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Centroamericana Healing Genealogies: Centering the Healing Experiences of
U.S. *Centroamericana* Student Survivors in Higher Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Karla Lilibeth Aguilar Marquez

2026

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Centroamericana Healing Genealogies: Centering the Healing Experiences of
U.S. *Centroamericana* Student Survivors in Higher Education

by

Karla Lilibeth Aguilar Marquez

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2026

Professor Jessica C. Harris, Chair

The doctoral dissertation study explored the healing experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors impacted by sexual and relationship violence in higher education. Emerging literature has focused on reimagining healing through identity and race-conscious lenses that position individual, wholistic, and communal healing at the center of possible institutional interventions and implications for higher education (Harris et al., 2021; Karunaratne, 2026). Exploration of the healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors was guided through a theoretical framework that heavily centered *Centroamericana* Feminist epistemological perspectives and Grounded Theory. The research questions included (1) How does a U.S. *Centroamericana* identity shape experiences with campus sexual and relationship violence? And

(2) How do U.S. *Centroamericana* college students engage healing from their experiences of campus sexual and relationship violence?

Centroamericana Feminist Theory is rooted, experienced, and grounded in the lives of various Central American Women writers, creatives, scholars, and theorists connected to a lineage of Black and Indigenous Women and Women of Color feminisms in a praxis of ancestral and embodied knowledge, resistance, anti-oppressive, and decolonial futures, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions (Abrego, 2020; Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007; Hernández-Linares, 2015; Hoppe, 2024; Mena, 2023; Menchú, 2010; Padilla, 2012, 2018; Portillo, 2015; Ramsey, 2024; Rodríguez, 2008). In line with *Centroamericana* epistemologies and theoretical framework, I used plática, walking plática, collective healing plática, testimonio, field site visits, photo/artifact elicitation, a research journal, and analytical memo to explore embodied experiences of healing.

U.S. *Centroamericana* students are often not centered in higher education research due to the homogenization of the Latine identity and contextual dominance of Mexican-American identity in current research (Maldonado Dominguez, 2019). Emerging research that centers U.S. *Centroamericana* students must not fracture and remove histories of migration and genealogies that impact the identity formation and wholistic healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* students on college campuses. The healing of sexual and relationship violence for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors is connected to ancestral medicines, systems of spirituality, and ancestral lands that bring tools of resistance and persistence in community with other Women of Color students in higher education. The findings from this dissertation study, *Centroamericana* Healing Genealogies, can inform the development of healing centered practices (e.g., strategies for advocates, preventionist, campus administrators, educators), inform policy response and

prevention efforts on university campuses that restore community relationships, and reimagine how we research sexual violence in higher education that supports the persistence of Indigenous and Black Students and Students of Color.

The dissertation of Karla Aguilar Marquez is approved.

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2026

DEDICACIÓN

Para mi madrina, Yoya—

“Todas las mañanas
Que entra por mi ventana el Señor Sol
Doy gracias a Dios
Por otro día más.”
— Juan Gabriel

For my beautiful Daniel, Isabella, Alexandro, David, Nathan, Kaia, Zoe, and kin descendants—
Tía Kiki is dreaming a loving world for all of you

For the brave survivors who teach me to have courage and show me that healing is possible in
every lifetime

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I am grateful that each of you exist, los amo hasta la luna.

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Karunaratne, N., & Aguilar Marquez, K. (2026). The complexities of addressing dating Violence within a student organizations. In J. Quayle & S. Pendakur (Eds.), *Student engagement in*

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Poon Ghaffari, G., Karunaratne, N., Aguilar Marquez, K. (2026, February). *Culturally and spiritually grounded healing For college survivors of sexual and relationship violence.* [Conference Session] 2026 Transforming Theory, Policy, and Practice: Decolonise Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education.

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Aguilar Marquez, K. (2024). What Indigenous futurity can teach us about healing sexual violence for minoritized students in higher education. *Journal of Trauma Studies in Education*, 3(3), 52–73.

Karunaratne, N., & Aguilar Marquez, K. (2024). The role of spirituality in healing from sexual and relationship violence in higher education. *Journal of Trauma Studies in Education*, 3(3), 74–95.

Aguilar, K. & Palacios, N. (2017). An empowerment-based model of sexual violence intervention and prevention on campus. In J. Harris & C. Linder (Eds.), *Intersections of identity and sexual violence on campus: Centering minoritized students' experiences.* Stylus Publishing.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

As a student affairs practitioner with over 15 years of experience in higher education, supporting student survivors of sexual violence on U.S. college campuses has been transformative and life changing for me. In my experiences as a campus sexual violence advocate and educator, I have witnessed hundreds of Minoritized student survivors face challenges, obstacles, and barriers in their pursuit of healing, justice, and accountability while simultaneously working toward their academic, professional, and personal endeavors. The challenges that Minoritized student survivors have faced in seeking healing became very apparent to me as I navigated reporting processes, developed primary prevention strategies, and cultivated healing spaces with various students, staff, cultural equity centers, academic departments, faculty, and student organizations across higher education systems.

Minoritized campus sexual violence survivors are students who identify with nondominant social identities that are systematically Minoritized by structural systems of inequities in higher education (Dache-Gerbino, 2017; Harper, 2012; Harris & Linder, 2017). These nondominant identities can include, but are not limited to Black and Indigenous Students; Students of Color; Students with Disabilities; and students who identify as LGBTQ+, Undocumented, and other nonprivileged identities. I intentionally capitalized the word Minoritized in this study to emphasize the *continuous process* of minoritization of students who identify with nondominant identities. Minoritized students are not passively or inherently marginalized by their multiple and intersecting identities, but experience minoritization continuously through active policies and systems shaped by colonial legacies, structural inequities, racism, and other forms of oppression at higher education institutions that shape student outcomes and campus climate (Dache-Gerbino, 2017; Harper, 2012; Harris & Linder,

2017). Minoritized students are targeted for violence and experience high rates of sexual violence due to the white supremacy, oppression, and settler-colonial violence that exist at institutions of higher education and the broader United States (Cantor et al., 2020; Dache-Gerbino, 2017; Harris & Linder, 2017; INCITE!, 2016; Wright & Tierney, 1991). As a result, some drop out of college or experience severe challenges on their way to graduating, including impacts on their mental health, physical safety, and interpersonal relationships (Harris, 2024; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024). Witnessing student survivors experience pain, grief, re-traumatization, and healing on their campuses catalyzed me into social action and heartwork—work facilitated from body-mind-spirit through ancestral visions and purpose.

The healing experiences of Minoritized student survivors are unique because many experience sexual and relationship violence in their places of learning, community, family, and employment already shaped by systemic oppression (Harris, 2024; Harris & Aguilar Marquez, 2026; Linder et al., 2020; Moylan & Javorka, 2020). This can include college classrooms; university-owned residence halls and apartments; research labs; alumni spaces; student organization spaces; their home; and local community places where students, staff, and faculty cultivate community and care. Student survivors experience violence in the context and intersections of their Minoritized identities, histories, and geographies (Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024). Often, Minoritized student survivors must navigate accountability, justice, healing, and conceptualizations of safety in the same spaces where their victimization occurred (Harris & Linder, 2017). They might seek support services found at counseling and sexual violence advocacy centers, cultural equity centers, relationships with faculty and classroom curriculum, and physical locations like land and water-based places that facilitate healing.

After several years in the campus advocacy field, I have come to understand the compliance culture and risk mitigation facets of institutional responses to sexual violence in higher education. These responses heavily focus on legalistic policy and nonrestorative carceral practices that often re-traumatize students and communities on campus and do not address or change the structural violence that perpetuates harm (E. Collins, 2016; Jessup-Anger & Edwards, 2015; Lorenz et al., 2022). As a director of campus advocacy centers for several years, I was both empowered and challenged in my pursuit of developing programs, policies, and institutional initiatives that centered trauma-informed and healing-centered frameworks. In my efforts to center the lived experiences and needs of Women of Color, Queer, Indigenous, Central American, and other Minoritized student survivors on the campuses where I worked, I was constantly met with push back due to the lack of research and “evidence-based” practices surrounding the needs of Minoritized student survivors in higher education. These existing practices often center White women and colonial, western models of healing. Minoritized students were constantly left at the margins, made invisible by euro-centric models of wellness, and burdened with finding spaces of healing alone and with each other.

I found pockets of hope, creativity, love, and resistance in the relationships with campus and community partners that centered the needs of Minoritized students continuously. In solidarity, we pushed back on the compliance mechanisms of universities (e.g., Campus Counsel, Risk Management, Compliance and Audit) that would assess our healing spaces and, at times, deem them too “risky,” not “evidence-based,” “noncompliant,” and “liability heavy.” In these spaces of resistance and affirmation, I witnessed the healing of Minoritized student survivors, practitioners, and faculty together and in community.

I left my full-time position as a student affairs practitioner to pursue research in hopes of elevating the needs of Black and Indigenous Student Survivors and Students Survivors of Color, highlighting their stories and their healing to change theory, policies, practices, and responses that govern campus sexual violence in higher education. As I engaged in my doctoral research courses and training including methodology courses, Black Women's Book Club, Central Americans in the United States, Key Theories in American Indian Studies, Narrative Analysis, and many more, I was honored and grateful to have spent time with Black, Queer, Latine, Undocumented, Asian, Indigenous, and U.S. Central American women students seeking to heal, thrive, and realize their dreams despite the trauma and institutional violence. Using Indigenous Research Methods, Plática Methodology, and other critical qualitative methods, Minoritized student survivors' conceptualizations of time, space, and healing connected to multiple relationships and dimensions of wholistic healing centered me. It cemented for me the decision to continue to explore their healing to better understand how practitioners and institutions can support their healing and persistence on U.S. college campuses, their families, communities, and beyond.

At the time of the current study, now serving as a research affiliate on a national research team that examined nonpunitive responses to sexual violence in higher education, I was re-introduced to abolitionist frameworks and methods that center creativity and dreaming in the pursuit of dignified responses to preventing, repairing, and healing harm that emerges from campus sexual violence. I connected with Minoritized student survivors, including U.S. *Centroamericana* students who have transgressed borders and sociopolitical factors to finish their studies on U.S. college campuses to pursue their dreams. Many minoritized student survivors are pursuing professional fields in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM);

law; public policy; and medical school, and are committed to empowering their families, communities, and futures grounded in justice and well-being shaped by the ancestral knowledge and resilience of their genealogies. There is much wisdom, ancestral knowledge, and lessons to be learned from Minoritized student survivors regarding healing, justice, and accountability when we center what they bravely choose to intentionally share with us. In centering the healing experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students, I hope to center the identity-affirming, intergenerational, land-based, community and body-mind-spirit healing of all Minoritized students in higher education in solidarity with my Indigenous relatives and kin.

Statement of the Problem

U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors of campus sexual violence are navigating unique challenges with accessing spaces of healing in higher education. The research on U.S. Central American students in higher education is limited. The recent expansion of the literature is due to the growing body of Central American scholars centering the experiences, histories, and relationships of Central American students within larger Latine scholarship (Abrego, 2006; Coronado, 2018; Diaz-Strong, 2021; Maldonado Dominguez, 2019; Paredes, 2022). U.S. Central American students are not often sampled in higher education research due to the homogenization of the Latine identity and contextual dominance of particular groups (Maldonado Dominguez, 2019). Central Americans are often conflated with Mexican and Mexican American populations, further rendering U.S. Central American students invisible, including U.S. *Centroamericana* survivors. U.S. Central American students are often navigating historical, familial, and institutional dynamics impacted by broader campus climates tied to political histories and sociopolitical contexts abroad (Paredes, 2022).

Campus sexual violence is rooted in the histories of sexual and racial violence in U.S. higher education as they are deeply connected to settler colonization, slavery, and white supremacy (Deer, 2015; INCITE!, 2016). Driven by several historical conditions and the pervasiveness of sexual violence on college campuses (e.g., statistics highlighting 1 in 5 college students and 1 in 4 Transgender/Gender Nonconforming students will experience sexual violence while in college), former vice president Joe Biden unveiled the historic “Dear Colleague Letter” on sexual violence at the University of New Hampshire on April 4th, 2011 (R. Wilson, 2020). Responding to and preventing campus sexual violence in higher education has mostly been conceptualized and understood through the federal Title IX Education Amendments of 1972. Originally set out to prevent discrimination based on sex and gender in federally funded programs, Title IX’s expansion throughout the following decades became critical to creating equitable learning environments for campus sexual violence survivors and gender nonconforming students in higher education (Jessup-Anger et al., 2018). Although efforts to address campus sexual violence on college campuses have made progress in the decade prior to this study, critical campus sexual violence research has highlighted the inequities and gaps that Minoritized students continue to face in their search for healing and support after experiencing violence on campus due to the heavy compliance and risk aversion policies, race evasiveness interventions, and dominant narratives of “healing” at institutions of higher education (Harris, 2020; Harris & Linder, 2017).

Furthermore, research on campus sexual violence has been heavily focused on prevalence, risk factors for victimization and perpetration, disclosure and reporting of sexual violence, victim help-seeking behavior, and sexual violence prevention. There exists a gap in literature for healing for Women of Color students (DeLoveh & Cattaneo, 2017; Moylan et al.,

2021; Moylan & Javorka, 2020; Sabina & Ho, 2014). Most sexual violence climate studies have been large scale, quantitative studies using survey methods that capture experiences heavily focused on individual factors that decenter structural, historical, and racial climate analysis on campus sexual violence (Harris & Aguilar Marquez, 2026; Linder et al., 2020; Moylan & Javorka, 2020). Many studies that have explored campus sexual violence among college students have tended to sample predominately white women students in the data, highlighting the impacts of prevalence and risk factors for majority white student samples on campus (Katz et al., 2017). Campus sexual violence research has also centered race-neutral, and one-size-fits-all approaches to researching and implementing sexual violence response efforts on campus that relegates individual responsibility on students to access safety and healing instead of relying on institutional structures, mechanisms, and other campus specific factors that contribute to healing (Anderson Wadley & Hurtado, 2023; Harris et al., 2021; Wooten, 2017). Exploring the ways in which U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors belong, build community, and healing is critical to support their access and persistence in higher education.

Significance of Study

This dissertation was designed to center and explore the healing experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors through expanding the existing scholarship on healing from campus sexual violence that has traditionally focused on addressing psychological symptoms of trauma and mostly centering the healing experiences of white women (Gameon et al., 2021; Harris, 2024; McCauley et al., 2019). For Women of Color, sexual violence may be compounded with other forms of racial, historical, and intergenerational trauma, which has adverse impacts on their learning and experiences on campus (Gómez, 2020). Emerging scholarship focused on the healing experiences of Women of Color students has begun to shed light on the identity

affirming and multifaceted aspects of healing (Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Harris, 2024; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024). Current literature has focused on reimagining healing through identity and race-conscious lenses that center individual, wholistic, and communal healing through institutional interventions and implications for higher education (Harris, 2021; Karunaratne, 2023b). This dissertation was positioned to add to the research on healing in campus sexual violence and fill the gap of literature on Central American students in higher education by exploring the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students healing from sexual violence through a racial *and* gendered lens.

Emerging research that centers U.S. *Centroamericana* students must not fracture and remove histories of migration and generational knowledge that impact the identity formation and wholistic health of U.S. *Centroamericana* students on college campuses. The healing of sexual and relationship violence for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors is connected to ancestral medicines, systems of spirituality, and ancestral lands that bring tools of resistance and persistence in community with other Women of Color students in higher education. The findings from this dissertation study can inform implications for practice (e.g., strategies for advocates, prevention educators, campus administrators, educators), inform policy response and prevention efforts on university campuses, and reimagine how we research sexual violence in higher education.

Research Questions

The research questions I explored through this dissertation were:

- 1) How does a U.S. *Centroamericana* identity shape experiences with campus sexual and relationship violence?

- 2) How do U.S. *Centroamericana* college students engage healing from their experiences of campus sexual and relationship violence?

Overview of Framework and Methods

Exploring the healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors was guided through a theoretical framework that heavily centers *Centroamericana* Feminist epistemological perspectives and Theory. *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory is rooted, experienced, and grounded in the lives of various *Centroamericana* identified writers, activist, scholars, creatives, and theorists connected to a lineage of Black and Indigenous Women and Women of Color feminisms (Abrego, 2020; Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007; Hernández-Linares, 2015; Hoppe, 2024; Mena, 2023; Menchú, 2010; Padilla, 2012, 2018; Portillo, 2015; Ramsey, 2024; Rodríguez, 2008). Rooted in the deep traditions of ancestral and embodied knowledge and resistance, they are grounded in antioppressive, decolonial, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions of the lived experience of *Centroamericana* women across geographies of time and space. Deeply connected to a sense of self, ancestral knowledge, and a politics of place, theorizing within body-mind-spirit centers a type of radical healing often connected to others forms of spiritual resistance found in other Black and Indigenous Women and Women of Color epistemologies and feminisms (Alvarado et al., 2017; P. H. Collins, 1986; Dillard, 1997). By using *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory as a theoretical framework, I explored, navigated, and built understanding with U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors as whole human beings. Grounded in multiple realities, varying contexts, and with a space to theorize within the body, these theories offer an abundance of analytical tools and healing that work toward uplifting the realities of individual U.S.

Centroamericana student survivors while making sense of collective liberatory futures from oppressive systems and realities.

The current dissertation centered the wholistic experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors, including their relationships to their identity, lived experiences as Women of Color, and how they engage with the systems around them that influence their racialized bodies. In line with the dissertation epistemologies and theoretical framework, I used *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology to explore their embodied experiences of sexual violence and healing. Grounded Theory is an iterative and generative methodology that centers real life experiences of collaborators and provides a flexible approach to theory development grounded in data rather than existing theories and structures (Malagon et al., 2009; see also Strauss & Corbin, 1990). *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology is an intergenerational, collaborative, story-centered, and reflexive methodology grounded in the lived realities of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. Using various methods like plática, walking plática, collective healing plática, testimonio, field site visits, photo/artifact elicitation, a research journal, and analytical memo allowed me to further engage in exploring wholistic dimensions of collaborators in relation to the research questions.

To answer the research questions using a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology and research design, I engaged in data analysis grounded in Charmaz's (2006, 2014) three-part coding process that consisted of open coding, focused (selective) coding, and theoretical coding through an abductive approach that is developed through Theoretical Memo and Integrative Diagrams. Grounded Theory Methodology primary uses an inductive (bottom-up) approach to generate theory from the data (Charmaz, 2014; Urquhart, 2019). Essentially, by using a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Theory Methodology with data engagement, I, as

the researcher, could theorize and analyze how *Centroamericana Feminist Theory* (e.g., structural violence, gender, sexism, migration, neoliberalism, healing) shaped the data to provide insight into the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. In addition to *Centroamericana Feminist-Grounded Methodology*, I used composite and narrative vignettes and Central American storywork to highlight the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors for several reasons. Narrative/composite vignettes and storywork are grounded in robust traditions of Black and Indigenous People and People of Color storytelling (Marin et al., 2020; Meixi et al., 2022). *Centroamericana Feminist* scholars, activists, and theorists have urged us to continuously position ourselves as researchers in relation with collaborators as we make meaning collectively and creatively.

Defining Key Terms

In this section, I define key terms that help to contextualize the current research. Defining the terms *violence* and *healing* is a political and subjective process of positionality within individual, intergenerational, and communal ways of knowing.

U.S. Centroamericana Students

I used the terms U.S. Central American and U.S. *Centroamericana* throughout this dissertation in various ways. The term U.S. Central American is defined to highlight the social political position of Central Americans living in diaspora within the United States and from the “social and national location from which members of the Central American diaspora construct our identities, histories, communities and cultures” (Alvarado, 2017, p. 29). By placing the United States and Central America together, Alvarado et al. (2017) highlighted the ways U.S. Central Americans “experience belonging and nonbelonging in both the U.S. and Central America” (p. 29) and emphasize historical cultural unity while centering the differences that

make up the Isthmus. The Isthmus refers to the seven countries that make up Central America, including Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama (Alvarado et al., 2017).

Centroamericana and Chicana/Latina scholars (Anzaldúa, 1987; Moraga, 1983; Pulido, 1996) have stated that self-naming is a necessity in the act of agency and re-empowerment and includes the proposal of feminine language that explains “the lived female experience that cannot be divorced from race, ethnicity and culture” (Alvarado et al., 2017, p. 102). U.S.

Centroamericana is italicized to encompass the experiences of U.S. Central American *women* that centers their *racial and gendered* experiences as U.S *Centroamericanas* wholistically. The term *Latine* is used in this dissertation to encompass the experiences of Latine identified students who have ancestry and descend from Latin American countries including Mexico and South America. Latine is often connected to other terms like Latina/o/x or Latin* to provide a more gender inclusive term. I explore these terms and histories more specifically in Chapter 2.

Sexual Violence

The term *sexual violence* is used to encompass broad experiences of violence in higher education that include harassment, sexual assault, and relationship violence. Sexual harassment can be defined as experiences of harassment that are sexual in nature including catcalling, sexual jokes, quid-pro-quo such as invitations of sexual favors in exchange for, and hostile environments created by ongoing patterns of violence. Sexual assault is defined as incidents where a person experienced nonconsensual sexual activity, including, but not limited to, sexual touching, groping, digital penetration, and rape. *Relationship violence* refers to the emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical, financial, and academic abuse experienced by an intimate partner or former partner in an intimate relationship. Relationship violence is conceptualized as

cycles of power and control enacted on a partner to threaten and control a partner's behavior.

Relationship violence is also often referred to as domestic violence, intimate partner violence and dating violence. I use the term *sexual violence* to encapsulate these definitions and experiences of sexual and relationship violence in the dissertation. The term *survivor* is used in this dissertation to describe students who have been impacted by campus sexual violence.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation was conceptualized and cocreated as an iterative story of healing and resistance. Grounded and continuously built through the genealogies, relationships and experiences of past, present, and future U.S. *Centroamericana* women, scholars, and survivors, this dissertation was grounded in multiple realities and dimensions of time. The dissertation is organized into six chapters. Each chapter is forwarded with an epilogue or prologue in the form of a story or composite narrative, which explores the thematic elements, ideas, and concepts discussed in the chapter in relation to me as the researcher.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the current problem, dissertation research questions, overviews of frameworks and methodology, while highlighting the significance of the study in the broader field of higher education. The chapter defines and discusses important terminology and provides a pathway for how to make sense of the dissertation structure and process. Chapter 1 concludes with an epilogue titled *A Poem by My Central American Mother*. My journey into this dissertation, this doctoral program, and this current world was birthed by my mami, Rosa Ivonne Aguilar Marquez, a survivor and theorist shaped by the *Centroamericanas* who came before her and who will come after her.

Chapter 2 provides an expansive literature review and theoretical framework for how we can begin to understand the positionality and lived realities of U.S. *Centroamericana* student

survivors in higher education. The chapter is outlined into three parts to understand the larger bodies of scholarship that guide the research questions. In Part 1 of this story, we travel back to the lands and histories of Central America to understand the lineages, memories, and context to better understand sexual violence and healing. My elders and mentors have taught me that to engage *healing* at its root, we must understand the *violence* at its root. I dive into the literature centering the experiences of U.S. Central American students in higher education by understanding student outcomes and sense of belonging in the U.S. diaspora that brings insight into the sociopolitical factors and histories that impact their daily lives. Often erased in the literature due to contextual dominance of other groups and the homogenization of Latine identity, U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors are not often centered within higher education research.

In Part 2, I outline the context for campus sexual violence as it pertains to the historical and systemic legacies often not centered in campus sexual violence research in higher education. Understanding historical and institutional contexts of the campus sexual violence problem highlights the structural factors that often contribute to the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students. Second, I explore the literature on campus sexual violence briefly reviewing prevalence, victimization risk factors, reporting, and disclosure that leads to an extensive overview of research that centers the healing of students impacted by campus sexual violence, especially Women of Color. I highlight the limitations in campus sexual violence research for Latine and graduate student campus sexual violence survivors, particularly for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors who often experience erasure in the context of broader campus sexual violence research.

Part 3 introduces the theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools that guided the dissertation study centering *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory to explore the healing experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors of sexual violence in U.S. higher education. Chapter 2 features a prologue titled *¿Quieren Baleadas o Tlayudas Cipotes?* This short story explores my connection to the literature review as a child of parents in diaspora from Central America and Oaxaca. As an Indigenous Oaxaqueña (Chatina/Zapotec) and U.S. *Centroamericana* college student survivor myself, the story provides a glimpse into the multiple realities of students navigating their identity, belonging, and histories tied to other spaces and places while in the United States.

Chapter 3 provides an in-depth discussion of the methodology and methods for the dissertation study. Using *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology, I used various methods like plática, walking plática, collective healing plática, testimonio, field site visits, photo/artifact elicitation, a research journal, and analytical memo to explore the wholistic dimensions of collaborators in relation to the research questions. Chapter 3 features a prologue titled *Plática, Where the Healing Happens* and explores the healing between two *Centroamericana* survivors, my mother and me, through the praxis of plática grounded in storytelling, repair, and *rememoria*. *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology offers us a glimpse into the possibilities of intergenerational healing and repair for collective liberatory futures.

Chapter 4 introduces the findings to the research questions in this dissertation. Introduced by a prologue titled *A Visit from La Cigua in the Garden*, the prologue leads with *Centroamericana* storywork to center *Centroamericana* epistemology and research findings. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the findings responding to Research Question 1: How

does a U.S. *Centroamericana* identity shape experiences with campus sexual and relationship violence? In the second section, I discuss the findings responding to Research Question 2: How do U.S. *Centroamericana* college students engage healing from their experiences of campus sexual and relationship violence? This section is divided into two findings (a) healing defined for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors and (b) healing modalities for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors.

Chapter 5 concludes with the discussion and implication sections of the dissertation study. The chapter begins with a prologue titled *Centroamericana Healing Genealogies* that narrates a composite vignette of the final *Centroamericana* Collective Healing Plática with collaborators. Through this chapter, I explore how centering the healing genealogies of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors can engage forms of resistance, persistence, and healing for students and their lineages. I then introduce the framework of *Centroamericana Healing Genealogies* to outline practice and research implications of this study in the “Implications” section.

The testimonios of U.S. *Centroamericana* survivors are weaved throughout this dissertation through chapter prologues and epilogues, positionality, methodologies, data engagement, and findings to embody the praxis of collaborative storytelling and collective meaning making. I position this dissertation as testimonio, as a *whole story and in its smaller parts*, that centers the intergenerational healing and resistance of U.S. *Centroamericana* survivors. Through this dissertation and heartwork, I hope to share the realities, healing, and future making of past-present-future U.S. *Centroamericanas*.

As we journey through stories of pain, healing, and resistance, I center the following affirmations and ancestral wisdom for those who engage with this dissertation:

An Offering | Una Ofrenda

Soy suficiente tal como soy.
Mi cuerpo-mente-espíritu merece cariño y amor.
Soy valiente.
No estoy sola en mi linaje ni en mi comunidad.
Soy digna.
Soy completa.

I am enough as I am.
My body-mind-spirit is deserving of care and love.
I am brave.
I am not alone in my lineage and community.
I am worthy.
I am whole.

Epilogue: A Poem by My Central American Mother

Central American scholars have empowered us, Central Americans, to be truthful and unwavering in the storytelling of our family histories, experiences with intergenerational trauma, healing, and resistance. We are *orgullosos* [proud] of the ways in which we make meaning of our own community identity, past and futures. As a U.S. *Centroamericana* and Indigenous Oaxaqueña student survivor living in diaspora, my existence is found in multiple places and memories at the same time. Centering the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students in research requires we listen deeply to the stories of what has shaped our identity, how these experiences interact with the U.S. imperial narrative and academy, and in what ways we create our current reality. There is no *one* way to exist as a U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivor—we are diverse in diaspora, and so must our healing.

My mother, a *Centroamericana* woman from Honduras and El Salvador (see Figure 1), taught me the importance of these histories and lineages through her love, healing, and storytelling. We wrote this poem together while sitting in my parents' comedor as we engaged in plática about her childhood in Honduras for an oral history project during my doctoral training at University of California, Los Angeles. We utilized the "I am Poem" Exercise (see Appendix A).

Figure 1

Rosa Ivonne Aguilar Marquez



Note. My mother migrated in the 1970s to Tovaangar (Los Angeles).

Yo Soy

by Rosa Ivonne Marquez de Aguilar

Yo soy del mar, el olor de la lluvia con la tierra, los cantos de los pájaros, gallinas y
chanchitos en la mañanita, de las hojas de plátano, de la luna y pescados

Yo soy de los mangos, cocos, cacos, nances, mamones, arroz con frijoles, queso y tortillas, del
pan y tabletas de coco, plátano frito y maíz cocido con azúcar

Yo soy de “cipotes, pónganse chancletas que se van a resfriar,” “paren de jugar en los charcos
que se van a revolcar” y “apaguen las luces y suban al cuarto con comida”
(por las toque de quedas)

Yo soy de mi Mama Rosa (Tía), mi Tía Clemen, mis hermanos Bety y Javier, y mi mama, Rosa.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Prologue: ¿Quieren Baleadas o Tlayudas cipotes?

I have a distinct memory of being about 10 years old in elementary school. The school I attended was down the street from my parents' house; our first home. After being undocumented for several years, my mami and papi spent years saving up to purchase their first home. Six of us lived in one bedroom in my Tio's home in Mid City Tovaangar (Los Angeles) to save up for it. My parents' dream was to give us a home where us *hijos* [children] could live together, something my parents didn't get to experience as children in their pueblos (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Child in Diaspora



Note. In the bottom photo, I am celebrating my fifth birthday in La Esperanza, Honduras at my Tia Deisy's house with my maternal primos. In the top photo, I am visiting el Zocalo in Ciudad Oaxaca as a child with my paternal primos.

Growing up with a Central American mother (Honduran) and an Indigenous Oaxaqueño father (Chatino/Zapotec) meant living in multiple worlds that no one in my extended family or schooling truly understood. I'd get asked questions by my elementary classmates: "Are you *really* Mexican? Why is your skin darker than mine? Why does your mom sound like she's always mad when she talks—referring to my ma's thick Honduran accent and use of the word "vos" instead of the more common "tú." I never really understood at that age that there was more than one way to be Mexican, to be Honduran, to be Latine, to be Indigenous, to be American. I grew up on *plátanos fritos* and *frijoles negros con crema*, *baleadas* were my favorite. On weekends, *tlayudas* and *mole negro* made with sweet chocolates and chiles were gifted to us by my madrina, Yoya, who would make the 1-hour drive to visit us in the high desert. Salsa and punta music would blast from the radio on Saturday mornings when my mami was home after working overnight shifts at the local convalescent home. Hot cheetos were sacred though. I practiced my fractions at a young age by having to divide one hot cheeto bag among the four of us siblings—exactly one quarter of the bag for each of us.

In the evenings when the sun would start to set, we would play outside as my papi made carne asada after coming home from work. His cassette tape and record player would blast the latest *chilenas* and *bandas costeñas* from back home in Oaxaca. "*Guelaguetza*, hija, nunca se olviden [daughter, never forget this]" he'd say to us growing up—*Guelaguetza*, the Zapotec word that embodies the spirit of reciprocity in family and community. My papi would surprise us occasionally with rock music—"Hotel California" by the Eagles and the Beatles were some of his favorites. It was through these moments that I began learning English and was introduced to "American" mainstream culture, multiple mundos at once.

My Central American cousins on my mami's side would look at us differently for having a *cantadito* Spanish, a "sung" spanish, often coded for an "Indio" spanish, a racialized Indigenous person in Mexico. They would make note of when we would say "popote" when referring to a straw because popote is a term used mostly in Mexico. When I was with my primos on my papi's side, they were fascinated by our "gabacho" Spanish, a mix of U.S. English and Spanish. They would giggle when I'd ask for a "pajilla" at the mercado back in el pueblo in Oaxaca —"pajilla" is the word for straw mostly used in Central America. At home it was easy, I didn't have to choose, it just was. Whether I asked for a "popote or pajilla or straw," my parents and siblings knew exactly what I was asking for. Nothing *was* strange about it—nothing *is* strange about it.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature necessary to ground the research questions that explore the healing experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in higher education. The review of the literature is outlined into three parts. In Part 1, I dive into the literature centering the experiences of U.S. Central American students in higher education. Understanding the history and context of the U.S. Central American diaspora brings insight into the sociopolitical factors that impact U.S. *Centroamericana* survivors' student outcomes and sense of belonging more broadly. In Part 2, I outline the context for campus sexual violence as it pertains to the historical and systemic legacies often not centered in campus sexual violence research in higher education. Understanding historical and institutional contexts of campus sexual violence highlights the structural factors that often contribute to the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students. I also explore the literature on campus sexual violence, briefly reviewing prevalence, victimization risk factors, reporting and disclosure, and finally, an extensive overview of research that centers the healing of students impacted by campus sexual violence, especially for Women of Color student survivors. I highlight special considerations for Latine and graduate student survivors in campus sexual violence research, particularly for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors who often experience erasure in the context of broader campus sexual violence research.

Lastly, Part 3 introduces the theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools that guided the dissertation study centering *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology to explore the healing experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students who have experienced sexual violence on U.S. college campuses. As stated in the introduction, *Centroamericana* and Chicana/Latina scholars (Anzaldúa, 1987; Moraga, 1983; Pulido, 1996) have posited that self-naming is a necessity in the act of agency and re-empowerment and includes the proposal of feminine

language that explains “the lived female experience that cannot be divorced from race, ethnicity and culture” (Alvarado et al., 2017, p. 102). U.S. *Centroamericana* is italicized throughout this study to encompass the experiences of U.S. Central American *women* that centers their *racial and gendered* experiences as U.S *Centroamericanas* wholistically.

Part 1: U.S. Central American Students in Higher Education

The research on U.S. Central American students in higher education is limited and emerging. The recent expansion of the literature has been driven by a small but growing number of Central American scholars centering the experiences, histories, and relationships of U.S. Central American students within larger Latine scholarship (Abrego, 2006; Coronado, 2013; Diaz-Strong, 2021; Maldonado Dominguez, 2019; Paredes, 2022). In the following section, I provide an overview of Central American political contexts and U.S. Central American students in higher education, and discuss how U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors are often invisible in Latine higher education research.

The Central American Diaspora in the United States

Otra forma de dominio es el patriarcado, con un triple peso para las mujeres: por ser mujeres, por ser indígenas y por ser pobres. Ante esa panorama, nuestra organización y nuestra comunidad no se ha quedado de brazos cruzados. Hemos luchado y hemos definido nuestras propias formas de lucha, legalizadas por nosotras y nosotros mismos que se manifiestan de diversas maneras sabiendo que la articulación es un imperativo más que urgente para todos nosotros.

[Another form of domination is patriarchy, with a triple weight on women: because they are women, because they are Indigenous, because they are poor. As we face this picture, our organization in our community did not just stand with arms crossed. We fight and

define our own forms of struggle, made legal by ourselves. We express them in many different ways, knowing that organizing is imperative and extremely urgent to all of us.]

—Cáceres Flores, 2007, 09:01

Berta Cáceres Flores was a Lenca Indigenous land and water protector born in La Esperanza, Honduras. A mother to five children and founder of the Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras, Berta's commitment to defending the Lenca habitat and rights to water for Lenca people moved organizers and anticapitalist and anti-imperialism efforts to organize for environmental justice and Indigenous sovereignty across Central America and internationally. A fierce leader against patriarchy and gender-based violence, Berta was assassinated by a U.S. trained soldier on March 3, 2016, who was hired by the president of a building company attempting to build a waterway through Lenca territory (Guzman, 2023). Drawing on her experiences as an Indigenous woman, Berta Cáceres connected the dots to help us understand how imperialism and colonialism, gender, and patriarchy impact the lives of Central American women at home and in diaspora and can serve as the foundation to then understand U.S. *Centroamericana* students' experiences in higher education.

To begin to understand the stories of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors, one must understand the histories and sociopolitical contexts of Central America. Central America, in the dominant imperial narrative of the Global North, has been carefully curated to represent geographies of insecurity and violence to the international community (Abrego & Cárcamo, 2020). Made up of seven countries (see Figure 3), including Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama, these countries are rich in history, people, and diverse traditions grounded in Latine, Indigenous, and Afro Central American genealogies (Alvarado et al., 2017). In dominant mainstream media, Central Americans are often portrayed

within geographies of poverty, murder, femicide, and sexual violence facilitated by gang, military and civil war violence (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012). Political discourse surrounding Central America in the United States has often been engineered to symbolically portray Central American immigrants as criminals, communists and guerillas, “illegal aliens,” and uncivilized bodies to justify violent immigration policies and nativist ideologies in issues of legality and immigration responses from the United States (Abrego & Villalpando, 2021; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012). Central American scholars have argued that the United States has enacted the most violence in Central America due to neoliberal and imperial ideologies of exploitation and resource extraction.

Figure 3

Map of Central America



The migration of Central Americans to the United States has stemmed from a long history of U.S. military and economic interventions that have destabilized local economies, exploited land resources for capital gain, and exacerbated poverty as a result of environmental and economic catastrophes (Abrego, 2017; Alvarado et al., 2017). The U.S. intervention in Central America has long been responsible for the Central American diaspora, starting from the late 19th century with the creation of Canal Zones and the development of the banana plantation companies (*las bananeras*), and coffee trades (Alvarado et al., 2017). Imperial projects and capitalist agendas gave way to privatize and colonize natural resources and human labor as they built plantations and railroads to transport various products. U.S. government policies that have facilitated agricultural and trade agreements have created contentious political relations over time with the United States and local tensions within Central American communities. Central American scholars have highlighted the political implications and unique ways in which these interventions have racialized and impacted migration for specific groups within Central America (Alvarado, 2017). Central America's history in resistance to imperial intervention has been seen through the many attempts "at revolution that aimed to redistribute unjustly concentrated wealth" and the various moments when the "U.S. intervened by repressing popular uprisings to protect business interests" (Abrego, 2017, p. 74).

For example, mass migrations from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua initially stemmed from internal civil wars because of competing interests in the region by internal and external imperial powers, including the United States, and by various competing political projects working toward "national liberation" (Varela Huerta, 2017, p. 4). Central American scholar Abrego (2017) highlighted the ways in which the United States collaborated with the military and elites in El Salvador to protect U.S. corporate wealth during the Reagan

Administration by arming and training the military and paramilitary leaders of death squads with the goal to end opposition in the region during the Cold War operations. A UN-mandated Truth Commission found that U.S.-backed state forces and paramilitary groups—often trained to facilitate torture, gender-based violence, and extrajudicial killings—were responsible for the genocide of over 200,000 Indigenous Mayan communities in Guatemala during the 1980s (Ramírez, 2021). Migration to the United States became contentious as Guatemalan and Salvadorian migrants seeking refuge from this violence were systemically denied any form of legal entry and residency to squash any support for resistance movements in Central America (Alvarado et al., 2017). Although migration patterns and policies have changed over time, the legacies of generational trauma and migration have continued to follow many families and communities to the United States.

Central American scholars have noted that Honduras has been used as a “middleman” for imperial and adjoining governments in their pursuit of political, military, and capitalist projects in the Isthmus (Alvarado et al., 2017). Although Honduras did not experience a civil war like its neighboring nations, Honduras resisted British occupation in the 1850s but set the soil and structural foundation for the facilitation of United States’s political and trade interest. U.S. fruit companies, like Chiquita and other external companies, came to own and exploit natural resources and farmable land (Portillo Villeda, 2021). U.S. companies built out infrastructure to destabilize small communities and make them dependable on the U.S. trade economy through job security, access to resources and other basic needs. It also served as a key military interest for later U.S. military interventions in the 19th century with the goal of protecting U.S. monopoly companies (Alvarado et al., 2017). The Reagan presidential administration based its covert military attacks on Nicaragua and other nations from Honduras that led to environmental

deforestation, the increase of violence within community through the creation of *maras* (gangs), and political unrest that has led to high rates of poverty and migration from the region. With high rates of gender-based violence and violence against journalists and activists due to these histories, in the 2010s, Honduran youth seeking safety and opportunity constituted the largest Central American demographic leaving Honduras to the United States (Alvarado et al., 2017).

Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize have had varying experiences with racialization and positioning within Central American political contexts (Morris, 2016; Ramsey, 2024). Panama became the means for how the United States could manipulate lands, water, and people in creating interventionist projects that would facilitate the U.S. control of commerce and power by sea (Corinealdi, 2022). The simultaneous building of the Panama Canal alongside the building of the sovereign nation-state of Panama occurred because of U.S. strategic efforts to gain military control of a region heavily used by international trade (Alvarado et al., 2017). Influenced to a great extent by the Jim Crow racial policies occurring in the United States during this time, racialization occurred within Panama in part of a strategic plan to stratify Panamanian people based on education levels, labor activities, and involvement in the building of the canal. Panamanians and neighboring nations were recruited and compensated higher for jobs while others were channeled into responsibilities that would have impact on generational wealth and access to property (Alvarado et al., 2017). Pew Research (M. Anderson, 2015) suggested, because Black Panamanian and Costa Rican immigrants were from English-speaking Caribbean nations, they were more likely to be proficient in English and have access to more education and resources with over 23% of immigrants holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

The racialization of Central America is part of a longer historical context that has had direct impact on the lived experiences of Black and Indigenous Central Americans in diaspora.

López Oro (2021) elaborated on the invisibilities of Black people in Central America by centering the experiences of Garifuna people in diaspora. Garifuna are Black Indigenous peoples who are “descendants of shipwrecked enslaved West Africans and autochthonous Carib-Arawak of the Caribbean Island of Saint Vincent” (López Oro, 2021, p. 224) exiled to Honduras and later migrating to Belize, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. To understand Black and Indigenous-identified U.S. Central American students, navigating identity formation in the context of *mestizaje*, requires to examining the ways in which “Blackness is relegated, alienated and ascribed to the Caribbean coast while erasing centuries of Black folks” (López Oro, 2021, p. 223). Central American ideologies of *mestizaje* emerged contextually as imperial and political policies and decisions shaped the daily lives of Garifuna people in certain regions. For example, Black Hondurans experienced discrimination and deportations from the Caribbean coast in the 1920s when *mestizaje*, as a political project and process of racial mixture, and the colonization of Indigenous people by the Spanish, “drew on the postindependence rejection of blackness” (López Oro, 2021, p. 226), specifically by making Garifuna Blackness a racial threat to the project. Artiaga (2020) documented and highlighted the ways in which Garifuna people were erased and “omitted from national narratives” (p. 423) of the story of Central American conflicts and were contextualized only in other Latine Indigenous paradigms. In diaspora, it is critical that people understand how Latinidad in the United States, as a project, is “built, travels and performed on the ideological legacies of Latin American *mestizaje*.” Artiaga (2020) showed that centering a politic of Black Central Americanness can highlight the ways in Garifuna and Black Central Americans disrupt and transgress hegemonic narratives of race in Central America and in the United States.

In addition, Indigenous Central Americans have also been racialized and imagined in relation to United States and other settler-nation state structures and geographies. Boj Lopez (2022) elaborated on the ways in which “Latinidad articulates a marginalization in the U.S. but obscures the racial and settler colonial hierarchies embedded in countries in Latin America” (p. 52). Essentially, the project of Latinidad works by “collapsing and flattening racial hierarchies of our own countries” (Boj Lopez, 2022, p. 53) by generalizing everyone as Latinos. Blackwell et al. (2017) provided the framework of Critical Latinx Indigeneities as an “interdisciplinary analytic that reflects how indigeneity is defined and constructed across multiple countries and at times, across overlapping colonialities” (p. 127); it provides a framework to explore colonial legacies and how they intersect with Indigenous migration. Within Central American and other critical studies areas, bringing awareness to the ways in which “im/migrants arrive on the homelands and nation of Indigenous peoples” can also bring awareness to the “responsibilities and the possibilities of new relationships with tension and solidarity” (Blackwell et al., 2017, p. 131). Scholar Saldaña-Portillo (2017) added that it is a framework that can be used to “interrogate the contemporary migration” of Black, Indigenous, and Latine people from various Latin American contexts “as a continual consequence of settler colonialism” (p. 143). We have much to learn and explore about the healing needs of Black and Indigenous U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors as their lineages transgress multiple borderlands, geographies, and contexts while engaging in healing.

Returning to Berta Cáceres’s work mentioned earlier in this section, it is critical that people understand the dynamics and histories of patriarchy and gender-based violence in Central America that often have trickling impacts on lineages of *Centroamericanas* in the United States. Varela Huerta (2017) described the “forced migration” of Central American Women into the

United States as both a consequence of state and political violence and a form of *resistance*. Many are fleeing labor violence from U.S. exploitative sweatshops, violence from patriarchy, and “*muerta en vida*” [dead while alive], referring to the necropolitics of not having control over their bodies, livelihoods, and futures. Citing gender-based violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and femicide, *Centroamericanas* have described this violence “not as an isolated event in the lives of women victims of violence, but as the tragic epilogue to a continuum of terror made up of verbal and physical abuse, characterized by a wide range of manifestations of violence” (Varela Huerta, 2017, p. 8). Upon arriving to the United States, many Central American migrants and their children experience structural gender-based violence through their experiences with labor markets, discrimination, and patriarchy (Abrego, 2020). Undocumented immigrants, specifically Salvadorian mothers, highlighted the ways in which labor and sexual violence exploitation were “rampant” and humiliating, and they often were exploited at higher rates than their male counterparts in the United States, providing further evidence of structural harm embedded in many institutions across borders. Seeking futures for themselves and their families, seeking environments with human dignity, and working to assert their humanity, Valera Huerta described the migration of *Centroamericanas* as resisting neoliberalism and the commodification of their bodies and labor by state-sanctioned violence. Alvarado et al. (2017) provided a reminder that U.S. Central American “histories have shown violence of the past links to the present through global processes”(p. 221) and that within the culture of Central American diasporas, “we need to examine the stories and knowledges that women communicate to their children [descendants]” (p. 224) while making sense of their identities and positionalities. It is within this backdrop of sociopolitical contexts that we explore how the lineages of migration,

history, and generational knowledge impact U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors on college campuses.

Central American Students Within Latine Higher Education Research

The Latine community in the United States made up approximately about 20% of the population at the time of this study and it has continued to grow, making it one of the largest populations in the United States (B. E. Vega et al., 2021). Historically, the Latine community has been researched and studied as a general pan-ethnic group despite having diversity within its population. Latine communities' experiences of racialization, migration, health, and access to education and resources have often been mitigated by how immigration and foreign policies have shaped Latin American countries by the United States. Central Americans in the United States have been estimated to be the third largest Latine identified group at over 3.5 million people (B. E. Vega et al., 2021). According to Pew's Hispanic Research Center, Central American migrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras are some of the largest growing populations of immigrants to the United States (Coronado & Paredes, 2018; B. E. Vega et al., 2021). The Central American population experienced its greatest growth between 1980 and 2017 with individuals and families settling in greater Los Angeles, New York, Washington DC, Miami, and Houston metropolitan areas (B. E. Vega et al., 2021). Despite the growing numbers of Central Americans in the United States, Central American students and their persistence have not been centered in educational research (Lau & Gordon, 2015).

One of the reasons why U.S. Central American students are often not sampled in higher education research is due to the homogenization of the Latine identity (Maldonado Dominguez, 2019). Central Americans are often conflated with Mexican and Mexican American populations further rendering U.S. Central Americans invisible. Central American scholars have referred to

this process of invisibility due, in part, to the contextual dominance of Mexican/Mexican American/Chicanx identities in research (Alvarado et al., 2017). For example, Ek (2009) found Central Americans in the United States may go through a process of “Mexicanization” where Central American students are incorporated or develop a sense of belonging to Chicana/Mexican identities due to familiarity and or a lack of Central American belonging on their campuses. Maldonado Dominguez (2019) found that Central American students found a “dual sense of belonging” within Chicano Studies departments, stating:

The Chicana/o studies department does offer a relevant, safe space for U.S. Central American students, providing them access to tools that allow them to begin to uncover their Central American roots. However, as U.S. Central Americans, they are not fully represented. This dual sense of belonging reveals the urgent need to address Latina/o/x homogenization and to not force Latina/o/x students to fit one mold that erases distinct realities, creating unequal educational trajectories. (p. 116)

U.S. Central American students are often navigating historical, familial, and institutional dynamics impacted by broader campus climates (Paredes, 2022). Some research on campus climate with Latine students can provide insight into how student demographics, geographical locations of the university campus, and universities are conceptualizing sense of belonging and the impact on persistence.

The literature that is available regarding the experiences of U.S. Central American student outcomes and their persistence in higher education can provide some context regarding their experiences in higher education. For example, Coronado (2013) used testimonios to explore the ways in which Central American students felt different than their other peers as “Central Americans,” referring to the contextual dominance and posited that their connections to histories

of generational trauma, migration, and healing motivated them to continue in their education journeys. In a later study, Coronado (2013) shared that U.S. Central American students' persistence and motivation was tied to resistance, a resistance grounded in the "discrimination they faced in school, the lack of Central American role models, their family's immigration stories, their resilience about living in poverty, and transforming the schools they attended which had limited educational resources" (p. 14). Linares and Maffini (2020) explored how historical trauma impacted first-, 1.5-, and second-generation Salvadorian undergraduate students, finding that Salvadorian student's sense of belonging was heavily impacted by limited "safe spaces to foster a sense of community, learning about their history and culture, and share knowledge with others" (p. 13). Zimmerman et al. (2023) discussed how undocumented Central American youth navigated their sense of belonging in social movement spaces, exploring how *compounded foreignness* excluded their identities in broader dominant conceptions of Latinidad, often making them feel socially invisible and foreign to dominant U.S. and Latine culture. War trauma, stories of migration, and lineages of resistance are part of many ways that U.S. Central American students are making sense of their identities in the literature; however, further exploration is needed to understand the experiences of U.S. Central American students that is unique to their own context and identity, especially as Women.

The experiences of U.S. Central American students in higher education can also be examined through literature that explores the experiences of Undocumented students in higher education. Abrego (2006) explored the ways Undocumented Latine students, some of whom identified as U.S. Central American, were heavily impacted by their Undocumented status when experiencing their college-going processes. Although the study focused on Latine students broadly, there were implications regarding how their Undocumented status impacted their

abilities to see a college degree attainable or connect to their identity. Salazar et al. (2024) explored the experiences of four undocumented Central American students, out of 23 undocumented students in the sample, in a study about postgraduation aspirations. They found that having DACA (i.e., Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) did not provide stability in their future planning. Instead, students showed “sense of self diminished” and students “doubted if they were going to be able to adjust to new routines, relationships, and roles” after graduation (Salazar et al., 2024, p. 756). In two studies in particular that examined the experiences of U.S. Central American students, Diaz-Strong (2021) and Hernandez (2016) heavily focused on the barriers and opportunities that undocumented U.S. Central American students face, including, but not limited to, lack of financial support for tuition costs that was heavily mitigated by the support from intergenerational peers, family, and school agents that strategically served their identity as Undocumented students. These studies showcased further insight into how immigration status shapes identity making for Central American students and further research is needed to explore the impacts of immigration status in connection with sexual violence. The literature on Central Americans students in the United States is limited but emerging. This dissertation is positioned to add to the research with Central American students in higher education by exploring the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students healing from sexual violence through a racial, gendered, and transnational migration lens.

Part 2: The Problem of Campus Sexual Violence in Higher Education

The history of sexual and relationship violence has been heavily documented and analyzed through several critical lenses including colonization, white supremacy, and slavery (INCITE!, 2016). Campus sexual violence has been rooted in the histories of sexual and racial violence in U.S. higher education as they have been deeply connected to settler colonization,

slavery, and white supremacy (Deer, 2015; INCITE!, 2016). Historically, white colonizers have used sexual violence as a genocidal tool to remove Indigenous peoples from their land and disenfranchise Indigenous communities in the United States (Deer, 2015; Simpson, 2007). Enslavers perpetrated sexual violence to terrorize enslaved Africans and used sexual violence to threaten Black communities that continued past the formal abolishment of slavery (McGuire, 2010).

Historians have highlighted the subjugation of Black labor to build institutions of higher education, the mechanisms used to force assimilation into mainstream “white colonial colleges,” and have analyzed the racist policies of segregation that impacted many Black, Indigenous and Students of Color at the inception of many colleges and universities in the United States (Rudolf, 1991; Wright & Tierney, 1991). Critical analysis of “land-grab [grant]” institutions established in various states across the nation has pointed to the ongoing settler-colonial project of the stealing of unceded Indigenous territories and turning them into college endowments through higher education legislation such as the Morrill Act (Lee & Ahtone, 2020). Eliminating sexual violence has long been a part of the greater U.S. gender and racial justice project, given postsecondary institutions have legacies of this violence while also being the spaces and catalyst for change to address these issues (McGuire, 2010). Dache-Gerbino (2017) situated these connections to history, the racialization of space and place, and its impacts on Minoritized students and higher education, as they stated:

The political-economic and cultural binaries that exist in physical and literal geographies have manifested in avant-garde forms of bondage: mass incarceration, confinement of indigenous people on reservations, and the militarization of the police state. Within local geographies and institutions of learning, such as higher education, a postcolonial

theorization is needed in order to grapple with the socioracial stagnation of US higher education. (p. 369)

Political landscapes, geographical locations, and histories tied to university campuses impact the mechanisms for how learning, curriculum development, access, educational policies, and student services are conceptualized, implemented, and in some cases, weaponized to continue to perpetuate inequities and settler-colonization (Dache-Gerbino, 2017).

Campus sexual violence activism and advocacy have long been present on college campuses stemming back decades of organizing for victim's rights and inclusion in higher education. The Anti-Rape Movement in the early 1970s included a wide range of consciousness-raising activities as part of the second-wave feminist movement where white, college educated women came together to advocate for community and university responses to sexual assault on and off campus (Jessup-Anger et al., 2018). Acknowledging that second-wave feminism and the Anti-Rape Movement was not intersectional and lacked an analysis of how race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ability intersect to create varying experiences of oppression and dominance for Women of Color, the movement nonetheless set the foundation for the later campus movement organizing in higher education (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

Black Feminists, Indigenous scholars, and Abolitionists focused on both racial and gender justice; however, most research of campus sexual violence and its impact on students heavily centered white women (Harris & Linder, 2017). In the 1990s, the Clery Act (1990) and The Violence Against Women Act (1994), both federal legislation that increased protections, attention, and institutional resources to victim rights, including campus sexual violence survivors, were the first of their kind to outline federal guidelines for how states should address issues of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking (Jessup-Anger et al., 2018). Responding

to and preventing campus sexual violence in higher education has mostly been conceptualized and understood through the federal Title IX Education Amendments of 1972. Originally set out to prevent discrimination based on sex and gender in federally funded programs, Title IX's expansion throughout the following decades became critical to creating equitable learning environments for campus sexual violence survivors and gender nonconforming students in higher education (Jessup-Anger et al., 2018).

In the years leading up to 2014, the Campus Sexual Violence Movement experienced an enormous surge of action as social media and technology (e.g., Facebook, twitter) facilitated the connection of hundreds of campus sexual violence survivors across the nation (Dick, 2015; Know Your IX, 2013). Student survivors shared their experiences of sexual violence, discrimination, and retaliation on public platforms and began organizing on their college campuses to expose institutional betrayals, the lack of Title IX and adjudication infrastructures, and the impacts of sexual violence on undergraduate and graduate students in their academic environments (Dick, 2015). Op-eds, survivor campus "speakouts," and social media facilitated education on Title IX rights, reporting processes, and campus organizing tools, and allowed university students to become knowledgeable on policies and procedures while demanding action, support, and intervention from university officials and external agencies, like the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights and state auditor offices (Know Your IX, 2013). For example, student activism and the massive education campaigns that allowed students to learn about federal, state, and campus policies and the history of sexual violence in higher education created avenues for students to report violations of their federal Title IX rights, experiences of gender and racial-based discrimination in the classroom, and the lack of institutional resources that essentially denied access to higher education and learning (Dick,

2015). The Office of Civil Rights received student complaints, including complaints from top-ranked universities and colleges, with some complaints having yet to be resolved (Brown, 2021). Investigations of these complaints showcased the myriad of issues with higher education systems and how universities were noncompliant and lacked trauma-informed, investigatory, and adjudication structures on college campuses while highlighting the minimal support available for campus survivors which many resolved through resolution agreements (U.S. Office of the Vice President, & White House Council on Women and Girls, 2014). In the following months, college and universities began addressing the issue of campus sexual violence due to Clery noncompliance fines, state audits, risks of losing federal funding for Title IX noncompliance, and surmounting public pressure that pushed universities and the federal government to “symbolically” address the campus sexual violence issue nationally (Jessup-Anger et al., 2018).

Driven by several historical conditions and the pervasiveness of sexual violence on college campuses (e.g., statistics highlighting 1 in 5 college students and 1 in 4 Transgender/Gender Nonconforming students will experience sexual violence while in college), former vice president Joe Biden unveiled the historical “Dear Colleague Letter” on sexual violence at the University of New Hampshire on April 4th, 2011 (R. Wilson, 2020). The “Dear Colleague Letter” was the impetus of a long list of legislation that would follow to institutionalize sexual violence prevention and response within diversity, equity, and inclusion university structures and mechanisms by the federal and state government (Jessup-Anger et al., 2018). In this letter, Title IX offices were reminded of their responsibility for responding and resolving sexual violence complaints on university campuses and were expected to adopt “best practices” in sexual violence response models (Jessup-Anger & Edwards, 2015). This included the implementation of policies, adjudication processes, investigatory models, publication of case

numbers (e.g., reports of incidents), intakes, interim measures, alternative resolutions versus investigations, number of policy violations versus not founded, demographic information, and efforts on policy education among other criteria. The restructuring of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Offices, Student Affairs Organizations, and Confidential Victim Advocacy offices institutionalized resources and missions to provide comprehensive primary prevention of sexual harassment and discrimination while providing survivor wholistic healing support services to students, staff, and faculty impacted by sexual violence and discrimination (Jessup-Anger et al., 2018).

Former President Barack Obama signed a presidential memorandum that established the White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault on January 22nd, 2014 because of national student-led activism and the need for federal guidance on addressing inequities on university campuses. In April of the same year, the task force released the “Not Alone” report that outlined action items and recommendations for how to respond to campus sexual violence, including expanding research on prevalence of sexual violence, development of trauma informed training for school officials, and creation of comprehensive sexual misconduct policies were among the beginning of initial actions (U.S. Office of the Vice President, & White House Council on Women and Girls, 2014). These efforts were accompanied with the prioritization of grant funding for universities and colleges through a collaboration with the Department of Justice Violence Against Women to fund research and campus efforts to develop comprehensive plans with campus officials, local community agencies, and law enforcement (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Violence Against Women, 2023).

On the federal and state legislative front, with the implementation of the 2011 “Dear Colleague Letter,” since rescinded with challenges over the years, further supported these efforts

by passing legislation to codify protections and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts regarding sexual violence through the 2013 Campus Sexual Violence Act Provision (Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act, 2013), referred to as the Campus SaVE Act (Jessup-Anger et al., 2018). The SaVE Act expanded reporting requirements within the Clery Act (1990) and addressed mandated prevention training and response efforts for students on college campuses.

It is important to acknowledge that although efforts to address campus sexual violence on college campuses have made progress in the decade prior to the current study, critical campus sexual violence research has highlighted the inequities and gaps that Minoritized students still face in their search for healing and support after experiencing violence on campus due to the heavy compliance and risk aversion policies, race evasiveness interventions, and dominant narratives of “healing” at institutions of higher education (Harris, 2020; Harris & Linder, 2017). The Campus Sexual Violence Movement has positioned federal and state governments, legislative policy makers, academic researchers, student and community stakeholders, and university administrators as foundational key players in the creation of sexual violence response efforts in higher education. Student activism with the support of faculty, on- and off-campus equity centers, public organizations, and national coalitions has continued to push forth efforts for equitable and inclusive learning environments while addressing harm in classrooms and institutions. Through understanding these histories and legacies of campus sexual violence, we can begin to understand part of the current context in which U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors experience violence and healing in higher education.

Healing From Campus Sexual Violence

The research on campus sexual violence has been heavily focused on prevalence, risk factors for victimization and perpetration, disclosure and reporting of sexual violence, victim

help-seeking behavior, and sexual violence prevention (DeLoveh & Cattaneo, 2017; Moylan & Javorka, 2020; Moylan et al., 2021; Sabina & Ho, 2014). A majority of these studies were large scale, quantitative studies using survey methods that captured experiences heavily focused on individual factors that decenter structural, historical, and campus climate influences on campus sexual violence (Linder et al., 2020; Moylan & Javorka, 2020). Many studies that have explored campus sexual violence among college students tended to sample predominately white women students in the data, highlighting the impacts of prevalence and risk factors for majority white student samples on campus (Katz et al., 2017). For example, only a few studies have explored the consequences of efficacy on the impacts of bystander training on survivors, bystanders, and the individuals targeted by bystander techniques (Krauss et al., 2021; Moschella et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2019). These programs are often developed from research studies that have sampled predominately white cis gender students in high school settings and critical scholars have identified gaps in the literature for minoritized students as Students of Color often face different risks and attitudes in negotiation intervention due to safety, identity, and other forms of violence in campus settings (Harris & Linder, 2017; Karunaratne & Harris, 2022; Linder, 2018).

Campus sexual violence research has also centered “race-neutral” and “once size fits all” approaches to researching and implementing sexual violence response efforts on campus that relegates individual responsibility on students to access safety and healing instead of relying on institutional structures, mechanisms and other campus specific factors that contribute to healing (Anderson Wadley & Hurtado, 2023; Wooten, 2017). For purposes of this literature review, this section focuses on the current research available for healing campus sexual violence for women students on campus.

Disclosure and Reporting. Some literature has supported the positive impact of formal disclosures from survivors in their healing and recovering journey (Barrios et al., 2025; Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012). Formal disclosures have been described as students discussing their experiences of sexual violence to formal and nonformal support providers, including sexual violence advocates, therapists, Title IX coordinators, and peers who are able to assist them with accessing resources, accommodations and avenues for seeking justice (Edwards & Dardis, 2020; Sears-Greer et al., 2022; Tillman et al., 2010). Research has shown that women survivors disclosed experiences of sexual violence at higher rates to informal support systems such as peers, friends, and romantic partners compared to formal sources like law enforcement and Title IX (Palmer & Vil, 2018). Studies have shown the reaction of the first person a student discloses to may have a positive impact on their recovery if the disclosure was received with positive support (Bonnan-White et al., 2018). Students who disclosed experiences of violence and were met with blame were found to correspond with increases in psychological distress and duress (Bonnan-White et al., 2018; Edwards et al., 2015). Survivors in some studies have shown that women survivors disclosing their experiences of violence to others who provided supportive spaces to process their experience of violence felt validating, feelings of worthiness, and decreased negative mental health symptoms (Draucker et al., 2009; Hassija & Turchik, 2016; Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012). Studies that highlighted peer and familial support as helpful spaces of healing for sexual violence survivors have discussed how these relationships can serve as support systems in the form of tangible support, like financial support for school supplies and providing childcare, housing, and other forms of emotional support (Voth Schrag, 2017; Voth Schrag & Edmond, 2018).

Although disclosure can be important for individual healing and recovery, many survivors are hesitant to disclose with studies showing anywhere from 1%–30% of survivors formally disclosing their experiences of violence (Barrios et al., 2025; Cantor et al., 2020; Cusano et al., 2023). For example, Caron and Mitchell (2022) found some college student survivors perceived they would receive negative responses like blame, humiliation, and risks to their safety, thus deciding not to share their experiences with others. Many of these studies cited general impacts of disclosure as healing pathways for majority white women students, but did not account for racial oppression and other structural power dynamics that can create unique experiences for Women of Color that often are felt through intrapersonal and institutional factors such as climate, race, and identity (Harris & Aguilar Marquez, 2026; Thomas, 2024).

Psychological Healing Support. Scholars studying the healing of women impacted by campus sexual violence have centered psychological and psychiatric approaches (T. Anderson et al., 2010; Conley & Griffith, 2016; L. C. Wilson & Miller, 2016). The impacts of sexual violence can include “psychological disorders (e.g., depression, posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD]), self-blame, loss of trust, substance use, suicidal thoughts, sleep disturbances, sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancies, sexual dysfunction, academic impairment, and school drop-out” (Coates Quezada et al., 2024, p. 1539). Women student survivors on campus are navigating multiple challenges and symptoms that have critical impacts to their connections to other students, community, and learning environments. Focusing heavily on psychological and therapeutic interventions to healing, scholars have analyzed and created interventions focused on reducing mental health impacts of sexual trauma and diagnosis (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety; Gómez, 2021; Kress et al., 2003; Roblbiecki et al., 2016).

Much of the research on healing campus sexual violence has centered psychological impacts limited to emotional functions and interventions that guide students to “talk” out their experience of violence. Most of these studies have relied heavily on collaborator samples that tend to center the experience of cisgender white women. For example, in one study on the psychological impacts of sexual violence and recommendations for providing healing support for college students through multi-level ecological interventions, Coates Quezada et al. (2024) engaged in a qualitative study with nine students who had experienced sexual violence on campus, only 2 out of 9 collaborators identified as cis-gender Women of Color. Although the study centered helpful recommendations regarding increasing connections to support networks and campus resources in environments for survivors, the study did not explore racial or gender implications that centered the student’s identity and specific needs for healing within the research.

In a mixed-methods, photo elicitation study, Sinko (2020) found students’ experiences of healing were not linear but instead were heavily impacted by the day-to-day experiences students navigated in their relationships with environments and people. Healing in this study was conceptualized as a continuum of dark and healing moments where students experienced fear, anxiety, loneliness, and worthlessness, and worked to rebuild their self-care, self-love, and connections to hope. Citing psychological impacts of positive psychology and resilience, the authors argued healing in this study allowed students to feel present, sought out spaces that acknowledged their healing, and the practice of photography as a healing practice. Other scholars (Driessen, 2024; Olson, 2015) have cited the importance of environments in healing that “reinforce feelings of calm or goodness [and] can be particularly powerful for challenging one’s

negative beliefs while promoting healing moments such as hope, freedom, and peace” (Sinko, 2020, p. 671).

Other studies have focused heavily on resilience and postassault life in the contexts of campus environments (Brubaker et al., 2017; Driessen, 2024; Fedina et al., 2018; Graham et al., 2021). Resilience is defined as the ability for individuals and communities to overcome adversity and trauma stemming from multiple structures of oppression (Driessen, 2024). Campus sexual violence student survivors who practice resilience and the ability to “bounce back” from trauma tended to have higher agency, coping skills, connections to others, and feelings of hope. For example, campus survivors who practiced agency through smaller choices such as participating in self-disclosure and reporting were able to actively make a consensual decision facilitating healing from their past nonconsensual experience of violence. Students also engaged in coping mechanisms such as avoidance, isolation, and use of substances to cope with the experience of trauma, and, although collaborators viewed these as “unhealthy coping mechanisms,” many highlighted these mechanisms as active decisions to adapt, move through, and survive new campus environment after their experiences of violence (Driessen, 2024).

Many of the campus survivors in these studies also highlighted how being seen, heard, and validated in their experiences of violence by their peers and support systems allowed them to envision futures of moving forward and persist within the context of their academic and personal goals. Critical scholars have also criticized resilience models of healing that normalize and essentialize experience of racial trauma and gender-based violence (Atallah et al., 2019). Many of these studies have sampled white women or failed to report back racial demographics of study samples and often have not considered structural and historical violence that impacts the daily

life of Women of Color students and other Minoritized students (T. Anderson et al., 2010; Rolbiecki et al., 2016).

Collective Activism and Education. Some studies have highlighted healing connected to collective social support from other students through learning about sexual violence in cocurricular education and courses, spending time with other students dialoguing about consent and healthy relationships, taking time to reflect on similar personal experiences with other students (Rodenhizer et al., 2021). Several mixed-methods studies have examined the connection between online social media activism with the #MeToo movement and healing. They found that engaging in online activism helped increase understanding of survivors in relation to their experiences of sexual violence, allowed survivors to provide education on a larger platforms, provided support and validation in community, and provided purpose and fulfillment with their lives (Gómez & Gobin, 2020; Linder et al., 2016; Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). Although activism may support healing for campus student survivors, the literature did not consider how discourses of white feminism and Intersectionality (i.e., political, structural, and representational) impact how gender and race create unique challenges to engaging in activism for Women of Color often highlighted by critical scholars of campus sexual violence (Gómez & Gobin, 2020; Harris, 2020; Harris et al., 2021; Onwuachi-Willig, 2018).

Campus Sexual Violence and Women of Color

Examining the rates of sexual violence for Women of Color students has proven difficult for several reasons. Race evasive approaches to campus sexual violence research has been apparent through the limited studies that have centered Women of Color students and their experiences of sexual violence on campus (Harris, 2020, 2024; Harris et al., 2021; Harris & Linder, 2017; Lundy-Wagner & Winkle-Wagner, 2013). Research focused on the prevalence of

sexual violence in higher education has shown 1 out of 5 college women (about 23%) will experience sexual violence while in college (Fedina et al., 2018; Muehlenhard et al., 2017). Using mostly quantitative surveys and studies, the rates of sexual violence for Women of Color broadly have been estimated to be at 25% for Native American/Indigenous Women, 23% for Latina Women, 22% for Multiracial women, 18% for Black Women, 21% for Pacific Islander Women, and 12% for Asian American women (Cantor et al., 2020). Studies have shown, at the intersections of race and gender, Black transgender students experienced higher rates of sexual violence (Coulter et al., 2017). In a recent thematic analysis of queer students of color and their experiences of intimate partner violence, gender and sexual orientation had an impact on the way abusive partners used racial privilege to control Women of Color partners in a relationship (Harden et al., 2022). Harris and Linder (2017) argued, without critical and intersectional analysis of campus sexual violence, scholars risk equating white, cis-gender women experiences of sexual violence to that of Women of Color students, perpetuating violence through policies and responses that fail to respond to other experiences of oppression.

Regarding risk factors for sexual violence for Women of Color students, Women of Color must navigate multiple systems of racial and gender experiences tied to a history of violence in the United States and higher education. For students of color, especially Women of color students, college environments often have direct impacts on higher levels of distress due to unique experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination, immigration status, first-generation experiences, and social and political disadvantages in additions to academic obligations (Harwood et al., 2012; Koo, 2001; Martinez et al., 2020).

Healing From Campus Sexual Violence for Women of Color

The dissertation was designed to explore the healing experiences of *U.S. Centroeamericana* student survivors. Existing scholarship on healing from campus sexual violence has traditionally focused on addressing psychological symptoms of trauma and mostly centering the healing experiences of white women (Gameon et al., 2021; Harris, 2024; McCauley et al., 2019). For Women of Color, sexual violence may be compounded with other forms of racial, historical, and intergenerational trauma which has adverse impacts on their learning and experiences on campus (Gómez, 2020). Emerging scholarship focused on the healing experiences of Women of Color students has begun to shed light on the identity affirming and multifaceted aspects of healing (Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Harris, 2024; Karunaratne, 2026). Current literature has focused on reimagining healing through identity and race-conscious lenses that position individual, wholistic, and communal healing at the center of possible institutional interventions and implications for higher education (Harris, 2021; Harris & Aguilar Marquez, 2026; Karunaratne, 2026). The literature on healing from campus sexual violence for Women of Color students has explored several areas, including:

- Disclosure and reporting,
- Culturally affirming psychological therapeutic interventions,
- Somatic and body-based modalities,
- Land and nature-based healing,
- Spiritual healing,
- Community and collective healing, and
- Advocacy and education activism.

Disclosure and Reporting. Reporting sexual violence for Women of Color encompasses an array of experiences, expectations, and outcomes. Although some students may seek reporting to find resolve from someone who harmed them directly through formal reporting structures like Title IX or criminal justice processes, decisions to report to institutional and reporting outlets are more complex and nuanced for Women of Color due to their minoritized identity (Howard, 2018; Jackson, 2022). Women of Color students and gender nonconforming students have often cited minimization of trauma, fear of negative treatment by reporting offices, and socioemotional concerns when deciding not to move forward, highlighting the fact that white cisgender women are more likely to report than nonwhite students (Holland & Cipriano, 2021).

Critical research using intersectionality frameworks to explore these reporting experiences found Women of Color students chose not to report to formal reporting outlets due to structural, political, and representational aspects of campus sexual violence (Anderson Wadley & Hurtado, 2023; Crenshaw, 1991; Harris, 2020, 2024; Harris & Linder, 2017; Karunaratne, 2023a; Thomas, 2024). Limitations on identity affirming healing services, survivor tropes that center white women in relation to “believability” of Women of Color survivors, and concerns with reporting Men of Color as harmers due to historical racist tropes of Men of color emerged for students (Harris, 2020). Highlighting the reporting structures themselves, some scholars have believed that current reporting structures and policies do not facilitate helpful reporting processes for Black women and other Women of Color because of “hidden curriculums” that convey “unstated values, judgement, regulatory norms” (Wooten, 2017, p. 406) that erase Black Women and other Women of Color through race-neutral language that promotes more silence.

There are also broader intra-student community factors that may also impact why Women of Color students do not choose to formally report. Women of Color student survivors often face

higher impacts of distress due to multiple layers of “betrayal” within their own identity group which often has impacts on psychological outcomes that may impact reporting (Gómez, 2017, 2020; Harris & Aguilar Marquez, 2026). This is different than the institutional betrayal that survivors who are not minoritized might experience when reporting violence and can have several psychological and mental health outcomes (C. P. Smith & Freyd, 2014). Studies exploring Women of Color’s experience with reporting options such as Title IX and Campus Police have found that instead of providing pathways for healing, campus reporting options were harmful and retraumatizing and perpetuated carceral solutions that did not align with their values of justice, healing and accountability as Women of Color (E. Collins, 2016; Karunaratne, 2026; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2026; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024; Lorenz et al., 2022; Shepp et al., 2023; Wooten, 2017). There are multiple layers, decision-making processes, and risks involved for reporting for Women of Color.

Harris and Aguilar Marquez (2026) found, although Women of Color did not disclose or report experiences of sexual violence to formal investigation offices, Women of Color in the study found confidential sexual violence advocacy offices were supportive, affirming, and helpful spaces to feel validated, empowered, and safe to explore their healing journeys. The study also found Women of Color student survivors’ decision to formally disclose violence often involved their commitment to protecting other Women of Color students increasing their connection to other students in community and their sense of belonging. The research on racial and sexual campus climate is increasing and further insight is needed to explore how individual, intrapersonal, and institutional factors influence Women of Color in their journeys to disclosing and seeking healing services.

Culturally Affirming Psychological Therapeutic Interventions. Critical scholar Harris (2024) gave insight into the myriads of healing spaces and practices Women of Color are using to heal from sexual violence on college campuses. She found Women of Color survivors found healing in engagement and practices that centered identity development and “culture and agency as a core component of their well-being” (Harris, 2024, p. 138). In a monumental qualitative study exploring the experiences of Women of Color student survivors, Harris found many of the Women of Color experienced an impact on their identity development as Women of Color after experiencing violence. Citing cultural disconnection, fear, and experiencing feelings of disownment from family and community circles for experiencing violence, Harris (2024) highlighted how survivors connecting to “their cultures, their communities and their identities” (p. 140) offers opportunities for radical healing. Out of the 34 Women of Color sampled in her study, 14 Latine-identified students identified as Mexican and “Other Race.” Harris’s study is important as it expanded the literature through use of Intersectionality and providing analysis on the ways that Women of Color experience violence, reporting, and help-seeking behavior in higher education settings.

Psychological and psychiatric healing interventions, referred to as “talk therapy,” have been healing for some Women of Color when centered in culturally affirming support that recognizes oppressive systems that resist racist frameworks of Western psychological models. Harris (2024) and other scholars found many Women of Color expected to experience more harm than healing from talk therapy due to the racist and sexist history of colonial psychology and mental health services in the United States (Akbar et al., 2024; Harris, 2024; Suite et al., 2007). Although psychological associations are working to improve and create more spaces of cultural humility and competency within psychological models of healing, the field is still rooted

in histories of whiteness, white people, and colonial epistemologies. Moreover, Harris (2024) also found Women of Color had challenges accessing support due to policies that limited the number of sessions students could have at campus counseling centers before being “outsourced” to community providers whereas other Women of Color students could not engage in therapy due to lack of health insurance as out of pocket fees became too expensive. If Women of Color students successfully connected with a therapist to address their needs with healing, they experienced therapists who were not competent in interventions relating to race and gender of their particular communities. Studies have shown Women of Color student survivors often engaged with therapist who did not center intergenerational trauma or culturally affirming support or engage in healing modalities within therapeutic settings that affirm the student’s cultural identity (Harris, 2024; Sabina et al., 2013).

Critical scholars studying the healing of Women of Color campus survivors have provided insights into the ways that race and gender impact clinical settings. For example, French et al. (2020) and other critical scholars have centered radical healing clinical practices that involve the use of testimony that provide transformation through “personal narratives that give voice to experiences of oppression, provide opportunities to give meaning of their individual and collective experiences of oppression and empower individuals to envision future possibilities” (p. 29). When aligned with Black liberation psychologies and epistemologies frameworks, French et al. argued these clinical spaces have been found transformative for People of Color trauma survivors. Gómez (2020) centered Women of Color in her work with campus sexual violence survivors and highlighted how racial identity shapes the ways Women of Color student survivors make sense of trust, connection, and safety in psychological responses. Many of these studies focused on Women of Color generally as one community in study samples and

or sampled subpopulations of Women of Color in the context of identity to explore the healing of campus sexual violence survivors.

Somatic and Body-Based Modalities. Somatic and body-based healing modalities have been found to be helpful for Women of Color healing from campus sexual violence as explored by various scholars (Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Harris, 2021, 2024; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024). Somatic and body-based modalities can be defined as practices that center bodily awareness and the body's connection to the mind and nervous system to regulate wholistic health and wellness (Levine, 2010). For Women of Color, studies have shown trauma-informed yoga has been found to “reduce the effects of trauma on mental health symptoms, such as Post Traumatic stress disorder and depression” (Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024, p. 83) and can increase self-compassion and self-kindness (Harris, 2021, 2024). The studies have heavily focused on Women of Color with specific attention to Southeast Asian student survivors as culturally affirming support (Karunaratne, 2022). The literature review heavily cited the use of yoga to reduce individual symptoms but also highlighted the ways campus trauma-informed yoga programs built connections between Women of Color survivors and their sense of belonging to each other. For example, many universities cited in the studies referred to the “yoga as healing” programs which included multiweek series where students could practice yoga and engage in weekly discussion topics such as healing, safety, self-care, boundaries, and strength, which promoted safety, collaboration, choice, and hope among collaborators (Yamasaki, 2022). In reviewing the literature, it became more apparent the importance of exploring further the connections between identity and self-connection in community.

Women of Color survivors have engaged in other forms of body-based healing modalities that have included dancing, ballet, running, and martial arts (Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Harris 2021, 2024; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024). Women of Color survivors heavily engaged in healing movements that allowed them to feel and release emotion, facilitate reconnection with the sensations in their bodies, practice curiosity, and engage in spaces that developed strength within their bodies. Aguilar Marquez (2024) found Women of Color student survivors engaged in dancing to help “reclaim a sense of intimacy” and empower “micro decision making” about how their bodies moved within their own agency. Karunaratne (2023b) found South Asian campus survivors engaged in “embodied practices, such as yoga, swimming, dancing, art, and sex” (p. 139) to reconnect to themselves.

Land and Nature-Based Healing. Studies exploring healing with land and nature-based engagement for Women of Color survivors in higher education have provided insight into the ways students are connecting with plants, waters, and more-than-human relatives to regulate and experience connection with living relations (Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024). Framing sexual violence within the context of colonization and historical trauma, one can identify the ways sexual violence has historically impacted the ability for Women of Color survivors to engage in healthy relationships with individuals, land, waters, and more-than-human relatives. Suzack et al. (2010) highlighted the many ways colonial trauma causes ruptures and fractures connections to self-worth and connection to culture and community. Colonization and settler-colonialism have continued to facilitate the removal of Indigenous and Women of color from positions of power and have introduced western patriarchy and rigid gender roles and practices, while managing Women of Color’s body through sexual violence and other forms of violence. Linklater (2014) described the

displacement, desecration, and destruction of land and waters as a direct act of violence that disconnects community from genealogies, land-based cultural practices, and connection to shared memory and healing sources. Healing in this context is described as “re-connecting” to land, waters, and more-than-human relatives to center interconnectedness. Literature for land- and nature-based healing for Women of Color campus survivors has highlighted the many ways in which identity is also connected to the learning and relationships they engage within their natural world.

According to Redvers (2020), “Land-based activities (and healing) such as harvesting, education, ceremony, recreation and culturally based activities are components of integrative practices” (p. 90) and are grounded in Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology shared by Communities of Color. Women of Color campus survivors are developing relationships and caregiving for plants and animals and use connections to oceans, lakes, and gardens to regulate their bodies and find connections with ancestors and genealogies (Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024). Researchers in these studies have discussed the ways campus advocacy programs developed nature and land-based healing spaces to teach Women of Color students survivors about local plant knowledge, integrating meditation and breathing practices into garden settings and facilitating emotional regulation by guiding students through sensory activities with harvesting and tasting local plants within the campus gardens (Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024). The emerging research on healing for Women of Color student survivors with land and nature-based has honored the ways in which students are a part of their greater environment on campus and have self-agency in feeling connections with multiple spaces.

Spiritual Healing. Emerging qualitative studies in higher education have examined the ways Women of Color students have connected with various forms of spirituality to engage in healing from campus sexual violence. For example, one study found Women of Color student survivors conceptualized spirituality as felt, embodied, energetic, and connected to the natural world, while others stated it was a belief that connected them to something greater than themselves which included notions of the universe and or godly (Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024). Researchers also found students in their connections to spirituality or religious communities held active relationships with cultural healing traditions, including the use of ancestral altars, prayers, crystals, and smudging while also engaging spiritual healers in their communities, including connections to elders, ancestors, *sobadoras*, and *curanderas*. Most of these studies sampled some Latine student survivors (e.g., Linklater, 2014) and highlighted the ways in which sacred plants and sage like Yerba Santa could be used to “calm the nervous system when experiencing anxiety, triggers, or panic attacks” (Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024, p. 83). Although Aguilar Marquez (2024) sampled two U.S. Central American student survivors in her study, the study within itself did not center the spiritual needs of these students in the context of their identity and lived experiences specifically. Considerations with U.S. *Centroamericana* students in the study highlighted how students resourced and found healing with connections back to their ancestral homes, plants, and pueblos in Central America through channeling memory and visualizations.

Spirituality was also defined by Women of Color student survivors as connection to their intergenerational knowledge and storytelling passed down their ancestral lineages (Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Harris, 2024; Karunaratne, 2023a; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Poon Ghaffari, 2024; young, 2023). Healing for Women of Color student survivors through their

relationships with intergenerational wisdom and knowledge allowed them to resource memories; connections to ancestral lands; and feelings of love, safety and support. For example, Poon Ghaffari's (2024) research with 13 Asian American college students provided insight into the ways Asian American campus survivors used their intergenerational wisdom to break intergenerational trauma and practice healing across generations through the sharing of their stories of healing. Some students spoke to ancestral genealogies connected to larger communities of healers, including an Asian American campus survivor who used "Asian Witchcraft" learned from a "convening of Witches" (Harris, 2024, p. 136) to explore the ways in which meditation, art and culturally specific healing practices could heal her from campus sexual violence holistically. Many of the students in these studies mentioned the challenges with accessing these healing spaces on campus and were often "othered" when discussing these healing practices in university settings due to the colonial narrative and norms that shape healing in higher education. For example, colonial narratives of healing in higher education framed student's Indigenous, intergenerational, and ancestral knowledge systems as objects to be extracted, decontextualized, or commodified while simultaneously erasing their ways of being and existing in the world (Poon Ghaffari, 2024; L. T. Smith, 2012). In this context, students were made to feel both hypervisible due to the othering of their healing needs and, at the same, invisible for not being able to access services that truly affirmed their belief systems and collective ways of healing in community.

Karunaratne (2023a) and Aguilar Marquez (2024) shared how Women and Femme of Color and Minoritized campus survivors connected with their ancestors through resourcing memories, prayer, and affirmations to seek guidance and grounding whenever they needed active support. Often described as connection with ancestors, grandparents, and parents, and healing to

break generational cycles of trauma for descendants, many of these Women of Color engaged healing in multiple spatialities. Karunaratne and Aguilar Marquez (2024) shared that these relationships were multiple ways of knowing, as they stated:

Storytelling, oral and written histories, and community knowledge have always been powerful teaching tools, traditions, and radical practices of communities of color. Passing down sacred ancestral gifts, lineages, family histories, and familial stories serves to teach lessons and acts as a reminder of important concepts and practices that are core to existing and living healthy, balanced, and fulfilled lives. (p. 85)

Studies focused on the spiritual aspects of healing for Women of Color student survivors have centered decolonial healing practices and provided spaces that facilitated reconnection with ancestral medicines tied to their cultural lineages.

For Black college survivors, young (2023) shared the enslavement of African people and colonization prohibited and forbade the use of Black “Indigenous medicine, access to sacred plants and herbs, music, language, movement and spiritual tools” (p. xvi). young’s (2023) research and healing work with Black campus sexual violence survivors was anchored in the “practice of decolonizing our medicine and reclaiming our body sovereignty” (p. xvi). Although the literature on spirituality for Women of Color student survivors healing from campus sexual violence is emerging, there is much to learn from the wisdom and knowledge of their experiences of spirituality with healing.

Community and Collective Healing. For Women of Color student survivors, community and collective healing have been heavily cited for facilitating social support, peer connections, and identity affirming healing. Within higher education, frameworks for radical healing among communities of color have emphasized the importance of collective and

community healing that resist oppression in multiple dimensions (French et al., 2020; Ginwright, 2016). Radical collective healing is conceptualized to be felt, embodied, and connected to a sense of belonging to one's ethnic identity. Healing collectively, French et al. (2020) shared, includes "authenticity, comradery, and refuge" for one another and includes "sharing one's story as a way of testifying and building solidarity with others" (p. 28). This connects to other forms of storytelling healing centered in Million's (2014) work with Indigenous and Women of Color survivors of trauma that highlighted the ways in which "bearing witness" (i.e., hearing and listening to stories of violence and healing actively) can bring about individual and intergenerational healing through validation and being seen.

Women of Color student survivors sharing their stories of healing and engaging in healing practice collectively has been found to facilitate reconnection, reduce isolation and have positive impacts on peer-to-peer relationships. For example, Karunaratne (2023a) found communal healing spaces for Women and Femme of Color student survivors served to explore their own identities, reciprocally process shared lived experiences, and foster healing" within the context of their gender and sexuality. Poon Ghaffari (2024) found, in communal healing spaces, Women of Color student survivors "re/embodied Women solidarities" and spaces of "togetherness" by processing and discussing broader cultural and societal norms that shaped their experiences within the context of race and gender. Survivors "witnessing" other survivors heal as they heal was seen as critical for many Women of Color student survivors. Harris (2024) found there was positive influence on survivor's healing when they interacted with other survivors in the organizations they were volunteering to support *other* survivors. Being in community to witness regulation, resilience, and self-agency allowed students to be connected to a broader community on and off campus.

Collective healing in academic and research settings emerged in the literature, although limited, still provided insight into the ways that Women of Color student survivors engage their identities and active processes of healing in the academy. For example, Harris (2021) found academic courses and classroom settings focused on community-centered topics created counter-spaces for Women of Color student survivors to explore their experiences of violence and healing. In a critical duoethnography, Hurtado and Garcia (2024) explored their identities as scholars and Women of Color to understand the ways in which survivorhoodship, and “unmasking” their experiences of trauma and healing within their dissertation processes can be seen as an “act of resistance” for marginalized doctoral students and survivors. Using narrative vignettes and storywork, Aguilar Marquez (2024) shared her experiences of healing as a Women of Color graduate student survivor “researching other survivors” (p. 68) and the ways in which research methodologies and reflexivity can be healing for Women of Color survivor researchers.

Advocacy and Education Activism. For Women of Color, literature pointed to the ways that healing emerged from transforming disempowerment and trauma into practices of advocacy and student activism through multiple forms of education (Linder et al., 2020; Zounlome et al., 2019). Linder et al. (2024) explored the ways Women of Color student survivors “[learn] about oppression and how their identities influence their navigation of the world” (p. 105) to develop their critical consciousness to feel more self-assured in their healing and wholistic lives. Students develop critical consciousness and engage in healing by learning about systemic oppression, stories of healing in classrooms, and programming spaces to then join efforts to educate others within student and community organizations addressing sexual violence on campus. For example, Harris (2024) posited Women of Color engaging in advocacy and activism as healing find “healing through advocating for more and better education around sex, sexual violence and

health more broadly” (p. 157). She pointed to the ways in which students in their student positions as Resident Advisors use their positions of power to help guide students to resources and hold space for their stories within community due to the lack of institutional support.

Women of Color students in the literature discussed the ways in which they received training on topics such as consent, healthy relationships, resources, and healing as peer educators and, through this education, were able to improve their own mental health while providing support to others (Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Harris, 2024; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024). Although the literature in this area did not cite specific connections of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors’ experiences with education and advocacy within their healing context, it did provide insight into the ways that institutional programming creates opportunities for Women of Color to learn and engage in their identities as Women of Color survivors, educators, advocates and activists.

The literature on Women of Color and healing for campus sexual violence has provided new pathways to examine the ways identity and healing are closely connected with other relationships and spatialities. Although many of these studies did not sample majority U.S. *Centroamericana* students, they provided insight into Latine campus sexual violence survivors who often experience cultural, patriarchal, and intersectional experiences with histories. The next section explores additional facets of the literature surrounding Latine campus sexual violence survivors in higher education.

Considerations for Latine Student Sexual Violence Survivors

Latine student survivors are navigating unique challenges with reporting and accessing support. However, within this body of literature, there is still much to learn about the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors and their healing. Studies have shown many factors

impact the reporting and help-seeking behaviors of Latine women impacted by sexual violence broadly. Latine women have lower rates of reporting sexual violence, which may be influenced by gender role adherence, acculturation, language barriers, limited socioeconomic status, and immigration status (Adames & Campbell, 2005; Christensen et al., 2021; Cuevas & Sabina, 2010; Estrada-Martínez et al., 2011; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002). For example, some studies have suggested an adherence to patriarchal gender roles correlated with a lower likelihood of reporting (e.g., Estrada-Martínez et al., 2011). Latine women who experienced violence and isolation from “staying at home” or being prohibited from expanding social networks by partners were at higher levels of risk of victimization (Klevens et al., 2007). In other studies, researchers found Latine women with high levels of acculturation reported higher levels of sexual violence as opposed to women with lower levels of acculturation (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2014; Sabina et al., 2013, 2015). Cuevas and Sabina (2010) stated that the “changing cultural values and roles may create acculturative stress” (p. 17), resulting in increased risk for victimization. Decker et al. (2007) found immigration status and whether a person was undocumented could impact reporting for Latine women. Citing experiences with deportation, fear of state authorities (e.g., police, law enforcement, Child Protective Services), and the safety of their families, Latine women experience an array of structural and social issues with reporting.

The experiences of Latina, Chicana and *Centroamericana* women have been heavily shaped by gender and sexuality in the context of religion and spirituality throughout Latin America (Espin, 1997; Facio & Lara, 2014; Gonzalez, 2009; Medina, 2001; Medina & Gonzalez, 2019; Vidal-Ortiz, 2010). Religious ideology has played a role in empire building as a neocolonial tool for dominance over land, resources, and bodies while spirituality has also served as a space of reclamation, re-connection, and liberation for Latine women (Facio & Lara, 2014).

Studies that explored help-seeking behaviors of Latine women impacted by sexual violence generally showed Latine women were less likely to seek out formal services after experiencing sexual violence due to fear of retaliation from the individual that caused harm, lack of cultural competent services, distrust of legal and medical institutions, and feelings of shame and guilt (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010; Flicker et al., 2011; Lipsky et al., 2006; Messing et al., 2015).

Many of these studies have explored the intersecting identities and ways in which identity, religion, and gender roles impact the experiences of Latine women. For example, Flicker et al. (2011) found Latine women were equally likely to disclose as much as other Black women survivors to their families, and they were less likely than white women to disclose to informal structures like friends, mentors, or colleagues. D. V. Reyes (2016) explored the experiences of Latine student survivors with shame and found Latine student survivors felt sexual disembodiment as part of patriarchal family structures that placed value on their bodies based on their engagement with sexual activity. For example, Latine student survivors who were perceived to engage in higher sexual activity, were perceived to have less “value and worth” in the family. Latine women survivors reported and sought out help less due to feelings of shame and the impact it would have on perceptions of themselves by their families and communities. One study explored the healing of 35 Latine-identified college students via reporting and self-help-seeking behaviors and found many faced barriers with accessing support on campus (Christensen et al., 2021). Out of the 35 students, 50% identified as first-generation Mexican while the other identified as U.S. Citizens.

Machismo and Marianismo, gender ideologies that refer to hyper/dominant masculinity and submissive/virginal femininity in Latine culture, heavily influence the ways Latina women survivors acknowledge violence (Cummings et al., 2013; Maryn & Dover, 2022). For example,

Latina women who identified more with attitudes reinforced by Marianismo reported feeling like they had less power in their sexual relationships than those who did not identify with notions of Marianismo (Cummings et al., 2013). A study facilitated by Maryn and Dover (2022) found Latina women survivors experienced sexual violence often perpetrated by an intimate partner under coercion and pressure. The study sampled over 81 college going Latina identified students in a mixed-methods study with over 82% identifying as American, Mexican-American, or Mexican while 10% identifying as “Multiple/Other.” Harris (2024) found some Latine and other women identified student survivors experienced sexual violence due to lack of education on sex, consent, healthy relationships, and influence of religious gender roles. Her qualitative work found Catholicism and a family’s inability to talk about sex increased risk factor for Latine women when they left for college.

When exploring the sexual violence experiences of Queer Latine identified college students, the literature was widely quantitative and heavily sampled Latine students particular to non-U.S. Central American students (O’Connor et al., 2024). For example, one quantitative study found sexual violence victimization occurred at significantly higher rates among transgender/gender nonconforming and cisgender Latinx students compared to cisgender men (O’Connor et al., 2024). The study explored data from a campus survey that included over 89,000 students across 75 colleges and universities. When sampling “Hispanic and or Latino/a” students in the data, about 6,690 students shared their disclosure and reporting regarding sexual violence. The study did not disaggregate or provide information on how or from what countries the students identified making it difficult to identify queer U.S. *Centroamericana* students within the data set. Although the research centering unique considerations for Latine identified campus sexual violence survivors continue to expand, the stories of U.S. *Centroamericana* student

survivors and their healing is missing from this research. Most of these studies have explored risk factors, reporting and disclosures for Latine women college students, have been heavily quantitative, and did not center *healing* as an area of exploration for Latine student survivors in their experiences with violence.

Considerations for Graduate Student Sexual Violence Survivors

Exploring the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* graduate student survivors provides insight into the vulnerable experiences of graduate students in the academy. There is limited research on the experiences of graduate student survivors in higher education, and even less on the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* graduate students. Graduate student survivors navigate complex experiences of violence and healing due to the hierarchal power structure of academia in neoliberal university settings. Graduate students may hold dual or multiple roles within the academic structure directly connected to their sources of mentorship, academic training, teaching opportunities, funding, and future career aspirations (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; O’Callaghan et al., 2022). For example, graduate students may experience violence from peers and colleagues, from undergraduate students whom they teach or mentor in teaching assistantships, or from faculty with direct connections to their current and future career networks. Research focused on sexual harassment in the sciences, engineering, and medicine academic workplaces has found graduate survivors and bystanders impacted by violence were often silenced due to (a) the dependence of advisors for career advancement, (b) the impact of systemic meritocracy and how this shapes productivity and morale after experiencing violence, (c) the impacts of patriarchy and male domination in many graduate academic programs, (d) and the small nature of academic fields that limit privacy due to informal

communication networks where rumors and accusations may spread (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

Emerging research for addressing sexual violence response and healing for graduate students includes institutional and department wide efforts to mitigate power structures that create violence in these settings. For example, Hurtado (2021) argued heavily engaging faculty and creating access for departmental changes (e.g., resisting compliance focused policies) could be helpful in creating subversive rewards that allow faculty experts the capacity to address harm in departments through research, training and programming. Implications for creating more access to resource for healing has involved removing compelled disclosure reporting to give agency back to graduate students, eliminate “Pass the Harasser” policies that allow faculty perpetrators to move from places of employment without repercussions that ultimately harm more graduate students, implement restorative justice and alternative Title IX adjudication processes to expand reporting capacity, and improve the working conditions of graduate students to mitigate the power structures on basic needs (O’Callaghan et al., 2022). The research on healing for graduate students is limited but emerging and the current dissertation is positioned to add to the literature for graduate student survivors.

Discussion and Summary of Review of Literature

It is important to understand the history and sociopolitical contexts of the genealogies of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors while centering the resistance, healing, and futurity of our experiences. Central Americans living in the United States, the Isthmus, and diaspora have continued to resist, create counter spaces, and live out futures collectively. Through artistic performance, reclamation of healing spaces, writings, and poetry, U.S. Central Americans are creating community, futures, and belonging grounded in community care and storytelling.

Alvarado et al. (2017) posited, “Intergenerational memory holds the potential to create an effective solidarity that binds and transcends the U.S. Central American population within and across non-Central Americans” (p. 115). It is critical that the self-determination of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors is viewed as connected to liberation movements across the globe and in diaspora.

The literature review highlighted the ways research on campus sexual violence has been heavily driven by quantitative methods that have decentered Women of Color and other minoritized student survivors within epistemological, methodological, and healing-centered aspects. Using race evasive frameworks and designs, the invisibility of Women of Color students in campus sexual violence research moves researchers to explore the ways that racial and sexual violence impact the ways they experience violence and healing. U.S. *Centroamericana* students become more invisible when exploring the literature in higher education regarding Latine identified women students. Often clumped into “Latinidad” models of identity and persistence, U.S. *Centroamericana* students are often minoritized due to contextual dominance that impacts research, policies, and access to wholistic resources on college campuses across the nation. Exploring the ways in which U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors belong, build community, and heal is critical to support their access to higher education.

Lastly, one must not fracture and remove histories of migration and generational knowledge that impact the identity formation and wholistic health of U.S. *Centroamericana* students on college campuses. The healing of sexual and relationship violence for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors is connected to ancestral medicines, systems of spirituality and ancestral lands that bring tools of resistance and persistence. I am grounded by the words of Central American scholars Alvarado et al. (2017), when they stated U.S. Central Americans “are

people with rich cultures, stories, and memories in flux” and “understanding U.S. Central Americans means doing away with stereotypes, of subalternity” (p. 4). They proposed that we must explore the “experiences of violence and traumas without essentializing U.S. Central Americans as traumatized people” (Alvarado et al., 2017, p. 5). Through this dissertation, I centered the voices, resistance, and intergenerational healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors as *whole* individuals connected to deep embodied lineages, stories, and genealogies of healing in the Isthmus, in the United States, and in between.

Part 3: Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Tools

Exploring the healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors was guided through a theoretical framework that heavily centers *Centroamericana* Feminist Theories that are different and shared by Chicana/Latina Feminist epistemological perspectives. In the following section, I outline the perspectives and guiding concepts behind *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory and Chicana/Latina epistemology as a growing body of literature to expand the ways we research U.S. *Centroamericana* students in higher education.

Centroamericana Feminist Theory

Centroamericana Feminist scholars, activists, theorists, and creatives have shown that by centering the embodied experiences of *Centroamericana* women through narrative making; *rememorar*; and a critical analysis of neoliberalism, settler-colonialism, migration, gender, sexuality, and patriarchy across nation-state borders, one can examine and reclaim tools for healing, resistance, and self-determination as Central American women in the Isthmus and in diaspora (Abrego, 2020; Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007; Hernández-Linares, 2015; Hoppe, 2024; Mena, 2023; Menchú, 2010; Padilla, 2012, 2018; Portillo, 2015; Ramsey, 2024; Rodríguez, 2008). Padilla

(2018) shared that an emerging body of Central-American Feminism, some self-proclaimed Feminist and others not, has engaged in theorizing and praxis making through an “emphasis on intersectionality and the notion of shared struggles against broader systems of domination among women and peoples of color” (p. 1). *Centroamericana* Feminist theories often engage diasporic experiences related to notions of identity and belonging, intergenerational relations, gender, transnational migrations and legacies of war trauma and imperialism. Alma (2024) shared:

Neo/colonial trauma cannot negate space for identitarian cultural continuity and the potential to suture the gash of colonization, colonial entrenchments, immigration, and state and domestic gender and sexual violence. Neoliberal perspectives have ontologized the diverse U.S. Central American diaspora as an amalgamated traumatized social body, leaving no room for personhood of neighborhood. Counter to such reification, rememorar [rememory] offers the reembodyment of love, cultural pleasure, and healing, thus giving new life to past and present communities. (Preface)

Shaped by the work of Black, Indigenous, and Women of Color feminists in the United States and globally, Alma (2024) defined *rememoria* as a space of theorization and process that “allows a deeper understanding of isthmian people especially creatives who defiantly challenge Central American erasure” and where “rememoring overlaps the past and future in the present as a means of regeneration” (Preface). *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory posits U.S. Central American scholars, researchers, and activists must explore complicity in the colonial power matrix (i.e., neocoloniality) and engage in a decolonial praxis that “refuses and resists master narratives, cultural and patriotic nationalisms, and g/local hierarchies for a radial copresence of plurality that fosters people’s own specific ecologies of knowledge” (Alma, 2024, p. XV). *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory engages a cycled intra- and intergenerational process evoked

through embodied feelings, knowledge, and sensitizations processed through body-mind-spirit. *Centroamericana* Feminist scholars position the researcher and collaborators as active collaborators in the creation of research to make meaning of the spaces they inhabit intertwined. *Rememorar*, as an active praxis, cultivates possibilities of life, generational resilience, and futures of agency—a space of collective healing.

Centroamericana Feminist Theory storywork allows for the transmission of intergenerational knowledge of gendered resistance. For example, Alvarado (2017) outlined “A Gynealogy of Cigua Resistance” that speaks to a genealogy grounded in the intergenerational and shared experiences of *Centroamericana* women in diaspora. Alvarado (2017) shared violence against women in Central America and the United States “replicates lineages long established by coloniality, where resistance connects women across borders of time and space, breaking constrictive functions of nations” (p. 98). Alvarado used the narratives and stories of *Centroamericana* writers, activists, and poets in the story of *La Ciguanaba* as an analytical framework to make meaning of *Centroamericanas* in diaspora navigating experiences of gender-based violence and resistance. The story of *La Ciguanaba* was about a young woman desired by her plantation enslaver. When she rejected his advances, the plantation enslaver sent his men to torture and kill the young woman in a cave by the river. She became known to others as *La Ciguanaba* or *La Cigua*, a woman who exists in permanent exile and embodies beauty and horror in the storytelling of pre-Columbian and postconquest Central America (Alvarado, 2017). *La Ciguanaba* has come to be understood as a symbol of feminist resistance in the ways that she persists in knowledge systems and a symbol of a women’s self-agency in making sense of her own image after experiencing violence—she is both ancestral and a teacher.

By using the story of *La Ciguanaba* in conversation with the writings and art of Prudencia Ayala and Leticia Hernández-Linares, Alvarado (2017) offered an analytical framework of *Cigua Gynealogies* that redeploys the word *Cigua* to describe the resistance of U.S. Central American and Latina Women creating a “hemispheric consciousness of gendered resistance.” *Cigua Gynealogies* provide a space for U.S. *Centroamericanas* to explore their identities and experiences of healing that resist narratives of “perfect victim” and dichotomies like “survivor/perpetrator and healed/unhealed” that can often truncate complex and whole experiences of violence and healing.

Cigua translates to “women” in Nahuatl and Nahuatl (i.e., Indigenous languages to Central America and Mexico) and, by placing *Cigua* at the forefront of such gynealogies, it “(re)members the indigenous-mestiza woman” and centers their involvement in the creation of memory and discourse. As Alvarado (2017) shared:

In the face of major economic and gendered violence, *Cigua* narratives are recovered, acknowledged, and contemporized within the long struggle of female resistance as a historical continuum in and of the Americas. Exploring the lives and works of *Ciguas* represents an opportunity for conscientization that centers and sutures Latina, U.S.

Central American and indigenous resistance against female displacement from her own body, voice and civil rights. (p. 109)

Cigua narratives and genealogies provide an analytical framework for U.S. *Centroamericanas* to define their own narratives, stories, and embodied knowledge in collective solidarity and future building with other Chicana, Latina, Afro-Latina, Black, and Indigenous Women, and Women of Color. *Cigua* narratives and storytelling provided the theoretical framework in shaping counter-narratives and served as an analytical tool to counter sexist, racist, and violent discourses of

gender and sexuality for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. Sexual violence has long been described as the fracturing of the body-mind-spirit that violates multiple dimensions of relationships, time, and space in our historical memory and genealogies. Examining violence and healing through *Centroamericana* Feminist storywork, we are guided to honor and explore the ways in which U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors are experiencing harm and healing through their embodied memories, intersectional identities, and self-assertions in everyday living. Placing healing as resistance within a *Centroamericana* Feminist genealogy empowers student survivors to explore and embody a resistance that is identity-based, ancestral, intergenerational, and collective and one that transgresses borders and time.

Central American Feminist Diasporic Epistemology and Theory

Paredes and Galvez (2021) proposed the development of an epistemological stance that centers the lived experiences, narratives, and ways of knowing of *Centroamericanas* in diaspora in education. Exploring their experiences as *Centroamericanas* in doctoral programs through a duo-ethnography, Paredes and Galvez found a unique framework for the study of Central Americans would push back on the deficit positioning of Central Americans in research that often center “war, trauma, silence, and invisibility” (Paredes, 2021, p. 66). Paredes (2021) argued that a Central American Feminist diasporic epistemology lens would “honor those experiences but rather be generative and imaginative of a liberatory future for Central Americans in the academy” (p. 66). Grounded and expanding on Delgado Bernal’s (1998) Chicana/Latina feminist epistemological and theoretical frameworks, Paredes and Galvez offered a framework that could center the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* survivors in connection with a lineage and community of other *Centroamericanas* in diaspora. Sexual violence narratives can often depict Women of Color student survivors as apathetic, traumatized, and hyper-sexualized human

beings, especially for Women of Color survivors (Karunaratne, 2023a). Exploring the healing experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors within the context of *Centroamericana* Feminist diasporic epistemology and theory would highlight the ways in which U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors are practicing self-agency and collective care and are resisting colonial, imperial, and patriarchal systems by simply existing within their experiences as U.S. *Centroamericanas* in diaspora.

Teachings From Chicana/Latina Feminist Epistemology

Padilla (2018) stated that many U.S. *Centroamericanas* have identified with and been shaped by Chicana feminist paradigms and lived experiences of oppression, but they also “disidentify with them, responding with their own sense of US Central American feminist politics and paradigms that draw on their Central American roots and diasporic experiences” (p. 1). It is important to recognize how *Centromericana* Feminist Theory is both shaped and different from Chicana/Latina Feminist Epistemology as it directly connects with the identity formation of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in higher education. Chicana/Latina Feminist (CLF) epistemology is rooted, experienced, and grounded in the lives of various Chicana and Latina identified writers, scholars, and theorists connected to a lineage of Black, Indigenous and Women of Color feminisms (Alvarado et al., 2017; Anzaldúa, 1987; Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2005). Rooted in the deep traditions of ancestral and embodied knowledge and resistance, CLF is grounded in antioppressive, decolonial, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions of the lived experience of Chicana and Latina women across geographies of time and space. Chicana Feminist theorist and writer Anzaldúa shared:

To me [Coyolxauhqui's story is] a symbol not only of violence and hatred of women but also of how we're split body and mind, spirit and soul. We're separated. I think the reason this image is so important to me is that when you take a person and divide her up, you disempower her. She's no longer a threat. My whole struggle in writing, in this anticolonial struggle, has been to put us back together again. To connect up the body with the soul and the mind with the spirit. That's why for me there's such a link between the text and the body, between textuality and sexuality, between the body and the spirit. (as cited in Keating, 2000, p. 220)

CLF is theorized to disrupt dominant western and colonized notions of knowledge. Often expanding on notions of queerness and providing spaces of decolonialization, CLF epistemology offers analytical tools to explore the impact of race, class, gender, and sexuality on Chicana and Latina women across various fields of study (Calderón et al., 2012; González Ybarra & Saavedra, 2021).

CLF epistemology and theory is grounded in transformative action that centers embodied and generational experiences of women rewriting, narrating, and culturally producing notions of healing and resistance working to build liberatory futures for other Chicana and Latina women in the United States and in diaspora. CLF education scholars Calderón et al. (2012) described three thematic areas in which CLF theory has been enacted including frameworks of *Nepantla*, *El Mundo Zurdo*, and decolonial narratives of *Coyolxauhqui*. Each of these concepts brings into conversation multiple facets of CLF theory while highlighting key elements unique to the experiences of CLF researchers and collaborators (Anzaldúa, 1987; Calderón et al., 2012).

Like other CLF scholars, Calderón et al. (2012) stated, "Chicana feminisms provide the tools to perform decolonizing educational research that reimagines these processes in liberatory

ways” and provides “rich hermeneutical trajectory [that] provides education scholars with theoretical, methodological, and epistemological sources to document the lives of students placed at the margins of the educational pipeline” (p. 527). Although the current dissertation study framework centered *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory, acknowledging how CLF epistemology has shaped and centered the lives of Central American Women scholars and theory informs how we build multiple spaces of theorization, conceptualization, transformation, healing, and action continuously built in the legacies and futurity of past and present Chicana, Latina, and Central American women and scholars.

Chapter 2 provided an overview of the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students in higher education, campus sexual violence, and healing. It is critical that we researchers and educators understand the gap in research and how the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* survivors on college campuses intersect to create challenges and opportunities in supporting their persistence in higher education. Guided by *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory and teachings from Chicana/Latina epistemologies, I hope to center their experiences of healing in a lineage of ancestral, intergenerational, and embodied resistance connected to liberatory and collective futures.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology and Research Design

Prologue: Plática—Where the Healing Happens

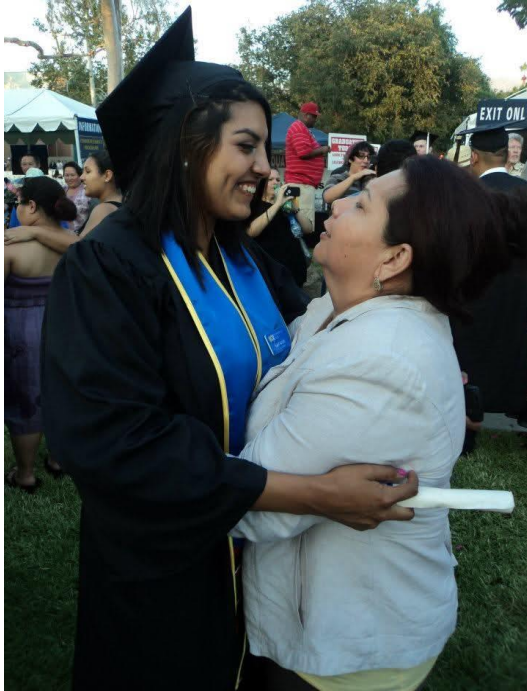
As I heal, I transform my lineage and legacy.

—Octavia Raheem, 2020, p. 33

I remember moments when I learned my mami was more than a mother, she was a *mujer* with life experiences, too (see Figure 4). Born and raised in San Pedro Sula and Tela, Honduras with her tias, my mami's life was full of many stories. Although I always knew she loved me, "*las amo hasta la luna*" [I love you to the moon], our relationship was complicated growing up. Our intergenerational healing and repair began through pláticas, conversations *del corazón*, one by one. The first time it happened is the story of when my mami and I sat in deepness with one another for the first time. It was my senior year of college, and I was visiting home for the weekend. My mami had just learned about what I had posted on Facebook the past week. She had learned how to navigate "*el feis*," [Facebook] that year to stay connected to family back home in the Isthmus. My prima had posted a rape joke on a public family Facebook comment thread. What my mami, pa and siblings did not know was that I had experienced a sexual assault my sophomore year of college by another student I had trusted—an experience that changed my life. Having worked on my healing that past year and feeling empowered in my experiences as a survivor, I made the decision to say something publicly for the first time since it had happened. I responded to my prima on the post—"as a survivor, I don't appreciate you laughing about rape," I wrote under her comment. With my heart racing and a knot in my throat, *sabía que mi familia se iba dar cuenta por la primera vez* [I knew that my family was going to find out for the first time] of what had happened to me. A word written and left for my family to read—"survivor."

Figure 4

My Mami and Me at My Undergraduate Graduation Ceremony



A week later, as I was sitting on the bed of my high school bedroom getting ready to head outside, my mom saw me and walked in. Taking a moment to look at me, she asked, “¿Karlita, te quiero preguntar algo [I want to ask you something]?” I looked at her unaware of what she knew, “¿Que significa lo que le escribistes a tu prima, te pasó algo? [What does it mean, what you wrote to your cousin? Did something happen?]” My stomach dropped instantly. In a split second, I had to make the decision to either lie and brush off the question or be vulnerable and share with my mami what I had withheld from her these past years. I closed my eyes and felt myself let go. I have a vivid memory of the words leaving my mouth. The hot tears rolling down my cheeks. My fingers fidgeting with the bedsheets where I sat. I shared with her what happened to me in my sophomore year of college in my student apartment she had visited countless times

before. I remember this plática because my mami's first response was to ask me, "*¿Por qué dejaste que te pasara esto* [Why did you let this happen to you]?"

You see, my mami grew up in a machista culture, a culture that objectifies mujeres, dehumanizes us, and often sees us as sexual objects at a young age. Machismo is a culture that blames victims for the violence enacted on us. "*Te me cuidas, no dejen que te toquen ahí* [take care of yourself, don't let nobody touch you there]," my mami would tell us growing up as she pointed to the space between our legs. I felt shame for a moment when she asked me that question, a sensation that I felt in the pit of my stomach. I let go a cry of anger and hurt and responded to her, "*Mami, esto no fue mi culpa, fue la culpa de esa persona* [this was not my fault, the fault is with the other person]." My mami looked at me surprised that I had responded to her in this way. Years of pain and resentment had complicated our conversations, but in my heart this one felt different. I could have stayed angry with her in that moment. I could have shouted at her to leave me alone. I could have cut off the conversation because as my counselor advocate had told me—parents might not get it right away or ever, but I chose to lean in. Something in my body-mind-spirit told me to be brave and confront what I hadn't confronted her about. Having worked at a Women's Resource Center during college and having received education on consent and healthy relationships from my campus sexual assault advocate, peers, mentors and professors, and without knowing at the time, had prepared me for what I said next. I responded, "*Mami, así no se apoya cuando alguien te cuenta una vivencia de abuso y violencia* [this is not how you support someone when they disclose an experience of abuse and violence]." There was a pause as she looked into my eyes, and before I knew what was happening, she had her arms wrapped around me as the tears began to run down her cheeks. She responded in her soft, empathetic voice, "*Mija, perdóname, yo no sé de estas cosas* [daughter, forgive me, I do not

know about these things].” My body softened and we sat there and cried together, holding onto each other until the tears stopped.

It was that day when our pláticas began—mujer a mujer. Pláticas can be defined as conversations about everyday experiences and transformative moments that shape who we are and how we understand ourselves in multiple *mundos* [worlds]. My mami and I have cried together more since then. What I learned that day was my mami was a survivor of gender-based violence. Later, I learned my Abuelita Rosa Alvarez Marquez and my *bisbuelitas* Herminia Alvarez y Josefina Marquez were survivors of gender-based violence, too. We had pláticas, *acompañadas* with more pláticas, until I had learned about the intergenerational and historical trauma that had impacted the lineage of us mujeres, a history tied to both Central America and Oaxaca—my maternal and paternal ancestral lineages. Plática *grounded* within our *Centoramericana* lineages was where and how my mom learned to support me through my healing that last year of college until I graduated. Plática was the space where she learned to forgive herself and forgive her mother’s pain. It was in our shared stories and our testimonios where I learned about my mami and she learned about me. It was in this sacred space where I found her truth, where I found forgiveness, and where we found our healing together.

In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I review the methodology and methods I used to explore the healing experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in higher education. First, I explore Healing Methodology and Research as Ceremony as aspects of researcher positionality and an introduction to research design. I then explore *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology as the primary methodology of the dissertation using plática (interviews), site visits, testimonio, and photo/artifact elicitation methods. In this chapter, I outline the research design including collaborator criteria, sites, data generation and engagement (analysis) process. The chapter concludes with the research positionality statement and connections to the dissertation study.

Teachings From Healing Methodology and Research as Ceremony

Centroamericana Feminist-Grounded Methodology is centered around my own positionality of *healing* in research and praxis. Karunaratne (2023c) defined healing methodology as a methodology that “seeks to promote healing through the very act of engaging in specific methods and the research process” (p. 41). Healing Methodology is an active and reflexive process that invites researchers to engage in the process of “viewing collaborators as ends in themselves, rather than means to our academic ends” (Bhattacharya, 2019, p. 199). I centered my relationship with U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors first and invited collaborators to enter the dissertation research process as a healing space *itself*. Karunaratne (2023c) moved us closer to “viewing student collaborators wholistically and holding a deep motivation to support their leaning and growth beyond our goals as researchers” (p. 43).

Employing Healing Methodology included creating trauma-informed and healing centered spaces that include dworking to create physical environments that cultivate safety such as making fidget items and coloring books available during pláticas to invite collaborators to

engage in somatic grounding. Healing methodology centered student engagement and supported it as part of a healing process where students could show up authentically, take breaks from the process, stay in silence, and skip questions and prompts they chose not to answer. Healing Methodology moved us to put the *whole student first* and cultivated an intentional praxis of well-being through relationality and commitment to collaborators actively healing.

Centroamericana Feminist-Grounded Methodology and Healing Methodology aligned with my own positionality of protecting sacred research spaces as an Indigenous scholar myself. S. Wilson (2008) posited that research *by* and *with* Indigenous people requires that we Indigenous researchers and educators center relationality with people, environment, land, cosmos and with our Indigenous ways of knowing. Indigenous scholars have empowered researchers to center deep reflection and accountability in spaces, and be accountable to the ways in which we uphold individuals, lands, cultural practices, and stories with respect, reverence, responsibility, and reciprocity (L. T. Smith, 2012; S. Wilson, 2008). The spaces, relationships, and stories that U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors shared with me as the researcher are sacred.

To cultivate safety and healing in *plática* spaces, I invited collaborators to incorporate their own healing practices and knowledge within the research process as ceremony. For example, I worked toward creating spaces that were healing centered by “opening and closing” through meditation, grounding and breathing exercises, and prayer. I invited collaborators to incorporate their own healing practices before, after, or during the research process to preserve their well-being, relations, and sacredness in the process of storytelling, which I describe later in this chapter. Building relationships grounded in trust and reciprocity that invited collaborators and researchers to push back on Western, colonial, and neo-liberal understanding of research were critical throughout this dissertation and looked different for various collaborators and

individuals. Building in moments into the research process to discuss and center the needs of students was part of the healing process itself.

Centroamericana Feminist-Grounded Methodology

Grounded Theory is an iterative and generative methodology that centers real life experiences of collaborators and provides a flexible approach to theory development grounded in data rather than existing theories and structures. According to Malagon et al. (2009):

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (p. 261; see also Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Critical scholars have used Grounded Theory as both methodology and method of analysis in conjunction with other theories (e.g., Critical Race Theory and Feminist inquiry; Charmaz, 2014; Malagon et al., 2009), to examine “both the result of the research process and the research process itself” (Stough & Lee, 2021, p. 3). Grounded Theory developed primarily as a methodological strategy to challenge positivist scientific methods by Glaser and Strauss (1967) aiming to generate theory from real life experiences of research collaborators. The development of Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss also served to challenge “great man” doctrinaire approaches to research inquiry and instead create pathways for qualitative methods to generate theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) acknowledged the importance of theory elaboration in Grounded Theory and acknowledged how researchers’ experiences, prior knowledge, and

perspectives are influential and useful in data generation and analysis. I posit *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory parallels similar objectives in that *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory seeks to theorize, make meaning, and ground the lived experiences of *Centroamericana* women through reflexive spaces and research processes.

Scholars who use grounded theory often use *theoretical sampling*, defined as the researcher seeking people, events, and information that “illuminates and defines the boundaries and relevance of the categories” and allows for the researcher to gain *theoretical saturation*, defined as “the point at which gathering more data about a theoretical category reveals no new properties nor requires any further theoretical inquiries about the emergent theory” (Malagon et al., 2009, p. 267). Grounded Theory methodology requires deep engagement with data such as diagramming concepts, focused coding, memos, initial coding, and theoretical memo writing before, during, and after data generation to develop further questions, inquiries, and areas of theory development to be explored in further data generation methods. In Grounded Theory Methodology, theoretical sampling and saturation is aimed at theory construction and not population representativeness (Charmaz, 2014; Malagon et al., 2009).

Centroamericana Feminist Theory in epistemology-theory-praxis is intersectional, embodied, and grounded in critical analysis of imperialism, settler-colonialism, and neoliberalism. *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory exists in resistance to the external validation of colonial research methodologies that seek to generalize and homogenize research findings that erase nuance and context. Similar to Malagon et al.’s (2009) use of Critical Race-Grounded Methodology that used Critical Race Theory to develop liberatory and emancipatory research methodology for People of Color, a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology seeks to understand the conditions and outcomes of *Centroamericana* women experiencing structural

violence while advancing Central American liberation, self-determination, justice and healing grounded in Central American realities.

To explore the experiences and healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors, I engaged a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology. Using methodology that theorizes from the body-mind-spirit of *Centroamericana* lineages in the context of systemic, transnational, imperial violence requires that we Central American researchers and educators center our identities, relationality, place, and healing in research and praxis. Separate and connected in solidarity with Chicana/Latina Feminist theories and epistemologies, the current dissertation centered the wholistic experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors that included their relationships to their identity, lived experiences as Women of Color, and how they engaged with the systems around them that influenced their racialized bodies. Grounded in the epistemology and frameworks of *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory reviewed in Chapter 2 in collaboration with Grounded Theory and inspired by my own past experience with Plática and Indigenous Research Methodology, the following principles are what transforms “methods into methodology” and connect researchers and collaborators to ancestors and lineages that are felt and embodied in ways of knowing (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Million, 2014; L. T. Smith, 2012). I conceptualized four guiding principles that guided the current study’s methodology:

- 1) *Grounded in Centroamericana epistemologies* was conceptualized as centering the theorization from the lived experiences of *Centroamericana* body-mind-spirit.
- 2) *Relationality* was conceptualized as centering reciprocity, researcher reflexivity, and an embodied self that honors *Centroamericana* beings as cocreators of knowledge.

- 3) *Place-based and engaged* was conceptualized as theorizing from the experiences of *Centroamericanas* (in the Isthmus and diaspora) in connection to place and land and water knowledge systems
- 4) *Healing-centered* was conceptualized as centering healing in research, praxis and future making for *Centroamericana* body-mind-spirits.

The first guiding principle of *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology begins with the centering of the *Centroamericana* body-mind-spirit, epistemologies, and identity. All seven *Centroamericana* student survivors who collaborated on this healing research project, including me as the researcher, described the importance of carving out our own space of theorization, identity formation, and belonging *separate and in connection-solidarity* with Chicana/Latina epistemologies and lived experiences. *Centroamericana* Feminist scholars, activists, theorists, and creatives are not a homogenous entity—all spanning diverse lineages from the Isthmus including nation-states of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Belize—many born of Indigenous and Afro genealogies, and all with varying transnational, migration, political, and settler-colonial contexts (Abrego, 2020; Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007; Hernández-Linares, 2015; Hoppe, 2024; Mena, 2023; Menchú, 2010; Padilla, 2012, 2018; Portillo, 2015; Ramsey, 2024; Rodríguez, 2008). Developing an analysis of intersectionality within the thoughts, emotions, memories, and embodied experiences of diverse *Centroamericana* genealogies centered the decolonial and antiimperialist perspectives that shed light on future making practices and ways of being for U.S. *Centroamericanas*.

Positioning Grounded Methodology within *Centroamericana* Feminist epistemologies and broader feminist Women of Color theories created opportunities for transformation in the

research context. I grounded my entire dissertation study in *believing* the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors as students impacted by multiple forms of oppression and healing. I used the theorization and input from U.S. *Centroamericana* students and survivors within my past research and current advocacy work to shape the dissertation project, including theories, methodology, concepts, and questions highlighted in Plática Guiding Protocols (see Appendix B). Our informal and formal plática during this project often included sharing of literature, music, poetry, and memories centered around being *Centroamericana*, which brought visibility, joy and affirmations of resilience. By using my existing and new relationships with collaborators in the project, I positioned myself not just as a researcher in this project, but as someone who identified as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivor myself and engaged my own genealogy, beliefs, and relationality to other collaborators. For example, in line with *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology, theoretical sampling consisted of connecting, recruiting, and developing authentic relationships with student survivors who self-identified themselves as Central American Women who experienced sexual violence. Students in the study self-identified to participate in the project without having to rationalize or disclose detailed accounts of their experiences of violence to justify their eligibility for the project. The interview protocols were developed to elicit open-ended questions and connections to their identity to provide an open space for students to theorize around their own intersectionality and epistemology of healing not necessarily tied to academic theories or frameworks mentioned in the dissertation study.

The second guiding principle was relationality grounded in reciprocity, vulnerability, and researcher reflexivity that acknowledged multiple forms of relations, connections to people, more than human relatives, and an embodied self that honored Central American beings as

cocreators of knowledge (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory is grounded in inter-intra generational lineages of storytelling, histories, and ways of knowing (Alma & Hernández, 2026; Padilla, 2018). Like Plática Methodology and Indigenous Research Methodologies, scholars in sharing their own personal and academic experiences with collaborators can open opportunities for collaborators to share back and shape the research process and engage in knowledge production while their own interest and theorization emerges (Godinez, 2006; L. T. Smith, 2012). For example, the U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in this dissertation shared experiences of healing from sexual violence and directly contributed to what it means to be a U.S. *Centroamericana* in higher education. Throughout this dissertation, I continued to adapt and shape the process as student collaborators shared feedback about our plática space, the questions, and their input in crafting narratives based on their lived experiences. This included member checking; offering opportunities to review transcripts; findings drafts; and inviting them to access and have control of what they would like to share, change, or remove from the data corpus.

Relationality emphasized my intention and connection to the collaborators as wholistic students first. For example, recruitment was intentional and involved informal plática (i.e., nonaudio recorded), and formal plática (i.e., audio recorded) to build trust, safety, and familiarity with the collaborators before they trusted me to go on record with their stories of identity, violence, and healing. The principle of relationality moves researchers past a formal interview that invites collaborators to ask questions, expect responses from the researcher themselves about questions they may ask, and a back-and-forth conversation that emerges from the sharing of experiences in multiple directions. Espino et al. (2010) stated that research reflexivity forms “a

collaborative process comprised of sharing stories, building community, and acknowledging multiple realities and vulnerabilities is an effort to enforce strong bonds” (p. 805). With many collaborators, I would meet with them for coffee or sit on benches, at tennis courts, and on grassy areas on campus so they could learn more about me, my work, and my interest in exploring this area of research. We would discuss our relationships with our more-than-human relatives (e.g., cats, dogs, plants, trees, oceans), academic and personal goals, areas we were struggling with (e.g., mental health, academic courses, family conflict), graduate school aspirations, career mentoring, and more. Informal *plática* happened before, during, and after the recruitment and data generation period.

Relationality enacted meant cultivating relationships with various Latine and Central American student organizations on campus, community hubs such as the Latinx student affairs departments and Hispanic-Serving Institution efforts, and academic department events that highlighted and shaped the lived experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students on campus. Positioning myself as both a cocollaborator and researcher in these spaces created opportunities to advocate for the needs of U.S. *Centroamericana* students through policy efforts, campus climate efforts, and political actions that advance the needs of our families and communities. Participating and staying involved in efforts to protect and support Undocumented students and families and advocate for healthcare, education, and immigration rights while affirming their realities off campus was critical beyond this dissertation project. Centering the healing experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students within *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology meant inviting collaborators to show up as their authentic whole selves in the process and being curious about how that impacted their healing through research inquiry. U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors are not just survivors in healing from sexual violence, but

embody roles such as sister, mother, daughter, granddaughter, partner, tía, niece, amiga, student, and community member that in turn shapes their lived experiences wholistically. Overall, I grew to have deep, connected, and lasting relationships with these collaborators and feel immense gratitude about the months and moments we spent together—our healing is reciprocal.

The third principle of *Centroamericana Feminist*-Grounded Methodology is that it engages place-based theorization and methodology. Central American scholars, writers, and creatives have heavily theorized and explored the experiences of Central Americans in the Isthmus and in diaspora by analyzing their connection to place through migration, identity-formation, and land/water knowledge systems (Abrego, 2020; Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007; Hernández-Linares, 2015; Hoppe, 2024; Mena, 2023; Menchú, 2010; Padilla, 2012, 2018; Portillo, 2015; Ramsey, 2024; Rodríguez, 2008). As discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Central American scholars have conceptualized frameworks, storywork and storytelling tied to ancestral sacred places, healing practices, and traditions tied to pueblos and peoples. *Centroamericana* Feminist scholar Alma (2024) enacted the praxis of *rememorar* [rememory] to re-visit, re-center, and re-narrate the pain and trauma of anti-indigeneity, antiblackness, genocide, ethnocide, epistemicide, queericide, femicide, colonization, militarism, imperialism by coming back to place, and identity and connection to ancestral lands and waters that can teach us how to regenerate embodied self and lineages. Central American scholars through the development of Critical Latinx Indigeneities and Afro-Indigenous frameworks have created analytical lenses that bring into light the complex nuance of place, belonging, and connection while creating opportunities to challenge complicity in settler-colonial logics due to migration and invite the expansion of Indigenous/Afro solidarities (Blackwell et al., 2017; López Oro, 2021). Because U.S. *Centroamericana* student

survivors have experienced violence in *physical* places on campus and have inherited intergenerational violence in their bodies from their ancestral places in the Isthmus—their healing engages current, past, and future conceptualization of place in *Centroamericana Feminist-Grounded Methodology*.

To invite the theorization and methodology of place and healing in *Centroamericana Feminist-Grounded Methodology*, it was critical that collaborators engage in physical environments with their places of healing. Pulling from *Centroamericana*, Chicana, Latina Feminist, and Indigenous Healing Methodologies, I used walking plática with collaborators to invoke storytelling from their ancestral places as they connected with trees/water/land on campus, facilitated site visits of their places of healing on campus, and had collaborators diagram their places of healing on a campus map that created opportunities to dive in deeper with their connections to identity, intergenerational trauma, and healing genealogies with place (Alma, 2024; Fernandez et al., 2021). For example, collaborators invited me to campus gardens, tennis courts, libraries, and identity-affirming student organization meetings and events to experience their places of healing. As we sat under trees and grass, experienced the sound of water in the fountains and ponds, and heard music from their ancestral pueblos and communities at events, collaborators experienced embodied and somatic reactions connected to memory and emotion. As I connected with Latine/Central American student organizations on campus to facilitate collective healing spaces, present on my previous research, and share space together with other students, more participants felt comfortable coming forward wanting to officially participate in the study. Generating theory from place in *Centroamericana Feminist-Grounded Methodology* allowed for the opportunity to center the healing needs of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors.

The fourth principle of *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology is centering the *healing* of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in research, praxis, and future making. When we lead with intentions of healing centered in *Centroamericana* Feminist epistemologies and grounded in the lives of *Centroamericana* student survivors' genealogies, the research process itself can facilitate healing for all collaborators including the researcher themselves. *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory and methodologies of healing in Chicana/Latina methodologies discuss how research methodologies can serve as a therapeutic practice and embodied healing practices (Alma, 2024; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Within her work as a *curandera*, Avila (1999) shared the ways in which Aztec tradition positioned the space of *plática* as a space where curanderas could learn about their clients and provide education and/or healing remedies. In this context, the space of *plática* serves as a spiritual act where curanderas and healers listen to their clients and provide ancestral gifts of education, remedies, and their own ancestral connections to serve the healing needs of their clients. De la Torre (2008) and Espino et al. (2010) positioned the space of *plática* as a tool used by family to discuss ailments, support each other, explore hopes and dreams, and address ways to heal trauma through processes of “unburdening”—to release challenges and tensions in hopes of inviting space for dreaming and creation. Making spaces for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors to heal was possible through this dissertation as all brought with them inherit gifts, stories of healing and resilience with each other. Positioning methodology grounded in *Centroamericana* genealogy as a tool of healing requires that the research design allow them to engage in storytelling, unburdening and healing within themselves with the researcher and with each other.

Engaging the principle of healing in *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology meant cultivating opportunities to cocreate experiences and engage healing in *plática* and

collective healing spaces in the dissertation. For example, there were moments during walking plática when collaborators would suddenly stop speaking as they noticed a plant, a more-than-human relative, or the sound of water and ask me to take a moment to listen with them. We would close our eyes together, breathe, and listen to the sound of the elements that were in real time coregulating our body-mind-spirits. Engaging in the principle of healing meant moving like water through the plática protocols, trusting collaborators would guide us together where we needed to go to experience healing. Some collaborators in the project took several days and weeks to consider whether they were ready to engage in the study. Honoring their own understanding of time, pace, and processing of their needs gave them back power in the process—a reclamation of power in decision making that was taken from them during periods of violence in their lives. Being patient, honoring our timelines, and centering our needs was critical to creating a trauma-informed and healing-centered praxis. During plática, I was grateful when collaborators would interrupt me to connect with nature, pets, their children, and visualization processes where their ancestors, beloved and hurtful, would join us in spirit, and where they would talk directly to their descendants. See Appendix C (Audio Memo After Informal Plática With Luna) for insight regarding this principle.

Collaborators in this dissertation project engaged in multiple forms of healing, including breathwork, releasing of sacred tears, manifestation, prayer, affirmations, plant medicine, astrology, crystal work, pole dancing, music therapy, pilates, art, poetry and so much more. Through our time together, many began and felt empowered to continue therapy, some left unhealthy relationships and set/affirmed/questioned boundaries with family and friends, some grew curious about their own healing they still wanted to do, and some still did not know how to feel about relationships who caused harm in their lives. Many wanted to dive deeper into their

own healing and community work and shared they did now know research could be “healing.” My commitment to collaborators in this project was centered on their wellness and healing as humans first and as part of the larger survivor community. Engaging the principle of healing meant offering myself as a facilitator of healing for collaborators and communities. For example, I was trained in various somatic and grounding therapies throughout my professional career as a sexual violence advocate and educator. As *a don* (a gift) passed down to me by my ancestors and genealogies, I have been given the opportunity to learn ancestral healing practices from my elders that I used to cocreate with survivors, students, and my own community when appropriate. I aimed to incorporate these principles and practices into recruitment processes, data generation, and engagement protocols to ground individual and collective U.S. *Centroamericana* genealogies generated through this dissertation project.

During data generation and engagement (i.e., analysis), journaling and the tool of memo became critical to making sense of how *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology invited my own theorization as a collaborator and survivor in the dissertation. More specifically, it brought me closer to understanding how methodologies connected to the cultivation of our own healing genealogies can serve as a space to engage in healing, sustain care, and cultivate a practice of reflexivity when working in trauma intensive environments with research and practice. For example, Appendix C (Memo on Spiritual Care in Data Generation and Engagement) highlights my theorizing at a point in the dissertation project when data generation became overwhelming and heavy on my body-mind-spirit, and was impacted by current sociopolitical factors impacting my family and community during the 2025 Winter Solstice. *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology brings into reflection and practice epistemologies, frameworks and tools that can help sustain decolonial, and community-based

and liberatory projects that not only support the work of Central American self-determination but can cocreate collective spaces of healing, resistance and hope for continued futurity for oppressed people in solidarity. I describe the methods used and shaped by these principles more in depth in the Data Generation and Engagement section of this chapter.

Keeping Sacred Centroamericana Genealogies

Decolonial scholars Tuck and Yang (2014a, 2014b) showed how the colonial extracting of stories and the objectification of “replication” in the social sciences has led to many injustices in the academy. According to Tuck and Yang (2014a), “There are some forms of knowledge that the academy doesn’t deserve” (p. 813) because these are details, ceremonial and intimate processes that are grounded in relationality with collaborators and sacred spaces. To uphold the sacredness of these spaces and practices, there may be explicit omissions on details or protocols with individual and collaborative processes to preserve honor, respect, and integrity with collaborators. Tuck and Yang (2014b) explained, in the pursuit of replication of research, there is quest of “accumulation of intellectual and financial capital, while informants [researcher and collaborators] give a part of themselves away” and while Western researchers want to “absorb or repudiate competing knowledge systems, while claiming limitless horizons” (p. 233). Although the stories, lessons, and teachings from this dissertation project are important to share, there are experiences, processes, and healing spaces collaborators and I refused to give to the academic university setting. U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors are deserving of healing, reciprocity, and community bonds, first and foremost.

Refusal was apparent in areas of this dissertation that were kept sacred by all collaborators (Simpson, 2007). For example, not all pláticas were audio recorded, omissions of names, places, memories, and emotional processes were kept sacred and held with each other. I

refused to record our opening and closing ceremonies to let ourselves engage in ceremony witnessed by ourselves and by spirit ancestors that were with us in those exact moments of ceremony. We refused to romanticize, commodify, and generalize our experiences and, instead, chose to complicate, humanize, and call truth to power in our realities. Refusing the academy when it attempted to commodify our medicine and “package” our healing practices without our consent meant our intention in sharing our collective teachings, wisdoms, and medicine in this dissertation was given as a gift and not an expectation. By sharing what we chose to share we could shape, provide guidance, and create opportunities for shaping institutions to better support U.S. *Centroamericana* students. We believed our collective sacred gifts and stories can help empower other *Centroamericana* survivors feel seen, valued, and affirmed that they are connected to genealogies of resistance, resilience, and hope. Reflexivity requires collaborators, our genealogies, and stories are protected, respected, and honored as we envision our past, present, and futures.

Research Design

In line with *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology epistemologies and theoretical frameworks, the dissertation included methods of plática, walking plática, collective healing plática, testimonio, field site visits, photo/artifact elicitation, a research journal, and analytical/theoretical memo. To explore and understand the healing experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors, the dissertation explored the following research questions:

1. How does a U.S. *Centroamericana* identity shape experiences with campus sexual and relationship violence?
2. How do U.S. *Centroamericana* college students engage in healing from their experiences of campus sexual and relationship violence?

Site Background Information

To facilitate collaborator confidentiality and anonymity, the research site used the pseudonym of *Acorn University*, the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of *Acorn University's* Indigenous peoples. Situated on the Western part of what is known as the United States, *Acorn University*, like many other land-grab and colonial colleges, was established and profits from the ongoing dispossession, genocide, theft, and expropriation of Indigenous People. Land-grab universities were established through violent higher education projects and policies, like the Morrill Acts, which seized and occupied—through force and violence—the Indigenous lands in which universities currently reside on (Lee & Ahtone, 2020; Stewart-Ambo & Yang, 2021). Built in part through visions of western conquest and imperialism, colonial colleges and land-grab universities used the labor of enslaved Black people to build colleges and profited from the bounties of Indigenous People (Rudolph, 1991). Lee and Ahtone (2020) stated, through policies, universities were built from the “bounties for Indigenous heads and scalps, paid by the state and reimbursed by the federal government” which “encouraged the carving up of traditional territories without any compensation” (p. 25) to Indigenous People. As a public-land-grab university with over 40,000 students, *Acorn University* served over 20% of first-generation students receiving Pell Grants and served about 20 % Latine identifying students with about 50% of students identifying as female at the time of this study. Despite ongoing efforts of dispossession and settler-colonialism by higher education institutions, Indigenous People in the Western United States and globally have continued to center decolonial possibilities and engage in the reimagining of relationships to place outside of settler-colonial structures, Land Back and rematriation efforts, and Indigenous futurity in solidarity with other colonized people

(Sepulveda, 2018, 2025; Vaughn & Ambo, 2022). Figure 5 provides a map of the ancestral places of Indigenous People in areas of western United States.

Figure 5

Map of Ancestral Places of Indigenous Peoples



Note. Image courtesy of Timara Lotah Link, “Indigenous Place”

Collaborators

Collaborators in the study consisted of six U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors enrolled at Acorn University in what is known as the United States. The collaborator criteria included being currently enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate woman student at Acorn University, self-identifying as a person with ancestry from Central America (i.e., Honduras, Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Indigenous Central American,

Black/Afro Central American), being over the age of 18 at the time of data generation, and having past experiences of sexual or relationship violence that impacted them during college.

Collaborator Recruitment

Recruitment for the project began with invitations to connect with collaborators during Winter 2025 and spanned 5 months of recruitment and data generation. I reached out via email to places where I had already established relationships with various campus cultural and gender equity centers, academic departments, and student organizations to connect about the research study. Some of these academic departments and centers served Central American undergraduate and graduate students. The recruitment material included flyers and social media graphics (i.e., Instagram and LinkedIn) where they were asked to share with their listservs, networks, and social meetings. The target materials asked, “Are you a U.S. Central American woman student at [Acorn University] that has experienced sexual or relationship violence on campus?”

In the recruitment materials, I provided examples of sexual violence behaviors to draw interest from students who may not readily identify their experiences as the term of sexual violence. All recruitment messages included a link or QR code that took them to the recruitment screening form that provided more information on the study, including criteria for participation, study purpose, and the lead researcher’s contact information. The screening form provided information on local support for healing and support resources. Collaborators were able to learn more about the research before they committed to submitting information. If the individual was interested in participating in the research project, they were prompted to fill out a secure Qualtrics questionnaire. This allowed me to determine whether the individual was eligible for participation and would be invited into the next phase of the project or notified that they did not meet the criterion. Collaborators were sent an outreach email to confirm participation, including

study information sheet, consent form, and resources, 1–2 days after they submitted the interest form.

The study compensation of \$50 cash (\$25 for the initial individual plática and \$25 for the Collective Healing Plática) was sent to collaborators after the initial plática and additionally after the Collective Healing Plática. However, in line with other critical sexual violence scholars, I did not include this information in the recruitment materials to minimize any undue influence on students' desire to engage in the research (Harris, 2020; Karunaratne, 2023a). Students learned of the participation funds if they visited this interest form. To minimize the amount of screening tools used before they submitted their interest forms, collaborators were asked during the initial plática to complete a demographic form (see Appendix D) asking about their preferred pseudonym, gender identity, first generation college student status, class standing, major, grade point average, housing status, and other salient identities. I used two recording devices to generate audio recordings of the plática spaces transcribed later in the process for data engagement.

Collaborator Information

To further protect collaborators' confidentiality, I did not share disaggregated collaborator demographic information of each student. Collaborators' self-identified racial and ethnic identities included Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, Honduran, Salvadorian, and Panamanian, identifying also as Central American, Latina, Mexican, and Hispanic. Their self-described sex and gender included female and woman. Students' ages ranged from 18–33, with a mean age of 22. The collaborators consisted of 2nd-year students, 4th-year students, and graduate students. All collaborators identified as first-generation college students and some transferred to their current institution. Their academic majors ranged from sociology; international development;

Chicana/o and Central American Studies; education; and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Collaborators noted other salient identities including being an immigrant, Woman in STEM, Mother, Daughter, Sister, Neurodivergent, Central American, Student, Woman, Eldest Daughter, Mixed-Status, and low income. About half of the collaborators lived in Acorn University owned housing while the others lived in off-campus facilities or at home with their families. In the documentation of study findings and discussion, I used the terms “survivors” and “students” interchangeably to refer to collaborators. Collaborator or “student” is in recognition that survivorship is not their sole identity and that students may not identify with the term “survivor.”

Data Generation

Centroamericana Feminist-Grounded Methodology is an intergenerational, collaborative story-centered, and reflexive methodology grounded in the lived realities of U.S.

Centroamericana student survivors. Using various methods like plática, walking plática, collective healing plática, testimonio, field site visits, photo/artifact elicitation, a research journal, and analytical memo allowed me to further engage in exploring wholistic dimensions of collaborators in relation to the research questions.

Plática (Intensive Interviewing)

The term “plática” refers to conversational spaces grounded in the everyday lives of many Chicanx/Latinx and Central American communities. “Plática” is a common Spanish colloquial term defined as “to talk” used by many Central American people to connect, engage, and make meaning of everyday experiences. For Chicana/Latina and *Centroamericana* scholars, plática is a space where “relational conversations allow self-discovery and an exploration of who we are in relationship to ourselves and others” (De la Torre, 2008, p. 44). The term *plática* in the

context of *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology refers to the three forms of intensive interviewing used in the dissertation. Intensive Interviewing is a practice of active listening that allows the researcher and participant to generate data grounded in the lived experiences and expertise of the phenomenon being explored and theorized (Charmaz, 2014). In Grounded Methodology, interviews that are “open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted” and where researchers conduct “open-ended, in-depth exploration of an area in which the interviewee has substantial experience” can generate data for theorization (Charmaz, 2014, p. 187). Charmaz (2014) described intensive interviewing as an emergent technique that “combines flexibility and control, opens interactional space for ideas and issues to arise, allows possibilities for immediate follow-up on these ideas and issues, results from interviewers and interview participants’ coconstruction of the interview conversation” (p. 139). Intensive interviewing “may elicit a range of responses and discourses, including a person’s concerns at the moment, justifications of past actions, and measured reflections” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 187), making it a useful method in relation with *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory to bring insight into the unique healing experiences of US. *Centroamericana* student survivors.

Developing the Plática protocol was an iterative process and included few questions to invoke thinking in the key areas of research interest for the dissertation. Charmaz (2014) stated that having few planned questions helps researchers “improvise in a smoother, less confrontational way, which is a typical goal of intensive interviewing” and helps researchers “to become aware of their interests, assumptions, and use of language” (p.151). Plática guides can be viewed in Appendix B.

Informal Plática

I used *informal plática* with all collaborators in the project. Many of the collaborators met with me in *nonaudio*-recorded sessions where they shared insights of their experiences, healing, racialized and gendered identities, and shared memories and thoughts on their experience in the project. These were facilitated through phone texts, phone calls, email, Zoom calls, and meet ups on campus at coffee shops and gardens. No set questions or guides were used for informal plática as collaborators would bring up conversations related to their immediate needs and interest. We would share books with one another, listen to music together, and discuss our experiences as U.S. *Centroamericana* students. Informal Plática lasted between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours depending on the collaborator's availability. I relied heavily on audio/written memos to capture and analyze the content of these informal plática spaces in my research journal.

Formal Plática

Formal plática refers to an intensive interviewing space (outlined in Appendix B: Plática Guides); these were audio recorded and transcribed to be used in data engagement with theoretical sampling and data saturation. Centering the principles of *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology, it is important to note the transcripts only showcased the recorded portions of the plática (1–1.5 hours). The whole plática itself lasted between 1.5–3 hours, incorporating opening and closing of the space, breathing work, and checking in before and after the actual recordings. The initial plática was conducted in person and in a private room on the site campus with windows to let sunlight into the space for grounding support. I provided fidget items, Kleenex tissues, coloring pencils in case collaborators wanted to doodle, and water. A Zoom meeting was offered in case there were issues with transportation or safety concerns. I

relied heavily on audio/written memos after the formal plática to capture and analyze the content of these interactions in my research journal.

Walking Plática

To further explore the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors with healing, I used *walking plática* to (a) generate data from physically experiencing the spaces of healing with collaborators and (b) engage in a methodology of healing and *rememorar* as outlined in the principles of *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology. Walking interviews (Evans & Jones, 2011; Lynch, 2005) are widely used in qualitative research for the ability to focus on how participants “comprehend and engage their physical and social environments” (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 456). Walking interviews used in higher education research have been helpful to “encourage a focus on environmental perceptions, individual experiences, and institutionalized structures” with campus climate (Harris, 2016, p. 36). In a collaborator-guided walking plática, collaborators chose a select the location that engaged their healing and gave insights into the perception, special practices, biographies, social architecture, and social realms of their healing environments in relation to their experiences as *Centroamericana* students on a college campus.

Chicana/Latina and *Centroamericana* Feminist scholars (Alvarado et al., 2017; Anzaldúa, 1987; Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2005) have provided reminders of how important the body is as “a source of herstory, knowledge and resistance” (Gaxiola Serrano, 2023, p. 1644) and how walking plática elicits place-based narratives of space as it “exposes the brown body’s facultad by privileging the brown body as a site of memory that is central to understanding the spatial experiences of Communities of Color” (Gaxiola Serrano, 2023, p. 1646). An embodied

experience of walking plática harnessed the body, hearing, sight, smell, touch, and taste that generates data and has the possibilities of re-generating [*rememorar*] to re-narrate space and place for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors who were impacted by violence on campus—a place where they experienced their whole selves. Indigenous Walking Research Methodologies grounded in place have the potential to re-position and re-connect to place by allowing the body to engage in remembrance, reduce isolation, and re-center the body as reciprocal embodied space of healing with the place and memory (Schultz et al., 2016). Using walking plática served as a data generation method, but most importantly, a mechanism for which collaborators were given a space to engage in collective healing. I also engaged in walking plática with other researchers, scholars, and *Centroamericana* colleagues as a reflexive praxis to process thoughts, memories, and connections to findings through the data generation and engagement process. Walking plática were audio-recorded using small, wireless microphones and lasted between 1–3 hours on campus. I relied heavily on audio/written memos after plática to capture and analyze the content of these interactions in my research journal. The composite narrative in Chapter 4 titled “*Prologue: A Visit from the Cigua in the Garden*” provides insight into the healing aspects of walking plática.

Collective Healing Plática

The last form of plática to support the implementation of a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology consisted of a Collective Healing Plática method that engaged the *collective* theorization and healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in the study. The collective plática invited collaborators to convene with each other and me, as the researcher, to explore their experiences of healing collectively. Grounded Methodology uses intensive interviewing with focus groups to further generate theorization on the research phenomenon

(Charmaz, 2014; Urquhart, 2023). Focusing on a broad plática protocol for the Collective Healing Plática, in collaboration with photo/artifact elicitation described previously, facilitated the opportunity for collaborators to cocreate knowledge, support one another in their healing, and dream about futures of healing in their lineages as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. If collaborators did not feel comfortable with participating in the collective space, they were invited to connect in further individual plática if interested. All collaborators confirmed and participated in the in-person plática.

Developing the Collective Healing Plática protocol emerged from the praxis of identity and healing in *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory and somatic healing traditions from my own healing lineage that I have engaged with as somatic educator with survivors, and were shaped by the theorization of study collaborators that emerged over the span of 5 months of data generation (Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024). Developing a research design that could engage collaborators in healing meant developing a *collective* space that affirmed our *Centroamericana* identities and lineages, engaged our bodies in wholistic somatic healing practices, and embodied the praxis of healing *as resistance*. The opening and closing ceremonies were intentionally not audio or visually recorded to protect our ceremonies and spirit ancestors. The Surrender Bowl exercise for the opening ceremony invited participants to release heaviness before they entered the space and an opportunity to ground and position themselves in their lineages (e.g., call in spirits, self-affirmations, invite bravery) to engage in plática. In inviting collaborators to share a photo/artifact that related to their healing, it was important that we created a trauma-informed and healing-centered space that discussed informed consent, collective plática expectations on confidentiality and privacy, invited collaborators to have control of how they wanted to participate, and modeled vulnerability through my own collaboration and sharing in the space.

In the closing ceremony, it was critical that we “closed” out the healing space as a container of intergenerational storytelling, memories, thoughts, and emotions that we wanted to “take or leave” with us as we finished this project collectively. I curated the healing space with yoga mats for stretching and breathwork and intentional music, flowers, flame lights, water, and oils to incorporate my own Indigenous teachings of healing with fire, earth, water, air, which we used to connect with our ancestral places of healing. I curated gift bags for collaborators that incorporated elements of healing, including bookmarks, crystals, water dissolvable paper for the surrender bowl exercise, essential oils, plushy bears, journals, pens, and individual handwritten letters with personal reflections about each one of them. Lastly, the Collective Healing Plática served as a form of member checking to compare and revisit saturated categories in the data analysis, ending our last moments affirmed in the excerpts of our futurity with healing. Due to collaborator availability and scheduling, one in-person Healing Collective Plática was facilitated on campus after all individual formal plática were completed and lasted about 2.5 hours. I relied heavily on audio/written memos after plática to capture and analyze the content of these interactions in my research journal. The composite narrative in Chapter 5 titled *Prologue: Centroamericana Healing Genealogies* provides insight into the *Centroamericana* Collective Healing Plática.

Testimonio

Grounded in *Centroamericana* and Chicana/Latina epistemology and theory, the use of Testimonio was critical to understanding the lived experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students wholistically. Narrated by and with other collaborators, testimonios shared within the plática setting were recorded during the dissertation process. Testimonio is an “anti-imperial and anti-militarist methodology” (K. Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012, p. 526) rooted in Latin America with a

collective goal of shaping discourses of solidarity (Carmona et al., 2018; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Hamzeh et al., 2020). It is described as the “telling of an account from an individual point of view whose conscious has led to an analysis of the experience as a shared component of oppression” (K. Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012, p. 528). Testimonio differs from oral history or other methods of autobiography as it “involves the collaborator in a critical reflection of their personal experience within particular sociopolitical realities” and a methodology in which researchers “break silences and bear witness to both injustice and social change” (Delgado et al., 2012a, p. 364). My testimonio as a U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivor and collaborator within the dissertation was weaved throughout this dissertation study through dissertation chapter prologues and epilogues, positionality, and methodologies to embody the praxis of collaborative storytelling and collective meaning making with other U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivor collaborators.

In line with *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology, collaborators were given power through member checks; opportunities to access their transcripts to correct or redact from their testimonios; and shape the data engagement, findings, and implications of the dissertation project in person, via email, or zoom. I relied heavily on audio/written memos to capture and analyze testimonios of violence and healing in my research journal.

Field Site Visits

Grounded Theory Methodology uses ethnography and observation heavily as a method for gathering rich data on the phenomenon being studied as it can record individual collective actions, contain detailed notes with anecdotes and observations, highlight significant processes occurring in the setting, place participants language and actions in contexts, and become focused on key analytic ideas (Charmaz, 2014). For purposes of this research design, I engaged in

observation for several site visits to generate data on the healing spaces of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in this study. Collaborators in the study invited me to several extra-curricular events like student organization meetings, celebrations, talks, and study spaces. This gave me the opportunity to understand the “energy” of sites, observe the structure and organization of these sites, and, most importantly, observe the way collaborators engaged in the sites as I observed. I had my research journal in hand and would write down anecdotes to describe the environment and the behaviors observed and relied heavily on audio/written memos to describe processes and themes and generate questions for later plática with collaborators.

Photo/Artifact Elicitation Methods

Centroamericana Feminist-Grounded Methodology can be further generate rich data when using photo/artifact/document elicitation methods (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) shared, “Texts, like published autobiographies, may elicit thoughts, feelings, and concerns of the thinking, acting subject as well as give researchers ideas about what structures and cultural values influence this person” (p. 116). I provided a paper copy of campus maps to collaborators during the initial plática to invoke thinking and elicitation around their healing with sexual violence on campus. Many used assorted colors like red, green, and blue to describe the “energy and vibe” of spaces on campus. The method of photo and artifact elicitation was used in the study to provide insight into the ways U.S. *Centroamericana* students are engaging in healing in multiple facets. Using an “reflexive” photo and artifact elicitation method in the study invited collaborators to generate photographs or artifacts related to a broad prompt of healing (Lapenta, 2012). Photo-elicitation research methods have been developed and enacted by feminist and critical theories that allow for the analysis of social structures through “everyday life events” and experiences of people (Haymore et al., 2012, p. 2). Haymore et al. (2012) also found that photo-

elicitation with interpersonal survivors created spaces of creative expression and processing that moved beyond verbal or written responses and engagement with data generation processes. In previous similar studies with Minoritized student survivors that I facilitated, inviting students to bring in a photo or artifact connected to their healing cultivated spaces of deep reflection, intention, and grounding as students could engage in ways that affirmed their own authentic ways of sharing their experiences. Photo-elicitation can also bring attention to power and disrupt hierarchy between researchers and collaborators (Kortegast et al., 2019; Walls & Holquist, 2019). This includes “conducting research *with* rather than *on* collaborators” (Kortegast et al., 2019, p. 503) by allowing collaborators to share their own interpretations and meanings to prompts and questions in research settings. Photo and artifact elicitation invited U.S. *Centroamericana* students to feel empowered to connect to their bodies and share their experiences of healing in multiple ways.

Research Journal and Memos

I kept a research journal to provide structures reflexivity and documentation of the research process with collaborators. Ravitch and Carl (2020) stated that research journals are places to record “thoughts, questions, struggles, ideas, excitements and experiences with the process of learning and engaging” (p. 116). Research journals provide spaces for ongoing reflexivity, provide spaces to contemplate questions and concepts, and formulate changes and shifts in the dissertation process. It allowed me to engage and connect with collaborators regarding any action items or considerations. To practice reflexivity and validity, I wrote reflexive memos throughout the data generation phase of the study to reflect and engage with my own positionality as a researcher. The research journal and memos were used for data engagement (analysis) later in the dissertation process, which I describe later in this chapter. The

final summary of the data corpus generated in the dissertation study during a 5-month period included 12 audio-recorded, transcribed plática between 1.5–3 hours each, one audio recorded Collective Healing Plática transcribed plática, 36 audio/written memos with five field visits/observations, six annotated campus maps, six photographs of healing sites, testimonio from the researcher, and seven artifacts of healing.

Indigenous scholar L. T. Smith (2012) stated a decolonizing praxis is the active process of producing “knowledge that documents social injustice, that recovers subjugated knowledges, that help create spaces for the voices of the silenced to be expressed and ‘listened to’, and that challenges racism, colonialism, and oppression” (p. 198). U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors, through a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology research design, were enacting decolonial and creative methodologies of the body-mind-spirit while producing genealogies of wisdom and resistance individually and collectively.

Confidentiality and Safety

Confidentiality was maintained by means of pseudonyms (i.e., fake names) in all documents and storing information on a required login computer. Though identifiable data, such as racial/ethnic identity, student status, and other salient identifiers, were collected, this information was kept separate from the interview transcript for each collaborator under their pseudonym. The data, which included demographic forms, plática transcripts, and plática audio, used pseudonyms rather than the collaborator’s name. I transcribed the interviews using Otter automatic transcription services, which used a secure server. If collaborators stated their name or identifying information on the transcript, it was replaced with a pseudonym. Additionally, if collaborators stated identifying organizations or the institution, identified information were replaced with generic descriptors (e.g., ORGANIZATION, INSTITUTION). I created a

pseudonym key and the key was kept in a separate and secure place separate from the data corpus (e.g., demographic form, plática audio, transcripts) When reporting findings from the study, I made efforts to not compromise the identity of collaborators by using pseudonyms for their names and affiliations/organizations. When writing about the findings of this research, I was intentional about not reporting any information that could reveal collaborators' identities and changed some details from their experiences.

Data Engagement (Analysis)

To answer the research questions using a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology and research design, I engaged in data analysis grounded in Charmaz's (2006, 2014) three-part coding process that consisted of open coding, focused (selective) coding, and theoretical coding through an abductive approach that can be shown through Theoretical Memo and Integrative Diagrams. Grounded Theory Methodology primary uses an inductive (bottom-up) approach to generate theory from the data (Charmaz, 2014; Urquhart, 2023). Critical scholars using Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) in collaboration with other critical theories have argued that by using an abductive approach, defined as "examining and scrutinizing the data and considering all possible theoretical explanation for the phenomenon being studied," researchers can consider how "structural phenomena shape the data" (Malagon et al., 2009, p. 262). Essentially, by using a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Theory Methodology with data engagement, I could theorize and analyze how *Centroamericana Feminist* Theory (i.e., structural violence, gender, sexism, migration, neoliberalism, healing) shaped the data to provide insight into the experiences of U.S *Centroamericana* student survivors. I used Dedoose software to organize data, track codes, and categories (Urquhart, 2023). Accompanied by intentional active listening, qualitative scholars have posited that "good" qualitative research requires "engaged

listening and described listening with the heart to bring validity (Wolgemuth et al., 2025, p. 90). In staying connected to the body-mind-spirit of collaborators in the study, I listened to audio recordings of the plática to listen and explore *how* things were shared and nuance in voice tones and emotional expressions, and engaged in reflection with moments where collaborators were sharing parts of themselves wholeheartedly.

Theoretical Memos

Throughout the data generation and engagement process to increase trustworthiness and reflexivity, I engaged in the use of theoretical memos as an aspect of theoretical sensitivity first described by Glaser (1978) and later used by other Grounded Theorists and qualitative researchers (Urquhart, 2023). Theoretical memos are valuable in that they capture “creative ideas about the findings, and relationships between categories, are written down during the process of analysis” and “capture the ‘lightbulb’ moments we have about the data” (Urquhart, 2023, p. 135). Grounded Theorists described theoretical memos as the bedrock of theory generation and suggested memo occur throughout the entire process, but especially in data engagement to complicate, challenge, amend, and assess for new developments. Using concepts from Grounded Theory to assist me in generation analysis among relationships, I used the following language to think about the codes and categories: “Is a kind of,” “Is a part of/a place in,” “Is a way to,” “Is used for,” “Is a reason for,” “Is a stage of,” “Is a result/cause of,” “Is a place for,” and “Is a characteristic of” (Urquhart, 2023). I constantly went back and forth when coding and memoing to not forget and begin building key concepts, processes, and connections among the codes.

Integrative Diagrams

Grounded theorists engage in the use of integrative diagrams. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated that integrative diagrams “give a clear picture of where you have come from after data

collection, coding and memoing” and mentions that diagrams “can give direction to research” (p. 139) as it guides researchers to view categories as conceptual objects that relate to one another. The processes of developing the integrative diagrams were a creative, iterative, and reflective process. See Table 1 for an example of a code table used for diagramming Finding 2.1.

Table 1

Finding 2.1 Healing Defined for U.S. Centroamericana Student Survivors

Category	Selective codes	Open codes
Healing	Processes of reconnection	Nonlinear and cyclical Feels overwhelming, messy, exhausting day to day rebuilding connection to my body- mind-spirit moving through grief loss/grief feeling that it is not time bound Reconnection to land and waters
	Intra-intergenerational	Breaking cycles for past and future lineages Making meaning in Abuela-Mother-Daughter relationships Learning from older/younger survivors through experiences
	Developing self-agency	Serving my inner child Learning to identify and serve self needs Affirming through self-talk Being seen and validated without judgement

Open Coding

I engaged in open coding with each type of data available in the data corpus. Open coding is described as a “detailed and open analysis of the data” (Urquhart 2023, p. 107) to find as many unique insights as possible. Focusing on analytical codes and in vivo codes (i.e., codes that are generated through collaborators own language and experience), I completed first rounds of open coding as plática were completed with collaborators to identify emerging codes and categories to inquire more about the phenomenon. Example of these codes included minimizing

feelings of migration trauma, isolation from Latinx peers due to erasure of *Centroamericana* identity, and betrayal of mother for not believing them. I compared the codes to other plática with collaborators and generated more questions based on processes, relationships, and categories that were emerging. After completing all open coding for the entire data corpus, a list of 659 emergent codes was generated.

Selective Coding

The second round of coding is considered selective (i.e., focused coding) in that selective coding enables researchers to identify dimensions directly related to the research questions and dimensions through generating selective codes from the open codes to identify major relationships, processes, and concepts that may lead to the foundational one to two categories of a theory (Glaser, 1978; Urquhart, 2023). I downloaded all open codes on spreadsheet and started grouping them based on similar codes to examine code saturation. I also went back to my research questions and engaged in theoretical memo about which codes/selective codes were becoming saturated and prominent. I also engaged with *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory to analyze and write about how these selective codes were shaped by structural phenomena like oppression, migration, gender, sexism, and healing, further discussed in Chapter 5. Out of the 659 open codes, I generated 55 selective codes. The selective codes were then diagrammed to begin to conceptualize categories in the findings.

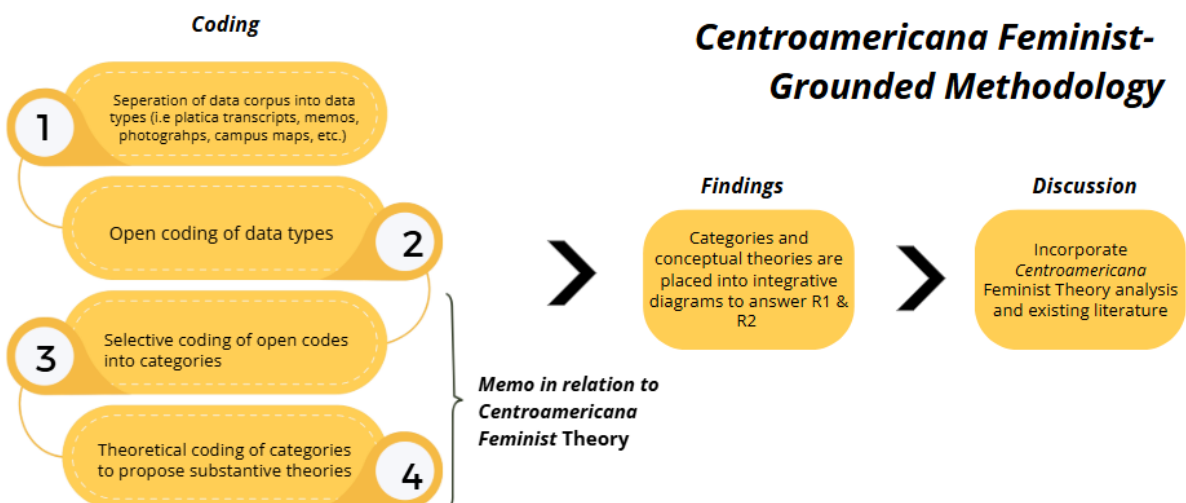
Theoretical Coding

Theoretical coding is defined as the stage where “codes are related to each other” and the theory starts to be “filled out” (Urquhart, 2023, p. 79) my generating the connections, relationships and processes related to phenomena. Connections between categories can be other categories, ideas about relationships from literature, and theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978;

Spradley, 1979; Urquhart, 2023). Through theoretical memos, I began to memo about connection to codes, categories and how they related to *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory and existing literature to begin to theorize and generate findings for the research questions. Out of the 55 selective codes, I generated eight categories for Research Question 1 and 10 categories for Research Question 2. At this point, I created an outline of the selective codes and categories for Research Question 1 and 2 and sent the memo to participants for feedback to continue to build out the theories of healing finalized in Chapter 4 and 5 of the dissertation study. Figure 6 includes a diagram that describes the coding process in *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Theory Methodology.

Figure 6

Centroamericana Feminist-Grounded Methodology



Storywork and Composite Vignettes as Analytical Tools

In addition to *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology, I use composite and narrative vignettes and storywork to highlight the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student

survivors for several reasons. Narrative/composite vignettes and storywork is grounded in robust traditions of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color storytelling (Marin et al., 2020; Meixi et al., 2022). L. T. Smith (2012), a Māori scholar, said, “The story and the storyteller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people, and the people with the story” (p. 166). Engaging in storywork considers the essence and values guiding these stories, and if given permission, ensures stories are told to others for learning (Archibald, 2008; Toliver, 2022). Composite vignettes and storywork “create space in the mind, heart, body and spirit to be open to questions and feelings that arise from stories (holism)” (Toliver, 2022, p. xviii). It allows the storyteller to consider connections between the storyteller, story listener, and story (Toliver, 2022). Narrative profiles and composite vignettes allow researchers to “present collaborators in context, clarify intentions, convey a sense of process and time” (Seidman, 2019, p. 128), and through telling stories, researchers with collaborators narrate how human beings “make sense of themselves and their social world” (Seidman, 2019, p. 128). Composite vignettes are helpful in highlighting key aspects of phenomena while preserving confidentiality and anonymity of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Generating composite vignettes to accompany key findings and discussions center the storywork and storytelling cultivated in the genealogies of U.S. *Centroamericana* women. Appendix C (Memo on Centroamericana Storywork and Prologues/Epilogues) captures the methodology in practice sharing insight into the prologues and storywork process for this dissertation study.

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

To work toward trustworthiness, I offered to send each collaborator their transcripts during the initial plática. After engaging in the final phase of theoretical coding, I shared a document that contained a summary of my preliminary findings with all collaborators. I invited

participants to provide written—via email or in the document—or verbal—through a check-in discussion or voice memo—feedback. Please see Appendix E, Preliminary Findings Outline for Member Checking, for the document. One collaborator responded via email affirming and validating the preliminary findings and the other collaborators affirmed the findings and provided more data during the Collective Healing Plática. Reflective and theoretical memos became spaces of constant reflection to make sense between findings, relationships, research questions, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks. Further, I continuously used memo to reflect on how my own interactions with collaborators, data generation practices, and data engagement approaches aligned with *Centroamericana* Feminist theories and healing methodologies. Throughout this study and writing, I engaged in reflection with Dr. Jessica Harris, my faculty committee members, survivors, critical education scholars, and Women of Color practitioners working with student survivors of sexual violence.

Summary

In this study, I used a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology to understand the experiences and healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors of sexual violence. The collaborators attended one public institution in the United States. Embodying *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology, I centered *Centroamericana* identity, relationality, place-based, and healing-centered principles and methods to create a space where collaborators could bring our authentic selves. Using various methods like plática, walking plática, collective healing plática, testimonio, field site visits, photo/artifact elicitation, a research journal, and analytical memo allowed me to further engage in exploring wholistic dimensions of collaborators. I engaged in Grounded Theory coding (i.e., three phases) and theoretical memo to generate

findings in Chapter 4. Although we journeyed through intense and painful memories in our genealogies, we also emerged in healing for the present for our futures.

Positionality

I want to live the rest of my life, however long or short, with as much sweetness as I can decently manage, loving all the people I love, and doing as much as I can of the work I still have to do. I am going to write fire until it comes out of my ears, my eyes, my nose holes—everywhere. Until it's every breath I breathe. I'm going to go out like a fucking meteor!

—Audre Lorde

My positionality and connection to this dissertation and heart work was grounded in my lineage, family, and community that spans across space, time, and generations. I am the daughter of an Indigenous Oaxaqueño (Chatino/Zapotec) father, Ramiro Aguilar Cuevas, and a Honduran mother, Rosa Ivonne Aguilar Marquez. I come from the lineage of my paternal abuelos, Celedonia Aguilar Cuevas and Carlos Aguilar Cabellero, and my maternal abuelos, Jose Marquez and Rosa Marquez Alvarez. My great grandparents and ancestors are from the lands of Honduras and El Salvador, and the coast and mountains of Santa Catarina Juquila and Ocotlan de Morelos in the Centro Valles of Oaxaca, Mexico. They are embedded in my thoughts and ways of being, and their stories continue to shape the person I am today. Concepts such as relationality,;ancestral knowledge; traditions; and care of our families, relatives, and community are strongly cultivated among my family and community. *Guelaguetza*—the Zapotec word for the praxis of reciprocity—has been centered immensely for my siblings and I growing up, and I navigate the world through these ways of being.

I position myself as a child of parents in diaspora who migrated undocumented to the United States in the 1970s due to the poverty and violence enacted by U.S. imperialism in Central America and Mexico. My mother's family was directly impacted by the violence, exploitation, and silencing that Bananera companies facilitated during their establishment in Honduras during the 1900s. The stories my mami shared with my siblings and me center the ways my Abuelo Jose labored for these companies and, upon organizing and demanding better living wages for workers at the time, was fired and blacklisted in the area. This plunged my mami's family into poverty, cycles of alcoholism, death, trauma, and gender-based violence that led to the separation of the Marquez Alvarez siblings. My Abuelita Rosa, like many Women of Color in our communities, endured the burden of overcoming violence in many forms to give my mother and her siblings the chance to live despite being widowed at a young age. I position my own healing and resistance within the lineage of Marquez Alvarez *Centroamericana* mujeres—the lineage of my mami, Abuelita Rosita, and abuelita ancestors.

My father has always said he was “born rich” in many ways because of the Women in his life who raised him after experiencing family separation from his parents as a young boy. Raised by his mother and father, mis Abuelos, and my Tía Gloria and Tío Mundo, my father is a product of the love, persistence, and commitment from elders to see him thrive despite the trauma and legacies of these fractures. My father and paternal elders have passed down traditions, stories, and gifts that continue to heal and grow my family in various ways. My family's journey to break cycles of alcoholism, trauma, and unhealthy relationships to build healthy ones has been the work of my parents, siblings, and me during this lifetime. I am grateful for their courage, and I am grounded in their lineages of Indigenous steadfastness and resistance.

I was first introduced to the experiences of sexual and relationship violence as experiences we witnessed and heard about among our families, friends, and community. As someone who experienced a sexual assault my sophomore year in college, these stories and perspectives became even more relevant to my positionality and the ways in which I approached my research and practice with Minoritized student survivors of sexual and relationship violence. Experiences and bodies of knowledge such as colonization, settler-colonialism, white supremacy, racism, sexism, patriarchy, historical and generational trauma, and intergenerational healing, have given me the language and frameworks to deeply understand why sexual violence is perpetuated at various socioecological levels, including at higher education institutions.

As a sexual violence educator and advocate with over 15 years of experience in higher education, my experiences confirm that Minoritized students are targeted for violence and experience high rates of sexual violence, as noted in prominent studies (Cantor et al., 2020). Minoritized student survivors face enormous barriers in accessing healing and support on college campuses—some choosing to drop out of college or experience severe challenges on their way to graduating because of systemic and carceral violence in higher education (Karunaratne, 2026; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024). After several years in the campus advocacy field, I have come to understand the spatialities, compliance culture, and risk mitigation facets of institutional responses to sexual violence in higher education. These responses heavily focus on legalistic policy and nonrestorative practices that often re-traumatize students and communities on campus and do not address or change the structural violence that perpetuates harm (E. Collins, 2016; Jessup-Anger & Edwards, 2015; Lorenz et al., 2022). I position myself as an Indigenous Woman of Color and scholar-practitioner to explore how institutions can better support Minoritized student survivors of sexual and relationship violence on college campuses through implementing

trauma-informed and healing-centered policies, practices, and interventions that create futures for wholeness.

Researching and writing my dissertation during this time was a rollercoaster of emotions filled with many experiences, lessons, and teachings. Entering my doctoral program at the “end” of the COVID-19 global pandemic, I was still grieving the loss of many family members and friends to the virus, many of whom were impacted by the health inequalities and lack of healthcare in the United States and abroad. I quickly found myself in community with other doctoral students making meaning of pandemic grief; making sense of new normals; and processing the opportunities of having survived isolation, death, and perseverance in a shared collective experience. I am convinced my ancestors guided me into enrolling into Dr. Jessica Harris’s Black Women’s Book club during my first quarter in the doctoral program. In this space, I found healing, discovered my yearning for storytelling in research, found a space for my grief, and I met other Women of Color in the department who have given me the strength to continue in this program. In that space, I recognized we were gifted life—an opportunity to continue to dream and live with purpose with our families and communities.

During the pandemic, my Madrina Gloria, my older prima and a second mother to me, was diagnosed with terminal cancer. My first 2 years of graduate school were spent caregiving for her and cherishing the last moments I had with her earthside. I had the blessing to visit my Tio Mundo in Oaxaca—Gloria’s father and second grandfather to me—during this time. I physically held onto them as long as I could until they both transitioned into Ancestors, both passing away during the 2nd and 3rd year of my doctoral program. It was in this grief, with their love and stories, that I found solace, comfort, and the importance of preserving and passing on generational knowledge, connection, and remembrance. They teach me the importance of

Futurity—the practice of remembering the past, to enact change now, for my future descendants, students, and survivors.

Entering this past year of my doctoral program, we were met with the Palestinian Genocide and scholasticide facilitated by the United States and State of Israel. It was accompanied by other genocides occurring in Sudan and Congo that have had immense impacts on our local and international communities. Even more acutely, we were met with violence, repression, and minoritization on our own college campuses across the nation for engaging in resistance—a legacy of activism that demands universities divest from their current investments in technologies and industries funding the violence in Palestine, in our own communities and Indigenous ancestral lands internationally. The grief of witnessing family lineages vaporize into dust as U.S.-Israeli made bombs are dropped onto homes full of generational memories, children, parents and elders is beyond painful. No words can capture the videos and images of violence. No words can capture the devastation and dehumanization of Palestinians and other occupied people across the world. Their resistance continues to teach me.

This violence was further exacerbated by the presidential Trump administration that worked to dehumanize my Undocumented students, family and friends, criminalizing individuals for their reproductive rights and enacting multiple layers of violence as we were pulled into continued violence in the United States during this year. Being a part of two graduate student union strikes aiming to access basic needs was a lesson in community solidarity. Working with family, friends, and community to defend our neighbors from immigration enforcement (ICE) raids as I wrote and defended this dissertation taught me the power of community defense—what we defend, will defend us back. The attacks on the Department of Education, the weaponizing of

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) to dismantle core tenets and pillars of free speech and higher education is without its volatile moments.

I have witnessed the persistence and steadfastness of survivors of sexual violence on campus working daily to heal and thrive despite this violence. Within these pockets of violence and grief, I have found resistance and hope. I am inspired by extraordinary campus survivors, college students, faculty, families, and community members working to transform and dismantle systems. I am honored to study, research, and work beside students, colleagues, and faculty who see our liberation and futures connected to each other, our Ancestors and Descendants.

Grief was one of the greatest teachers for me during this dissertation process, it positioned me to see the world in ways I did not see it before. It radicalized me and prevented me from becoming desensitized to the world changing so quickly due to ongoing neoliberal violence and settler colonialism that attempts to assimilate, burn out, and create divisions among ourselves and community. It centered my visions of Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty made possible through the decolonization and efforts to re-indigenize lands, waters, knowledge, education, and community care. It has brought me more in line with my praxis and activism and continues to deepen my commitment to defending and protecting the people I love at all costs.

Grief has led me to hold on to joy in steadfastness and to be present with love. Grief is love enduring—a resourced power, and it has given me purpose and taught me new ways of healing and understanding I could have ever imagined. It is within this positionality, my genealogy, collective grief, and love that centers my continual fight for justice, radical love and healing, and a collective vision of liberation that spans generations, time, and spaces inside and outside higher education.

CHAPTER FOUR: Findings

Prologue: A Visit From La Cigua in the Garden

It was around 3:30pm on a Wednesday afternoon, when Coqueta and I walked into the campus garden for our walking plática. The rain had just stopped a couple days ago, allowing a warm cool breeze to flow as we felt the warmth of the sun sprinkling across our skin. We walked toward some green trees near us and sat on two chairs that overlooked the garden (see Figure 7). The location created a cozy space for us enclosed under the tree's branches. Coqueta had chosen this place as her healing space. She said she came here to think and release the tension in her thoughts, and to disconnect from the stress, anxiety, and chaos of the world. She is a first-generation student and daughter of Central American parents who migrated to the United States in the 1980s escaping violence. She comes from a lineage of survivors, her Mother and Abuela both impacted by political and gender-based violence in Central America. Her own experience with sexual violence in college has been shaped by the stories of resistance, violence, and healing experienced by her own Abuela-Mother-Daughter lineage.

Figure 7

Centroamericana Healing Garden



As we sat, Coqueta shared with me about the pain she carried caused by her Mother, a “wound,” as she described it. When Coqueta disclosed to her Mother about the sexual violence she experienced as a child and later on as an adult in college, her Mother did not believe or support her. She shared:

I fel[t] like at some point it [not being believed by her mother] affected me more than my abuse . . . I remember talking about that with my therapist and she told me that sometimes people are projecting their own pain, their own experiences. As a survivor and as someone who’s been through a lot [referring to her Mother], I’ve also seen my mom go through a lot. I have a lot of empathy towards her, but as a Daughter, I cannot understand her rejection towards me, or her lack of support. So as someone who’s been through a lot,

I try to understand her, give her a break and not be as harsh with her. And as a Daughter, it hurts me, just the way things are sometimes.

I nod and place my hand over my heart, recognizing the complicated journeys we both have had with our Mothers in our healing with sexual violence.

After an hour of *plática* invoking the memories of the women that came before us and naming out loud the violence and healing that has shaped our own genealogies, a figure appeared sitting between us on the small table. A woman wearing a white huipil dress, with long black hair that falls to her waist and skin that glows radiant brown. The figure stared at both of us, looking intensely with brown eyes as she sits with her hands in her lap. Coqueta and I gasped in shock and disbelief! Not believing what was in front of us, scared but intrigued, we were drawn in by the figure's presence and curious to understand who she is. After a couple seconds, the figure in a soft and firm voice said, "Yo soy, *La Cigua*."

Coqueta and I were familiar with the story of *La Cigua* through the oral stories passed down by our families, the teachings, and writings of Central American women we have read and studied in our coursework. *La Cigua*, in flesh, was a *Centroamericana* woman killed by a plantation enslaver near the river in Central America after she rejected his sexual advances. Exiled into Central American herstory and our imaginations, *La Cigua* now lives as a symbol of *Centroamericana* feminist resistance—a spiritual storyteller who teaches us *Centroamericanas* the agency and power we have in reclaiming our own narratives of violence, healing, and resistance.

Coqueta and I immediately recognized the significance of this moment as we both made eye contact—being visited by this beloved ancestor in the garden. We stayed quiet as the wind picked up around us, as the trees began to sway more intensely, and as the water in the nearby

foundation drowned out the sounds around us. We listened attentively to decipher the purpose of this spiritual visit, *La Cigua* said to us, “You have called for me, *mis hijas*, I hear your voices.” She continued, “They are full of pain, disconnection, and isolation. I feel the heaviness of your shame, guilt and self-blame for how this world has treated you—for what these men have done to you and your body-mind-spirits.” Coqueta and I began to cry, releasing sacred tears into the earth soil below us, filled with emotions we have been carrying in our body-mind-spirits. “I bear witness to the moments where this present world does not *see* you,” she added. *La Cigua* sat with us patiently as we cried for what felt like an eternity, until no more tears fall to the ground.

She moved her body toward me and said:

I have met with your Mothers, your Abuelas, and Mothers before them, too. I tell you what I have told them: Surrender to your pain, give it a name, and let it transform you in return. It will feel all-consuming, until it is not. Commune collectively and let yourselves be carried and held by each other.

I looked down at my hands as she turned to Coqueta and said:

You will heal in cycles not linear in time, not one rebirth, but many in this life. Heal yourselves, so that your Mothers and Daughters can too. Do not forget the lands and waters of your Mother’s homes, you are of the same root . . . and always return to the body, it knows.

Acknowledging the weight of her words, she paused, and added delicately, “You are enough as you are, *mis hijas*, and do not let the past-present-future world tell you otherwise.” Coqueta and I looked at each other for a second, affirming her words in our spirit. As we turned to look back at the woman beside us, she vanished as quickly as she came. We noticed a pink Native Wild Rose, growing in the soil where *La Cigua* had sat and where our tears had fallen.

We hugged each other and released a laughing sigh, looking for some kind of confirmation, validation, assurance of this visit. Vulnerable, exhausted, lighter in our bodies, and in many ways comforted, we sat in silence for the remaining hour until the sun set that afternoon. We breathed in the air, smelled the earthy soil, outlined the trees that reminded us of our Mother's pueblos back in the Isthmus. Together, we left the garden braver than when we entered—and in many ways, hopeful.

The Chapter 4 findings were introduced with a composite vignette grounded in *Centroamericana* storywork to illustrate key findings of the experiences and healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in this study. Engaging a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology analysis, I analyzed the student's experiences to identify theoretical conceptualizations of their experiences and healing discussed in this chapter. The first section of this chapter addresses Research Question 1, while the second section addresses Research Question 2.

- 1) How does a U.S. *Centroamericana* identity shape experiences with campus sexual and relationship violence?
- 2) How do U.S. *Centroamericana* college students engage healing from their experiences of campus sexual and relationship violence?

Research Question 1

In the first section, I discuss the findings responding to the first research question of this study: How does a U.S. *Centroamericana* identity shape experiences with campus sexual and relationship violence? Each finding provides subsections that provide more in-depth insights into students' testimonios.

Finding 1: U.S. Centroamericana Identity Experiences With Sexual Violence

Students in the study shared their U.S. *Centroamericana* identity as student survivors were heavily shaped by experiences with gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, and their migrant identities. Heavily discussing their lived experiences as U.S. *Centroamericana* women, students shared multiple experiences regarding the impacts of religion, gender roles, and expectations; experiences of racial/ethnic contextual dominance; and experiences of individual and family migration that heavily shaped their connection and sense of belonging as U.S. *Centroamericana*

students. Their experiences as U.S. *Centroamericana* students shaped their lived experiences with sexual violence, including feelings of shame, minimization of sexual trauma, dissociation, hesitancy to disclose and seek help, and the impacts of physical manifestations of sexual trauma.

Impacts of Religion. Students in the study shared their experiences as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors were complicated by feelings of shame they experienced with religion as children and young adults. Growing up in spaces shaped by organized religion (e.g., Catholicism, Pentecostal, Christianity), many of them felt that ideas of *marianismo* shaped how their parents and families tied their “worth” as woman to outward appearances and engagement in sexual activity. Students were socialized to believe that to be a “good” woman with “worth,” they had to be “pure” and not engage in “sinful” activities like dancing, getting tattoos, wearing revealing clothing, and sexual activity before marriage to preserve their “virginal” identities. For example, Daisy shared about growing up in the Pentecostal church as a child. She said:

We had to be really conservative and dress really modest. We used to get shamed for wearing jeans or makeup, cutting [our] hair and wearing jewelry. I feel like I was raised with that mentality . . . I was really excluded from the outside world.

Religious leaders in these spaces developed narratives of women’s worth when discussing their gender identities, Daisy added, “The pastor [would] make comments about women, our skirts—if they were too short, and our appearances. I feel like we had to kind of adapt to what men wanted us to be.” Helena highlighted the experiences of her mother internalizing similar attitudes and holding her up to similar expectations. She shared, “[My mother’s] beliefs about women and how they should be in purity culture—all of that definitely impacted the way that I saw myself as a woman.” For students, this religious upbringing and current belief structure in their families

made it difficult to come forward to disclose their instances of sexual violence. Student survivors shared their hesitancy to disclose to family or family friends due to the religious shame associated of being “touched” sexually before marriage. Although many women recognized that their experiences of sexual violence were nonconsensual, many of them did not want to experience victim blaming, experience not being believed, and be shamed due to religious perspectives. For many, the internalized messages of shame led them to be hesitant to disclose to friends and health providers.

Students shared their complicated relationships with religion and how the expectations to practice “purity” culture removed access to learn about their sexual identity and education. Coqueta shared that she and the U.S. *Centroamericana* students she taught often discussed that when learning about gender identity in college, many began to realize how much “shame is around sex with religion and it’s almost as if they don’t have access to this information [sexual health].” Describing how religion disconnected them from their expression, Daisy added:

I was really restricted growing up. I didn’t really get to learn how to dance . . . because I was taught that it was really sinful and part of the devil . . . I feel like a big part of my identity was stolen from me because of religion.

The feelings of shame in relation to religious identity were felt heavily by Aurora when deciding whether to disclose her experiences of sexual violence to her church group; she shared:

I remember how much conflict the abuse brought me [with religion], and how shameful I felt coming to God and talking to God, things that I used to do before . . . I never went back to [that] church. It was like a family, they were in my second family, and I was not able to face them because of shame.

Women discussed how the shame caused by some religious spaces created barriers to discussing sex, sexuality, healthy relationships and consent in relation to their gender identity. For many, this impacted their experiences of not being able to recognize sexual violence when it occurred, often describing confusion, disconnection, and dissociation when incidents of sexual abuse happened as children and as college students.

Students shared that religion in connection to *machismo* [patriarchy] heavily reinforced the nuclear family structure and the practice of *familismo*. These experiences made it difficult to acknowledge sexual violence *while* it occurred and manage boundaries *after* their experiences of sexual violence. For example, students in the study shared the emphasis on family within the Central American context silenced their abilities to disclose sexual violence in fear of fracturing their family unit. Luna and Daisy grew up in households where domestic violence was a normalized aspect of their family experience and learned at a young age to suppress their emotions, silence critiques of violence against their mother by their father, and silence any opinions or perspectives that would challenge their family's dynamic. Moreover, many students were also threatened with corporal punishment for "stepping out of line," denied access to mental health services as children due to mental health stigma (e.g., therapy was for "crazy" people), or told Child Protective Services or the police would break their families apart should they ever disclose violence that was occurring in the household. Aurora shared:

Saying no to things and putting boundaries with people is so hard, even growing up no one respected my boundaries. It's hard to set them up and I told her [her therapist] I was so scared, telling her I was so scared [to set boundaries after violence happened].

Having to survive unstable and unpredictable environments by learning to walk on "egg shells" as young adults, many student students shared how these trauma responses carried over to

romantic partnerships and encounters of sexual activity as they became older. Setting boundaries, expressing their needs in partnerships, and feeling that they were “deserving” of respect and validation became especially difficult in college with romantic partners and with other peers. For students, “outing” the issues of the family unit or romantic relationship felt like “airing your dirty laundry” in public and created isolation, distrust, and feelings of shame when deciding to disclose their experiences to others when seeking support in college.

Impacts of Gender Roles/Expectations. Students in the study described how machismo (i.e., sexism) in Central American culture shaped their experiences of what was and is expected of them as U.S. *Centroamericana* women and how this shaped the sexual violence they experienced. Heavily discussing their experiences with rigid binary gender roles as “*mujeres y hombres*,” many shared how machismo in the United States and Central America shaped the domestic violence in their households. These ideologies reinforced the rigid “boxed” expectations of women as caregivers and narratives of submissive wives/girlfriends positioned as sexual objects to be used by the men in their families and college relationships. When she was living in her pueblo in Central America, Aurora shared:

I was told so many times, “do you know how to cook” and if you knew how to make tortillas. *Tu esposo de va a pijiar como dicen en Honduras* [Your husband is going to beat you, how they say in Honduras]. And for them, how to be a woman is learning how to cook and clean, learn how to be submissive. Don’t speak up.

Students shared their college relationships were heavily shaped by these gender stereotypes and expectations. For example, for students like Luna and Helena, their former partners expected them to engage in caregiving and submissive behavior and to “submit” to their partner’s sexual advances without regard for their feelings and affirmative consent. For Irene, these gender role

expectations were met with physical violence if certain asks were not carried out in the relationship. Students shared feeling scared, confused, and trauma-bonded to these partners, making it difficult to leave these relationships. For Luna, the internalized self-blame and low self-esteem from years of abuse in her former long-term relationship made it hard to disclose to her family and peers what she was experiencing. Luna shared, “I felt like I should have known better.”

Students shared the differences in how they were socialized compared to male siblings or fathers in their lives and the impacts it had on their gender identity in connection to healthy relationships with men. Helena shared about the preference her mother often gave to her brother and how it was expected of her to stay within these gender roles; she shared, “There was that whole notion of women belong in the kitchen . . . It was like you couldn’t have anything and my mom treated my brothers differently because they were men, like they mattered more.” Helena, like other students in the study, struggled to feel wanted, loved, and validated as a woman in her familial and romantic relationships. Sexually abused by a family member as a child and later as an adult, she shared, “I’ve had terrible relationships with men [in college] in which I’ve always been sexualized or abused in some way, shape or form.” Helena, like others, often spoke about how machismo made them feel like objects and lesser than in relationships, which impacted their self-esteem and self-worth. Citing emotional manipulation in their experiences of sexual violence by their male partners, students shared they were told by their former partners that “they would not find anyone else who would love them.” Emotional abuse, gaslighting, and sexual coercion perpetuated by their partners became common experiences for students that made it difficult for them to understand what was occurring in their relationships at the time. Describing instances of severe low-self-esteem and isolation caused by the ongoing abuse, student survivors felt they

were not “worthy” or “deserving” of help from others because of the internalized messages they “chose” to stay in abusive relationships.

Women in the study centered the tension of not buying into narratives that positioned Central American culture and men as “violent people that harm women.” At the same time, many felt overwhelmed about the femicide and gender-based violence that they themselves, their mothers, cousins, and aunts experienced due to the misogyny and experiences of women who do not conform to these ideologies. Several students narrated multiple stories about sexual harassment, rape, and domestic violence that they and their mothers experienced from their fathers and other men. Aurora shared:

Se habla de abuso en general en nuestros países, se normaliza mucho, especialmente con el patriarcado. Se maneja mucho aceptar la violencia porque eres una mujer. Te minimizan tanto y te hacen creer que no eres nada, que no vales nada. A veces no es tan directo, pero hay maneras indirectas que te lo hacen saber. Nomás ver las noticias y miras cuantas mujeres son desaparecidas cada día, y ver que no hay justicia, que pasa nada.

[Abuse is talked about in general in our countries; it’s very normalized, especially with patriarchy. There’s a lot of talk about accepting violence because you’re a woman. They minimize you so much and make you believe you’re nothing, that you’re worthless.

Sometimes it’s not so direct, but there are indirect ways they let you know. Just watch the news and see how many women disappear every day, and see that there’s no justice, that nothing happens.]

Fleeing war and resisting gender-based violence was a common experience among students and their families; Coqueta, shared her mother fled El Salvador when her sister (i.e., Coqueta’s aunt)

was assassinated by men in their pueblo due to political unrest at the time. In another example, Aurora recalled the time when her mother intervened to prevent a sexual assault in their home. Aurora shared, when her sister was in her *cuarentena* (i.e., the first 40 days of postpartum where women are advised to not engage in sexual activity due to health reasons), her sister's husband forced himself onto her in attempts to sexually assault her while taking a shower. She shared, "To normalize it [sexual violence] and to feel like this is okay because you're *his* woman. That's not how it should be. But sadly, that's how things are over there and how people think." Students shared the realities of the intersection of class and how many *Centroamericana* women in their lives experienced violence due to the gender ideologies they were expected to endure because of financial insecurity.

Due to machismo and the normalization of sexual violence in Central America and the United States, many students shared the fear and shame of disclosing their experiences of sexual violence to others, acknowledging how their families had reacted to previous disclosures of violence with doubt, blame, and minimization of the violence. For example, Daisy remembered the time her mother shared the story of how her aunt, who had experienced a rape at 12-years old, resulting in a pregnancy by an older man in their pueblo in Central America. When Daisy confronted her mother about the rape and how "it wasn't okay what had happened" to her aunt, her mother told her, "*Que se dejo* [her aunt had let herself be impregnated]" by this man. Citing frustration, anger, and intergenerational differences in response, Daisy, like others, felt that witnessing moments of victim blaming after the disclosure of others moved them further way from disclosing and seeking help for their experiences of sexual violence in college.

Although machismo and sexual violence was normalized in their everyday lives, students shared the complexity of women internalizing rigid roles that led to violence while also resisting

these expectations daily. Speaking to her experiences as a U.S. *Centroamericana*, Coqueta stated:

We're women living in a patriarchal society, we have all these misogynistic things ingrained into us unfortunately. Central American women, especially older women, they have a lot of like self-hatred. Like they have been taught to kind of be disgusted or despise aspects of their womanhood. So being a *Centroamericana* for me as a person existing on this campus means existing in a subversive manner to the institution. For me it means not fitting within these boxes.

Coqueta, like other students in the study, was to free herself of machismo and marianismo that kept her silent in her experiences of sexual violence. For student survivors like Aurora, holding this complexity daily for the women in her life became a normal occurrence that shaped the way she engaged in resisting normalizing sexual violence in her life; she shared:

Lo miran algo común [violencia sexual], o como algo no paso. Lo normalizan tanto y pienso a cuantas niñas le está pasando esto. Porque no las creen porque no hay leyes que las protejan, porque simplemente es muy difícil . . . y quisiera terminar todo el dolor para todo el mundo para que nadie tener que pasar por esto.

[They see it [sexual violence] as something common, as something that didn't happen.

They normalize it so much, and I think about how many girls this is happening to.

Because they aren't believed, because there are no laws to protect them, because it's simply very difficult . . . I wish I could end all the pain for everyone so that no one must go through this. It's frustrating.]

Aurora, like other women, described how gender roles and expectations within her U.S. *Centroamericana* identity shaped the way her processed her own experiences of sexual violence.

Students described not necessarily being surprised by the acts of violence but angered at the normalization of violence and knowing what to expect regarding support from others. Students shared that they continuously attempted not to become “numb” to these occurrences but, instead, moved to take action to prevent it from happening.

Complex Abuela-Mother-Daughter Lineages. Although machismo, marianismo, and rigid gender expectations shaped the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors, students spent a significant amount of time recalling stories about their abuela-mothers and how this relationship shaped their own experiences with sexual violence. Students felt admiration for their mothers, reflected on the complexity of their mother-abuelas behavior due to trauma, and valued notions of resilience in the caregiving and collective care provided by the *Centroamericana* women in their lives despite the sexual violence. For Irene, drawing resilience from her U.S. *Centroamericana* identity as a sexual violence survivor, was heavily shaped by the women who took care of her family, managed financial responsibilities, and responded to the collective needs of community. She shared:

As a *Centroamericana* women I feel like we are the ones that take it upon ourselves to kind of oversee everything. *Somos muy responsables* [we are very responsible]. We’re kind of like *quitate, ahí te voy* [move out the way, here I come]. *Las mujeres son las que andan trenandose los dedos y poniéndose las pilas* [women are the ones’s cracking their knuckles and getting stuff done], doing, and getting things done.

Students like Irene shared sentiments about their mothers’ ability to be resilient, survive multiple forms of trauma, migrate to the United States without knowing English, and find ways to raise them and their siblings with limited financial resources as caregivers. They described instances where their mothers acknowledged being proud of them for pursuing college education while not

fully understanding their trajectories in higher education. Aurora shared, “I never had that someone pushing me to be better, but I always saw my mom as an example. I look up to her and see how much she has suffered, but also how much she tried.” Students cited that they drew hope, steadfastness, and possibilities of moving through sexual trauma as they had witnessed their abuela-mothers survive and provide possibilities for them as *Centroamericana* students in the United States. One student shared, “If their mothers could do it, they could too.”

For women in the study, relationships with their abuela-mothers were also sources of pain, hurt, and betrayal due to instances of victim-blaming after disclosures of sexual violence. Their abuela-mother’s inability to be vulnerable with them made it difficult to formulate processes of accountability where harm was caused. Luna shared, “My relationship with my mom is weird because we used to be really close . . . but after she separated from my dad [due to domestic violence], she got into a relationship that is also bad and that sort of broke our relationship.” Centering the rupture of the relationship with her mother, Luna described actively trying to understand her mother’s process while also protecting herself from reliving the abuse she experienced as a child with her father and other partners. For Luna and others, there was a constant tension that mitigated further harm or potential moments of healing from mutual experiences of sexual violence as they navigated conflict, boundary setting, and validation from abuela-mother relationships.

Students also heavily discussed the emotional pain and grief caused by ruptures within their maternal lineages connected to their experiences of sexual violence. Students shared, in many ways, the ruptures with their abuela-mothers felt more painful than the actual acts of sexual violence on their body-mind-spirits. For example, Aurora shared:

I fel[t] like at some point, it [not being believed by my mother] affected me more than my abuse from my dad and other men. I remember talking about that with my therapist and she told me that sometimes people are projecting their own pain, their own experiences. I have a lot of empathy towards her [as a survivor], but as a daughter, I cannot understand her rejection towards me, or her lack of support.

Many students described not recognizing this abuela-mother “wound,” as some described it, until learning about the topics of sexual violence, generational trauma, and exploring their maternal lineages in therapy and other spaces. Daisy shared, her Latina therapist on campus first helped her articulate and validate the pain her mother had caused her. After spending time in therapy and sharing about her sexual abuse, her Latina therapist affirmed Daisy deserved to be believed and supported by her mother. Daisy shared:

Being able to hear that from someone, especially from a woman [referring to her Latina therapist], it was much more impactful to me. Because now I’m looking back at my mom and this is something I wanted when I was a child. I wanted comfort, reassurance, but also, I wanted to feel safe and feel that from a woman.

For students in the study, the ruptures and feelings of loss in their abuela-mother relationships created stress, anxiety, isolation, dissociation, depression, and feelings of despair. For many, this impacted their own internalized messaging with self-seeking behavior as it made it more difficult for them to feel deserving of support with their experiences of sexual violence. Some students internalized heavy negative self-talk, as one student said, “If my own mother and father treated me this way [referring to abandonment issues and victim blaming], who would actually support me?”

Students also shared the impacts of sexual violence and intergenerational trauma on siblings and birth order as U.S. *Centroamericana* sisters. Students who identified as eldest sisters became coparents to their younger siblings, taking on several major responsibilities as young adults. Daisy grew up in a low-income household with a father who engaged in abusive behavior; she had to navigate multiple emotions and withhold her feelings to cope with the pressure of being available to her parents and siblings. She shared:

I was in a state of survival under that roof because I had all these different responsibilities and had little time to take care of myself. I was always go, go, go, do this, do that, but never had time for myself. You live in a household where mental health or emotions are completely ignored.

U.S *Centroamericana* students taking on roles as caregivers at a young age exacerbated and, at times, complicated relationships with their younger siblings who were also survivors of sexual violence. Students felt pressured as the oldest sisters in the family to dismiss their own experiences, dissociate from their bodies, and minimize their experiences of sexual violence to cope with feelings of overwhelm and trauma activations. Helena, a younger sibling who sought support from her oldest sister, shared that her sister became a support person when making sense of her complicated relationship with their mother in processing her experiences of sexual violence. She shared:

[My sister] was like a mother to me in a lot of ways. Growing up, she gave me a lot of comfort that my actual mother wasn't capable of, but even then, that relationship is a little complicated because our upbringing was just like traumatic. When you have siblings, we have shared experiences but everyone's going to interpret that differently.

Citing the collective trauma felt in their abuela-mother-daughter-sister relationships, students spoke to the manifestation of chronic illnesses felt intergenerationally. Majority of students in the study discussed their mental health diagnosis such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorder, eating disorder, body dysmorphia, and suicidal ideation and physical manifestations of trauma like Irritable Bowel Syndrome, migraines, self-cutting, high cholesterol, and cancer as connected to trauma passed down by their abuela-mothers shaped by daily environments and relationships that perpetuated sexual violence against their body-mind-spirits. Students discussed how they dissociated from their bodies to cope with violence and trauma activations, and the challenges of identifying how to treat illness that manifests in their body-mind-spirits.

U.S. *Centroamericana* students, despite the impacts of gender roles, intergenerational sexual trauma, and complicated relationships with their grandmothers and mothers, still sought to empathize with the experiences of their maternal lineages and work through conflict and ruptures. Coqueta centered the relationship with her abuela as a source of complication, noting her abuela had lost a daughter to political violence (referring to Coqueta's aunt). She shared:

It's kind of sad, I didn't really care because she felt mean [referring to the time she spent with her abuela in Central America], but she was also a product of her environment too, you know? I did love going to my Abuelita's [house] before she passed, I remember it was one of the last times I saw her.

Coqueta continued to discuss how the death of her aunt impacted the relationship with her mom and abuela and, in turn, complicated the relationship with her own ability to trust, disclose, and be vulnerable with them both about their experiences of sexual violence. Students described how

the inability to be vulnerable about their feelings as survivors with their abuela-mothers shaped their own complicated relationship with healing experiences of sexual violence.

Students centered similar testimonios regarding the complicated nature of their relationships with *Centroamericana* women in their lineages and their continued efforts to try to resolve conflict despite the complicated dynamics. Helena, although encouraged by her mother to attend college and pursue higher education, experienced moments of frustration when her mother becomes hostile and annoyed with Helena when asking for support like transportation to get to campus to attend class because she does not have a car. Helena shared, “My sister advised me to approach my mother as if there was no resentment. I told my mom that I don’t want to stress her out anymore, because it was a lot of fighting.” U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors spent significant time sharing how religion, rigid gender roles, sexism, and intergenerational trauma with their maternal lineages shaped their experiences with sexual violence as U.S. *Centroamericana* women.

Contextual Dominance. In the context of their racial/ethnic identities, student survivors in the study shared a myriad of experiences with feeling erased in Mexican-dominant neighborhoods and school systems and within social circles that complicated their experiences as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors of sexual violence. Students attended diverse K–12 educational settings and identified feeling “out of place” due to their Central American identities until their first year of college. Some of the students discussed feeling shame for being misidentified as Mexican that led to feelings of isolation, limited sense of belonging, and the need to “perform” other identities to fit it, which, in turn, created barriers for seeking support from their experiences of sexual violence. For example, Daisy shared, “Back home, I was mainly surrounded by Mexican and Black students. I was in a Mexican-Black majority community. So,

a lot of times I had to suppress what it meant to be a Central American woman.” For Daisy and other students, this led to recognizing that feeling silenced in her experiences as a U.S. *Centroamericana* woman survivor was part of a larger systemic process that she came to understand. Daisy said, “It was a lot of silencing, being a Central American woman myself, I learned that our silence is systemic, it’s a lot of learning what it means [to be a Central Americana woman] and trying to embody that.” For students like Helena, it was more about the curiosity that others had about her identity that created a sense of “othering;” she shared, “There’d be the occasional person assuming you’re Mexican. It wasn’t coming from a place of malicious intent or ignorance, necessarily. It was more like they were wondering. They would ask, instead of assuming sometimes.” Helena shared this later led to moments of feeling tokenized as a U.S. *Centroamericana* woman that caused her to disengage from centering her racial identity, mentioning that learning about her culture and history was often inaccessible in school and family settings.

For student survivors navigating their U.S. *Centroamericana* identities in the workplace, they heavily shared experiences about navigating professional conversations about their race and identities. Luna shared experiences where a professional staff member and students in her class assumed she was from Mexico and she felt tension in how to move forward with responding to these types of comments. She shared:

A coworker asked me about that one event that Oaxaqueños host, Guelaguetza, the festival thing. She was asking me about it, because she wanted me to back her up in a conversation that we were having at work . . . And I was like I don’t know. I’m just saying there are small things like that. For example, when you meet new people too in classes, “they’re always like what part of Mexico are you from?”

Students shared similar experiences, often working to find strategies to respond to comments and questions about their racial/ethnic identities and assessing whether to engage or dismiss the assumptions as they managed the mental health impacts. Students shared the frustration, othering, and erasing they felt as U.S. *Centroamericana* already navigating the impacts of sexual trauma on their body-mind-spirits. Women in the study described the challenges of identifying what they could do to feel “less erased” while also balancing the stress of school, family responsibilities, and other extracurricular activities. Students like Daisy found code-switching to be a normal day-to-day experience to cope with the racial/ethnic comments and erasure. Daisy shared:

I feel like I had to code switch a lot. In the sense of, this is how we talk at home and then how we are expected or how we’re supposed to talk at school and stuff. There were certain phrases and stuff everywhere growing up [referring to words she did not understand] and being ashamed of it because I did not know. I didn’t really say certain words because I thought it was not correct.

Although students experienced erasure and silencing of their Central American identities through the contextual dominance of Mexican culture that exacerbated impacts of sexual violence, many found opportunities to reconnect to their cultures and genealogies in multiple ways that shaped their sense of belonging and healing from sexual violence.

Reconnection to Central American Identity. Students in the study shared how their racial and ethnic identities heavily shaped their experiences as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors of sexual violence. Students described experiences where they felt proud and seen in their identities that connected them to ancestral homes in the Isthmus. Students like Daisy shared

that taking up space and learning about her heritage was a way to resist the erasure and create reclamation of her body-mind-spirit. Shese shared:

We should be able to take up space, it's a lot of learning and connecting with other people. I'm Central American, I knew that, but I didn't know what it meant to *be* Central American. It wasn't until I got here [college], that I was able to learn what it truly means to be Central American, and to carry those values with me.

The values she referred to were found in the stories of her family's migration, the customs of her father's pueblo back in Nicaragua, and the collective care she experienced with other Central American students on campus. In observing students when discussing their experiences of re-connecting to their Central American identities as student survivors, students became more energetic, curious, and hopeful in their affect with each other.

For students like Helena, actively working to repair the fracture that migration trauma caused in her family meant understanding the histories of Central America to begin to minimize the disconnect she felt in her body-mind-spirit. She shared:

I wanted to connect to my Central American roots and learn about the history of Central America, specifically because they teach you a little bit about the history of Mexico, but they don't teach about my experiences. I have a desire to connect, learn more, and have an acknowledgement that my past has been a disconnect to that identity.

For Helena and other women, learning about their Central American identity through coursework allowed them to become more curious, develop self-agency and determination in creating their own pathways for learning and understanding their own experiences of sexual violence. Helena, like other students in the study, wanted to name and understand the reasons why they were not taught their histories earlier in their lives.

Students in the study also discussed other aspects of their identity that made them feel joy and have pride in Central American traditions and customs. For example, Luna shared the ways she connected with her Central American identity when she said, “I really love the food that she [her mother] makes . . . the music too. It’s always a marimba or Semana Santa [holy week festivals in their pueblo], too. Carrying my culture and being able to say that I’m *not* Mexican [is important]”. For students in the study, the process of reconnecting with their Central American identities allowed them to feel seen and minimize the erasure they felt as students on campus.

Intra-Intergenerational Migration Trauma. Students in the study shared countless stories of migration from Central America that heavily shaped their identity as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. Majority of students in the study were second-generation migrants, meaning their parents were born in a foreign country in Central America and Mexico, and gave birth to children born in the United States. For students with first-generation migrant parents, leaving ancestral homes in Central America was a complicated reality that had intergenerational impacts on their lineages and their experiences of sexual violence in the United States. Student survivors’ parents and families fled political violence, war, and poverty and left their ancestral homes to seek opportunities for employment, education, and survival. For example, Daisy shared, “My mom migrated here in 2004 when she was 8 months pregnant with me, she had me 2 weeks after that. It was faith and chance that she came to live with my grandpa.” Daisy and others highlighted the intense migration experiences of their families and highlighted the network of families that facilitated their migration to the United States.

In discussing the impacts of migration on their lineages, students discussed the trauma and silence surrounding their parents’ migration stories and how this impacted their ability to ask

questions, learn about their cultural identities, and process the impacts with their families. Daisy shared:

I've tried asking, but he [her grandpa] usually dodges the questions and the little that he has shared with me, he went through the Civil War and stuff in Guatemala. He witnessed a lot of crime and a lot of violence . . . I was raised in a household where they didn't really talk about their time and what their life was growing up in Central America. I feel like that's shame and that silence kind of goes back.

Women shared related stories about not being able to be vulnerable with their parents and learn in depth about their migration due to emotional and physical trauma, limited vulnerability, and the pain that their families may have experienced. Due to the silence, students felt they could not ask about their Central American genealogies and histories impacting their connections to their identity.

The shame, fear, and silence around migration stories had profound impacts on the way students perceived and felt about disclosing their experiences of sexual violence. Students minimized their experiences of sexual violence by comparing the trauma felt with migration against their own individual experiences of sexual violence. For example, women in the study often felt they would not disclose or seek help for their experiences of sexual violence because it did not feel as "big" or "as violent" as the stories of their families in Central America and processes of migration. Luna shared that she minimized her experiences of dating abuse because she felt it "didn't compare to the violence experienced by [her] parents and what they had to go through to get here." Many students shared similar experiences about how the silence around migration trauma reinforced notions of coping with sexual violence in isolation and feeling prohibited in talking about abuse through self-policing and the policing of others on their

experiences (e.g., family members telling them their experiences in the United States were not as bad compared to in Central America). Students felt they had to adhere and appease the immediate needs of their families impacted by immigration systems instead of seeking help and support for the sexual violence they were experiencing in romantic and peer relationships.

For students like Helena, migration had intragenerational impacts on the relationships with their siblings due to violence experienced in the household after migration occurred. Helena described the impacts of inter-intra generational trauma on her relationship with her sister and brother; she shared:

We have shared traumatic experiences that I think when people hear that, they think maybe that would make you closer because you can like relate on that level. But I think that in combination with the way we were raised, it just created a lot of complications in our relationships that we were too in our own issues, and too young to be able to acknowledge and talk about it.

In their testimonios, women discussed several instances where silence, misunderstandings of trauma responses, and the inability to manage conflict led to resentment, ongoing tension, and disconnection within family. Due to the ruptures with their siblings, many felt even more isolated in their experiences of sexual violence and felt unable to disclose and find safety with their siblings. Women shared feeling anger, grief, and loss in the inability to feel seen by their siblings in their experiences of violence, acknowledging that many of them were also survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

For students who were 1.5-generation immigrants—defined as students who were born in a foreign country like Central America and migrated to the United States as children, the trauma of family separation had immense impacts on their relationships with their parents and siblings

that, in turn, shaped their experiences of sexual violence and identities as U.S. *Centroamericana* students. For example, Aurora spoke at length about the impacts migration had on her ability to belong, feel wanted, and feel safe with her family and support systems. She recalled the moments where her parents, specifically her mother, had to negotiate which siblings would migrate to the United States and which siblings would stay in the environments where sexual abuse and other violence occurred. Discussing her complex thoughts and feelings with this reality, Aurora centered her relief and guilt with being chosen by her mother to migrate; she shared, “She [her mother] decided to take me with her and I am not the only victim of my dad. [pause] I’m not the only victim. [pause]. He had done similar things to other people I didn’t know.” Other students like Aurora discussed the ways migration trauma impacted not only their connection to their families and disclosures of sexual violence, but also the complex memories they held with ancestral homes in their context of their identity. For students like Aurora, harboring complicated emotions about their ancestral home often made them feel trapped and imperfect, and mitigated their relationship with seeking help in college with their experiences of sexual violence. Aurora mentioned, if people did not understand or support survivors of sexual violence in Central America, then her experiences of seeking support in the United States would be even more erased as a migrant woman. Family separation had complicated impacts on the students in the study. Women shared experiences navigating feelings of abandonment, guilt, grief, and relief for being chosen to migrate, or not, by their parents, which, in turn, impacted their sense of belonging and help seeking behavior as survivors of sexual violence.

Migrant Sense of Belonging. Students in the study had several experiences connected to their sense of belonging as migrants depending on their identities as 1.5-generation and 2nd-generation immigrants to the United States that impacted their experiences of sexual violence.

For students who identified as 1.5-generation immigrants, their experiences with identity were heavily shaped by their deep belonging and identification in Central America while in constant comparison to their identity in the United States. For example, Aurora shared:

Aquí es cuando creo que me di cuenta que era 'Latina,' y que lo importante de ser Latina. Para mí cuando estaba en Honduras, ni si quiera pensaba lo que será ser Latina. Sabía que era latina-hispana, pero no era gran parte de mi identidad. No me resaltaba, pero ahora resalta mucho porque me identifico mucho de donde hay tanta gente, tantos países, y tú quieres identificarte con alguien de esa sociedad.

[Here is when I think I realized I was Latina, and what it means to be Latina. When I was in Honduras, I didn't even think about what it meant to be Latina. I knew I was Latina-Hispanic, but it wasn't a big part of my identity. It didn't stand out, but now it really stands out because I identify strongly with a place where there are so many people, so many countries, and you want to identify with someone from that society.]

Aurora, like other 1.5-generation immigrants in the study, shared she was “*ni de aquí, ni de allá* [not from here, or from there,]” and their identity development as a U.S. *Centroamericana* meant connecting and identifying in multiple ways to feel they belonged to a community. Feeling a sense of national pride connected to ancestral place, 1.5-generation immigrant student survivors discussed the inability to “divide” their identity as they belonged to many places in complex ways. When learning about the history of her country of origin in class, Aurora shared, “When I’m in classes . . . I always see my story and with certain stories it’s hard not to talk about it, because that’s my life, that’s my culture, that’s who *I* was. I cannot divide who I am.” Similar to Aurora, other students in the study discussed their feelings of nostalgia with missing home, frustration with having to “choose” an identity to forefront in certain settings (e.g., international

student, migrant) and having to process the contradicting feelings of not having “one” home but many.

Women in the study discussed their sense belonging as U.S. *Centroamericana* students connected to the amount of access they had to Central American family and community networks and how that impacted how they felt safe or supported in disclosing their experiences of sexual violence. For example, students like Irene had higher access to immediate family and community who migrated to the United States at a young age. She shared, “I got to experience a lot of the Central American culture through my mother, my father’s family is not as united as hers, so I am blessed to say that all of my family from my mom’s side is here.” Irene and others with higher access to Central American migrant networks experienced connection to traditions, knowledge systems, and community wealth, and had access to individuals outside of her immediate family that provided reciprocal care and support for one another (e.g., supporting Central American businesses, fundraising medical funds for sick community member). Irene and others spoke of belonging tied to a community network that they interacted with daily and felt they had a place they “belonged to” when emergencies and family crisis occurred and when community mutual aid was needed. Irene shared that having an expanded support system when leaving an abusive relationship in college created opportunities and possibilities for her to seek safety. She was able to rely on her parents, extended family, and church community to access basic needs for her and her children and emotional support, and coordinate care for the immediate and long-term impacts of violence.

For students with limited access to Central American migrant networks, family, and community, sense of belonging to their Central American identities was disjointed and often impacted their self-perception with feeling safe or familiar “enough” to feel seen in her

experiences of sexual violence. For example, Helena shared, due to the limited access to Central American culture and community in her life, her sense of belonging was often attached to Mexican identities. She shared that her *Centroamericana* abuela was “very obsessed with Mexican culture.” She continued, “She was a bad person, but that’s kind of what she passed on to my mom—Mexican traditions. There weren’t a lot of us, like there’s not a lot of stuff I know about Guatemala.” For Helena and others, learning how to adapt, belong, and connect with cultures and community networks that shared similar values created opportunities to survive, build, and feel connected in a new place far from their Central American ancestral homes. For Helena and other students, the need to belong to community to survive as Central American people was more important than seeking support and feeling seen in their individual experiences of sexual violence.

Navigating multiple environments and a nuanced sense of belonging, students also shared how these complicated relationships impacted their self-esteem, confidence, and connection to belonging in Central America that shaped their ability to disclose and seek support for sexual violence experiences. For students survivors navigating 1.5-generation identities, the feelings of “not being enough” or “doing enough” to support family and community back home in Central American was overwhelming. For example, Aurora shared:

It’s so hard to acknowledge the work that I put in because I try to diminish myself. A lot of the times with my accomplishments, I try to just put them aside and tell myself it feels wrong to make a big deal of it. It makes it feel wrong sometimes to feel proud of it. I get a lot of comments from my family [in Central America] that say that I feel better than them. I don’t, I don’t feel like I’m better than them.

For Aurora and others, the complicated guilt that accompanied education and access in the United States was a shared experience with many U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. Students shared how family members in the United States and Central America commented on their privileges of accessing resources and education in the United States while simultaneously making them feel undeserving of praise for those accomplishments because of the privileges they held. Aurora shared, “Sometimes I feel like I’m not enough, then I try to remind myself how I got in so far. I feel proud of myself, I do feel proud of myself a lot, but it’s hard to acknowledge it.” For Aurora and other students, these experiences created a complicated relationship with disclosure of sexual violence as many students feared being perceived as “complaining” when disclosing their experiences with mental health and sexual violence. Feeling pressured to negotiate their privilege and access to resources, students felt both guilty of having access to resources for sexual violence and guilt for not feeling deserving or seen in the resources offered for sexual violence support on campus.

Lastly, although many students shared the complicated nature of their relationship with identity and sense of belonging to their experiences of sexual violence, their commitment to supporting Central Americans in the United States and in the Isthmus was highlighted by their feelings regarding their future trajectory. For example, Daisy shared that research was her way of belonging and empowering Central Americans to feel seen in their identities and experiences with violence; she shared, “Doing research on Central Americans has been empowering. I feel like there’s not a lot of women researchers, let alone Central Americans, let alone Central American woman.” Daisy and other spoke to the ways that centering the stories and needs of Central American migrant families was how they kept connected to their ancestral lineages in Central America and reduced erasure in their experiences of sexual violence. For other students

like Aurora, returning to Central America after completing college is exciting and complicated; Aurora shared:

I really want to go back and visit my family but what also affects me as a Centroamericana is that I'm an immigrant here. If I'm in an immigration process then it's like you're running away from your country, and you should not be allowed back right? Why are you gonna go back? There's so much things that I run away from, but also so many things I want to go back to and I feel like the system doesn't understand that. Home is always going to be home, and they just expect you to forget about it.

U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors were diverse in their experiences with belonging that impacted their relationships to identity, place, and access in their experiences of sexual violence. These experiences had impacts on their self-esteem, self-perception, and identity formation in the context of greater community systems that had impacts on their abilities to disclose and seek support for the impacts of sexual violence while in college.

Socioeconomic Impacts of Migration. Students in this study described their experiences with navigating low socioeconomic environments as children that had impacts on their experiences of sexual violence while in college. Identifying as low-income students and families, many shared experiences of how low-income status made them vulnerable to housing and food insecurity and created barriers to having stable opportunities for education and employment before and during college. For example, Daisy shared:

I'm low income and so that really shaped my childhood. I was raised shopping at Goodwill, getting my shoes at Payless, and I didn't really go out to eat as much because we couldn't really afford that. I feel like a lot of it [identity] was shaped by poverty but also, family of immigrants, I had to navigate a lot of systems with my parents.

For students like Daisy, experiences of poverty shaped their access to extra-curriculars and exposed them to economic realities of migrant parents at a young age that, in turn, shaped their ability to navigate access in college when seeking support for sexual violence. Similarly, Coqueta shared her experiences with having to begin working at a young age with her Central American migrant mother to support her small business; she shared, “My mom, she couldn’t afford to pay anybody, so I had to go work with my mom. A lot of like my experience working has been informed through working with my mom.” Witnessing their parents work several jobs to be able to provide for them and their siblings, U.S. *Centroamericana* students noticed the stark difference in how mothers became heavily responsible for their financial well-being in comparison to absent fathers who were inconsistent in providing stability for them and their siblings.

Women shared that growing up in households where domestic violence was present, their mothers and eldest sisters became critical in managing the impacts of financial dependency with individuals who harmed them in the family. For students in the study, the pressures of having to navigate basic needs within their family unit minimized and often made their own experiences of sexual violence “less important.” Students shared the experiences of having to put aside their own mental health needs with the impacts of sexual violence to support themselves and siblings in financial hardships. For students who experienced relationship violence, *staying* in abusive environments was a way to survive and have basic needs met to minimize financial hardships and barriers that existed in their college trajectories.

Experiences of generational poverty had material impacts on students regarding access to educational and employment opportunities. For example, Irene shared:

After a few semesters of failing [community college], I ended up dropping out. It was around the same time that we were facing homelessness, so I prioritized getting my family out of that status. Fast forward years later, I have my second baby and by then, I had already had a second child, which is my daughter now and I was jobless. I had my baby girl, and I ended up obtaining welfare, cash aid, food stamps.

Students like Irene shared the difficulties of relying on family safety nets due to the limited income and wealth their families had when migrating to the United States. Women shared their families were already low-income when migrating to the United States, making them vulnerable to coyotes (i.e., individuals paid a fee to cross people over the border) and fees associated with migrating through Mexico from Central America. Upon arriving to the United States, students' families relied heavily on the labor of *all* family members to provide financially and send remittances to Central America to support family. Luna shared that her experiences with low socioeconomic status impacted her ability to stay in college and pursue her higher education goals while navigating the impacts of sexual violence; she shared, "last year I was just focused on getting a job, because obviously, I don't have support from my parents." Luna, a student in her early undergraduate journey, mentioned the stress of having to manage her job schedule and make capacity for extra-curricular involvement on campus to apply for medical school while learning to seek support for the sexual violence she experienced in college. Students spoke to the overwhelming financial pressures, overstimulation of trauma responses, and the centering of their own needs with accessing healing.

Although students felt the impacts of generational poverty, students also reflected deeply on the intergenerational lessons they have learned navigating low socioeconomic status and recognize the systemic realities of help-seeking behavior. Irene shared:

My parents, *ellos* [them], they didn't know how to ask for help or where to ask for help. I truly do believe that they would have taken advantage of the resources that were available. Luckily, this time around, I was a lot more mature [her second attempt at college] and just my mindset, everything, was a little bit different. So, I've been very successful with that.

Centering challenges and resilience in their abilities to navigate low socioeconomic status, students compared the privileges and access to economic resources available to them in the United States that differ from their experiences and families in Central America. For example, Aurora in recalling memories of her childhood in Central America, spoke to the discrimination she faced as a low-income student, being given broken instruments and old course materials in comparison to her wealthier and more privileged peers. In discussing the opportunities for social mobility and employment in Central America, Aurora shared the economic inequity of finding a position in her pueblo while having to work to maintain it. She shared:

You have to not only do your job, but have to put in an extra effort in politics to be considered for a position. Then as soon as a new politician comes into power that you replaced, you're so disposable over there. And this affected our economic background.

For example, once my mom and my dad separated [due to domestic violence and sexual abuse] my dad kind of forgot our existence.

Students like Aurora shared their experiences with poverty as being shaped by political processes attached to financial access in social services, education, and larger social mobility mechanisms in the Isthmus. U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors were impacted by the socioeconomic status of their family in Central America and in the United States generationally and simultaneously. These experiences shaped students' abilities, feelings of safety, and capacity to

disclose experiences of sexual violence, which then created challenges with centering their body-mind-spirits to heal from sexual violence.

Finding 1 provided insight into the experiences of the U.S. *Centroamericana* identity and how it shaped their experiences of sexual violence as college students. Discussing their experiences with gender and racial/ethnic identity, U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors discussed how religion, gender roles, intergenerational trauma, and contextual dominance heavily shaped their experience of disclosing and healing from sexual violence. Additionally, students shared their experiences with migration and the impacts on their relationships with family, community, place and belonging as 1.5- and 2nd-generation migrants that mitigated their ability to disclose and heal from sexual violence.

Research Question 2

In the second section, I discuss the findings responding to the second research question of this study: How do U.S. *Centroamericana* college students engage healing from their experiences of campus sexual and relationship violence? This section is divided into two findings: (a) healing defined for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors and (b) healing modalities for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. Each finding provides subsections that provide more in-depth insights into students' testimonios.

Finding 1: Healing Defined for U.S. Centroamericana Student Survivors

Defining *healing* for U.S. *Centroamericana* students navigating experiences of sexual violence was conceptualized in multiple ways that position healing in connection to time, self-reflection, relationships, processes, and actions of the body-mind-spirit. Students shared their experiences with healing individually, collectively, and intergenerationally.

Healing as Reconnection. For U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors, healing was defined as a concept that was not bound by Western notions of time. Healing was often defined and experienced as nonlinear and cyclical and grounded in grief, growth, and self-development in relation to others. Student survivors used phrases like “learning to take it day by day,” “accepting I’ll have good days and bad weeks,” and “learning to move forward” to describe their healing from sexual violence. For example, Daisy shared:

Healing is not linear. Sometimes people depict that “Oh you get into therapy and boom, you’re healed.” It doesn’t work like that, it takes a lot of work, learning, relapses, a lot of back and forth, questioning your identity, but a lot of unlearning, too.

Students spoke about how notions of “perfectionism” of dominant healing narratives that centered transactional timelines conflicted with their own concepts of “seasons” and “chapters” of healing in their lives. For students, healing was connected to grief. Aurora shared, “Healing is like pain that will never go away, you just feel it differently in different parts of your life.” Healing meant opening new chapters and re-learning new concepts such as boundary setting, conflict resolution, healthy relationships, consent, and intimacy at different points in their lives shaped by their current realities, contexts, and relationships. For example, Helena shared:

Healing has been learning to live with how it changes you. You feel it physically, the emotional weight of everything . . . the way I think about healing has changed a lot throughout my life as I have experienced it.

Students described their healing as cyclical in nature shaped by the relationships they centered in their lives, the experiences that led them to have to focus on their healing, and the challenges they were facing at any current moment.

U.S. *Centroamericana* students described healing as a process of re-connecting to their body-mind-spirits through multiple processes and emotions. For example, healing was described as “there’s no one way to heal.” Students described healing as “overwhelming,” “messy,” “unpredictable,” “exhausting” and having “moments of clarity” and “reconnection” in the process of healing. Helena described healing as “growing pains” as part of the process of reconnection to healthy relationships; she shared:

It’s been a struggle to learn what a healthy relationship should look like . . . when you learn anything, there will be growing pains. I’ve hit walls a lot and it’s hard to maintain that feeling of ‘it’s for a reason or it’s for a purpose.’ I’m learning and I’m growing.

For other students like Daisy, healing meant engaging in several moments of reconnection with their current needs until they felt that it was the “right” time to seek support services for their body-mind-spirit. For example, Daisy shared:

Being able to ‘take the jump’ and actually do the work was a step within itself and was really hard. I remember procrastinating for months. It wasn’t until I *knew* I needed the resources that we had since freshman year, it wasn’t until sophomore year that I started seeking help.

Like other students in the study, Helena discussed her experiences with healing as a process of reconnecting varying dimensions of her body-mind-spirit during each time she participated in outpatient programs that addressed her mental health and experiences with sexual violence. She described the knowledge she gained in these programs when she said:

I came out of it with a different sense of self and self-worth each time . . . the program teaches you a lot of things about healing. Healing is learning to be content for one thing

and accepting that life is always gonna be painful. Trying to extend those periods of time in which you're content . . . or the level of gratitude is like healing.

Helena, like others, continuously centered the experience of reconnection as a space of self-reflection, re-learning, and opportunities to practice skills and knowledge in different contexts.

Women described how their decision to participate in the study engaged several moments of reconnecting to their body-mind-spirits in finally deciding to participate in the study. Discussing moments of decision making and checking in with themselves regarding whether participation in the study would feel overwhelming, many had “moments” of self-reflection before following through with committing to a project about healing. Daisy shared, “Truthfully, I was hesitant at first not knowing whether I would have to talk about my experiences but what attracted me to the study was that I wanted to derive purpose from what I’ve been through.” With similar sentiments, Helena shared that she was “hesitant” at first to participate but after having moments to process her connection to the study during multiple attempts, she finally confirmed her participation. U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors engaged in multiple forms of reconnection tied to their body-mind-spirits, land and waters, ancestral homes, and community identities, described more closely in Finding 2.

Healing as Intra-Intergenerational. U.S. *Centroamericana* students described healing in connection to intra-intergenerational relationships. In describing their experiences with intra-intergenerational healing, students actively sought out to acknowledge, explore, and make meaning of sexual violence in their lineages. For example, student mothers in the study described healing as tied to their understanding of generational trauma and learning to create healthy, loving, and safe environments for their children. Irene shared, in learning to advocate for her daughter’s learning accommodations at school, she engaged in “healing a part” of herself that

she did not know “needed healing.” She shared, in teaching her daughter to advocate for resources, it healed a form of shame she carried from not advocating for herself in previous unhealthy relationships. She shared:

Yo le digo a mi hija [I tell my daughter], mami, you need to learn to advocate for yourself. You need to learn that there’s accommodations for you out there. Those children don’t have a learning disability, so they don’t understand what you’re going through, but you need to speak up for yourself. So that’s something that’s happening too, that I feel like she’s *me* in some ways.

Student mother survivors spent time discussing how building healthier relationships with their daughters facilitated healing in that it allowed for a form of re-parenting of themselves. Healing was engaged through building safe spaces with their children, minimizing shame, engaging in educational conversations (e.g., topics about mental health, sexual health, gender), practicing vulnerability with their daughters, and increasing help-seeking behavior generationally.

Women in the study discussed their healing in connection with their mothers and learning to understand their experiences of sexual violence. Students in their individual and collective plática discussed how understanding their mothers’ experiences of sexual violence created pathways for understanding their own trauma activations and experiences with sexual violence. For example, Coqueta shared how learning to empathize and understand her mother’s pain in connection to her own experiences of sexual violence, “released” and liberated her from a burden and pain that was “not hers to carry.” She shared:

My mother, a woman who does not know rest, nor softness. My mother, a woman who has been taken from her whole life . . . I love my mom very deeply, but I was failed by

everybody around me, and it's because our mothers, like my mother, was failed too.

Nobody teaches you how to love women or how to take care of women in this life.

Students in the study shared the complexity and nuance of the power that the Mother-Daughter relationship has in healing sexual violence. The testimonio shared in Chapter 2 *Prologue: Platica—Where The Healing Happens* provides insight into the healing experiences of sexual violence through understanding the Mother-Daughter relationship.

Students shared the possibilities of healing intergenerational sexual trauma as they witnessed the testimonios of each other during collective plática. U.S. *Centroamericana* women who identified as younger survivors shared complicated feelings about becoming future mothers due to the impacts of sexual violence and abuse on their body-mind-spirits. During individual plática, several students shared feeling concerned and fearful that they would pass on generational trauma to children as result of the sexual violence they had experienced. Through the shared collective plática, younger students began to shift in their perspectives as they listened and witnessed the testimonio of older student survivors speak about their experiences with healing and motherhood. Aurora shared her feelings upon hearing Irene's testimonio, a student mother, with healing. Aurora said:

I am the woman that I am because of my mom . . . I fear not being able to come to her because she's been through so much abuse and doesn't know how to handle it, she wasn't able to break all those generational traumas. Seeing someone trying to do it is very inspiring to see, it means that I can do it, that we all can break those curses. The fact that you're looking out for your little girls, it gives me hope.

Other students had similar experiences in witnessing older students share their stories of healing. Luna described that hearing testimonio from mother student survivors was like "seeing her future

self.” She shared, with deep emotion and conviction, “I’m grateful that you [directed to student mothers] shared your experiences as mothers in healing, it gives me possibilities to look forward to that I didn’t have before.” As students dove deeper into their experiences with healing sexual violence during collective plática, many felt hopeful for the future. Aurora shared, “It heals parts of my heart to know that I will heal parts of generations. As little as it feels sometimes . . . we can move mountains, we have long generations of women who have overcome things—*somos mujeres* [we are women].”

Healing as Developing Self-Agency. U.S *Centroamericana* student survivors described healing as intentional and active. Describing intentional decisions where they sought out support and served self-needs, students affirmed themselves in body-mind-spirit and discussed identifying specific dimensions of their healing process while resisting self-judgment. For example, Aurora shared her perspective on identifying what she could and could not control in her healing. She described, “We don’t have much control over changing what happened or towards a person, but we do have control over who we are and how we act moving forward.” For Helena, continuously reflecting on expectations to be “perfect” and having agency to mitigate the demands of her family and academic work means “releasing the pressure we have on ourselves.”

Women took active steps to affirm their healing in the attitudes and words they used in “self-talk” when working through difficult emotions related to their experiences of sexual violence. For example, Daisy shared how intentionally changing her internal “self-talk” to include more positive and affirming language that honored her accomplishments shaped her healing journey. She said:

I think of all the beauty, and especially the woman in my family. I’m the eldest, the first woman to graduate with the high school diploma and the first one to hopefully pursue the

highest form of education . . . I'm learning to embrace it . . . it's been a beautiful process, really healing.

Students described engaging in self-talk to increase self-confidence, increase sense of belonging to place and other more-than-human relatives, and resist minoritization by the institution. Irene's use of self-talk in healing was described as a process of identifying where she had power in changing her circumstances, and "channeling power" to manage expectations, trauma activations, and responsibilities in her life. Similarly, Helena shared, "Just the acknowledgement that whatever you choose in life, it's okay, and if you don't do better than what was done before you, that's fine too." The process of developing affirmations and self-talk provided a space of reflection for students and developed self-agency in their healing journeys.

Women in the study described how developing *self-agency as healing* facilitated a form of resistance to feeling minoritized on campus. When discussing concepts like "imposter syndrome" or feeling unseen as a U.S. *Centroamericana* survivor on campus, Irene shared:

Somebody had a conversation with me about imposter syndrome, where we don't feel like we belong . . . as long as you're true to yourself, you're gonna be okay. I do not walk through these halls in hopes of adapting or changing or assimilating. I don't want to look like any of them, because one day, my baby girls are gonna walk through these halls, they're gonna look like me, they're not gonna look like them... I need to succeed so they can see that it is possible.

Like Irene, Coqueta and others had strong thoughts and visions about cultivating a deep connection to their self-agency in shaping realities with healing and belonging after experiences of violence. Coqueta shared:

For such a long time, I carried with me so much shame, because I felt like I was trying so hard to do things by the book . . . now I feel like you're robbing yourself of so much joy . . . the sooner you learn to not care about anyone else's opinion about you the sooner you let yourself free.

For Coqueta and other women, shame from sexual violence in connection with experiences of machismo created isolation, feelings of self-doubt, and increased levels of self-judgement for not meeting the unrealistic expectations of others. These unrealistic expectations were related to rigid gender binaries, neoliberal academic cultures, and social norms regarding how they should “perform” merit and ideas of western “excellence” in their lives. Women in the study engaged healing and developing positive self-talk and affirming messages of resistance by learning to center their own needs, processes, thinking, and ways of existing with value systems of care, self-compassion, gratitude, and liberation.

U.S. *Centroamericana* women also discussed healing in connection to self-agency by intentionally acting to “heal their inner child” by intentionally cultivating moments and experiences of joy. Daisy shared that she often engaged in activities like attending concerts, gathering flowers, and dancing to heal “her inner self.” She shared, “I’m so critical with myself . . . I try to let myself feel how proud and happy I am, because it took a lot of work . . . I now try enjoying the little things in life.” Similarly, Aurora added, “Sometimes, we just have to keep our little kid in ourselves well, that helps us through. Remembering what we wanted or who we were when we were kids, that’s super important.” Students in their healing actively sought out relational experiences of joy, calm, play, and laughter to heal the body-mind-spirit.

U.S *Centroamericana* students described healing as developing self-agency by reclaiming concepts and experiences that once felt harmful in their experiences of sexual

violence. For example, women shared experiences of shame and disconnect from their spirituality in their experiences of sexual violence due to the judgement they felt in nonaffirming spaces of organized religion. For Irene, finding a healthy partner and getting married after her experiences of relationship abuse in college felt impossible due to her own relationship with trauma and experiences of not having healthy marriages modeled in her life. Her healing from sexual violence was connected to relearning experiences of joy, commitment, vulnerability, and trust in a romantic healthy relationship grounded in religious values. For Irene, a religious union with her partner felt like a reclamation of her faith and religious practice and helped define what it meant to exist in a marriage grounded in her own practice and values. She shared:

My wedding was so healing for me as a mother, as a daughter, as a sister. I was brought up in a very religious household . . . I realized that it became very ritualistic for us . . . we weren't partaking because it was spiritual but it felt like it was a way of them being in control . . . but being able to choose my partner, choose to get married on my own terms spiritually felt so healing.

For students like Irene, developing self-agency by reclaiming her religious space of healing through a romantic partnership became critical to healing shame and “setting right” her past experiences of sexual violence. For others, this was facilitated in their continued journey to reclaim visibility by taking up space in conversations with peers, self-expression (e.g., clothing, hair styles, art), establishing new friendships, choosing their “energy,” and working to participate in extra-curriculars on and off campus.

Findings 2: Healing Modalities for U.S. Centroamericana Student Survivors

U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors engaged in a myriad of healing modalities after experiencing sexual violence while in college. Healing modalities included the following

dimensions: emotional and psychological, embodied, connections with nature (e.g., land, waters, and plants), religion/spirituality, education as healing, and collective healing. Women in the study shared how the research project grounded in *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology engaged healing through collective storytelling and kinship.

Emotional and Psychological. U.S. *Centroamericana* students engaged in culturally affirming therapy, psychiatry services, and testimonio to understand the impacts of sexual violence on their body-mind-spirits and relational dynamics. Students highlighted the importance of feeling seen and validated in their experiences of sexual violence which was essential to identifying and managing trauma activations, healthy/dysfunctional relationships, and mental health diagnosis on their body-mind-spirits. Seeking mental health support through formal clinical settings like on- and off-campus counseling centers created space to learn about healthy relationship skills, setting boundaries with peers and family, sexual health, consent, and learning to identify and serve individual needs.

Culturally Affirming Therapy and Psychiatry Services. For students who engaged in clinical therapy for healing experiences of sexual violence, engaging in culturally-affirming therapy and psychiatry services inside and outside the institution was critical in understanding how trauma activations and mental health diagnosis shaped their everyday lives. Helena shared that she started therapy after several incidents of sexual violence and mental health crisis in college. She said, “I wanted to understand myself better, I wanted to make sense of the things that have happened in my life.” For students like Daisy, she did not feel validated or seen in her identities and experiences of violence until she connected with a Latina-identified clinician on campus who could understand the impacts of cultural and gender dynamics in her experiences. She shared:

Validating my emotions was really healing. It was like, “Wow this has never happened to me.” You’re stranger [referring to her therapist] and you’re over here, validating me in the way that I’ve been craving and I’ve been wanting since I was a child.

The clinical therapeutic space was the first time students could express conflicting emotions, complicate expectations about how they “should heal,” and feel validated in having nuanced perspectives on the individuals that harmed them. Helena shared:

When I started talking about things in therapy, you have someone telling you “that’s not right.” You have a right to feel like that’s not right, a right for it to hurt you. You start to realize “oh, my parents suck or this isn’t fair.” I have a lot to grieve, I have a lot to mourn. You start grieving it and you start feeling it. It was really hard.

Clinical therapeutic spaces became a space to make meaning of grief, loss, and pain with sexual violence while also developing understanding and purpose to cultivate learning, possibilities, and dreaming. For example, Helena shared that in therapy with an off-campus clinician, she learned that healing means “you don’t forget everything you’ve learned, even when you feel like you have, healing is learning, patience and working on it.”

U.S. *Centroamericana* students identified as neurodivergent and or as having a diagnosis of a mental health condition that impacted their ability to function daily. Students shared their experiences with diagnosis including attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorder, generalizing diet disorder, bipolar disorder, depression, and irritable bowel syndrome from chronic anxiety. Many described the symptoms, episodes, and impacts of mental health conditions on their personal and academic lives often experienced “in waves,” activated by triggers, and not bound by time and place. Students had a complicated relationship with their diagnosis stating that being diagnosed sometimes felt “stigmatizing,” “colonial,”

“dehumanizing,” due to how mental health is discussed and perceived in college and the broader Latine community.

For some students, anger and grief accompanied their relationship to diagnosis, acknowledging that they developed these mental health conditions in part because of other individuals’ actions—the individuals who harmed them. Concurrently, they shared that “getting a diagnosis” created capacity for language, access to medication to manage their symptoms, and a deeper learning for how the diagnosis impacted their body-mind-spirits. For example, for students like Coqueta, being diagnosed and having access to medication to regulate her mood disorder allowed her to be more present and engaged in her relationships, family, and academic coursework by creating stability, consistency, and regulation. Being diagnosed with a mental health condition created capacity to conceptualize possible healing—there would be no “magical cure” for managing symptoms, relationships, and trauma activations. Accessing a diagnosis brought complicated relief in that students gained knowledge for how to manage support; Daisy shared, “I’ve always struggled with communicating and even just making friends, that was hard for me. I realized that it was attached to my anxiety with what I’ve been experiencing . . . I wasn’t diagnosed until I got to college and that’s helped.” Acquiring a diagnosis and learning more about that particular diagnosis created capacity for shaping attitudes regarding the day-to-day impacts on the body-mind-spirit. Luna shares that after learning her diagnosis with irritable bowel syndrome due to chronic anxiety and relationship trauma, she could better acknowledge how stress triggered her “flight or fight response,” which led her to take care of her chronic illness by learning to “take it one day at a time, one step at a time, one thing at a time.”

Embodied. Students in the study discussed in depth the myriads of embodied practices that facilitated reconnection and reclamation of their body-mind-spirits when describing healing.

Women in the study described these practices as “coming back to” and healing “parts” of them they felt were “stolen” or “taken from them” through experiences of sexual violence. Engaging in embodied modalities of healing allowed for a connection back to physical sensations, intimate body parts, creativity, boundaries, and cultivated reconnection to *Centroamericana* genealogies and traditions.

U.S. *Centroamericana* survivors described their embodied practices of healing as reconnection to their bodies through body movement. For example, Coqueta shared, “Trauma is stored in the body,” and releasing shame associated with her experiences of sexual violence was facilitated through reclaiming the sensations and sensuality of her body parts once heavily shamed by machismo and sexual violence. She shared:

I do pole dancing; it’s been really fun. As a Latina in these more minoritized cultures, women are made to seem vulgar [for dancing] and I denounce that as much as possible . . . sexuality and sensuality is energy that can be funneled into your life very positively, not just in a sexual way, but it’s energy you’re able to grasp from when you need energy in other places.

For Coqueta, pole dancing served to resist dominant narratives of women being submissive and “saint like” in a culture that continuously used machismo to justify nonconsensual sexual objectification. Daisy and others shared that dancing allowed them to reconnect to their sensuality and pleasure, learn about how their bodies moved in intimate ways, and helped them regain an aspect of body agency stolen and violated by individuals who perpetuated harm.

Similarly, students shared reconnecting with their bodies through actively learning how to dance music from the Isthmus and broader Latine diaspora. Centering how dancing once felt inaccessible due to social control of the modality, Daisy shared:

Reggaeton is really sexual and powerful. Being able to move your body and do it so in a way that says “this is my body” is kind of reclamation . . . growing up that that type of dancing is really shamed upon . . . being able to take that back and be like “no, I can and I will dance like that” has been really powerful, healing, and something that I enjoy.

Students discussed how the process of getting together with other women friends to go out dancing felt “ritual” like and brought collective joy and healing to their body-mind-spirits.

Coqueta shared, “The getting ready collectively, the putting on makeup and dressing up and the pregame . . . for a moment you realize how happy you are sweating, hearing the loud music, laughing, and surrounded by women who love you.” For students in the study who engaged healing through dance, the “vibrations and movements of [their] hips” activated releases of trauma stored in the body and an invitation to reclaim their body and sexuality through movement.

U.S. *Centroamericana* students discussed the use of other embodied activities like Pilates, hiking, and physical activity at the gym (e.g., running, weightlifting) that provided access to breath regulation, sweat/purging practices, endurance building, and releasing anxiety and stress as they navigated multiple responsibilities on and off campus. Luna shared that returning to the campus gym and recentering her body through working out was healing after leaving a relationship where she experienced abuse. She shared that her ex-partner would control her whereabouts, show up unexpectedly to locations on campus, and monitor her time with others. “It was exhausting and consuming, my body was always on edge,” she shared about constantly worrying for her safety. Luna shared, by making time for herself to be physically active, she reclaimed “her energy” and returned to a modality that once gave her joy and care. Sharing stories about her time playing organized sports growing up, Luna shared, as we sat in her healing

space at the tennis courts, that playing sports made her feel connected to her body. The lessons, teachings, and movement from the sport of tennis created capacity for her to *feel* her body, which she often dissociated from due to violence, and reminded her of “happy memories” with others. Similarly, for Coqueta, she shared, “Pilates forces me to slow down and pay attention to my breathe in working through the exercises, something that I didn’t do as much before.” Women in the study shared how healing had been a journey of re-connecting to their breath and identifying signals in their body when they were not well, Daisy shared, “I’m learning to better understand when my body needs something.” For Aurora, walking/hiking outside and through green spaces provided an outlet to move her body, “get out of [her] head,” and reconnect with land and waters directly when she felt stressed or uneasy, and when she experienced episodes of “overthinking.”

Students in the study discussed how getting tattoos on their bodies felt like a ritual and ceremonial in healing their body-mind-spirits and genealogies. For student survivors, the process of getting a tattoo served as a reclamation of agency after experiencing betrayal and feeling like they had “no control of their bodies.” Growing up in religious households where women’s bodies were heavily controlled and policed and later dissociating from their bodies after sexual violence, women in the study shared that the tattoo process itself became a reclamation of their *Centroamericana* identities. For example, the pain experienced when getting a tattoo made students feel “alive” in that they were capable of not being “numb” and passive to their experiences as survivors. For Daisy, designing a tattoo that incorporated her *Centroamericana* roots and pueblo, allowed her to reconnect to a place that once felt foreign due to migration and displacement. She described in depth how directing the tattoo artist and educating the artist on Central American history made her feel in control of the process and cultivated a sense of pride for her genealogy. She shared:

I don't have the words, but I feel like this is my body and I get to choose what I get to do with it. That's like a form of resistance . . . tattoos are permanent . . . and so is my identity . . . my background is permanent. I wanted to honor that in a way that's visual and for me.

Students also shared their experiences with the ritual of *crying* during tattoo sessions and as healing practice in general. Conceptualizing a practice and ritual of "letting go," crying helped student survivors release emotions in their bodies that verbal modalities could not ease, cure, or tend to. Students described crying when feeling stressed; when activated by trauma triggers, overwhelm, joy, or anger; and when feeling grief. Luna shared that it was not a "regular" cry but an "ugly cry," where she cried with her "entire body," forcing her to release the tension and pain she feels in her body occasionally. Women in the study described their process of normalizing crying as a practice of purging or release noting that colonial and machista cultures viewed crying as a "weakness." Reconnecting with practices of embodied crying facilitated healing for U.S *Centroamericana* students.

Students in the study engaged in embodied modalities of healing connected to music, art, and writing that centered bodily sensations, body-mind-spirit memory, sounds, visions, and rhythms that facilitated healing from their experiences of sexual violence. Students through these modalities intentionally listened and wrote what was *felt* in their body-mind-spirits. For example, students listened to music daily and were intentional about the artists, lyrics, and genres they engaged in when needing to connect with their body-mind-spirits. Students shared having specific songs for when they wanted to resource joy, calm, and memory and often allowed them to "be in [their] feelings," or grief as they described. Aurora shared that going to music concerts felt cathartic, especially when she was joined by other women friends; she shared:

I love music, just the sounds. For me, it's not only the lyrics but also the melody of it . . . and lately I've been feeling my inner child music taste when I was a child, because at home it was something that I would listen when I was back in Honduras with my mom. For students like Aurora and Irene, listening to music collectively with friends, family, and their church community felt "spiritual" and recalled memory of place and identity. For Aurora, writing lyrics and developing her own music helped process the sexual violence she experienced and often returned to her music when she "needed healing." For Irene, the harmonies and rhythms of *alabanzas* [Spanish worship songs] facilitated healing for her body-mind-spirit grounding love, reflection, and faith as pillars of her healing practices within religion.

U.S. *Centroamericana* students shared their passion for reading and authoring poems to engage in healing. For example, Helena and Coqueta shared multiple poems during individual and collective *plática* to bring insight into their experiences with intergenerational trauma, grief, joy, and purpose making after experiencing sexual violence. Helena mentioned that poems created a space for her to express her truths; she shared:

I wanted to be heard . . . that was constantly met with deflection and a lot of different things. Poetry became a way to be clear and also understand things that weren't clear, like a conversation with myself, but also a conversation with the reader . . . It made me ask myself 'how do I piece together these fragments, things that have happened and understand them to myself and explain them to someone else?' I think it's very natural and humans want to be seen and heard.

For students like Helena, writing poetry provided a self-reflective space to speak clearly about their narratives of violence and healing. Embodied poetry gave back control and decision making regarding *how* students wanted to narrate their experiences of violence and healing. As students

became empowered to share their poetry and stories with each other during collective plática, they resonated with each other's experiences, validated their own experiences, and felt braver to continue to share with one another. Sharing writings, lyrics, and poems with one another allowed many students to feel seen in their identities. Helena shared during collective plática, "I am grateful for these kinds of spaces to be able to relate to others and to be able to see that others are also processing, and that we're all processing at our own pace. Thank you for listening."

Connections With Nature. U.S. *Centroamericana* students engaged healing with nature, land and waters, plants and trees, and more-than-human relatives. These relationships with nature helped regulate body-mind-spirits and reconnect student survivors to ancestral place in Central America. Students invited me to join them in botanical gardens and green areas on campus that featured an abundance of trees, plants, grass, ponds, and fountains with running water. For women in the study, walking and sitting in their healing spaces of nature facilitated storytelling that connected their well-being and resilience to memory in Central America. For example, Daisy shared her healing connection to nature in Central America as we sat in a garden walkway with trees on campus; she shared:

I feel like I healed, that [trip] healed my soul. I love nature . . . nature is instilled in me because of my ancestors who have lived and thrived in environments like the jungle. My grandma is from a small pueblo but the *rio* [river] is really close . . . it makes you feel like you're one with nature. There's mangos, cocos, platanos everywhere . . . I see nature as really healing and grounding.

Student survivors shared similar sentiments to Daisy, sharing how being in green areas on campus reminded them of healing spaces back in the Isthmus. Resourcing memories in real time

to regulate their body-mind-spirit, Aurora shared stories about how living on her abuela's *finca* [small ranch] in Central America allowed her to connect with nature continuously. She shared:

I remember growing up, waking up at four in the morning to make her [abuela] Cafecito. We would go feed the horses, *regar la plantitas* [water the plants]. She would take me and my other cousins and make us walk down to the river *y cada vez que volvíamos regrasabos con un terso de lenia* [we would come back with wood logs] . . . I love it a lot, nature and looking at trees . . . the silence here [in nature], is so quiet.

Students described the reciprocity and coregulation that nature offered for their body-mind-spirits. Pointing to the trauma activations of chaotic and violent environments, nature offered a quiet place away from the constant activations, crowds of people, and overstimulation. Student survivors engaged in the practice of gratitude continuously as we walked in their healing spaces on campus giving time to admire and acknowledge the trees, plants and waters present in the gardens. Aurora shared, as we sat next to a tree discussing healing, “It’s so healing being in green spaces, like just look at all these trees, we don’t know how long they have been here [as she stares up at the branches].” Coqueta shared similar sentiments about her connections to trees and how they help situate her experience in a larger system of beings that decenter human supremacy; she said, “they’re so big and they kind of serve as this reminder that in the grand scheme of it all, I’m very small. Not in a ‘I don’t matter sense,’ but that my existence is one that’s very tiny—I think it’s grounding.”

Students in the study discussed the healing power of elements like wind, fire, and water. Women in the study used the sound of water to study and ground their chaotic commutes to campus, and sat near water when they were needed a space to “ease their minds.” Some students used water to cleanse their bodies and “wash away” heavy feelings from activations at the end of

the day. For Daisy, her relationship with water was healing and was connected to her genealogies of ancestral place; she shared:

I have a relationship with water and I feel connected to it . . . water has always been there. Water carries memories, history, and it's a reminder that life keeps going. You know how waves flow, it's like life always comes in waves. It's not linear, it's not perfect. And I feel like that in itself is a good grounding method for me.

Students like Daisy learned how to tend to their needs, manage stressors, and use ancestral knowledge taught by nature to maintain wellness in their body-mind-spirits. For students like Coqueta, flowers reminded them of natural life cycles in nature and the teachings of interconnected ecosystems. While visiting her healing place in a garden, Coqueta shared:

It's so pretty [here] on rainy days. It's nice to see when the seasons are changing, like these two little trees over here [points to trees next to us]. Once the flower dies off, what's left is like a leaf and it's shaped like a heart, yes? It's that pink one right there, if I'm not mistaken . . . the things that I notice here are really beautiful and green.

Coqueta, like other students in the study, discussed how nature teaches human beings to practice intention, gratitude, and presence. Healing is fostered by being in direct relation with land and waters, and by changing *with* plant relatives as the seasons shift. By being present in relationships with land and water, students experienced continuous reconnection, reduced isolation, and an increased sense of belonging to Mother Earth.

U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors provided insight into the healing engaged through intentional ancestral visits to their pueblos in Central America. By visiting pueblos and maternal/paternal homelands, students actively sought to re-narrate stories and memories connected to their *Centroamericana* genealogies. Central America is often depicted and narrated

by U.S. imperialism as “violent and poverty stricken;” students intentionally traveled to Central America to learn different perspectives, reconnect with their Central American lineages, and re-imagine their relationship to the Isthmus. For example, Coqueta shared her healing in connection to visiting her abuela’s house as we sat in a campus garden. She shared:

I was thinking about my time spent in El Salvador, in my abuelita’s rancho. She is not alive anymore, but the rancho is in a very dense forest area. Once you start driving that way, there is a significant dip in temperature because of the vegetation. In El Salvador, it’s hot and humid, but as soon as you pass that point within the vegetation, it’s cool, serene and green. This [as she looks around the campus garden] reminds me a lot of our pueblo . . . I have memories of my body just being surrounded by these green lush trees and plants.

Coqueta, and other women in the study, engaged healing with land directly by resourcing place through the practice of visualization to access feelings of joy, calm, and assurance. She added, “I’m drawn to it [campus garden] because of the sounds and the green. It makes me feel really happy and calm.” Like other students in the study, Daisy shared how her ancestral trip back to Central America reconceptualized the way she viewed her genealogy by shaping her worldview of people and place belonging to one another. She shared:

I wasn’t really exposed to Central American women in my family, because I saw them as something separate, like they’re back there and I’m here [the United States]. I didn’t really learn a lot from them . . . my grandparents, my grandma or both of my grandmas. It wasn’t until I went to Nicaragua this past December that I was able to get to know them, get to talk to them, and see what that was like . . . they’re really strong and I see them as the head of the family because they’re the foundation of it.

Reconnecting with ancestral lands in relation to the women in her lineage facilitated a type of healing for Daisy that many other students discussed during plática. Women in the study shared how learning about their extended family in Central America opened opportunities to learn about their traditions, genealogies and stories of resistance not easily accessed before. U.S.

Centroamericana students also centered their reciprocal connections to more-than-human relatives like *gallinas* [chickens], cats, dogs, and birds that cultivated feelings of support in their engagement with healing. Coqueta shared, “I love animals . . . I have very big respect for and admiration for this form of life.” For Aurora, more-than-human relatives are part of a larger support system that provide companionship, emotional support, and teach humans how to take care of themselves through taking care of another living being.

Religion and Spirituality. U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors held complicated relationships with religion and spirituality as it heavily shaped their experiences with sexual violence. For students who engaged healing with religion and spirituality, identifying and reclaiming aspects of religion/spirituality that were healing was critical to developing their own practices of nourishment and fulfillment. In discussing what was harmful and healing for students with their religious/spiritual practices, many students went through a transformative process with reconnecting and reshaping their relationships with churches, ancestral belief systems, traditions, and ontological dimensions of faith. For example, for students who identified with organized religion, they gathered immense “strength” and “will” to meet the unpredictable nature of life through organized prayer, church events, and religious mentors who guided them through crisis, grief, trauma, and community issues in need of care. Irene shared:

[My religious mentor] has been a huge part of my healing, *muchas cosas* [lots of little things] . . . she gave me some exercises to do, which have helped me a lot. I practice them

cuando estoy anciosa [when I have anxiety], but she's also helped me with just understanding how to process what is happening to me and how I can implement it in my everyday life.

For Irene, having a religious mentor grounded in faith equipped her with tools, affirmations, and knowledge to make meaning of the sexual violence that she has endured in her life. Cocreating a healing space with her religious mentor allowed her to reclaim an organized religious space that once felt "obligatory" and "forced" by her family growing up. She added, "Going to church is important to me. I've always done it simply to go to the *iglesia* [church], but I've never tried building a relationship with personnel at church and that's changed for me."

For Aurora, organized religious spaces were healing depending on how accepting, nonjudgmental, and nurturing church community members were when seeking support for experiences of sexual violence. For example, Aurora discussed about her experiences at an all-women retreat at her church. She shared, "I got to open up and learn a lot about forgiveness from a different perspective, and how these things are for you and not for someone else, like encouraging that you want to be good with yourself." Through these experiences, Aurora felt that she released anger and pain stored in her body-mind-spirit, and how the church retreat facilitated a family activity that eventually led her to feel brave enough to disclose her experiences of sexual violence to a trusted cousin. She added:

I do remember coming to peace with what happened and with God. I didn't fully let it go but I understood that I didn't need to be ashamed of what happened, because it was not my fault. It was not my actions . . . it helped me stop asking *why me* because I realized I would never find an answer for *why* it happened to me.

Students who engaged healing in religious spaces found tools to process trauma, forgiveness, accountability, repair, and integration of justice into their narratives of violence. Students often verbalized their perspectives on intergenerational trauma and justice by centering the notion of “hurt people, hurt people,” meaning the people who harmed them needed and were deserving of healing, too. Shaping their ideas of justice and accountability, students who engaged healing through religion and spirituality found resolve with their experiences of sexual violence by “leaving it to god” trusting that atonement would come through a higher being. For students like Irene, her relationship with religion engaged healing through continuous prayer and practices of gratitude with other *Centroamericana* women at her church. She shared:

I feel like he [God] is with us. I feel his presence. I feel his love. I feel connection. I see my tias, my mom . . . As Central Americans, we’re very united, *las mujeres somos muy poderosas* [women are very powerful]. So seeing so many of us, seeing so many women together praying . . . [she closes her eyes as to acknowledge the power.]

For students like Irene, praying to God collectively with other women in her religious community engaged healing that was grounded in her faith and teachings of compassion, gratitude, and grace. Being present and learning from a community of intergenerational women was affirming to her experiences as a U.S. *Centroamericana* survivor.

For other students in the study, connections to their spirituality grounded in *Centroamericana*, Indigenous and Chicana/Latina ontologies and epistemologies engaged healing through spiritual practices, teachings, and offerings. Women in the study would refer to healing in connection to elders, teachings learned and cultivated from their academic courses, as well as offerings from their own lineages and traditions. For example, for students like Coqueta, experiencing healing and transformation with her experiences of sexual violence emerged during

a time in her studies where she became ill in her body-mind-spirit. Discussing fatigue, exhaustion, and severe body dysregulation due to past sexual violence, chronic stress, and anxiety from coursework, there came a point where she “surrendered” to the illness and channeled her spirituality for support. She described the process of healing and transformation when she reconnected with a course that focused on Chicana/Latina methodologies; she shared:

I started reading Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* and the whole process of when you go through the Snake Bite, and you’re engulfed, and you’re going through these things . . . reading these things I recognized that I was in a really fucked up place but that didn’t necessarily mean that it was a bad thing. It was a really fucked up place that I had to get to so that I could finally submit . . . submit to my humanity and nature . . . that was a big change for me.

Coqueta and other students referred to storywork and knowledge in their ontologies and epistemologies as tools to understand and make meaning of their healing from the impacts of sexual violence. Students described having “out of body” experiences and spiritual realizations that catalyzed movement *through* their trauma. Acknowledging that the pain and grief from sexual violence could no longer be avoidable, students leaned into their spiritual teachings to minimize self-judgement and pursue meaning and action with their healing. For students engaging in spiritual healing, the belief that their descendants (e.g., children, future children, nieces and nephews) would experience less harm if they engaged in healing *now* emerged from strong spiritual convictions that positioned manifestations and intentions of healing for their future lineages at the center of their practice.

Education as Healing. U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors engaged healing through education grounded in Central American histories, ontologies and epistemologies, and

frameworks. Students discussed how taking academic courses that focused on Central American politics, stories, and diaspora led them to reconnect with knowledge that was inaccessible before college. Feeling empowered to learn more about their lineages, students in the study discussed how courses developed their critical-thinking skills, minimized isolation from their experiences of racial and sexual violence, and empowered them to act on social problems. For example, Aurora shared how learning about her Central American history through a *critical* lens shaped her own experience with generational trauma and healing. She shared:

For me, it wasn't until I started studying international development did I realize how much we don't have the global and economic perspective of it . . . I knew about the banana plantations and how people went on strike. But it wasn't until here [college] that I learned about the Chiquita company . . . I feel like they keep those things from us . . . they try to keep us on naïve.

Like Aurora, Helena and other students discussed how learning about social movements in Central America empowered them to be critical of systems that shaped their families and communities in the United States and in diaspora. Helena and other students chose certain courses to learn more about their parents' experiences with migration in hopes of understanding more of their own migration history and the impacts of migration on their families. For students like Daisy, learning about Chicana/Latina Feminist theories was critical to her healing. She shared, "Learning especially from Chicana/Latina feminist theorist has been really empowering especially in women spaces." Learning about machismo and gender-based violence in Central America provided a framework for students to understand how their experiences of sexual violence were rooted in systems and not just their individual experiences. Aurora shared:

I feel a lot when we talk about Berta Caceres in classes because, WOW, what a woman she was. Seeing her in the classroom, I feel like her work was never in vain *por todo lo que hizo para todos* [for everything she did for everyone] . . . the hardwork that she put in . . . the fact that I didn't know how important she was when I lived back home. I remember when she died, when they killed her . . . but I didn't know who she was until I recognized how silent they keep them, how much they belittle them.

For Aurora and other students, learning about *Centroamericana* leaders, professors, researchers, writers, and activists led to feelings of validation, empowerment, visibility, and a sense of purpose tied to their own experiences of injustice. For students like Luna, learning about Central American histories in her courses began to minimize the shame and silence she felt was passed down intergenerationally by her parents and abuelos due to the impacts of migration trauma. Students came to realize through Central American courses how closely their experiences of sexual violence were intertwined with those of other Central American people. Daisy shared how learning about Central American histories in college connected her healing to the fight for liberation of other social justice movements—a shared solidarity with other oppressed people. She shared:

I learned so much about my own parents' homelands, other people and how a lot of our histories interconnect . . . I learned about the influences that shape the conditions . . . I was able to connect my personal experiences and my parents' experiences . . . I feel like it was really healing and sad at the same time.

Women discussed how learning about the injustices in Central America and the impacts of these histories in diaspora led them to develop a sense of serving others and addressing the injustices through their educational trajectories. Students felt that through serving others, their feelings of

hopelessness and disempowerment caused by the sexual violence they experienced could be transformed into “something powerful.” Channeling hope and moving grief into action, Aurora shared:

I love being Hondureña, it’s a big part of my identity. I have so much love for my roots, for my culture, for my people, but at the same time I hate so much violence, so much oppression . . . but we can make a change. We can educate people. We can share thoughts, experiences and not let our pain stay silent, not let it sit there alone. We already been through pain, we might as well just empower pain and just build something stronger.

Women shared similar sentiments channeling their knowledge, skills, and passion into social action, intentionally working to transform their experiences of sexual violence into opportunities to address systemic violence in their communities. For example, Daisy shared how her experiences of sexual and migration trauma moved her into wanting to research Central American people to develop solutions grounded in Central American ontologies and epistemologies. She shared:

Doing research on Central Americans has been empowering especially because we’re in spaces that were built and made by white, European centric frameworks . . . it has been really healing. Being able to be like ‘Fuck your frameworks and fuck everything!’ I’m gonna do it my own way. I’m gonna do it the way that my ancestors did it, like scholars in my field with my identities do it.

For student survivors engaging research with Central American people, healing was engaged through collective resistance and a reclamation of *Centroamericana* women narratives. Daisy shared:

I feel like there's not a lot of Central American researchers, let alone Central American woman researchers. . . . I've been able to see education as a form of resistance and healing in itself too. I'm able to tell my own story in the way that I want to, but also ask how can we use education as a way to educate others and understand our experiences?

U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors highlighted the importance of storytelling and narration self-determined by their own realities, critical analysis, and dreams for community futures. Resisting ongoing erasure in colonial neoliberal universities, women centered ongoing healing in their activism, educational aspirations, and approaches to social transformation.

Students in the study shared their perspectives and thoughts about participating in a study that focused on healing from sexual violence. Gifting their perspectives in the forms of affirmations and gratitude, Aurora shared, "I was really happy when I heard about the study. We're never centered in research." Other students provided their thoughts on how having a space dedicated to their experiences as *Centroamericana* women survivors was "validating," "refreshing," and "grateful." For other students, participating in research that uplifted healing through a strengths-based perspective, as opposed to a deficit-approach, felt necessary in resisting imperial narratives that impact Central American diaspora. Daisy added, "Research feels like it's a form of reclamation . . . a form of resistance. Especially being able to tell it in a way that's not victimizing because often times I feel like we are portrayed as that, victims."

U.S. *Centroamericana* survivors centered healing in their experiences as student scholars pursuing higher education. Highlighting spaces that cultivated their intellectual interests, students invited me to visit their places of healing which included campus libraries. Positioned as sites connected to genealogies of writers, thinkers, theorists, and activists, student survivors felt that libraries provided them with a space to fully engage in their academic work and sense of

belonging as student scholars. For students like Helena, libraries excited and motivated her to continue to pursue her academic endeavors by feeling connected to authors who had inspired her healing outlet of poetry. In describing her healing place and practice of studying and reading in the library basement, she shared, “I don’t know if it’s true because I never fact checked it but [author name], the guy who wrote [book name], wrote it down there, supposedly. So cool! I’m a huge fan of the book.” Creating practices and rituals of healing in libraries allowed students to slow down, be present, and focus on certain tasks when feeling overwhelmed with trauma activations, stress, and anxiety. Helena would frequent the library continuously as part of her healing engagement and spent time reading and writing during her early undergraduate years.

For student survivors like Irene, libraries became a refuge, a place to disconnect from ongoing relationship violence that heavily impacted her day-to-day life and academic coursework. Describing a tumultuous time where she was mitigating the impacts of violence from a former partner (and father of her child), she shared:

I found myself standing [outside the library]. I was talking to the case worker for child support, and I was telling her “How can I stop child support? He’s harassing me.” I told her, “I have police reports, I have medical records, anything that you need from me. Just make it stop.” . . . You need to show all this proof that you have for domestic violence . . . My head was everywhere and I was in a very bad place. I told myself, *calmate* [calm down] because I suffer from anxiety. So *yo me meto ahi* [I go into the library], and then it just . . . kind of all goes away and I could really focus on my studies . . . ground myself.

Irene and others shared similar experiences about feeling overwhelmed while navigating resources and managing the impacts of sexual violence on their body-mind-spirits. For students who engaged healing in library spaces, they were grounded by the calm, predictable nature of

study spaces. Helena added, “Because there was just a lot of noise in my family [referring to violence and unpredictable environments], and then commuting is a lot, the hyper vigilance [of my body] . . . I felt like I could just relax there.”

Collective Healing. Women in the study discussed their experiences with collective healing that affirmed their identities as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. Feeling seen, validated, and celebrated in their identities as Central American women, students discussed how Central American student organizations on campus developed their sense of belonging and community on campus. Luna described joining the Central American student organization her sophomore year after feeling isolated and disconnected her freshman year; she shared, “Last year I felt really lost. So I joined [Central American student organization], and it’s just a really fun club, you become friends with other Central Americans.” During informal plática, Luna would provide updates on her gradual involvement in the club including stepping into leadership positions, organizing events, and developing a sense of purpose in how the student organization supported her persistence by shaping her academic and professional goals within community.

During observations of the Central American student organization meetings in which students invited me, students would greet each other with laughter and were welcomed with music and physical embraces. Students in the organization verbally emphasized the importance of collective solidarities and mentorship with each other, and the importance of building relationships with faculty, community partners, guest speakers, and healers to support them as student scholars. On several occasions, I witnessed how student survivors shared their perspectives on critical issues impacting their communities and model vulnerability with their experiences of mental health and migration. Students in the organization provided spaces of safety, dignity, and opportunities for collective care with each other when sharing personal

stories that pertained to meeting topics that were heavy in the body-mind-spirit like mental health, migration trauma, and others. For Daisy, learning to cultivate her collective healing space as active kinship engaged healing. She shared:

Community is a really big part of that healing process. Being able to talk to others who also went through the same thing . . . having that space within itself is healing. Because like I've said, we are often pushed to the sidelines, we're often unable to talk about these spaces . . . even if it's just one conversation, we're just able to be vulnerable and share these things... that within itself is powerful, and really I want to use the word *healing*.

For student survivors actively involved in collective spaces that affirmed their identities, taking leadership roles as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in collective spaces engaged healing by empowering their self-worth, contributions, and confidence that served to minimize the silence of their experiences of sexual violence and oppression. Daisy shared:

Being a leader in a leadership position puts you in that empowerment role. Being able to lead programs, being able to talk to faculty, being a part of different initiatives has been really like "Wow. I'm really like a *Centroamericana* woman" . . . being able embrace that and be like "I'm here and I'm not gonna stay silent" has been empowering.

Women in the study spoke to similar instances where collective healing helped to minimize shame regarding their experiences of violence and bring reconnection to kin that affirm their visibility as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. For Irene, taking initiative and serving as a leader in her church community in leading prayers, organizing mutual aid efforts for vulnerable people in her community, and receiving collective care from her church was healing in rewiring her relationship with codependency. Being in collective healing with her faith community with other women, Irene shared, "I feel at peace with myself when we're done praying together . . . I

know that I'm going to be okay, because I know the Lord is by my side and with time I'm going to heal." For students like Aurora, collective healing was felt in spaces where women have gathered to organize around political issues in her community. Aurora would often accompany her mother to facilitate community projects that provided services to system-impacted families in her pueblo. These experiences taught her resilience, reciprocity, and the power of empathy with collective care; she shared, "I love community, my mom, who worked with the deepest remote communities showed me. I do feel what other people feel and it enriched me." For students like Aurora, cultivating relationships in community teaches reciprocity, mutual aid, and a commitment to the future and collective well-being of community.

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I presented the findings for this study as analyzed through *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory using a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology, *Centroamericana* story work, and composite narrative (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Archibald, 2008; Cáceres Flores, 2007; Charmaz, 2014; Malagon et al., 2009; Padilla, 2018; Paredes & Galvez, 2021; Ravitch & Carl, 2020; Toliver, 2022). I first discussed how the identity of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors shaped their experiences of sexual violence and healing. Students were hesitant to disclose and seek support for their experiences of sexual violence due to the shame, silence, and victim-blaming culture created by religion (i.e., machismo/marianismo), rigid gender expectations, and intergenerational sexual violence experienced by their abuela-mothers. Students felt invisible and erased in their experiences of sexual violence and healing due to intergenerational migration trauma and contextual dominance of other Latine-identified groups. Women in the study also felt minimized

and minoritized in their experiences of sexual violence, which impacted their sense of belonging and access to resources on campus.

Despite the impacts of sexual violence and systemic oppression on their body-mind-spirits, students found pathways to cope, reconnect, and make meaning of their experiences of sexual violence through healing. U.S. *Centroamericana* students defined healing as processes of reconnection that engaged intra-intergenerational lineages and the development of self-agency. Through engaging multiple modalities of healing including culturally affirming therapy and psychiatric services, embodied practices, connections to nature, religion/spirituality, education, and collective healing, students were able to re-build feelings of self-worth, connection, and cultivate resilience for future making.

In the following chapter, I discuss the significance of these findings in relation to *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory and the literature on campus sexual violence and Central American students in higher education. I provide implications for practice, policy, and future research through the introduction of *Centroamericana* Healing Genealogies as a framework for preventing and responding to *Centroamericana* student survivors and issues of campus sexual violence in higher education.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion and Implications

Prologue: Centroamericana Healing Genealogies

[Queue song “Hasta La Raiz” by Natalia Lafourcade]

Karla: As we enter ceremony collectively for our final plática (see Figure 8), I invite you to surrender something heavy that you are carrying in your body-mind-spirit. We give it to our relative, water, to help us carry it. We thank and release what does not serve us anymore, to make space for what we need.

[Surrender. We surrender, collectively.]

Karla: I invite you to share an artifact . . . a story, a poem, a photograph, a tattoo, a song . . . a reclamation of your genealogy of healing.

[Genealogies shared and received. We share and receive, collectively.]

Karla: As we close out our space and time together, I invite you to find a comfortable position, close your eyes and connect with your body-mind-spirit. I invite you to visualize and enter your own place of healing.

[Visualize. We visualize, collectively.]

Karla: As you visit your place of healing, we invite your genealogy to join you/us: beloved ancestors, loved ones, the land and water, more-than-human relatives, the people in our life in need of healing, our inner child, our future self, our descendants... we invite them into this sacred place to hear our words.

[Reconnect. We reconnect, collectively.]

Karla: Calling upon our *Centroamericana* lineages, we affirm out loud with our body-mind-spirits, that healing means:

Aurora: It's okay to feel pain, it is okay to heal, it wasn't our fault. We can share thoughts and experiences and not let our pain stay silent; not let it sit there alone—we can build something stronger together.

Irene: Understanding my family dynamics and changing it for my daughters. It means connecting with my spirituality and learning how to process what has happened to me and how I can implement change in my everyday life.

Daisy: It is not linear, it means being present. It means asking that question once a day, or whenever you feel overwhelmed or stressed, ask yourself what is it that I need right now? We are so hard on ourselves, remember to give ourselves grace.

Luna: I'm still figuring out and taking it day by day. But for now, it means reclaiming my energy, my friends, my safety, my time for what matters to me.

Coqueta: It doesn't have to be loud, it is yours, it is ours. It means surrendering the roles and expectations of what we were taught to be and softening my space for the first time after living a life that has been full of grief and loss of so many things.

Helena: That whatever you choose in life, it's okay. It's okay if you make mistakes . . . part of doing better is learning to have compassion for yourself and figuring out what you actually want. You are enough as you are.

Karla: Possibilities. Possibilities of repair, of love, of transformation. It means refusing and resisting . . . protecting a space in me, in us, that they cannot enter . . . healing is my softness in a world working to make me rigid and numb.

[Affirmation. We affirm, collectively].

Karla: As we come back to this place of collective ceremony, we acknowledge that our pain and healing are interconnected. It is in our body-mind-spirits, in our lineages, and in our stories

connected to the Isthmus, here, and in between. I invite you to take the last minutes to breathe, release, receive, and honor what we have shared collectively in this place . . . we are seen, we are held, we are loved.

[Healing. We heal, collectively.]

Figure 8

Collective Healing Plática



Discussion

In this study, I employed the framework of *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory to understand the experiences of sexual violence and healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. The experiences of sexual violence and healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* students are shaped by their social identities (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, and sexuality) and are impacted by patriarchy, neoliberalism, and migration across nation-state borders. Through this chapter, I explore how centering the healing genealogies of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors engaged forms of resistance, persistence, and healing for students and their lineages. I then introduce the framework of *Centroamericana Healing Genealogies* to outline policy, practice, and research implications of this study in the Implications section.

Centroamericana Feminist Theory as a collective body of literature provides intersectional, trans-national, and embodied frameworks that center the experiences of Central American women impacted by patriarchy, neoliberalism, settler-colonialism, and migration (Abrego, 2020; Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007; Hernández-Linares, 2015; Hoppe, 2024; Mena, 2023; Menchú, 2010; Padilla, 2012, 2018; Portillo, 2015; Ramsey, 2024; Rodríguez, 2008). The discussion and implication sections of this chapter expand on the following research questions in this study:

- 1) How does a U.S. *Centroamericana* identity shape experiences with campus sexual and relationship violence?
- 2) How do U.S. *Centroamericana* college students engage healing from their experiences of campus sexual and relationship violence?

For purposes of this discussion, I centered three areas of *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory in connection with the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in the

study. The three areas included (a) the intersectionality of U.S. *Centroamericana* students shaped by multiple forms of oppression across borders, (b) the significance of the Abuela-Mother-Daughter relationship (gender identity) in shaping sexual violence and healing, and (c) the healing of sexual violence through *rememoria* for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors.

“Triple Peso Para Las Mujeres:” Intersectionality of U.S. Centroamericana Student Survivors

Indigenous Central American activist, Berta Cáceres Flores (2007), centered the framework of intersectionality through highlighting the forms of domination that impact Central American Women and analyzed how gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic identity intersect to create “*triple peso para la mujeres*” [triple weight on women] (09:01). To understand the experiences of sexual violence and healing for U.S. *Centroamericana* students, the findings highlighted the need to understand *how* the U.S. *Centroamericana* identity (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and migration status) shaped experiences of sexual violence and healing for student survivors. Some findings in the study aligned with existing literature regarding how *Centroamericana* women are impacted by multiple forms of violence from intersecting systems and ideologies of domination (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007). For example, students highlighted the compounded trauma and violence from machismo/marianismo felt through intergenerational linages (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010; Decker et al., 2007; Estrada-Martínez et al., 2011).

Centroamericana Feminist theory provides the framework to examine how machismo creates the conditions for the objectification of women students that then normalizes the sexual violence experienced by themselves and their Abuela-Mothers (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). Machismo privileges Latino men over Latina women and Marianismo reinforces *Centroamericana*/Latina women as second class citizens when analyzing

power within systems (Cummings et al., 2013; Maryn & Dover, 2022). Highlighting the normalized experiences of domination felt in systems such as family, campus climate, and education, student survivors described isolation and disconnection from their body-mind-spirits while navigating the impacts on their sense of worth, dignity, help-seeking behavior, and agency with healing. Similarly, students also spoke about erasure and invisibility as *Centroamericana* students due to the contextual dominance of other Latine-identified students in higher education (Coronado, 2013; Ek, 2009; Maldonado Dominguez, 2019; Paredes, 2022).

There are unique differences for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors that expands and complicates the literature on sexual violence and healing for Women of Color and Latine student survivors in higher education. Elaborating on the research question exploring how a U.S. *Centroamericana* identity shaped the experiences of sexual violence for students, women experienced *further* minoritization and erasure in experiences of contextual dominance due to the sexual violence they experienced as Central American *women*. Although students shared similar experiences of contextual dominance with other Central American peers as outlined in existing literature (Coronado, 2013; Ek, 2009; Maldonado Dominguez, 2019; Paredes, 2022), student survivors' unique positionality as Central American *women* impacted by machismo and targeted by sexism, made them feel targeted by violence and invisible *within* the Central American community when seeking support. Students often negotiated their racial and gender identities through choosing what identity to forefront based on whether environments, relationships, and services cultivated safety and affirmed their identities wholistically. The findings suggest students felt validated and held in their experiences of sexual violence and healing when seen within their racial *and* gender identities.

Centroamericana Feminist Theory provided a lens to analyze and highlight the impacts of migration on the body-mind-spirit of students (Abrego, 2020; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Padilla, 2018). Complicating the literature on Women of Color and Latine student survivors in higher education, U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors also experienced further minoritization and barriers to care due to the felt impacts of migration across several borders (Diaz-Strong, 2021; Hernandez, 2016; Salazar et al., 2024). The experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors with sexual violence and healing were intimately interwoven with intergenerational narratives of migration. For example, students minimized their experiences of sexual violence due to the migration trauma experienced by their families and lineages with civil war, migration to the United States, and political violence manufactured by imperialist entities. Students did not feel validated in their own experiences of sexual violence and did not feel worthy of *being heard* due to the silence and “unsaid” impacts of intergenerational trauma. Similar to the literature for Central American students that highlighted the impacts of intergenerational trauma on sense of belonging (Coronado, 2013; Linares & Maffini, 2020), students made meaning of their experiences of intergenerational trauma as both challenging and a motivator when seeking healing from sexual violence.

Elaborating on the research question for how a U.S. *Centroamericana* identity shapes experiences of sexual violence through *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory, the findings analyzed through the framework highlighted how student’s narratives of migration trauma created a system of hierarchal needs for student survivors. Women in the study felt as though they had to choose between highlighting the community and familial experiences of migration injustices versus making their own experiences of sexual violence visible. These experiences were similar and different from other migrant women and Women of Color student survivors with

experiences of intersectionality (Harris, 2020; Harris et al., 2021; Varela Huerta, 2017). Additionally, student survivors who identified as 1.5 generation or from mixed-status families often felt pressured to prioritize immigration needs such as financial stability and fears of deportation, over their own healing with sexual violence. Women in negotiating priorities with family and community obligations while navigating the silence that stemmed from intergenerational trauma often found themselves feeling “invisible” and “not important” in their experiences.

Centroamericana Feminist Theory emphasizes the violence caused by systemic exploitation and resource extraction of Central America through neoliberal policies and projects (Abrego, 2017; Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). In analyzing student’s socioeconomic identity through *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory, women experienced additional systemic violence and inequity such as financial barriers and lack of basic needs that stemmed from intergenerational poverty and contexts in the United States and Central America. For U.S. *Centroamericana* students, socioeconomic identity shaped their vulnerability to violence and influenced resource navigation on and off campus. Analyzing intersecting systems of domination for *Centroamericana* student survivors through their identities (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, migration status), women often experienced barriers with accessing resources for sexual violence and faced challenges with developing a sense of belonging to their campuses. For example, students often discussed facing challenges with accessing identity-affirming therapeutic services due to lack of money and insurance coverage and facing financial challenges when seeking housing for themselves and their children due to the lack of financial support from the university. Women discussed the impacts of generational financial barriers that forced them into working several jobs on and off campus to

support family and university expenses that interfered with their abilities to participate in extra-curricular opportunities creating inequities for students on campus.

As highlighted in the literature with campus sexual violence and *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory, neoliberal structures, policies, and environments can often disconnect, dehumanize, and further isolate human beings from feeling seen in their individual and collective needs (Alma, 2024; Anderson Wadley & Hurtado, 2023; Wooten, 2017). Students in the neoliberal academy found it difficult to reach out to peers, family, and professors regarding their experiences of sexual violence due to the national and campus climate. Women in the study discussed how the national anti-immigration raids and the heavy police surveillance on campus because of recent student activism created further minoritization from the university campus by limiting their sense of belonging.

Literature on neoliberal and carceral systems in higher education has adversely impacted the mental health and well-being of minoritized student survivors as it creates heavy surveillance and “othering” of students on their own campuses (Karunaratne, 2026; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2026; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024; Lorenz et al., 2022). *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory provides insights into the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors by uncovering the intersectionality of Central American women across imperial borders and nation-states. Analyzing the experiences of sexual violence and healing for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors provides insight into how systems of domination impact their individual identities with gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, migration status while providing an analysis on how these identities intersect to systemically create vulnerability, barriers to care, and compounded trauma for student survivors. By using *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory to understand how social identities impact students, we unmask and get to the

root causes of sexual violence for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors to better address and prevent sexual violence.

U.S. Centroamericana Genealogies: The Significance of the Abuela-Mother-Daughter Relationship for U.S. Centroamericana Student Survivors

U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors spent time processing and theorizing the significance of intergenerational collective healing in their experiences of sexual violence and healing similar to other Women of Color in higher education (Karunaratne, 2023a; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Poon Ghaffari, 2024). In addressing the second research question that sought to understand how U.S. *Centroamericana* students engage healing, the findings complicate and expand on the literature of collective healing by centering how the Abuela-Mother-Daughter relationship became a site of intergenerational healing and continuous transformation for students in their collective experiences of sexual violence. Although their experiences of sexual violence mirrored similar literature regarding the intergenerational impacts of sexual violence for Women of Color and Latine student survivors, students in this study showed complicated notions of repair in healing from sexual violence (Karunaratne, 2023a, 2026; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024; Poon Ghaffari, 2024). *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory heavily centers the intergenerational experiences of Central American women and creates opportunities to learn and understand the impacts of U.S. imperialism, colonization, and neoliberalism, individually and collectively (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007). Through *plática*, students engaged in a process of analyzing and processing the experiences of Abuela-Mother-Daughter lineages as intricately connected to how they experience sexual violence that shares insights and opportunities for intergenerational collective healing.

Women in the study highlighted how the Abuela-Mother-Daughter relationship had the capacity to create further harm to their experiences of disclosure and help-seeking behavior while also creating possibilities for individual and intergenerational healing from sexual violence. Women shared how their experiences of sexual violence were heavily shaped by the experiences of their Abuela-Mothers. For example, the social identity of their Abuela-Mothers as *Centroamericanas*, with low socioeconomic status, and as first-generation migrants, shaped how they experienced their social identities through access to knowledge and learned behaviors. Women often referred to how their Abuela-Mothers were complicit in shaming and silencing their experiences of sexual violence and how that experience “often hurt more than the sexual abuse itself.” These experiences shaped their hesitancy to disclose experiences of sexual violence to family or peers, including preventing them from seeking supportive services due to the minimizing by their Abuela-Mothers. Many felt as if they were “robbed” of a healthy Abuela-Mother-Daughter relationship due to the machismo/marianismo ideologies internalized by their Abuela-Mothers.

Centroamericana Feminist Theory provides a framework to understand the systemic, intergenerational impacts of internalized and externalized violence across borders and moves us to explore healing opportunities that emerge with collective intergenerational storytelling (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). Students in individual and collective plática affirmed the resilience of their Abuela-Mothers acknowledging the sacrifices of migration and collective care they provided to family and community. Students asserted that Abuela-Mothers often did “the best they could with what they had” with access to resources and education. Women discussed how machismo/marianismo heavily policed their access to knowledge around affirmative consent and sexual health education while also perpetuating a

culture of shame and silence that directly impacted their help-seeking behaviors as adults—experiences also *witnessed and lived* by their Abuela-Mothers. Although students experienced ongoing harm in the Abuela-Mother-Daughter relationship, many grew to have empathy and understand how their Abuela-Mothers were survivors of sexual violence too, navigating similar environments and oppression enacted by systemic violence and neoliberal ideologies (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017).

Upon learning and processing the generational and systemic sexual violence experienced by their Mother-Abuelas in Central America and the United States, many grew to understand their Abuela-Mother's unhealthy trauma responses as projection from unhealed trauma and how their Abuela-Mothers were denied safety and access to their own healing with sexual violence. For students in the study, conceptualizing and engaging with their Abuela-Mothers as complicated individuals who engaged in healthy and unhealthy behaviors allowed for students to harness resilience from their stories; unburden themselves of imposed expectations from their Abuela-Mothers; and allow capacity for accountability, repair, and boundary setting based on their individual needs and contexts that facilitated a form of healing. By positioning the Abuela-Mother-Daughter relationship as an ongoing site of intergenerational collective healing, U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors created healing through intergenerational connection and validation, which minimized isolation and created opportunities to identify areas to practice self-agency in healing from sexual violence *different* from their Abuela-Mothers.

Adding to the literature for Latina Motherscholars in higher education (Navarro-Cruz et al., 2021; Vasquez-Angeles, 2020; C. Vega, 2019), the findings provide insight into intergenerational healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* Motherscholar survivors in higher education. For example, the Motherscholar-Daughter relationship served as a site of repair, reclamation, and

a motivator to break cycles of generational sexual violence, pursue higher education as a means of social mobility, and model healing for their Daughters. U.S. *Centroamericana* Motherscholar survivors reflected heavily on their experiences as children and Motherscholars in processing and healing their experiences of sexual violence. Becoming Mothers created an opportunity to self-reflect on the violence enacted on them by their Abuela-Mothers and others through therapy, plática, and in parenting spaces. Embodying the role of Motherscholars, students sought to engage in healing through understanding their own trauma responses, coping with sexual violence, and finding healthy ways to manage the impacts of sexual violence on their body-mind-spirits.

Developing self-agency, intergenerational reflection and self-awareness, and reconnecting with nonviolent parenting as a form of healing, Motherscholar survivors in learning nonviolent parenting skills and perspectives, re-parented and soothed themselves. The experiences of teaching their Daughters how to advocate for themselves in school settings and resist machismo/marianismo and rigid gender expectations in family and community provided continuous opportunities for reflection and learning. By providing their Daughters age-appropriate consent education and modeling accountability, forgiveness, and vulnerability in their Mother-Daughter relationships, they created opportunities to re-learn knowledge and skills *collectively*. Healing sexual violence for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in the context of the Mother-Daughter relationship can be conceptualized as an ongoing dynamic site of learning not bound by time and led by a commitment to go inward reconnecting to body-mind-spirit continuously as described by *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). For student survivors in the study who did not identify as Mothers, baring witness to the reconnection and healing of *Centroamericana* Motherscholar

survivors during *plática* served as a site of inspiration, healing for future self, and a shift in possibilities for future making as Mothers, partners, and caretakers—a site of intergenerational wisdom as *collective regeneration* for sexual violence.

Complicating and adding to the literature on nonpunitive responses to sexual violence and healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors, women complicated the nonbinary narratives of survivor/perpetrator that often permeates dominant and carceral narratives of sexual violence response (E. Collins, 2016; Karunaratne, 2026; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez; 2026; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024; Lorenz et al., 2022; Shepp et al., 2023; Wooten, 2017). Expanding on Research Question 2 that explored how U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors engage healing, *Cigua Gyneaologies in Centroamericana Feminist Theory* moves us to resist narratives of a “perfect victim” that can often isolate and build rigid expectations for survivors in their experiences of sexual violence and healing (Alvarado, 2017). Analyzing the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors through *Centroamericana Feminist Theory* complicated the narratives of survivorship, identified structural root causes of sexual violence, and highlighted protentional sites and practices of intergenerational collective healing. Through processing and centering the Abuela-Mother-Daughter relationship as a site of harm *and* healing, the relationship proposes possibilities of repairing and healing sexual violence collectively that helps support the persistence of students in higher education outside of carceral and punitive logics (Karunaratne, 2026; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024). U.S. *Centroamericana* students are engaging healing through complicated perspectives of accountability and justice that provide unique implications for practice and research.

Rememoria: Healing as Resistance for U.S. Centroamericana Student Survivors

Centroamericana Feminist Theory centers *rememoria* as theorization and praxis that challenges erasure and presents a means of *regeneration* for Central American people (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026). Expanding on Research Question 2 that sought to explore how U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors engage healing, women in the study engaged healing through *rememoria* by making visible complex experiences of sexual violence and healing through re-narration and intergenerational storytelling. Resisting the erasure from contextual dominance of other Latine identified people and positioning healing from body-mind-spirit as *regeneration*, U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors positioned healing *as resistance*.

The dissertation findings confirm some of the literature on healing modalities for Women of Color student survivors (Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Espin, 1997; Facio & Lara, 2014; Gonzalez, 2009; Harris, 2024; Harris & Aguilar Marquez, 2026; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Medina, 2001; Medina & Gonzalez, 2019; Vidal-Ortiz, 2010). U.S. *Centroamericana* students are healing through disclosure, culturally affirming psychological care, somatic and body-based modalities, spiritual healing, land and nature-based healing, education efforts, and collective care. Women in the study were intentional about choosing what healing modalities felt supportive in their healing experiences while assessing for accessibility, sustainability, and impact on their body-mind-spirits. Seeking to challenge the race-neutral frameworks used in sexual violence research (Harris et al., 2021) and expand on the literature mentioned previously, the study found U.S. *Centroamericana* students are affirming their identities through several modalities of healing tied to deep *Centroamericana* genealogies.

First, the dissertation findings challenge the narratives of Central American people as “traumatized people” and positions U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in ecologies and

genealogies that generate love, futures, intergenerational wisdom, and place-based knowledge highlighted in *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026).

Expanding on the literature of Women of Color healing in higher education, U.S.

Centroamericana student survivors found that healing modalities grounded in Central American ontologies and epistemologies were effective at healing their experiences of violence on campus.

For example, students affirmed their experiences of healing in the study when identities, histories, and practices were grounded in the Central American Woman diaspora experience.

Placing healing as resistance within a *Centroamericana* Feminist genealogy empowered student survivors to explore and embody a resistance that is identity based, ancestral, intergenerational, and collective, and transgresses borders and time (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026).

Centroamericana Feminist Theory places healing at sites of intergenerational storytelling and *rememoria*. Alma (2024) posited, “Counter to such reification, *rememorar* [rememory] offers the reembodiment of love, cultural pleasure, and healing, thus giving new life to past and present communities” (Preface). Students re-narrated their testimonios of violence and made meaning of their realities through the cocreation of analysis with the researcher and other student survivors. By intentionally coming forward with their stories of violence and healing, they re-positioned their narratives as *testimonio*—a political act narrated as *Centroamericana* women bringing injustices to light to prevent sexual violence for others (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Carmona et al., 2018; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012).

Women in the study actively chose to center their body-mind-spirits and resist neoliberal and carceral responses to their experiences of healing by actively choosing joy and engaging in regenerative practices that provided symptom management. Students channeled their *Centroamericana* genealogies by refusing to be “boxed” into expectations at the intersection of

gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or Migrant status and by transforming their stories of violence into action by engaging in healing to prevent harm to others. In line with Cigua Gynealogies of resistance and as evidenced in Chapter 4 *Prologue: A Visit from the Cigua in the Garden*, U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors resist neoliberalism, erasure, and silencing by engaging in healing in relation to and with intergenerational experiences of *Centroamericana* women in diaspora as described in *Centroamericana Feminist Theory* (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026).

Expanding on the literature for Women of Color and healing in campus sexual violence (Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Gómez, 2020; Harris, 2021, 2024; Karunaratne, 2023b; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Poon Ghaffari, 2024; young, 2023), the findings suggest healing for U.S. *Centroamericanas* is grounded in relationality connected to place and collective care. *Centroamericana Feminist Theory* provides an analysis deeply connected to place in genealogy (Abrego, 2020; Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007; Hernández-Linares, 2015; Hoppe, 2024; Mena, 2023; Menchú, 2010; Padilla, 2012, 2018; Portillo, 2015; Ramsey, 2024; Rodríguez, 2008). The findings highlighted how students actively invoke pueblo memory to resource medicine for body-mind-spirit that include water, air, trees, and plants, and sounds and pursue ancestral trips to Central America in hopes of re-narrating their relationships with ancestral land and waters and intergenerational trauma in their genealogies. Resisting the pathologization and western notions of individual healing, students recognized the power of healing when connected with other individuals. By bearing witness to the healing of others, students moved to integrate wisdom, lessons, and creative ideas for healing grounded in a collective vision of healed futures.

The study findings highlight healing through reconnection and self-agency and center how students work to not avoid their experiences of violence but instead seek to take responsibility for their healing by navigating self-acceptance, self-esteem, and awareness of their body-mind-spirits. U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in moving through truth which include histories of violence and learning of Central American epistemologies, integrated learning and regenerated continually as worldmaking for their genealogies—an act of resistance through *rememoria* (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017).

Elaborating on Research Question 2 that explored how U.S. *Centroamericana* students engage healing, using a *Centroamericana* Feminist Grounded- Methodology resisted generalizations of the experiences of campus student survivors by complicating the heavy quantitative research in campus sexual violence (DeLoveh & Cattaneo, 2017; Linder et al., 2020; Moylan & Javorka, 2020; Moylan et al., 2021; Sabina & Ho, 2014) and further expanded on healing methodologies for U.S. *Centroamericana* students. Centering the body-mind-spirit of student survivors and me as the researcher, a methodology that centered the healing of all collaborators in the dissertation study was regenerative and cultivated deep purpose for everyone involved. For example, the findings highlight the importance of collaborators engaging in healing practices while engaging in research to mitigate potential re-traumatization.

Centroamericana Feminist Theory positions collaborators and researchers as reciprocal cocreators of knowledge and active storytellers in *rememoria* (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). Collaborators positioned relationships as the sacred site of healing and resisted the extractive, colonial, and invasive methodologies of the neoliberal academy by intentionally using the research space as a tool of reclamation and learning. For example, by honoring and listening to sacred tears in plática, students engaged in kinship and re-learned to

hold space and collective care. Students collectively became containers to hold silence and embodied reactions to pain and healing. In bearing witness to testimonio as narrated by everyone without judgement and interruptions, student survivors collectively affirmed their humanity by making collective pain and healing visible.

Additionally, the dissertation findings expand the literature on healing as activism for student survivors in higher education (Gómez & Gobin, 2020; Harris, 2020; Karunaratne, 2023c; Linder et al., 2016; Rodenhizer et al., 2021; Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). Positioning *rememoria* as healing as resistance, U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors engaged healing in relation and in solidarity with Indigenous, Black and People of Color communities.

Centroamericana Feminist Theory positions futures of solidarities with Indigenous, Black, and People of Color as interconnected and necessary in resistance to neoliberalism, capitalism, and ongoing U.S. imperialism (Abrego, 2020; Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007; Hernández-Linares, 2015; Hoppe, 2024; Mena, 2023; Menchú, 2010; Padilla, 2012, 2018; Portillo, 2015; Ramsey, 2024; Rodríguez, 2008). Women in the study were motivated and persisted in their healing through finding solidarities among connected injustices and experiences of oppression. For example, students were inspired and pursued further learning of histories of violence and solidarity with oppressed people through course curriculum and research. Engaging in collective, cocurricular activities and spaces, students learned how to advocate, organize, and move toward liberatory practices in their education that positioned students as political, active, and worldmaking descendants within their genealogies. Through practicing kinship, love, and care for one another in their peer spaces, U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors positioned their healing as a refusal to engage in exploitative relationships, engage in resource extraction from peers and their families, and

intentionally acted to cultivate a politic of collective healing grounded in *Centroamericana* resistance (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). For student survivors in the study, healing their body-mind-spirits was part of the greater project of dismantling oppression and building healthy futures collectively.

Conclusion of Discussion

The framework of *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory is a powerful tool for understanding the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in higher education (Abrego, 2020; Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007; Hernández-Linares, 2015; Hoppe, 2024; Mena, 2023; Menchú, 2010; Padilla, 2012, 2018; Portillo, 2015; Ramsey, 2024; Rodríguez, 2008). Understanding the intersectionality of student survivors in the study highlighted the impacts of sexual violence and challenges with help seeking when accessing support for healing. Healing for women engaged healing from multiple forms of violence (e.g., machismo, sexism, xenophobia, systemic poverty) that shaped their self-perceptions, visibility, and feelings of self-worth. Through positioning their healing as resistance and providing insight into possibilities of healing like the Abuela-Mother-Daughter relationship, students reclaimed narratives through *rememoria* that previously positioned them as “traumatized people” (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). By using a *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory framework, U.S *Centroamericana* student survivors engaged in reclamation of *Centroamericana* Healing Genealogies and created possibilities for interconnected solidarities.

Implications

What if the first step is to correct the record? What if we name how we got here — the source, the actors, and the experiences still in our bodies, now turned to fire in

our blood, fog in our heads, splinters in our hearts? What if we reject what we were told, the internalization of a fatal flaw or weakness, the false fear of a demon at our backs, counting push-ups in the corner, and instead tell the truth.

—Hoppe, 2024, p. 155

Central American scholars, writers, and creatives have continued to center the importance of *rememoria* in Central American stories of collective violence and healing as worldmaking and regeneration (Abrego, 2020; Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Boj Lopez, 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007; Hernández-Linares, 2015; Hoppe, 2024; Mena, 2023; Menchú, 2010; Padilla, 2012, 2018; Portillo, 2015; Ramsey, 2024; Rodríguez, 2008). Positioning this dissertation study as a collaborative storytelling project of visibility, reclamation, healing, and resistance, I introduce the framework of *Centroamericana Healing Genealogies* to offer teachings, wisdoms, and lessons for supporting U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in higher education. Grounded in the testimonios of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in conversation with Central American scholars, writers, and creatives, *Centroamericana Healing Genealogies* offers implications for practice, policy, and research highlighting the importance of *rememoria* (*re-memory*) in sexual violence prevention and response, healing-centered practices and policies, reconnection to genealogies for survivors, and the cultivation of kinship in relation and solidarity with other Indigenous, Black and Communities of Color.

Healing Praxis in Sexual Violence Response and Prevention (Practice and Policy)

In this section, I provide insight into the powerful process of recentring healing and *rememoria* in responding and preventing sexual violence for U.S. *Centroamericana* students (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). As previously discussed, *rememoria* is a powerful praxis grounded in the genealogies of student survivors connected to

intergenerational and relational spaces of resistance. Centering healing as a core foundation of praxis, the dissertation invites practitioners and policymakers to consider the importance of re-narration for U.S. student survivors as a means to visibility and justice from sexual violence. Healing through *Centroamericana* Healing Genealogies is a political act of rejoining body-mind-spirit and wholistic regeneration. If practitioners and policymakers are committed to the wholistic healing of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors, then policies and practices must commit to creating possibilities of regeneration in higher education.

Recentring Re-Narration in Policy. Re-narration for student survivors cultivated a container that empowered students to re-narrate their own stories on their own terms that explicitly named the genealogies, histories, the violence, the healing, people, and places that have shaped their current realities. It provided a means for students to move through trauma to engage healing and make meaning of their responsibilities and agency with setting the “record” right by naming who was responsible for the harm caused to them and what was needed to move forward. Re-narration provided the space for themselves and others to practice of form of accountability, where collectively, women in the space could name the systems and root causes of sexual violence. More importantly, collaborators owned their narratives and outlined their expectations of how their narratives would be used in the process. Some students sought to be heard, others wanted to feel validated in their realities, and others did not want to engage in carceral systems of reporting. Thus, the space of re-narration became the pathway to take power back in their experiences without a preset outcome.

Higher education practitioners and policymakers must consider how policies on mandated reporting and compelled disclosures in compliance-focused environments directly impact the agency that students have over their narratives of violence and healing (E. Collins,

2016; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez; 2026; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024; Lorenz et al., 2022; Shepp et al., 2023; Wooten, 2017). Compliance and dominant mechanisms of narration center “one truth” and rely on the consistency of a narrative of sexual violence to analyze, legitimize, and believe survivors to respond and enact accountability (Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024). Students’ credibility is policed and assigned based on how detailed and consistent the facts, realities, and timelines are organized by investigators. Policies that remove agency, betray trust, and force students into carceral responses of reporting or disclosing harm disrupt student’s experiences with re-narration and create barriers to accessing healing opportunities. For example, centering policies that allow for re-narration for student survivors that do not trigger mandatory reporting in university settings can be a means in creating containers for students to reclaim agency. This can include policies that recenter restorative practices, accountability processes that do not rely on carceral/punitive outcomes in adjudication processes, and practices that do not force students into binary decisions without considering how they would like to move through their healing processes with individuals that have harmed them.

The dissertation findings and discussion provided insight into the systemic violence and healing genealogies of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors (e.g., epistemologies, healing practices) and provide policymakers guidance on the types of interim measures and accommodations they can provide to students through policy. For example, creating policies that provide financial funding for students to pursue travel to their ancestral lands for healing ceremonies and somatic therapies as a form of institutional repair and restoration. Cobuilding creative responses grounded in the genealogies of students could provide possibilities of regeneration and healing outside of compliance driven frameworks and increase the likelihood of student survivors disclosing their experiences of sexual violence to seek support.

Policymakers must consider how campus climate impacts the healing and well-being of U.S. *Centroamericana* students as they are shaped by multiple forms of domination (Harris & Aguilar Marquez, 2024). For example, students in the study were heavily impacted by contextual dominance of other Latino identified groups as well as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations on and near *Acorn University*. In mitigating the contextual dominance of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors, universities can make efforts to outreach to Central American student survivors, organizations, and departments to involve in policy development and implementation that complicates general “Latine” and Hispanic-Serving Institution inclusion efforts. If university systems are engaging or cultivating relationships with carceral agencies (e.g., ICE, on- and off-campus police, Child Protective Services, Sheriff’s office, political figures) that seek to harm student survivors and their families, university responses systems committed to U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors must address how adjacent nonsexual violence policies may further violate students’ body-mind-spirits. For example, universities can work to provide students with immigration support through legal services, access to U-Visas, and immigration-based safety planning and ensure students’ basic needs are met regarding immigration deportation risks.

If U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors are engaging in forms of campus activism as *healing and resistance* as outlined in the dissertation findings, one may wonder how student conduct policies or militarized campus police responses perpetuate further harm, betrayal, disconnection in sense of belonging and inequities when seeking to punish student survivors for engaging in critical thinking when responding to systemic violence and inequities on their campuses. If U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors are healing with Indigenous land and waters, one may ask how university systems and policies that seek to harm the earth and erase

Indigenous sovereignty through continuous settler-colonialism harm their access to healing. Higher education policymakers must consider how approaches and policies interact with the intersectionality of U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in developing sexual violence response mechanisms. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color activist, scholars, and survivors continuously remind us that when we develop realities, policies, and structures centered around the most oppressed and vulnerable, everyone benefits (INCITE!, 2016).

The findings and discussion bring insight into the complexities of violence by dismantling and complicating the binary narrative of survivor/harmer (Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2026; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024). Students, in their processing of the Abuela-Mother-Daughter relationships and views of justice and accountability, highlighted the learned and systemic consequences of harm when not healed or addressed holistically (E. Collins, 2016; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2026; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024; Lorenz et al., 2022; Shepp et al., 2023; Wooten, 2017). Response and adjudication policies, like the current U.S. Title IX federal framework, create barriers and perpetuate harm to survivors who engage in harmful behavior without creating spaces for them to process intergenerational, systemic, and historical trauma that impacts their experiences. For example, one may wonder how the framework of re-narration, analysis of historical violence, and holistic support for everyone involved in the process (e.g., complainants, respondents, witnesses, impacted community) can be conceptualized in policy frameworks that seek to meet the needs of each party. Policymakers must consider creative problem solving and build multiresponse efforts that serve the needs of all individuals involved without ostracizing and or replicating punitive harm through policies that perpetuate similar dynamics that institutions are working to eradicate (Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2026; Linder, Karunaratne et al., 2024).

For survivor support practitioners like campus therapists, advocates, and administrators, they should consider the gradual, intentional, and relational process of re-narration that emerges from multiple sessions and relationship building with student survivors. Policies that impose time limits on counseling and advocacy sessions or create barriers for student survivors by referring them “off campus” for services without navigation support can disrupt processes of re-narration that are healing for U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. In engaging her *Centroamericana* Healing Genealogy, student survivor Aurora mentioned how listening to the sound of water during her course examinations alleviated anxiety, stress, and overwhelm as it provided her with calm memories of her pueblo back in the Isthmus. When she approached faculty about this accommodation, she was advised it was against university policy in that students could not have earphones during examinations. Universities must be open to thinking creatively to integrate healing genealogies of student survivors within educational settings that support their persistence. *Centroamericana* Feminist scholars inspire educators to recenter strategies of love, creation, and care in future making; thus, policymakers can work toward developing policies that love and care for U.S. *Centroamericana* students in higher education.

Recentering Healing in Prevention Education, Survivor Support and Teaching. My Chatina-Zapotec elders teach me that we cannot heal an illness without understanding the root cause of the illness and part of understanding the root of illness is also seeking to understand the antidote to such illness. As described by *Centroamericana* Feminist scholars and other Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, sexual violence at its root is the manifestation of ongoing conquest, colonialism, enslavement, capitalism, neoliberalism—an illness maintained by systems, ideologies, and practices in the United States and by imperial logics (Deer, 2015; INCITE!, 2016; Padilla, 2018; Simpson, 2007; young, 2023). The antidote to sexual violence can

be found in the genealogies of student survivors connected to knowledge systems, stories, ancestral lands, and ways of being that hold collective people, land, and waters, and our more-than-human relatives sacred. *Centroamericana* Healing Genealogies teaches educators and practitioners that we must navigate and teach the intergenerational historical context of sexual violence in student survivor genealogies (i.e., the root of illness) *and* teach resistance, coping skills, healing practices (i.e., the medicine) found in student survivor genealogies to regenerate and re-narrate complex histories and realities.

Higher education leaders, practitioners, and educators can support U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors by recentering strategies for healing tied to individual and collective *Centroamericana* lineages, traditions, ancestral knowledge, lands, and waters that resist neoliberal and settler-colonial logics. Working to employ and recruit prevention education and survivor support practitioners that identity as Central American or are knowledgeable in Central American diaspora realities can address barriers that student survivors face in feeling affirmed by services on campus. Student survivors felt affirmed and supported with therapist, instructors, and peers who were knowledgeable about sexual relationship violence in relation to the experiences of Central American Women in the Isthmus and diaspora. Students felt that having to explain their experiences with identity *and* sexual violence was labor intensive and having researchers, faculty, and practitioners aware of historical context was helpful in minimizing barriers to care. Students often cocreated strategies and shared healing knowledge from each other's genealogies to creatively address symptoms, feelings, and processes experiences by student survivors.

Faculty and practitioners can consider how re-narration of Central American experiences for student survivors in courses, prevention spaces, and cocurricular activities can cultivate intergenerational storytelling and healing engagement for students and families. For

preventionists and advocates, they should consider creating prevention and healing programming that centers discussion, readings, storywork, dialogue, speakers (e.g., elders and young adults), and modalities (e.g., gardening, poetry writing, somatic movement) grounded in *Centroamericana* genealogies. Particularly, for Motherscholars, developing intergenerational collective healing spaces where they feel empowered and welcomed to bring their children to cocurricular educational and healing spaces can further facilitate healing in their genealogies. There were several times during the dissertation project where I offered to coordinate childcare, where collaborators brought their children to plática, and where their children greeted me during Zoom calls in plática as we managed to build the research protocols around their schedules and realities.

Women in the study, when asked to provide suggestions to higher education leaders and faculty regarding engaging their healing genealogies, provided an array of practices, including, but not limited to, projects and pedagogies that positioned them in intergenerational lineages of Central American histories and healing spaces that engaged storytelling tied to places in the Isthmus. The dissertation findings invite educators and faculty in education, Ethnic Studies, and other academic departments to cultivate their responsibility in creating spaces of healing in the academy. Resisting neoliberal pedagogies of transactional and “banking system” education, the findings share knowledge and wisdom for how to cultivate regenerative pedagogies that support the learning, development, and wholistic wellbeing of students. Course projects and cocurricular education spaces inviting students and faculty to learn about pueblo histories, spiritual practices, engaging in oral history projects with elders and community organizers, connecting with guest speakers in their coursework, and engaging in service with local community organizations that support social movements have the potential to recenter student survivors healing genealogies.

Students suggested learning and cocreating spaces that leaned deeper into political education that transformed their experience of sexual violence into opportunities of solidarity with other Black, Indigenous, and People of Color healing genealogies of resistance. Additionally, students found it helpful when faculty included sexual violence and campus support resources in the syllabi while including readings and content that addressed gender-based violence in course work to make visible Central American gender-based violence.

Faculty and practitioners have an opportunity to engage *Centroamericana* Healing Genealogies by teaching *with* nature, land, and waters, and Indigenous People and place in general curricula. Students suggested taking courses and lectures outside while learning with local Indigenous plants, land, and waters. As highlighted in the findings and discussion, students actively regenerated when engaging with campus gardens, water, and green spaces. Students found that discussing heavy topics and themes related to violence while in nature did not feel as heavy, confined, and boxed as sitting in stale classrooms with limited natural light. Indigenous and *Centroamericana* ontologies and epistemologies of healing for student survivors' positions land and waters, plant relatives, and more-than-human relatives as healers in collective trauma (Aguilar Marquez, 2024; Karunaratne & Aguilar Marquez, 2024).

Lastly, the dissertation findings and discussion move toward examining more deeply how cultures of machismo/marianismo and sexism actively harm and perpetuate sexual violence against U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors in higher education and more broadly (Cummings et al., 2013; Harris, 2024; Maryn & Dover, 2022). For example, women in the study described how the lack of sexual education knowledge stemming from intergenerational trauma and conservative religious ideologies impacted their ability to identify sexual violence as it was happening. Many described the lack of sexual health education in their K–12 schooling and

familial and community systems while learning about sexual education in their healing. Additionally, most of the sexual violence that was experienced by U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors was perpetuated by Central American, Mexican, and Latino-identified cis men who engaged in unhealthy machista ideologies and who were *also* impacted by generational sexual violence and migration trauma. Educators, policymakers, and practitioners must consider earlier interventions for sexual health education for students before they enter college to increase knowledge of consent, healthy relationships, conflict management, sexism, and other relevant topics to prevent violence during college. Centering *Centroamericana* Healing Genealogies in prevention can invite Central American and other Latino-identified cis men to engage in discussions relating to their genealogies that may help them identify cycles of learned violence and unhealthy/abusive behaviors in relationships, learn consent practices, and unpack generational trauma that they may be projecting in their intimate relationships that harm others. By centering Healing Genealogies in practice and policy, educators, practitioners, and policymakers can continue to work toward repairing and regenerating body-mind-spirit for every individual impacted by sexual violence.

Healing Genealogies in Theory and Research

Recentring *healing* as theory, framework, and research methodology highlights implications for how researchers can develop humanistic and relational frameworks and methodologies that affirm identities, sustain care, and cultivate resistance for all collaborators involved. Theoretical implications for the research findings and discussion expand and complicate the framework and project of *mestizaje* and Latinidad while expanding the framework of intersectionality (Artiaga, 2020; Blackwell et al., 2017; Cáceres Flores, 2007; López Oro, 2021; Padilla, 2018) as it centers and analyzes the lived experiences of diverse

Central American women. The *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology served as an analytical framework that resisted race-evasive frameworks and centered power-conscious insights (Harris, 2024; Harris & Linder, 2017; Linder, 2018). Critical scholars of sexual violence research have provided reminders of the importance of being critical and aware of how intersecting systems of domination create different realities and challenges for Women of Color in academia (Harris & Linder, 2017; Harris, 2020). Using *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory provided insight into highlighting how the social positionalities of U.S. *Centroamericana* students in higher education are impacted by sexual violence across nation-state borders and *differ* from other Latinas, Chicanas, and Women of Color impacted by sexual violence. Although students positioned healing as a form of resistance and justice, further research on how U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors are conceptualizing justice and accountability in relation to policy responses and campus systems could be helpful in providing recommendations for responding to violence.

Additional theoretical implications for this study further understanding of healing theories (French et al., 2020; Ginwright, 2016; Karunaratne, 2023c) that move researchers and scholars to develop other forms of healing connected to genealogies. Developing and using a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded Methodology provided insight into the possibilities of healing *while* facilitating research on sexual violence. Positioning research as ceremony for collaborators, the research design centered the needs of collaborators first and kept sacred healing genealogies as collaborators engaged in acts of refusal as previously outlined in the dissertation (Tuck & Yang, 2014a, 2014b). The study affirmed and expanded on the literature to include healing methodologies for U.S. *Centroamericana* students in higher education that can be used to elevate the needs of Central American people while facilitating regeneration as

outlines by *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). By providing continuous care, psychoeducation, and resources support to student collaborators as data generation occurred, methodologies became not only tools of data generation, but also tools for healing, reconnection, and movement through sexual violence experiences that lead to possibilities. For example, student survivors in the study found validation, visibility, and purpose in their experiences of sexual violence when sharing and witnessing testimonio individually and collectively through *Centroamericana* grounded plática methodology (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). Because of contextual dominance and the shame surrounding sexual violence, students felt isolation, invisibility, and loneliness in their experiences of sexual violence. As students began to share their stories through plática, they began to share gratitude and empowerment with having a space *to be heard and bear witness* to stories with intention, love, and care. As Aurora shared:

It's nice to be able to talk about these things with someone who understands it in a deep and meaningful way. I appreciate that a lot. I really can't wait to read your research, because I know it's going to be very powerful for other Central American women . . . thank you for giving this, for bringing the space that we didn't have before, and now we do because of you, so thank you.

In sharing their experiences of sexual violence and healing through plática, students created opportunities to “take power back” in narratives that silenced them as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. Irene shared, “You’re giving me the space to be able to take control of this situation, for me to be able to just express myself, whatever is important to me.” Centering intergenerational memory in their genealogies, students shared that they had never been given an

opportunity to share “out loud” the experiences of their ancestors, elders, and siblings in connection to their own stories.

Women in the study shared, in collective plática, seeing a study on U.S. *Centroamericana* students that focused specifically on testimonios of sexual violence and healing made them feel “worthy” of feeling important and seen. Luna shared:

I was really hesitant because I felt like I wasn’t worthy of sharing my story. But now that I’m here, she [Karla] saw me . . . I went to her for help, and honestly, I still would have been in it if Karla hadn’t started her research . . . I want you to let people know that your research saved me. That your study saved me. I would still be in a dark place if it wasn’t for you and our conversations.

For Luna and other students in the study, engaging in plática that allowed for the mutual sharing of testimonio and psychoeducation on sexual violence facilitated healing by creating a container for releasing shame and self-judgment in their experiences of sexual violence. Additionally, learning about trauma bonds led students to understand why they stayed in abusive relationships, as Luna added, “I stayed because of not wanting to lose someone, because I’ve already lost so many people before . . . it was a traumatizing situation, trauma bonds keep you stuck with someone else.” Students felt empowered and purposeful in sharing their testimonio, acknowledging that their stories were going to be helpful in advocating and helping other *Centroamericana* women impacted by sexual violence—a reciprocal relationship of self-efficacy. During the final collective plática, student survivors shared feeling “seen,” “not alone” and stating that their experiences “were not in vain.” Aurora stated, by sharing stories, “We learn and we acknowledge it, so it becomes real. When it becomes real, we can fight it. We can come together and find solutions.”

Centering embodied practices of healing during plática became critical to cultivating safety and vulnerability with students. Holding sacred the practice of crying through the ancestral teachings of *sacred tears*—Indigenous knowledge that honors tears as carriers of stories that are worthy of being told, heard and tended to—became a pathway for students to heal individually and collectively. In modeling vulnerability and affirming my own experiences with embodied healing, I let myself cry with student survivors during plática, which facilitated further visibility, affirmation, and genuine exchanges of healing energy reciprocally. For example, upon normalizing the practice of crying through affirming body-mind-spirit reactions to processing emotions, students felt less shame in engaging in crying during plática as they shared their testimonios. Students gradually began to apologize *less* for crying during plática, resisting feelings of shame associated with “taking up space” and, instead, validated and supported one another as moments of crying began and closed. Students would physically stop crying when they were ready, use humor to transition out of crying, or use phrases like “okay, I’m finished crying now” to show gratitude to others for letting them release their embodied stories.

As student survivors and I cultivated trust and safety through plática, many began to feel more empowered in asking for their needs to coregulate and ground themselves. As a researcher and educator in sexual violence, being attuned to asking for or giving hugs through an affirmative consent process allows individuals to experience agency in their bodies and recenter concepts of permission. Modeling consensual behavior with students during plática became a pathway for students to ask for what they needed to feel supported. For example, after an intense plática in the garden where we cried together, Daisy asked if she could hug me to ground herself before class. The following is an excerpt of a memo that detailed our final one-on-one plática:

As we finished, Daisy told me that she's learning to be more of a *hugger*. In that moment she asked for what she needed directly—a hug. We held each other with the tightest embrace and stood under the trees, crying, smiling for a couple seconds. She thanked me and rushed off to class smiling in excitement about her future and plans after graduation. I sat down and let my emotions and tears flow. I reflected on how much she's opened up to me, others, and grown to be vulnerable with her needs during these past months. Healing means asking for what we need, and that need being met. In collective healing, that need is reciprocal, a gift—I needed that hug, too.

There were several instances throughout the research process when students took lead with guiding the space and body-based activities that allowed for coregulation as we spent more time together. This included verbalizing breaks during plática, stretching, guiding walks, stopping to take a breath and engage with trees and plants, asking for tissues in case they cried, and rescheduling plática when they needed time for themselves. During the collective plática, students, upon seeing each other respond to each other's testimonio, began to offer support, hugs, wisdoms, and held each other's hands when describing experiences that felt heavy in their body-mind-spirit. The dissertation findings and discussion move us to honor and center the self-agency that student survivors of sexual violence exercise when collaborating and participating in campus sexual violence research. Disrupting paternalistic and colonial frameworks of research (L. T. Smith, 2012), the study highlights how campus sexual violence researchers and scholars must resist making decisions on behalf or “in protection” of student survivors and instead cultivate and build reciprocal relationships that position student survivors as cocreators and producers of knowledge and theory. This includes resisting and refusing to replicate paternalistic and violent Institutional Review Board (IRB) recommendations, policies, and reviews that create hetero-

patriarchal power dynamics with student survivors instead of centering their self-determination, dignity, and care.

The methodology in this study was heavily shaped by *Centroamericana* spiritual epistemologies as the protocol invited ceremonial practices, knowledge, and readings from *Centroamericana* writers, activists, and healers (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). For example, during plática, students would invoke their spirit ancestors when feeling pained and overwhelmed and called in when students wanted to feel connection, needed guidance, and validation in not “carrying pain alone.” Students were intentionally led through prompts, activities, and guided meditations that invoked spirit ancestors, elders, descendants, land and nature, and memories tied to our genealogies. As student survivors in the space, we were all invited to “surrender” pain, make meaning, and affirm each other collectively as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors.

Centroamericana Feminist-Grounded collective plática engaged healing for many students through the sharing of healing artifacts, storytelling and the cobuilding of story and knowledge together (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017). Adding to the literature on healing methodologies that center intergenerational meaning making, students shared through storytelling the power of collective healing for each other as *Centroamericana* women. Upon hearing the testimonios of other U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors, women began acknowledging their healing from sexual violence as intertwined with healing from other forms of violence in need of collective validation. For example, Luna shared perspectives on how sexual violence impacted her intimate relationships adversely; she stated, “I just never felt like I belonged anywhere. I didn’t feel like I belonged at home with my family and with the situation . . . I was really ashamed of what I was going through.” Upon other students hearing

Luna's testimonio with sexual violence, students moved to acknowledge her bravery with sharing, empathized with going through similar experiences, and verbally and physically affirmed that she belonged *to them*. For Luna and others, many shared they had rarely received words of affirmation regarding their experiences with sexual violence and healing which empowered and motivated students to continue to be vulnerable and commit to their continuous healing collectively. In using a methodology grounded in *Centroamericana* Feminist realities, I, the researcher, felt affirmed, held, and motivated to continue centering my healing as a survivor of sexual violence. I felt empowered to continue engaging research and methodology that refuses erasure in the academy and instead centers U.S. *Centroamericana*-Chatina-Zapotec ontology, epistemology, axiology.

Lastly, students through a *Centroamericana* Feminist-Grounded methodology were able to verbalize their realities, feel affirmed in their identities, and cobuild collective futures of hope and resilience with one another as felt in *Centroamericana* Feminist Theory (Alma, 2024; Alma & Hernández, 2026; Alvarado et al., 2017; Padilla, 2018). For example, toward the end of the collective plática, students began to verbalize a *shared* identity of solidarity in their experiences of sexual violence and healing as U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors. Aurora, in affirming the collective healing of students in the plática, shared, "We're strong women here, all of us. No matter what we've been through, we're strong Centroamericanas. We don't deserve what we've been through, but we deserve to heal." Coqueta shared, "It's really powerful that you're willing to share that because a lot of times, a lot of *us* are sitting very heartbroken and very ashamed, and your poetry reflects your journey." Using words like "us," "we," "our futures," there was a collective commitment and acknowledgement for individual *and* collective experiences of healing. Through the shared testimonios of U.S. *Centroamericana* survivorhoodship and the

challenges that come with healing intergenerational sexual violence, students built their own intentions with healing collectively. Aurora shared, “Seeing everyone trying to do it [healing] is very inspiring to see it . . . that I can do it too, that *we* all can break those curses.” Women shared that they had never experienced a plática on sexual violence facilitated within their *Centroamericana* identities and found it “very healing.” They described the collective plática space as feeling “held,” “hopeful,” “reconnected,” “lighter,” and “inspiring” as they shared their experiences toward the end of the collective plática.

Further research on healing methodologies and genealogies can bring insight into practices and frameworks that sustain, maintain, and cultivate care for collaborators in research including the researcher themselves. During study data generation, the method of memo became a place of theorization for how researchers spiritually sustain and regenerate as we journey through trauma, pain, social death, grief, and extraction in higher education (refer to Appendix C, Memo on Spiritual Care in Data Generation and Engagement). Meixi et al. (2022) stated researchers should center kinship, relational practices of care, storytelling, humor, dreams, and cocreation of knowledge to “persevere and protect ourselves” (p. 248) in academic and research settings that can be extractive, heavy, and transactional. Moreover, Indigenous scholars continue to center the importance of acknowledging, in pedagogies and methodologies of care, the gifts collaborators give researchers are sacred stories, feedback, and insights from their lived experiences. U.S. Central American scholars, researchers, student survivors, and communities are deserving of care, kinship, and love centered on our own ontoepistemological practices and genealogies that continually cultivate regeneration.

Additionally, findings and discussion from this study highlight how U.S. *Centroamericana* student survivors engage healing through place and methodologies, and with

local Indigenous land and waters. Centering healing as resistance and in solidarity with decolonial and anti-imperialist movements, this dissertation moves us as researchers and educators to reflect on our own relationships with Indigenous People and place in higher education. As Central American people in diaspora with diverse lived experiences and positionalities, Central American scholars have continued to center how we engage settler-colonial logics, erasure, and solidarities in relation to Indigenous People (Blackwell et al., 2017). Further research on sexual violence in relation to healing genealogies and kinship are critical to dismantling colonial and oppressive structures in higher education that perpetuate erasure. By confronting heteropatriarchy and settler-colonialism in higher education as a form of sexual and gender-based violence, researchers and scholars can “assist in creating systems that are meant to heal and recover our families, communities and practices of belonging” (Vaughn, 2022, p. 147). By building healthier models of prevention and support for sexual violence in academia and resisting settler values that are meant to “divide and separate people,” Indigenous and Central American genealogies can teach us about kinship, social responsibility and commitment to “restoring land, people and environment” (Vaughn, 2022, p. 150).

Central American scholars in solidarity with Indigenous scholars require that all scholars ask ourselves what it means to be on native lands as we research and cocreate knowledge with Central American people in the United States and globally. We must ask ourselves how our research methodologies and frameworks can work to support the sovereignty, repatriation, and self-determination of Indigenous people at our institutions and research sites. Indigenous scholars (e.g., Sepulveda, 2018) have urged scholars to continue to reflect on, “What would it mean for a settler speaker of a land acknowledgement to say . . . I am a visitor, and I hope to become a proper guest?” (Stewart-Ambo & Yang, 2021, p. 34). As we engage *Centroamericana*

Healing Genealogies in sexual violence response and prevention, we are invited to center relationality through a reflexive praxis and interconnected resistance.

Conclusion

Central American author, Jessica Hoppe (2024), teaches, “Recovery is a process of narration, a story we write to remember all we’ve forgotten, to challenge what has been denied and erased and stolen. Owning your true story can make you whole, and wholeness is the definition of healing” (p. 178). As I reflected on this study, I held close to my heart the manifestations, prayers, affirmations, and visions of healed futures spoken out loud by the intergenerational survivors who shared their testimonios in flesh, spirit, and memory. Healing is possible and *Centroamericana* Healing Genealogies provide us with analytical tools, context, histories, and practices to continue to push for realities and systems that love us back and create futures of wholeness. Central American scholar Carla Macal stated, intergenerational trauma is passed on, but so are cultural traditions, memory, and resiliency” (as cited in Alma & Hernández, 2026, p. 324). I am reminded about how much healing is possible when *Centroamericana* survivors move with intention, bravery, love, *confianza*, and a commitment to each other and our connected *futuros*.

A Closing Offering | Una Ofrenda:

“ . . . we are *constructoras*.

We are makers of life,
shapers of futures,
healers of pasts,
and changers of difficult and at times tyrannical realities.”

(Alma & Hernández, 2026, p. 18)



Sanación [Healing], by Salvadorian Artist Margoth Abrego

APPENDICES

Appendix A: I Am Poem Exercise

I AM FROM POEM

REFLECTION EXERCISE AND TEAM CONNECTION ACTIVITY

BE EQUITABLE

This activity is intended to build community and connection. As a team we will share written narratives that represent our identities, cultures, origin stories, places and people of whom we're from. During this activity we encourage you to go deep into personal reflection and be as vulnerable as you feel comfortable.



Reflect on the following questions: *Who am I?, Who am I from?, Where am I from?*

Write your narrative in first person, leading with, "I am..." and "I am from..." throughout the narrative. Bring your narrative with you to team time

As you complete your narrative, consider:

- Your values.
- Childhood memories and cultural practices, norms, familial quotes.
- People, ancestors who have impacted your life.
- Your faith, spirituality, or other practices that keep you grounded.
- Your purpose, interests, gifts.
- Things you enjoy doing, that bring you joy.
- Places that hold special and joyful feelings and memories

This activity is adapted from George Ella Lyon's, "I am from..." poem.

During our time together we will share our narratives in small groups and then reflect on the experience as a large group with the following questions:

- What was it like to experience this exercise?
- How might understanding the history and perspectives of others support your work in centering equity?
- What are you bringing forward from this exercise into your role, team, workplace, communities of impact?

Thank you for your engagement and investment in yourself and our team. Please reach out to your people leader if you have any questions.

I Am From Poem

Use this template to draft your poem, and then write a final draft to share on blank paper.

I am from _____
(specific ordinary item)

From _____ and _____
(product name) (product name)

I am from the _____
(home description)

_____, _____, _____
(adjective) (adjective) (sensory detail)

I am from _____,
(plant, flower, natural item)

(description of above item)

I'm from _____ and _____
(family tradition) (family trait)

From _____ and _____
(name of family member) (another family name)

I'm from the _____ and _____
(description of family tendency) (another one)

From _____ and _____
(something you were told as a child) (another)

I'm from _____,
(representation of religion or lack of), (further description)

I'm from _____
(place of birth and family ancestry)

_____, _____
(a food item that represents your family) (another one)

From the _____
(specific family story about a specific person and detail)

The _____
(another detail of another family member)

(location of family pictures, mementos, archives)

(line explaining the importance of family items)

Original Poem: Where I'm From <i>By George Ella Lyon</i> I am from clothespins, from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride. I am from the dirt under the back porch. (Black, glistening, it tasted like beets.) I am from the forsythia bush the Dutch elm whose long-gone limbs I remember as if they were my own. I'm from fudge and eyeglasses, from Imogene and Alafair. I'm from the know-it-alls and the pass-it-ons, from Perk up! and Pipe down! I'm from He restoreth my soul with a cottonball lamb and ten verses I can say myself. I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch, fried corn and strong coffee. From the finger my grandfather lost to the auger, the eye my father shut to keep his sight. Under my bed was a dress box spilling old pictures, a sift of lost faces to drift beneath my dreams. I am from those moments-- snapped before I budded -- leaf-fall from the family tree.	Model Poem: Where I'm From <i>By Ms. Vaca</i> I am from bookshelves, from vinegar and green detergent. I am from the dog hair in every corner (Yellow, abundant, the vacuum could never get it all.) I am from azaleas the magnolia tree whose leaves crunched under my feet like snow every fall. I'm from puzzles and sunburns, from Dorothy Ann and Mary Christine Catherine I'm from reading and road trips From "Please watch your brother" and "Don't let your brother hit you!" I'm from Easter sunrises and Iowa churches at Christmas I'm from Alexandria and the Rileys, Sterzing's potato chips and sponge candy. From my Air Force dad's refusal to go to Vietnam, from my mom's leaving home at 17. On a low shelf in my new house is a stack of photo albums, carefully curated by my faraway father, chronicling my childhood. I am from these pages, yellowed but firm, holding on to me across the country.
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Appendix B: Plática Guides

Initial Plática Protocol

	Part One: Individual Plática (1.5 -2 hours) Identity & Experiences with Healing to be explored over the initial plática and walking plática. Subsequent prompts and questions are generated through ongoing data analysis and memos after the first interview to meet data saturation and facilitate member checking in following interviews as outlines by Centroamericana Feminist Theory-Grounded Methodology. Plática questions are emailed before the initial plática and collective healing plática.
Research questions: How does a U.S. <i>Centroamericana</i> identity shape experiences with campus sexual and relationship violence? How do U.S. <i>Centroamericana</i> students engage healing and support with their experiences of campus sexual and relationship violence? Theories/Frameworks: <i>Centroamericana Feminist Theory</i> Methodology: <i>Centroamericana Feminist - Grounded Methodology</i> Methods: Plática Walking Plática Collective Healing Plática Testimonio Field Site Visits Photo/Artifact Elicitation Journal and Memo	Introduction - Check in and learn about each other - Share research project process, researcher positionality, Informed consent to discuss any questions - Discuss resources available to them as collaborators and if they need any support connecting with them before the interview or after. - Fill out Demographic Form - Invitation to open up the interview space (i.e., breathe, ceremony, grounding exercise) (HIT RECORD) Identity (Initial Open Ended) 1. Tell me about yourself and where you're from? (i.e., locations, geographically, anything the collaborator wants to share) 2. Tell me about your decision to attend COLLEGE and what's been your experience as a student? 3. What does the Central American woman identity mean for you? Healing 4. What does healing mean to you? How have you practiced or engaged with it? 5. Are there spaces/places on campus or off campus that you feel connected to and or help facilitate your healing? (I will have printed campus maps and ask them to write/draw on them to highlight any spaces). [STOP RECORD] Closing - Thank them and invite them to participate in a walking and collective healing plática on campus. Discuss any safety concerns or expectations. Describe next steps with transcripts and project updates (would they like to continue to connect, etc). - Ask if they would like to be connected to resources or any other connections we would like to continue. - Coordinate for the walking plática in space of healing - Send \$25 (venmo or zelle) - Invitation to close the interview space (i.e., breathe, ceremony, grounding exercise)

	Part One: Walking Plática's (1.5 -2 hours) Emerging categories and themes through initial coding of initial interviews will guide the development of questions and prompts for the walking plática as outlined by <i>Centroamericana Feminist Theory-Grounded Methodology</i> . Below are questions that I will use as follow up from the initial plática, facilitate member checks, and provide further information on researcher generated categories, themes and processes to reach saturation.
Research questions: How does a U.S. <i>Centroamericana</i> identity shape experiences with campus sexual and relationship violence? How do U.S. <i>Centroamericana</i> students engage healing and support with their experiences of campus sexual and relationship violence? Theories/Frameworks: <i>Centroamericana Feminist Theory</i> Methodology: <i>Centroamericana Feminist - Grounded Methodology</i> Methods: Plática Walking Plática Collective Healing Plática Testimonio Field Site Visits Photo/Artifact Elicitation Journal and Memo	Check In - Check in with each other - Check in about research project process any needs during the walking plática - Invitation to open up the interview space (i.e., breathe, ceremony, grounding exercise) (HIT RECORD) Healing (Open-Ended Questions) 6. Can you share with me about this space/place. (Participant chose their location of healing on campus) 7. In the initial interview we talked about your identities, can you share how this space connects with your identity and healing? 8. In the initial interview, you share about (insert theme and category as generated from data), can you share more about this? 9. What more would you like to share with me regarding healing, this location or anything else you think is important about sexual violence on campus and students? [STOP RECORD] Closing - Thank them and invite them to a collective healing plática on campus. Discuss any safety concerns or expectations. Describe next steps with transcripts and project updates (would they like to continue to connect, etc). - Remind them to bring an artifact, journal prompts, photos, and/or art to share in the group interview. - Ask if they would like to be connected to resources - Invitation to close the interview space (i.e., breathe, ceremony, grounding exercise)

	Part Two: Collective Healing Plática (2-3 hours)
	Healing Collectively in person with collaborators
Research questions: How does a U.S. <i>Centroamericana</i> identity shape experiences with campus sexual and relationship violence? How do U.S. <i>Centroamericana</i> students engage healing and support with their experiences of campus sexual and relationship violence? Theories/Frameworks: <i>Centroamericana Feminist Theory</i> Methodology: <i>Centroamericana Feminist - Grounded Methodology</i> Methods: Plática Walking Plática Collective Healing Plática Testimonio Field Site Visits Photo/Artifact Elicitation Journal and Memo	Introduction - Check in about research project process, informed consent to discuss any group privacy questions or concerns - Discuss resources available to them as campus survivors and if they need any support connecting with them before the space - Researcher positionality, purpose, proposed structure behind the collective plática - Manage expectations in space: - o Everyone has different experiences - o Take care of yourself. - o Feel free to build on each other - ask each other questions, engage in conversations. - o Be mindful of not sharing others' identifying information without consent - o Anything else we want to add or shape? Surrender Bowl Grounding Exercise: - Breathwork, releasing what is heavy through surrender bowl, and coming into the body on the yoga mat (HIT RECORD) Healing (Open-Ended Questions) 1) Describe the themes that I have generated from the data. Invite them to further discuss, challenge, or bring more insight as we engage in plática today. 2) Please share the artifacts, journal prompts, photos, and/or art that you have brought (Researcher will start to invite vulnerability). Collective Healing (Ending Questions) 3) Is there anything else you would like to share with me or with each other? [STOP RECORD] Healing Lineages Closing Activity - Lead a breathing and ancestral visualizing exercise that brings them to their healing space (campus, beach, forest, ancestral home in Central America) - Read out quotes about healing generated by the participants from previous plática affirming that they themselves have the medicine they need individually and collectively - Closing Breath: Invite them to breath in and invite intentions and visions of healing— ending with the collective affirmation. - Inviting them to take a moment and let themselves be present, release and close out the project, queue closing song: "<i>Hasta La Raiz</i>" by <i>Natalia Lafourcade</i> - Gratitude circle and self-care giftbags. Project Next Steps - Describe next steps with transcripts and project updates (would they like to continue to connect, etc). - Ask if they would like to be connected to resources or any other connections we would like to continue. - Send \$25 (venmo or zelle)

Appendix C: Select Research Memos

Audio Memo After Informal Plática With Luna (Monday, November 3, 2025)

I think what is really beautiful about this research project is that she's opening up little by little. She's practicing- engaging-unlearning-learning vulnerability, confianza (trust), and being heard in a relationship. She's building a relationship with me, and she even texts me ongoingly. When I texted her about the book that we were talking about, she sent me this long text that was beautiful. I think it speaks to the way that relationships heal us and the way that we see each other. She texted, "Thank you so much for always giving me more than enough. I really do appreciate talking to you, because I've never been able to talk about anything at all, and I know it's part of your research, but I feel like I did take advantage of your listening skills and knowledge."

It's so emotional, it feels beautiful. I let her know that I'm really happy that we met, that I hope she knows being in community and connecting with her is what matters most for me, that she's the most important. The research is important, but she's the most important. I am happy to be in this process with her, and really thankful for her trusting me with her story. She sent me a little hamster crying with little bows meme [I laughed]. Today was special, even though I was a bit tired, the powerful space of being together moved me. I did share about myself, my experience with relationships. We laughed, cried and laughed. I think seeing each other fully as human beings is another part of how important this process is being held together.

Memo on Spiritual Care in Data Generation and Engagement (December 29th, 2025)

Winter Solstice – a time to reflect, slow down, and let go of what is heavy in our hearts to make room for new things – arrived over a week ago. I met with a group of my closest spiritual friends to commune, bless and engage in a healing circle to hold space for feelings, thoughts and emotions that were in our hearts this Fall. I shared with them that I had been feeling very heavy in my headspace but could not determine what it was exactly that I was carrying. After our collective sharing and storytelling as well as their guided questions and curiosity, their affirming words, perspectives and our collective embodied knowledge led me to realize that my spirit was in need of release, care and support during this dissertation stage of my project due to the amount of plática around trauma I was engaging with amid a chaotic world.

Indigenous and embodied knowledge teaches us that as healers, educators and healing-centered practitioners, our minds, bodies and spirits become the sacred vessels for how healing can happen. We utilize our whole hearts, our ancestral medicines and spiritual energies to center and journey with our students and survivors through some of their most painful memories, moments and emotions that have shaped their lives and our lives in return. In our spaces of research and teaching, our cocreative space and relationships transform, exchange energies and impact the ways in which we enter and leave our environments forever changing our being and our human existence – as Shawn Wilson and Linda Tuhiwau Smith teach us – research is ceremony and through reciprocity, the relationships change us at the cellular level.

Indigenous and Centroamericana professoras once told me that protecting our sacred space was both our responsibility for those we hold space for and ourselves – a reciprocal relationship

where our collective care is honored. Our bodies and spirits can facilitate our own healing and the healing of others, and if we do not practice release, cleansing or a praxis of care, we can harm and exhaust ourselves and others, and misuse the medicine of our ancestors without proper protocol. This was a lesson that I had learned several years back when the healer in my pueblo shared with me during ceremony that I had to tend to the fire in my mind and learn to tend to the flames or else it would consume me (speaking to the pain I was experiencing from my prior sexual assault) – knowledge that I hold close to my heart. Similarly, a spiritual sister and teacher of mine once told me about the science and magic of Quantum Physics, the power that human minds have in directly impacting the atoms that move around us whether we know it or not. How powerful that our intuition, our imaginations, our words, our energy, and our love can heal with the land and water, with survivors and our community. Alas, these past weeks have reminded me of how important it is to tend to the spiritual care of our healers, researchers, educators and healing-centered practitioners:

- How do we energetically- spiritually take care of ourselves when engaging in research, teaching, and education?
- How do we open, close, and sustain sessions and projects for and with our collaborators and with ourselves?
- Where does the energy of pain, release and hurt go to if it is transferred to the air we breathe, our bodies, and our environments?
- Most importantly, if we can transfer trauma then we must also transfer hope, healing, re-connection and let nature and our more- than- human and plant relatives help us carry us – where does this exist in our praxis and healing genealogies?

The healing happens in our collective spiritual care. I'm grateful for my hermanas during this beautiful Winter Solstice.

Memo on Centroamericana Storywork and Prologues/Epilogues

Reading storywork, literature, and writings of Black, Indigenous and Women of color have always centered for me the healing that can happen through storytelling. I was inspired to develop these stories and vignettes through engaging what I learned in my doctoral program and from my lineages. In Dr. Jessica Harris' Black Women's Book club during my first quarter in the doctoral program, I found healing and discovered my yearning for storytelling in research. It was a space for my joy/grief at the time and where I met other Women of Color in my program who continue to shape my research. Dr. Ananda Marin's introduction to Indigenous Research Methodologies and storywork opened my mind and heart to centering the stories and knowledge systems of my parents pueblos and people. I grew more in love with research methodologies in Dr. Leisy Abrego's course as we read testimonios, poetry, short stories written on and by Central American people that brought me closer to my mami and lineage.

Chapter 1 Epilogue: A Poem By My Central American Mother

The poem I wrote with my mother in *Chapter 1 Epilogue: A Poem by My Central American Mother* emerged the first day I spent with her facilitating an oral history project for a Central American course I was taking early on in my doctoral program. My mami has been creative her entire life. From the fashion she sewed, to the way she decorated her garden, and the ways she decorated the house during seasons. My relationship with my mother has been healing through

plática these past 10 years of our lives. I have grown closer to her. In sharing my own vulnerability through my own struggles, my mother has learned to show hers. Developing this poem together opened up many moments for us:

1. I was introduced to the “I am Poem” in a previous education course as a course exercise. I remember thinking how wonderful it would be to facilitate this exercise with my parents, my siblings, and students. The “I Am Poem” exercise can be found in Appendix D.
2. To initiate the oral history project, I first asked her if she would be willing to write a poem with me—together. She was curious about it and then became excited. We went through the exercise of writing the poem. The exercise allowed her to home in on memories and words in smaller steps. We went through each prompt. She would talk, I would listen, I would ask, and she would share about the memory or word choice. Before I knew it, we were two hours into our plática, laughing, crying, and sharing stories about the words and phrases she had chosen. I learned a lot about my mami.
3. When we finished the poem, I wrote it neatly for her to see on my laptop in a word document. When we looked at the poem placed next to her picture, I exclaimed “mira mami, sos una poeta, tus palabras tan hermosas” [look mami, you’re a poet, your beautiful words]. She smiled the biggest smile and stared at the screen. The tears in my eyes filled, acknowledging that my mother and father’s memories and words have never been seen or written in books and pages. She responded, “si verdad, hay mira que hermosa era” [that’s true right, look how beautiful I was].
4. When I asked her later for permission to use it in my dissertation, she said yes without hesitation, “si piensas que va ayudar a tus estudiantes y las mujeres que lo van a leer, mami, claro que si.” My mother is brave; I’ve grown braver because of her or maybe we just make each other more brave together.

The teaching and lessons: Healing happens when we mix outlets, create spaces of safety, patience, when we teach others to write, create, model vulnerability and when we let them teach us. It’s reciprocal, it’s affirming. The medicine exists in us all, the stories, the imagination. My mother is my teacher as I am hers—we are storytellers and healers, together.

Chapter 4 Prologue: A Visit from la Cigua in the Garden

The vision for *Chapter 4 titled Prologue: A Visit from la Cigua in the Garden* came to me in a dream. Dreams have guided my body-mind-spirit since I was a child. I am visited by people, places, and ideas that are unbound by space, time or colonial realities. My dreams can also be nightmares when my depression, anxiety, and trauma activations are not cared for and not given a space to speak. Learning to understand and learn from them is daily practice.

1. The dream came to me after having visited a healing space with collaborator Coqueta. Coqueta and I had a spiritually grounded plática the day before where we spent time invoking our spirit ancestors through the stories we were sharing. She talked about Gloria Anzaldua and the Serpent, I talked about la Cigua and we talked about how much the spirit world moves us in our healing. I believe the dream was manifested-invoked through this moment of collective energy. I went to sleep that night with

- many thoughts in my mind from a full week of data generation. The words/images/phrases that collaborators had shared with me kept cycling in my mind as I tried to calm my body to sleep. Thinking about the ways I could organize the data, discuss these stories in connection with one another, and honor these women and our ancestral lineages and lands... I finally fell asleep. [I engaged in ceremony. The ritual of inviting guidance by asking my guides what I need—answers, a framework, a chart, a message, a sign.]
2. I won't share details of this dream, but what I will share is that in this dream the phrases/words shared by collaborators were said to me in a beautiful garden, by a woman's voice I could not identify but could feel—familiarity, comfort, curiosity, affirmation.
 3. I woke up frantically around 5:30am, grabbed my laptop and wrote down the details of my dreams as to not forget it. I wrote for hours that morning, inspired, anxious, purging what I was feeling, channeling, and releasing the energy of trauma stored in my body. I wrote crying, feeling the pain of what collaborators had been through (including myself), the stories that shaped our connection to our genealogies, and then was comforted by their words and phrases on healing. As I wrote, what centered in my mind was the story of La Cigua. I concluded that La Cigua was the woman in my dreams or perhaps in many ways, La Cigua was all of us, speaking to me. [The answers I had asked for in ceremony the night before had arrived.]
 4. I let the memo sit for some days. Once I spent time taking care of my body-mind-spirit, I built out the memo into a composite vignette/storywork and began incorporating quotes and findings from the study, analyzing and generating the larger story of us collaborators together. I reflected about how even though my Centroamericana ancestors lived thousands of miles away from here, they had the power to visit me and heal with me on Tongva lands, even in my dreams we are connected to land and waters as relatives.
 5. Later, I shared the vignette with collaborators for thoughts and feedback where we became emotional together. La Cigua through us had facilitated a space of healing.

The teaching and lessons: Storywork and dreaming is powerful medicine. A nonlinear, ongoing process of conversing with Ancestors, Descendants, and Elders and learning from teachings built over generations with knowledge and tools to be used in the present—futurity.

Appendix D: Qualtrics Screening and Demographic Forms

Qualtrics Screening Form for Collaborator Selection

Centroamericana Healing Genealogies: Centering the Healing Experiences of U.S. Centroamericana Student Survivors in Higher Education

This study aims to provide further understanding into the experiences of U.S. Centroamericana students impacted by sexual and relationship violence. Sexual and relationship violence can include sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking and relationship violence (physical, emotional, mental, financial, and/or sexual abuse committed by an intimate partner toward another partner in a dating relationship or marriage.) In this study Central American students refer to individuals that self- identify as Central American (i.e., with ancestry from Honduras, Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Indigenous Central American, Afro-Central American). While there is research exploring the experiences of survivors of sexual and relationship violence there is little scholarship highlighting the experiences of Central American college students. The study will focus on student's experiences with sexual and relationship violence, including, but not limited to identity, healing and institutional resources after experiencing violence. This research study is voluntary.

If you would like more information about the study, please review this information sheet: Centroamericana Healing Genealogies Study Informed Consent.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please fill out this secure form below. The questions below will determine whether you may be eligible for the research project. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or are uncomfortable answering, and you may stop at any time. Your participation in the screening is voluntary. The questionnaire should take no more than 5 minutes. No one will see your answers except for Karla Aguilar Marquez, the lead researcher. If you do not qualify for the research study, your answers to this form will be destroyed. If you do qualify, your answers to this form will be retained in a secure location and only available to Karla Aguilar Marquez.

Participants will be asked to participate in one individual interview (1.5-2 hours) and a group interview (2-3 hours) and be invited to participate in follow-up walking interviews on campus. Individuals that participate in the interview will be provided with two \$25 payments via Zelle/Venmo which will be sent individually after the first individual interview and the group interview.

First Name: **[Text Answer]**

Email Address: **[Text Answer]**

What is your age? **[Text Answer]**

Are you a currently enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate at Acorn University? **[Multiple Choice: Undergraduate Student at Acorn University, Graduate Student at Acorn University, Not a Student]**

Do you self-identify as a Central American Woman? (i.e., with ancestry from Honduras, Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Indigenous Central American, Afro-Central American **[Multiple Choice: Yes/No]**

Have you experienced sexual harassment or sexual assault while in college? The term sexual assault can refer to nonconsensual sexual touching and or rape by someone you may know or not know. **[Multiple Choice: Yes/No]**

Have you experienced relationship violence from a partner in a previous relationship while in college? The term relationship violence refers to physical, emotional, mental, financial, and/or sexual abuse committed by an intimate partner toward another partner in a dating relationship or marriage). **[Multiple Choice: Yes/No]**

Participants will be asked to participate in one individual interview (1.5-2 hours) and a group interview (2-3 hours) with an invitation to participate in follow-up walking interviews. Are you interested in participating in walking interviews? **[Multiple Choice: Yes/No]**

Thank you for completing this form. If you meet the criterion for this research, I will contact you within 5 days to set up an initial interview. If you have any questions, please contact me, Karla Aguilar Marquez at xxxxxx@g.ucla.edu and or the study faculty sponsor, Dr. Jessica Harris, at xxxxxx@gseis.ucla.edu.

Demographics Form After Selected to Participate (after screening form):

**Centroamericana Healing Genealogies: Centering the Healing Experiences of
U.S. Centroamericana-Student Survivors in Higher Education**

You have been selected to participate in the study. This research study is voluntary. Please provide the following additional demographic information before and or during your first interview. If you have any questions, please contact me, Karla Aguilar Marquez at xxxxxx@g.ucla.edu and or the study faculty sponsor, Dr. Jessica Harris, at xxxxxx@gseis.ucla.edu.

Pseudonym:

What is your race/ethnicity?

What is your gender?

What is your age?

Are you a first-generation student?

What are other identities that are important to you?

What college/university do you attend?

What is your class standing at your current university?

How long have you attended your current university?

What is your major?

What is your GPA?

Do you live on campus?

If there is anything else you would like to share, please feel free to do so in the space provided below:

Appendix E: Preliminary Findings Outline for Member Checking

Chapter 4: Findings Outline

Research Question 1

Introduction

R1: What are the experiences of U.S. *Centroamericana* students impacted by campus sexual and relationship violence?

Finding 1: U.S. *Centroamericana* Identity Experiences

- a) Experiences with Gender Identity
 - a. Impacted by religion (i.e., marianismo and machismo, purity, women's body worth tied to sexuality) leading to lack of sexual knowledge
 - b. Impacted by rigid gender roles/expectations for *Centroamericana* Women (caregivers, submissive, sexual objects; appreciate collective care and feel burdened)
 - i. Shaped by femicide/violence against women is normalized (rape, murder, domestic violence) in U.S and Central America
 - c. Abuela- Mother- Daughter lineage is heavily significant in identity shaping (inspired by their resilience and also caused harm)
 - i. Eldest daughters becoming caregivers to younger siblings and take on heavy responsibilities
- b) Experiences with Racial/Ethnic Identity
 - a. Proud/reconnecting with CA identity and ancestral place
 - b. Contextual Dominance and Latinidad
 - i. Feeling unseen and not being centered as Central Americans in courses, campus student orgs, k-12 education
 - ii. Internalized feelings of shame/frustration when being mis-labeled as Mexican most of their lives
 - iii. Heavily code-switching and navigating experiences of Latinidad in school and the workplace
 - c. Identity politics within Central American diaspora (not Central American enough, one Central American group being more dominant than the other, lateral violence)
- c) Experiences with Migrant Identity
 - a. Migration trauma is felt generationally by parents, children and siblings (family separation, leaving ancestral lands in Central America, fractures of family genealogies)
 - b. Migration/Immigration status and mixed family status heavily shapes identity
 - c. Sense of belonging/identity heavily shaped by place (borderlands, "ni de aqui, ni de alla")
 - d. Impacts of low-socio economic status in Central America/U.S. made vulnerable by systems

Finding 2: Experiences with Sexual Violence

- a) Psychological/Emotional

- a. Feeling shame for experiencing violence in abusive relationships (“should have known better”)
- b. Minimization and silencing of sexual trauma due to migration trauma (“minimizing sexual violence because people go through worse in Central America”, “my parents have gone through worse”)
- c. Dissociation from trauma ongoingly (disconnecting and not wanting to think about trauma all the time)
- d. shame/guilt/liberation with setting boundaries and expectations (i.e., feeling unworthy and undeserving of boundaries) due to familismo
- b) Hesitancy to disclose and seek help
 - a. due to the religious shame with dishonoring your family/putting your family business out there
 - b. due to stigma of mental health and talking about emotions in CA/Latinx family and community
 - c. Victim blaming culture where women are blamed for sexual violence in Central America and United States. (collaborators witnesses family members get blamed for sexual violence)
- c) Physical
 - a. Manifestation of physical illnesses (e.g., IBS, pain, migraines, depression, deterioration of body due to anxiety, stress)
 - b. Disconnection from the body due to trauma (e.g., body dysmorphia, “feeling uncomfortable and hating my body”)

Finding 3: Navigating Educational Experiences in the United States

- a) Limited sense of belonging
 - a. Ideas of “excellence” and “good students” increase feelings of imposter syndrome and not feeling “rigorous” enough in their coursework and extracurricular
 - b. Limited sense of safety on campus due to policing, political climate, ICE on campus
 - c. First- gen student challenges with accessing financial aid and accessing student services, they feel like consumers vs students on campus (bureaucracy)
- b) Structural and Access
 - a. Difficulty navigating neurodivergence with CAE accommodations and learning environments
 - b. Lack of identity affirming/trauma informed processes on campus
 - i. Traumatizing experiences with when reporting to police and Title IX processes
 - ii. “Jumping through 20 hoops to get into therapy”

Research Question 2

Introduction

R2: How do U.S. *Centroamericana* students engage healing from their experiences of campus sexual and relationship violence?

Finding 1: Healing Defined for U.S *Centroamericana* Student Survivors

- a) Healing is not time bound

- a. is nonlinear and cyclical
 - b. means breaking cycles for past and future lineages
- b) Healing is a process
 - a. can be overwhelming, messy, exhausting
 - b. means rebuilding connection to my body- mind-spirit
- c) Healing is active
 - a. means serving my inner child/self and needs
 - b. means affirming that I am enough as I am (self-talk)
 - c. means being seen and validated without judgment

Finding 2: U.S. *Centroamericana* Student Survivors are healing in multiple ways

- a) Emotional & Psychological
 - a. Culturally affirming Therapy
 - i. Understand how trauma manifests in relationships
 - ii. Coping with impacts of trauma individually
 - iii. Getting diagnosed and learning how it impacts life
 - iv. Learning how to set boundaries
 - b. Testimonio- sharing stories to others and feeling heard and seen in their identity and history
 - c. Self- Affirmations for self-esteem building
- b) Embodied
 - a. Learning to reconnect to their bodies, sexuality and creativity
 - i. Pilates
 - ii. Pole dancing
 - iii. Dancing
 - iv. Tattoos
 - v. Listening and making music
 - vi. Creating art and writing
 - vii. Crying/purging
- c) Connections with Nature
 - a. Relationships with more-than-human relatives (pets, gallinas, birds)
 - b. Plants and trees
 - c. Land and waters (rivers and oceans)
 - d. Gardens were spaces of healing
- d) Religion/Spirituality
 - a. Astrology and crystals
 - b. Prayer
 - c. Religious ceremonies connected to organized faith (i.e., church)
 - d. Spirituality connected to ancestors and medicinal traditions
- e) Education as Healing
 - a. Learning Central American history in courses
 - b. Social action/educating and helping others
 - c. Researching Central Americans as resistance (own methodologies and theories)
 - d. Unlearning and learning relationships (parenting classes)
 - e. Libraries spaces of healing that affirmed student-scholar identity
- f) Collective

- a. Cultural affirming student organizations on and off campus
 - b. Religious spaces of support (church, religious retreats, etc).
 - c. Spaces where women commune (women's circles, women's celebrations, plática)
- g) Intergenerational & Ancestral place-based
 - a. Future-making: breaking cycles for siblings, future children, nibbling and next generations
 - b. Reflection/resourcing of memory tied back to Central America (placed-based)
 - c. Ancestral trips to Central America where they re-connect with family, land/waters, history and traditions

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