring to the United States and Mexico. The exhibit featured the work of 32 artist from the Asociación Plástica de Monterrey, Asociación de la Plástica de Garza García, and independent artists from Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico. The philosophical discussion was inside the main exhibit hall and the audience of about 60 attendees in a space where we were surrounded by the 32 paintings depicting Mexican culture.

There were nine club members present, among them Charro, Burro, and Holden. After the remarks from Dr. Carlos Sanchez on the importance of philosophizing outside of the classroom and in relation to Mexican culture and identity, Charro, who was in the audience, felt confident enough to step up to the microphone and ask a question about the nature of Mexican American philosophy. Dr. Carlos Sanchez replied that in the past, he has been accused of “putting huaraches on Aristotle.” Huaraches are sandals originally worn by Indigenous Mexicans, and he was referring to what Mexican Americans are doing with philosophy, arguing that the key was to keep doing just that, adapting philosophy to make it accessible and relatable to all. He made it clear that even something that was meant as an insult in reference to our culture (e.g., huaraches) it, could be seen as a source of pride. After the talk and the question-and-answer session, Holden told me, “I relate to Carlos Sanchez being from Michoacan and talking about being a migrant. He shared how his family had to save money to come to the U.S.

and how learning English was difficult just like it has been for me.” Then, as people started moving throughout the exhibit, Burro told Charro, “Hey this is your chance to meet a big-time philosopher who is just like us.” Charro walked over to Dr. Carlos Sanchez, introduced himself and spent about 20 minutes talking to him about phenomenology. Charro asked him to autograph one of his books and called himself a “fan of his work.” They also took a photo together. Charro later shared:

Just meeting him was a way to give a face and an experience to a piece of work that I admire, his analysis and translation of Jorge Portilla’s *Fenomenologia del Relajo*. It’s not common for me to interact with the people whose work I find meaningful. It was an experience that made me value that he is another human being, and he is grounded.

After the talk, everyone toured the exhibit and reflected on each of the art pieces. The museum provided Mexican food to accompany the exhibit, including tacos, tostadas, and aguas frescas. The club members all sat together to eat on a bench outside the museum as they discussed the art, all the while, taking pictures with each other. There was also a lot of laughter and joking around when trying to take selfies. A member said jokingly, “it’s always the same person closing their eyes.” They had an ongoing joke about a member who consistently closes his eyes in most of the photos, even when he was laughing and agreeing that they needed to take another one. Holden took more time by himself in reflecting on the art inside the museum. He was particularly struck by one painting (Figure 3), and he noted a significant discovery he had made. He shared:

There was this painting that shocked me because it was a grandma with tattoos, which is not something we see in our culture. She looked so peaceful, even if the black crows are associated with something bad. They were on her, and it made me realize that I should be comfortable where I am not comfortable. I’m told this is not your language, this not your country, but you need to be peaceful even if the world is upon you. You have to keep moving forward because you are doing things no one else is doing. Like us, pushing the boundaries with philosophy. It’s like I’m getting that same tattoo by being in the first one in my family, it’s a metaphorical tattoo. I’m going to be the doctor and the one with the philosophy degree. It’s like it all came full circle.



Figure 3. Aves de la crisis [Digital image]. (2021). Retrieved from <http://crisisanduprising.com/mendozaperla>

After Holden shared this powerful epiphany, the event came to an end, with a Mariachi music performance. Holden said, “Mariachis are always amazing,” and he joined the club members outside. The members made plans to attend a traveling art exhibit with reproductions of the work of Michelangelo, just for fun, and to talk about how it related to philosophy.

Sometime after, Burro and Holden along with four other club members met for lunch at a local restaurant before they attended the Michelangelo exhibit next door. The art installation was marketed as an opportunity to explore the Sistine Chapel without having to travel to Italy, with giant replicas of the original pieces. The club members had made an open invitation through their mailing and texting lists, comprised of philosophy majors and students interested in philosophy, and on the club’s social media accounts. Graffiti, who is friends with some of the club members and on the mailing list found out about the gathering and showed up. Even though Graffiti had not mentioned the philosophy club during his testimonios, he attended this meeting, and he knew

some of the members, because they had been classmates in some of his philosophy courses. Like Burro, he immediately expressed disappointment in having been part of other philosophy clubs that “didn’t have a clear purpose and were only focused on institutional things like fundraising without really connecting with each other.” After a quick lunch, the club members explored the exhibit and discussed the feminist and antiracist implications of the images, particularly of The Creation of Adam, (Figure 4) which was the very first image near the entrance and one of the biggest replicas. “It’s cool how God is hugging a woman of color,” Graffiti said. I asked how he had come to that interpretation, and he responded, “because when you see it without any prior context, you don’t know that it is a white person or an angel, so we rely on what we have been told. But, in a historically context, it might be possible. Michelangelo was a revolutionary, so it would make sense for him to paint a woman of color.” Two other club members who had also overheard the conversation decided to recreate the scene on their own and joked about how “maybe we got it wrong, and all this time, all the ones on God’s side are better than the single white man that God is supposedly touching and creating.”



Figure 4. The Creation of Adam [Digital image] (own photo). (2023).

Graffiti added while laughing, “it is possible that he was trolling us” meaning that Michelangelo was intentionally hiding these radical images and meanings in plain sight for them to be interpreted wildly differently than how they have traditionally been presented. Graffiti moved on to the next pieces and said that the amount of artwork produced by Michelangelo was impressive. “ I am realizing that a lot of the true meanings are beyond religious. There are many layers, and it is overwhelming to see the depth because the religious interpretations had blinded me from seeing these paintings differently.”

Holden and Burro walked together and also talked about the different dimensions of meaning of each of the works, they were particularly interested in the hand placement of the men and women, and they discussed whether hands could convey messages. Holden did not answer the question but said,

All of Michelangelo’s work is a project of determination. He broke so many rules and I relate to that. He took the information that people gave him about the Bible and made it his own interpretation. I think that’s our job, to make things our own.

Burro told Holden, “It’s all very subjective and this is about understanding philosophy of religion and the story we are being told about Christianity.” Graffiti added to their conversation, “I noticed that in some of the images, women were painted higher and more elevated in stature than men. For his time, that was unusual and revolutionary.” Agreeing with Holden and circling back on the issue of gender and the representation of men and women, Graffiti then included some of his background and experience in TV and film. He continued:

When you want to portray dominance or intimidation, you visually frame a person taller, and in his paintings, women are elevated. It is important to see women higher than men. The framing implies he did it on purpose. I assume he was honoring his mother and he wanted to give it some hidden meaning.

I asked Graffiti if he thought Michelangelo was a feminist and he replied, “Not necessarily a feminist, but as an artist, he was radical.” The gathering ended with final thoughts from all present about how the exhibit was philosophical. Holden shared that he had the privilege of seeing the original images in Italy, but that taking the time to deconstruct and discuss them with the members was a “way better experience.”

For the last observation at the same local restaurant where they had met before, the club members celebrated the end of the semester with a Christmas party. Those present were Charro, Burro, Holden, Graffiti, and Julio along with seven other philosophy club members, who all sat together at a long table. They all wore “ugly Christmas sweaters” and showed up with wrapped gifts to exchange for the white elephant activity. Holden shared, “I love the ugly sweaters. No one wants to be made fun of except here. We are fighting to be the ugliest and the funniest and we are competing to be the worst one and it’s so gratifying to win.” Charro won with an old sweater he had thrifted and a vest with reindeers and candy canes. Winning was based on who received the loudest cheers and claps. Holden exclaimed, “I wanted to win!” His was a sweater with Mike Tyson on it that he had found last-minute. He said, “It doesn’t get uglier than this.”

The first collective conversation was a continuation of something the club had been planning for several weeks, their community engagement through service. Some of the discussed efforts that included giving Christmas gifts and blankets to migrant children at some of the local shelters. Julio was proactive and he arrived at the party with two brand new blankets. Everyone agreed to continue the collection and to inform their friends and family in both Juárez and El Paso. This is a tradition the club has been doing for several years. Charro said:

We have so many traditions. Some of our traditions are being involved with the community in multiple ways and in all the meetings there is the intention to be comfortable and have fun. There is always humor and food and that helps us generate trust. Snacks and pizza must always be

present at the meetings! But these end-of-the-year gatherings are a reaffirmation of our recognition that's why we get certificates and candy.

All the club members ordered their own food, a variety of dishes ranging from pasta to sandwiches, and as they waited for it to come out, Charro shared that he had finally had the opportunity to watch the film *Napoleon Dynamite*, a 2004 movie about an awkward teenager who becomes friends with a Mexican teen from Juárez, named Pedro. Although Pedro barely speaks English, he runs for class president and wins, despite all odds. The two main characters, Napoleon and Pedro, are presented as outcasts who do not fit in to the social world of their high school, but their personalities and the complexities of their personal lives make them fascinating and ultimately, endearing. Charro said with a smile on his face that, "the movie was funny," and that "if we wanted to, we could analyze the film philosophically." He then asked the club members, "was Napoleon a nerd or was he cool? And what about Pedro?" Graffiti stopped to think and then responded by saying that it would be interesting to analyze the film through the lens of "today's younger generations." He noted that this film from almost 20 years ago "may end up being canceled, for their portrayal of Pedro, the kid from Juárez." Burro immediately jumped in and said, "Yeah it can come off as racist," but he agreed with Charro, noting that "the movie is funny." Charro then with a more serious tone asked, "Is it racist if it's true?" No one answered. Charro then explained that Pedro's accent is an accent many people have and that "we do like to celebrate with piñatas." The club members reflected on the question for a few seconds while looking at each other. Then, Julio said, "So, are we also going to talk about Lord of the Rings?" He said it as joke, and the club members laughed. Then another club member brought the conversation back to the topic of racism, noting, "then what about Cheech and Chong and their song, "Mexican Americans"? They were referring to a song in *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie*, a 1980 American comedy film that is, like all of their work, about themselves, as the

dynamic underdog duo, Cheech and Chong. In this film, the duo, who have money problems, decide to pursue music with an improvised band. They start writing songs like, "Mexican Americans" and "Beaners." One of the lyrics in the Mexican Americans song says: "Mexican Americans love education, so they go to night school, and they take Spanish and get a B."

This can be seen as a sarcastic criticism of the fact that many Mexican Americans receive bad grades in Spanish for not knowing "proper" or standard Spanish. Instead because of being bilingual, being and living between two languages, it could be argued that the same is true of their struggle with "proper" or standard English, as well. The film is considered controversial by some who deem it offensive and see it as perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Movie critics, mostly white men, generally gave it bad reviews, (Mills, 1991) but as I witnessed in this observation, it is still being talked about by Mexican Americans 40 years later.

In response to the question of whether the song was racist, Burro replied, "That's not racist because Cheech is Mexican American and that's his lived experience, what matters is who is writing about our representation. Did the writers of *Napoleon* consult with Mexican people?" Burro defended the comedic component of the Cheech and Chong film because it was "written by a Mexican American." Charro added, there is this line in Cheech's song about "Mexican Americans are named *Chata* and *Chela* and *Chema* and that's true, and there's also *chula*, *Chihuahua* y *chale*." Julio and Holden were laughing and nodding throughout this interaction and started making the "ch" sound, which people in Chihuahua are known for overpronouncing. The "ch" sound, may be viewed as one of the most characteristic sounds of contemporary Mexican Spanish, especially in Northern Mexico (Nappo, 2012).

I perceived an interesting similarity in both of the films they had discussed. In both films, the main characters were duos: Napoleon and Pedro and Cheech and Chong. Both duos were

unlikely heroes who ended up succeeding, against all odds, in part because they celebrated the authenticity of being different. They created their own ways of remaining who they are and resisted the pressure to assimilate to the norm. After the film discussion, the club members then finished eating, and exchanged the white elephant gifts. The white elephant gifts included some fish sandals, a gift card to Starbucks, and the most coveted one of all, that was stolen four times: Barry Loewer's book, *30-Second Philosophies: The 50 most thought-provoking philosophies, each explained in half a minute* (2010).

A remarkable phenomenon that I witnessed throughout all the observations was the hybridity of language use among the club members. All of them were comfortable speaking in English, Spanish, and Spanglish. At my final observation, a recurring joke came up about how to pronounce Plato, the philosopher's name in English. I asked Holden to explain it, he said that a club member had originally pronounced it like *plate* in Spanish, *plato*, and Holden said they had to correct him, "*no como plato, como pleito*, not like a plate, like a fight, as *pleito* means fight in Spanish. Everyone laughed. Plato is translated to Platón in Spanish. Holden then said to me, "Do you remember the lotería?" Holden had remembered another exchange that happened at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic when the club met virtually through Zoom to play lotería. Holden recalled that people took turns reading out the lotería cards, and one of the club members read out what sounded like "*la perra*" (i.e., female dog, in English), everyone was confused because that did not sound familiar nor did they have it on their picture boards, so then they asked to see the card. When the club member that read it held it up on the camera, Holden started laughing uncontrollably to the point of tears when he realized, "it was a pear fruit, not a female dog." The card said "*la pera*" which means the pear, but the "r" had been mispronounced to double "rr".

Holden remembers this “as hilarious” and recognized that this type of exchange would only make sense or be funny in a bilingual setting.

Overall, I observed a relaxed and welcoming environment in the philosophy club, full of fun, support, and unexpected philosophical dimensions. In Charro’s words, “the best thing about the club is the solidarity and the growth that comes with it.” Or as Julio put it, “in the club, we see the world differently. We see what it could be, meaning that we realize there is more to this life when sharing our experiences.” Since Graffiti did not mention the club in his testimonio, but participated in the observations, I gave him the opportunity to describe the club. He responded:

It’s an official club obviously, but I would describe it as a group of friends. You come from a pragmatic school, so this is a pragmatic space, and we learn how to take action on important issues. The club gives you insight on how to look at the world and its problems while trying to make people’s lives better.

Ortega (2016) claims that for minoritized people, traditional academic spaces may lead to distress and invisibility and that there is a need for alternative spaces that share a commitment to pedagogy and mentoring that allow for direct engagement with others. Spaces like the philosophy club allow members to resist dominant academic norms, which can often be places where competition, distrust, and arrogance reign, especially in philosophy and academia.

In their written and oral testimonios, the participants expressed a sense of personal and academic improvement when juxtaposing their past, present, and future selves in relation to the club mentorship, events, and shared moments. Moreover, club gatherings transmuted and transmitted a hybrid space of membership and knowledge, enabling club members the internalization and interpretation of experiential growth as an extension of their multiple worlds, including their border academic and community selves. Club members credited their academic

resilience and personal growth to the “caring, consistent, and thoughtful mentoring, and leadership” of other club members and instructors.

4.8 ROLE OF LANGUAGE: *DICHOS* Y TRANZAS CON EL IDIOMA

In the pilot study, even though all three participants, Charro, Jaziz, and Burro reported being bilingual in English and Spanish, they also shared the struggle to identify with European philosophers and philosophy in English. According to Moore (1999), the key practitioners of philosophy have been prominently and most notably native-English speakers. This limiting ideology that centers mostly on European philosophy has led to the othering of philosophies like Latin American philosophy and Mexican American philosophy that are often seen as inferior and devalued in importance to others and in often cases produced in Spanish. The truth is that many of us with Mexican roots have been exposed to everyday wisdom in Spanish with a deep philosophical value, but it has been seen as epistemically subordinate.

According to Anzaldúa, if “you nudge a Mexican she or he will break out with a story or a *cuento*” as she calls them (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 87). *Dichos* are a shorter *cuento*. They are a type of traditional saying commonly used in the Spanish-speaking world, particularly in Mexico. *Dichos* are used to communicate everyday wisdom, cultural values, and advice, and are often passed down from generation to generation by parents and mostly women. Recognizing that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate and is essential to understanding their marginalization, Critical Race Theory allows us to draw from the lived experiences of the participants by including the methods of testimonios, family stories, *cuentos*, and *dichos* (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1989). Therefore, exploring the role of language and the participants’ use of *dichos* as a way of connecting their cultures to philosophy is crucial in the participants’ journeys to becoming philosophers.

The pilot participants easily identified with Mexican philosophy as opposed to canonical academic philosophy, which mostly represents white European thought. When given the opportunity to freely choose a *dicho*, or a saying in Spanish that they liked or had grown up with that could be seen as philosophical, they selected *dichos* that resonated with their lived experiences and allowed them to apply these as philosophical guides for pragmatic solutions to their own lives. In the pilot study, I discovered an ethical dimension and a pattern of good versus bad embedded in all of the *dichos* the participants selected on their own. They all hinted at an alternative ethic of in-betweenness that reveals an element of transformation from bad to good. In the pilot study, Charro selected the *dicho*, “*el que no tranza no avanza*,” Jaziz selected, “*árbol que nace torcido su tronco jamás endurecerá*,” and Burro, “*el jale Chicano*.” The pattern of moral rectification and ethical implications about deviance also arose when the seven dissertation study participants were also given the opportunity to share a *dicho* or Mexican philosophy saying during their testimonios. They all chose the *dichos* they had memorized and remembered from their upbringing in Mexican American culture.

Zuñiga (1992) claims that *dichos* in the Spanish language often use metaphors as a method of resistance to oppression. Metaphors, in this view, are a way of reframing inner beliefs and values towards the end of imparting meaning to the world (p.57). Additionally, Rivera (2010) characterizes *dichos* as a method of transmitting cultural scripts, which ascribe certain behaviors as appropriate or inappropriate and as playing a role in acquiring moral agency. Ballesteros (1979) agrees as he provides an anthology of Mexican *dichos* or proverbs collected from South Texas and Northern Mexico with interviews with 55 people. Ballesteros asserts that some *dichos* have philosophical content and defines them as a “brief statement of a general truth that is meant to advise, amuse, or convince someone of something” (1979, p. 4). Further, he

classifies them into five categories. The first and most significant one, is philosophical *dichos*. Then he categorizes them into proverbs that give advice, those that are humorous, religious, and those that are about animals. Ballesteros (1979) claims that the proverbs and maxims are held to be authoritative opinions and are a representation of Mexican Americans and their culture.

More recently, Sánchez et al. (2010) claim that *dichos* are a culturally and linguistically appropriate tool to encourage family and student participation in school (p.242). The authors reason that *dichos* play this role because they are part of the students' funds of knowledge (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). Funds of knowledge are historically and culturally accumulated and are essential for household functioning and well-being. Furthermore, *dichos* can resist oppression and realize educational goals. They are embedded in family discourse and create pathways of learning and allow for access not only to funds of knowledge but also to the co-construction of knowledge (Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2006). Galindo and Medina (2009) claim that *dichos* have been used by Mexican parents to translate and apply inter-generational values to contemporary problems. Ballesteros (1979) reminds us that when a Mexican or Mexican American hears them, they can provoke a nostalgia that transports them to a picture of themselves in their great-grandmother's kitchen. Charro learned *dichos* very similarly to Ballesteros's depiction.

Charro

Charro claimed that his 97-year-old grandmother is like a philosopher because she has constantly shared everyday wisdom with him, including teaching him *dichos*. During the pilot study, Charro talked about the *dicho*, “*el que no tranza no avanza*” as one of the *dichos* she had taught him and as the one he mostly identifies with in his philosophical journey. In my

dissertation research, when I worked with Charro again, I asked which *dicho* was still the one most present to him. He selected the same one.

I think that the whole notion of “*el que no tranza no avanza*” is a practical form of being in the world because it is closest to home, so to speak. If we have already found ourselves in a society whose main subjects of power or authorities break the very laws that they reinforce, and by doing so, they end up regulating or oppressing other individuals, sometimes, they are just creating inequalities within the social space, very explicit identifiable inequalities that encourage everyone to just do what they can in order to break from these inequalities to liberate themselves. Especially, if they are at the lowest hierarchy since sometimes these breakings of law could be the most honest ways of living, just because sometimes we can take certain laws or standards or values too seriously, then we don't really realize that life is just very complex. It's not black and white, and therefore *tranzando* is just a very honest or grounded way of being. Mi abuelita me lo enseñó.

For Charro, *tranzar*, is a way of living that does not necessarily mean breaking the law. For him, it is a mentality that is the equivalent of finding a way to survive and having to figure out different arrangements for things to work, but whether it is with language or his life in general, philosophy has given Charro a feeling “of being at home in the in-between.”

Charro claimed that because he grew up on the border only knowing Spanish, and struggling with learning English, he experienced certain detachments. In the sense that, sometimes, he could not communicate effectively with certain groups of people because his “English was not so well.” He is aware of his accent and shared he speaks a “shocked English”, which is how he described how he feels, the shock of being put on the spot and having to come up with English words suddenly. Nonetheless, reading philosophy in both English and Spanish has allowed him to express himself better in both languages.

It is a bit of an insecurity of mine and perhaps this could be very common when expressing my thoughts, my emotions, and my ideas. Growing up has been very difficult because I have been trying to learn two languages at the same time and not just like differently but sometimes together.

Charro expressed that he is finally aware of what “assimilation” is and that trying to fit in is a “form of oppression to himself.” He compared switching from Spanish to English as “just another way of crossing borders” something he is already used to.

Jaziz

The biggest challenge for Jaziz in his journey of becoming a philosopher has been language, because he began learning English as an adult. However, he feels comfortable mixing English and Spanish and stated that he speaks “a lenguaje de la frontera” a border language that is unique to the U.S.-Mexico border, similar to what Anzaldúa refers to as “speaking Tex-Mex” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78). He claimed that for him lenguaje de la frontera is, “a local language full of color, individually and collectively employed.” He is also proud to incorporate this linguistic hybridity into his philosophical music. He shared a lyric that exemplifies this.

“Llegó el tiempo de la siega, estoy listo para entrar a la liga, estoy mas que en forma para esto, I’m ready to pull the trigger.” Pero se pronuncia triggga. El tiempo de la ciega es el punto exacto donde recojes frutos que ya sembraste. La liga es la cultura de rap y la analogía con los deportes.

The lyric roughly translates to “it’s picking season and I’m ready to enter the league, I’m more than in shape and ready to pull the trigger. Jaziz claimed that life is about picking the fruits of your labor and that the term “league” he refers to is analogous to both rap culture and sports. He sees himself as ready to encounter new challenges and at the peak of his life.

During the pilot study, Jaziz selected the *dicho*, “*árbol que nace torcido su tronco jamás endurecerá.*” Coincidentally, Ballesteros (1979) includes this specific example as a philosophical *dicho* in his anthology, and translates it as “a tree that grows crooked never can straighten its limb.” (1979, p.1) Jaziz noted that this *dicho* is philosophical to him because it forces us to question human nature and whether “gender, upbringing, and social structures really determine us or whether “nos podemos levantar,” we can rise above and straighten our paths.

When given the opportunity to select another *dicho* for this dissertation this study, Jaziz selected, “*tropecé de nuevo y con la misma piedra.*” He said that this is representative of life and the journey of becoming a philosopher, “*el camino de la vida y el de ser un filósofo, no es lineal, te tropiezas.*” The *dicho* means you stumble again with the same rock. He claimed that the road of life and of being a philosopher is “not linear and is full of stumbling.” For him, the biggest stumble was the death of his father and having to move on with school despite his pain.

Burro

Burro noted that the role of language is very important in forming a philosopher or a philosophy. “Language is part of one’s identity and here on the border, I use two or even three languages. These languages are English, Spanish, and Spanglish. Here, there is another type of colloquial language. The role of language in my experience is key to understanding two identities, Mexican and American.”

Spanglish is a hybrid form of communication that mixes grammatical and lexical elements from both English and Spanish (Bazán-Figueras & Figueras, 2014). Its use is common in U.S.-Mexico border regions, and this kind of language mixing happens whenever two languages come into contact, especially in bilingual communities. The *dicho* that Burro selected is representative of this cultural hybridity, which is “*el jale Chicano.*”

El dicho “*el jale Chicano*” is very philosophical. What it means to me is this pragmatic approach to life, it also means perseverance. What I find very interesting is that it's this sort of applied philosophy to everyday life. It means that there's always a way to fix things. It means that Chicanos or Mexican Americans always find a way to make things better no matter the situation.

For Burro, this *dicho* means that we can fix anything without having the proper tools, we just use whatever is at hand to make things work. *Jale* means work. It’s a Chicano type of work that is improvised, creative, and successful. He recalled a time when someone crashed into his

father's 1987 Buick white station wagon and it needed some body work, his father took it to get an estimate and it was thousands of dollars. His father then saw a red Chevy station wagon for sale in his neighborhood and asked how much it was selling for. He pointed out that it was only \$50 dollars, because it did not work. Burro's father bought it and replaced the damaged part of the Buick with the Chevy. It fit perfectly. His father bought some paint, and it looked like nothing had ever happened. That taught Burro that "there are always other ways to get where you need to go." Coincidentally, this is very similar to the notion of *el que no tranza no avanza*, like Charro defines it, "a practical form of being in the world," of being creative and not being defeated by limiting circumstances.

Holden

For Holden, knowing a language is not just learning the grammar or the proper pronunciations of words, it also means understanding the cultural contexts language can have.

On the border, you will find that there are *pochos*, who speak a different kind of English and then there are people whom you meet in the medical sector and speak a very fine and difficult language to understand. It's not just the language that becomes difficult as being able to talk in the border, specifically with people who use English in different ways. I mean we have people that speak Spanglish, broke in Spanish and English, and you have people that try to speak English. It's difficult because philosophy is written as a very higher language; how do I say it? It is very fancy English to put it in a way.

Pochos, as Holden mentions, are linguistic *atravezados* according to Anzaldúa because they are in between being cultural traitors for using the oppressors' language of English and accused of ruining Spanish. Anzaldúa claims that linguistic oppression does not only come from English speakers, but that even other Spanish speakers try to hold others back with their "bag of reglas de academia" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 76). Here Anzaldúa is referring to the rules of language in the academy that exist within academia and the governing body of language policing that comes from the Real Academia Española (RAE). However, it is clear that for Holden,

philosophy is a language of its own, as Holden describes it, it uses, “very fancy English.” This can be very intimidating because “it is not always accessible even to native English speakers.”

Holden argued that *dichos* are philosophical because they are “cultural wisdom shared with others that come from grandma, grandpa, and people on the street.” He claimed it is “common to hear them when you are different.” He referred to being different because he was raised in Juarez and stated that because *dichos* are not in philosophy textbooks and are rarely written about, we appraise them differently than formal, philosophical texts. But Holden noted that they are, in fact, philosophy, “because we have been exposed to philosophy without knowing it.” The “we” that Holden refers to is those of “us” with Mexican roots.

Holden selected two *dichos*, “*de broma en broma la verdad se asoma*” and “*el flojo trabaja doble*”. The first *dicho* Holden selected, roughly translates to: between jokes the truth always peaks out, and the second, the lazy person works double.

If I were to explain the first one, it means that people are always playing around, but behind every joke there is some truth. The second one means you must do it right the first time because if you don't do it right the first time, then you're going to have to do it again, so you might as well get it right the first time around.

Holden said he selected these because they are the ones he has been exposed to the most throughout his life. He noted the first one had to do with the truth always coming out at some point, and how people who constantly joke about something are actually hiding the truth behind their jokes. The second, he related to hearing it constantly, especially from men who were teaching him how to do certain things related to work as he was growing up. Holden was very insistent on highlighting experiential knowledge that comes from the street and emphasizing that “actions speak louder than words.” This was a good opportunity for me to ask him, if Socrates ever came to visit him, what could he teach Socrates? His answer was very powerful.

I would teach him something about what is like being a Mexican American on the border. I would have him explore both sides of the border. There is no way that I can teach him something just with words, rather than with actions, and if you really want to understand the border you need to understand how people in Mexico are, and how people in the U.S. are. It would take so much time to see it all and have conversations with them, with us. I mean if I really wanted to teach him anything, I would just show him that we need to go around and talk to the people get to know them and get to know our culture. You can't just look at the Mexico map at the border and sit there and just look at them and not interact with them. Let's go out there and talk to them, get to know the people, and get to know the culture. Just walk the streets, just walk the buildings. Let's look at the history, let's look at the people. Explore the unpaved roads, where people don't have a roof. Socrates liked to see how people are different and similar and that is how the border is. There are unpaved roads that are physical in Mexico, but also so many unpaved roads figuratively in the U.S.

Graffiti

Graffiti selected the *dicho*, *dime con quien andas y te dire quien eres*. This means, tell me who you are with, and I will tell you who you are.

It's true. When it comes to friends, you attract similar people, you know? So, I'm not going to say that I wouldn't be able to be friends or acquaintances or respectful obviously, but you can't really be close friends to people that are too opposite to you. For that exact reason because you're just too different that's what that saying means. Obviously, in Mexico that saying is used mostly in a negative sense. Like, oh your friend is a thief he must be like you, but I don't know. I don't just look at it in a negative way, I also look at it in a positive way or in a general way. More specifically, if I'm one type of person and I want to change, or be better, maybe I should find people that are more how I want to be.

Graffiti said he used to work in film and television, and that this always been a huge passion for him. So, he used to spend a lot of time watching new films, new TV shows, and listening to new music in both languages.

For some people that looked like, oh he's just being lazy, he's just watching TV all day, or whatever, but for me, it's like going to an art gallery considering who directed this, who produced this, who edited this, who were the actors, did they act good, is the story good? So, in that sense, to me personally when I'm done with my shift, that's my time.

Graffiti noted that he felt comfortable with his level of bilingualism, but he shared that he has a hard time keeping up with the "heavy reading in philosophy" and that is why he

intentionally dedicates up to three hours a day to reading philosophy in English. The rest of his time, he spends engaging with TV, film, and pop culture.

Julio

Even though Julio is bilingual, he shared that he has always struggled with language, mostly because his first language is English, and others, especially teachers in El Paso made him feel like his identity was contested for “not speaking too much Spanish.” This is because people from the U.S-Mexico border of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, especially those with Mexican roots, are expected to speak Spanish. If you walk into a store, more than likely, you will be first greeted in Spanish as the default language. Julio has struggled with this.

So, an occurrence that has happened throughout my life, and especially within elementary school and middle school would be in the realm of the philosophy of language and how it correlates to racism in today's world. Many times, I was always asked why and how I was actually Mexican, if I didn't know Spanish. So that led me to believe that a lot of the time, one could have an ethnic or cultural background and even the whole citizenship legality but if one does not know the language or is able to enunciate the words that can follow with the language, then he or she is not able to identify to that specific culture or race or ethnicity.

Julio very vividly recalled a 4th grade teacher who mentioned a *dicho* to him and it had a negative impact that he carries with him to this day. That *dicho* is the same as Holden's, *el flojo trabajo doble*. Lazy people have to work twice as hard. Julio said this *dicho* was shared with him with racist connotations, in that the teacher “had the notion that we are lazy as Mexicans” and that the teacher said that to him within the context of giving him feedback on an English writing assignment for which he did not use proper citations.

The recurring theme of laziness found in Holden, Graffiti, and Julio's testimonios is ironic considering that Holden and Julio both have double majors, which require more work than a single major. Graffiti has a major in philosophy and a minor in film. Significantly, all three of them worked full-time jobs in addition to being students. In fact, the three of them shared that

they had begun working at an early age. Disgustingly, historically, minoritized students have had to endure the imposition of racist stereotypes like this one inside and outside of the classroom (Reyna, 2000).

Interestingly, we also find that language discrimination occurs on both sides of the border for having a “shocked English with an accent” as Charro described it, and for “not speaking too much Spanish “as Julio stated.

Nena

Nena claimed that her mother, who only speaks Spanish, uses *dichos* constantly.

My mom says *dichos* all the time at home, like when I don't wash the dishes she says, *mija, yes you can*. And that is also the name of the organization I belong to, *Mija Yes You Can*. The head of the organization, her mom used to say that to her, so that she would never give up. There is something philosophical about it, because you are too short, because you are a woman, and you are not the right size, but you can always find a way to do this.

It is very relevant to note that Nena is the only participant to mention any issues about appearance regarding the body, such as height and weight, when explaining her *dicho* and throughout her testimonios. This gives us a crucial insight into her distinctive intersectional struggles as a Mexican American woman and adds another dimension of what she has to worry about, beyond just her language use. Unfortunately, women tend to feel and report greater body dissatisfaction than men across cultures (McCabe et al., 2012). In the case of Nena, she has to fulfill the demand of both cultures, but the *dicho, mija, yes you can* is inspirational and meant to be a form of encouragement.

The word *mija* which is an elision of the words *mi* and *hija*, *mija* means like a daughter.

Nena adds that besides her mother, her cousins, and some of her older friends also call her *mija*.

It's a part of my Mexican culture. It symbolizes a show of caring between anyone. Even a teacher or at the grocery store, you never get offended as opposed to the English use of the word

“sweetheart” which may sound disrespectful. In a meeting, they addressed people as Mr. and me sweetheart and I had to correct them to use my name.

For Nena, language has cultural dimensions, like with the word *mija* for which there is no equivalent in the English language, “my daughter” does not capture what it means and how it is used as a sign of appreciation without it being belittling. It implies warm maternal mentorship from those who are not necessarily mothers to those who are not always their daughters. Diminution in Spanish is very common and tends to be related to endearment, but it in English may come off as insulting.

Nena stated that she often struggles with going back and forth between the two languages, especially because in her family “everyone only speaks Spanish.” This has turned her into her parents’ “unofficial secretary” because she is expected to translate for them, especially when they receive work text messages in English. Nena is the one that replies for them. She noted that philosophy readings are “the hardest to translate,” but that she “enjoyed the challenge.”

The other day I was watching a movie and it mentioned that *Finnegans Wake* was one of the hardest books to understand. So now, my goal is to read it and to try to understand it. I already went to Barnes and Noble, but they didn’t have it. I’m going to read it and I’m going to understand it because I’m stubborn. People don’t expect me to understand, but I will. It’s sort of the idea that we don’t fit in, so I want to be the one that stands out.

Nena was referring to “we” not just as Mexican Americans, but also as Mexican American women when sharing this with me. *Finnegans Wake* published in 1939 is a novel by Irish writer James Joyce that has a reputation as one of the most difficult works of fiction in the Western canon (Jackson, 1999), but for Nena it is something she was determined to understand. Nena was aware that the navigation of two languages is not easy and that when she and others who are Spanish speakers try to translate certain philosophical ideas from English to Spanish

“they don’t make any sense. My friend, who mostly only speaks Spanish and I have no choice but to laugh and make jokes about how absurd it all sounds.”

Just as Holden noted “*de broma en broma la verdad se asoma*,” despite the joking, there is a real concern shared by the participants regarding their bilingual language use in their journeys of becoming philosophers. Anzaldúa (1987) claims that if you really want to hurt someone from the U.S.-Mexico border, all you need to do is talk badly about their language. She adds that until we can take pride in our language, we cannot fully take pride in ourselves. We can see that for the participants, *dichos* have deep philosophical implications that resonate with Mexican culture and Mexican American lived experiences, which are precisely the experiences that Mexican American philosophy aims to explore.

5. Chapter V: Implications and Conclusion

In this study, I set out to answer these research questions:

1. How do Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border become philosophers?
2. For Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border, what does it mean to be a philosopher?
3. What are the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border in relation to becoming a philosopher?

In searching for the answers, compelling patterns and unexpected, striking similarities started emerging among the seven participants in their written and oral testimonios as well as in the observations. The participants are all the first people to go to college in their families. They all work full-time jobs, in addition to being college students, and six of the seven are pursuing double majors. Furthermore, all seven recognized the importance of the EPCC Philosophy Club as a source of inspiration and encouragement in their journeys to become philosophers.

Moreover, all mentioned the difficulties in understanding philosophical language, which can involve jargon, and the ways in which being bilingual can make what they call “fancy English” something that is new and sometimes challenging for them. These are all findings that could not have been predicted nor were solicited intentionally from the recruitment of the participants.

Phenomenologically, these commonalities add an interesting and essential dimension to this research. Overall, the findings of this study are frustrating and yet, empowering. They are frustrating in the sense that all the participants’ journeys are filled with sadness, discrimination, and suffering. This data speaks to the experience of some minoritized people in philosophy and may speak to some of the reasons behind the literature review for this dissertation. But more

specifically, suffering, in this case, border suffering, is precisely the source of the participants' motivation for them to imagine better versions of themselves and their community, and to study philosophy.

My contribution to the literature, through this study, focuses on enhancing our scholarly understanding of the particular challenges of growing up, living, studying, working, and most importantly *being* in the El Paso-Juárez border. It is crucial to demonstrate how this context is different from the challenges of other philosophy students. In this context-dependent understanding of what it means to be or not to be Mexican American on the border, we have obtained fascinating glimpses of how philosophy is tied to the life, history, and culture that is distinctive for my participants. Without exception, they all connected their lived experiences of struggle and suffering to their philosophical understandings, their philosophical journeys, and how they see philosophy as a key to liberation from tyranny and oppression. Perhaps, most remarkable is that all of them also reported the “strength and power they have obtained from philosophically processing their suffering.” These findings show that philosophy is a critical tool for Mexican American students of philosophy on the U.S.-Mexico border to understand themselves, others, and the world.

Although all the participants described pain in their journeys of becoming philosophers in the U.S.-Mexico border, they also have a lot of hope for themselves and their futures. I could argue that their journeys of becoming philosophers begin by simply declaring philosophy as a major at community college, but that would be an incomplete answer. Their written and oral testimonios and participant observations exemplify that their distinctive lived experiences and the reflections that come with them have shaped their philosophical inclinations at multiple stages of their lives.

For them, philosophy has opened new roads to becoming confident, using their voices, and being critical in their lives. This leads to their overcoming many limitations. The participants report that being a philosopher means being a multidimensional human being. This is also reflected in the fact that six of the seven are pursuing double majors, with philosophy as one of those majors.

They become philosophers through a process of navigating the *laberintos*, the never-ending mazes of living on the U.S.-Mexico border, as well as by keeping up with the demands of their jobs, overcoming the challenges of school, struggling to understand philosophy's "fancy English," while significantly surviving racism, and in the case of Nena, an additional layer of sexism. Fortunately, they are equipped with pragmatic tools. Their bilingualism, resilience, humor, incredible work ethic, brilliant minds, artistic sensibilities, and resourcefulness, all contribute to their lives. They continue *tranzando*, continually finding different ways to achieve their goals.

We need to ask; how do we solve the problem of the ongoing lack of diversity in philosophy? We must recognize that we need drastic changes in how we teach philosophy and in the academy as a whole to be more inclusive. We need people in philosophy like Charro, who question police brutality and injustice. We need musicians like Jaziz who combine rap and philosophy and create introspective and critical lyrics for others to question themselves and their circumstances. We need people like Burro who want to make their communities better, more diverse, and more loving of the U.S.-Mexico border with the knowledge of philosophy and Mexican American/Chicano culture.

We need medical doctors like Holden, who are philosophical, empathetic, caring, and respectful of others and their differences. We need people like Graffiti, who can envision music

and television as critical and philosophical avenues of information and entertainment, and like Julio, who see the connections between philosophy, journalism, music, and the environment. But more importantly, we desperately need more women like Nena, who advocate for little girls and women of color to follow their desires and create history by being the first in their families to receive an education and become *filósofas*. Even though Charro believes the participants of this study are like Spiderman, and I agree that they do have superpowers, they need support. The next question for us to answer is how do we cultivate these students' greatness?

5.1 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Community College

It is essential to recognize that the participants of this study are products of a community college experience and they made connections in this space that facilitated their growth in becoming philosophers. Research indicates that most Mexican American students begin their educational journeys at community colleges (Guzman, 2016). Therefore, we need to better fund these institutions, if we want to diversify the field of philosophy as a whole. It would be interesting to conduct further research to explore the longitudinal implications of these participants' lived experiences, or of a similar demographic, beyond associate's and bachelor's degrees in philosophy and see how these change as they progress in the academic pipeline.

Double Majors

I was surprised by the fact that six of the seven participants combined philosophy with an additional major, and the other seventh participant, with a minor. This was interesting because that is exactly what I did as an undergraduate student as well. I combined journalism and philosophy. In my case, it was because I believed that both fields were deeply interconnected, and I also wanted to honor both of my parents by following in their journalistic footsteps.

However, a future study is needed to explore this phenomenon and determine if it has anything to do with minoritized students simply being safe and doubling up on majors to alleviate their fears of lacking academic and professional opportunities.

Books and Lessons

In terms of educational practice, philosophy educators must acknowledge the complex intersectionality of the identities of Mexican American students of philosophy not just on the U.S.-Mexico border, but everywhere. They must participate in curriculum revisions so that these students can feel included, represented, and reflected in philosophical dialogue. We need to develop textbooks that ensure the inclusion of Mexican and Mexican American philosophers and philosophy. We also need to diversify our pedagogical approaches and allow students to tap into their cultural and linguistic resources. We can do this by enhancing the lessons to be representative of their lived experiences. This can be in the form of *dichos* or popular sayings in Spanish that are often dismissed in canonical philosophy, but that can be very powerful tools for Mexican students to feel represented to and reinforce their identities.

Representation

We need more than just books and lessons for Mexican American philosophy students to feel welcome in the field of philosophy. This dissertation study demonstrates the lack of women, and Mexican American women, in particular, in the field of philosophy. I recommend a further study, similar to mine, with more women participants. As far as faculty representation, institutions need to recognize the power of role models for Mexican American philosophy students by engaging in fair, antiracist, and antisexist hiring practices that allow minoritized philosophy faculty to teach and lead. This is essential for success in academia and for the future of philosophy as a field of inquiry.

Border suffering

For decades, the sociopolitical rhetoric about the U.S.-Mexico border has been hurtful and belittling to us, many would argue, that it has also had deadly consequences like in the instance of August 3rd of 2019 (Varela, 2019). Border suffering refers not only to the physical and emotional, but also existential pain experienced by those of us who must constantly prove who and what we are by living near national borders. Because of our unique geographical location, we are affected by issues such as immigration, the militarization of the border, narcoviolence, femicides, and economic inequality, just to name a few. Yet, somehow, we must endure the poverty, discrimination, and physical and spiritual displacement that comes with it. Border suffering is complex, but it is closely tied to political factors like the above-mentioned. Therefore, we must vote wisely and demand support and respect from the government and select worthy politicians to represent us. We must also conduct a scholarly exploration of the notion of *border healing* to proactively counteract and ease some of the pain of border suffering that I have presented in this dissertation. It would also be useful to study other U.S.-Mexico border sites, beyond El Paso- Juárez, and Mexican American participants and compare the data for differences and overlaps.

Philosophy Club

The participants mentioned the importance of being part of a club that engages in hands-on philosophical activities outside of the traditional classroom setting. Some examples of these alternative pedagogies included non-canonical activities like visiting museums and art exhibits and going into the community to help at immigrant aid associations or visiting homeless shelters with donations and discussing the philosophical value of community involvement. Therefore, we

must envision lessons and activities that promote experiential philosophical learning and create and support spaces with that mission.

Importance of Teaching and Learning About Mexican American Philosophy

According to Orosco (2011), Latin American philosophy is seen as being born out of suffering and experiencing life as precarious, so it is no surprise to encounter some of that suffering in the findings of this study. It is such a new field, that as a student, I did not take a single Latin American philosophy course in my undergraduate or graduate trajectory because such a course did not exist at my institutions. Until recently, the knowledge I have of Latin American philosophers has had to be researched by me, independently of school and by connecting with other scholars. Ironically, since the 1940s, philosophy journals in the United States and Europe have published distinctive works in Latin American philosophy, but it has since been seen as philosophy done on the outer edges of Anglophone philosophy (Sanchez, 2014). This means that for almost 100 years, Latin American philosophers have been at the margins.

The same experience has been true of my encounter with Mexican American philosophy. Mexican American philosophy is a diverse and multifaceted field that is best understood as an ethnic philosophy, which is in other words, the philosophical work produced by and about the Mexican American ethnos (Orosco, 2016). It refers to the philosophical ideas and concerns that have emerged from the Mexican American community in the United States. I have been practicing philosophy as a Mexican American and trying to legitimize Latin American and Mexican American philosophy for 20 years. In 2006, I became the first scholar to publish on the philosophy of Jose Ingenieros in English. This was because of the outstanding mentorship and

support of legendary philosopher Dr. John McDermott and my visionary advisor Dr. Gregory Pappas who saw a great bridge between American pragmatism and Latin American philosophy.

Unfortunately, Mexican American intellectual works have mostly been dismissed, devalued, and excluded from the philosophical canon as documented in my literature review. I have used the philosophical wisdom of the U.S.-Mexico border of Anzaldúa throughout this study, but to this day, she is still reduced to being simply a “theorist, a feminist, and a thinker instead of a philosopher” (Alessandri, 2020). The same is true of other legendary Mexican American figures like Cesar Chavez (Orosco, 2016), who tend to be delegitimized in terms of their philosophical value.

Mexican Americans face distinctive philosophical struggles that have to do with how to make sense of the self and how to relate that self to a community that is in between, *una comunidad atravesada*. The participants of this study have shared some crucial insights about the ways of life embedded in the border and how they figure themselves out as Mexican Americans and as philosophers in the process. They analyze the relationship between the U.S. to Mexico, they discuss the dynamics of subordination and suffering, but most importantly, they imagine how life could be different and mostly better.

Mexican American philosophy explores the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, language, and class, and offers some ideas about how to answer some of the ontological and existential questions about the self and about improving sociopolitical conditions, but sadly, these contributions have been mostly ignored. The excessive boundary policing of “real” philosophy has left the field hostile to diverse philosophers and philosophy educators (Jones, 2020). Thankfully, philosophers have recently demanded that we take Mexican American philosophy more seriously (Sanchez, 2014) because we need more theories and recollections of

lived experiences that do not necessarily come from Europe and that respect our own cultural values and unite us.

It has been my aim to demonstrate that there is an authentic worldview that comes out of the U.S.-Mexico border that needs to be further esteemed and explored. And just as the label “Mexican American” is not confined to strict boundaries and is both Mexican and American and sometimes neither and at others both simultaneously, so is this field of philosophy. Mexican American philosophy is in between academic fields like this study, which benefits the field of education and philosophy and is valuable despite its elusive categorization. We must teach Mexican American philosophy and philosophers specifically and intentionally and no longer engage in rhetoric that delegitimizes our contributions. We must actively fight the perpetual whiteness and Anglophone aspects of philosophy curricula and honor the epistemic contributions of Mexican Americans.

***Dichos* as Philosophy**

It is important to recognize that *dichos* are much more than a linguistic resource for philosophy students to feel engaged with the philosophical curriculum. They are not simple sayings. It has been my intention in this dissertation to demonstrate that *dichos*, as Ballesteros (1979) suggests, are also a form of philosophy that reflects the collective cultural wisdom of Mexican/Mexican Americans. *Dichos* treat one’s position in society, such as having Mexican roots, as an asset and a source of pride and insight. For instance, the *dichos*: “*el jale Chicano*” and “*el que no tranza, no avanza*” do not have actual literal translations into English. Nonetheless, they express deep pragmatic principles about being *atravesados* and having to traverse between limiting and sometimes impossible conditions to make things work. This constant negotiation embedded in these *dichos* is an interesting ontological implication of the

Mexican American experience, and epistemologically it reveals the construction of knowledge from the ground up. *Dichos* allow those that understand them and use them to feel connected and validated. *Dichos* are shaped by our social and cultural positions, and they highlight the importance of marginalized voices and the clever ways we have found to move forward and *avanzar*.

5.2 CONCLUSION

This dissertation, like me, is *atravesada* in-between the intersections of education and philosophy. To quote Charro, the journey of writing this has been “as difficult as it has been rewarding.” This is because, to quote Jaziz, the process “has not been linear.” At times, I felt nauseous with the recognition of my participants’ suffering and how that reflected my own pain and my personal struggles of becoming a Mexican American philosopher and educator. However, my motivation to keep going has come mostly from the butterflies of excitement in my stomach in realizing that these students are strong and courageous and are moving forward *tranzando* through the maze of academic philosophy despite all their struggles, and one by one are slowly on their way to changing the field. This study has been an arduous labor of love. I did not expect to be so profoundly impacted by the vulnerability and openness of my participants and their testimonios. These students are wise beyond their years and their lived experiences of navigating the complexity of two nations, two cultures, and two languages have doubled their maturity.

Today, as a professor of philosophy, the first woman ever to receive tenure at the same institution where I first learned English decades ago, I have the honor of encouraging others to be critical and to discover their vast power through philosophy. Most of my academic research and philosophical pedagogy have focused on creating a representation of diverse voices in

philosophy, including those who have been intentionally neglected. Through the years, like the participants of this study, I have found that philosophy is a great tool for amplifying my own voice, for healing, and for transformation. My whole life, I have also had to cross physical and metaphysical bridges from Mexico to the United States and vice versa and endure the contestation of my identity on both sides of the border. Being on the front lines of international political debates that range from immigration policies to the deadly effects of corruption, racism, and sexism is exhausting. However, through philosophy, I get renewed hope and energy to help students elevate their voices and to get the courage to act with empathy and reason and to be proud of themselves. My goal is for not just my students on the U.S.-Mexico border, but for students everywhere, to feel welcome in the field of philosophy just the way they are.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Sample Email

A qualitative research study is being conducted by a researcher from the College of Education at the University of Texas at El Paso. The researcher is looking for men and women participants who identify as Mexican American or as having U.S. and Mexican roots and have completed at least three or more college courses in philosophy, have declared philosophy as a major, or have graduated in philosophy from a community college on the U.S.-Mexico border. The primary purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of border students in their journeys of becoming philosophers. The overall purpose of this study is to reveal meaningful philosophical answers that arise from lived experiences about what it is like for Mexican American community college students to become and be philosophers on the U.S.-Mexico border. The objective is to understand how Mexican American students experience and interpret the phenomenon of becoming philosophers within a field that has institutionally marginalized them and within a transnational context of a hybrid place like the U.S.-Mexico border. Testimonios will take approximately 90 minutes. A date, time, and location for the participation will be determined to accommodate the participant. All information shared will be kept confidential and secure. Participants can choose anonymity for this study. Participation is voluntary. Your consideration and participation are greatly appreciated. Please contact Manuela Gomez for more information or to setup a meeting.

Appendix B : Pilot Study Questions

1. Define philosophy.
2. When did you first discover your interest in philosophy?
3. How many years have you studied philosophy for?

4. What degrees do you hold? Any other besides philosophy?
5. Any books that influenced you?
6. When did you realize that you wanted to study philosophy academically?
7. How would you describe your experience so far studying philosophy?
8. What would you say has been the hardest part of studying philosophy?
9. Have you experienced any instance of discrimination or racism in philosophy so far?
10. In terms of your identity, which philosopher do you identify with the most?
11. Is there a philosophy that in general represents you?
12. Are there any elements missing from that philosophy?
13. What factors have helped you become this persistent when you say nothing will stop you? What has motivated you to have this mentality?
14. What advice would you give to someone who was also a minority that said I want to become a philosopher, what advice would you give them?
15. Where do you see yourself in twenty years in terms of philosophy?
16. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to add in reference to this topic?

Appendix C: Oral Testimonio Guiding Questions

1. What label do you use to identify yourself? Do you identify as Mexican American? Yes no, and why?
2. What do you associate as an experience or a memory that sparked your interest in philosophy?
3. When did you realize that you wanted to study philosophy academically?
4. How would you describe your experience of studying philosophy?

5. Hardest part?
6. Best part?
7. What does it mean to be a philosopher?
8. Do you think you are a philosopher?
9. What is the role of language, in this case, English and Spanish in relation to becoming a philosopher, what's the connection here, and how does it play into philosophy?
10. What is a Mexican or Mexican American *dicho* that you consider to be philosophical and its meaning?
11. As I mentioned at the beginning of our meeting, I am studying the lived experiences of Mexican American community college students on the U.S.-Mexico border in becoming philosophers, would you like to add anything about this phenomenon or mention anything else?

Vita

Manuela Alejandra Gomez is a Philosophy Professor with many years of teaching experience on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. She specializes in philosophical pedagogy, ethics, feminism, and Latin American philosophy. Gomez is also a journalist who concentrates on U.S.-Mexico border politics. She is the author of the book *Rediscovering the Philosophical Importance of Jose Ingenieros - A Bridge between Two Worlds*. She wrote a chapter for the book *Pragmatism in the Americas*. She also published an Open Educational Resource (OER) *Ethics* textbook, which is a freely available textbook for lower-income college students. Additionally, she has published multiple academic articles and book reviews throughout the years. In 2017, she received a competitive educator scholarship to attend Yale University to learn about multiculturalism in education. In 2019, she presented her work on philosophy and border pedagogy at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India. Furthermore, she won the 2019 Success Through Technology Education (STTE) Award for her contributions to the community and for solving real-world problems with philosophy. In 2020, she received the EPCC Outstanding Faculty Achievement Award and the 2020 EPCC Inspirational Award two years in a row by the Student Government Association. In 2021, Gomez was appointed to the American Philosophical Association (APA) Committee on Hispanics and Latinx Philosophy. In 2022, she was named Piper Professor for the state of Texas. This is one of the most prestigious, state-wide awards for teaching excellence at the college level. In 2023, she was appointed to the APA Committee on Teaching Philosophy, charged with assessing trends and needs in the teaching of philosophy in the United States and making recommendations for action by the board.

Contact information: mgome327@epcc.edu