

Naomi Perez

Professor Kinyon

Writ 1133

June 3rd, 2020

### Writ 1133 Reflective Essay

My name is Naomi Perez and I am a first-year student at the University of Denver. During my spring quarter I was able to take Writing 1133 with professor Kamila Kinyon. For this class, I had to write three major unit papers. These papers focused on various topics such as photo analysis, oral history, and autoethnography. I was looking forward to taking this class in person, but given the circumstances that was not possible. However, I still learned a lot from this course and was able to write three strong papers. For the purpose of this essay, I will be summarizing each unit and what I learned from it in the order in which my papers appear in my portfolio.

For the first unit, our main focus was to analyze a set photographs. In my paper, titled “Gender Roles: Through the Eye of Carrie Mae Weems” I chose to focus on how one photographer told a story through her work. In Carrie Mae Weems’s *The Kitchen Table Series*, Weems tells a story from a very intimate setting, her kitchen table. I chose to focus on this series because I saw it as an opportunity to invest myself in the life of someone I did not know, and the opportunity to see what stories I could learn just from seeing a set of photos. After careful thought, I decided I wanted to focus on how Weems portrays gender roles in her work. More specifically, I wanted to focus on how Weems portrayed gender roles in the African American community. For this paper, I had to research how gender roles and patriarchy have affected

African Americans in the United States. By the end of this unit, I felt confident in my work and was able to create a story from the photos I used. I had never analyzed a photo in such depth. From assigned readings, I learned many things about how to properly analyze a photo. I learned about how a subject's gaze matters, and that even the way a person looks at the camera can mean something. I met my class goals by accurately using class reading to help me analyze Weems's work. I was able to use the work of authors such as Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins to defend my arguments. However, I feel as if this unit also helped me come up with my own methods. I often found myself looking at the lighting in the pictures or the movement of the people photographed. I learned a lot about analyzing photographs, but I also learned a lot about the African American community and how gender roles have affected them.

The second unit focused on oral history. For this unit, I had to collect in-depth interviews and research about an important topic. The topic I chose was about students and how they were being affected by COVID-19. The reason I chose this topic was that as a freshman, my first year of college was cut short due to the pandemic. Personally, being back home meant going back to work, and I was curious to see how my friends were being affected too. I went into this project with an open mind. For my paper "Studies in Times of COVID", my initial idea was to write about how this pandemic was making students uncomfortable or annoyed. However, my findings were very different than what I thought they were going to be. I chose to write my paper in the form of a journalistic article. I had never written a journalistic article before so it was very interesting to go out of my comfort zone and write a paper about how students were being greatly impacted by COVID-19. For this unit, I believe I met my class goals by being able to conduct several interviews and being able to create an informative piece out of them. One of the

goals of the unit was to create a paper that could be used as an article intended for a newspaper or magazine, and I believe my paper would have been a good piece to publish to educate people on different struggles during the pandemic. I learned a lot about what it meant to be a student during these hard times, and I also got to know more about my friends' home lives.

Finally, for the third and final unit, I got to write an autoethnography. This unit was my favorite because I got to write about a topic I knew a lot about, myself. The point of an autoethnography is for the writer to focus on their subjective experience in interaction with the beliefs and practices of others. In other words, I had to focus on how my experiences helped me understand another larger group. At first, I wasn't sure what aspect of my life I wanted to focus on for this paper. The two identities that are most prominent in my life right now are those of a first-generation student and a first-generation American citizen. I knew I wanted to write about something among those lines, but I wasn't quite sure what. Thanks to Professor Kinyon, I decided to write about my story as a Mexican-American woman and a first-generation student. For my autoethnography, I decided to interview my mother and my aunt because they are the two members of my family who experienced my journey to college by my side. My final paper was about difficult choices in my life that have led me to where I am right now. I believe I met my class goals by being able to take my experiences as an individual and placing them into a larger sociological context. I achieved this by talking about the different experiences many mixed-status families in the United States face, and by talking about the issues of family separations occurring daily. The process of writing this autoethnography led me to really think about myself and how everything I do relates to a much bigger picture of immigrants and children of immigrants in the United States.

Now that I have briefly introduced myself, my assignments, and my work I will list my three papers. I am very proud of how each of these pieces turned out, and I am very thankful to professor Kinyon for allowing my ideas to really show through my work. I hope whoever gets to read my papers enjoy reading them just as much as I enjoyed writing them.

Naomi Perez

Professor Kamila Kinyon

Writ 1133

April 9th, 2020

### Gender Roles: Through the Eye of Carrie Mae Weems

Carrie Mae Weems was born on April 20th, 1953, in Portland Oregon. Weems is commonly known for exploring stereotypes, especially those of black women, through her photography. (African American Almanac) In 1990, Weems created the *Kitchen Table series* which told the story of a black woman through the intimate setting of her kitchen. The series is made up of 20 images and 14 text panels. For the purpose of this paper, I will be analyzing only four, focusing on how Weems demonstrates gender roles in the African American community. Weems photography work is definitely staged, but she set up her subjects in a way that tells a story. Stories told through photographs are often interpreted differently by each viewer. In this paper, the topics of gender roles in African American communities will be explored, as well as the different ways in which gaze is used by Weems. Specifically, I will be focusing on how African American women are affected by gender roles. Through her photographic work, Weems is able to show the audience a part of life that is not often seen from the setting of her kitchen table, through her work, Weems is able to show gender roles and the effect they have on women and women of color specifically.



The kitchen is so commonly known as the place where women belong. However, in this picture, Weems places the man (presumably her husband or romantic partner) in the middle, under the light. Weems placed herself in the background, where she is barely visible in the dim light. In the photo, Weems is clearly looking at the man, but since it is so dark it is hard to tell what emotions her face conveys. The man seems to be distracted in whatever he is reading, paying no attention to Weems who is standing behind him. The table has two glasses on it, signifying that Weems was, at some point, sitting there accompanying the man. As Lutz points out, “Contemporary gender ideologies envisage men as active doers and define women as passive presence... One might simplify this by saying *men act* and *women appear*.” (Lutz 189) In her photograph, Weems clearly shows this. The man in the picture is reading the paper while ignoring the woman who seems to have blended into the shadows. In the African American

community, it seems to be a common thing where women have to watch over the men. As Marie Miville wrote, “in the African American community, some families raise our daughters and love our sons.” (Miville 70) This gives the impression that although she is being ignored, Weems is looking at this man because she feels as if she has to love and care for him. As Miville states, these “mixed-gender role expectations can sow the seeds of discontent, frustration, and even self-doubt about one’s worth as a female... in the family.” (Miville 70) This further adds to the idea that Weems may be hiding in the shadows because, even when the kitchen is stereotypically where women should be, as soon as a man gets there he takes over that space as well. Lutz states that “a look can mean anything... but in a social context, tend to open up certain possibilities for interpreting a photograph.” (Lutz 192) Taking this into account, it would seem important to see the way Weems is looking at the man sitting at the table, but not being able to opens up the idea that Weems does not want the spectator to know how she feels about this man. This leads to the spectator creating their own story from what is seen in the photo.



In this second image, Weems is still in the kitchen. This time, however, she is sitting in the center and is surrounded by what the spectator might assume are her daughters. In this photo, Weems is clearly seen because she is now under the light. Weems is also the only one in the picture who is completely in focus. The three younger girls around her seem to have a lot going on, therefore looking blurry or out of focus. While all the girls seem to be moving, Weems is perfectly still and seems to be tired and worn out. Although Weems was only 37 at the time the picture was taken, she is looking at the young girl with a look of longing, as if thinking back on her own youth. Interestingly though, in this photo, Weems is the only one who is looking directly at someone. Lutz comments that “Whether or not the gaze of the two parties is mutual provides a comment on who has the right and/or need to look at whom.” (Lutz 204) This raises the idea that Weems has the need to look at the young child because she is her caregiver. This photo further



feeds into the stereotype that women are the head of the family and are expected to care for their children. As Martinique Jones stated, “Each stereotype portrays African American women as selfless and nurturing, loud and aggressive, sexually uninhibited, or emotionally strong and self-sufficient, respectively.” (Jones et. al) In this photo, Weems is portraying the selfless and nurturing stereotype. For this gender role, however, women of all races and backgrounds might identify. As Lutz explains, many pictures can have different effects on viewers. Many pictures “may allow identification... and, through that, more interaction with, or imaginary participation in, the photo.” (Lutz 203) Many women, especially African American women, can identify themselves with this photo because it shows how draining it can be to be a mother. Especially a mother who is in charge of being a caregiver for the whole family. As stated in the *Journal of Black Psychology*, “When gender and race were considered simultaneously, studies indicated that African American women identified with their gendered-racial identity.” (Jones et. al) In this case, Weems’s gendered-racial identity is that of an African American woman/mother. In the picture, the young girls seem to be distracted with whatever work they are doing. This shows a contrast between them and Weems who seems to be solely focused on her daughter. As a child, it is easy to forget how much a mother works, and in the photo, the young girls seem to not even notice that Weems is present. In her article, Millville states that in her research, “Participants’ narratives... [portrayed] the lives of many Black/African American females as a balancing act of sorts as they attempt to conform to societal as well as family/community expectations while constructing their own gender roles and working toward their life goals.” (Millville 76) This research further proves how strongly the mother gender role is engraved into the minds of African American women.



In this third image, Weems is seen sitting at the table with two female friends. As Lutz stated, “[A] photograph has this quality because it is usually intended as a thing of either beauty or documentary interest and surveillance.” (Lutz 188) This image allows the viewer to see the beauty of friendship, and we slowly begin to see Weems lose the pressure of gender roles. As Claudia Lawrence states “The unique condition of slavery experienced by African Americans sought to destroy the opportunity for experiencing the basic bonds of caring, nurturing, protection, and support.” (Lawrence et. al 634) Despite all this, in the picture, we can see Weems experiencing friendship, which means she is also capable of experiencing care, nurture, protection, and support. For the first time, we also see Weems smiling, or looking happy with

what is going on in her life. For African American women, gender roles are much different because of the long history of slavery. In this photo we also see three women taking a seat at the table, literally. The women seem to be smoking and drinking, something that is typically seen as masculine. Millville, however, states that “observing female relatives enact more blended or androgynous roles also sends messages to young women that being independent and self-sufficient is necessary for survival and success.” (Millville 79) This being said, this photo can be used to show young women that they can also partake in activities that are commonly known to be for males. In this photo, Weems is looking down while the two other women look at each other. We know Weems set up her camera and her scene the way she wanted the viewer to see it. Lutz states that “under most circumstances, the photographer's gaze and the viewer's gaze overlap. The photographer may treat the camera eye as simply a conduit for the reader's look, the “searchlight” of his or her vision.” (Lutz 193) This leads the viewer to believe that Weems wanted them to see how a person can change emotionally, even when in the same setting. Because as Lutz put it, “Independently of what the photographer or the caption writer may include as the message of the photo, the reader can imagine something else.” (Lutz 195) Weems does a good job of using the camera to take a photo that people can interpret in many different ways.



For the last picture I chose to analyze, Weems is alone in her kitchen. She is laying halfway on the table, and she is nude, facing the light. This image is powerful because it shows the vulnerability of a woman who is alone. As Millville's research showed, "Narratives thus portray the lives of many Black/African American females as a balancing act of sorts as they attempt to conform to societal as well as family/community expectations while constructing their own gender roles and working toward their life goals." (Millville 76) This helps the viewer understand that when Weems is by herself, she is finally able to let her guard down and be completely vulnerable with herself as a woman. In this photo, Weems is looking away from the

camera, in fact, her eyes are closed and she is not looking at anything. Lutz says that “there is perhaps no more significant gaze in the photograph than that of its subject... The look into the camera must at least suggest an acknowledgment of photographer and reader.” (Lutz 197) In her photo, Weems is not looking or acknowledging anything. This gives off the idea that Weems is solely focused on herself in this photo. In previous photos, Weems is surrounded by other people, and in those same pictures, her eyes are open. Now that she is alone, her eyes are closed and the only person she is worried about is herself. In Millville’s article, she states that “the idea of female strength holds a far more complex meaning, as it is often equated with the ability to maintain one’s independence, should this become necessary.” (Millville 75) For Weems to pose by herself shows that the African American woman is capable of being at peace even when she is by herself.

Weems does an excellent job of showing gender roles in the African American community. Through her use of gaze and the way her subjects pose, Weems is able to create powerful images that convey a message. Weems is able to show relationships, families, and friends all from the view of her kitchen table. Having such an intimate setting helps the viewer better understand the personal difficulties Weems may have experienced. The images created by Weems helps the viewer understand a more personal side of African American life, which includes the pressures of gender roles, some even being affected by a history of slavery. Weems successfully

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### Studies in Times of COVID

“I didn't know what to think of it, I just like I heard about it and I was like, “Oh, that sucks that it's happening but It can't come over here and if it does, it's just like the flu, like it's not that bad.” And now, here we are.”

Starting in March of the year 2020, schools all over the country started shutting down and sending their students home. Due to the growing concerns of COVID-19, also known as the novel coronavirus, schools decided that online learning would be the way to go. Schools decided this to keep students safe, however, they did not take into account how remote learning would affect their students. Now, students everywhere are struggling with balancing their schoolwork while being home. Many students now have to work and study at the same time. Even when many schools have decided to go into a pass or fail grading system, students are still being impacted negatively. I spoke to some of the students who have been affected by COVID-19 and asked about how they were handling being at home while also having to be students. I conducted interviews through Zoom, and phone calls and found that many college students are not doing too well during these times. I spoke to students who attend the University of Denver (DU) and the University of New Mexico (UNM). The purpose of this article is to inform the audience that the online learning system that has been put into place is not always ideal, especially when students' perspectives aren't taken into account. Students are being affected by so many more



things now, but they are still expected to continue their courses like normal. When I started my interviews, I thought I would be faced with students who were simply uncomfortable, instead, I found students who were not doing well mentally or academically. Students are being affected in many ways, ways that some educators are unaware of.

Emily is 18 years old and is a freshman at the University of Denver. For Emily, being forced to move back home has been very stressful. As she puts it, the first time she heard about COVID-19 she thought, “That sucks that it's happening but It can't come over here and if it does, it's just like the flu, like it's not that bad.” (Hilla 2020) For many students like Emily, this virus seemed harmless. Emily never could imagine that her school and social life in Denver would be affected by this. “ It's really stressful to do school [work] at home... I do my homework and classes in my room because it's the only place where I can actually work without any distractions, or where it's actually quiet, but then I just never leave my room.” (Hilla 2020) For young people, being stuck in the same space for long periods of time can be emotionally and physically tiring. For Emily, not seeing her friends is very hard, and spending long periods of time with her family is also taking a toll on her. “ Not going out and seeing my friends is really frustrating. I love my family, but I also just need to have some other social connection outside of my house and outside of class.” (Hilla 2020) She also had to return to work, since her family became unemployed due to the pandemic. “I have to manage work and school, I don't know, it's just it's being home is just not like the ideal environment for classes for me, and having to go to work on top of that is very stressful.” (Hilla 2020) Emily hopes that things can go back to normal so she can go back to campus for her sophomore year of college.

In Albuquerque, New Mexico is the University of New Mexico. I spoke to Zuly Fornelli who is a junior at this school on how COVID-19 has affected her life. As a commuter student, Zuly says she's saving a lot of time. However, she thinks many of her professors were not ready for the shift to online courses. "Everything going online was a little difficult, especially for the teachers who have never taught online. I feel like that was difficult on them because they didn't have a plan B of how to work things." (Fornelli) Besides doing all her classwork online, Zuly also feels as if this new way of life is affecting her mentally. "Now that I'm home, I have more time to study and focus on studying. I don't have to take time off my day getting to school and then come back. But I also feel like it's affecting my mental health and I feel less motivated to do my work and it's affecting me in that way as well." (Fornelli 2020) Zuly did not expect her junior year of college to be interrupted by a worldwide pandemic, and now she must adjust to her new normal. A new normal that includes daily worrying about when things will return to normal. "the hardest part is not really knowing what's going to happen. It's kind of like taking every day as it is and just seeing what happens that day, not really having a step by step plan of like, say, we're going to reopen everything this day. And even when a date is set for, as I said before, reopening stores and going back to our normal life, it keeps getting pushed back. So I'm always worrying about that as well." (Fornelli 2020) For students like Zuly, who had already taken online courses before, remote learning is easier. However, they still have to deal with the stress caused by the current pandemic. This can lead to negative effects in a student's academics and is something schools did not foresee as an issue when deciding to go online. For Zuly, working at a community clinic is also very stressful. She worries about the patients she sees every day and

hopes COVID-19 can stay away from her workplace, and she and her co-workers can stay healthy and continue to serve their community.

Marina Wright, 19, is another student who was also affected by COVID-19. Originally from New Mexico, Wright attends the University of Denver. Like many of her peers, Marina was excited to finish her first year of college. She was barely becoming familiar with the city of Denver, and she was looking forward to the springtime. Even when she first heard about the virus, she wasn't worried. "I didn't even think that it would ever come to America," (Wright 2020) Marina recalls thinking. However, Marina's plans were drastically changed when she received an email that said she must return home and take her remaining classes online. For Marina, being home has been very difficult. "I struggle with just being home all day and just having, like, all the homework now and not being able to, like, walk to class or socialize or anything like that. Being home all the time and just sitting in a chair for nine hours a day, just looking at a computer screen is exhausting. My attention span has also gotten very short." (Wright 2020) During our interview, Marina also pointed out that she believes there is more the school and professors could do to help students. "I feel like [DU and our professors] could have much better communication and maybe just be a little bit more understanding that this is very hard. Not all of us have fast Wi-Fi or the resources that we had while being on campus." Marina hopes she can reunite with her friends on campus this upcoming fall, and she hopes to finish her quarter off strong despite the circumstances.

Lastly, I spoke with Savanna Leyba, 19. Savanna is also completing her first year of college at DU. However, Savanna transferred from Lawrence University in Appleton Wisconsin at the beginning of the winter quarter. Out of all the people I spoke to, Savanna seems to be the

most impacted. Her mental and physical health have been deteriorating, and she blames it on being home for so long. “One hundred and ten percent, my mental health is deteriorating.” (Leyba 2020) Savanna says her stress has gotten so bad she’s even developed a nervous twitch, and became very ill. Savanna says it would be helpful for professors to be more understanding during these times. “I got sick recently and I couldn't do coursework for a few days. And most of my teachers were understanding, maybe even giving me extensions. They said we can talk about [my missing work] later. But one of my professors just told me I'd have to take zeros for my assignments.” (Leyba 2020) Savanna’s migraines were getting so bad that even looking at her cellphone made her sick. For her grades to be affected by this was very saddening for her, especially since she let them know what was going on. “I've been really stressed out, and I’m facing a lot of cabin fever. My routine is being stressed out, being tired of being stuck inside, and constantly doing homework. And even when I have a break from, like homework, or when I decide that I'm tired and I just want to stop for the evening, it's not relaxing because I'm still thinking about everything I still need to get done.” All of this is taking a toll on Savanna. Talking about her stress even made her emotional during our interview, she apologized and said she just felt overwhelmed thinking about it. There are many students out there who are being emotionally affected by this situation, and that is something schools and professors are not taking into account.

Although there isn’t a lot schools can do about re-opening their campuses, students still believe they should offer help. When deciding to interview college students, I thought I was only going to find students who were overwhelmed. However, I found students who were being greatly affected by the situation. Many students have been able to work, and those who have not,

have no other choice but to stay indoors. Being indoors for so long is affecting the mental health of many of the students I talked to. In 2020, students are now faced with the issue of not knowing when they will be able to return to campus. Every student wants to be able to be in an actual classroom setting, and for many out of state students, they want to return to their new home. It is unclear when these students will be able to return. For now, students and educators must learn to adapt to this new normal.

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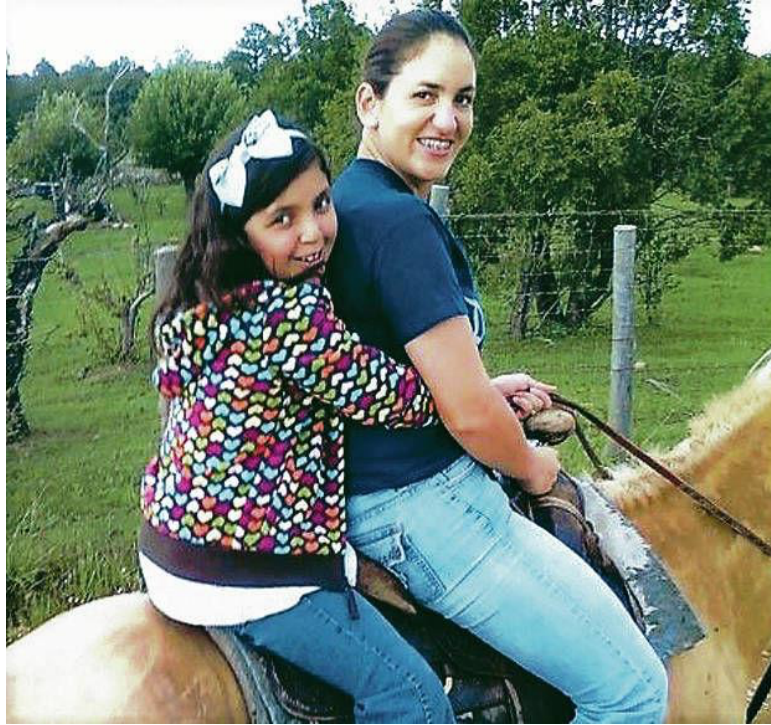
May 30th, 2020

From Here and From There

I was just eight years old when I learned about the harsh reality of immigration in the United States.

My grandfather passed away in March of 2009. For some time prior to that, he had been living in Madera, the Mexican city in Chihuahua where my mom and her sisters grew up. That night, my whole life changed. My mother and I set out on a long journey that included crossing a border I had no idea even existed. As an eight-year-old, I didn't fully understand what that meant. It wasn't until a few days later that my mom told me she could not return to Albuquerque. Albuquerque was my home, my family lived there and so did my friends.

How do you tell an eight-year-old girl who spent every day of her life playing with her cousins, singing with her aunts, or even cooking with her grandmother, that she may never get to see them again? How do you tell an eight-year-old that if she wants to return to her home, she must leave her mother behind? Or that the government of the country she was born in did not want people like her mom? My mother had committed an immigration offense and she would not be able to be pardoned by the government until her 10-year sentence was carried out. Even without these circumstances, the process of getting a visa was long and expensive.



My mom and I in 2009

Year after year, my mom tried again.

Until one day, we had to make the hard choice of me leaving her behind and returning to Albuquerque. It was a tough choice, but we knew the opportunities I would have in the U.S. were greater than those offered in Mexico, a country overrun with corruption leading to forced poverty.

“I knew my daughter’s dreams were big. I knew she wanted more than what was being offered to her.” (Perez 2020) My mom also knew Mexico was not the place for me, but she also knew she couldn’t leave.

During this time, I was just 12 years old. I knew the education I was receiving in Mexico would not get me to where I wanted to be. For a long time, I didn’t know what to do. One thing I



did know was that my mother was unable to return to the U.S. so going back meant I had to come back by myself.

So, I returned to Albuquerque. Once in Albuquerque, I began living with my mom's sister. From this moment, my aunt had to take on the responsibility of raising another child. "It wasn't a hard choice to take [Naomi] in, I already loved her like my own." (Yaira 2020) My aunt had been there since the moment I was born. From the first moments I can remember, she had always been like a second mother. Legally, she was now my legal guardian. This was a required step to enroll me in school, but to me, this felt like a betrayal to my mother. From this moment forward, I knew I had to work hard to achieve my dreams. As soon as I got to high school, I began working towards my dreams of attending the University of Denver. I also became an activist for immigrant rights, considering my past experiences.

I spent the school year in Albuquerque, but all my summers were spent in Mexico with my mother. I was constantly torn between the two places. I missed my mother so much, and I even became a big sister while living apart from my mother.

From a young age, I knew the harsh realities of the immigration system in the United States. Sadly, I was not alone. According to the migration policy, in 2018, approximately 18 million U.S. children under age 18 lived with at least one immigrant parent. For many immigrants, it is common for a mother and/or father to migrate to the United States and leave their children behind, in the care of relatives or family friends. (Sara Z. Poggio) Some studies even find that children separated from parents during migration are more likely to be behind others their age in school and are more likely to drop out of high school. I also knew that being an American citizen was a huge advantage I had and that I was lucky to have that opportunity.

My priority was achieving my dreams. I needed to make sure the sacrifices my family and I were making were worth it. In a way, I felt that if I was successful, it somehow erased all the pain I had endured. There was nothing I wanted more than to make my mother proud.

“From the moment she made such a big choice to leave Mexico to pursue a better education, I knew she would make me proud. When she started high school, I knew she would get so many opportunities.” (Perez 2020) Hearing my mom say she’s proud of me means everything to me.

As a Mexican-American woman, I knew I would have to work ten times harder than many people out there to achieve my dreams. I knew the statistics. According to The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, Latinas have the lowest percentage of graduate degrees compared to all women of other non-Hispanic racial groups combined. And, although Latinas are going to college in record numbers, they are significantly less likely to actually complete a degree, compared to all other major groups: in 2013, almost 19 percent of Latinas between 25 and 29 years of age had completed a degree, compared to 23 percent of African American women, 44 percent of white women, and 64 percent of Asian women. (The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics) But I knew I wanted to be more than just a statistic. I knew I had to work hard to beat the odds. For many students like myself, attending college is a big deal. For many, it makes a point of affirming a strong sense of responsibility to their families, which for students often takes the form of continued contributions to the family economy, as well as role modeling, paving the way to higher education for younger siblings. (Benmayor, Rina)

I began working on my college path during my freshman year of high school. In my sophomore year of high school, I earned my first scholarship worth \$16,000. I remember calling

my mom and telling her the good news, I also remember the few seconds of silence where I knew she was getting emotional before telling me how proud she was of me, and how our sacrifices were finally paying off.

This same year, my mother was pardoned by the U.S. government, and after years of trying, she was able to get her visa. She would finally be able to come to visit me and see her family once again. Her process was a rare one. Every year she had to travel to the U.S border to ask for her visa to enter the United States, and every time she was denied. Until one year, she got a very nice immigration officer who told her he could file a letter of forgiveness on her behalf to the United States government. This letter stated that yes, she did something illegal by having a child in the United States, but she was sorry and she didn't know it was illegal at the time. According to this immigration officer, these letters usually didn't work, but he wanted to try it anyways. A couple of months later, my mom got a letter in the mail saying she had been granted forgiveness and would be able to get apply for her visa the next year. When she applied, she was approved. Sometimes, it feels like this moment was sent to us by the universe to help us spend more time together.

After becoming a New Mexico Simon Scholar, and knowing my mom would be able to be there with me along the way, I knew I wasn't stopping there.

In my junior year of high school, I began working with local immigrant rights organizations. I became very self-aware of my status and knew if I wanted to see change, it would be up to me to change things. My role as a youth advocate opened up so many doors for me. I knew that as a first-generation Mexican American, going to college was a big deal. I knew getting there and staying there would mean that I was beating the odds. This inspired me and

prepared me for the road ahead. With these organizations, I was able to learn more about the process of family separation, especially the one occurring at the border. In one instance, this organization took a trip to Amarillo, Texas. Our goal was to see the children who had been recently separated from their families during migration, but the ICE officers didn't let us. Every moment I spent reading about the unfairness and injustices of the immigration system led me to want change, and I knew it would be up to me to see it.



Me at a student protest I organized in 2019

During my junior year of high school, my mother was finally able to return to the U.S. and live closer to me. She got to witness all of my ups and downs, but most importantly, we finally got to be together.

One of the biggest moments in my life happened during my senior year. On November 8th, 2018 my mother got to my house and found me crying outside. When she asked why I was crying, I simply replied "I got it." With those three words, my mom knew exactly what I was

talking about. I had just received a letter in the mail stating that I had been awarded a full-ride scholarship to any college of my choice. My mom embraced me and we both cried. As soon as my aunt got home, she also cried. There was a lot of crying that day.

On that day it was finally a fact that I would be the first person in my family to attend a four-year university. I would be able to attend my dream school, the University of Denver on a full-ride scholarship. This moment meant so much to me, and to my entire family.

Becoming a New Mexico Davis Scholar was the first step to being able to go to college. I knew I couldn't afford to pay for school, especially not a school like the University of Denver, but Davis changed that. Davis gave me the opportunity to go to my dream school, and graduate debt-free.



Me the day I committed to DU as a New Mexico Davis Scholar



It has now been 8 years since I came back to the United States and left my mom behind. And now, I am attending my dream school on a full-ride scholarship. The journey has been hard, but I know in the end it will all have been worth it. Now, I am close to finished with my first year of college. My mom and my aunt got to drive me and help me move into my dorm. The sacrifices my family and I made have all started paying off, and I can not wait to see where I will end up.



My mom, myself, and my aunt at my high school robing ceremony.

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