

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Yolanda Tellez Martinez for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education presented on April 20, 2004.

Title: Recordando Memoria: Shaping Chicana Identity.

Abstract approved:

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George H. Copa

This research explored the self-concept of Chicanas in terms of their lived experiences and how those experiences influenced the shaping of their identity. It examined the multiple labels Chicanas use to self-identify and the context or situations in which they use specific labels. Moreover, it took into account the influence of gender, ethnicity, language, race, and culture on their concept of self. My study employed interpretive and collaborative research methods and included my own narrative story as part of the analytical process. It draws on a Chicana *femenista* (feminist) pedagogy that is heavily influenced by an Indigenous perspective as the conduit for the construction and transmission of knowledge. My objectives during the course of the study were to explore the many facets of Chicanas' experiences and challenge prevailing notions about our identity.

The chief method for collecting data was interactive, dialogic interviews with five Chicana participants. During the loosely structured interviews, the women were asked to narrate their life stories as they related to

the shaping of their concept of self. The women's detailed narratives and personal reminiscences as well as my own provided the data that was analyzed and interpreted to examine Chicana identity. The women were co-participants in "making sense" of the data. They provided guidance, expressed opinions, and helped to construct the meaning of their lived experiences.

The results of the interpretation process indicated that culture and the intersecting factors of gender, language, age, ethnicity, and race shaped the participants' concept of self. Hence, their identity was culturally learned and mediated via their perceptions of the world. In turn, their worldview was influenced by the aforementioned factors. The women's narratives also suggested that they used multiple identity labels and that they were contextual. Thus, identity can change or evolve over the course of one's lifespan and through one's lived experiences. As such, Chicana identity is not fixed. As Chicanas we are constructing our own identity rather than allowing it to be imposed by others. Moreover, we are extending the possibility that we continually construct our identity.

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Recordando Memoria: Shaping Chicana Identity

by
Yolanda Tellez Martinez

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APPROVED:

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Major Professor, representing Education

Redacted for privacy

~~Dean of the School of Education~~

Redacted for privacy

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Yolanda Tellez Martinez, Author

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Recordando Memoria: Shaping Chicana Identity

Prologue: Crusando Fronteras

This is a story of five women, *Las Comadres*, my friends. It is the story of our past, our lived experiences told from our perch in the present. It is the story of who we became. Collectively, we are old enough to have a life history and young enough to recall it. Our lives have been packed by the many blessings that new experiences, places, and people bring as well as enough sorrow to fill the crevices.

We learned early on that we were loved and would be taken care of. We were taught what behavior was expected of us. We learned to take care of others especially the vulnerable ones and knew our role within our family and community. We were made to eat all the food on our plate not because of the proverbial parental admonishment about the starving children of the world but rather as a lesson in finishing what we started. When you come from a big family, you appreciate the wisdom of this lesson.

Lulú, Lily, Fe Dolores, Rosie (La Rosa), and Dulcina are Las Comadres. We were all born in the United States except for Fe. She was born in Mexico. We are mothers. Some of us are grandmothers. We all speak Spanish *mas o menos* (more or less.) Our parents or grandparents are mexicanos. Consequently, so are we. We are Chicanas, Latinas, and Indigenous women. This is our story.

Introduction: Ojeada

I sit in your crowded classrooms and learn
how to read about Dick, Jane and Spot
But I remember how to get a deer
I remember how to do beadwork
I remember how to fish
I remember the stories told by the old
But Spot keeps showing up
and my report card is bad
Ed Edmo, Shoshone-Bannock storyteller

Ed Edmo's portrayal of Indigenous knowledge at odds with Western education epitomizes the gist of my research. The invisibility, silencing, and lack of Chicana voices in research are situated much like Edmo's plaintive poem that clamors for conceding that alternative knowledge is valid and legitimate. Research, for the most part, ignores these ways of knowing as much by the exclusion and silencing as by the assumption that only "dominant" or Western researchers are capable of producing knowledge. Marc Pizarro (1999) maintains, "Only by listening intently to people of color, for example, can we begin to see that dominant 'realities' too are constructions and that they often exist at the expense of the reality of others" (p. 60).

The purpose of my research was to legitimize Chicana knowledge by moving beyond the limits of traditional research towards culturally appropriate research practices and methodologies. To that end, I employed a Chicana *femenista* (feminist) epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998) grounded in Indigenous methodology. The primary reason for focusing on Chicanas was to resist situating us as the "Other," a direct reference to "othering" or objectifying people such that it renders them inferior, (Villenas, 1996, p. 713)

by explicitly and purposely exposing and validating our experiences. The central issue of interest was to explore the self-concept of five Chicanas as reflected by their life stories and narrated in their own words. Specifically, my research was aimed at examining the identity labels the women used, the context in which they used them, and the significance that they attached to these labels. My research recognized the intimate connection of their lived experience to the shaping of their identity. I asked the following question (taken from a query posed by Standing Rock Sioux, Karen Gayton Swisher, 1998, in reference to Native Americans, the pan-ethnic label for the Indigenous Peoples of the United States), “What would the self-image of [Chicanas] be if it were researched by [Chicanas] (p. 194)?” In sum, my research sought to ascertain, “Who are Chicanas?”

More generally, my research proposed to re-situate Chicanas as the bearers and transmitters of knowledge. Pizarro (1999) stipulates that researchers must guide participants through the process of defining themselves as the authorities and as the ones to whom the researchers turn to for guidance. In going directly to the women as the main source for acquiring “data” and by focusing on their voices and including it with mine, I recognized them as the experts on their self-identity. Consequently, I interspersed the women’s voices throughout my dissertation. Their stories, quotes, and insights are cited along with that of other scholars and professionals to lend legitimacy and authenticity to their ways of knowing. Their voices enhanced my research on Chicana identity and provided for a deeper understanding of their concept of self. Thus,

the examination of Chicana identity from the participants and my viewpoints makes it possible for readers to acquire an alternative view of knowledge.

“The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 34). The need to do things differently is particularly critical in education. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by the year 2025, Latina/o students will represent about 25% of the United States K-12 population (Joinson, 2000). Yet, despite their increasing number, the educational attainment of Latina/o students is significantly less their non-Latina/o peers. In fact, Latinas/os “still suffer the lowest high school and college completion rates” (Hispanic Educators Meet in Washington, D. C., 2001, Paragraph 6). Not surprisingly, Martinez-Ebers, Fragua, Lopez, and Vega (2000) in their article on Latina/os and education policy remark that the single most important issue for Latinas/os is improving educational attainment. Antonio Flores, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) elaborates, “By sheer numbers alone, it is all too clear that the nation’s economic and social success will hinge on the academic and career success of our Hispanic communities” (Hispanic Educators Meet in Washington, D. C., 2001, Paragraph 6).

The school drop out rate is particularly acute among Latinas. More than a quarter of Latinas drop out of high school (Ginorio and Huston, 2000) and only ten percent complete four or more years of college (Fewer Caps and Gowns for Hispanic Girls, 2001). “Hispanic girls have a higher high school

dropout rate than girls in other racial or ethnic groups and are the least likely to earn a college degree, according to the American Association of University Women” (Fewer Caps and Gowns for Hispanic Girls, 2001, Paragraph 1).

Some scholars argue that dropping out of school is actually “an act of resistance” to colonialism (Cook-Lynn, 1996; Lujan Falcón, 1995). Resistance notwithstanding, change in education is slow to occur because of the assumptions made about Chicanas/os. “The myth that Mexicans do not value education came about as an explanation for their low level of academic achievement” (Rios, 1993, p. 145). This myth holds persons of Mexican descent solely responsible for their education while subtly perpetuating the status quo.

Chicanas are members of both the fastest growing female “minority” population (e.g., Latinas) and the largest national group (e.g., Mexican descent) within the largest United States minority group (e.g., Latinas/os). Therefore, one can predict that a large portion of the future workforce will be Chicanas. Sonia Perez of the National Council of La Raza, the largest constituency-based Latino organization in the nation contends, “We are already a very significant part of the current workforce. We will be even more significant in the future as Anglo birthrates decline, and Anglos grow older and retire. It’s in America’s best interest to invest in the Latino workforce” (Joinson, 2000, Paragraph 61). Clearly, more attention must be focused on this significant population to examine the barriers to education that Latinas face and that ultimately affect their economic future. Changing the dismal statistics

requires transforming how education goes about the process of educating. My study proposes ways for refocusing educational research to better understand Chicanas' "ways of knowing." Transformation can take place by utilizing and applying information gathered by Chicana scholars from Chicana sources in culturally appropriate pedagogy.

Failure to respect the multiplicity of knowledge stands in the way of getting past one's own cultural presuppositions and transforming one's consciousness to, at minimum, accommodate other knowledge. Acknowledging these "other ways of knowing" requires an ineluctable obligation to concede that there are multiple ways of articulating and consequently, multiple ways of understanding knowledge. An unwillingness to consider other ways of knowing critically limits the researcher and can eliminate the chance of appreciating other ways of "seeing the world" (McPherson & Rabb, 1999, p. 279). As a researcher, I realize that there is a plethora of knowledge "out there" which might be possible for me to glean. Whatever knowledge I gather is determined not only by what I can "discover" or is "discoverable." This situation poses the perhaps not-so-rhetorical question, "What can be done about what the researcher does not know and cannot learn" (Peshkin, 2000, p. 9)? It is also affected by what I knowingly and unknowingly choose to incorporate and discard in my studies; a counter situation that drives results, "What I exclude or de-emphasize has consequences on how and where my interpretation will proceed" (Peshkin, 2000, p. 7). Renato Rosaldo (1989) illustrates this latter concept by

paraphrasing historian and social critic Hayden White's claim, "that the moment one chooses a particular form of discourse (and not another), it shapes historical knowledge both by what it includes and by what it excludes," (pp. 130-131). What I glean and how I use knowledge is further influenced by the analysis, adaptations, and accommodations that I embed into my frame of reference. Likewise, the processes I use in my research will be colored by my beliefs, values, experiences, and biases or, put more succinctly, by my own ways of knowing that "are inherently culture-bound and perspectival" (Lather, 1991, p. 2).

Chicanas' ways of knowing our world "are cultural and political productions tied to and influenced by the discourses of class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation" (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 26). In order to understand Chicana's concept of self, researchers must take a multi-dimensional approach that focuses on historical, social, and political factors that underscore the conceptions of identity. Such an approach calls attention to the complexity of ethnic, racial, and cultural identity. In addition, the approach maintains that the idea of self is not a discrete psychological entity in all cultures (Hoare, 1991). Furthermore, it recognizes the existence of conceptions of identity that are outside traditional academic beliefs. Traditional views of identity postulate that it is a developmental process (Cross, 1978; Erickson, 1982; Helms, 1995; Hoare, 1991). They hold that the process is one of assimilation and acculturation (Garrett, 1996; Lee, 1991). In Western culture, traditional views of identity place autonomous individualism as the highest level of identity

achievement and the norm against which all other identities are judged (Hoare, 1994).

In fact, the Western notion of self as ego-oriented, individualistic, and unique is at odds with the construct of identity of persons from other cultures (see González, 1995; Hoare, 1991, 1994; Medicine, 1983; Mihesuah, 1998a; Nagel, 1994; Sue and Sue, 2003; Trotman Reid and Comas-Diaz, 1990; Zapffe, 1975). For example, in collectivist cultures such as those of First Nations Peoples, the “descendants of [the] first inhabitants of the Americas” (Yellow Bird, 1999, p. 2), identity is constituted as being accepting and inclusive in relational and connected ways with others, nature, and the spirit world (Churchill, 1999; Cleary and Peacock, 1997; Deloria, 1994; Garrett and Garret, 1998; LaFramboise and Plake, 1983; Peacock, 1996; Trimble and Medicine, 1993; Vizenor, 1994). As one of my research participants, Fe, put it, “I guess I look at it like this: if human beings stopped existing today life would still go on. There are things that are more important than us human beings. We are related to all living things, you know.” This collectivist, community-oriented, and spiritual view of identity more accurately characterizes Indigenous people (within the context of this research, the term includes Chicanas/os as explained later) than does the Western view. An individualistic culture views identity in terms of the self (i.e., self-definition, self-fulfillment, self-attainment) hence the gratification of personal needs and desires. This conflicts with the collectivist idea of self as connected with others in the community. This connection guides one’s behavior by how it

affects others instead of by the effect it has on the individual. Behavior is thus governed by how it reflects on family and community. This concept is illustrated by the following quotes taken from the women's narratives:

I knew that to have disagreed with my father was a terrible mistake. It made me appear *mal educada* [discourteous] and embarrassed my mom and dad (Rosie).

My mother didn't want me to "go astray" and have people think all Mexicans were like "*pachucos*" [slang for Mexican American males and an inference to gang affiliation] (Fe).

"Just as there are diverse ideas of self and identity in different cultures, the heterogeneous society of the United States is home to many who do not fit the image projected by dominant white, middle-class man" (Hoare, 1994, p. 34). As a Chicana, I realize that when people look at me, they do not recognize me as "American." They see me as "Other." My language, pronunciation, accent, coloring, and even my attire signals "different." According to C. Alejandra Elenes (1997), Chicana is a constructed identity. "Thus, as a constructed identity, like all identities, it is constructed as *different from*. That is, in order for an identity to exist it has to be differentiated from an Other" (p. 372). The fact that identities may be constructed does not cancel out the fact that people "may have real attachments to the constructed identities" (Jones-Correa and Leal, 1996, p. 12). This suggests that identity is both conferred and appropriated.

This way of conceptualizing identity is fully discussed in the ensuing discourse, which commences with a self-disclosing narrative of my background, experiences, and perspective. To take up a research procedure

without considering one's own perspective and how it situates one in the research process is to sidestep the very fact of all "human existence—namely, that we speak, feel, think, and do" (Martinez, 2000, p. 120). I next introduce the women via snapshot descriptions and synopses of their backgrounds. My self-disclosure reveals that I am Chicana, or an Indigenous woman of Mexican ancestry. Chicana is a self-identified term used by women of primarily Mexican descent. It is a political term arising out of the Chicana/o liberation movement of the 1960's used to signify solidarity and self-determination (Villenas, 1996). Lily, one of the participants, agreed that Chicana is a political term and said, "I guess I use it that way." Indigenous refers to the original inhabitants of a particular place. In the case of this paper, it applies to First Nations Peoples, which includes Mexican Americans and by extension, Chicanas. Hence, when I use the term "Indigenous" it should be understood to include Chicanas. (Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, informs us that the plural "peoples" is used as a way to recognize the real differences in terms of language, culture, and geographic location that exist among Indigenous Peoples.)

I prefer to identify as an Indigenous woman but will frequently call myself Chicana thereby claiming certain historical, political, and cultural experiences. I use the terms interchangeably. I favor these terms over the label, Latina, which homogenizes very diverse women of Latin American ancestry into a catchall category. The latter term is widely accepted in recognition of the fact that some derivative of Latin (Spanish, Portuguese) is

spoken by a majority of Latin Americans (Are Chicanos the Same as Mexicans? n.d., Paragraph 3). I never refer to myself as a “Hispanic” (the use of quotation marks designates my opposition to the use of this term) because, even more so than Latina, it presumes to apply a standardized terminology to a heterogeneous population. In effect, it creates an “artificial population” by aggregating “people who differ greatly in terms of national origin, language, race, time of arrival in the United States, culture, minority status, social class, and socioeconomic status” (Giménez, 1989, Paragraph 6).

A recounting of the theoretical perspectives that have most influenced my research as well as my understanding of Chicana feminista epistemology follow the disclosure and snapshots. Pizarro (1999) maintains, “research and its underlying method and epistemology must be grounded on the epistemology of those with whom we work” (p. 62). I next review the literature on identity formation, which I intertwine with an overview of Chicana/o or Latina/o history, the feminista and Chicana/o movements, and pan-ethnic terms in light of their significance on the evolution of identity labels. I then discuss Indigenous methodology, narrative inquiry, and other techniques used in the research process. From an Indigenous perspective, the research process is much more important than the outcome. In fact, from this standpoint, “Processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 128). Thus, sharing knowledge or the results of my research is in keeping with an Indigenous perspective. Accordingly, I share my interpretations or representations of the collected data,

which were informed by the insights and perspectives of the participants. I conclude the discourse with a discussion of the implications for educators and considerations for future research.

The sections are interspersed by quotes, snippets, and chunks of the participants' narrative stories. The women's knowledge is interwoven throughout the text and thusly privileged. Apart from writing the women's stories separately, I also wrote a *collective story* (Richardson, 1990), which blends our voices throughout the research project. This is accomplished by integrating the participants' quotes, opinions, insights, and interpretations where applicable to authenticate, legitimize, and illustrate Chicanas' ways of knowing. The collective story is an apropos representation of the Indigenous cultural concept of "community." In essence, community encapsulates individual voices into the "collaborative self," which "holds the shared knowledge of the group" (Lawrence and Mealman, 1997, p. 6). The collaborative self is situated, like any scholarly reference or individual in traditional research, as the voice of authority. The collective story includes reflections on my own life, which I employed as a way to understand how our experiences affected the terms we use to identify ourselves. This mutually created story was woven from the strands of our words and embroidered with our lived experiences. As a narrative, the collective story is a representation of how we see ourselves. Consequently, it communicates important aspects of our identity.

I used a first-person voice throughout my dissertation and included myself in the term “our” inasmuch as the narrative included the women’s and my collective history and knowledge. “Using first-person stems from the ethical and epistemological concerns regarding representation and voice” (Errante, 2000, p. 16). It reinforced personal accountability, subjectivity, and “embodied writing” as opposed to passive, third-person voice written “from nowhere by nobody” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 734). It positioned me, the researcher, as the subject. More importantly, it counterbalanced my authority (rather than obscuring it completely) to write about others while permitting inclusion of my history in the analytical process.

As much as the reader may crave solutions or conclusions, a “grand finale” is not included because not only does it exceed the boundaries of this research, but more importantly, because it detracts from the power of the women’s voices. My premise is that the mere act of verbalizing, writing, or naming something is not the same as the ability to comprehend it (e.g., to say it isn’t necessarily to see it). My view is that attempting to reach conclusions about identity is an absurd notion. Conclusions imply finality, “truth,” or reality, when in fact identity cannot be settled. It cannot be considered a precise “this” or “that” without considering that what is “concluded” is bounded by and fixed in time, location, and context. Conclusions presuppose that identity is static and once arrived at, finished. What is more, conclusions were not the aim of my research. Instead, my intent was to document the abundant array of lived experiences of a few select Chicanas to thus

understand how these experiences influenced their concept of self. I also sought to gain insight on the women's identity labels and the context in which they were used. Although generalizations cannot be made from these few women across other Chicanas, I nonetheless wanted to ascertain how their stories might be useful to articulating Chicanas' way of knowing and understanding self.

The women's lived experiences suggest that culture and the intersecting factors of gender, language, age, and "race" shaped their concept of self. Hence, the participants' identity was culturally learned and mediated via their perceptions of the world. In turn, their worldview was influenced by the aforementioned factors. The women's narratives indicate that they use multiple labels (e.g., Chicana, Latina, Hispanic, *mejicana* or Mexican). The narratives also suggest that the women attach different meanings to their identity labels. What is more, label usage is contextual. Schmidt, Barvosa-Carter, and Torres (2000) say that social context plays a powerful role in determining which identity "is most important at any given moment in a person's life" (Paragraph 3). Inasmuch as culture is a dynamic and fluid process, identity can likewise change or evolve over the course of one's lifespan and through one's lived experiences. That being the case, it stands to reason that Chicana identity is not fixed. By laying claim to our ways of knowing, we are in fact constructing a Chicana identity and extending the possibility that its construction is always in process (Elenes, 1997).

My point of view undoubtedly influenced my research; therefore, I do not claim to be unbiased or impartial in the research process. Thus, it should be understood that what I have written is a subjective account. It represents my understanding of identity based on my interpretations of the participants' life story narratives. In short, it is a representation influenced by my worldview. The personal disclosure and ensuing discourse serve to inform the reader of my worldview and how this subjectivity intertwines with my understanding of research. My dissertation specifies how my own experiences and identity have guided my interpretation of the "data" collected thus enabling readers to make their own evaluations and draw their own conclusions of my research (Alvermann, 2000). More importantly, by thoroughly describing the perspectives of the participants and my own, my dissertation encourages the reader to view Chicana identity through the appropriate lens of our own reality.

Researcher's Perspective: En Mis Ojos

People see the world not as it is, but as they are.

Al Lee

The role of the researcher is central in research. Heather Castleden (Castleden & Kursewski, 2000) says, "The role of re/searcher is analogous to that of a learner, storyteller, explorer" (Paragraph 18). The researcher designs the study, chooses the participants, selects the methodology, and determines what data to include or exclude in the final report. The researcher thus sits in a position of power and privilege in relation to the participants. Standpoint epistemologists contend that the relationship between the researcher and researched is in fact a social one "bound by the same patterns of power relations found in other social relationships" (Anderson 1993, p. 51). Mary Hermes (1995) a Lakota/Chinese/White scholar rightly maintains that researchers must resist the hierarchical power inherent in traditional research designs to counteract its potentially negative and oppressive effect on the participants. A way to accomplish this is for the researcher to be explicit about her subjectivity and to examine how it influenced the research process.

Ambert, Adler, Adler, and Detzner (1995) emphasize:

It is the researchers' responsibility to discuss and analyze their own role, behaviors, and impact on the research process and the results. The researchers' limitations or advantages stemming from their own ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status should also be addressed when these are relevant to the research process. (p. 169)

Hermes (1995) maintains that researchers must also focus on building relationships that are responsive to and respectful of participants. Again, self-revelation is the strategy to use because it can work to connect the researcher to the participants especially when it is revealed that they share commonalities. By sharing collective experiences, the researcher fosters mutually respectful relationships and forges connections with the participants. Consequently, a more complete story can be told; a story that “involves a particular type of human relationship, yet one that is subject to all the complexities and ambiguities of any other kind of human interaction” (McCarthy Brown, 1992, p. A56). A reciprocal relationship replaces a potentially exploitive one when the researcher’s presence and its implications in relation to subjectivity, truth claims, and representation are known (Alvermann, 2000; Hermes 1985). Patti Lather (1991) maintains, “Interviews conducted in an interactive, dialogic manner that requires self-disclosure on the part of the researcher encourage reciprocity” (p. 60). “Reciprocity implies give and take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power” (Lather, 1991, p. 57). Thus, Lather suggests that researchers construct “research designs that demand a vigorous self-reflexivity” (p. 66).

This, of course, does not imply that one must submit a full-length autobiography, but does require fully understanding one’s own perspective and how it facilitates and influences the research topic (Behar, 1996; Cleary and Peacock, 1997). How my research played out, for instance, had everything to do with my being Chicana/Indigenous, which in turn shaped my research

interpretations. As such, my perspective represents an important source of information that was useful throughout the research process. Hence, I premised my research on the belief that it must be predicated on my own experiences and interpretations of knowledge. Margaret Montoya (1995) elaborates:

The exploration of personal agency through autobiography and the seizure of discursive space formerly denied to Latinas are regenerative acts that can transform self-understanding and reclaim for all Latinas the right to define ourselves and to reject one-dimensional interpretations of our personal and collective experience. (p. 204)

Personal Disclosure – Recuerdos

Knowledge of the self is the mother of all knowledge.
So, it is incumbent on me to know my self, to know it
completely, to know its minutiae, its characteristics,
its subtleties and its very atoms.
Kahlil Gibran

I define myself by various names. I am Chicana, *Indigena* (Indigenous). In laying claim to these identities, I position myself as having certain social, political, and historical experiences. These experiences as well as my language, “race,” gender, age, social class, culture, and ethnicity have shaped who I am. In turn, these factors have influenced how I view the world. My self-identity is affected by who I think I am (an appropriated identity), how others define me (a conferred identity), and the *mescla* or mixture of the two. Like the foods that I prepare, a hodgepodge of Spanish, Mexican, “American,” and Indigenous ingredients, my identity is a combination of these cultures.

This combination influences my perspective on “how I know what I know.” To fully explain my perspective, my reality, I must first recount my personal history.

I was born in El Paso, Texas and am the second of four children. My mother was a Mexican citizen and my father self-identified alternately as a *mexicano* and Mexican American. I spent the first six years of my life in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. We lived in a home with dirt floors, had kerosene lamps for lighting, and used a community outhouse all of which, by U.S. standards, designated that we were poor. I lived on my grandparents’ *terreno* or land surrounded by a large, extended family that included many aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews. My grandparents’ home, *la casa grande* or big house, was where we invariably gathered. In the *casa grande*, I recall hearing stories of our family’s history and anecdotes about family events and family members. The stories created and interpreted social knowledge in their telling, ensuing discussion, and retelling (Lawrence & Mealman, 1999). They transmitted values, wisdom, teachings, and traditions via the lived experiences of our family. In essence, “Words [e.g., stories] reflect[ed] the way our minds touched the world about us” (Martin, 1992, p. 2). By imparting collective knowledge, the stories served to define and situate my cultural identity. Indeed, “Identity is inseparable from the specific culture that shapes it” (Hoare, 1991, p. 51).

In 1960, we moved to California. This move had a profound effect on me. The move was more than a physical separation from my extended family,

culture, language, and homeland. It was an emotional and spiritual separation from everything with which I identified. I was lonesome for our large family and felt a huge loss. I suffered tremendously and yearned to return to Mexico. These feelings were compounded by several negative experiences. I did not speak English so I was often in embarrassing situations because I could not communicate with others.

Once, I forgot to take my coat home from elementary school on the day before a holiday break. My mother made me walk the mile back to school to retrieve it. I tried unsuccessfully to tell my teacher what I needed. Thoroughly flustered I began to cry. Her attempts to pacify me made things worse. I cried even more. Other teachers interceded and somehow concluded that the way to shut me up was to send me home with all the holiday decorations, which I figure they were going to toss out anyway. I lugged home an armful of construction paper chains, glittery toothpick snowflakes, and cotton ball snowmen but no coat. I was grounded for the entire holiday vacation for showing up without the coat and disobeying my mother.

The nuances of the English language also perplexed me and caused me a great deal of confusion. For example, I did not understand what teachers meant when they said, "Period!" I thought it was a polite word for "shut up" because the immediate response from my classmates was silence. It took a long time for me to figure out that it meant the end of discussion. In a relatively short time, I learned to speak English. Although bilingual education

was yet unheard of in public schools, I nevertheless retained Spanish as my first language and with my mother's help learned to read and write it.

Although our family did not tout having Indigenous roots, it was a known "secret" that our grandmother was an *India* or Indian. Some of the family acknowledged it while others, such as my mother, did not. I understood that being India was not something to be proud of. In Mexico, Indigenous people were seen as backward, quaint, lower class, and uneducated. Peter Poynton (1997) verifies my recollection, "the self-perception of most *mestizo* Mexicans has internalized the undesirability of the identity 'Indian'" (p. 66; also see Anzaldua, 1987; Forbes, 1973 and 1990). These negative characterizations became clearer during an experience I had in junior high school. A boy who was interested in me followed me home one day. When I went inside my house, he shouted, "Hey, India, come out here." Upon hearing that, my mother rushed outside and in no uncertain terms, scolded him for insinuating that I was Indian. My mother ranted, "*Y tú que te cres? Ella no es india! El que es negro eres tú, maldito muchacho!*" ("Who do you think you are? She is not an Indian! The one who is black is you, wicked boy!") That was the end of my short-lived courtship. Thus, very early on I became aware of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity. Whereas, in Mexico, I do not recall ever thinking about whom I was in those terms, in the United States my identity was often called into question. It was defined and contested by others. According to my peers, I was poor, dark instead of White, foreign rather than

citizen, “them” not “us,” I was “Other.” I encountered the negative effects of social class, racism, and prejudice long before I learned the words.

In high school, I started coming into “my own.” Although there were few *Chicanitos* in elementary school, in high school there were a relatively large number of students of Mexican descent. Being around other students that looked like me was a reaffirming experience. Moreover, several teachers and staff were of Mexican descent. I no longer felt “alien” or isolated. For the first time in a long time, I was able to speak Spanish with people other than my family. The school had a program called New Horizons that worked with “underprivileged” youths. The program provided after-school tutoring, mentors, special classes, and cultural activities. In class, we learned of the rich history and contributions of people of Mexican descent. We were taught that we were, in fact, *Indias/os*. The program activities included field trips that highlighted the influence of Mexican culture in California and the Southwest. The program instilled a positive image of us as *Chicanas/os* and a sense of pride in our culture. It was in high school that I first heard of the Chicano/a Movement. I proudly began calling myself Chicana.

My subsequent life’s journey reconnected me with my Indigenous roots. For over twenty years, I have lived with and among First Nations Peoples. I spent the majority of that time with an Anishinaabe (more commonly known as Ojibwe or Chippewa) partner from northern Minnesota. Out of this partnership came two multi-ethnic children and our subsequent immersion in the cultural ways of their father. My initial arrival on the Red

Lake Band of Chippewa Reservation was a cultural shock. I met people whose ways were unfamiliar to me. They spoke slowly, pronounced words in unique ways, and found humor in things that did not seem funny to me. I was often asked, "What tribe are you from?" Most people assumed I was a North American "Indian." (The term "Indian" is a misnomer; however, it is commonly used by First Nations Peoples to refer to each other.) My partner would answer, "She's not Chippewa. She's 'Chick-a-no.'" Amid his laughter people would again ask perplexed, "*What* tribe?" In time, I came to understand and appreciate their way of humor and even to trade barbs in like fashion.

From the Anishinaabeg (plural) I learned to view the world in ways that often contradicted my own previously held beliefs. For example, as a person educated in Western ideology I had dismissed as *puro mito* (purely myth) the belief in the spirit world, *curanderas/os* (traditional healers), and "medicine" (so-called witchcraft used to heal or bring misfortune). Among traditional Anishinaabeg, these are widely held beliefs, which after witnessing its curative and punishment powers, I adopted as my own. I held on to some of my other beliefs but in keeping with what Gloria Anzaldua (1990) terms "surviving the crossroads" (p. 380) I accommodated other perspectives that influenced the way I saw the world. For instance, spiritually, which at one time had meant religion to me, took on a new significance. I began the practice of offering tobacco with prayers whenever I sought counsel or spiritual healing from the Creator. I also gave these offerings in thanks for wisdom and guidance.

Another example is the concept of time. I was already accustomed to seeing time as relative. When a family get-together was scheduled to commence at four o'clock and end at ten, it was expected that some people would not show up until two or three hours later. It was not uncommon for the event to go on until dawn. With the Anishinaabeg, however, a one-day event could easily last two or more days. I wisely learned to plan accordingly for these social events.

Many of the tenets of an Indigenous worldview, albeit with contradictory or minor differences, mirrored those of my Chicana perspective. For example, an integral component of the Anishinaabe and Mexican social system is the extended family. Anishinaabe people, like Mexicanos, easily assimilate outsiders into the family structure. It was thus that an elder became my mother and I her daughter. Consequently, her daughter became my sister and our children cousins. Although I continued to call myself Chicana, I began to see myself as they did, as an Indigenous woman or "Inden" as they would say. Other attributes that Mexicans and Anishinaabeg have in common are humility, generosity, respect, and truthfulness. Like beads on a loom, these traits are interconnected and strung together with the parallel virtues of loyalty, charity, and obligation. The tight weave of these beads form community. An off-color or misfit bead (e.g., humor) is always inserted in each loomed piece (e.g., lived experience). Every "beader" or storyteller worthy of her craft knows that only the Creator can create perfection. The odd bead defers to the Creator's wisdom but also signifies that the conspirator "beader" sees the humor in and the futility of attempting flawlessness.

I carry these beliefs over into my profession, which is that of college counselor. The Indigenous principle of interconnectedness dictates that our goal as humans is to first ensure personal growth before achieving professional expertise. Consequently, professional responsibilities are inseparable from personal values. Indeed, a dichotomy exists when professional expertise is held apart from personal growth. Such a separation devalues personhood and fosters imbalance and disharmony in one's life. To achieve balance one must integrate spirituality, *educación* (educating the whole person), and mental and physical health.

I earned my Masters in counseling before I had my first child. The program of study was an intensive one. There were approximately fifteen students from assorted ethnic, racial, social, and cultural backgrounds from across the United States. The students were a mix of men and women, gays and straights, First Nations Peoples, African Americans, Whites, and Chicanas, liberals and conservatives. The program intentionally stimulated, provoked, and challenged our various ways of thinking. Some students dropped out. Apparently, the program did a little too much probing. For me, it was an insightful experience. It exposed me to other ways of thinking about and being in the world. These new ways at times clashed with and at other times confirmed my own beliefs. Indeed, the people I have encountered throughout my life enriched the diverse experiences I encountered. Both the people and experiences taught me new ways of seeing the world and showed me new ways of living in it. They taught me to question, to accommodate new ideas, to

modify my way of thinking if appropriate, and to seek opportunities for further personal growth. Some of that growth was painful but I survived. I learned from the criticisms and wisdom of others. I also learned to ignore some people's assumptions about who I am or should be. In essence, I took what was useful and dumped the rest.

Participant Snapshots – Las Comadres

Nudge a Mexican and she...will break out with a story
Gloria Anzaldua (1987, p. 65)

I introduce the women by describing who they are, how I know them, and how I see them (see Watson, 1985). These “snapshots” are presented for readers to get acquainted with and visualize the participants. The snapshots include phenotypic descriptions to highlight that these false markers do nothing to locate identity (González, 1995). The description of a “typical Chicana” simply does not exist. The snapshots are meant to crush stereotypes of what Chicanas are and look like. I sprinkled short and lengthy quotes throughout the narrative summaries as a tool to reveal the women's personalities. Thereby, the women's voices as well as mine color the snapshots. I “rearranged” the women's narratives only to bring related topics together. The women would, in fact, talk about the same topic at different times throughout their narrative and interviews. As Cruikshank (1990) notes, “women's autobiographies rarely present a coherent polished synthesis, and the form of presentation is frequently discontinuous, reflecting the nature of

women's experience" (p. 3). Similarly, Carolyn Ellis (1999) points out, "Memory doesn't work in linear ways" (p. 675). I did not otherwise change the participants' words. The women were given pseudonyms to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality. Information that could potentially identify a participant, such as dates, geographical locations, and people's names, was either omitted or changed, as needed. Other information was deleted as requested by the participants.

"Lulú"

Lourdes, better known as Lulú, is a close relative of mine. She is 52 years old, married, and has three adult offspring and one grandchild. Lulú is the oldest of four children. Both her parents are Mexican. She always spoke Spanish to her parents but spoke only English with her siblings. Her mother had the U.S. equivalent of an eighth grade education in Mexico whereas her father, who attended school in the United States, sadly did not survive the fourth grade. He was an example of what has happened to countless Mexican descent students that dropped out or, more accurately, were pushed out of the U.S. education system.

Lulú is exceptionally pretty. She is dark-skinned but mostly because she's a sun-worshiper. Her hair is still a deep brown with no visible silver strands. Her teeth are brilliantly white and very straight unlike the rest of her family whose teeth either crowd their mouth or are so tiny they resemble those of a child's. Lulú has always been athletic. She runs several miles a day.

Men often whistle at her when they drive by. Lulú has worked in public education most of her adult life. Currently, she is a high school counselor in a predominantly Latino district. At the time of the interview, she was a resource teacher in the Learning Center under the Compensatory Education Program at the high school. I asked her to participate in my research because as a child she was raised in Mexico and the U.S. I wanted to tap into the bi-cultural, bilingual, and bi-national perspective of her lived experiences.

I interviewed Lulú in her home. I had arranged to spend the weekend with her since she lives in California and I was traveling from Oregon. We agreed to record about an hour of the interview then take a break after which we would resume taping. We recorded approximately four and one half hours of conversations over the weekend. We sat on her bedroom floor with the tape recorder between us. The ringer was off the telephone, the door closed for additional privacy. I began the first interview by asking her to talk about her background.

First thing, my real name is Lourdes. I've never really liked my name, Lourdes. Everybody calls me Lulú. I feel much more comfortable when people call me Lulú rather than Lourdes. Lourdes made me feel like I was being scolded or something. Just the sound of it . . . [Her face registered displeasure.]

I especially didn't like it when Dad called me Lourdes. It just didn't sound very positive to me. When Dad called me Lourdes it was always attached to a negative connotation. I knew I was going to be scolded or reprimanded for something or other. I guess that is why I dislike my real name. When people call me Lulú it sounds more intimate. I never felt uncomfortable with people calling me Lulú.

We came to the United States from Mexico when I was about 8 years old. All of us came, my mom, my dad, sister, and brothers. We came to live with my *Tia* Chela and *Tio* Lalo in California. We stayed with them for a while until we found a place and moved to Bienvenida [fictitious town]. I think we were probably one of the very, very, few Mexicans in Bienvenida. We went to elementary, junior high, and finally Bienvenida High School there.

In a subsequent telephone conversation, Lulú recounted another story about her name. A colleague of hers had been told by administrators that a certain Lourdes T. had been at the high school for numerous years. He responded, "We don't have a Lourdes T. working here." When told that there was, he adamantly responded, "I have been with the school for many years and there is no one here by that name." He was later told that Lulú was, in fact, Lourdes. All those years he, and most everyone else, had no idea that Lulú's name was actually Lourdes. The next time he ran into Lulú, he greeted her by her given name. "I felt like he slapped me," Lulú told me. The visceral reaction she experienced as a child was again recalled when he called her Lourdes.

With the help of scholarships, grants, financial aid, and jobs Lulú attended a private college and got a degree in teaching. Lulú is one of the first in her extended family to earn a college degree. After twenty years of teaching English, ESL, psychology, science, and coaching, she earned a graduate degree in counseling. Several times, she has been recognized at the local and state level for her innovative teaching style, involvement in the community, and leadership in education. She was honored with the Women of Achievement Award for her excellence in teaching secondary school children, English as a

Second Language, and for establishing a program to work with adolescent girls living with alcoholic family members. Family members widely admire her accomplishments and the inroads she has traversed for our children and grandchildren to follow.

“Lily”

I met Lily (Liliana) shortly after I moved to Oregon. She walked into my office, introduced herself, and welcomed me to the community. I immediately took a liking to her. At five feet, eight inches Lily is the tallest participant. Her shock of jet-black hair drapes tenaciously over her face no matter how often she tries to restrain it with hairpins or braids. Her small, dark eyes are constantly moving as if seeking a vantage point behind her hair, afraid of missing something important. Lily is 44 years old, married, and has four children. She is the director of a program that serves first-generation college students. Due to the nature of her job, which requires out-reach to Latina/o families, and her activities outside of work Lily is well known in the Latina/o community.

Lily was born in the Midwest but was raised in rural Oregon. It was because of this that I wanted her to take part in my study. I wanted to learn about the experiences of a Chicana that had not been raised in a metropolitan city or in one that had a large Latina/o community. Before asking her to participate, we talked about my graduate studies and the nature of my research. Lily indicated that she was interested in telling me about her experiences as a

Chicana growing up in Oregon. When I told her I wanted to include her in my research she readily agreed. I taped her interviews over a leisurely lunch in restaurants on three separate occasions. Over the din of noisy patrons, Mexican music, and an overly solicitous server, Lily began her tale.

My dad was born in *Tejas*. I guess you would consider him a *Tejanó*. My mom was born in *México* in Piedras Negras, Cahuila. I am the oldest of seven children. I am the only one out of the seven that has gone to college.

She moved from her parents' home to attend the closest university which was over one hundred miles away. The college was located in what was commonly known as a "red-neck town." She said, "*No habia hispanos, puros gringos*, [there were no Hispanics, just gringos] and I felt really isolated." She moved back to her hometown and continued her studies via a satellite program while she worked full time. When she married her first husband, they moved to western Oregon where things "went downhill from there." After her divorce, she found a part-time job at her current place of employment, which evolved into a full-time position. She indicated that this job made it possible for her to eke out a living for herself and her children.

I started working at the college almost fourteen years ago. I love my job. I love helping students, especially students that have the same background that I have, which is a migrant farm worker background.

Lily revealed that when she first started working at her place of employment she was the only Latina employee. Since then, the organization has seen a tremendous growth in Latina/o, especially Mexican and Mexican descent, employees. This is not to say that there are a lot of Latina/o

employees working there, just many more than when she started. Lily, like several of the other participants, started her post secondary education in a community college then transferred to a state university. Lily said that it took her a long time to complete her Bachelors degree because she struggled to support her family. Also, she could not decide on a major. She looked into nursing, teaching, and business before completing a liberal arts degree with a minor in sociology. She is slowly accumulating credits to earn a Masters degree in education. Her hope is to become a college professor.

“Fe Dolores”

My family and I had just arrived in a northern California coastal community when we first met Fe Dolores. We were at the home of a Chicano community activist when she walked into the room toting her infant daughter. A small, well-dressed woman, a wee bit over five feet tall, her hair in a neat coiffure, Fe captivated my attention. Upon being introduced to her I commented, “I feel as if I know you.” Her huge smile indicated that she was pleased. Fe and I have remained good friends for over eighteen years.

We have survived the birth and death of children, the passing of our mothers, debilitating illnesses, stepmothers, infidelity, unemployment, poverty, disastrous marriages, and heartache. Our relationship has borne witness to all the possible human emotions, hope, excitement, fear, jealousy, worry, rage, elation, and dejection. We are *comadres*, the special relationship that develops between two women when one entrusts her child to the other. Comadres

advise, teach, and help raise each other's children. When my son was a year and a half, we held a blessing ceremony for him, which initiated the relationship. By becoming my comadre, Fe took an oath to assume guardianship of him should anything happen to me. Over the years, Fe has given me more advice, assistance, and spiritual guidance than my boy ever required.

It is because of Fe's wisdom and spirituality that I asked her to participate in my research. I wanted the opportunity not only to hear and record her stories but also to learn from her. I knew that she could contribute a lot of knowledge to my research on identity and Chicanas. What is more, I knew that Fe had first hand knowledge of the Chicana *femenista* movement and had been involved in numerous social justice causes. She personifies what Ana Castillo (1994) calls *Xicanisma*, "the tenacious insistence at integrating a feminist perspective into their [women's] political conscientización [consciousness] as Chicanas" (p. 40). Fe is modest and would demur at such a characterization. Nonetheless, it is true.

I interviewed Fe in California over several days. The interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. Like me, Fe intersperses both languages throughout her speech. She also liberally sprinkles Spanish proverbs to convey meaning. For example, she said "*El sol sale 'pa todos* [the sun comes out for everyone]" to signify, in the context in which she used the proverb, that one should not discriminate because no one is better than someone else. Some of the interviews took place in her home. Others were

conducted in parks. One took place in her car on the way to a taping of a community television program. The program host wanted to record an interview with her on the ceremonial *danza* (dance) group that she has headed for several years. I learned a lot about Fe and danza during this taped program interview. A few days later Fe told me the history of danza, its significance, and how she became involved with it:

I first saw danza *Azteca* in San José. Andrés Segura Granádos, *en paz descanse* (may he rest in peace), was *un jefe de danza Azteca* (a chief of Aztec dancing). *Su palabra* (his authority) was established in the 1700's [and passed down through the generations to him.] *El heredó la danza* (he inherited the dance.)

Andrés brought danza [to the U.S.] as a *tradición* (tradition). His contribution was to teach the spiritual traditions. I learned the many meanings of danza from him. I learned about the *mesas* (the councils), about the people from the past, what the danza means, many, many things.

Another dancer, Florencio Yescas, always respected the tradiciones. Prior to Florencio, the feathers and the *trajes* (outfits) were *conchero* style, very *humilde* (humble), loincloth, and *manta* (muslin). Florencio believed *que tenía que ser un esplendor porque era la cultura* (it had to be a splendor because it represented our culture).

His contribution to danza was that the Azectas wore the big feathers. He was not a conchero so he didn't dance with *mandolinas* (mandolins). [He used] the drum and fancy dancing [a type of dance]. In the last 20-25 years, we have gone from conchero, which were the mandolinas and *conchas de armadillo* (armadillo shells) and the very humble Azteca dancer to the *esplendor* (splendor).

The first interview was conducted at the county park situated close to her home. The drive is up a winding tree lined road. The day was dry and hot. The summer wind rustled in the trees as we parked. We headed toward the

small creek to take advantage of the shade trees and coolness of the water. I laid out the recorder between us on a picnic table. Children's voices could be heard shrieking, laughing as they splashed each other in the water. I poised the microphone toward her.

Me: *Ahora si me dices de tu vida.* (Okay, now tell me about your life.)

Fe: Oh my god. [Fe gestured with her hands to indicate that her story was long.]

Me: We have time.

Fe: But I don't want to cry.

Me: That's okay. I'll edit that part [out].

Fe laughed and said, "Okay, good." She began telling me her story.

Fe was born in Uruapan, Michoacan in 1949. She is the third oldest of eight children. Fe has five sisters and two brothers. Her mother's parents were born in Mexico. Her father was born in Kannapolis, Kansas, and her mother in Michoacan, Mexico. Her dad's father was born in Mexico while his mother was born in Kansas and thought to be part Cherokee. Her father's mother died when he was a young boy so he was sent to Uruapan, Mexico where he was bounced from relative to relative.

After he got married, he came to work in the U.S. because he could not feed his large family in Mexico. He moved to Lucia [fictitious town], California because the climate was much like Uruapan. Meanwhile Fe and her family traveled by train to Tijuana, Baja California to wait while he arranged to bring them to the States. Fe recounts, "We waited while my dad fixed the

papers. In those days they didn't have the 'Berlin Wall' at the TJ [Tijuana] border." He sent for his wife and children in August of 1956.

Fe attended elementary and high school in Lucia. She then enrolled in the nearest community college and eventually transferred to a state university. She recently obtained a teaching credential although she has taught in public and private schools for years. She currently teaches in a public elementary school. Apart from being an educator, Fe is also an actor, poet, writer, *danzante* (dancer), artist, and community activist.

"Rosie"

Rosie or "*La Rosa*," is the person who introduced me to Fe. My partner, child, and I had met Rosie just a few days before. We had traveled from Minnesota and after a short stint at my parents' home, headed north in search of jobs and housing. A Seneca friend of ours had given us the name of a Lakota woman, Louna Clips, who is widely known among the Native community. Our friend assured us that Louna or Lou as she is affectionately called, would help us. After feeding us, Lou took us over to Rosie's house where we were again welcomed and given a place to stay. Lou and Rosie have been friends for decades. Together they fed, clothed, housed, and otherwise assisted hundreds of people that have passed through their doors. They were involved in youth programs, the Teens Against Gangs program, and began the food share and homeless assistance program through the Native American Church. They continue to assist people that are down on their luck. What is

more, they organize, motivate, instigate, and collaborate with others to help those in need. All across Indian Country, there are Native Peoples such as Lou and Rosie that generously assist other Indigenous people. We lived with Rosie in her modest, three bedroom home until I found a job in a nearby town.

La Rosa has a heart of gold. She is quick to chuckle and possesses a sharp wit. Even in the most serious occasions, Rosie finds humor in the situation. When I called her about participating in my research, she laughed and asked, "Are you sure you want to hear my story? I got some wild stories to tell!" We scheduled to record her stories a month later in her home in California. I spent three days with her. The first session was in her office. Rosie is a supervisor for the county adult services program. She has worked there for over ten years. It was a Friday afternoon so at the end of the day, she commenced the telling of her life story.

Rosie is fifty-three years old, stands about five feet, six inches, has hazel-green eyes, and light skin and hair. Rosie has three adult children, two of whom have children of their own. Her daughters and their children live with her. Her mother was born in Riverside, California and is of Mexican descent. Her father was born in Chicago, Illinois and is of Spanish and Mexican descent. Both sets of grandparents were from Durango, Mexico. Rosie's paternal grandparents held professional positions. Her grandfather, Genaro, was a journalist and her grandmother, Rita, a schoolteacher. Early in their marriage, they migrated to Chicago, Illinois where Genaro studied journalism. Rosie's father was born there. Shortly after moving back to

Durango, Genaro was assassinated. Family lore has it that he was killed in retaliation for something he wrote although no one knows for sure. Rosie's father, Genaro Jr., subsequently went to work in California at the age of fifteen to help support his mother and siblings. He did manual field labor for many years before joining the Army. In time, he was able to bring his family to California. After he married Rosie's mother the couple moved to Santa Barbara where Rosie was born. When Rosie was six, the family moved to Oxnard, a bustling beach town on California's central coast. The Mexican community more commonly calls Oxnard "Chiques."

In the quiet of her office, Rosie told the following story amid giggles and barely contained glee at her childhood behavior.

Kindergarten was one of the most memorable eras of my life. I attended school whenever I felt like it. Someone from the family, usually my dad, would drop me off in front of the school gate and I'd wave as I went up the stairs to the schoolhouse. As their car disappeared down the street, I would also disappear out the gate and head straight for my grandmother's house down the street.

A basement door that was never locked led to the laundry area on the side of my grandmother's house. I had set up a little play area in the basement of her house and would play for hours with my little dishes and *Panchito*, my little bear, before anyone came home. A friend of my dad who just happened to be driving down my grandmother's street finally busted me one day.

That was the end of the good old days. I was expelled from the Catholic school for being so bad. When we moved to another town, I was enrolled in public school. I couldn't play hooky there but I sure got into fights. The kids would pull my braids. I got this one boy good when I socked him in the nose. I guess you can say there wasn't a dull moment in my life.

Back at her house, we resumed the interview. Rosie lives in a house that is not too far from her childhood home. The house is situated in a well-maintained neighborhood. Rosie said that she knows most of her neighbors. Not long after buying her house, she went about introducing herself to the residents on her street. I was not surprised. Rosie is a friendly outgoing person. With a look of good-time mischief in her eyes, Rosie recounted the following tale:

When I was young, I guess I must have been two or three; my mother got very sick and ended up in a long-term care facility for about a year. My dad had to raise me on his own. At that time, he was working in Canoga near the facility where my mom stayed. We were living in a trailer behind his shop. He built a play area near where he worked so he could keep an eye on me. He would have to feed me, comb my hair, most of the time he'd just throw it in a bun.

He worked in a machine shop. There was all this grease all over the place. My dad told me that I would get so dirty! Every evening he would get a big *tina* [basin] and he would put the ice cold water in there to give me a bath. He would give me a bath in ice water! He says he thinks that's why I was so wild.

After high school, Rosie enrolled in the local community college then transferred to Sacramento City College and Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl (DQ) University, an Indigenous college in Davis, California. Rosie was involved in establishing DQ. She supported the American Indian Movement (AIM) in its take-over of the army base at Alcatraz Island by supplying food, clothing, and other essentials to the occupiers. First Nations Peoples and Chicanos activists laid claim to the site in 1972 pursuant to the United States policy of granting surplus federal lands to Native people. Their aim was to create a college controlled by Indigenous people. The General Services Administration deeded

the land on which DQ sits to Indigenous people after they left the island (A History of American Indians in California, n. d., Paragraph 2).

During this time, Rosie met her children's father. They were both involved with the college's development. They did fundraising, beadwork, and other art "to support the cause." Rosie worked as the college receptionist. She also assisted in developing college pamphlets and the curricula. After the college was established, she transferred to the University of California, Davis. She completed her degree in Community Development and minored in Native American/Chicano studies. Rosie and the children's father parted before their third child was born. She later moved back to Oxnard. Rosie devoted her life to raising her children "as best as she knew." She was a firm disciplinarian with her children who duly loved and respected her. Her family jokingly calls her "*La Sargenta*" (The Sergeant).

"Dulcina"

At 32 years of age, Dulcina is the youngest of the participants. She is married and has a one-year old child. Dulcina is a diminutive woman, standing less than five feet tall. She is fair-skinned, has short, curly brown hair, and a beautiful complexion. Her dimpled smile is disarming. Dulcina is loving, kind, and is an attentive listener. She always greets friends with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Invariably, she will rest her hand gently on one's arm when she talks. Dulcina exudes boundless energy. She is a college instructor and is

relentless when it comes to recruiting volunteers to share their expertise with her students. She is well liked by her colleagues and students alike.

I first met Dulcina when I interviewed for a position at her place of employment. A couple of years later, Dulcina and I attended a diversity workshop. Attendees were asked to give a brief overview of their background as it related to difference. Dulcina's summary contained experiences of how she saw herself. She spoke of the dilemmas and conflict she has experienced as a Latina in a predominantly White world. I approached her after the workshop to ask if she would take part in my research. We taped our first conversation at her kitchen table while her daughter napped. It was a weekend so she was able to devote most of the day to our session.

Her maternal grandfather was born in Nuevo Leon, Mexico. Her grandmother was also born in Mexico. Dulcina was born in Edinburg, Texas in 1971. Her parents were told that she would not survive the night. They took her home expecting her to die. Her grandmother put her in a shoebox, opened the oven door, and placed her in there to keep her warm. Her grandmother told her, "*Ahí estábamos* [there we were] sitting around just watching you. And the next morning you were still alive! The *doctores no saben nada* [doctors don't know anything]." She said that her family lived on a farm and was very poor. She has not been back to her hometown since moving to Oregon at the age of five. Years later, she found out the reason why they left Texas.

It turned out that my mom left my dad. We had no idea for the longest time. All we knew is my mom had us ride a

Greyhound bus [to Oregon]. She drove my dad's truck, which she loaded with everything that would fit in the back. Then she had us take the bus *solitos* [alone]. It was just the three of us, my brother, my sister, and me. We took the bus by ourselves from Texas to Oregon.

My brother was our protector. He was the oldest. To sleep, we would lie down together on the long seats and strap ourselves in with the seatbelts so we wouldn't fall off. The bus dropped us off right in front of my grandmother's house.

Her father joined them shortly after they arrived. She later found out that her mother moved them to Oregon to give them a better life. Dulcina remembers that her family had nothing. Her parents did not have a job so the entire family worked in the fields picking berries and other crops. Dulcina was about five or six years old at the time. After her mother learned to speak English, she went to college to train for a job monitoring hospital patients. Her father eventually landed a good job where he worked until his death.

Dulcina did not learn to speak English until she was in elementary school. She understands Spanish but no longer speaks it fluently. Dulcina said that she was punished for speaking Spanish in grammar school and then shamed by college peers for her pronunciation of Spanish. After a difficult transition from one college to other, she obtained a Bachelors degree then a Masters in Policies, Foundations, and Administration. Dulcina worked at a state university before being hired to teach at a community college.

Theoretical Influences – Tomando Cuenta

The truth is like a rabbit in the bramble bush:
you can't touch it
All you can do is circle around the bush
and know that the truth is in there
somewhere.

Unknown Storyteller

Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln (1998) maintain that no researcher, “ought to go about the business of inquiry without being clear about just what paradigm informs and guides his or her approach” (p. 218). The conceptual structure that informs my research is what Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) terms a Chicana *femenista* epistemology that is framed by an Indigenous worldview. Chicana *femenista* epistemology is best described as one that is “grounded in the life experiences of Chicanas and involves the Chicana research participants in analyzing how their lives are being interpreted, documented, and reported”(Delgado Bernal, p. 555). It holds certain beliefs or “truths” about knowledge as articulated by the following principles:

- It is grounded in the life experiences of Chicanas.
- It is highly personal.
- Truth is subject-oriented; it is derived from the lived and perceived experiences of Chicanas.
- Acknowledges that Chicanas’ lived experiences are markedly different from that of men and White women.

- Respects, incorporates, and preserves our history, language, and culture.
- Questions notions of objectivity and universal foundations of knowledge or “truths.”
- Claims the right of Chicanas to name themselves.
- Recognizes that lived experience can never be fully captured.
- Acknowledges the unique perspectives that Chicanas bring to the research process.
- Involves Chicana participants in research and in the analysis, interpretation, and reporting of that research.

Much like other feminist views, *femenista epistemology* values women’s experiences and emphasizes listening to those experiences as they relate to women’s social reality. It understands pedagogy not only as the construction of knowledge but also its transmission. Lester-Irabinna Rigney (1999), an Indigenous Australian scholar, indicates that feminist epistemology includes:

- Women as researchers
- Women as participants
- Women defining research for themselves
- Women’s knowledges/histories and epistemologies (p. 115)

As conceptualized by Delgado Bernal (1998), the foundation of a Chicana *femenista* paradigm is based on Chicanas’ shared knowledge, lived experiences, and unique cultural and social history. As such, our experiences

and realities are positioned as the keystone of knowledge. By legitimizing our experiences, Chicana scholars affirm our authority to design, conduct, and analyze research. Moreover, by relocating Chicanas as the central focus of inquiry and framing research questions around Chicana issues, we assert the right to speak for ourselves.

The unique viewpoint that Chicana researchers bring to the research process provides a perspective that Delgado Bernal (1998) coins “cultural intuition.” Her concept draws from Strauss and Corbin’s (as cited in Delgado Bernal, 1998) “theoretical sensitivity – a personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 563). Strauss and Corbin argue that theoretical sensitivity comes from four major sources: 1) personal experience, 2) the existing literature on the topic, 3) professional experience, and 4) the analytical research process itself (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Delgado Bernal proposes these four sources as contributing to cultural intuition and as the basis for *femenista* epistemology in research. Cultural intuition, however, encompasses other sources from which Chicanas draw. These include collective history, community memory, our realities, and our own interpretations of knowledge.

A Chicana *femenista* standpoint embraces and maintains connections to Indigenous roots and worldview (e.g., Alarcon, 1990; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Forbes, 1973 and 1992; Martinez, 1998). An integral component of an Indigenous worldview and Chicana perspective is the value placed on according deep veneration for our elders. This high regard is exemplified by

the following *dicho* (proverb) recited by Fe, “*Mas sabe el diablo por viejo que por diablo*” (The devil knows more because of his age than because he is the devil). Dulcina conveys an example of the respect accorded to elders when she admonished a schoolmate for disrespecting his grandfather. “He’s your grandfather. How could you not serve him? How could you not respect him? It’s not submissive. It’s out of respect.” Lulú recounts another example:

I remember one time that some kids were teasing us and throwing rocks at us. My Tio Lalo came out and was telling them, “Shut up the mouth! Shut up the mouth!” The kids started laughing and making fun of how my Tio spoke.

I felt real bad for my Tio ‘cause these kids were laughing at an adult. How dare they laugh at an adult and make fun! And these were little kids, *mocosos* (snotty nosed kids). The kids were making fun of him. And I thought that that was not right.

Cultural traditions and Mother Earth are also venerated as demonstrated by the following comments:

When I was in Mexico I helped organize the *Quinto Festival de los Teatros Chicanos, Primer Encuentro Latino Americano* [theater festival] (Fe).

I remember when we’d have the celebrations. We had the *matachines* [Indigenous dancers], *Los Reyes Magos* [Three Wise Men], and the *Posadas* [Christmas pageant]. We had all these things that we did as a family (Lulú).

He used to take me to *velaciones* [all night prayer ceremonies]. In those days, *velaciones* were four days long, night and day. People had to know about medicine [traditional healing] before they were allowed to dance. People had to earn the right to dance (Fe).

Other components of an Indigenous worldview are the interrelated values of cooperation, obligation, duty, and loyalty; “He was the oldest. He had to take care of us and we had to listen to him” (Dulcina), “We had nothing;

no money. So we would get up early to go work in the fields with my parents” (Dulcina), and “*Me dio su palabra* (he gave me his word)” (Fe). Being responsible means fulfilling one’s obligation to the family, friends, and community, which engenders and maintains harmonious and balanced relations. Responsibility ties back to respect. It is reflected by the concept of *educación*, which refers to knowing how to be or behave and how to treat others with respect.

Another important component of an Indigenous perspective is the protocol of demonstrating and accepting respect, which includes reciprocating respectful behaviors (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). This value is embodied in respectful attitudes toward nature and women. For example, in the creation stories of the Ojibwa or Anishaanabe nation, earth is depicted as Mother and human beings as her children. Red Lake Chippewa Renee Senogles says, “My understanding is, at one point, Mother Earth religions were all over the world. In fact, that was probably the original instructions of all people everywhere” (as cited in Farley, 1993, p. 69). This belief accords high esteem and reverence to women and their role in society, which in turn, engenders respect and harmony within the family. “The tribes see women variously, but they do not question the power of femininity. Sometimes they see women as fearful, sometimes peaceful, sometimes omnipotent and omniscient, but they never portray women as mindless, helpless, simple, or oppressed” (Allen, 1986, p. 44).

Many Indigenous women position themselves as caretakers. Senogles speaks on this issue, “The difference between Native women and white feminists is that the feminists talk about their rights and we talk about our responsibilities. There is a profound difference. Our responsibility is to take care of our natural place in the world” (as cited in Farley, 1993, p. 69). Indigenous women also assume the obligation to transmit cultural knowledge. Apart from their role as parents, several of the participants also took care of elderly parents and grandchildren. One of them was in the process of assuming guardianship of her daughter’s two children. The participants transmitted cultural knowledge through the instruction of food preparation, use of medicinal and culinary herbs and plants, acquisition of Spanish and Indigenous languages, *creencias* or beliefs, spirituality and associated practices, history, and customs. Two of the women have been involved in teaching folk and ceremonial dances and cultural *tradiciones* for years.

“I think I did a good job [raising my kids], at least in making them feel proud of whom they are. There are a lot of things that I did within the Mexican tradition, within the culture, like cooking and the music” (Lily). “Having Mom raise him [son] made him more appreciative of being Mexican. He would listen to Mexican music and talk to Mom in Spanish” (Lulú). “My *traje* [dance regalia] represents me. What goes into a *traje*, the colors and symbols, depends on the time of day that you were born, the time of year that you were born, and the date that you were born” (Fe).

Cultural knowledge is evident in the context of the relationship that exists between communal traditions and the natural, including spiritual, world. Indigenous worldview expresses a preference for explaining natural events according to the supernatural (Garrett and Garrett, 1998). Fe expressed this concept in her explanation of the tradition of making *ojo de dios* [God's eye, a four- or eight-sided woven talisman]:

A mother would pray and dream of the colors for her unborn child. As the baby was journeying into the world, she would make an *ojo de dios* to protect the child. The *ojo de dios* would have the colors of that child and when the child got old enough, s/he would make her or his own *ojo de dios*.

An *ojo de dios* also protects a child on his journey back to the spirit world. My eight-month-old grandson died on the very day that Fe and I recorded the above interview. Fe instructed my daughter to make him an *ojo de dios* using white yarn to symbolize light and purity and other colors that best represented him. The latter is indicative of Indigenous beliefs that relegate meaning or power to colors. The *ojo de dios* was used in the memorial ceremony, which Fe officiated. On an otherwise hot and calm day, a refreshingly cool breeze whipped through the trees as she spoke his name. We believe that it was my grandson's spirit bidding us farewell. On the one-year anniversary of his death, we shall honor him with a Ghost Feast. At that time, we are once again allowed to say his name. We believe that we confuse the dead by speaking their name because they may think we are calling them to remain on earth with us. After watching over us to ensure that we will be okay Baby will be free to travel to the Spirit World and return to our ancestors.

Indigenous worldview is also communicated by living in the present. Too often, this is misconstrued to mean that we are fatalistic and do not plan for the future. Instead, this belief belies the stereotype of living in the “here and now” when viewed from the perspective that it facilitates our ability to change and adapt as a means of survival (Rios, 1993). An Indigenous perspective believes in living in harmony with nature (Garrett and Garrett, 1998; Herring, 1994). An example of this concept comes from Fe when she explained her beliefs about evolution.

I think the whole idea that God made the world in seven days may well be how people related in order to understand. But I know that it took thousands of years for the world to be created.

If we believe in the *Nahui Ollin* [Four Movements; concept of duality] and in movement, in revolution, what is revolution if not evolution as well? Everything changes, right? It evolves. Revolution is evolvment.

Our realities as Chicanas give us unique perspectives from which we view ourselves in relation to our world. Our realities are seamless and fluid and can accommodate the many selves (mothers, grandmothers, teachers, healers, and companions) that comprise who we are as Chicanas and Indígenas. For many of us this means straddling two or more cultures (Anzaldua, 1990) while maintaining the ability to operate with contradictions and ambiguity. For Dulcina, spanning cultures manifested in difficulty fitting in with either Western or Mexican college peers. “That was the first time that I really felt stuck in the middle. I did not belong anywhere. That’s when I really felt like an outsider. I just didn’t feel accepted.” Some of the uncertainties we

encounter are the result of living in a society that it at odds with some of our own cultural beliefs.

This realization came early to me when, as a child, I was confronted by an adult who questioned my honesty. I tried to communicate to a neighbor that the parakeet he found in his yard was ours. After convincing him it belonged to us, I asked to take the bird home in the neighbor's birdcage. He very clearly let me know that he did not believe I would bring the cage back. I felt my face turn red in humiliation as I quickly bundled the bird in my sweater and headed home. I had never lied to an adult. I was taught not to; the consequences were too severe if I got caught. Being confronted by someone's disbelief ran counter to my parents' teachings that I would not suffer if I told the truth.

The contradictions manifested in other ways for the women. For Fe it was with religion. She said, "I grew up very Catholic. Not just Catholic, staunch Catholic . . . with all the guilt." When she went away to college and became involved with the Chicana/o movement, she learned about the church's role in the "invasion of the Indigenous people." She became very angry and turned her back on Catholicism. Eventually, she returned to her religious roots.

Little by little, rather than fight it, I began to understand that one didn't have to supersede one [belief] for the other. And the more I learned about my tradiciones, I found that many things within Catholicism, especially the Catholicism of *México*, were tied into the Indigenous tradition. Many of the Indigenous traditions and beliefs are hidden within Catholicism because the people were forced to believe in Catholicism. As some point, I made peace with Catholicism.

For Dulcina the contradictions presented themselves in her parents' attitude about Western culture. Her narrative story conveys her own cultural ambiguity. Her parents, especially her mother, believed that they were a cut above and better off than other mexicanos.

My parents really embraced this culture [Western]. They were so poor that now it's, "We want a better life for you." They saw that the more we were like the people we were living with [Whites] the more successful we would be. However, my dad really embraced mexicano culture and so did my mom, to a certain extent.

Lily expressed the inevitable clash that occurs when one tries to fit in two different cultures:

I think it's really hard for us that are trying to live within our culture but also trying to live within the dominant culture. I think we are always struggling with, "This is acceptable in this culture, but it isn't in that culture."

As Chicanas, we juggle cultures that are sometimes in opposition to each other. "I've always had this feeling of being this bicultural person in the middle and never finding a home on either side" (Dulcina). We develop tolerances to their polarities and vagueness. "You have to make it on your own, in the middle. That's how I feel" (Dulcina). We balance and harmonize the divergent tunes to produce music that sings truth to our beliefs, to our cultural intuition. Dulcina recognized that the population of persons of Mexican descent would increase in the future.

The good thing is, more and more kids are going to look like [my daughter]. That's what's going to be so special and make it different for her. I look at her, I look at her cousins, and I'm thinking, "That is what the future's going to look like." I think she's going to have a better chance or a better head start, hopefully a better experience (Dulcina).

My own cultural intuition guides me toward research methods that respect, incorporate, and preserve our history, language, and culture. Moreover, it grounds me politically in specific Chicana Indigenous ideals, beliefs, experiences, struggles, and histories. Femenista Aida Hurtado (1998) hones in on this point. She asserts that most Women of Color claim their particular group's history as part of their own "activist legacy" (p. 40). As has been demonstrated, several of the women are activists in their own right. The participants credit their parents for their civic involvement. As children, they saw their parents contribute to their communities. Rosie's father was politically involved as a talk show host for *El Pueblo Opina* (The Community Opines) on a local Mexican radio station in Chiques. He regularly wrote letters to the editor of the English language newspaper, was an accomplished musician and composer, and finished his college graduate work at the same time that Rosie earned her Bachelor's degree. Rosie said, "My dad had a lot of spirit. He used to like to get involved with stuff. I think I grew up liking to do the same things he did."

Rosie's father was active in the Mexican community and belonged to LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) and the Mexican American Business Association in the 1960's. "I don't think there were a lot of mexicanos in those days but everybody knew everybody else. I think that it was because of the involvement." Her father was also involved with the *El Cristo Rey*, the Catholic Church in *La Colonia* (the Colony) on the Mexican side of town. He assisted in fundraising to build a new church when the

Mexican congregation outgrew El Cristo Rey. Rosie remembered that few Whites attended the church.

Martha Menchaca (1995) in her book, The Mexican Outsiders, reiterates that biological theories claimed that racial minorities were culturally inferior. These theories paved the way for a philosophy of social segregation that separated Whites from Mexicans in towns, churches, and schools. Priscilla Lujan Falcón (1995) asserts that from 1848 through the 1960's, Mexicans were denied equal access to the public school system by the imposition of language, social institutions, and a U.S. legal system that segregated society along color lines. Rosie's contention that the majority of the Mexican population lived in La Colonia supports Menchaca and Lujan Falcón's segregation claims. Menchaca says, "The popular belief that Anglo-Saxons were God's chosen people provided the religious rationale for racist practices" (p. 32). Although, Menchaca's book chronicles the history of the small town of Santa Paula, California (Oxnard's neighbor) she asserts that these supremacist ideologies were widespread. Fe recalled that Mexicans were also segregated in her community.

In those days, the mexicanos from Mexico lived on the outskirts of the city. They were the farm workers and they [farmers] had the housing out there for them. Most of the people on this side of town were the Chicanos, people who had been here for generations.

Although Fe's family was relatively new to the community, they moved into town because they had relatives there. Like Rosie, Fe credits her parents, in particular her father, for promoting community involvement. "He

was very civic oriented. My father very much believed in contributing to the community.” He was a founder of *La Casa del Mexicano*, a Mexican community organization that sponsored cultural events. “My mother was a big influence, religiously and humanitarily.” Her mother would tell her that she had no inheritance to leave Fe other than her religion. “She brought us up very Catholic, with all the traditions and all the strictness.”

Fe said that in the 1930’s and 1940’s, the Mexican government was anti-Catholic. The church was prohibited and “people had to go underground.” Her parents were involved in a national youth movement call the *Sinarquismo* whose mission was to save the church. The movement was organized in response to the Mexican government clamping down on the Catholic Church. The government’s goal was to restrict the church’s influence on the Mexican people. When Fe was in Mexico, she did some research on the movement. “My mother and father did not know, and I don’t argue with them ‘cause I don’t think they can handle it, that Sinarquismo, at the time that Hitler and his people were kicked out, was a Fascist-backed organization.” The fascists used the youths’ belief in the Church to do their political organizing. The Sinarquismo held underground masses. “I’ve heard stories about how they [the government] closed down the churches and the priests were hunted down.” The members of Fe’s mother’s family were the “protectors of the Church and priests.” They would camouflage the priests by dressing them up like women.

Her parents' involvement carried through to their community when they moved to the United States. They raised their children to contribute to society. Fe recalled, "*Que Dios nos dio la vida por algo, para contribuir* (God gave us life so that we might contribute.) I always, even as a little girl, had a political consciousness. I was very politically aware." In high school, her political activism gave her parents cause for concern. They feared that she would turn into a "full-fledged Commie." Fe mercilessly teased her mother about evolution and argued that it could not have possibly happened. "My poor mother didn't know what to do with me." Her activism continued in college.

When she was in Mexico City on the Education Abroad program she helped organize a theater festival. Fe remembers the overall event as a historical time. When she came back to the States, she went through culture shock.

I had lived through the Salvador Allendes (events), the student movement, a lot of farm worker strikes in Méjico, and labor strikes. My perspective on life was totally different. It was even real hard for me to look at the streets.

Even the highways seemed so bourgeois to me at the time. Everything seemed so bourgeois. Here in the U.S. everyone was worried about the latest styles and dances. And I was thinking, "but there's a revolution going on!" Psychologically, it affected me big-time.

The other participants' civic involvement was less global but their parents were no less influential. Dulcina greatly admired her father. For years, she had no idea what her father did for a living. She went to work with him when she was in high school.

It was the first time that I really saw what he did. He was the shipping maintenance guy. He cleaned the restrooms, worked on the floor, fixed whatever they needed and with such pride. That was so wonderful that someone could find happiness, and joy, and pride in whatever they're doing.

She realized then why he stayed at his job for so many years. Her parents thus instilled that no work was beneath them and they were not above anything. Although Lily and Lulú did not indicate whether their parents were involved in their communities, both women significantly contributed to theirs. As noted in the snapshot descriptions, the community has recognized Lulú for her support in educating youth. She attributed her involvement to "people who thought I had something. They saw something in me that they felt I would be a success. It's my role now to help, to do my share because somebody did it for me." Lily has also contributed. As the coordinator for a college assistance program, she has been instrumental in ensuring that persons that might not otherwise go to college are given the opportunity to do so.

Both women were also involved in activities outside of their work that promoted the betterment and welfare of their community. The women strongly identified with their work, social, and/or religious communities. As Elenes (1997) insists, by "saying" themselves Chicanas are "filling in the blanks before someone else does it" (p. 375). Tuhiwai Smith (1999) articulates this phenomenon thusly, "Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes" (p. 28). In doing so, we resist paradigms that misrepresent or exclude our experiences and

knowledge. Also, by telling and writing our own story we hold out the possibility of alternative knowledge that can transform the way we do research.

First Nations scholars take the same stance as Chicana scholars that research of Indigenous populations must be predicated on their experiences and interpretations of knowledge. Indigenous scholars (e.g., Allen, 1994; Churchill, 1999; Cook-Lynn, 1996; Deloria, 1994; Haig-Brown and Archibald, 1996; Mihesuah, 1998b, Rigney, 1999; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) as well as national associations such as the American Indian Research and Policy Institute (1999) believe that research of First Nations Peoples should be positioned within the context of their own worldview. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) advocates, “coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (p. 39). Swisher (1998) expresses the concern that Indigenous people must have more authority to write about themselves. She indicates that what has previously been written about them is missing “the passion from within and the authority to ask new and different questions” (p. 193).

To be sure, current scholarly discourse holds up as ideal the postmodern notions of subjective reality, deconstructing meaning, and multiple truths. These notions imply that all subjectivities are welcomed and all truths are equal. However, to quote Teresa Cordova (1998), “It’s probably no coincidence that truth has been declared dead at a point when scholars of color, building on 500 years of indigenous, anti-colonial, civil rights, and nationalist ideas, are speaking ‘truth to power’” (p. 29). Scholars of Color seem to be

divided on the value of theory. On the one hand, Tey Diana Rebolledo (1990) for example, urges Chicanas forward toward a “desperate search for a theoretical/critical discourse in which to situate what is happening to us” (p. 346). On the other hand, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) charges that, “Indigenous people have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory” (p. 38). Barbara Christian (1990) recognizes that it is difficult to ignore theory “since theory has become a commodity which helps determine whether we are hired or promoted in academic institutions—worse, whether we are heard at all” (p. 335). Similarly, Tuhiwai Smith concludes that theory, “gives us space to plan, to strategize, to take greater control over our resistances” (p. 38). She expounds on the importance of theory to Indigenous people. At minimum, she says, theory helps make sense of our reality, allows us to deal with ambiguities and uncertainties, and allows us to put reality in perspective.

Chicana Indígena interpretations of theory are based on the realities that ground who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we behave given those realities. Our worldview encompasses theory as a set of knowledge arising out of our “powerful life experiences and history” (Rigney, 1999, p. 116). Thus, when constructing theory to apply to our way of knowing we must consider it in terms of an oppressed people whose “knowledge has been violated, discredited, challenged, diluted, separated, and channeled into institutions rooted in the dominant society that vulgarizes it” (Blea, 1992, p. 145). However, it is not enough that we explain and understand why we suffer oppression. We must also employ methods for becoming free. Cordova

(1998) proposes that Chicanas directly challenge or change the “existing relations of power” (p. 25).

Anzaldua (1990) suggests that we “occupy theorizing space” (p. xxv). She calls on us to challenge institutionalized discourse and to be wary of the ways that knowledge is invented. She states, “What is considered theory in the dominant academic community is not necessarily what counts as theory for women-of-color” (p. xxv). She concludes that we need theories to describe our own ways of knowing, to interpret what occurs in the world, and to explain how and why we relate to people in specific ways. She further suggests that we find practical applications for our theories and that we “give up on the notion that there is a ‘correct way’ to write theory” (pp. xxv-xxvi). Tuhiwai Smith (1999) concludes, “new ways of theorizing by indigenous scholars are grounded in a real sense of, and sensitivity towards, what it means to be an indigenous person” (p. 38).

In creating new theories, Chicanas and Indigenous women must be cautious not to replicate the methods of the dominant discourse. We must reject old paradigms and construct our own. This requires that we take into account our individual histories and not make cultural generalizations lest the theories become hegemonic. Dennis J. McPherson and H. Douglas Rabb (1999) caution of the “danger of failing to respect the difference and producing nothing more than a mere Western construct,” (p. 272). Chela Sandoval (1990) further cautions us about the “erasure of our many differences” (p. 65).

She asserts, "This positive perception of difference is not divisive, so there is no need to deny our differences or make them invisible" (p. 67).

Whatever course we take, we must be wary of formulating theory that casts us in the role of dominator or oppressor. We also need to ask ourselves, "For whom are we doing theory" (Cordova, 1998, p. 41)? We must be vigilant against transforming from "the silenced" to "the silencer." We need to take pains to become involved in our communities, to guard against objectivity by developing methodology that "allows for *our* subjectivity," and to examine how our privileged positions as researchers might shape our analysis (Cordova, 1998). Sofia Villenas (1996) examines the situation of the "native" researcher as both the colonizer, in terms of her role as a researcher, and the colonized, in terms of her membership in the community that is made "other" in her research.

Villenas (1996) articulates the dilemma of the researcher in the context of her position of power and privilege and her marginalized position in relation to the dominant society. This dilemma positions the Chicana researcher such that she "cannot escape a history of her own marginalization nor her guilt of complicity" (p. 716). Villenas suggests that the route out of this dilemma is for Chicanas to work from within, that is, to continue theorizing on the multiplicity of our identities, and to expedite procedures whereby Chicanas "become the subjects and the creators of knowledge" (p. 730). This route juxtaposes us within the research process as the insider/outsider "rather than as the researchers from the colonized/colonizer perspective" (Castelden and

Kurszewski, 2000, Paragraph 8.) By attending to our own collective and individual voices, we open ourselves to the possibility of learning not only what questions should be asked but also how to ask them. Moreover, we stand to gain insight on the appropriate way to portray our voices.

In summary, Chicana epistemology is grounded in an Indigenous worldview that guides the researcher throughout the research process. It shares the goal with constructivist, interpretivist approaches of “understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 221.) Although Chicana epistemology makes no claim to traditional ideas about generalizing, it nonetheless attempts to make sense of information or “reality” in terms of the meanings that Chicanas attach to it. We need to decide what constitutes knowledge rather than continuing to allow others to construct it for us. What is more, we must recognize that knowledge is closely linked to power to effectively challenge both knowledge and power. Most importantly, our theories must be rooted in our language, knowledge, history, and cultural practices. By asserting our own philosophies, we retain the right to name our realities and ourselves.

Literature Review: Brincando Barreras

She has this fear that she has no names
 that she has many names
 that she doesn't know her names.
 She has this fear that she's an image
 that comes and goes clearing and darkening.
 Gloria Anzaldua (1987, p. 43)

We were born mejicanas. Whether we were born here or in Mexico, we identified as Mexican. "Growing up I identified myself as being Mexican American because my parents are of Mexican descent. They are from Mexico. Even though I was born here in the United States, I feel I'm Mexican" (Lily). Our given Spanish names, Lourdes, Rosa, Dulcina, Liliana, Fe Dolores, and Yolanda, reflected the allure that tradition exerted over our parents. Most of us were named after aunts, grandmothers, or another close relative. Two of us were named after our fathers' ex-girlfriend, which is arguably, a tradition of sorts. Over time, as our lives took the inevitable twists and turns on the journey toward being, our identity labels evolved. Consequently, our self-names changed or took on new meanings.

As Chicanas/os, we have never been able to take our identity for granted nor has it been unproblematic in terms of our culture, language, race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Alcoff, 1995). Being part Indigenous, European, Black, and a host of other mezclas has given rise to a multitude of notions about our identity. For example, in her article on mestizo identity, Linda Alcoff (1995) reflects on the contradiction that exists between Chicana reality and ideas that place value on racial purity and cultural authenticity. She posits

that these contradictions have produced a plethora of “philosophical work on the concept of cultural identity and its relation to the self” (p. 257). According to Moya and Hames-Garcia (2000), “prevailing theories of identity lack the intellectual resources to distinguish between different kinds of identities” (Introduction). As indicated in the introduction to my research paper, I wanted to go beyond traditional research to employ *femenista* methodology in researching the self-concept of Chicanas. My strategy was to review the existing literature on identity in the search for culturally appropriate practices that positioned Chicanas as the authorities on their identity.

The purpose of reviewing the literature was to examine racial, ethnic, and cultural identity as studied by other scholars. The general goal was to demonstrate how historical, political, and social factors have influenced the practice of assigning identity labels to certain people in the United States based on arbitrary, and at times, artificial attributes such as race, phenotype or physical characteristics, language, ethnicity, and culture. I illustrated how the practice of conferring as well as appropriating identity or identities, and the intersection of age, language, and gender have shaped Chicana identity. The specific intention of my analysis was to explore how Chicana identity is situated within this work. It was also to “recontextualize the ways in which qualitative researchers in education have theorized about identity and privilege to include the repositioning and manipulation of identities that can occur” (Villenas, 1996, p. 715). My aim was to contribute to new ways of thinking

about Chicana identity being that existing paradigms are inadequate for describing it.

The structural foundation of my study was based on the political, historical, and social experiences of Chicanas and how those experiences have shaped the participants' and my concept of self. The historical evolution of the labels ascribed to people of Mexican descent illustrates the interaction between external (outside the group) and internal (within group) forces inasmuch as identity formulations have as much to do with one as with the other. The fluidity of names used as identifiers (i.e., from *india* to *mestiza* – a woman of mixed ancestry – to Mexican-American to Spanish-American to Chicana, Hispanic, Latina, or Indigenous) reflects the evolving nature of constructed definitions and meaning associated with Chicana identity (Nagel, 1994). These categories for labeling contain within them other terms that are used between group members to designate membership (e.g., *Raza*, which is typically used by Mexicans and those of Mexican descent or 'Skin' used by some First Nations Peoples to refer to each other). I examined the evolution of ethnic designators such as "Hispanic" and Latina, and the role race and culture play along with age, language, and gender to understand the varied meanings that Chicanas attribute to their preferred identity label(s.) An understanding of how identity labels develop sheds light on factors that influence the confluence of self and group identity.

The literature review is organized around the following headings:

- **Key Concepts** – A brief discussion of the concepts of identity. The specific concepts relevant to the focus of my study are racial, ethnic, and cultural identity and the multiple dimensions of identity that intersect these concepts. Discerning the numerous concepts of identity is, however, akin to peering through muddy water. The concepts overlap and blur to such a degree that the terms are often used interchangeably. A case in point; although the U.S. Census Bureau's official position is that race and ethnicity are two separate concepts, ethnicity is often equated with race. Indeed, ethnicity often sits in for race while culture typically refers to ethnicity. An example of this confusion is illustrated by a quote from Lulú, "There tends to be more people of Hispanic descent (a pan-ethnic identity) than any other racial group."
- **Racial Nation** – I traced the history of Mexico beginning with its original inhabitants through the period before the Chicana/o Movement. I outlined the history of the concept of race as a hierarchical classification system that was claimed initially by Northern European Americans as simultaneously biologically determined and established by a Supreme Being. The assertion set the stage for the justification of racism, which functions as a mechanism for the exclusion, oppression, and discrimination of Chicanas/os (see Goldberg, 1993).

- Revolution – I described the evolution of the term, Chicana, set in the context of historical, social, and political issues. The insistence on identifying in our own terms as opposed to externally imposed labels is central to Chicanas’ concept of self and poses a direct challenge to identity, especially racial, construction in the United States.
- Evolution – I examined the pan-ethnic labels, “Hispanic,” and Latina. I demonstrated that the terms may be other-imposed or self-imposed and, like other labels, are conditioned by internal and external factors.

Key Concepts – En Otras Palabras

An image is a bridge between evoked emotions and conscious knowledge.

Words are the cables that hold up the bridge.

Gloria Anzaluda (1987, p. 69)

The following concepts are set forth as momentary placeholders, bookmarkers to turn to, but which could just as easily be moved forward and back or discarded all together. I held these descriptions tentatively and at arms length expecting to learn how, if at all, they apply to the participants’ sense of self. The terms are meant to describe instead of define concepts of identity.

- Cultural Identity – Culture refers to learned patterns of thought and behaviors passed down from one generation to another and are experienced as distinct to a particular group (Carter, 2000). It is a multidimensional concept encompassing the collective reality of a group of people (Lee, 1991). Culture is constructed by the actions or behaviors of individuals

and groups interacting with society. Thus, cultural identity is “a relationally constituted phenomenon” embedded in the collective “experience of affinity” emerging from forms of cultural knowledge— language, traditions, historical events, and community life (Darder, 1995). This affinity falls under the I-know-it-when-I-see-it category. For example, when one Chicana describes an incident to another Chicana, the latter will inevitably relate it to a similar experience or usually “see” what the former is conveying.

Cultural identity can be individualistic or collectivistic oriented. Individualistically oriented people tend to describe themselves in terms of internal personality traits while collectivistic people describe themselves via the perspective of others. Collectivistic identity is viewed as salient across a number and variety of social roles whereas individualistic identity is construed as constant across social contexts. The terminology that is used to confer group membership and to describe people’s cultural socializations affects the self-perceptions of individual group members. This cultural relativity of identity suggests that identity and self have distinct meanings in different cultures. Therefore, it is inaccurate to assume that the construct of identity is universal (Hoare, 1994; Trotman Reid and Comas-Diaz, 1990). “National (or cultural) identity is not a natural phenomenon; rather it is an identity that is constructed and that can be (re) claimed” (Elenes, 1997, p. 372).

- Ethnic Identity – “Ethnicity refers to the national, regional, or tribal origins of ones’ oldest remembered ancestors and the customs, traditions, and rituals...handed down by these ancestors, which among the ethnic group members, are assumed to be their culture” (Helms and Cook, 1999, p. 19). A broader definition of ethnicity includes physical characteristics thereby positioning ethnicity as a euphemism or proxy for race. Ethnic identity refers to an individual’s perception of belonging to an ethnic group with whom s/he shares ancestry and/or culture.

Joan Nagel (1994) claims that a person’s chosen ethnic identity depends on what that person thinks her ethnicity is, versus what others think her ethnicity is, a process that is contextual and situational, and internally and externally defining. “Ethnic identity is always expressed in dynamic processes of interaction with others” (Castex, 1998, p. 258). Most models of ethnic identity are predicated on the notion of acculturation or the degree to which the individual assimilates or “identifies with the attitudes, life-styles, and values of the predominant macroculture” (Lee, 1991, p. 14).

- Racial Identity – Race is a social construction rather than a biological fact intended to maintain certain societal norms that function as a mechanism to divide, rank, and control populations based on visible or perceived physical, linguistic, or cultural differences (Alarcon, 1990; Fernandez, 1992; Forbes, 1992; Nagel, 1986; Sandoval, 1990). How one identifies with race is known as racial identity. Racial identity is based on the

perception that its members share a common racial heritage. Racial identity theory, from the perspective of a developmental model, views the individual as demonstrating different degrees, styles, or stages of identification with her racial group (Howard, G. R., 1999). One's racial identity is demarcated and influenced by the historical, political, and social events that punctuate the markings of group membership (i.e., gender, class, or sexual orientation).

Racial Nation – De Colores

Take one part Black, one part White,
one part Indian, and one part Other.
Mix well.
Bake in oppression for 500 years.
Mixed results guaranteed.

The history of Mexico begins with its Indigenous people. During this period, Mexico included vast territory of what is now the United States' southwest region. It is estimated that at the time of the Spanish invasion twenty-five million Indigenous natives lived in Central America and Mexico. When the Spaniards "conquered" the Mexica capital city of Tenochtitlan in what is now Mexico they did so by aligning with huge armies of non-Mexica people more so than by disease and genocide as was the case in North America (Fernandez, 1992; Foley, 1998; Kelly, 1947). The Indigenous-Spanish alliance resulted in the first mestizos born of these relationships and were acknowledged as Spanish, Creole, or *criollo*. India/o on the other hand, according to Deena J. González (1995), began signifying non-Spanish-

speaking rather than non-Spanish since few Spanish-speaking Northern frontiers residents could actually claim to be “pure-blooded” Spanish. From the beginning of Spanish colonialism, Indigenous slaves were forced to work in the silver mines thereby subjugating them to subordinate positions.

Soon thereafter, foreign-origin slaves, Spanish Muslims (Arabs, Berbers, and Moors) and *ladino* Blacks (slaves in Spain or one of its colonies) were introduced to Mexico. Slaves from the coast of Africa were subsequently brought in to work the large coastal plantations. Throughout this colonial period intermarriage, interracial relations, the higher ratio of men to women, and the raping of Indigenous and Black women resulted in miscegenation (Oboler, 1995). After centuries of intermixing among Indigenous, African, and Spanish people the “*mestizaje* or race-mixing” society in Mexico was categorized as “*raza blanca* (Whites),” “*raza indígena* (Indians),” and “*raza mezclada* (mestizos)” (Foley, 1998, p. 56). All of these people were increasingly absorbed into the mestizo population such that by 1900, mestizos had become the largest ethnic group in Mexico (Fernandez, 1992; Menchaca, 2001; Nash, 1980). According to June Nash mestizo and illegitimate became almost synonymous thereby positioning mestizos on the lower rungs of colonial society.

Suzanne Oboler (1995) and other scholars (Forbes, 1992; Menchaca, 2001) explain that miscegenation, social classifications, and social status evolved into a hierarchical racial system that imposed social restrictions on marriage, residency, taxes, and inheritance. Oboler notes that some inter-

marriages, for example among Whites, mestizos, and Indians, were permitted. Marriage of “pure bloods” to Blacks or mulattos required permission from the authorities whereas Afro-Indian marriages were strictly forbidden. “The Spanish notion of *pureza de sangre* or purity of blood was thus embedded in the New World’s aristocracy’s understanding of the interrelated concepts of race, social status, and honor” (Oboler, p. 21). Oboler indicates that the racial system was maintained in part because of the ideology of family honor and respect but more so because of the patriarchal authority men derived from it. She says that in effect, this system ensured the subordination of all women regardless of race or class.

The racial system established a complex classification of people based on supposedly “racial” or ethnic origins (see Bustamante, 1991). For example, *penninsulares* were individuals of full European descent born in Spain, *criollos* were of full European descent born in the “New World,” *castas* or mestizos were of mixed blood, and *Indios* were people of full Indigenous descent (Menchaca, 2001). In terms of hierarchy *penninsulares* and *criollos* held the highest rung. Mestizos, although considered inferior to Spaniards, enjoyed a higher social prestige than Indians. *Afromestizos* were considered socially inferior to all others. Exceptions to the racial system were made depending on the social standing of the father and whether the child was born in a legitimate marriage. Menchaca (2001) notes that by recording only the race of the father in the baptismal registry parish priests could register children of means as mestizos. This could also be done for *Afromestizo* children who did not

appear to be Black. Moreover, high status Spaniards could classify their Indigenous or mixed-blood wives as Spaniards. Robert H. Jackson (1999) portrays the ease of shifting from one racial status to another as a “demographic sleight of hand” indicative of the “artificial race terms created during the colonial period” (p. 22).

The history of “becoming” Mexican American follows similar artful shifts. It is also a history of becoming White (Foley, 1998; Kelly, 1947; Meyer and Sherman, 1995; Poynton, 1997). Following the Mexican-American war of 1846-48, the U. S. government “forcibly purchased” (Schmidt, Barvosa-Carter, and Torres, 2000) territory that is now Arizona, California, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. The land included “80,000 people with a culture that was different not only from that of the United States but also from that of the traditional European immigrant. Without moving, these people became foreigners in their native land” (Meier and Ribera, 1993, p. 69) even though, under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, they were automatically accorded United States citizenship.

Under the terms of the treaty, *mexicanos*, as they were now calling themselves (a “Hispanicized” term used as a national ethnic identifier), were to be accorded the racial status of Whites. However, socially, politically, and economically, Mexicans were treated as non-Whites thereby fostering animosity between both groups that resulted in social biases. Whereas, according to Meier and Ribera (1993), the Whites stressed the “role of the individual” and the “drive for personal benefit,” the “Spanish-Mexican view

tended to subordinate individual advantage to community welfare” (p. 68).

The differences in cultural viewpoints and historical experience between the two societies inevitably led to conflict. Laws were subsequently designed that reflected and reified racial prejudices (Ladson-Billings, 2000). For centuries, the Chicano community has recognized the double standard implicit in this social system. Irene J. Blea (1992) writes, “Since before 1848, Chicanos have recognized that there is a set of laws and unwritten rules for Anglos and another set of rules and laws for Chicanos and other people of color” (p. 128).

In fact, during the eighteenth century, science was used to assert the existence of different biologically constituted races. Race became a mode of classifying human beings by positioning “natural” categories, based on phenotypic or physical differences, on a hierarchy supposedly established by a Supreme Being or nature. Race was used to underscore and bolster “unequal rank and status differences, and provided the rationalization that the inequality was natural or God-given” (AAA Statement on Race, 1999, p. 712). In the United States a rigid hierarchy of socially exclusive categories was fabricated by European-Americans to link “superior traits with Europeans and negative or inferior ones to blacks [sic] and Indians” (AAA Statement on Race, p. 712). Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* address may arguably be the first American public figure to have articulated a theory of race and the inferiority of “others” to promote slavery (Strain, 2003). Virginia R. Harris and Trinity A. Ordonia (1990) assert, “America created a simple system of

privilege for whites based on the exploitation of people of color” (p. 310).

They allege:

The American nation was founded on racism. Compare the rapid emergence and eventual world dominance of the U.S. with the centuries-long process of national formation in Europe. This dominance was *not* the result of “Yankee ingenuity” and would not have been accomplished without the resources and wealth first created by stolen Native American land and enslaved black labor. (p. 310)

Racism and prejudice based on color and class standing have also contributed to the conflict between the two societies. C. Street Chilman (1993) characterizes the “discriminatory and often exploitative behaviors by some Anglo-Americans toward many Mexicans” (p. 151) as perpetuating resentment. Meier and Ribera (1993) maintain that the prejudices of the White majority tended to isolate and dominate the Mexican. “By the end of the century [1800] mexicanos had become defined as cheap labor, without a claim to economic or social equality” (p. 86). Robert T. Carter (2000) asserts that Whites learn to perceive themselves as being entitled to certain privileges; a status that they protect by denying or distorting race-related reality “although Whites generally do not see themselves as members of a racial group” (p. 874).

Verily, when one’s own attributes prevail and are valued, “they can be taken for granted and ignored” (Alcoff, 1995, p. 271). Hence, Whites can exercise the privilege of choice by being blind to their own racial identity while keeping intact the socialization mechanisms that further help to sustain their power and status (Fernandez, 1992; Forbes, 1992; Goldberg, 1995; Jackson, 1999). Ironically, privilege also allows the declaration of

colorblindness, which assumes to erase racial categories and ignore differences. This “dominance-oriented perspective” achieves the “illusionary state of sameness or equality” (Howard, G. R., 1999, p. 53). In truth, this belief in the sameness of all human beings denies the “existence of people whose experiences of reality” (Howard, G. R., p. 54) are markedly different from Whites. At the same time, colorblindness and the various labels used to relegate people to particular racial groups maintain the societal norm of between-race disparity.

In the case of First Nations Peoples, the racist concept of “blood quantum” or degree of “blood” was implemented to determine who qualified as a member of a Native nation although the initial “Indian problem” was one of culture not race, according to the ideology first promoted by Thomas Jefferson (Strain, 2003). (Jefferson eventually withdrew from this stance and instead promoted the rhetoric of race superiority.) Similar to the idea of who was African American for the purpose of enslavement, blood quantum was set up as a genetic marker of assimilation, extermination, and eventual relocation and termination. The use of blood quantum was started in 1705 by the colony of Virginia, which approved laws that denied rights to any “negro, mulatto, or Indian” (Forbes, 2000, Paragraph 2). “Half-breeds” or persons of mixed European and Native “blood” were denied the “legal privileges of Whiteness” and treated as legally inferior (Forbes, Paragraph 2). Other colonies adopted similar laws.

In 1887, the Dawes Act enacted by Congress decreed that the blood quantum standard to determine “Indianness” was one-half or more Indian blood. The “degree of blood” implemented in the latter part of the nineteenth-century by the Federal government bolstered the assumption that “persons with greater amounts of white ancestry were ... more competent than persons with lesser amounts” (Forbes, 2000, Paragraph 4) and that when “competent” or “White enough” a person ceased to be Indian. Thus, the process of attaining competency set in motion the Federal plan of eliminating Indigenous people (see Forbes, 2000; Horwich, 2001; Jaimes, 1992). The failure of the plan is evidenced by the survival of Indigenous people as “distinct peoples and mixtures simultaneously” (Phelan, 1994, p. 65).

Neil Foley (1998) contends that Mexicans desired to pass into “hispanicity” by denigrating Indigenous “Mexicaness” and ignoring “the culture and historical role played by Mexico in the formation of Southwestern culture” while celebrating “Spanishness” or European Whiteness (p. 56). Mexican Americans were horrified when, despite their desire that it be otherwise, Anglo Americans made no distinction between “Spanish or White” Mexicans and “Indian” Mexicans. The Anglo American belief was that “when Spaniards mixed their blood with Indians and Africans they removed themselves from the domain of whiteness” (Foley, p. 57). Hence, Whiteness was set apart as distinct from and privileged over all other “colorednesses.” Harris and Ordon (1990) evince, “America created a simple system of privilege for whites based on the exploitation of people of color” (p. 310). Not

surprisingly, Mexican Americans desired similar privileges and coveted a White image (see Rios, 1993). To be sure, being a “White” served to protect Mexicans from discriminatory anti-Indian sentiments (Forbes, 1973). Mexicans embraced Whiteness and in the process, “reinforced the color line that has denied people of African descent full participation in American democracy” (Foley, 1998, p. 65). Mexican Americans failed to grasp or perhaps wished not to acknowledge the commonality they shared with African Americans and Native Peoples: a constructed racial identity.

The irony of this fact is not lost on Alcoff (1995) who claims that assimilation, as the primary alternative to racial purity and separateness, was restricted to European ethnicities and that the “melting pot” was never intended to include other races. Her comments reminded me of an incident in elementary school. I asked a teacher to clarify what an American was. My classmates had been teasing me about my “foreign” appearance so I hoped the teacher would tell them that I was one of them. She began by giving a glowing report of the American melting pot into which everyone goes and comes out like every other person. She then explained that an American is a person born in the United States and that sometimes those who are not born here can become citizens. She assumed that I fit into the latter category even though my school records clearly indicated that I was born in the U.S. Her melting pot story simultaneously conveyed the message, “If White folks melted, anyone can,” (Howard, G. R., 1999, p. 53) and “only Whites can melt.”

The failure to accommodate interracial people (e.g., Chicanas) and relations perpetuates racial disharmony and makes resolution of the inequities inherent therein impossible. Alcoff (1995) claims, "The mythic authentic voice of the oppressed, valorized by the left, is culturally *unchanged*, racially *unmixed*, and, as a matter of fact, *extinct*" (p. 260). She thus maintains that a significant relationship exists between racial purity and racial identity. She insists, "In cultures defined by racialized identities and divided by racial hierarchies, mixed white-nonwhite persons face an unresolvable status ambiguity" (p. 259). Alcoff further claims that mixed race persons are rejected by the colonizer (insider) as impure and inferior, and disliked by the oppressed (outsider) for their closer association with the colonizers. She asserts that the assimilationist discourse promoted by Northern European Americans was in reality a ploy to bolster their claims of cultural superiority. Alcoff thus views as inadequate the "assimilationism and imagery of the melting pot" (see Howard, G. R., 1999; Lujan Falcón 1995; Oboler, 1995; Nelson and Tienda, 1985) from which to situate mixed-race identity. She says, "no proponent of the melting pot ideology ever promoted miscegenation" (p. 263).

To be sure, unlike Latin America, the United States has never officially had a mixed-race category. The exception is the practice of designating as "Black," any person of discernible African ancestry, a principle referred to as hypo-descent or "the one-drop rule." Curiously, this rule does not apply to Whites. Shane Phelan (1994) observes that it is never debated whether someone is "really" Hungarian or French but routinely discussions are held

about whether someone is “really Black” or a First Nations person. Carlos A. Fernandez (1992) contrasts the difference in attitude toward race and race mixing between the United States and Latin American. He asserts that although the majority of people from both places are a “mixed race” this shared history has unfolded differently in many significant respects.

In the United States such miscegenation occurred primarily because of the practice of concubines that accompanied slavery but, “because of White racism, and the stigma of illegitimacy, the very idea of including ‘people of color’ in the mix was for the most part ignored, if not regarded as abhorrent” (Fernandez, 1992, p. 131). According to Foley (1998), White persons in America believed that “race mixing was a menace to the purity of the Nordic race that, unchecked, would lead to the demise of White civilization” (p. 57). In fact, since the time of slavery in the United States, the dividing line between Black and White has been “a line of protection from the threat of commodification” because Whites could not legally be enslaved (Martinez, 2000, p. 1). The eighteenth century emerging field of science was called upon to answer the “question of race” and it obliged by “naturalizing” a social structure based on race (Strain, 2003). The ideology about the physical differences among Europeans, Africans, and Indigenous people was thereafter predicated on the notion of “blood” or race. Fe gave an example of the persistence of the notion of blood quantum:

We find discrimination even among our own. There are Native Americans who will allow a blonde blue-eyed person who has one sixteenth or one thirty-second of Native American blood to

be part of their ceremonies or pow wows but they won't let a Mexican in.

To date, race continues to function as a mechanism for exclusion, oppression, and the justification for racism and remains one of the most salient features of life in the United States (Alcoff, 1995; Darder, 1995; Fernandez, 1992; Howard, G. R., 1999; Rigney, 1999; Saragoza, Juarez, Valenzuela, and Gonzalez 1992). In their article, Coloring Epistemologies, James J. Scheurich and Michelle D. Young (1997) contend:

When any group within a large, complex civilization significantly dominates other groups for hundreds of years, the ways of the dominant group (its epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies), not only become the dominant ways of that civilization, but also these ways become so deeply embedded that they typically are seen as "natural" or appropriate norms rather than as historically evolved social constructions. (p. 7)

Revolution – Chicanada

*We belong to a group not only because we are born into it,
not only because we profess to belong to it,
not finally because we give it our loyalty and allegiance,
but primarily because we see the world in the way our culture
does.*

Karl Mannheim (1929)

Throughout the 1930's, 40's, and 50's urban and middle class Mexican Americans continued to try rectifying their racial status. Despite their efforts, the 1930 census introduced "Mexican" as a separate racial category and was defined as "all person born in Mexico, or having parents born in Mexico, and who are definitely not white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese" (Goldberg,

1995, p. 242). Mexican Americans ardently objected to being labeled “colored” and increasingly began to refer to themselves as “Spanish” and to insist on their Whiteness. In fact, except in the 1930’s, “Mexicans” were listed as “white” unless they were “definitely Indian or some race other than white” (Goldberg, p. 242).

In the 1960’s a new generation of Mexican Americans, Chicanas/os, rejected the assimilationist and accommodationist strategies of the previous generations. These mainly U. S. born youth faced discrimination in all aspects of their life. Consequently, many Chicanas/os stepped forward to loudly denounce racism, reject Whiteness, and exalt their opposition to and exclusion from White America. Chicana feministas, who fully participated in the movement, also began “actively fighting against her socioeconomic subjugation as a Chicana and as a woman” (Castillo, 1994, p. 33). Fe reported that sexism existed in *El Movimiento* (Chicana/o Movement). She indicated that Chicanos monopolized key positions and agendas and did not accord equal treatment to Chicanas.

It was always the same in the sense that it was no different than anywhere else [in society]. The women participated but we were always relegated to certain roles, the *secretarias* [secretaries]. The presidents were definitely not women then. The meetings, the community activism, and the leadership were not the women then. It was mostly the guys.

Many feministas suggested that an examination of the relationship between Chicanos and Chicanas needed to take place. Yolanda Orozco (1997) declared:

It needs to be pointed out that if the women's movement has ignored the needs and priorities of Chicanas and therefore excluded us, then to some extent so has the Chicano movement that often confines Chicanas to stereotyping sex roles—in the kitchen or at the typewriter. (p. 222)

Meier and Ribera (1993) note, "Chicanas' participation in the *movimiento* made them increasingly aware of the chauvinism of its male leadership" (p. 230). Mirta Vidal (1972) a *femenista* of the Chicano movement, stated:

While it is true that the unity of La Raza is the basic foundation of the Chicano movement, when Chicano men talk about maintaining La Familia and the 'cultural heritage' of La Raza, they are in fact talking about maintaining the age-old concept of keeping the woman barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen. (pp. 31-32)

Meier and Ribera (1993) posit a connection between the emergence of *femenistas* and White feminism, the latter of which arose in response to sexism. They claim, "Although most Chicanas tended to be wary of Anglo feminist groups, they were influenced by the women's movement and greatly expanded their own activities" (p. 230). However, scholar Alma M. Garcia (1995) however attributes the emergence of the Chicana feminist movement to "the dynamics within the Chicano movement" and states that it "originated from the nationalist Chicano struggle" (pp. 360). She recounted that the nationalist struggle came to a head at the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB). Members of MEChA (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán*), a Chicana/o activist student organization founded at UCSB, debated the philosophical issue of nationalism versus global issues. Nationalism centered on the ideal of a Chicana/o homeland named *Aztlán* (land which is now Mexico and the United States' Southwest) and located oppression within

colonialism (Phelan, 1994). Global issues centered on freeing oppressed peoples worldwide. Fe explained:

Now they are known as People of Color. Back then it was "Third World." Some of the students had more of a Marxist, Third World orientation and others had a very nationalistic Chicano vision. This meant that you only focused on Chicanos. Just stone-Chicanos and forget about everybody else. You weren't Third World oriented.

Eventually, the rift over philosophical differences caused a split from MEChA to a new organization, *La Raza Libre*, which eventually became *El Congreso*. During the time that I was in Mexico, I heard that the struggles got so hard on campus that there were times when people actually came to campus with *cuetes* [slang word for guns]. It got real ugly. Little by little, they started to work at it [unity] again.

Chicana feminists contended that there were distinct differences between themselves and White women. Velia Garcia (1997) in her writings of the Chicana/o Movement maintained that there were "major philosophical and tactical differences" between the women's camps (p. 199). For example, according to Consuelo Nieto (1997) Chicanas saw their struggle as one against discrimination and "sexism within the context of a racist society" (p. 206). Fe verified that the issues between both feminist groups were dissimilar. She said that in college several Chicanas were involved with a woman's organization on campus. "The early days of N.O.W. [National Organization of Women] and Betty Friedman." A large delegation of women was to meet in Canada so the MEChA group on campus sent a female representative. Fe recalled:

When she came back, I remember she made a report about how there were differences between the White women and us. There were differences because their thing [agenda] was 'this,' but how could we talk about freedom for women when in our own community, we still had issues that we had to deal with? So, it

was real different. Aside from the gender issues, there were also social, economic, and political issues.

Meier and Ribera (1993) maintain, "Whereas Chicanos may encounter discrimination on the basis of race and class, Chicanas as a group suffer from a triple handicap, the burden of their gender, race, and social class" (p. 262). A. M. Garcia (1997) claims that consequently, "Chicana feminists chose not to identify with nor integrate themselves completely within the women's movement" (p. 192). Chicanas recognized that their struggle was multi-dimensional and as such initiated a *femenista* discourse that included race, gender, sexual orientation, and class. Garcia (1995) indicated that, "Chicana feminists began to draw their own political agenda and raised a series of questions to assess their role within the Chicano movement" (p. 361). She elaborated:

Chicana feminists adopted an analysis that began with race as a critical variable in interpreting the experiences of Chicano communities in the United States. They expanded this analysis by identifying gender as a variable interconnected with race in analyzing the specific daily life circumstances of Chicanas as women in Chicano communities.

Thus, Chicana feminism went beyond the limits of an exclusively racial theory of oppression that tended to overlook gender and also went beyond the limits of a theory of oppression based exclusively on gender that tended to overlook race. (p. 372)

Vidal (1972) commented on the "rising consciousness of Chicanas" (p. 22) that resulted in their active participation in the Chicana/o movement. "With their growing involvement in the struggle for Chicano liberation and the emergence of the feminist movement, Chicanas [were] beginning to challenge

every social institution which contribute[d] to and [was] responsible for their oppression, from inequality on the job to their role in the home” (Vidal, p. 21). “In the struggle to articulate, getting acknowledgement of the similarities and differences in social inequality, you can find the Chicana feminista in the politics of women’s right, the workforce, and in the gatherings of Indigenous people” (Rosie). Both Fe and Rosie recounted their activities in the Chicana/o Movement. Rosie described the sixties as the “era of the born-to-be-wild.”

The sixties was the decade of “freedom of expression,” and boy, did I have an on opinion on everything! Some were good and some just got me into trouble. I broke away from the conservative lifestyle of my parents by the time I was eighteen.

Nineteen sixty-eight was the year of the Rev-o-lu-tion! I joined the ranks of women who were outspoken on the rights of women to make their own choices. I got involved with some of the issues, especially equality and civil rights. I also took part in the Women’s Rights Movement. Burn-the-bra and-let-me-show-you-what-I-am-made-of-generation!

Fe’s experiences during the sixties and seventies followed a similar path. She transferred from one community college to another because she knew that there were “more things happening” politically at the latter. “The Chicano movement was happening and I became involved.” She helped to coordinate a Chicano student conference at the college at the time that Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez were leading the Farm Workers Union in the boycott against grape growers. The college cafeteria served the lunch.

And lo and behold, during lunch time the food that they served was grapes color-coated like cherries. But when you ate them, they weren’t cherries they were grapes! And the Chicano kids found out about it. It was during the United Farm Workers, I mean the height of it!

And so, it became a BIG ole thing. Oh, my god! It was a big old mess. And they were all upset! They called us sell-outs and they called us Chicanos *falsos* [fakes]! It was an experience. We were young, wet behind the ears.

“As a result of their collective efforts to overcome racial and gender oppression, Chicana feministas constructed a feminist ideology based on their specific experiences as women of color” (Garcia, A. M. 1997, p. 7). The ideology included the claiming of the name, Chicana. Norma Alarcon (1990) contends that although not all women of Mexican descent call themselves Chicanas, “in the Mexican-descent continuum of meanings, Chicana is still the name that brings into focus the interrelatedness of class/race/gender” (p. 103). She contends that Chicana, “has become a critical site of political, ideological, and discursive struggle through which the notion of ‘definitiveness’ and hegemonic tendencies are placed in question” (p. 97).

Alarcon (1990) chronicles the emergence of the term Chicana/o from its oral usage in working-class communities (a fact confirmed by Fe’s recollection that in her youth the *veteranos* or old-timers used the word among themselves). Alarcon further documents the term from the “inclusion of the excluded” Mexican-American to the “work on the hyphens” (see Fine, 1998) which culminated in the formation of a new political Chicana/o class. There are several versions on the origins of the word, Chicana/o. One version traces it to the *bracero* (migrant Mexican contracted laborers) guest-worker program during and after World War II. According to this version, the term came into use to mock native Nahuatl speakers from the Mexican state of Morelos who were unable to say “Mexicanos” and instead pronounced it “Mesheecanos”

(Are Chicanos the Same as Mexicans? n. d., Paragraph 10). Fe indicated that the term Chicana/o was not widely used in southern California until the early seventies. After *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (Chicana/o activists' plan of action) established MEChA in 1968 at UCSB, Chicana/o became the term of choice among students of Mexican descent.

The women's stories verify that their school experiences influenced them to start identifying as Chicanas. Lily said, "I got influenced by other students. I got to meet people from California and other places. They would say, 'Chicano Power! Brown Power!'" Fe's peers and the events of the time, namely the Chicano Movement, also influenced how she identified. A Mexican national by birth, she said, "I was Chicana in college. I became Chicana." Lulú indicated that she first heard the term in high school, "Chicana was very popular. When I was in college I would tend to use Chicana more." By the time we were in high school, Rosie and I considered ourselves Chicanas as well. In college, both of us were heavily involved in Chicana/o issues and fully immersed in our Chicana identity.

Rosie recalled that her father argued with her about her choice of Chicana as an identity label. He objected to the label because it made her out to be "a rebel." He pointed to her birth certificate and said, "See here? It says you're an Anglo." In fact, it did state her race as Caucasian as do the birth certificates of persons of Mexican descent born since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848. She told me the following story about her "White" appearance. She said thoroughly amused, "I tried to pass for an Anglo once,

with these green eyes and light skin, but the linguistics gave me away.” Rosie indicated that her light features prompted her high school classmates to stereotype her. She said that she was often quiet and did not speak up in class. Consequently, her peers accused her of being “a dumb blonde.” She laughed that at her high school reunion, her classmates “were amazed that I had such a high position with the Census Bureau” (her job at the time), because she was voted least-likely-to-succeed. Her light coloring belies the fact that, as she proudly proclaimed, she is, “*Una Chicana Indígena!* I am the descendent of the mestizos.”

The significance of skin color similarly affected Lily’s oldest daughter. She told me that her daughter was put in English-as-a-Second-Language courses although she only spoke English. “They [school officials] just went according to her name and the color of her skin.” My daughter, on the other hand, is often mistaken for someone other than Chicana and Anishaanabe, which is how she identifies. As a child, she complained that her classmates did not believe she was Indian because she was “too white.” I tried to explain to her what white versus “redskin” meant. Instead, I confused her because when she looked at her arm she wailed, “But I’m not ‘red’ either!” Her fair skin challenged the stereotype of the “dark, foreign other.” Lily’s youngest daughter, unlike Lily, is also fair-skinned. “If she’s with me somewhere, they [people] probably think I’m babysitting or something. But if my oldest daughter is with me, they would think we’re related.” She continued, “I think

those are the kids that have the hardest time. The kids that are bi-racial. They have it really hard. Imagine their identity crisis.”

Dulcina reported that race did in fact affect her concept of self. She recounted the story of being the girlfriend of a popular boy even though “I was actually a total nerd.” The White girls in her class gave her a hard time. They would vandalize her locker and talk behind her back. “I never understood what the big deal was.” Looking back Dulcina believed that race was the “deal.” “That was the factor ‘cause there were just a few of us [Mexicans].” Initially, she had not seen race as a factor because “I was really trying to enter into this [White] society. I really wanted to be a part of this culture.” When she was May Day Queen in high school, she was again made aware of her “racial” status. She recounted, “A White girl called me a ‘beaner.’ Again, it was like a blow. It was like, ‘Okay, I’m different.’ For a minute, there I was thinking I was a part of everybody [White society].”

I had a similar experience in elementary school when a boy of Mexican descent called me “blackie.” That was the first time I had heard the word. I do not recall what led to the name-calling but I do remember that I felt devastated and humiliated. I thought, “Why did he call me that when he is so much darker than I am?” I was confused about his reasons but understood that being “dark” skinned was not okay. My confusion was further compounded by the fact that, up until then, I had considered myself light skinned. In fact, my childhood nickname was “*Güera*,” which means a blonde-haired person. My

hair used to be light colored and I was fair-skinned in comparison to other relatives.

Jacqueline M. Martinez (2000) notes, “A Chicana can be light or dark skinned. But she is not white. Whiteness is a racist category that severs the Chicana from her ethnic and racial identity” (p. 127). “‘*Color*’ is a signifier of visibility – of a presumed otherness and inferiority based on how one looks” (Martinez, 2000, p. 131). The snapshots of the participants described the women’s skin color as ranging from light or “white” to dark. However, the physical descriptions say nothing about the women’s personality, how they view the world, or what they believe. Instead, the physical descriptions expose the artificialness of assigning “racial” identity based on skin color and other physical characteristics. Nonetheless, “*Color*, rather than saying simply ethnicity, in addition to class and gender, as well as *conscientización* [consciousness], all determine one’s identity and predict one’s fate in the United States” (Castillo, 1994, p. 29). Lily confirmed that things change when we venture outside of our family niche. “Within our own communities or our culture, there are rules and customs or traditions that influence how we identify ourselves. Once we went to school and in other environments, that’s when it became, ‘who are they? What are they?’”

Lulú recalled that she questioned her own identity after being asked by a college peer about discrimination. “I felt very intimidated and didn’t quite know how to respond. I had to be honest with him that I didn’t feel any of that while growing up.” Afterwards, “I was really trying to figure out, ‘Am I

pretending that I'm White?" Lily confessed that, at one time, she too wished to assimilate. "For a while I didn't want anything to do with the Mexican culture. That's why I ended up marrying a White person." The result she said was, "I lost myself." Castillo (1994) encapsulates their predicament, "We are advised to assimilate into white dominant society or opt for invisibility – an invisibility that we are blamed for because of our own lack or ability to take advantage of the supposedly endless opportunities available through acculturation" (p. 22). Castillo asserts, "The general public assumes that all Mexicans are immigrants and therefore, *obligated* to assimilate just as European immigrants did and do" (p. 23).

Dulcina talked about also wanting to fit in and assimilate. Instead, Whites and persons of Mexican descent rejected her. "I guess I really didn't 'get it' in elementary school how different I really was. I didn't think about that. I didn't think about being different." Dulcina experienced additional feelings of doubt when the Chicano students in college teased her about being "Hispanic" instead of Chicana. "I did not belong anywhere. I thought, 'Well, who am I really?'" Anzaldua (1992) attributes the hostility between Chicanas to the internalization of our negative self-image, which results in making our own people the Other.

Para que sea "legal" [to be "legal"], she must pass the ethnic legitimacy test we have devised... and woe to any sister or any part of us that steps out of our assigned places, woe to anyone who doesn't measure up to our standards of ethnicity. (p. 4)

In essence, Anzaldua (1992) claims that we are "acting out" from oppression. Our own stereotypes pit "*mexicanas de nacimiento contra* [Mexicans by birth

against] the born-again *mexicanas*” (p. 4). Anzaldua alleges that for most of us, our struggle for identity is still the issue of ethnicity. Our ethnic self is socially mediated by factors such as age, culture, nationality, religion, and language.

The research participants and I were taught Spanish at home and then learned English in school. We all speak Spanish in varying degrees. By retaining our first language, we preserved the ability to express our concept of self and communicate our culture. Lulú observed that her daughter communicated these ideas when she told her, “Well, if my mother had spoken to me in Spanish I would be Mexican.” Lily expressed the link between self and language thusly, “At home, we speak Spanish mostly and we don’t have to worry about who we are.” Spanish gives direction to our thoughts and patterns of communication (González, 1999) or as Lily put it, “Language transmits culture.” Subjectivity, a central concern of *femenistas* and feminists alike, is configured by Chicanas in the use of Spanish with English (González, 1999). This application of both languages is an integral part of our culture, “being bilingual is a plus wherever I am” (Rosie). Furthermore, it supplements our ability to express our reality. As shown by the participants’ quotes, they intersperse their speech with Spanish and English words.

English only, on the other hand, is inadequate for articulating our way of knowing. As Lily put it, “It was hard to express ourselves, to *be* ourselves.” “I was forced to speak English almost all the time. It was really, really, hard. There were a lot of words I did not know” (Lulú). According to Delgado

Bernal (1995), "Bilingualism is often seen as un-American and is considered a deficit and an obstacle to learning" (p. 562). This belief is contradicted by the participants' educational attainment (college graduates) and the following comments, "I'm proud that I am bilingual. I struggled to be at the point where I am right now. I was successful" (Lulú). "I was not learning anything in special education. I told the principal I wanted to be with my classmates. I wanted to learn what they were learning. By the time I got to college, I was doing better than they were" (Dulcina). "I appreciate that my dad sent us to school in México. In the job that I have, the language [Spanish] is so important. It's been an asset for me" (Rosie).

In truth, holding on to our first language came at a great personal cost. "As Chicanas, we have struggled to articulate our experiences" (Rosie). Lily recalled that in Oregon, as has historically been the case throughout the U.S., students were not allowed to "speak our native language, not even during recess" in the schools. In response, her father required his family to speak Spanish at home. He told them, "Well, *si no pueden hablar español en la escuela* [if you can't speak Spanish at school], then you can't speak English at home." Lily said that it created a hardship for her and her siblings, "That was hard for us because we'd be at home with one language from one culture and then we'd go to school and have to live by that society's or culture's rules and language."

Lulú recalled that learning English was difficult. "The kids would laugh because my pronunciation was terrible. I had a bad accent." She told a

story about misusing a word in class. "I just wanted to disappear. I wished I could disappear because I was so embarrassed. I felt like crying." Lily had a similar experience. She recalled:

I was so embarrassed [trying to learn English]. I would always sit there and pray that the teacher would not call me to the board because I was so nervous that I would trip over everything, that the kids would laugh at me, and I'd be up there shaking. That if I said a word in English, I'd pronounce it wrong. It was just terrible. It was a terrible time.

I also recall that learning English was both difficult and embarrassing. One time, I volunteered to explain a first grade class project to some visitors. I happily chatted away, fully detailing what I knew about the project. Suddenly, I heard laughter in the classroom. To my horror, I realized that the visitors had not understood a word I said because I had been speaking to them in Spanish.

The other participants also reported negative experiences. For Dulcinea, being a native Spanish speaker resulted in her being placed in special education classes because "When I got there they had no idea what to do with me." She heard her first grade teacher say, "I don't understand her. I don't know what I am going to do with her. I think she's slow. I don't think she's very smart." Dulcinea recounted that the teacher sat her in the back of the room and completely ignored her. Delgado Bernal (1995) indicates that historically our "perceived language deficiency" has been used as justification to segregate and stigmatize. The same thing happened to Rosie except that it was in high school. She had returned to school in California after being in Mexico for several months. When she told the school officials that she had come from Mexico, they assumed that she spoke no English so they placed her in remedial

courses. Her science teacher eventually informed the school officials, "She doesn't belong here." She was subsequently pulled from the remedial classes. The devaluation of the participants' Spanish ability resulted in being physically removed from their peers (see Delgado Bernal, 1995). Dulcina explained why she feels so much discomfort when she speaks Spanish:

The thing with the language has been a whole issue for me. In elementary school, they'd tell me not to speak Spanish and I'd get in trouble for speaking Spanish. I would be punished. They would say, "Well I don't know what you're saying." I really felt ashamed about speaking Spanish.

To this day, I don't know *si es verguenza* [if it is shame] or what. And it wasn't just in elementary school. It was when I got to college too. It's just been an issue for me. I will speak Spanish when I have to.

It's almost...I get real nervous about it. All through my life I've always been told, "You don't say things that way" or "That's not how you say that." "You're not a mejicana! That totally sounds like an English accent."

Castillo (1994) points out, "language can add to the trauma of Chicanas' schizophrenic-like experience" (p. 39). She explains that having been educated in English one learns that it is "the only acceptable language in society" (p. 39) while Spanish, the language of our childhood, family, and community, is denigrated. Castillo observes that we may not be able to rid ourselves of our accents and alternately "become anxious and self conscious in later years if [we] have no or little facility in Spanish" (p. 39). Thus, "language creates a particular view of reality" (Richardson, 1995, p. 199) and makes an indelible impression on how we self-identity. Fe's following story highlights the way language contributes to our identity:

When I started getting older and looking very mejicana, they started talking to me in Spanish when I went to the stores. Initially I was really upset, I'd get mad. "What? Do they think I don't know English?" I hated it. At some point, I'm no longer offended when people speak to me in Spanish.

I asked Fe what bothered her about people speaking Spanish to her. I asked if it was because she thought others assumed that she was uneducated. She responded:

Yeah. [It's] because I look like a fieldworker. I don't dress like I have a Masters degree. I don't act like I have a Masters degree. I think it bothered me that they thought that I didn't know English. I am very mejicana in many ways, but it's just the assumption [that bothered me].

Before this time in her life, Fe considered herself both a mejicana and Chicana.

Alarcon (1990) declares, "The name Chicana is not a name that women (or men) are born to or with, as is often the case with 'Mexican,' but rather it is consciously and critically assumed" (p. 98). Martinez (2000) elaborates, "Identifying as Chicana or Chicano requires assuming a certain political consciousness, a resistance to being totally assimilated into Anglo culture, a commitment to bonding the surviving fragments from shared pasts into a proud and creative future" (p. 126). Laura E. Gomez (1992) points out that although many people still use Chicana/o, most notably writers and scholars of Mexican descent (Alarcon), it has almost completely disappeared from the mainstream. Gomez (1992) attributes this to the nation becoming increasingly conservative, the increasing political organizing by Cuban-Americans and Puerto Ricans, and to the immigrants from Central America who prefer other identify labels. These factors, as well as the desire for a politically and instrumentally useful

umbrella term, teamed to favor the most problematic category, that of “Hispanic” (Masud-Piloto, 1995; Melville, 1988; Oboler, 1995 and 1992).

Evolution – Sin Colores

En Lak 'Ech (you are my other self.)
Quiche Nation

David T. Goldberg (1995) contends that “Hispanic, ” a 1980 Census term, was crafted to cut across racial designations although its generality “serves silently to reify a new racial category, to extend the project of purity, even as it is a product of mixture” (p. 245). Census respondents under this category were asked to choose between a myriad of “racial” options even though, as Maria P. P. Root (1992) asserts in her book on racially mixed people, forcing a single choice can produce invalid or unreliable results. Choices on the Census included the ethnic or national categories Mexican, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Cuban, Argentinean, or “other Spanish/Hispanic” “regardless of race.” Martha E. Giménez (1989) notes that there were three different methods to assign race or ethnicity to newborns: “Hispanic” parentage and the race or ethnicity of the mother and father. She points out that the “ethnicity” of the child will vary depending on which method is used.

Insistence on considering “Hispanic” anyone who has at least one “Hispanic” parent or ancestor betrays a remarkable obsession with racial purity and racial classification that should not remain unnoticed or escape criticism at a time when racism is, presumably, under attack. It also indicates allegiance to a

reified concept of culture, as if it were genetically inherited.
(Giménez, 1989, paragraph 31)

“Hispanic” is thereby an ambiguously racial category whereby
“Hispanics” may now be Black or White, “ethnic,” or “other.” Scholar Jack D.
Forbes (1992), Rappahannock-Powhatan, cogently argues:

The use of Hispanic or Spanish-origin categories achieves the end of continuing to empower white Spanish-speaking elites at the expense of people of mestizo, Indian, and African origin and of masking the hierarchical, color-ranked structure and racial/ethnic diversity within the Spanish-speaking and Latin American origin populations. Another function of Hispanic is to confuse people of color so that they will “think white” and allow themselves to be dominated by white assimilative forces.
(p. 65)

Jose Angel Gutierrez, founder of the political party La Raza Unida and Chicano author, alluded to this confusion in a 1999 public radio interview in Portland, Oregon by noting that when Latinas/os are asked in Spanish, “What are you?” we proudly respond, “*Mexicano, Puerto Riqueño, Guatemalteco, or Tejano.*” When asked in English we do not always know how to answer. We tentatively respond, “Mexican American, Latina, Hispanic?” Dulcinea related a story of being asked in a college class what label she preferred. She hesitated before answering, “I just don’t know which one I would prefer. It was a valid question but I could not answer it only because I don’t know.” Lulú likewise expressed a similar sentiment, “It seems one group [of people] would take offense if I use one term or the other, so I test the waters and try to answer in the term I feel that audience expects.” Both women, however, revealed that they consider themselves mexicanas and, like the other participants, exalted

their “Mexicanness.” Other participants vehemently opposed the term “Hispanic.”

I’m not from Spain and I’m nobody’s “panic” (Fe).

When they say “Hispanic,” they’ve just lumped us all together (Lulú).

I definitely hate the word “Hispanic” (Lily).

Lily was even more vocal in her opposition to the term:

I have never liked it and I don’t even like to refer to people as Hispanics. I don’t like to use it because it was a political word used in a certain presidential era. I don’t know, maybe because it reminds me of the word, Spic. His-panic, spic. It just tries to put everybody that speaks a certain language in one group. I just don’t like it.

Thus, “Hispanic” as an externally imposed label, serves to exclude by signifying who is and who is not Hispanic thereby marginalizing and stereotyping as it “others.”

The term “Latinas/os” is similarly situated. Oboler’s (1995) research on the meaning and implication of ethnic labels indicates that the term Latino emerged out of grassroots sections of the population with ties to Latin America. She posits that the term was coined as an alternative to the state-imposed “Hispanic” label. Geoffrey E. Fox (1996) agrees with Obler’s first statement. However, he traces the term back to a nineteenth-century nationalistic idea originating in the time of Napoleon III. Fox indicates that the phrase “Latin America” dramatized the distinction between what had been known as Spanish America and “Anglo-Saxon” America, made it possible to ignore the historical connection to Spain, and “continued to suppress any hint

of [the Latin American] countries' embarrassing indigenous or African heritages" (p. 13). He contends that those who prefer "Latino" to "Hispanic" emphasize their non-European heritages. Fox scoffs at their nonsensical assertion "unless one believes that the Latini were an indigenous tribe of Mexico rather than of Italy" (p. 15). Giménez (1998), a strong opponent of standardized terms, makes her position clear:

The labels perform neat tricks; they "minoritize" foreigners from Spanish speaking countries (many of whom are of European descent), make Native Americans disappear under the pseudo-European veneer of "Hispanic," or transform all "Latinos" into Native Americans because, as a Chicano scholar noted, the real reason why populations of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Spanish descent have been historically subject to racist practices had nothing to do with their "Spanish" culture but with the fact that a large proportion had Native American blood. (Paragraph 8)

Giménez also criticizes the assumption that Latinas/os are a homogeneous group. She persuasively argues that the label creates an artificial population that aggregates people who differ in terms of language, social class, race, minority status, socioeconomic status, national origin, and time of arrival in the United States. Fox (1996) observes that intellectuals typically favor the term "Latino" although "Hispanic" appears to be the prevailing term, especially among newer Latin American immigrants who already use the term *hispanos*. He observes that "Hispanic" is "usually favored by those who do much of their thinking in Spanish and anyone who is applying for a grant" (p. 15). Fox notes that the terms tend to be used interchangeably by most people. To varying degrees, some of the participants' supported Fox's claim, "I'm Hispanic. I'm Latina" (Lily) and "I am comfortable with all those terms"

(Dulcina). Some of the women expressed ambivalence about the terms. “I don’t know which I identify with more” (Dulcina), “Very rarely do I say I’m Hispanic. But I think I would rather use the word, Hispanic, than, Latin American” (Lulú), and “Some [people] are more accepting of ‘Hispanic.’ So, therefore, I tend to automatically say that just to make people feel a little bit more comfortable” (Lulú).

In their study of the coherence of the term “Hispanic” as an ethnic label, Martha Tienda and Vilma Ortiz (1986) concluded that the majority of respondents ascribed to more than one identity label. This suggests that pan-ethnic labels are elastic rather than core identities and “are often addenda – identities set aside and picked up momentarily in addition to other primary identifications” (Portes and MacLeod, 1996, p. 6). In fact, the participants were not particularly attached to pan-ethnic terms. They said things such as “I would rather be called Chicana than Hispanic” (Fe), “I’m not offended if someone calls me Hispanic but I do not refer to myself as Hispanic” (Lily), “I felt I could go with any of those words” (Dulcina), and “I won’t feel insulted no matter what people think I am” (Lulú). Indeed, participant responses indicated that they use “Hispanic” or Latina sparingly. “Very rarely do I say I’m Hispanic” (Dulcina), “I guess I use ‘Mexican’ more” (Lulú); and “Sometimes I call myself Latina” (Lily).

Michael Jones-Correa and David L. Leal (1996) in their article, Becoming “Hispanic,” discuss the use of these pan-ethnic labels. They define pan-ethnic as ethnic origins belonging to no one specific country or place of

origin. The results of their study indicate that most respondents do not identify primarily pan-ethnically and that national-origin terms outweigh pan-ethnic terms. Alejandro Portes and Dag MacLeod (1996) similarly found that the strongest influence on ethnic identification was national origin. Without exception, all of the participants referred to themselves as Mexican regardless of their country of birth. They made comments such as:

I am Mexican (Dulcina).

I felt I was a Mexican (Lily).

The "Mexican" is always there 'cause that's what I grew up with (Lulú).

We were brought up in the mexicano culture. That is our background (Fe).

I knew I wasn't Mexican because I was born here but I grew up with the language, with the culture (Lily).

The food identified me. I knew what I was because people eat those foods in Mexico (Lulú).

The participants' overall comments suggest that culture was the strongest factor in determining how they identified. Nagel (1994) asserts, "Culture provides the content and meaning of ethnicity" (p. 162) and answers the question, "What are we?" Although only one of the participants was born in Mexico, they all referred to themselves as mejicanas. In choosing to identify as Mexican they appropriated it as one among other ethnic and cultural identities for themselves. However, "even when ancestry can be proven, questions can arise about the cultural depths of the individual's ethnicity"

(Nagel, p. 160). Indeed, some of the participants reported having their cultural or ethnic authenticity questioned or relegated by others:

You're the first "Spanish" girl that's ever had this honor
(Dulcina).

But you look more Native American than you do Mexican
(Lulú).

Some would not even call me Mexican (Dulcina).

Hey, are you Hawaiian? I was always something else. Some students thought I was Asian (Dulcina).

How do you know Spanish? You're White (Rosie)!

I came across *otros latinos* [other Latinos] that were, "Well, you're not Mexican enough" (Dulcina).

Some have mistaken me for "Spanish." That really bothers me. What does that mean? Does that mean that I am from Spain? Does that mean that because I speak Spanish, I am Spanish (Lily)?

Nagel (1994) states:

Just as ethnic identity results both from the choices of individuals and from the ascriptions of others, ethnic boundaries and meaning are also constructed from within and from without, propped up by internal and external pressures. (p. 167)

These pressures or factors (e.g., language, culture, and race) are often regarded to be discrete components of identity and as such are investigated as mutually exclusive processes. An exception is Susan R. Jones' (1997) research, which conceptualized identity in terms of its numerous components. Her study examined the influence that race, ethnicity, social class, gender, and sexual orientation exerted on the construction of identity. She focused her study on understanding the meaning that these discrete dimensions had for

female college students. Jones was also interested in how the experience of difference within the context of these dimensions shaped the participants' identity. She concluded that identity is not fixed but rather made up of multiple identities that cannot be separated from the contexts in which they are constructed. In another one of her conclusions Jones noted, "Gender also was connected with experiences of sexism, double standards, feminist identifications" (p. 381). In truth, Mexican family traditions and socialization can sometimes restrain the successful "straddling of cultures" (Anzaldua, 1990), which can be seen as impediments to the formation of identity (de los Santos, 1998). "*Mexicanas* are socialized to learn particular values, behaviors, and ways of thinking and knowing" (González, 1999, p. 127). The participants recounted their lived experiences in terms of how they negotiated the impact culture and gender had on their concept of self.

Lily, Dulcinea, Lulú, and Rosie relayed stories describing their parents' resistance to their moving away from home. Traditionally, Mexican females were expected to move out only after they were married. In this case, the participants wanted to go away to college. Lily's parents, "Felt I had enough education and should just have kids and live happily ever after." Lulú's father was adamantly opposed to her going to college. He was steadfast in his resolve to block any attempts that facilitated her access to higher education. The women sought intervention from people outside of the family. Lulú's high school counselor and a Chicano administrator interceded on her behalf. (Lulú thus paved the way for me to go to college.) Lily relied on the parish priest to

speak to her parents. "They got really mad at me because I involved the priest." Both women ended up going to college, Lulú with her father's reluctant acquiescence and Lily without her father's permission. "Basically, my dad disowned me. He said I was dead to them forever. I left with whatever clothes I had on. I found out later that he burned all my clothes" (Lily).

Rosie's story was more light-hearted. Her father, an educated man (he had a PhD), encouraged his children's education. He would tell them, "Your brain has only an inch's worth of information stored in it. You need to expand it. Your brain is like a recording machine. You need to fill it with knowledge." Although he wanted Rosie to go to college, he wanted her to stick close to home. She chuckled recalling that he would use reverse psychology on her. "Ah, you don't need to go to school. All they do is party." She laughed saying that this prompted her to go to college. Dulcinea also fared better with her parents. She indicated that they did not understand the concept of higher education for females. "My brother was the only one that had gone to college. My parents were, 'oh good, *Mijo* [my son], good.' Yeah, he's a guy so it's okay. We were raised with that double standard. He could do that." She believed her parents meant well, however they did not know what college was or what moving away to college meant. Therefore, they accompanied her to the college orientation so they too could learn from the experience.

Gender stereotyping also came into play in other arenas of the women lives. Traditionally, Chicanas are "expected to be passive, economically

dependent, chaste, and monogamous, and to provide unlimited domestic service to the men culturally designated to protect them (e.g., fathers, brothers, and husbands)” (Schmidt, Barvosa-Carter, and Torres, 2000, Paragraph 10). For Rosie, stereotyping came in the form of admonishments from her father not to marry “beneath” her. “He wanted me to stay within the middle-class or higher.” When she turned eighteen he had an arranged marriage lined up for her. He was very upset with her when she refused to get married. His anger carried over to her involvement with her children’s father. “It was a very disappointing point in my dad’s life. After being brought up Catholic, here I went against everything.” She said her father thought, “She’s been brought up, educated, and she’s married this long-haired guy, a real Indio.” Her father asked the parish priest to talk to her. “The priest was very upset because we didn’t get married in the Church. I never expected the priest to come and see me, I was just visiting, telling me that I committed a big sin and that I needed to get married.” She told the priest, “But I am married. I just didn’t get married by the Church.” Rosie chuckled as she told me that she was subsequently ex-communicated by the priest. More seriously, she related that her father disowned her for disobeying his wishes. They were estranged for a few years until her children’s father talked to her dad and got them to mend their differences.

For Lily and Dulcina gender stereotyping took the form of warnings from their parents’ about mexicano men. Lily began:

As I was growing up, I would hear my parents tell us, “You’d better not marry a wetback.” A wetback was somebody that

was from Mexico that didn't have any papers; that would cross over the river and was here illegally. "Because all they want is for you to fix their papers."

Lily believed that her parents were insinuating that their family was better than other mexicanos. Laughingly she confessed, "But at the same time, you know how it is, forbidden fruit is always more delicious!" Her parents kept a vigilant eye on her and would interrogate her about the males she met. "Who is this person? How did you meet him? *Y tienen papeles*, does he have papers?"

Dulcina's parents cautioned her about Mexican men before she started dating. "We don't want you to have any mexicano boyfriends." They too held stereotypes of Mexican males. Her mother was especially adamant; "They'll keep you in the house. You won't be able to do what you want to do. You won't be able to go to school." Like Lily, Dulcina believed that her parents thought they were better than other Mexicans. Although Dulcina does not really know why her parents felt that way, she postulated that it was because of the discrimination that they experienced due to their ancestry. She speculated that her mother also held negative opinions because her own father was very strict. "My grandfather didn't let her do a lot of things and that's where I think she got that stereotype."

The stereotypical portrayal of males carried over to the participants.

Lulú for example, shied away from marrying:

You know, I never thought I would ever marry 'cause I always assumed everybody was going to be like my dad. He was so chauvinistic. He always had to be right. It made a difference in how I was viewing the world.

Lily felt the same way. “Because of the way my dad was, he was your typical Mexican macho man, womanizer, gambler. He was very violent.” She distanced herself from her culture and married a White man. The participants’ stories illustrated how gender intersected with the shaping of their identity.

Francisca E. González (1999) conducted similar research on how identities are shaped. She reported the voices of young mejicanas in constructing narratives of how gender shaped their identities. She placed their voices and her own at the forefront of their lived experiences and realities. Like Jones (1997), González framed her study around multiple identities and dimensions with the various ways in which race and gender intersect. Along with her participants, González constructed narratives that examined how they sifted through cultural knowledge and meanings to create their identities (p. 126). She claimed that it is through this *intersectionality* that acknowledgment of and differences among women can be explored. González concludes that, “cultural knowledge and the foundations of *educación* are sources of power, affirmations, and contradictions of real-life complexities” (p. 146).

After reviewing the literature, I concluded that there is a paucity of studies on identity that focus on members of ignored groups. Little interpretive and collaborative research included Chicanas as both the researcher and researched. Of the many studies on “Hispanic” identity, none addressed the question, “What specific terms do women of Mexican descent use to self-identify?” Furthermore, they did not focus on the women’s understanding of how their life stories shaped their identity or explore the contexts in which

particular identity terms are used. What the literature lacked is the descriptions of the self-imposed identity constructs of women, Women of Color in particular, and Chicanas specifically.

The review of the literature served to set the context of my own research. It legitimized focusing on an Indigenous Chicana worldview as the foundation of my study. It suggested the use of narrative as a method for eliciting the participants' understanding of how their lived experiences shaped their identity. In addition, it helped to form the basis on which to design the study and determine its methods. For example, it set the groundwork for structuring the study around a multi-dimensional approach that underscores the complexity of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity. The literature review served to suggest ways to address these concepts amid multiple intersecting dimensions such as social class, gender, and language. In particular, the studies on ethnic identity served to suggest exploration of the notion that people ascribe to more than one identity label. The studies further elucidated the internal and external processes that influence identity.

The purpose of my study was to resurrect, challenge, deliberate, and possibly revise the meaning of Chicana identity told from the perspective of other Chicanas and mine. At minimum, the goal was to break the silence and make our voices heard if only to a small circle in academia. At most, it was to assert our right to preserve and recreate our own identity.

Ways and Means: A Mi Manera

Memory is another word for story
Ann-Marie MacDonald (1996, p. 255)

Ambert, Adler, Adler, and Detzner (1995) stipulate that, “Qualitative researchers should at least briefly, explain the approach they used, and the ways in which they interpreted their early data, and how preliminary findings influenced subsequent data gathering and analysis” (p. 167). I address the aforementioned authors’ requisites in this section on my research methods and methodology. I discuss the focus of my study, which was Chicana identity and the utilization of Indigenous methodologies inclusive of the qualitative research approach of narrative inquiry. I also discuss storytelling, interviewing, and field notes as methods for gathering data. Further, I detail the interpretive methods I employed in ascertaining the findings, which included the participants’ collaborative participation throughout the research process. Involving the women as co-participants in all stages of the research project, positions them as “insiders” as opposed to “outsiders.” As such, they enhanced the depth and richness of the interpretations garnered from the data that they themselves generated.

D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2000) view research as a collaborative process, a mutually created story emerging out of the lives of both the researcher and the participants. Margaret L. Anderson (1993) says, “Research is an act of self-discovery, as well as a process of learning about others” (p. 50). It is a means of sharing knowledge and a process of reflection

that can lead to new ways of understanding self (Castleden and Kurszewski, 2000).

Research is also intrusive, exploitative, an imposition of a dominant ideology on others. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) says, "The term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonization" (p. 1). Research is used to generalize about "otherness." If and when "others" are included in research, researchers often do not transmute their methods to reflect an inclusion of other ways of knowing. The consequences of exclusion set up a situation such that, "paradigms define their own territory and the prevailing paradigm in science not only dictates the questions that can be asked, it dictates the answers that can be obtained" (Barden and Boyer, 1993, p. 13). It is therefore imperative that Chicanas find the appropriate application of their ways of knowing in culturally relevant ways to thus challenge and redefine existing paradigms.

Antonia Darder (1995) asserts that Latinas must continue to "find the manner to incorporate in our intellectual work those ways of knowing that are rooted in experience" (p. 5). Tuhiwai Smith (1999) points out, however, that few Indigenous scholars have received curriculum support for issues of concern within their own communities. According to Marijane Ambler (1997), editor of the Tribal College Journal, the protocols for research, the models for good research, and the role of scholars conducting research in Indigenous communities are not well defined. Out of necessity, some Indigenous scholars are self-taught in developing the appropriate research skills or turn to emerging

Indigenous scholarship to work in their communities (Churchill, 1995; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Cook-Lynn, 1996; La Fromboise and Plake, 1983; Rigney, 1999; Swisher and Deyhle, 1992; Swisher and Tippenconnic, 1999). Most scholars of Color, however, are cast in “epistemological limbo – between the old discourse and the new” and “find themselves simultaneously having been trained in the dominant tradition and needing to break free of it” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 267.) Pizarro (1999) for example, relates the disjuncture created between the traditional research he was trained in and his own methodological and research interests. He says that Chicana/o researchers had to justify their work and their epistemology was “seen by the mainstream as poor training and substandard scholarship by ‘unqualified, affirmative-action faculty’” (p. 64).

Darder (1995) expounds on these concerns. She maintains that the consequence for those whose research engages cultural questions in their own communities is that they are often marginalized by the “enlightened” mainstream. Their presence in research is subsumed such that Chicanas are presented as representing the entire Raza or group. Chicanas are therein objectified and relegated to last place behind White males, White females, and Men of Color, in that order. They continue to be silenced, or if they speak, to not be heard at all. Their voices are discounted or trivialized. Often how they say things is given more significance than what they say. If Chicanas insist on raising their voices, they are labeled malcontents or troublemakers. Lily vocalized how this phenomena plays out for Chicanas:

When we go out there's always this thing about being more cautious about what I say, how I act, what I do. I feel that as People of Color, we are always being looked at. We are always being watched to see how we are going to react to things, what we are going to do. Are we going to get offended? Are we going to get defensive? Are we going to get aggressive?

Paula Gunn Allen (1995) lodges similar complaints about how First Nations women are portrayed. She says, "Our 'allies' adamantly cast us in the role of helpless, hopeless, inadequate, incompetent, much in need of white champions and saviors, dependent upon an uncaring state for every shred of personal and community dignity we might hope to enjoy" (p. 32). Should research acknowledge that they exist, researchers "then go on to do what they were going to do anyway, which is to invent a theory that has little relevance for us" (Christian, 1990, p. 342). Darder (1995) references the "uneasiness" over the exploration of "cultural consciousness and the merits of knowledge that is rooted in the lived cultural experience of marginalized communities" (p. 4). She claims that this anxiety's overarching affect is to protect Western notions of "individualism, objectivity, and universal truth which deceptively conceal institutionalized structures of entitlement and privilege embedded in critiques of identity politics that, intentionally or unintentionally function" to silence (p. 5).

Although the words and perspectives of otherwise silenced voices are becoming more prevalent in qualitative research, much research is still told from the perspective of outsiders. This research, usually conducted by White feminists, is including Women of Color as both researcher and participants in the research. Too often, however, these standpoint epistemologists are

including us “without actually modifying their own academic practices to reflect the significance of race and class dynamics” (Uttal, 1990, p. 42). Alcoff (1995) charges, “universal pretensions often produce alienation in those whose identities are not dominant” (p. 273). Our inclusion presents more problems than simple omission did. This is evident in education where notions about truths are played out such that they reinforce and maintain the power and privilege of those that espouse Western perspectives. Traditional or Western scholarship is based on its own unexamined assumptions about truth, which are presented as universal (see Sue and Sue, 2003). These assumptions or manifestations of power relations structure and prescribe “societal definitions of truth, rules of normalcy, and notions of legitimacy which often defy and denigrate the cultural existence and lived experiences of subordinate groups” (Darder, 1995, p. 2). In effect, Western scholarship fails to acknowledge the viewpoints and experiences of Chicanas.

Focus of the Study – Punto Central

Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth.
Alan Watts

My study proposed to explore and reaffirm Chicanas’ experiences and perspectives as expressed through their stories. By focusing my research on Chicanas, I privileged our experiences as a basis and justification for knowledge. It centered research on a shared commonality: identifying as Chicanas. Moreover, it reflected a heeding to the call for alternative voices to

be heard. My interest centered on the ways in which women identify themselves as determined by the labels they apply to their concept of self. I used open-ended face-to-face dialogical inquiries to determine the influence that the women's experiences, gender, history, social class, and culture have on their identity concepts. If culture does indeed contribute to the shaping of identity, then examining Chicanas' concept of self and how our lived experiences help to shape our identity might reveal how our culture influences the way we understand self.

The primary reason for choosing to focus on Chicanas is because I feel intimately tied to our issues and, as Allen (1995), Laguna/Sioux/Lebanese scholar suggests, "the way to liberation from oppression and injustice is to focus on one's own interest, creativity, concerns, and community" (p. 43). The collective knowledge generated by the research participants and me sharing our stories and the consequential cycle of dialogue and reflection culminated in creating a stronger voice. What emerged out of this interaction is the collaborative self that is "characterized by its own language including words, phrases, shared stories and metaphors Like a rope made up of individual threads we can be pulled apart and retain our individual uniqueness. However, entwined together, the rope has more strength. Rather than losing our selves to the collaboration, we found a stronger self" (Lawrence and Mealman, 1999, pp. 5-6).

Methodology – Encuentros

The road less traveled makes all the difference.

The decision on whether to use quantitative or qualitative methods rests on the issues and research questions asked (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Qualitative research is conceptualized as employing multiple practices and methodologies. It privileges no one methodology over another (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative research is holistic, empirical, and empathetic. It interweaves theory, data, and methods and links them to existing literature (Ambert, Adler, Adler, and Detzner, 1995). Qualitative inquiry centers phenomena as intricately related across spatial, temporal, historical, political, economic, cultural, social, and political contexts (Stake, 1998). “It seeks to describe and understand rather than to test hypothesis” (Crazy Bull, 1997, p. 18). What is more, qualitative research lends itself to participatory and collaborative or two-way interactions with the participants. Bearing all these issues in mind, the most crucial is the utilization of methodology that accommodates the realities and experiences of the researched.

I was informed by a Chicana feminista approach that is grounded by Indigenous methodologies, which tend “to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.15). Methodology is an analytic system for determining how research should proceed. “Methodology is important because it frames the questions being asked, determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed and

shapes the analysis” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 143). An Indigenous Chicana methodology lends itself to the methods of narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry is the process of understanding experience as lived and told stories and gathering this information for the purpose of research. It can be oral or written. It is multifunctional, frequently embedded in other kinds of discourse, and depends on ongoing collaboration between the researcher and participants (Cruikshank, 1990; Rosen, 1986). Narrative inquiry holds that to understand the world of meaning one must interpret it. Although it is “principally concerned with matters of knowing and being, not methods per se,” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 222) it nonetheless lends itself to various methods to gather data. Methods are strategies and techniques; “disinterested tools” for gathering or drawing out information, ways of doing rather than ways of thinking about that “are implicitly a one-way interaction,” (Hermes, 1995, p. 87).

A method I employed was that of storytelling or oral narratives. Storytelling is an essential element of the oral traditions of Indigenous people (Howard, S. J., 1999). It is an unfolding and evolving process likely to have a “loose episodic structure” (Collins, 1985, p. 59). To be sure, a perusal of the women’s narrative transcript corroborates Collins. The participants made their way through their life stories, skipping back and forth across past and present events, connecting themes, returning to previously talked about topics, and finally circling back to where their story started or ended. The structural course of storytelling makes it impossible to predict outcomes or guarantee that

any expected outcomes would be achieved (Chase, 1996). Indeed, researchers must be prepared for the emergence of new or unanticipated data. This necessitates amending methods to accommodate the responses from the participants. Rosaldo (1989) makes the observation, "that in everyday life the wise guide themselves as often by waiting to see how events unfold as by plans and predictions" (p. 92). He postulates that people find out about their world by living with uncertainty and ambiguity and by improvising, learning by doing and making things up as they go along. The art of storytelling requires multiple methods of understanding and evoking shared experiences. Since stories have infinite meanings, they are open to a multitude of interpretations.

Nevertheless, narrative accounts seek to describe and communicate "truths" inasmuch as "words reflect the way our minds touch the world about us" (Martin, 1992, p. 2). Narrative, then, is a form of representation as well as a mode of reasoning. It is the way we understand our lived experiences and the lives of others. Antoinette Errante (2000) maintains, "the ways in which we narrate our voice are inextricably linked to our perceptions of how our stories narrate important aspects of our identity" (p. 26). Hence, stories are a form of self-presentation in which the tellers are expressing their claimed identity (Polkinghorne, 1988). "We increasingly recognize that all narratives, whether oral or written, personal or collective, official or subaltern are 'narratives of identity;' that is, they are representations of reality in which narrators also communicate how they see themselves and wish others to see

them” (Errante, p. 16). Narrative inquiry is in fact strongly autobiographical. In sum, life story narratives are indistinguishable from the constructed self.

Narrators tell stories to create bonds. Stories thereby represent cohesion, shared understandings, and meanings (Delgado, 1995). “Communicating orally [leads] to recollections and shared thought, rather than the relative anonymity of the written word” (Crazy Bull, 1997, p. 21). The emergent processes of collaboration and dialogue include storytelling as a way for the participants to convey and recover their own story. Stories are the connections between the past and present. In fact, as narrative truths, stories seek to “keep the past alive in the present” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 745). People make sense of their past through the meanings they ascribe to the events in their stories. Narrative itself is always in the past and, as Ellis (1999) claims, “the truth is that we can never capture experience” (p. 673). However, what is in the present is the act of telling, reconstructing, and reshaping the story to fit one’s audience, situation, and understanding of lived experience. Stories are links between the narrator and the group or community to which she belongs and between the narrator and listener (Lagrand, 1997).

Another method I employed comes from my own experiences as a Chicana. I utilized cultural intuition to attend to and hear the stories told by the participants (Delgado Bernal, 1998). My cultural intuition helped me ask appropriate and “distinctively Chicana feminist research questions” (Delgado Bernal, p. 559). For example, I know that how we say things in Spanish can be vastly different from how it would be said in English. Moreover, the

connotation it conveys is different. Therefore, I asked Lulu, "Is there a difference in the identity labels you use when you speak Spanish as opposed to English?" When she and the other participants indicated that the terms that they used are situational I asked, "Does what you feel about other people affect how you identify yourself?" This question was based on my understanding that mexicano culture puts the feelings of others first and we go out of our way not to offend.

I also employed written and audio taped field notes that included the location, description of the setting, and my impressions and reflections of the narrator within the context of a particular interview. "Qualitative research depends on the presentation of solid descriptive data, so that the researcher leads the reader to an understand[ing] of the meaning of the experience under study" (Janesick, 1998, p. 48). It lends itself to "thick description" or the "particular perceptions of the actors" (Stake, 1995, p. 42), which enables "the researcher to elicit and interpret the meaning of lived experience" (Morse, 1998, p. 66). By providing sufficient descriptive narratives, researchers give readers a vicarious experience of what the researcher learned. The tapes or field notes do not, however, constitute the "findings" (Richardson, 1995, p. 198). Instead, interpretive methods must be employed to ascertain the "results" of what was learned. This required "getting at" or understanding the narratives as representations of the participants' sense of self.

The American Indian Research and Policy Institute (1999) puts forth the belief, "An interview should be an honorable 'engagement' between

interviewer and subject” (p. 49). This situates the researcher and participants as co-participants in the creation of the interview and, by extension, the entire research process. In fact, a major principle of Chicana epistemology advocates for methods that pose the researcher and participants as equals throughout all phases of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Pizarro (1999) and Swisher and Tippenconnic (1999) echo this sentiment by proposing that participants’ voices and concerns be evident throughout the research project. Hermes (1995) promotes research that involves participants in ongoing, two-way exchanges with the researcher. Lather (1991) likewise supports “an increased visibility for research designs that are interactive, contextualized, and humanly compelling because they invite joint participation in exploration of research issues” (p. 52). The strategy of giving voice to the participants confers privilege and prominence to their voices and situates them as the authorities on the narrative data. I relied on the women’s insights and opinions when formulating the interpretations on identity. I juxtaposed their voices, as culled from their narrative stories, with mine throughout the research process and inserted them in the written dissertation. As much as possible, I strove to position them as equals. This altruistic ideal was, of course, impossible given that I was solely responsible for the final written text and doctoral programs do not permit co-authored dissertations. The resultant collaborative narrative is a web of interwoven strands that are our stories and the tension inherent in weaving lived experience with the “order and clarity of abstraction” (McCarthy Brown, 1992, p. 4).

Exploration – Buscando Fronteras

For all of us memory is a labyrinth that takes
different turnings each time we come back to it.
Marea C. Teski and Jacob J. Climo (1995, p. 1)

The following is the questions I devised to ask the participants.

Although the lists of questions may suggest that the interviews were orderly and standardized, such is not the case. Each interview was as free flowing and unstructured as any social visit usually is. The questions functioned merely as a guide from which I could draw to elicit information from the participants.

My interview format was informed by an interview that I conducted for a graduate level anthropology course. The pilot case served to acquaint me with narrative inquiry, provided an opportunity to practice interviewing as well as using audio-taping and transcription equipment, and formulating appropriate questions for my research. Also, Watson and Watson-Frankle's (1985) book, Interpreting Life Histories: An Anthropological Inquiry, proved informative in the methods of data gathering. I sought to ascertain:

- What terms do the women used to self-identify?
- In what context or situations are the terms used?
- What meaning do they attach to these terms?
- Do the women use more than one term? If so:
 - What determines which term is used?
 - Do others, within and outside the group, affect the use of the terms?
 - How do others affect the terms used?

- In what situations are specific identifiers used?

Other questions that I explored with some of the participants:

- When was the first time you heard the term used?
- Who told it to you?
- Tell me about a situation when you would not use that term.
- Tell me of a time when there was a misunderstanding with people who identified you in a certain way.

Participants – *Carnalhood*

Blessed are they who listen when no one is left to speak.
Linda Hogan, *Chickasaw Poet*, (1986, p. 115)

I acknowledged the women as the authorities and encouraged their full participation in the discursive analytical process. After all, they were the bearers of knowledge who generated the “data” in the first place. The participants I included in my research were women that expressed an interest in narrating their life stories and who were willing to meet with me to discuss their thoughts about identity. Including willing participants that are vested in the research topic enriched the information that was gathered.

The criteria for selecting the participants was:

1. Women over thirty – it was assumed that at that age, the women would have had numerous and varied life experiences which influenced their self-identity.
2. Women of Mexican descent

- a) To learn about the self image of women that share the same ethnic and cultural identity as the researcher
 - b) To designate a particular ethnic and cultural group instead of the more hegemonic “Hispanic” or Latina. Specifically, “to name” rather than “be named”
 - c) To increase the likelihood that the women would be familiar with the term, Chicana, and its social, political, and historical meanings.
3. Women born in or who lived a significant portion of their life in the United States – to examine the struggles and barriers the women face in this society and hear their stories of survival.
 4. Women who identify with the Latino and/or Indigenous community and are acknowledged as members by their respective communities. Alcoff (1995) claims that the ability to be accepted and achieve status within a community is tied to one’s racial identification and “*identifiability*” (p. 261).

I knew each of the women before the start of the study and had a long-term relationship with most of them. This fact obviously influenced whom I included and excluded in my research. I excluded Chicanas that I did not personally know well simply to avoid uncomfortable or burdensome “lulls” during the interviews. Being that I sought to explore Chicana identity through interactive and dialogic conversations with participants, I did not believe that I would achieve these meaningful dialogues with women I did not know well. I

relied on my own judgment in choosing suitable participants. Hence, the “sample” was a purposefully chosen group (see Facio, 1993a). As expected, having an established relationship with the women greatly facilitated the interactive interview process and contributed to the depth and richness of the information gathered.

Being that we had numerous prior occasions to talk about other topics, it was easy to converse about their life stories. At no time did I sense any apprehensions on the part of the women. On the contrary, the women appeared comfortable and eager to tell their story. Some of the women initiated the *pláticas* or conversations whenever they were ready to resume. They even asked that I turn on the recorder when they remembered something they had left out. Some of the participants submitted written copies of stories and events they wanted to include in their narratives. The high level of trust that existed between us as friends carried over into the interviews. Given this, and the comfort we felt with each other, the sessions were truly interactive conversations.

Participants in the study were five women of Mexican descent who were over the age of thirty. The average age of the women was 46 with the youngest being 32 and the oldest 54. Every one had at least a Bachelor’s degree and three had earned a Masters, which means that they fell into the 10% of Latinas that complete four or more years of college. Each of the participants had professional positions, the majority of which were in education. This positioned all of them, including me, in the socioeconomic middle-class. With

the exception of Rosie who grew up in a middle-class family, all of us grew up poor or in the lower economic class. Only one of the participants was unemployed at the time of her initial interview. She has since started teaching. The similarities between the participants and me situated us as peers in terms of age, gender, language, ethnic and cultural identity, education, and social class.

I believe that our commonalities enhanced the research process by positioning us as apparent equals despite the fact that I was the “researcher” and they the “researched.” All of the women acknowledged their Mexican ancestry but otherwise identified in different ways. They used multiple identity terms although some of them indicated they had a preferred term that they used more consistently. All the women except for one were fluent in Spanish and fully bilingual. This one participant understood Spanish but was reticent to speak it although she was able to articulate grammatically correct sentences. Half of the women were married and had children. Half were single parents.

After reviewing the literature and given the uniqueness of each participant and her lived experiences, I knew that trying to “make sense” of Chicana identity would be difficult, complicated, and full of inconsistencies. Nevertheless, I intentionally invited these particular women to participate precisely because of the multiple, exceptional, and rich perspectives that each would bring to the study. Oboler (1995) points out that scholars recognize that “in-depth studies of small groups such as this one can pinpoint the web of

subtle interstices in the multiple ways that a particular group of men and women understand their lived experiences” (p. 163).

Information Gathering- Pláticas

*When you are actively learning about someone else
you are passively teaching them about yourself.
Daryl Davis, Klan-Destine Relations*

Initial participant contact was made via a telephone call or an in-person meeting with each of the five women to ask them to participate in my research. I explained the research, its purpose and design, and the methods I would employ. I also gave the participants an overview of the preliminary literature review I had conducted on the topic of identity. Their expected involvement in terms of the length of time and the anticipated benefits of participating in the study were also discussed. Each woman was informed of her rights including the right to refuse to answer any question and to request that any or all of her interview be deleted from the record. They were also told that they could drop out of the study at any time.

The women were assured that they should feel no obligation to participate and were given ample opportunity to consider my request. Furthermore, I encouraged them to ask questions before consenting to tell their stories. The participants were given the Informed Consent form, which they were asked to read, ask questions about, sign, and return to me if they agreed to participate. Each participant then received a copy of the form, which was

signed by both of us. More importantly, I explained to each woman why I was interested in her particular story. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity and to avoid confusing the readers in the narrative text, each woman was given a pseudonym (one woman proposed her own) by which they would be referred.

I conducted several individual in-depth interviews with each woman. More than just a research tool, the interview itself is a veritable source of useful data. "Hence the findings or outcomes of an inquiry are themselves a literal creation or construction of the inquiry process" (Schwandt, 1998, p. 243). Charles L. Briggs (1986) notes the complex and multifaceted nature of interviews. Consequently, none of the interviews were identical in either format or protocol. Duplicating each interview across individual sessions and different women (or even the same woman) is, of course, impossible given the inherent differences among the women and their lived experiences and the difference in time and place of each interview. Besides, each interview presented different issues and challenges that had to be taken into account. For example, three of the woman I interviewed live out of state. I had to schedule their interviews in advance and then make travel arrangements. Sometimes I was able to schedule interviews with each of them on a given visit thus limiting the number of trips I made. Some of the interviews were conducted over several consecutive days during visits with the participants that lived out of the state. Others were conducted during a participant's lunch hour or over several hours.

All of the interviews were scheduled at the time specified by the participants and in the location of their choice. Locations included restaurants, work places, homes, parks, and even in automobiles. Elizabeth W. Lindsey (1997) says that, "holding interviews in participants' homes and using an open-ended interviewing style...may actually lead participants to share more than they feel comfortable sharing, especially in retrospect" (p. 69). This was resolved by giving the participants the opportunity to delete any portion or all of their narrative. In fact, one of the participants requested that a particular story she told me not be included. I believed that the story contributed substantially to understanding subsequent life choices she made; nonetheless, her wishes were respected and the story was deleted from the record. Esther Madriz (2000) counters Lindsey's concerns. She reasons, "Using the participants' familiar spaces further diffuses the power of the researcher, decreasing the possibilities of 'Otherization'" (p. 841.) Being that I knew all of the participants, the interviews took on the tone of social visits rather than that of a formal event. Briggs (1986) evinces that interviews reflect "the relationship that is established between the involved parties" (p. 18).

Each woman had a different story to tell, in her own way, and in her own time. Consequently, the length of time for each interview was rarely predetermined. This ensured that the women would have ample time to tell their stories. I encouraged the narrators to respond to my inquiries in their own terms thereby taking "part in producing and validating knowledge" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 575). No two participants were asked the exact same

questions which would have been impossible anyway, again due to the uniqueness of each woman and the interactive and dialogical nature of the interviews. Once the initial purpose of the study was discussed, the ensuing interviews became pláticas. The interview, in fact, "should be understood as part of the dialogue between two people" (Lagrand, 1997, p. 76). Being that the women were the authorities on their life and intimately knew this subject, they talked at length about their experiences. As the women became comfortable with the session and recording apparatus, they invariably told their story without prompting. In fact, I asked few if any predetermined questions.

Consequently, my minimal interference in the narratives kept "biasing" the women's responses to my queries to a minimum (Oboler, 1995). (Bias in this usage refers to the imposition of my own viewpoint or ideological beliefs on the participants although it is impossible, of course, to completely disengage from my own biases to achieve objectivity.) Also, the use of open-ended questions and the dialogic nature of the interviews elicited first impressions further minimizing the "potential influence of a theoretical framework" (Girden, 1996, p. 44). Despite the apparent flexibility and looseness of the interviews, I kept the central focus of ascertaining Chicana identity in the forefront and never lost sight of this goal. I often gently prodded the participants back to the issue of eliciting stories that spoke on the issue of how their lived experiences shaped their concept of self. I would guide the women back to the central question of identity and ask them to elaborate on the terms they used to self-identify. I probed as unobtrusively as

possible when I asked for clarity on how they saw themselves and what lead to their beliefs about who they were.

Although informed consent was obtained before the start of the research project, it was not possible to spell out in advance precisely what would be addressed in the interviews because I could not know what might come up and be important. I also wanted to remain flexible and open to unexpected issues that individual participants might talk about for, as Errante (2000) said, "all interviews are 'telling' events" (p. 26.) With the participants' permission, the sessions were audio taped and transcribed. The participants reviewed a written copy of the transcript for accuracy and submitted written or oral instructions of changes, corrections, and in some cases, additional stories to me. I called or met with the participant to discuss the transcript and clarify particular points. A benefit of this review process or member checking was that it created another social interaction that produced more data or information useful to understanding identity. Subsequent sessions probed the issues brought forth in these conversations. For example, in her first interview, Fe talked about the integration of Catholicism with Indigenous beliefs. I asked her to expound on this topic in a later conversation, which proved to be informative in terms of how her identity labels had evolved. It also led to discussions on the significance of danza and acting both of which were essential to her concept of self. The women were again informed that they had the right to ask that all or portions of their interview be stricken from the narrative.

I utilized the written and audio taped field notes I kept during the research process as an additional source of information. I did not keep copious notes, however. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner (2000) in their co-authored article on autoethnography, suggest that field notes are not essential in that they do not tell what actually happened. Field notes are in fact partial interpretations of a story in the past; "one selective story about what happened written from a particular point of view for a particular purpose" (Ellis and Bochner, p. 750). The authors point out that the goal of personal narrative is not to portray facts of what happened but rather to convey the meanings one attaches to the experience. I usually wrote or recorded the notes as soon as possible after each interview. The notes consisted of impressions, observations, and initial interpretations of the interviews. They had a "considered quality, the mulling-over which is possible with writing" (Collins, 1985, p. 59). Since I always drove to the sessions I had with the participants in California, the long trips home to Oregon were grand opportunities to audiotape personal reflections. These audio taped notes were particularly helpful. I argue that in contrast to the more organized and "filtered" written notes, the tapes best "captured" my "real" or true perceptions and the meaning I assigned to the sessions at the time.

My earliest notes, both written and audio taped, were the most troublesome to interpret because I did not always remember how I felt or what I thought back then when I first noted them down (see Briggs, 1986). They were, however, useful for situating the "context" of the interviews. These field

notes included descriptions of the physical and social setting of the interview and participants. I understand, however, that examining contexts requires more than descriptive data. The social settings and verbal and non-verbal communicative interactions of the participants must also be taken into account. These factors must be understood in the context of culture-specific constructs that are continually changing throughout the course of the interaction or interview (Briggs, 1986).

I spent time with the participants to collaboratively discover emerging ideas, extrapolate meaning, and generate interpretations of their stories. I usually did this in subsequent interviews but was also able to talk to them about their impressions in ensuing casual conversations. I shared my initial interpretations with each participant via informal conversations or by giving them a copy of written transcripts. This method of analysis is an absurd notion according to Briggs (1986) because presenting participants with a transcript creates “*another* speech event.” Briggs argues, “Human introspective capacities do not necessarily extend to recalling exactly what one was intending to say at some point in the past” (p. 108). Therefore, he says it is nearly impossible to check the researcher’s perceptions against those of the participants.

In place of member checking, Briggs (1986) suggests providing substantial excerpts from the interviews so that readers can competently judge the interpretations. I abided by Briggs’ strategy and included substantive excerpts from the participants’ narratives throughout my dissertation. I not

only included direct quotes and lengthy passages from their transcribed narrative texts, I also had numerous subsequent conversations with them which led to additional information on their perspective on identity. My intent in providing transcripts to the participants exceeded mere member checking. I sought the women's insights as well as their own interpretations against which I could evaluate my own. Rather than simply verifying that I was "correct" about a certain point, the women's perceptions enhanced and provided alternative ways of understanding their stories. In addition, the review of the transcripts allowed the women to verify my characterization of them. In essence, by giving them a copy of the text, I was asking questions of identity, "Is this you? Is this how you see yourself and how you want others to see you?"

By employing as many strategies as possible, for example, the submission of generated data for scrutiny by the participants and including substantial portions of the narratives not only assisted in this process but also generated stronger, more detailed interpretations. I addressed other challenges, such as accurate representation and reflection of the participants' voices, by channeling them back through the analytical research process. These multiple methods or triangulation (the process of using multiple perceptions e.g., data and perspectives; and theories to clarify meaning) reflected my attempt to reach an in-depth understanding of Chicana identity. I used the various strategies to juxtapose their voices with mine so that together, our "stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (Delgado Bernal, 1995,

Analysis – Intercambios

I have heard it said that memory is little more than a ghost telling half-lies.
William G. Tierney (2000, p. 103)

Chicana epistemology and Indigenous methodology allow for the insertion of the researcher's voice within the research process and the text. Consequently, the narrator or participant is not the only person telling the story. The researcher or listener also shapes the story in that her influence is always present in the telling. Thus, Briggs (1986) contends that the content of participant responses cannot be interpreted without seriously taking into account the role of the interviewer. One of my main tasks as the researcher was to "interpret the subtle and intricate intersections of factors that converge to form a particular interview" (Briggs, p. 22). I was responsible for deciding what story to tell, how to tell it, and how much of it to tell. As the person whose name is on the finished dissertation, I keenly felt the discomfort of this awesome responsibility and the risks inherent therein.

I attempted to adeptly re-tell the women's stories by composing written text. Martinez (2000) maintains that there is a wide gap between what is lived experience and what is spoken. As Ertmer and Newby (1993) declare, "Representations of experience are not formalized or structured into a single piece of declarative knowledge and then stored in the heard" (p. 63). Words, however, are not inert. They have power and gain strength as they go out and interact with the world. Shifting the focus from the women's narratives to the writing of the text was therefore difficult and complex. According to Lather

(2000b), no matter how diligently the participants' voices are represented, "The text is never free of the contamination of language" (p. 155).

Committing the participant's spoken word to text, of course, is never complete or final because it is woefully inadequate for depicting lived experiences.

The text is otherwise problematic for other reasons (see Richardson, 2000; Wolcott, 1990). These include the decision of what to keep and what to exclude, the difficulty in transferring non-verbal elements to text, the errors that may have occurred during the process of transcribing, adjusting the writing to fit my "audience," and the assumption that what is written constitutes "the reality" of what was studied (Finnegan, 1992). I had to continually recycle thought, action, reflection, and writing while construing the interpretations and transcribing the narratives into text (Hermes, 1995). The writing process required listening and re-listening to the taped narratives, multiple readings of the transcripts, and mentally reviewing the interviews and subsequent pláticas. As I sorted through the data, one idea lead to another such that these new understandings grew exponentially to additional questions asked, analogies made, thoughts formulated, and concepts refined. This is not to say that my role was that of the "interpreter of the universe." Instead, I strove to construct meaning with the women rather than unilaterally imposing it. In fact, the problem of representation or speaking for others requires setting up the opportunity for dialogue and speaking to and with rather than for others (Alcoff, 1991-1992).

Even though I was conscious of the issue of voice and accurately representing our shared stories, I also had to take into account that I was writing a dissertation for an academic audience. “*How* we are expected to write affects *what* we can write about” (Richardson, 1995, p. 203). Consequently, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) cautions Indigenous people about uncritically adopting patterns of writing that are similar to those of the dominant discourse or writing about ourselves as if we really are the “other.” The writing process thus posed a risk because I was writing in the “dominant” language even as the collaborative self was “speaking out of difference” (Lather, 2000a, Paragraph 10). Writing the research dissertation in English further perpetuated the many silences that Chicanas are already subjected to (Lugones and Spelman, 1983). These inequities relegate Chicanas to a communicative style that is inadequate for articulating our lived experiences and perspectives. To counteract the effects of silencing, I included direct quotes from the women’s narrative. I provided the participants’ own words whether they were in Spanish or English so that they could “speak” for themselves. Granted, I was selective in what I included but nonetheless my goals were to situate the women as authorities and have their voices heard.

In considering the women’s perspectives, I capacitated the participants as producers of knowledge because of the valuable insight they contributed to the research process. As stated earlier, this research was as much my story as the participants’. Nonetheless, I had to exercise great care to avoid losing the individual voices that contributed to the collaborative work. The process of

including and accurately reflecting the voices of the participants and my own was a juggling act that required careful balancing. On the one hand was the challenge of revealing enough about how I related to the participants without turning the research into a story about me. On the other was the writing of the text such that it was representative of the participants' voices without limiting or eliminating mine (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Pizarro, 1999; Sparks, 1997). "Then there's the vulnerability of revealing yourself, not being able to take back what you've written or having any control over how readers interpret it" (Ellis, 1999, p. 672).

Consequently, the transition from analysis to interpretation was also a complex task. I was not necessarily looking for the "right" story or "correct" interpretation of the story. Rather I was striving to obtain a variety of stories and multiple interpretations with which to weave my own interpretation. I centered these "diversities of truth" (Tuhiwai Smith, p. 145) on the research question concerning the meaning and significance of identity to the participants. My aim was to locate narrative threads to shape the analysis of the women's stories. Therefore, I included the participants in the interpretation of the data, which is in keeping with a major principle of Chicana epistemology.

Not only did I ask the participants whether the snapshot descriptions were accurate depictions of how they saw themselves, I also discussed where my "findings" were headed and asked for their own "analysis." Delgado-Gaitan (1993) asserts, "to counter our own ignorance and biases as researchers,

we must integrate into our research rigorous and systematic joint analysis with our participants” (p. 409). Delgado Bernal (1998) suggests that including Chicana participants in the interactive process of data interpretation not only contributes to the researcher’s cultural intuition but also stages the participants as equals in the research process. Writing detailed personal accounts, descriptions of sensory experiences, and an emphasis on time and place provide “rich ingredients for vicarious experience” of the readers (Stake, 1995, p. 87). Ellis (1999) further suggests that researchers “write in a way to evoke readers to feel and think about your life and their lives in relation to yours” (p. 674).

Including rich descriptions of the content of the participants’ narrative gives readers insight into the parameters around which the interpretations were framed. Watson and Watson-Frankle (1985) explain that one “must know something about the context in which the text was evoked before we can begin to make any sense of it” (p. 16). They emphasize that because life stories are subjective, it is imperative that one be specific about the conditions under which it was written or related to understand their meaning for both researcher and researched. To achieve this end, whole or partial transcripts of the narrators’ words are included throughout the research paper. This serves the purpose of allowing readers to test the interpretations against the text and my theoretical perspectives. By making the content of the research experience clear, readers are able to judge the adequacy of my interpretations and draw their own inferences or conclusions. Of course, their own analysis of the study

is inextricable from their own worldview being that one cannot read without interpretation. Thus, interpretations are never finished; they are incomplete and conditional. Interpretations do not produce conclusions of certainty; they produce “likelihood” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 175). That’s why we need to see what we do not so much as representation but as *communication* (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p.19).

As stated, I did not use a representative sample of Chicanas because I did not intend to generalize about, confirm, or settle the issue of identity (see Facio, 1993b). Therefore, I did not look for themes to conduct a cross analysis of the participants to make comparisons among the women or between their narrative and others. Instead, my quest was to contribute to the understanding of and prompt future research on Chicana identity based on my research of a few, selected participants. My aim was to prompt alternative understandings, to challenge presuppositions, and clarify the concept of self. More importantly, my goal was to privilege Chicanas’ social reality by placing it as the cornerstone of knowledge. My focus was on exploring how racial, cultural, and ethnic identity and the intersecting factors of age, language, and gender shaped their identity.

I situated the women as the authoritative scholars of their life stories and centered my research on privileging them as the focal point of inquiry. Thereby, as required by Chicana epistemology and Indigenous methodology, the participants were positioned as collaborators in the research process and co-producers and interpreters of the gathered data. My research utilized the

women's and my life histories as data from which representations or "findings" were culled. Moreover, in keeping with Chicana epistemology as interpretive and collaborative research, it reflected the women's insights and opinions in the interpretations and implications of the data. Rather than producing one "grand" or neatly abutted "master narrative," the women's and my narrative are told through our individual and collective stories. As previously stated, my goal was not to find the perfect "representativeness" (Lagrand, 1997) but rather to assist in guiding future research on Chicana identity. In sum, my research was guided by the following:

To read for difference rather than the same; to focus on what is becoming in the data; to probe the price people pay to tell the truth about themselves; to attend to how stories are told, and to situate interpretations as supplement rather than mimesis, both inadequate and necessary. (Lather, 2000b, p. 153)

Interpretations: Herstories

The soul's capricious reporter, memory filters out what hurts,
combines the incidents that remain, and then adapts them to the
form it wants to remember. Memory composes its own truth.
Imagination slips into the retelling; contradictory though loving
statements combine with the luminosity of released memories.

Martha Zamora (1990, p. 7)

I do not pretend to offer a complete empirical analysis of the women's narratives. Instead, I present my reflections, which serve as points of reference for future explorations of Chicana identity. My research suggests that identity is evolutionary over time. My findings further suggest that Chicana identity is shaped by the participants' language, gender, age, and their lived experiences. Moreover, identity is contextual. "The chosen ethnic identity is determined by the individual's perception of its meaning to different audiences, its salience in different social contexts, and its utility in different settings" (Nagel, 1994, p. 155). Historical, cultural, and social contexts make it exceedingly problematic to locate a single definition of identity. Indeed, my research indicates that identity is more complex and more yielding than the definitions of race, culture, and ethnic identity would have us believe. What is more, my research shows that it is difficult and perhaps impossible to disentangle ethnic, cultural, and racial identities.

"It seems clear, however, that the Western notion of autonomous identity is only one mode of identity – a mode that in its early forms tends to abet exclusion of those who are different from the dominant group" (Hoare, 1994, p. 37). Alcoff (1995) argues that the account of the "core of human

nature” is, in fact, “a racialized concept of the self *passing* for a universal one” (p. 269).] “For mainstream historians, ignoring a group—say women of Mexican descent, as many have done—is part of a selection process; not naming women constitutes including them by omission” (González, 1995, p. 42). Aside from the problems of definition and exclusion is another important issue; that of the failure to include the multiple dimensions of identity as articulated by Chicanas. These dimensions include language, age, gender, culture, race, and ethnicity. These external forces shape, shift, and reshape Chicana identity around my central research question, “Who are we” (Nagel, 1994)? Alarcon (1990) suggests, “there are as many names as there are namers” (p. 102) while Villenas (1996) comments, “It is also important to note that people self-identify differently” (p. 712).

As shown throughout the narratives, the women used various labels to self-identify. The terms that the participants used evolved over time and were influenced by their experiences. All of them, including me, chose Mexican or mejicana as a primary or “core identity.” According to the Latino National Political Survey, national origin is the most important marker of ethnic self-identification among Latina/o respondents (Schmidt, Barvosa-Carter, and Torres, 2000). This ethnic identity reflects the entrenched affinity to our ancestral origins be they from the historically recent nation of Mexico or the location of our legendary Atzlán. It is also a reflection of our intense identification with Mexican culture. Fe, for example, acknowledged that she was born in Mexico but because she was raised in the U.S., referred to herself

as “*La Chicana Michoacana*” (The Chicana from Michoacan, a state in Mexico).

As stated, the participants used other identity labels. Lulú, for example, used the labels Chicana, “Hispanic,” and Latina. In addition, she used the term American, “because of the fact that we are in America and I was taking advantage of what was offered to us here.” Dulcina said, “I guess I’ve used every one. I’ve used Hispanic, Latina, Chicana, and Mexican American.” She stated that she no longer refers to herself as “Hispanic” because, “the mexicanos would tease me, call me ‘Hispanic’, and use it derogatorily.” Lily used all the terms except “Hispanic.” Rosie, Fe, and I likewise do not use this pan-ethnic term. As for the term, Latina, Fe said, “I’m not from Latin, I don’t speak Latin. I guess I would rather be called Latina than Hispanic but that really isn’t correct either.” Rosie and Fe, the oldest participants, were more decided about their preferred term and less likely to use alternate labels. When I asked if she used more than one term Rosie decisively answered, “No!” She elaborated, “I have expressed my ethnicity wherever I am and with whomever is in my company, in the workplace, social gatherings, the *cocina* [kitchen], and in society in general.” Both women considered themselves Indígenas, with Rosie adding Chicana to the term.

Lily and Rosie identified primarily as Chicana. At one time, Fe also considered herself Chicana but said, “for the most part I look at myself more as an Indigenous woman now.” She lamented that some First Nations Peoples do not accept mejicanas/os as being Indigenous. She argued:

I feel that it doesn't matter whether they recognize me or not. I am Indigenous! My roots are embedded for thousands of years here on this continent and you can't take that from me. My ancestors have been on this Turtle Continent for thousands of years. Indian blood is in our bones, in our essence, in our spirits. It goes from one generation to another. And because of government – I can't prove it to the government – doesn't make me any less Indian.

Like her, Rosie and I identify as Indígenas. The Chicana/o Movement revitalized our interest in our Indigenous origins as it did for countless other Chicanas/os (Lux and Vigil, 1979). As previously reported by Fe, many Chicanas/os are reconnecting with Native ways through danza and also by learning our history, ancient tradiciones, customs, and languages.

However, despite Guillermo Lux and Maurilio E. Vigil's (1979) declaration that "the Indianness in our heritage will no longer be a source of embarrassment or something to ignore" (p. 15) many mexicanos and Mexican Americans are ignorant or perhaps in denial of our Indigenous heritage. Several scholars address our reconnection to and/or rejection of this heritage. Castillo (1994) for example declares, "Most Mexicans are mestizo/as and by and large mostly Mexic Amerindian. However the denigration of our indigenous blood has been so pervasive that few of us, especially in the past, have claimed our lineage" (p. 8). Alarcon (1990) offers another example. She says, "It is worthwhile to remember that the historical founding moment of the construction of mestiza and mestizo subjectivity entails the rejection and denial of the dark Indian Mother as Indian, which has compelled women to often collude in silence against themselves . . ." (p. 101).

Dulcina and Lulú expressed uncertainty about some of their identity labels. Lulú confessed to believing that Chicana was “used more by radicals or politically correct people.” Lulú said, “I just pretended to go along with them. I know I would definitely use the term ‘Chicana’ when in the presence of *those* group members.” Somewhat similarly, Dulcina admitted, “I try to avoid using the terms myself. I think I use them more if I have to answer a question on an application or something. Then I pick the one that’s there.” Both women conceded that at one time they wished to integrate or assimilate into White society. For Lulú the reason seemed to be because she had not experienced any discrimination. Therefore, she had no resentment or negative feelings toward Whites. The negative social experiences she had were with other Chicanas/os. She spoke about the incident involving her high school peer who “was pushing his ideologies and anger towards the Anglos onto me. Still, I did not waver in my feelings or stance in America.” She also related similar incidents in college. “While I did enjoy being with the group [Chicana/o students], I just could not agree with their political ideas and the prejudices...I guess because I never really had experienced what they had experienced.”

In contrast to Lulú, Lily and Fe experienced bigotry. They told stories of being discriminated against by students in school. Lily recalled, “I knew that we were looked upon differently by the White, dominant culture. The White children did not want to sit by Mexicans or be our friends. The kids would call us spics or dirty Mexican.” Fe lamented, “High school was difficult for me because I liked to hang out with everybody. Aside from that, we were

poor. Kids made fun of me. They said that I didn't know whom I wanted to hang around with." Fe explained that this caused her schoolmates to question who she was and where she stood on the issue of her Mexican identity.

Dulcina experienced discriminatory incidents perpetrated by both Whites and Chicanas/os. "You always have to think if it's [prejudice]. You always have to think if it has to do with your background. It just gets tiring." Despite these events, Dulcina, like the other women, had positive feelings about her Mexican background. "I'm very proud, very fortunate to be who I am and to be in my culture. I love that."

Our culture inclusive of its norms, traditions, and language, shaped who we are. In essence, we became what our culture dictated but with our own interpretation of what that meant. For some of the women, culture was simply the foods, customs, and celebrations. For others, it was embedded in our ways of thinking and behaviors. Our parents were the first to introduce us to our culture. They defined its meaning to us. They demonstrated how culture is transmitted and reflected in our ways of being in the world (e.g., behaviors or educación). Our parents inculcated Mexican customs, traditions, history, language, and ways of thinking or more specifically, our reality. These learned patterns of thought and behavior translate as cultural identity. Our parents and family were the principal influences on how we culturally identified. The participants' narratives convey the significant role their parents played in forming their identity. "Our parents never told us how to identify. It was never questioned whom we were. It was never an issue because we knew we

were mexicanos” (Lily). “Within my own family, the conversation takes a different turn ‘cause I know who they are, I feel comfortable with them, and they know me, who I am” (Lulú). Our Mexican cultural identity is entrenched within our Chicana identity. One can argue that they are one and the same albeit with subtle distinctions on the one hand and extreme differences on the other. “Cultural constructions assist in the construction of community when they act to define the boundaries of collective identity, establish membership criteria, generate a shared symbolic vocabulary, and define a common purpose” (Nagel, 1994, p. 163).

Thus, culture is inextricably connected to others and relationships. “The recurring theme is one of connection – to other people and nature. Connections with people are explored through ties of kinship . . .” (Cruikshank, 1990, p. 3). Kinship ties radiate to others especially to those with whom we feel a connection. “Well, at home you’re usually with your family and friends that are of the same background as you. You have some kind of connection there. There’s no need to worry about identity. You are what you are” (Lily). “Recognition of cultural similarities (e.g., language, folklore, and artistic expressions) generates a sense of ‘we-ness’ that leads many, although not all, Latina/os to feel an affinity across national-origin, generational, class, gender, and sexuality differences . . .” (Schmidt, Barvosa-Carter, and Torres, 2000, Paragraph 14). This sense of belonging extends to our community. Fe’s words reflected that bond:

Everybody I know, the elders and even my generation, even if you never see each other hardly, but we see each other at the

store—you know each other, you grew up with each other. You know who you are and what you are. It's like a connection to you through all time.

Cruikshank (1990) emphasizes that, “. . . connections with land emphasize sense of place” (p. 3). The participants' narrative expressed this concept. “Every time, when things have gone on in my life where I need to reenergize and replenish myself, I usually come [home] until I feel strong enough. Then I go out again. Only this time, I don't know that I feel like going out again” (Fe). “It really hurt me when we came to the United States. We had the whole family down in Mexico” (Lulú). “I have such great memories of being on the farm” (Dulcina). As with me, these participants experienced loss when they emigrated from Mexico or migrated from their birthplace. The connection to place links our culture to our identity. “My roots [culture] are here. It's home. It's home. It's where I was raised. It's where my spirit [identity] is. It's so strong when I am here” (Fe). The sense of place encompasses a site of cultural learning, which helps to define and locate identity within our culture. Again, I turn to Fe to express this idea:

I was uprooted from Michoacan and I can never do anything about that. I'm not from México anymore. As much as I wanted to believe that I am, I'm not. This is home. I came to the realization that I was never going to get back to México.

It reminded me of those history books when I was in college. You know, the history books that talk about the *viejitos* [old folks] always wanting to go back to México but never going. I had become like them. I had to accept that this is home.

It can be argued that identity and, as illustrated above, culture shape perceptions. “But culture is not a thing; it is the outcome of the lived

experience of people, and it changes as that experience changes, subject to the processes that are constantly changing the society as a whole” (Giménez, 1998, Paragraph 6). A participant’s chosen identity is in constant interaction with her other identities be they social, cultural, or familial. Furthermore, the affirmation of identity is embedded in one’s history, culture, and language. “Language transmits culture. Language affects our identity. For example, if you have a young man that doesn’t speak Spanish and another one that does, people look down on the one that doesn’t speak Spanish” (Lily). Our bilingual skills, specifically our bilingual understanding of our reality, likewise formulated our identities. Castillo (1994) observes, “Explicitly or implicitly, language is the vehicle by which we perceive ourselves in relation to the world” (p. 16). Lily explained how language affected her identity:

I’m real glad that my parents forced me to speak both languages. It wasn’t easy but because I did it now you can say that I am bilingual and bicultural. Language plays a big role in how we identify ourselves but also our environments, our settings, and our society.

In a reflective moment, Dulcina proclaimed, “The more I learn the more my identity changes.” This indicated that identity changes over time with age and maturity. It also indicated that with age and maturity come additional lived experiences, which add to personal growth and knowledge. Lily confirmed Dulcina's insight:

I didn’t take any Latino/Chicano classes until I was in college. That’s where I learned the history of Chicanos and Latinos and even Mexican history. What I’ve noticed about students that take those classes, they become more empowered because they learn more about their history and themselves.

They're less afraid to speak out and speak their mind. A lot of them, just like me, were ignorant. There are a lot of stuff in the history books that isn't true or isn't there, that doesn't talk about our history. It's empowering to know where you came from, your roots.

My research also indicated that identity is contextual. Whatever names the participants chose to label themselves could be used at different times and in different settings. Some of the women, except Fe who did not address the issue, noted that the use of labels was contextual. "It really does depend on where I'm at, in what environment I'm in" (Lily), "Depending on where I am, I do change the words" (Dulcina), "It really does depend on the situation, my role, on the times, on many things" (Lily), and "*Pues*, [well] I probably wouldn't use that term when interviewing for a job! Ha, ha, ha" (Rosie). Lulú stated that she identified herself as Mexican when speaking to her Latina/o students' parents. "I feel it is most precise and parents seem to want to know specifically what country of origin I am from." When she speaks to her students "who seem more accepting of 'Chicana,' I find myself identifying with that term." Dulcina remarked, "I think I take cues from people and what terms are being used. If I'm with a group at work such as Latinas United, I use Latina." Lily maintained that the labels she used also depend on the setting, "Do I identify myself as a Chicana? Yes, I do depending on where I am. It is different at home than at work." She believed that it also depends on the situation, "If I want to be seen as a rebellious Chicana, because that's a political term, then I guess I use it that way." In addition, Lily observed that labels depend on whom she's with, "Latina is for me, as I've gotten older and

been in professional settings, a word I use professionally.” As she described it, context influences the labels she uses, “The word, Chicana, is very powerful politically and the word, Latina, is very powerful professionally.”

Our lived experiences communicated the subtle and overt barriers we faced. These included gender stereotyping, racial discrimination, devaluation of our first language, poverty, and cultural and ethnic biases. Our lived experiences further exposed society’s stereotypic assumptions, which contrasted with the real differences among us. “The reasons why Chicanas/os and other minorities continue to discuss notions of difference . . . [are] that difference grows out of the unequal power relations in this society . . . The ‘reality’ is that even though these differences are socially and politically constituted, they are meaningful” (Elenes, 1997, p. 370-371). For example, although notions of racial purity are artificial and arbitrary, an imposed identity, they nonetheless resulted in ambiguity for some participants, specifically Dulcinea and Lulú. Dulcinea moaned, “It just gets tiring. This whole issue, ‘How do you see yourself?’ I really just don’t know.”

Others, specifically Fe, Rosie, Lily, and I were sure of who we are. This difference could be attributed to our knowing our self and collective history and, in contrast to Dulcinea, due to our older age. Lulú, whose age situated her in the median, acknowledged not knowing as much as she wanted. “I wish now that I had questioned Mom more about exactly who we were.” Dulcinea likewise had limited knowledge of her background. For example, she did not know where one set of grandparents was from. The differences in age

could account for Dulcinea's ambivalence about her identity. She is at least ten years and up to twenty years younger than the rest of us. She confessed, "I don't think I'm strong enough to say I'm this or that. I don't know myself that well." Her age may be indicative of having limited lived experiences and a lack of opportunities to learn more about herself and Chicanas' collective history. She recognized however, "When I'm older, it will probably be different. I know who I am to some extent but it's a process for me."

In fact, our identity labels reflect their evolutionary and contextual nature. My research revealed that identity is evolutionary being that our chosen identity labels changed over time. We initially and, in most cases, still referred to ourselves as mejicanas. With age, we adopted additional terms based on their lived experiences, which included learning about our individual and collective histories (i.e., family, Indigenous, and Mexican history, and *femenista* and Chicana ideology). For some participants, the choice of labels was dependent on situations, settings, and whom they were with, which indicates that identity is contextual. What is more, our identity was influenced by the languages we speak and by our age and gender. An important influence on identity was our lived experiences including familial and cultural influences. For some participants, the question they struggled with was "how *much* to be Chicana and in what circles or locations to situate that identity, or, have it situated for one ..." (González, 1995, p. 51). Moreover, the meaning attributed to identity labels defined who was and who was not a specific identity.

To identify as Chicana, Latina, “Hispanic,” or Indigenous is a conscious decision that is based on a woman’s social reality. Chicanas, in fact, are in the unique position of sharing a distinct way of knowing about as well as understanding our shared social reality. Patricia Hill Collins refers to this as *positionality* or knowledge that comes from previously ignored social positions (as cited in Hurtado, 1998). Our critical orientation as Chicanas situates us “in the best position to speak to [our] history and circumstance ” (Martinez, 2000, p. 112). My research suggests that we are in fact still learning what it means to be Chicana. According to Alarcon (1990), “the story” of Chicanas (e.g., our identity) has not turned out to be a “definitive” culture.

Instead, Chicana identity is mediated by factors such as gender, language, and age and the intersection of these dimensions within the context of lived experiences. Being that identity both absorbs and reflects these factors, (Hoare, 1991) it is inaccurate to postulate that it is monopolized solely by ethnicity, race, or culture. Chicana identity is evolutionary and contextual. It is always in process and created from within the person and from outside influences. Even though “no label is capable of containing all that may come to fall under it,” (Martinez, 2000, p. 78) Chicanas must continue to search for the appropriate application of Chicana, Indígena, or some as yet to be developed identity term because labels matter, race matters, and identity matters (González, 1995).

Insights and Future Exploration: Nuevas Fronteras

There are intangible realities which float near us,
formless and without words;
realities which no one has thought out,
and which are excluded for lack of interpreters.

Natalie Clifford Barney, *American Heir*

Chicana *femenista* epistemology gave me the opportunity to interpret the research findings outside of traditional paradigms. Therefore, I am able to propose educational practices that better address Chicana issues (Delgado Bernal, 1998). In addition, *femenista* epistemology legitimized our ways of knowing by resituating Chicanas as the authorities of knowledge. How and by whom research is conducted determines the questions asked and the answers given and significantly contributes to what does and does not happen in schools (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Mainstream views of education recognize that teaching methods may be inappropriate with Chicana/o students. However, implementing alternative educational strategies has proven ineffective as evidenced by the high Chicana attrition rates in high schools and our low attainment of higher education degrees. Enrique T. Trueba and Lilia I. Bartolomé (1997) contend that educators “do not believe that their own teaching methods or tools cause students’ problems . . . Further, teaching techniques are based on the belief that schools and teaching are value-free and politically neutral” (Paragraph 1). Priscilla Lujan Falcón (1995), as well as others (i.e., Howard, G. R., 1999; Martinez, Y., 1998; Menchaca, 1995), cites the unwritten policy of assimilation, conformity, and segregation that existed

throughout the twentieth century to make the case that, like other social institutions, education is set up as system of asymmetrical power relations.

To affect a balance, educational research must seek a new subjectivity, one that encompasses many perspectives rather than one “true” perspective. In essence, this means listening to voices that are not exclusively White so that one can hear what has not been heard before. This requires asking different questions from a Chicana perspective to get different answers from those that traditional research has put forth. Yet, despite the urgency for culturally appropriate social and educational policy, some educational institutions still resist efforts to be inclusive and to promote multicultural competence in the profession (D’Andrea and Daniels, 2003). Trueba and Bartolomé (1997) indicates that assumptions of neutrality and the requirement for change on the part of students and families rather than schools and teachers absolve “teachers from the need to critically analyze whether their teaching methods are equally effective with all student populations” (Paragraph 1). “Theories of cognitive development (Piaget, 1952, 1954) still espoused in many teacher education and educational psychology programs are normed on the behaviors of White middle-class male students, and ignore or are misapplied to students of any other identities” (Delgado Bernal, p. 557).

Researchers must move away from marginal identities and the cultural deficit theories that are the foregone conclusions of traditional research. What needs to take place is a systematic analysis of education (i.e., ideological foundations, theories, and cultural deficit and assimilation models) and the

direction these take in shaping its research, policies, curriculum, and pedagogy (González, 1999). Furthermore, only by taking into account the race and racism that exists in education, can we begin to challenge the “subordination and marginalization of students of color” (González, 1999, p. 148). Barbara Gross Davis (1999) for example, maintains that once on campus students from groups that are historically underrepresented in higher education feel they are treated as unwelcome outsiders. My personal knowledge indicates that faculty of Color suffer the same fate. González (1995) adds credence to my belief, “The statistics on faculty hiring and on graduate student recruitment are appalling on the question of diversity” (p. 52). Castillo (1994) contends that once Chicana scholars earn a doctorate, we are “well versed in Western philosophy and letters,” and have succeeded in rigorous programs of study “under mostly white mentorship” (p. 214). She observes that we become jaded by the experience of having to compete and “of being courted for being Chicana and then often ‘dropped’ for being Chicana by administrators and faculty” (p. 214). She maintains that we may be accepted for our ethnicity but rejected for our gender or accepted for both but rejected for other numerous reasons.

The larger society cannot continue to discount new and emerging voices. As the population becomes increasingly of Color, in particular “Latinas/os,” the balance of power will be tipped on its head if only by the sheer force of our numbers rather than by the once “minority” group attaining representative power. It therefore, behooves the currently dominant White

populace to ensure that Latinas/os attain higher levels of academic achievement. The results of my research provide suggestions for how educators might bring about positive change. A review of ethnic labels indicates that some terms, such as "Hispanic," tend to homogenize persons of varied backgrounds, histories, and circumstances. However, as Oboler (1995) indicates, "there is no consensus on who or what a Hispanic is" (p. 5).

Research shows that a large percentage of Latinas/os prefer their own national or historic identities (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban) to identities imposed by politicians, academics, or governments (Giménez, 1989 and 1998; Jones-Correa and Leal, 1996; Nelson and Tienda, 1985). Nonetheless, imposed labels persist in ascribing persons to being or not being of a designated race, ethnic, or cultural group.

My research confirmed that persons choose their identity labels. As such, educators would be prudent to ascertain how learners self-identify. According to Oboler (1995), educators must recognize that Latinas/os have grown up in the United States as Latinas/os or "Hispanics" while identifying themselves by their or their parents' national identities. Educators should, therefore, ask students how they identify rather than make guesses on the basis of phenotypic or other artificial identity markers. According to Trueba and Bartolomé (1999), classifying students according to their racial, ethnic, or cultural background is often underlined by the assumption that these statuses mark them as "deficit" individuals. As demonstrated in the narratives, some of the women were stigmatized by the assumptions made by others on the basis of

gender, language, and perceived racial, ethnic, or cultural identity. Trueba and Bartolomé (1999) say, “such a gratuitous conclusion lowers teachers’ expectations of certain students, which in turn can compromise their potential for academic success” (Paragraph 9). The results of my research have implications for how student affairs professionals might think about Chicana students and rethink their tendency to categorize them along visible identity dimensions.

By acknowledging Chicanas’ chosen identity, educators affirm learners’ concept of self and the importance they attach to it. In this way, educators open up communication with students and forge relationships based on understanding who the students are. This paves the way for educators and learners alike to learn about each national group’s experiences “as a part of a long history of survival, of cultural resistance, of cultural affirmation, rather than as a deviation of a stereotype or a confirmation of the stigmas attached to the label Hispanic” (Obler, 1995, p. 173). Educators must refrain from making assumptions or assigning characteristics to all Chicanas based on previously held beliefs or stereotypes of them as a group. For example, if a student identifies as Mexican, it should not be assumed that she speaks Spanish or that she and her family, because of her gender, do not value academic achievement.

Although education is valued in Chicana/o communities, educators need to be aware that family needs and expectations of Chicanas based on traditional gender roles might clash with school expectations of Chicanas (Ginorio and Huston, 2000). However, by exposing Chicana students to more

rigorous coursework and holding them to high standards, educators can affect positive change, not only in the attainment of higher education degrees, but also in preparing our future workforce. Several national organizations such as the American Association of University Women and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) address the needs of Latinas/os in general and, in particular, female members of this population. They urge investing in “strengthening a population whose well-being is vital to the nation’s future” (NCLR, 2004, Conclusions).

Teachers of adult Chicana learners should be cognizant that Chicanas bring with them historical, political, and social histories that have uniquely shaped their concept of self. By acknowledging Chicanas’ ways of knowing educators provide opportunities that enrich the learning experiences of all students. Allowing Chicanas to demonstrate their ways of knowing inclusive of their language “constitutes an affirming experience for those students who feel dehumanized and disempowered in the schools” (Trueba and Bartolomé, 1999, Paragraph 11). “To hear each other (the sound of different voices), to listen to one another, is an exercise in recognition” (hooks, 1994, p. 41). Only by listening to the voices of Chicanas will scholars and educators be able to discern how we understand and see ourselves. Furthermore, by acknowledging plural ways of thinking and experiences, educators can recreate teaching styles that reflect, respect, and honor the social reality and experiences of all marginalized groups. Also, we can then begin to learn from each other and

build bridges to span racial and social tensions, worldviews, and create learning spaces for all students.

Educators should also be aware that Chicana identity is contextual and shaped by the multiple and overlapping factors of language, age, gender, and lived experiences. It is, therefore, imperative that educators ascertain Chicana students' preferred language and life experiences to thus begin understanding their worldview. Also, educators should understand that older Chicanas (in comparison to younger Chicanas) have numerous political, social, and historical experiences that influenced how they view themselves and relate to the world around them. By knowing and understanding the context of Chicanas' experiences, educators can further enhance the relationships that they forge with them. Lastly, educators should keep in mind that Chicana identity is evolutionary and that a woman's chosen identity is not fixed but rather temporarily situated by both internal and external forces at any given time and place. Apart from awareness and acknowledgement of the aforementioned factors, educators must actively seek to learn about Chicanas both from Chicanas themselves and relevant research.

Effective changes in the way education is conducted can come about through research. Research, for example, might explore Chicana's educational paths to ascertain the barriers to education that we encounter. This research might point to ways to counteract the effects of the barriers. Research could also be conducted to ask and listen to how people identify and determine the attributes that they assign to their ethnic and cultural group. This research on

the construction of identity might expose the consequences (e.g., power, discrimination, ostracism, access to education, and political clout) of a chosen identity. In turn, the research findings might reveal ways to mitigate the personal cost wrought by the consequences of appropriated and conferred identity on legions of Chicana/o students. Educational research can also suggest culturally appropriate pedagogy while giving teachers the skills to employ it. Other research could also examine “mixed-race” Chicanas and the consequences of having to choose one race or ethnicity over another. Research could also explore the emergent and future Chicana and the labels of this yet-to-be-constructed identity.

“Any name tends to freeze the meanings of something,” which in reality, is a rapidly evolving process of understandings and relationships (Fox, 1996, p. 14). Therefore, future Chicana scholars should consider whether there is the need for a new application of “Chicana.” Castillo (1994) for example, proposes Xicanisma to conceptualize this “new” Chicana feminism. González (1999) observes that a new generation of university-educated, middle-class Chicanas may lay claim to a different identity altogether. The final story of being or becoming Chicana has yet to be told. However, the on-going story can offer new perspectives of what it means to be, to live, and to metamorphous as a Chicana. I therefore, encourage researchers and readers alike to keep turning the pages on Chicana identity and to stay tuned to the as-yet-to-be-written chapters. By so doing readers and scholars broaden their own perspectives while simultaneously reflecting on their own lived

experiences. One's perspectives and lived experiences can thusly be juxtaposed with alternative viewpoints to bring about a new understanding of self and identity. As Tierney (2000) eloquently states:

The challenge ought not be to silence some and return scholars to their coveted perch above the fray, but rather to enable the academic to listen, to hear, to engage in fundamentally new ways with people and texts that do not seek one unified answer, but instead reach out for understandings of commonalities and fellowship en route to the creation of the real. (p. 112)

Epilogue: Rondando la Esquina

Perhaps some day we will play together
And we shall not speak a universal language
But rather, you will speak in my voice and
I in yours. [English translation]
Maria C. Lugones (1996, p. 19)

The women's narratives were woven into a collective story of Chicana identity and the factors that shaped it. Some of the stories the women shared were humorous, others were serious, but all were told with rich detail and obvious enjoyment. At times, it appeared that through the retelling the women were transported back to the time and place of their story. It was evident that through their recollections, the women were forging ties to their stated identities. The confluence of the multiple understandings the women attached to their lived experiences is evident throughout their narrative.

The women were adept storytellers. They set the context of their stories by stating the time-period, describing the location and people, and using different voices for each character. They drew me into their stories by using gestures, for example, to signify that I should pay particular attention to a story or highlight a portion of the story. Also, they would reference events or people that I was familiar with thus further drawing me into the story. Other ways they used to include me in the story was to ask me questions such as, "Has that ever happened to you?" or "Do you remember such-and-such? Wasn't so-and-so there?" As these women demonstrated, a good storyteller knows that having an attentive and participatory audience enhances the story. They framed their stories much as a skilled bead worker weaves a loomed piece.

The beads are the colorful variations of race, gender, age, language, culture, and ethnicity, which intersect and crisscross to form the selected identity.

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