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Rethinking Critical Consciousness: Latina Teachers, Latina Girls, and Alternative Educational Spaces

Salvador Martin

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Rethinking Critical Consciousness: Latina Teachers, Latina Girls, and
Alternative Educational Spaces

by

Salvador Martin

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirement for the degree

Doctor of Education

2011

Rethinking Critical Consciousness: Latina Teachers, Latina Girls, and

Alternative Spaces

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by

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This dissertation written by Salvador Martin, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

12.10.2010

Date

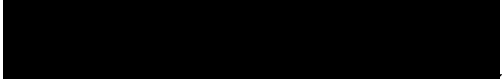
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the women that taught me how to be a man. To Dyana, my partner in crime and in life who has patiently allowed me to struggle and grow our whole life together, I love you. Para mi Mamá Rosa quien me enseñó la importancia de ser un buen hombre con educación y a mi Abuelita Goña quien me enseñó a tener caridad y fuerza de caracter, las quiero mucho. Para mi Padre, Salvador, que me apoyo e impulso a ser una persona responsable. Te quiero mucho. To my brothers Carlos and Edwardo, thank you for all of the support during the long process. To my sons Daniel Ozomahtli, Jacob Cuahitli, and Raymond Tochtli, I love you very much. To all of my past, present, and future students, never stop learning. Education will set you free.

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ABSTRACT

Rethinking Critical Consciousness: Latina Teachers,
Latina Girls, and Alternative Spaces

By

Salvador Martin

Latinas face many challenges within public schools. They are a marginalized group that has struggled to overcome the effects of practices that have created entrenched cycles of poverty and educational failure. The development of a critical consciousness has been proposed as a means of resisting and transcending oppression. Freire (1970) defined *conscientização*, or critical consciousness, as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality” (p.19). This study reexamined the development and nature of critical consciousness through the use of critical feminist methodologies. Standpoint theories assisted in the development of counter-stories that challenged androcentric perceptions of consciousness.

This qualitative study examined how some Latina teachers, working with Latina students, were able to transform an after-school club, lunchtime meetings, and a daylong conference into opportunities for Latina students to reexamine their role and position in their family, culture, American society, and develop a critical awareness or consciousness.

What emerged from the findings was an approach used by these particular Latina teachers that elevated the affective domain to footing equal to the intellectual. The participating teachers created a matrix of connection with students that challenged a masculine perception of consciousness. They used socially and culturally located histories and experiences to develop a gendered critical consciousness. What was observed and heard throughout the research process was the unearthing of a consciousness that was decidedly enmeshed in the private arena of the body and identity, in addition to the public domains of politics and economics.

CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND OF STUDY

“Behind the technological veil, behind the political veil of democracy,
appears the reality, the universal servitude,
the loss of human dignity in a prefabricated freedom of choice”

(Marcuse, 1972, p. 14).

Statement of the Problem

Latinas/os are the fastest growing group of young people within the United States, and the economic viability of many states, if not the whole nation, depends on their academic and, by extension, economic success (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; National Women's Law, 2009; Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). However, children of color, specifically Latina/o students, have been sacrificed year after year to a system of capital accumulation and consumption by schools that are reproducing caste-like separations between affluent whites and everyone else (Giroux, 2006). The failure of schools has created a semi-permanent underclass that is demarcated along racial lines. The accumulated and systematic disregard for the wellbeing of Latinas/os has produced communities with high concentrations of poverty in large urban centers. In Los Angeles County Latinas/os represent 60.46% or 1,012,455 of the 1,674,599 people who are living in poverty (Los Angeles Almanac, 2009). Latinas/os represent half of the population within the county, yet they make-up a staggering two thirds of those living in poverty. Even more disturbing is the statistic that almost 75% of Latina/o children under five years of age are living under the poverty line in Los Angeles County (Los Angeles Almanac, 2009). This phenomenon means that the future of the Latina/o community is in peril of

producing a large group that has lived most of their lives in poverty. It is also time to dispel the myth that this is an immigration problem and not an American problem, as more than 90% of Latinas/os are born in the United States, making them citizens with the right of full participation in this democracy (National Women's Law, 2009). The educational achievement of Latinas represents the best hope for breaking the cycle of poverty and improving the material condition of Latinos. As studies have shown, the educational attainment of the mother is the greatest determinant of a child's educational success (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). The National Women's Law Council (NWLC) and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) (2009) stated, "Unfortunately, the problem is multi-generational, as the children of dropouts are more likely to drop out themselves, even more so if it is the maternal parent who did not graduate"(p. 8).

Education has been the arena in which to propose solutions to the problems faced by subjugated peoples (Darder, 1991; hooks, 1994; Freire, 1970). Education continues to be the most effective vehicle for marginalized people to change their present material existence and reality, yet schools in many ways have helped to create a pool of workers that will, in the short run, produce a surplus of cheap labor, and in the long run destroy immigrant communities (Anyon, 1997; Darder, 1991; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 2003). As more and more Latinas/os drop out of school, they stay in their neighborhoods with few options for economic progress. This leads to a further deterioration of communities that are already struggling with a state-created crisis from the accumulation of the effects of substandard social services (Anyon, 1997). The manner in which

children of color, and specifically Latinas, are educated becomes central to changing their present circumstances, yet Latina students are consistently being failed by public school education (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Holling, 2006; McClaren & Jaramillo, 2006; National Research Council of the National Academies, 2006; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). According to a recent report by NWLC and MALDEF (2009), the economic impact of the failure of public education extends beyond drop out rates. The report stated:

The statistics for Latina adolescents reveal the scope of the problem. Forty-one percent of Latinas—as compared to 22% of White girls—fail to graduate from high school on time with a standard diploma. Failure to obtain a high school diploma has life-long negative consequences for Latinas' health and economic wellbeing, as well as a long-term impact on the general strength of the United States labor force. Almost half of Latinas between the ages of 25 and 64 who lack a high school diploma are unemployed. Those who are employed earn an average annual income of only \$15,030.40. These grim prospects have serious consequences: for example, 35% of Latina high school dropouts are forced to rely on Medicaid for health care services (p. 5).

In addition to the findings by NWLC and MALDEF, The Harvard Civil Rights Project estimated graduation rates at a dire 45% for Latina/o students in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Landsburg, 2006). This phenomenon almost ensures that children who have been marginalized or pushed out by the public school system will endure a life of economic hardship (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). For this reason the practices of public

school teachers are vital to the necessary improvement in the educational attainment of Latinas/os.

Teachers and Their Practice

The macro level effects of an education shaped by a political ideology are predicated on the micro level actions of teachers. So how can teachers act in defense of children of color? How can teachers use their classroom space, “as a means of empowering students around issues of social justice” (McLaren, 2003, p. 70), while resisting the function of schools as a “means of sustaining, legitimizing, and reproducing dominant class interests directed at creating obedient, docile and low paid future workers (p.70)”? The dilemma intensifies for Latinas as class interests are just one of the socially located determinants of their marginalization.

The practice of teachers is especially important because schools reproduce inequality and support the hegemonic societal structures. However, schools also provide a space for resistance and growth (Apple, 1995, Giroux, 2006; McLaren, 2003; Willis, 1981). There are teachers that develop a critical awareness to the processes of state education and resist against policies that they deem as unfair or hurtful (Arce, 2004). They resist by not accepting everything that is presented by the state, or school administrators as the only viable truth. These teachers have developed political clarity and a “hermeneutic of suspicion” (Lebacqz, 1986, p. 103) that helps them question the motivation of shifts in curriculum and control (Bartolomé, 2004; Freire, 1970). They have transformed their approach to educating children by resisting said policies and are humanizing students in the sometimes dehumanizing social endeavor that is public

education. Critical and aware, these teachers are creating spaces within their classrooms for children to see beyond “the veil” (DuBois, 1903/2003, p. 12) of privilege and to experience education as a means of liberation (Acosta, 2007; Arce, 2004; Freire, 2005; Watts, Pratt, & Abdul-Adil, 2002).

These alternative spaces within the classroom serve as a focus for this study, because there are material consequences to the manner in which children of color are being educated (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Foley, 1990; McLaren, 2003; Willis, 1981). A teacher’s “political clarity” (Bartolomé, 2003, p. 412) must match their dedication to their craft because they provide for students a template on how to negotiate systems of interaction and exchange.

For students of color, teachers must be more than deliverers of instruction, but also advocates. Freire (2005) stated that teachers must possess a bit of “militancy” (p.6) in protection of their students. This militancy may take the form of alternative approaches to conscientization that may use established spaces for other purposes. These educators are able to see, “. . .the ways in which historically repressed cultures and struggles could be used to illuminate radical potentialities in the present” (Giroux, 2003, p. 51) and create opportunities for transformation within the dialectic of education.

Latinas have high educational aspirations, yet through internalized messages from school, media, and parents, some have doubted their ability to achieve them (National Women's Law & Mexican American Legal Defense & Education Fund, 2009). There are, however, Latina teachers who are creating spaces within schools, but outside of school hours, to broach subjects that have been pushed out of the classroom. The

discourse within schools is not focused on the liberatory or transformative possibility of education, but on increasing test scores (Lapayese, 2007). Teachers have moved beyond the curriculum in order to connect with and serve students. Prescribing curricular methods as a solution to the problem of Latina school achievement is problematic because the state adopted curriculum is “detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that endangered them and could give them significance” (Freire, 1970, p. 57). Furthermore, schools in poor, immigrant, and segregated neighborhoods are moving to a curriculum that is driven by high-stakes test results which diminish the opportunities for critical teachers to effect a change within the classroom and keep students from becoming marginalized (Cammarota, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999). Compounding the effects of a rote curriculum is the perception by many teachers that Latina/o students are less able than their white counterparts regardless of their actual educational attainment (Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). For Latina students and critical educators, the classroom space is fast becoming a place where teachers and students are trained to be docile and submissive.

For these reasons, this study will examine the practice of Latina teachers as they create critical spaces for Latina students that are beyond curriculum. Adolescent Latinas, when interviewed, voiced their perception that part of the challenge of fulfilling their educational goals was the fact that schools lacked role models that reflected their physical appearance and cultural heritage (National Women's Law, 2009). Additionally, mentoring studies have shown that pairing Latina students and Latina mentors have produced positive and beneficial relationships that are developed through a commonality

of experiences and similarity of backgrounds (Kaplan, Turner, Piotrkowski, & Silber, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to: first, examine the practice of Latina teachers as they used available physical spaces to engage adolescent Latina students in activities that helped them develop a critical consciousness; second, to privilege the voice of Latina teachers and students by using feminist methodologies in interpreting the data from the study; and lastly, make recommendations for teachers working with Latina students.

For some Latina teachers working with a predominantly Latina student population, creating or finding alternative spaces outside of school hours to engage with students has become necessary as classrooms are controlled through conservative agendas, pacing guides, and scripted curriculum (Arce, 2004). This study investigated how Latina teachers interact with Latina students in informal spaces created outside of the formal confines of the classroom. For this study the alternative space created by teachers took the form of an after school and lunchtime club for girls only. This space was not encroached upon by the demands of the school's curriculum, and was used to initiate dialogue among adolescents in order to develop an emancipatory or critical consciousness. For the purposes of this study, informal and alternative spaces are used interchangeably.

The research aimed to privilege the voice of Latina students and teachers. There are many studies about Latinas and their educational trajectory, but they are generally

from the perspective of deficit and rarely use the voice of teachers and adolescents in their analysis (Darder, 2006; Rodriguez & Morribe1, 2004). This study endeavors to add to the discourse of education focused on hope and not on hopelessness. The use of feminist methodologies and theory in this study will help rearticulate Freire's (1970) theories of a liberatory pedagogy in an American educational setting through the inclusion of socially located and gendered discourses on the nature of oppression. Analyzing and presenting the data using feminist theories, such as Standpoint, are purposeful and deliberate as the power of the analysis when using this methodology rests in the voice of marginalized people.

This research may help teachers reflect on their practice and how they approach Latina students. Latinas are the largest group of students of color in the United States, and are also the fastest growing population of students within public schools (Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). Yet there is very little mention of their plight in the mainstream media or in educational research that is not framed in a perception of deficit (Denner & Guzman, 2006; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Rodriguez & Morribe1, 2004). Past research has shown that teachers have very low expectations of Latina students (National Women's Law, 2009; Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). This phenomenon has exacerbated the difficulties that Latina students face in schools. Teachers whether they be Latino, female, male, white, Black, etc... need to find ways to reach this rapidly expanding group.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addresses the practice of teachers who work with Latina girls from the perspective of possibility, not of deficit. This research presents the voice of Latina teachers and students in order to give a perspective on the liberatory possibilities of education at this particular school. Because Latinas are the single largest group of students in Los Angeles County, this study presents a narrative that resonates with teachers and students, and encourages reflection and dialogue on the substantial power of teachers in students' lives.

Most public schools no longer have a space for teachers to engage in a discussion of the effects on their practice within the classroom of their own perceptions on sexism, racism, homophobia, and/or segregation. This study is presented to spur conversation among educational practitioners regarding their treatment of Latina students in particular and all students in general. Because teachers are cultural workers, they must re-engage in discussions regarding their role in the larger endeavor of working toward a democratic and socially just society.

The development and accumulation of discourse about *how* and *what* educators should teach has attempted to keep up with the ever-changing movement of politics and economics. From Dewey's essays on the battle between traditional and progressive education to the evolvment of critical pedagogy, many perspectives have laid claim to being the most effective means of educating disenfranchised children to form a more democratic society (Dewey, 1938/1963; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2003). For children of color, the history of educational policy is littered with failed attempts to assimilate them

into American society through the eradication of their culture. From Indian schools that espoused the Admiral Pratt's theory of "kill the Indian, and save the man" (History Matters, 2005) to California's proposition 227, which devalued the home language of the largest group of students in their system, the state has attempted to coerce people of color into conforming. The voice of the individuals "studied" is rarely reflected in the research to explain the condition of said marginalized group. In addressing the educational needs of Latinas, their actions within schools are characterized by an attitude that excuses systemic causes for their lack of success. Gendered resistance is reduced to a deficit view of a girl's behavior.

Educational research needs to examine the practice of critical teachers and analyze what they are doing to improve the chances for girls succeeding. The educational attainment of women of color is crucial to sustaining and improving the condition of disenfranchised groups. In Latino communities specifically, the educational success of the mother plays the most significant role in predicting their child's success (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). The boy problem that colleges face with a reduced number of male students, is not a boy problem, it is a girl problem. As long as educators ignore the protection and advancement of young Latina women, there will not be an improvement in the conditions of Latinas/os in the United States.

Catalyst for the Study

"How does it feel to be a problem?" (DuBois, 1903/2003, p.7)

There was an incident at the school where the researcher teaches, which is also the location for the data collection used in this study. A teacher at the school site had

made a racist comment to a class consisting wholly of recent immigrants from Mexico and Latin America and who were second language learners. The teacher intimated that “Mexicans” were only here to collect food stamps and that most of the students were too stubborn or dumb to learn anything. Not surprisingly, most of the students in the class were very upset. Many of the children were former students of the researcher and reached out for help. Parents and students were connected with counselors and administrators to try and resolve the situation. The most interesting aspect of the student response was that the leaders of the charge were all girls. This was surprising, not because young women are incapable of standing up for themselves, but because the immigrant Latina, and in some cases undocumented, students defied many of the cultural pressures from their own community and an oppressive school culture. The young women stood up and made themselves heard, even though traditional Mexican culture teaches many girls that they are expected to be demure and submissive. The young women also went against the accepted posture of the quiet and acquiescent immigrant student by speaking directly to those in perceived power, thus shocking some of the school administrators that had been used to intimidating these students into silence.

The students shared with administrators and teachers that they understood how unfair and wrong these comments were, and they were willing to risk their position (e.g. some of the girls were on the Principal’s honor role) in the eyes of their teachers in order to stand up for what was right, even though they felt there would be a backlash for standing up against a teacher. The students prevailed and eventually the teacher was

reprimanded and warned to be careful in her choice of words when addressing her students. Later that year she left the school.

After many conversations with students and teachers, the researcher reflected upon the mitigating factors that would embolden the girls to act. They were developing a “critical consciousness” (Freire, 1970, p. 19) or at least a critical awareness of their position in the world, and they were finding their unique and powerful voice. The students’ actions in the face of the school’s authority and cultural power were the impetus for this study.

More questions arose as to how they had developed the ability to move beyond simple anger to action. Some of the students were part of one teacher’s class at the school site and had participated in “lunch talks” for girls only. These “lunches” were the precursor to the group on which this study is based. This group is called the Girls Only Club (GOC) and is comprised of present and former Latina students from Anzaldúa Middle School. The focus on Latinas emerged from speculation on the part of the researcher regarding the power of conscientization to propel and protect a young woman as she negotiated the public school system.

Theoretical Rationale

The students that stood up to the teacher were exhibiting the beginning of a critical consciousness. The theoretical underpinnings of this study begin with Freire’s (1970) theory of *conscientização* or conscientization. These terms are interchangeable and mean the same. Freire (1970) defines *conscientização* as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive

elements of reality” (p.19). The basic premise of the study is that conscientization will help Latina students resist the domesticating forces of a public school education and transform themselves and situations that oppress them. The practice of Latina teachers in alternative spaces was examined to see if the cycle described by Freire was present in their interactions with adolescent Latina students.

Conscientization occurs through an iterative cycle that moves people from dialogue, to *praxis* (italicized in the original), and finally to reflection. Dialogue, is the process by which new knowledge and interpretations of power are exposed and situated within the context of the marginalized individual. *Praxis* or “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 36) represents a movement from thought to activity. *Praxis* is predicated on action that is thought out and strategic. Otherwise, according to Freire (1970) *praxis* becomes activism or misguided reaction based on emotion. Reflection is the final component of the cycle and probably the most important as an individual interrogates the motivation for their actions. This reflection leads to dialogue, then *praxis*, and the dynamic process continues towards transformation.

Feminist Thought, Identity, and Consciousness

Freire’s theories, while useful, were hampered by the exclusion of more complete and nuanced representation of oppression and transformation. White, Black, and Chicana feminists deconstructed the inherent privilege that Freire allocated to men in the process of liberation and conscientization (Anzaldúa, 1999; Brady, 1994; Hill-Collins, 2009; hooks, 1994; Luke & Gore, 1992; Weiler, 1994). Black Feminists such as Patricia Hill-Collins (2009) have been able to define oppression within a socially located “matrix of

domination” (p. 21), as opposed to a universal reality, that all disenfranchised people experience. Chicana feminists in particular presented an enhancement to the Freirian depiction of conscientization.

This study was about Latina women teaching Latina girls. Feminists, particularly Chicana scholars, present the best theoretical understanding of the pressures faced by Latinas within family, school, and community. Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) presented the *mestiza* consciousness as a rendering of conscientization that is rooted in the material, social, and spiritual realities of Chicanas in the United States. The *mestiza* consciousness, or *conocimiento*, emerges from the reality of the contradictory identities that Chicanas must inhabit in order to survive. Where Freire theorized the universality of oppression, the *mestiza* engages in the process of transformation through their particular reality. Reality for Chicanas is characterized by the presence of contradiction. Contradiction is represented as a negative, yet Anzaldúa (1999) embraced a Chicana’s ability to thrive within the contradiction.

Chela Sandoval (2000) extended the *mestiza* consciousness, and politicized the movement between identities as strategic maneuvering used by disenfranchised women in order to advance a liberatory objective. Sandoval proposed her theory of a differential consciousness. Agency is at the center of Sandoval’s reconceptualization of conscientization. A differential consciousness presented the movement of disenfranchised women within identities and oppositional consciousnesses not only as means of survival, but also as a strategic mobilization in order to change their material reality.

Standpoint Theory

The perspective of marginalized women and girls is rarely privileged within education (Darder, 2006; Harding, 2004a; Rodriguez & Morribe, 2004). For this reason, Standpoint theory was chosen to help guide the research. Standpoint theory is based on the understanding that oppression is materially, socially, and historically located (Hartsock, 1998). The oppression of women is based on socially constructed notions that are accepted in order to ensure the maintenance of a gendered, sexual, racial, and class hierarchy (Haraway, 2004).

By privileging the voices of Latina teachers and students, a standpoint is developed that helps in understanding the mechanisms and artifacts of privilege that help advance a deficit perspective of being female, working class, and Latina. The creation of a standpoint will yield data that reflects more accurately the experiences of the participants.

Research Question

In order to let themes emerge from observations and interviews, this study limited the research questions to one. The research question that guided this study was: How do Latina teachers use informal educational spaces to create opportunities for students to develop a critical consciousness?

Limitations and Delimitations

The first and most obvious limitation of this study is the gender of the researcher. The researcher is male and observed female teachers and students. There were cultural similarities with the teachers and students, as the researcher is a Chicano, though male

privilege may have hindered the interpretation of observed behaviors. The gender of the researcher may also have affected how participants behaved during observations and interviews for this study and affected the data.

Generalizability to other groups and other educational settings is difficult. All of the participants were Latinas and the social location of the study was in a *de facto* racially and economically segregated school and community. The study took place at only one school and the observations and interviews were of only one group within the school. The study focused mostly on two teachers and a group of their female students. The low number of participants also limits the application of findings from this study to Latinas in general.

The study was delimited to a small sample of girls and teachers participating in a club led by Latina teachers. The researcher used qualitative methods to collect data and counter-stories to present findings. Both of these approaches called for the researcher to develop an in depth understanding of the factors which affected the participants in the study and best answered the research question. Therefore, in order to collect data rich narratives from the participants, the researcher chose to focus on a smaller group that would be accessible and amenable to taking part in the work.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

“Indeed, the interests of the oppressor lies in changing the consciousness of the oppressed not the situation that oppresses them.” (Freire, 1970, p. 60)

Introduction

The United States, particularly California, is in an educational crisis in regards to children of color (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). As Latinas/os become the largest group of students of color in the public school population, there has been a search for effective methods for increasing their success. Unfortunately, methods employed by schools for improving the plight of Latinas/os have been reactionary, have maintained a deficit perspective, and have been traditionally based in curricular remedies (Bartolomé, 2003; Cammarota, 2007; Darder, 1991; Delpit, 1995/2006; Denner & Guzman, 2006; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Giroux, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Methods stemming from the mindset of deficit blame the student for not conforming, while excusing explanations for their struggles that are critical of American educational ideology. Bartolomé (2003) points out that agents of the state that focus on solutions to the problem of Latinas/os on curriculum (and assume that problems are technical) place the blame for failure of the same technical pursuits on teachers, students, and parents, while ignoring the institutional/structural causes of inequality. This researcher argued that teaching is a political act, the effects of which extend beyond what is done in the classroom to spaces that are created by critical educators for the benefit of students. This study examined some of the outcomes of

student-teacher interactions in non-curricular, critical spaces in an effort to privilege the perspective of Latina teachers and students.

Latinas, as a group, are oppressed within the United States (Anzaldúa, 1997; Cruz, 2001; Denner, 2001; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Sandoval, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999). Schools are the places where much of the oppression of women of color has been formalized and also where the seeds of their empowerment are sown (hooks, 2003). It is important to note that some critical scholars do not believe that schools are completely deterministic (Apple, 1995; Darder, 2006; Freire, 1974/2008; hooks, 2003). Michael Apple (1995) makes the point, that while it is true that schools are places where reproduction occurs, they are also simultaneously spaces for the production of new knowledge and relationships. This new knowledge can be liberatory as students become aware of their positionality.

Patricia Hill-Collins (2009) defined oppression as "...an unjust situation where systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society. Race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, age, and ethnicity, constitute major forms of oppression" (p. 320). Schools within the United States, specifically in areas where there is a high concentration of Latinas, are the contentious spaces where racial and gendered roles have been reproduced through the cultivation of deficit views of language and culture (Darder, 1991). These views have excluded or limited the access for women of color from full participation in society by creating an environment that diminishes the value of their being (National Women's Law, 2009).

Teachers are fundamental to changing deficit views and preparing female students of color to negotiate American society. Yet, in order for teachers to be effective they must have developed a critical approach to their calling. The development of an educator's critical consciousness is vital, as they are in a position to resist or deflect hegemonic practices that reproduce internalized deficit thinking (Apple, 1995; Arce, 2004; Bartolomé, 2004; Chomsky, 2000; Darder, 2006; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Elenes, Gonzalez, Delgado Bernal, & Villenas, 2001; Freire, 2005; Shor & Freire, 1987). The challenge for educators is to not fall prey themselves to majoritarian cultural artifacts that are presented as the norm but to become advocates for student empowerment (Freire, 1970).

Past Research

Very little educational research of any kind is developed with data from interviews, observations, or stories derived from the experiences of Latinas/os (Darder, 2006; Rodriguez & Morribe, 2004). Of the research that has been published in academic journals, the focus of studies, regarding both female and male students of color, has concentrated on negative or self-destructive behaviors as the subject of inquiry (Darder, 2006; Rodriguez & Morribe, 2004; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Educational research regarding Latina youth, in particular, and their reality is many times reduced to studies defined by statistics around pregnancy, addiction, or drop out rates (Denner & Guzman, 2006). Unfortunately, much of the recent research essentializes Latina

adolescents by presenting young females as a static representation of the destructive circumstances affecting their community (Darder, 2006; Denner & Guzman, 2006).

The limited educational research focusing on the condition of Latinas/os in the United States has created a gap in the studies. There is very little if any research that privileges the perspectives of Latinas/os. Critical examinations of how schools affect Latina/o children are scarce; specifically, how the development of a critical consciousness can protect Latinas from a hidden curriculum and transform them as they become aware of the mechanisms of oppression operating in American schools and society. The lack of scholarship created using the voice of Latina students and teachers is the reason this study will privilege the perspective of said marginalized group.

Critical Pedagogy and Conscientization

Critical pedagogy emerged from a critique based on class as a central tenet of understanding inequality. Critical theorists such as Giroux (2001) and McLaren (2007) wrote of the power of a hidden curriculum as a mechanism for the maintenance of class-based separation and the exploitation of students lacking social and cultural capital. Bourdieu & Passeron (1970/2000) wrote of the “instruments of concealment” (pg. 15) that allow for the regeneration of social castes. However, there is a need to supplement this particular presentation of the hidden curriculum to include deficit presentations of race, gender, and sexuality as part of the analysis.

Conscientization serves as a platform from which students can begin to develop the ability to name and transform their reality (Freire, 1970). Many other authors

including, Apple (1995), Darder (1991), Giroux (2001), and Weiler (1994), have extended Freire's writings and teachings to develop the field of Critical Pedagogy. While discourse is established in the area of Critical Pedagogy and the creation of a questioning curriculum, it was the power of an informal questioning pedagogy that exists in the spaces between formalized curricular exercises that directed the research in this study (Arce, 2004; Cammarota, 2007; Darder, 1991; Darder & Miron, 2006; Freire, 1974/2008; Giroux, 2003; Kincheloe, 2007; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2006).

While relatively young as a field, Critical Pedagogy has made an indelible mark on the educational landscape by presenting a critical evaluation of the intended consequences, as well as the unintended and hidden consequences, of an unquestioned curriculum (Brady, 1994; Kincheloe, 2007; Weiler, 1995). However, Giroux (2006) wrote of the limiting nature of thinking of critical pedagogy as simply a curricular exercise. By examining the interactions and relationships that develop outside of school hours and away from curricular exercises, the theoretical support for this study came from past research that directed its attention away from a technical or curricular approach to a critical pedagogy. Therefore, the focus of this paper was directed at Freire's (1970) theories on the process and impact of conscientization instead of a survey of the development of Critical Pedagogy as a whole. Specifically, past research was examined on the development of critical consciousness among adolescents of color as a means of resistance and transformation, in order to support the premise that the conscientization of Latinas can occur in spite of a curriculum of domination.

Although Critical Pedagogy has presented a curricular solution or approach to addressing oppressive school cultures, it has not fully explored the alternative emotional and physical spaces that present themselves within a school (Kincheloe, 2007). Freire (1998) understood the epistemic possibility of interactions between students and teachers in spaces not defined by a formal relationship. He wrote, “There is a strong ‘witness’ potential in all of these informal situations, but it is, practically speaking, unexplored territory” (Freire, 1998, p. 48). As stated earlier, studies that focused on Latinas in the United States have been limited in their rendering of a more contextualized presentation of their circumstances. The impetus for this study was a need for the examination of interactions between Latina teachers and students in alternative spaces, unrestricted by the curriculum driven classroom, in order to consider if adolescent Latinas are developing a critical consciousness or awareness.

The literature review addressed the existence and creation of alternative critical spaces by presenting first a survey of theoretical developments around the concept of a critical consciousness and the liberatory effects of teaching oppressed peoples to question their circumstances. This first section focuses on the work of Paulo Freire as well as recent studies that have explicitly attempted to use the development of a critical consciousness as a means of transforming the realities of marginalized students. The second section presents a feminist critique of Freire and *conscientização* and examines other representations of a critical consciousness. This section also references the work of feminists of color in the United States, third world feminists, and other oppressed groups’

critiques of power and how these discourses have affected the educational research landscape. The chapter will close with a discussion of how critical methodologies, including Standpoint Theory, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit), are instrumental in capturing complex and nuanced information that allows the researcher to present data that answers and supports the research question specific to this study.

Freire and Critical Consciousness

“There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 75)

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are firmly rooted in Freire’s (1970) theory of oppressed peoples developing *conscientização* (p. 19) or critical consciousness. Conscientization becomes the means of liberation and transformation for the systematically marginalized. Freire (1970) defines *conscientização* as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality” (p.19). This definition is a starting point to begin understanding critical consciousness, but it is limited in that oppression is more than simply a political or economic force. Pertinent, socially located factors must be taken into account in order to have a more nuanced understanding of oppressive elements of poor people’s reality (Freire, 1997). To borrow Carol Hanisch’s feminist phrase, “the personal is political” (Carol Hanisch, 2006). The researcher proposes that an

understanding of the oppression of women must be grounded in an understanding of their specific struggles (Hill-Collins, 2000/2009, Freire, 1997).

Freire's (1970) language in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* framed conscientization in the patriarchal language of masculinity as humanity. In order to have a more developed understanding of critical consciousness, the definition must be adjusted to include factors beyond the economic and must be understood in the context of a "matrix of domination" that is socially located and particular to each oppressed group's material reality (Hill-Collins, 2000/2009, p. 21). Freire (1997), being engaged critically in dialogue with educators throughout his life, was able to articulate the challenges of varying contexts as teachers tried to apply his work in order to help students in the United States. Freire (1997) wrote:

What I have been proposing is a profound respect for the cultural identity of students—a cultural identity that implies respect for the language of the other, the gender of the other, the class of the other, the sexual orientation of the other, the intellectual capacity of the other, that implies the ability to stimulate the creativity of the other. But these things take place in a social and historical context and not in pure air (p. 308).

Freire (1997) did not want his theories reduced to a set of procedural steps but wanted educators to modify the basic message to fit the circumstances of their students and families.

Freire (1970) introduced the concept of *conscientização* (p. 19) or conscientization as he worked with the poor and illiterate of Brazil. Freire (1970) believed that it was through critical literacy that conscientization and “humanization” (p. 27) could occur, leading to full participation in society. American public schools and the manner in which curriculum is disseminated are places where reproduction of the mechanisms of oppression and dehumanization occur (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/2000; Foley, 1990; Freire, 2005; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2006). Through a hidden curriculum that is sometimes implemented by well-meaning teachers that socializes students to racial, gendered, sexual, and economic roles, Latina adolescents are faced with diminishing opportunities to learn how to question (Darder, 1998). Using Sandoval’s (2000) presentation of “semiotics” (p. 72) as a means of identifying the power expressed through the acceptance and use of the language of domination, it is asserted that students are not versed in the use of the language of power. Most adolescents are no longer illiterate, in the sense that they are able to decode sounds from text. However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher has expanded the definition of illiteracy to include the inability to name and speak of the sources or causes of injustice.

In his seminal work, “Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” Freire (1970) presented a critical response to the dehumanizing nature of “education for domination” (p. 63). He proposed a process for the liberation of both the oppressed and the oppressor through an iterative cycle of dialogue, praxis, and reflection. Through this cycle one could transform the oppressive situation of poor people by participating in the process of liberation.

Dialogue is presented first, as Freire (1970) began the process of understanding the needs of the people he worked with through conversation and listening. Next, *praxis* detailed the movement from thought to action. Finally, reflection marked a cycle of conversation, active listening, action, and contemplation.

Dialogue. The iterative cycle begins with dialogue. From dialogue, knowledge is produced. This knowledge helps to reveal the world to the marginalized who have been alienated not only from the spoils of their labor, but also from participation in their humanity (Freire, 1970). From this process people move from being objects *of* this world, to subjects *in* the world. Dialogue in and of itself is not enough to transform the world for the oppressed; action must be brought forth from thought (Freire, 1992/2009). The social and physical location of Freire’s work was situated in Brazil, Chile, and Guinea-Bissau over 40 years ago, yet the seemingly simple concept of the power of communication as a transformative process is the foundation of his theories, and though the social location of his work is situated in a different time in history and a different country, the basic premise has persisted. In order for liberation to occur for both oppressors and oppressed, lines of authentic communication and dialogue must be created and nurtured (Freire 1970).

“If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim” (Kipling, 1910).

Praxis. The second component of the iterative process is *praxis*, a “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 36). Action without thought is just “activism” (p. 52), where all that is accomplished is the release of energy

that does not humanize because it does not have a basis in knowing the world or in critical reflection. Many activist teachers believe they are helping; however, without a critical understanding of their position or ability to reconcile the benefits received from their privileged status, they find it difficult, if not impossible, to effect change in urban settings (Seider & Huguley, 2009). According to Freire (1970), teachers, by virtue of their privilege, bring with them their “deformations” (p. 46), and it is through reflection and release of their privilege that they can become a part of the solution. Teachers and students then participate in the process as equal partners.

Reflection. Reflection is the next component of Freire’s iterative process towards conscientization. Critical reflection elicits for all people a set of moral choices and calls to action. Freire wrote (1970) that people in the struggle for liberation must choose: to be “wholly themselves” or “divided”(p. 33); eject the oppressor [within] versus not ejecting; human solidarity or alienation; following prescription or having choices; being a spectator or an actor; speaking out or being silent; and creating a pedagogy forged with the others instead of for others. Freire has been criticized for presenting choices in a dualistic or binary presentation as if all other people shared the same two options (Brady, 1994; Weiler, 1994). The points made by other critical theorists are valid and insightful and have enhanced Freire’s theories. Educators must have a spirit of understanding that is grounded in the lives of the people they serve because their decisions are fundamentally moral exercises that should be based in the belief systems held by the communities where they work.

From dialogue, praxis, and reflection to conscientization. The iterative process moves people through stages of consciousness. Freire (1970) presented this movement through consciousness from the “magical” (p.48) where the conditions of oppression are caused by the work of a powerful deity, to a naïve consciousness that views the present order of things as intractable and natural, to a critical consciousness that sees and names the world. Critical consciousness is not presented as an end, but as a process whereby humans search to complete themselves as full participants in the world (Freire, 1970). Full participation in this process can only occur through living an authentic life; one that is able to see the innocuous forms of domination that are invisible to those who do not question. The development of conscientization is crucial in changing the dynamics of oppression because oppressive social relationships, language, and traditions that have been presented as natural, what Freire (1970) referred to as *doxa* (p. 68) and Duncan (2005) termed as “allochronistic” (p. 94), cannot be transformed without critical reflection of their purpose.

Freire in the United States

Past research on adolescent development of a critical consciousness in the context of a developed country has been limited, as Freire’s (1970) writings originally emerged from the field of critical literacy in still developing countries. Yet Freire’s (1970) message of humanization, transformation, and liberation has resonated with educators who struggle to affect the plight of children of color in the United States (hooks, 1994). Although this message has resonated with educators, this researcher was unable to locate

any studies based on the experiences of Latina youth in the United States and their development of a critical consciousness in informal spaces. As such, teachers can help Latina students protect themselves from the effects of a “subtractive” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 3) educational experience through the use of alternative spaces that are not driven by curriculum, to create opportunities for the development of a critical consciousness. These alternative physical or emotional spaces have been called, “nepantla” (Anzaldúa, 2002b, p. 541), “hybrid” (BhaBha, 1994, p. 11), “third” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 148), or “borderlands” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 77). The spaces between rigid and socially constructed identities represent physical, emotional, and psychological places where students can de-center said identities and reassess their positions within their family, school, and world. These in-between spaces allow for the simultaneity of contradiction to occur, where the formal and the familiar can commingle to create a new and different reality (BhaBha, 1994, p. 11).

Valenzuela (1999) characterized schooling “as a subtractive process [because] it divests youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure” (p. 3). Vulnerability, however, does not reduce students to helpless pawns, and schools are not one-dimensional reproducers of oppression (Apple, 1995; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). Students are not a *tabula rasa* without agency in determining their own fates (Giroux, 1997). On the contrary, from classic research on student resistance and the role of schools in social, cultural and economic reproduction by Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/2000), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Foley

(1990) and Willis (1981), to Giroux's (1983) widening of the research that included a social consciousness to resistance, and Solorzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) research on transformational resistance, youth have been able to have a voice in spite of fatalistic perceptions of school culture.

Freire felt misunderstood as he tried to process some of the critique that was directed at him from educators in the United States who demanded a curriculum or set of steps that would solve the problem of illiteracy and oppression (Freire, 1997). He posited that in order for educators to understand what he was trying to accomplish, they had to share with him, at a minimum, some basic beliefs. He listed the "substantivity" (p. 325) of his beliefs in *Mentoring the Mentor* which included: an unwavering "respect for the other;" a "refusal to accept any type of discrimination, radical opposition to racial discrimination, to class discrimination, to cultural discrimination;" a belief in "history as possibility;" the "rejection of fatalism;" and an "unconditional love of freedom" (p.325). The substantivity of his ideas were not to be seen as law, but as a bare minimum that would position a person to work for and with others. Freire (1997) reiterated the need for each educator/cultural worker to base his/her approaches not on what *he* (Freire) had accomplished or done, but on the necessities of the community he/she would be serving. He wrote of just learning to "listen" without prejudice to what people needed and wanted. From truly listening to the people there would come a course of action necessary for change and not from a "guru" (Freire 1997, p. 327) that was not familiar with the community in need.

Extensions of Freire's work

Freire's (1970) theories regarding the humanizing effects of conscientization have radiated far beyond the scope of education to include social work, social psychology, and family therapy (King Keenan & Miehl, 2008; Kosutic et al., 2009; Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). Researchers have taken Freire and adapted his theories to their fields. Researchers such as Osijama (2007), Sakamoto and Pitner (2005), and King Keenan and Miehl (2008), used major themes from Freire regarding the preconditions necessary for the development of a critical consciousness.

Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) used critical consciousness to develop anti-oppressive perspectives (AOP) in social workers based on an understanding of their social position and beliefs associated with their station. They reiterated a theme found in Freire's (1997) writing of a romanticized perspective held by outsiders of the people they were trying to serve. Freire (1997) called these people "tourists" (p. 307) in the reality of the oppressed. These tourists visited the real existence of others, while always being able to return to privilege. According to Freire (1997), wanting to help was different from actually helping, as the trappings of privilege surfaced and the tourist's presence caused damage because they did not listen to the needs of the people. Pitner and Sakamoto (2005) write of "self-interrogation" (p. 441) as a means for social workers to reflect on how they have been formed by the hegemonic ideologies of the United States. Critical consciousness allows social workers to be able to suspend judgment or assumption of the factors that have led their clients to their present situation, while being able to reflect on

the basis of their reactions to the people they serve (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). For people from privilege working with the less fortunate, one of the most important skills necessary in helping others is the ability to just listen while suspending judgment (Freire, 1997).

Another example of the process of developing a critical consciousness is how feminist family therapists have included a critical component to the use of genograms (Kosutic et al., 2009). A genogram is used to form a type of emotional family tree that assists therapists in fully understanding the possible causes of problems in individuals and families. Kosutic et al. (2009) have turned to Freire's ideas of conscientization to understand contextual factors that have affected their client's emotional development, as well as addressing therapists' own biases. By developing a Critical Genogram (CritG) exercise rooted in feminist thought, they have found that therapists' participation in creating a personal CritG has allowed them to have "insight into the impact of social, political, and economic systems on individual and family life" (Kosutic et al., 2009, p. 151).

King Keenan and Miehl (2008) may provide the bridge from other disciplines to understanding the power of creating a critical consciousness in alternative spaces within educational settings. They write of a psychological "third space" (Bhabha, 1994), or "borderlands" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 77), that psychotherapists and social workers can inhabit in order to understand themselves and their clients (King Keenan & Miehl, 2008). These spaces represent a temporary disconnection from the tensions that arise from paradoxes that present themselves when conflict is reduced to essentialized

understandings of other people. What King Keenan and Miehl (2008) sought was a deeper understanding of the complexities of relationships, and situating those complexities in a place that allows participants to critically assess a position that is neither theirs nor ours, and displaces the subject-object relationship. King Keenan and Miehl (2008) have witnessed instances of “openness, dialogue, reconciliation, and negotiation” (p.165) when people were in a space where there was acceptance and lack of judgment. Their findings mirrored what Freire (1970) wrote of his commitment to liberation based in “dialogue, hope, humility, love, sympathy, and vocation” (p. 21).

According to some critical theorists, developing a critical consciousness from a position of privilege dictates there be an extinction of the mindset that comes with privilege (Freire, 1997). The challenge for therapists that deal with clients from a position of power is to diminish the effects of their privilege. King Keenan and Miehl (2008), by citing Bhabha in their work, brought the focus of this transformation from the perspective not of extinction but to one of de-centering some of the socially constructed frameworks that have persisted in maintaining inequality. Bhabha (1994) wrote:

The move away from the singularities of ‘class’ or ‘gender’ as primary conceptual or organizational categories has resulted in an awareness of the subject position of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geo-political locale, sexual orientation—that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-

between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining society itself (p. 2).

As Bhabha pointed out, in order for people to develop a deeper understanding of self in relation to others they must become aware of the forces that have shaped their identities, and then work to disentangle the effects of said forces on their perception of social realities.

Issues pertaining to a gendered, cultural, racial, and/or sexual identity are central to critically understanding where a person stands in relation to their locus of oppression. The use of Freire's theories by disciplines outside of traditional education illustrates the liberatory possibilities of developing a critical consciousness far beyond implementation of an educational curriculum to an understanding of the underpinnings of identity. Of the studies done in other fields, Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) have best articulated what needs to occur for critical consciousness to catalyze transformation. In order for transformation to occur there needs to be a shift in three domains: cognitive, behavioral, and affective (Osijama, 2007; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). These domains align with Freire's (1970) steps in the process of conscientization: dialogue, praxis, and reflection. The affective, cognitive and behavioral domains also begin to emerge as themes in the studies that have attempted to extend Freire's theories.

Cognitive. Knowledge is central to understanding one's position in this world. It is as if language begins to be real as meaning is created through the sharing of information. The

synthesis of knowledge through dialogue brings to life a situated reality for oppressed peoples. Osijama's (2007) study of Asian-American students' awakening at a university shares the words that young people spoke, and how exposure to others with similar ethnicities, their stories and histories, created a tapestry or mosaic of shared knowledge that begins to define the blurry edges of identity in relation to power. They became politicized as they saw behind the veil of subjectivity. What was once thought of as an individual experience became a powerful piece of knowledge as patterns revealed collective realities (Osijama, 2007). Bright, articulate university students still find themselves in the naïve consciousness that reduces the events of their lives into disconnected phenomena. Critical review and dialogue begin to create cognition as an awakening begins to contextualize the seemingly unrelated into new and deeper understandings.

Revilla Tijerina (2004) also found that college women with various "raza" (p. 1) backgrounds and characteristics were able to create a space where the creation of knowledge was directed through a commitment to social change. "Raza Womyn" (Revilla Tijerina, 2004, p. 1) were able to appropriate language and create their own meaning through dialogue and by critically addressing how to define who they were without accepting popular representations of "Latinas" (Revilla Tijerina, 2004). They are "Raza" because they felt it best described the diverse group, as well as from the concept of "La Raza Cosmica" or universal race; "Womyn" because they did not need to depend on the word "men" to define their identity. As mentioned in the Revilla Tijerina (2004) study, conversations between the Womyn became more than an exchange of pleasantries.

The exchanges became part of liberatory process as mutual understandings of the effects of practices of marginalization were shared by the participants of the discussion group.

Only two studies examined for this literature review explicitly pursued the development of critical consciousness in students of color within the United States as a means of addressing inequities in their community and fortifying students. Watts, Pratt, and Abdul-Adil (2002) conducted a participant action research study of a program titled the “Young Warriors.” This program used hip-hop and urban themed films to address and educate young African-American males regarding exploitation and oppression within their own community. Watts et al. (2002) were able to use informal spaces to have conversations with young African-American males regarding their own privilege and oppression. Activities steeped in popular forms of expression and possessing the social and cultural capital of their particular population were used to instigate dialogue that led their students towards “sociopolitical development” (Watts et al. 2002, p. 41). Through the reinterpretation of what was seen as “negative modeling” (p. 44) students began to appropriate the meaning behind the messages sent through music, videos, and movies and began to question the purpose behind the messages. Through this process students began to develop an interest in participating in civic activities pertinent to their community.

Acosta (2007) created a high school Chicano literature class based on social justice and resistance writings. The expressed purpose of the class was to expose high school seniors to other perspectives of knowledge that reframed their identity as one not based in deficit, but in their pre-Columbian ancestry. Acosta (2007, p. 37) appropriated Nahuatl nomenclature to identify Freire’s (1970) theories of dialogue (Quetzalkoatl),

praxis (Huitzilopochtli), and reflection (Tezkatlipoka). The Chicano literature class had students read a variety of texts ranging from excerpts of speeches by Malcolm X to the writings of Sandra Cisneros, with accompanying dialogue to deconstruct the messages within the texts (Acosta, 2007). Students were then asked to create a “transformation project” (Acosta, 2007, p. 41) that served as a roadmap of sorts and a precursor to critical action in their own lives. Examples of these projects included a documentary on issues surrounding immigration, and parent workshops on school finance and parental rights. These projects were then collected and presented in digital format and shared through an online document. Students were creators of knowledge instead of simply consumers.

These particular studies demonstrated that cognition led to conscientization, and the process of creating knowledge through dialogue transformed newly created understandings into actionable thoughts (Cammarota, 2007; Cruz, 2001; Darder, 2006; Elenes et al., 2001; Freire, 1970; Frymer, 2005; Giroux, 2001; Osijama, 2007; Shor, 1996; Watts et al., 2002). The comparable iteration of Freire’s (1970) theory based in dialogue, praxis, and reflection coincides with Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) and Osijama’s (2007) re-articulation as the cognitive, behavioral and affective domains.

Behavioral. The second component described by Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) and Osijama (2007) is based on the behavioral manifestations of knowledge production in the form of political or civic action. This viewpoint differs from traditional resistance theorists’ perspectives that emphasized self-negating behaviors that reproduced economic inequality (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Willis, 1981). Giroux (1983/2001) posited that behaviors welling from frustration devoid of a

theoretical or philosophical impetus were not resistance, had no purpose, and did not support the development of a critical consciousness. Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) added to what Giroux presented as necessary for resistance and developed his theories by explaining how resistance based in a pursuit of social justice was a means of transformation. Solorzano and Bernal (2001) identified different types of behaviors exhibited by resistant students: reactionary; self-defeating resistance; conformist resistance; and transformational resistance (p. 316). The theoretical concept of “transformational resistance” (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 308) stemmed from research about Chicano students engaging politically to change structures in places that allowed educational inequity to persist. Both Giroux (1983/2001) and Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) have asserted that a critique of oppression needs to be in place in order to make resistant behavior meaningful.

Critical action or praxis is not always represented in the form of resistance. As the Raza Womyn of Revilla Tijerina’s (2004) study showed, participation in a community that exists to continue the education of others leads to the creation of opportunities to reflect while actively working towards a definition of self. Participation in groups like Raza Womyn led to “a raised critical consciousness as they dialogued during meetings, at protests, vigils, conferences, and at community events” (p. 80). The students participating in the “Young Warriors” program and the Chicano Literature class eventually stepped out into the community and put into practice measures not based in resistance but in proactive transformation of their own identity and community (Acosta, 2007; Watts et al., 2002).

An interesting rendition of action in the behavioral domain presented itself in the form of “critical civic praxis” (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007, p.694). In the Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) study, students who participated in cultural and civic activities through community organization were exposed to opportunities for expression as well as a “chance to build individual and collective capacity to struggle for social justice” (p. 694), and thus participate in critical civic praxis. This study was interesting because it did not presuppose a necessity for consciousness before action. In fact it would seem that action was the force behind cognition. In other words, students participating for whatever motivation in civic activities would benefit from the mere exposure to networks of people who are in the struggle for social justice. The findings regarding the effectiveness of a “critical civic praxis” were supported by Watts and Flanagan (2007) and the field of Liberation Psychology, which identified the need for adolescents to find commonalities or “concordance” (p.781) with other individuals, groups, and organizations. This desire by adolescents to feel part of a group or movement can lead to participation in civic actions. According to Liberation Psychologists, these commonalities can be based in the need to understand and act in support of socially just causes (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). The research done by Hart (2006) presents a link between reflection and action in the behavior of young people. Similar to Ginwright and Cammarota (2007), Hart’s study proposed that through “critical service learning” (p. 17) youth reflect upon the injustices in their communities and also act by doing something about them. Because critical service learning is based on the lived experiences of the participating students, the development of voice occurs and an outcome represents a

record of their actions. Critical service learning weds emancipatory pedagogy to school experiences and students' lives (Hart, 2006). The research reiterated the reality that schools are the place where young people can be activated to change their behavior in order to fight the destructive nature of society's oppressive constructs.

Affective. The third and final domain necessary for the development of a critical consciousness is the affective. Second language acquisition expert Stephen Krashen (1982) coined the term "affective filter" (p. 30) to describe how a student's affect (feelings) influenced their rate of learning. Affect, or better-said positive affect, needs to be present in order for students to feel open and able to risk (Acosta, 2007; Darder, 1998; hooks, 1994; Freire, 1970; Martin, 2008; Osijama, 2007; Revilla Tijerina, 2004; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts et al., 2002). Freire (1970) called it humanization; Darder (1998) and others have distilled the emotional feelings of courage and risk down to love. Ultimately, whatever the affect is called, it has to do with trust and the safety of acceptance (Osijama, 2007; Revilla Tijerina, 2004). This safety and acceptance may take the form of the creation of alternative spaces to the ones provided by schools, or by group participation based on similar background, ethnicity, race, or gender (Acosta, 2007; Kaplan et al., 2009; Osijama, 2007; Revilla Tijerina, 2004; Watts et al, 2002).

All of the studies included in the review of literature have had emotion or affect at the center of their inquiry. Participants in Osijama's (2007) study of Asian-American college students found that most, if not all, wanted their educational experience to have "meaning" (p. 64). These same students wanted to break through the isolation of feeling

as though no one else understood their reality. Fundamental to their experience was the availability of a safe place where they could receive “non-judgmental support” (p. 69) as they negotiated their burgeoning identity and consciousness.

Revilla Tijerina (2004) observed how a group of college students self-defined as “Raza Womyn” provided a “safe space” (p. 85) for any woman to come and be accepted regardless of race, ethnicity, and more importantly for this group, sexual identity. Some women who felt they had no place in other groups based on ethnicity because of their sexual identity found a forum where they would be heard and appreciated. Acosta (2007) relied on the emotional reaction to injustice by the participants in his Chicano literature class to spur the conversation among students about their heritage and place within American society; this same affective response moved participants in the class to engage in meaningful and transformative dialogue.

Diemer, Kauffman, Koenig, Trahan, and Hsieh (2006) conducted a mixed method study where they surveyed and interviewed urban high school students to gauge their perception of support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice. The study found that if a student felt supported in challenging racism, sexism, and injustice by their peers and family, it precipitated the development of their critical consciousness. The strength of this research is the power of the positive affective response from family and peers that helped “facilitate the reflection component of critical consciousness among urban adolescents” (Diemer et al., 2006, p. 454) that predicted they would be more likely to participate in behaviors resisting racism and sexism. Interestingly enough, the

students who felt the most support to resist stereotypical notions around gender were the high school girls participating in the study.

The idea that positive affect must be present in order to create conditions where people feel valued and accepted ties in with Freire's (1970) theories about the humanizing process of oppressed peoples' feeling heard and empowered to participate in their own liberation. The same affective dynamic that occurred within groups of Asian-American Studies students, African-American "young warriors," "Raza Womyn," and Chicana/o students was evident across the research. (Acosta, 2007; Freire, 1970; Osijama, 2007; Revilla Tijerina, 2004; Watts et al., 2002).

It is evident, based on the literature reviewed, that a safe place free of judgment has to exist for a cognitive shift to occur in marginalized people's understanding of the historical, political, social, personal, and economic aspects of oppression. By creating safe, non-judgmental spaces a new perspective of the determinants of their realities can occur for people who feel marginalized. The studies included in this review did not present a clear preference as to which domain should be activated first in order to develop a critical consciousness. For some participants in the studies, activation of the behavioral domain through civic activities led to conversations that eventually bore a better understanding of which mechanisms of oppression were present within their community (Carlson, Engebrtson, & Chamberlain, 2006; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Watts & Flanagan, 2007), while others depended on frontloading information in order to have a common language from which to have a dialogue and decide on a collective action (Acosta, 2007; Osijama, 2007; Revilla Tijerina, 2004; Watts et al., 2002). However a

consistent theme found in all studies was an agreement on the necessity that all three domains be activated. Without the behavioral, cognitive, and affective areas being involved one would not reach a critical consciousness, only a false consciousness (Freire, 1970).

Feminist Critiques of Freire

Kathleen Weiler (1994) and other feminist theorists pointed out the difference between the theory and practice of Freire's perspective of the behavior of a critical educator (Brady, 1994; Gore, 1992). Theoretically, it should be clearly apparent to said critical educator that a difference exists between the oppressed and the oppressor. Practically, finding the clean edges of each identity becomes a difficult task, as clear-cut delineations between multiple identities rarely exist in modern society (Anzaldúa, 1999; Cruz, 2001; Denner, 2001; Haraway, 2004; Holling, 2006; Luke & Gore, 1992a; Mattuck Tarule, 1997). Furthermore, whoever defines the role of oppressor and oppressed possesses the power to guide the discourse about liberation. To some, the limitation of Freire's theories began with the language he used to describe who would work towards liberation and who would possess the power to define what that liberation would look like (Luke & Gore, 1992b). An example of this limitation is represented in the work of multiple authors, including Luke and Gore (1992b), Brady (1994), and Weiler (1994).

Luke and Gore (1992b) presented a vigorous challenge to critical pedagogy and Freire's theories. The positions that Freire took in regards to marginalized and oppressed people still came from the same androcentric, master narrative that had created systems of oppression. Luke and Gore (1992a) felt the supposed emancipatory projects, as

presented by Freire and others, were not addressing the gendered and political reality of women's participation in society. They wrote:

Our apprenticeships completed, our theoretical positions professed in print and in body at the confessional oral, where *did* we stand? After years of uneasy readings of the fathers, our various responses to the discourse of critical pedagogy were not 'critical' choices, conscious moves in a moment of avant-garde leftist leaning toward a culturalist or continental 'theory' of the subject. Rather, our readings of critical pedagogy have been arrived at out of our positioning, location, and identity as women in education: as women within a patriarchal system of knowledge, scholarship, and pedagogical relations (Luke & Gore, 1992a, p. 3).

Beyond the "universal subject" (Luke & Gore, 1992a, p. 5) feminists like Luke and Gore questioned the basic underpinnings of identity, positionality, and epistemology through a deconstruction of the "technologies of control" (p. 4) that allowed men to create and define the meaning of language. This researcher agrees with Luke and Gore's (1992a) basic premise of feeling as though they had been "written to the margins" (p. 3) of critical pedagogy. Much of the writing regarding liberatory education comes from the position of privilege. McLaren, Giroux, Lankshear, Shor, Kincheloe, and Freire all are male, white, and espouse how liberation should occur. These are the "fathers" that create the master narrative of critical pedagogy (Luke & Gore, 1992a). Their writings are reminiscent of how Foley (1990) described the various masculinities within a Texas high school. A male football player by virtue of membership in a privileged group was able to dress up as a cheerleader for a powder-puff football game without losing any of his

status, as all understood the power imparted by masculinity, heterosexuality, and participation in the highest social strata within the school allowed him to release control temporarily without consequence. Likewise, the white men who speak and write of emancipatory education *can* because they have enough cultural and/or social capital to release their responsibility to the privilege of maleness. Men have choice. Luke and Gore (1992a) saw this when quoting bell hooks (1990), “It’s easy to give up identity, when you got one” (p. 6).

Another point of white feminists’ critique of Freire’s (1970) theories of oppression has been around the dualistic, and sometimes simplistic, description of good and evil (Brady, 1994; hooks, 1994; Weiler, 1994). For Freire (1970) it was understandable to fall into the binary relationship of the oppressor and the oppressed, the object versus the subject, as his experience in Brazil with extreme poverty and dehumanization by corrupt government officials were the relationships he observed. Freire (1970), a class scholar, experienced these relationships as clear dichotomies where the peasants were easily discernible from the privileged classes (Brady, 1994; Weiler, 1994).

Weiler (1994) and other white feminists brought to light, in regards to the practice of critical educators, the reality that sometimes the oppressed is the oppressor simultaneously. For example, other men on the basis of economic accumulation or material realities may very well oppress a man living in poverty, while in his own home the same man is reaping the benefits of an unfair and imbalanced relationship with his female partner. That same couple, by virtue of their skin tone may also exact a certain

privilege in comparison to other darker skinned people in the same economic situation. While this example is simplistic in the presentation of the problem of a matrix of oppression, it does illustrate the limitations of presenting a universal claim to the nature of oppression. The situated realities of different people dictate that it is not as clear as it may seem.

Weiler (1994) wrote, "...they [universal goals for liberation] do not directly analyze the contradictions between conflicting oppressed groups or the ways in which a single individual can experience oppression in one sphere while being privileged in another" (p. 13). For many feminists there is no universality of oppression, and said oppression must be understood as a contextual and socially located phenomena. Many feminists, while critical of Freire's presentation of oppression as a universal or "collective" (Weiler, 1994, p. 13) experience, have articulated how a Freirian pedagogy still retains meaningful messages of questioning, consciousness, and transformation (Brady, 1994; hooks, 1994; Weiler, 1994). Weiler (1994) continued, "Feminist pedagogy as it is developed in the United States provides an historically situated example of a critical pedagogy in practice" (p. 13).

White feminists were able to enhance a Freirian approach to addressing subjugation by expanding the understanding of oppression into a more complete and complex theoretical offering that took into account the social and historical location of constructs causing inequality. They insisted that critical pedagogy move beyond the universal representation of the subject to addressing the uniqueness of each situation and demanded the identification of elements that created instances where some forms of

oppression were privileged above others. The view of the dialectic as viewed by the followers of Freire, was seen as simplistic and incomplete. Mattuck Tarrule (1997) wrote:

Moreover, male or female can no longer be understood as a simple dialectic. Rather, the complexity lies in the fact that we each have layered identities, comprised of a race, class, gender, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual partner preference, regional affiliation, and so forth (P. 14).

Ultimately, Freire's theories lacked a space for factors that affected women, and feminists were able to identify and critique these gaps.

White feminists have been able to be incisive in their critique of Freire and of supposed liberatory projects, but have failed at addressing their own construct of feminist hegemony that has pushed out women of color from the larger movement (Sandoval, 2000). As a result, many women of color exercised their voice, in their own way, and in their own language in a language that was not understood by women of privilege in academia.

Feminists of Color and Freire

Many feminists of color who emerged from the struggle for civil rights understood that the fight for justice extended beyond racial equality to include an examination of the unaddressed inequity based on gender within the country and their own communities (Anzaldúa, 1999; Cruz, 2001; Haraway, 2004; Harding, 2004; Hill-Collins, 2000/2009; hooks, 1994; Sandoval, 2000). The struggle for racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, and economic justice developed an approach within the feminist

movement that deconstructed power and privilege in a way that moved the discourse of oppression even further. Examinations of the causes for disparate treatment of people had excluded the perspective of women of color. Feminists of color were able to challenge the objectivity of knowledge production from the mindset of the powerful, and privilege the position of the oppressed (Harding, 2004; Hill-Collins, 2000/2009). The eyes, conscience, and lens through which American academia had to reflect on the treatment of women began to change as marginalized narratives began to emerge and transform the homogeneous nature of social science research (Sandoval, 2000). Their challenges extended to other feminists as well as to Freire.

The invisibility of women of color, which had become normal for majoritarian society, became a powerful analysis of oppression by feminists of color (Hill-Collins, 2000/2009). Chicana and Black feminists brought an awareness of oppression not based in deficit, but based on the strength that is created through living in oppressive environs and finding ways to thrive (Anzaldúa, 1999; Cruz, 2001). The emerging understanding coming from the privileging of the perspective of women of color redefined how oppression was identified and situated within a layered and nuanced “matrix of domination” (Hill-Collins, 2000/2009, p. 21). Difference was no longer a negative; on the contrary, it was the appreciation and centering of difference that began to inform a critique of oppression from the perspective of those most affected (Lorde, 1984/2007). Theories of difference allowed researchers to access a different understanding of the complexity of oppression. The inextricable nature of the socially situated causes of oppression meant that the process of liberation would be equally as complex. The

tangled web, or matrix, of oppression that characterizes the experience of marginalized people does not have to be disentangled to find an essential truth or cause; its existence must first be acknowledged, identified, and explained.

Some women of color did not find a place within the white feminist movement (Hill-Collins, 2000/2009; Sandoval, 2000). While points of agreement were apparent between white feminists and women of color, the persistence of racial divides existed within even a supposed liberal social movement, and it alienated women who felt that the leadership did not represent the reality of all women (Hill-Collins 2000/2009; Sandoval, 2000).

A theoretical shift occurred as Black and Chicana feminists began to challenge the perspectives of white feminist academics. For many the methodology used by white feminists to state their case was still entrenched in a Eurocentric, paternalistic approach to the creation and appreciation of knowledge (Anzaldúa, 2002a; Haraway, 2004; Harding, 2004). Many of the poor and working class women of color were excluded from participation in the analysis of oppression by white academia, yet their viewpoints and experiences became the unit of study for critical U.S. third world feminists (Hill-Collins, 2000/2009; Sandoval, 2001). Being a woman of color did not represent weakness due to their position in society, and it was not ignorant to possess knowledge not found in books, or created by academics; on the contrary, real power and knowledge emerged from their struggles and experience (Harding, 2004). The focus on experience as the measure of knowledge creation aligned well with Freire's (1970) ideas about learning the world. The epistemic privilege of women of color allows for a critical perspective of all

of the groups in front of them in the metaphoric line. Although people are not participating in an oppression contest vying for the title of the most oppressed, the positionality of women of color in this society leaves them with fewer instances or opportunities to be privileged, while ironically possessing a rare and valuable viewpoint on the state of American society (Hill-Collins, 2000/2009).

There were some Chicana and Black feminists that felt the challenges by white feminists in academia on American ideology were lacking in regards to the treatment and histories of people of color. Bartolomé (2004) defined ideology as a “framework of thought constructed and held by members of a society to justify or rationalize the existing social order” (p. 97), and posited there are three basic assumptions of American ideology: first, the myth of meritocracy where everybody has equal opportunities to succeed according to the merit of their labor; second, a deficit view of minorities as incapable of success; third, the superiority of white mainstream culture which demeans all other groups. This basic framework for the reproduction of American ideology was not changed within the white feminist movement (Lorde, 1984/2007; Sandoval, 2000). Academia was not addressing the hegemonic practices of intellectuals that maintained social order within universities and American society. These assumptions separated women who seemingly had similar agendas and affected how liberatory theories, like those presented by Freire, were accepted.

To many white feminists, Freire’s theories were seen as flawed beyond use because of the sexist language of his writings, where maleness was presented as humanity and alienated many to his work (Brady, 1994; hooks, 1984/2000). bell hooks

(1984/2000) responded to feminists that perceived Freire's theories as untenable through an incisive metaphor that illustrated the privilege of race that white feminists failed to account for when approaching his work. hooks (1984/2000) wrote in *Teaching to Transgress*:

When you are privileged, living in one of the richest countries in the world, you can waste resources. And you can especially justify the disposal of something you consider impure. Look at what most people do with water in this country. Many people purchase special water because they consider tap water unclean—and of course this purchasing is a luxury. Even our ability to see the water that comes from the tap as unclean is itself informed by an imperialist consumer perspective. It is an expression of luxury and not just simply a response to the condition of water. If we approach the drinking of water that comes from the tap from a global perspective we would have to consider what the vast majority of the people in the world who are thirsty must do to obtain water. Paulo's work has been living water for me (hooks, 1994, p. 50).

For hooks (1994), Freire represented a resource that spoke to the possibility and hope for a change in the way teachers approached their responsibility and charges. Although the criticism of Freire's earliest writings merited a strong critique for many, like hooks, his theories based in class and spirituality were a starting point from which to ground their struggle. In response to the critique by some feminists, those who knew Freire have written that he was the first to engage in a dialogue that would educate, transform, and advance his understanding of the world, and being able to listen to others was not only a

suggestion made in his books, but a way of living life (Kincheloe, 2007). There is no doubt that some of Freire's ideas are problematic, even naïve, but the spirit and thrust of his theories represented an approach that placed liberation into the practice of education. For some feminists Freire may have represented the limitations of dichotomous thinking or universal oppression, but to others searching for a critique that emerged from the point of view of humanization and love of the disenfranchised, reading him *was* like the water of life to a person dying of thirst (Darder, 1998; hooks, 1994). One such group was Latina and Chicana feminists.

Some Latina and Chicana feminists appropriated, transformed, and implemented Freire's theories in a way that best served their needs. As an example, Raza feminists who believed in a Muxerista Pedagogy embraced Freire's theories as invaluable to their goals of understanding and fighting oppression. They recognized that the struggle to change oppressive conditions had to "involve dialogue, praxis (theory in action), and dialectical exchange between the participants" (Revilla Tijerina, 2004, p. 85). The Muxerista framework, developed by Revilla-Tijerina (2004) to conduct and analyze research, echoed Freire's (1997) call to listen to the needs of the community one serves, oppose all forms of bigotry, and challenge all structures that precipitated the marginalization of people. Chicana scholars argued that some of the constructions that reproduced a deficit view of women of color originated in the same research that was produced to explain their plight. This framework represented an approach to understanding academic exercises that was vastly different from the accepted forms of

research, and illustrated an epistemology that challenged the status quo. Based on the following nine elements, The Muxerista framework:

1. Is committed to challenging all types of oppression in Chicana/Latina/o communities, including but not limited to racism, imperialism, patriarchy, heterosexism, homophobia, nativism, and monolingualism.
2. Addresses holistic needs of Chicana/Latina/o communities, including females and males.
3. Makes distinctions between Chicanas and Chicanos, as well as Chicanas and white women, and other women of color, by understanding and examining the specificity and intersectionality of experiences.
4. Challenges traditional research paradigms and theories by advocating for “theory in the flesh” that bridges our lived experiences with academia.
5. Opposes and resists the competitive and divisive practice of ‘ranking oppressions’ based on race, class, gender, and sexuality.
6. Redefines, reconstructs, and re-empowers ideological constructs historically used to oppress women.
7. Focuses research, pedagogy, and practice, on experiences of Chicanas/Latinas/os and views these experiences as sources of strength.
8. Offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, sexuality, and class discrimination.

9. Utilizes the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, social sciences, history, humanities, and the law to inform praxis. (Revilla Tijerina, 2004, p. 84)

The Muxerista framework does not follow a plan from a text. It addresses the needs of a specific group that is choosing to use what is valuable and choosing to set aside what is irrelevant to their situation. Like hooks (1994) or Anzaldúa (1999), the Muxerista's were able to choose how and when some theories would be engaged or ignored. By situating their struggle in a social location (university) specific to their group membership they are able to best utilize what advanced their liberatory practice without losing the essence of their identity.

The power of Freire's message is that it is not fixed, it is dynamic. Freire's theories are like the mother dough for critical educators. In a bakery, the mother dough is used to give life to bread and can last many years as long as it is replenished. The beauty of the mother dough is that as pieces are taken away to start a new batch, they never quite taste the same as the original. Some of the new bread is better and some is not. It all depends on the atmospheric conditions in which this dough, this living organism, exists. To copy Freire's actions in Brazil will not work in other places. The social and historical location of each instance of oppression is different, and what is needed for liberation will be determined by the people who are living in said situation. Freire's theories, however, serve as a sort of mother dough, a natural leaven that gives the endeavors of educators a starting point from which to create their own liberatory enterprise. His theories will only

be as meaningful as the efforts of the teachers, as well as the replenishment of his theories through critique and adaptation.

Consciousness and Chicana Feminists

Latina, specifically Chicana, feminists have refined past theories concerning what can be considered a critical consciousness. Conscientization or “existing in the world as historical beings, capable of intervening in, and knowing this world (Freire, 1998, p. 35)” is one construction of an involved and conscious person. However, to Chicana feminist theorists and scholars, like Anzaldúa (1999), Sandoval (2000), and Cruz (2001), a universal consciousness does not adequately represent their reality. Freire’s (1970) interpretation of consciousness does not sufficiently address how one’s cultural, sexual, and racial identity affects how a critical consciousness will be expressed in practice. For some Chicana feminists how one navigates identity is foundational to understanding oppression. In other words, critical consciousness is different for each and every person, as each defines what it means to be oppressed and thereupon formulate their praxis.

The Mestiza Consciousness

La conciencia de la mestiza develops:

As the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly ‘crossing over,’ this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an ‘alien’ consciousness is presently in the

making – a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una consciencia de mujer*. It is the consciousness of the Borderlands. (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 77)

Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) puts forth *la conciencia de la mestiza* (mestiza consciousness) as a representation of the consciousness of Chicana women who grow up in the physical, psychological, and spiritual borderlands of the United States. The Mestiza/o is a person who possesses a mixture of Indian and Spanish blood. They are a new race of inhabitants of a middle land between two worlds, in “*los intersticios*,” or the space in between identities (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 20). Anzaldúa’s theories are evolved from a point of view that is socially and historically situated within the immigrant reality of economic refugees who have suffered sexual violence, physical helplessness, and a history of rape and prostitution of Mexican women as they arrive to live and work in the United States.

Anzaldúa’s (1997) discourse is decidedly Chicana, Queer, and Feminist. She was clear about defending her culture from white supremacist attack, but did not glorify the myths that caused oppressive relationships and denigrated the role of women (Anzaldúa, 1999). Anzaldúa (1999) described being Mexican as “a state of the soul” (p. 62), a racial identification that is not bound by borders. She had compared herself to a turtle that takes its home wherever it goes. She believed that as people moved through life’s situations they would take with them what is historically theirs to carry, as they explored new homes. Agency allowed women to choose what part of their culture, identities, and narratives they carried and picked up along life’s path. This new form of consciousness

was defined not by exclusion of the things one is not, but by inclusion of what one chooses to accept.

Chicana women live lives of contradiction. They are living the dialectic of subservience and fierce independence. According to Anzaldúa (1999), the mestiza consciousness has a “tolerance for contradiction, a tolerance for ambiguity” (p. 79). From this tolerance a new form of consciousness begins, one that stresses agency as central. She wrote, “The dominant white culture is killing us with its ignorance. By taking away our self-determination” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 86). The mestiza consciousness inhabits what she calls “nepantla” the Nahuatl word for the land in between (Anzaldúa, 2002b, p. 1), which allows one the choice to have a stake in different worlds while creating an alternative identity or consciousness not bound to any.

Empowerment of the Chicana/Mexicana/India/European was in the ability to have power over identification. Anzaldúa (1999) wrote:

So, don't give me your tenets or your laws. Don't give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures—white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture (p. 22).

The power of definition, or participation in the creation of identity, liberates women who possess a mestiza consciousness to form coalitions with groups and individuals that

superficially would not possess points of connection. The mestiza consciousness is a critical consciousness. Realities are exposed and a woman is able to see the world as it is, with the power to interject and change oppressive situations because they can bridge differences to create new understandings.

In order to achieve this new consciousness one must travel through the “seven stages of *conocimiento*” (Anzaldúa, 2002b, p. 543). Anzaldúa (2002b) presents an allegory based on the survival of a catastrophic earthquake. The first stage is “*el arrebato*”, the rupture; the emotional and physical crisis that occurs at the time of devastation. A person is left shaken to their core as all that they know is reduced to rubble. The second stage is called “*nepantla*”(p. 548) as one is torn between what was known and new realities and understandings. Third is the “*Coatlicue state*” of “*desconocimiento*” (p. 550) or despair, as one falls to questioning why this disaster has occurred and becomes mired in self-loathing and hopelessness. In stage four there is “The call to action—*el compromiso*” (p. 554), one begins to reconnect with others and moves across differences to accept the spirit of conversion. The fifth stage is “putting *Coyolxauqui* together” (p. 558), (*Coyolxauqui* is the Aztec moon goddess that is decapitated and cut into pieces) representing the search for order as one tries to put the pieces of their identity together. Stage six is a relapse as “The blow up—clash of realities”(p. 563) occurs. The contradictions of various worlds and identities clash and threaten to pull one asunder when the world rejects your newfound truths; one is faced with a struggle for understanding. Finally, one reaches the “critical turning point of transformation” (p. 545) and a shift in realities happens. At this stage a person has been

able figure out how to deal in a world of conflicting inputs and make coalitions. Aailed with the Mestiza consciousness, one is ready to participate in “spiritual activism” (p. 568) that has choice and acceptance at its’ center.

Anzaldúa (2002b) used the analogy of a new mestiza consciousness as a set of bridges. These bridges allowed those who had achieved this new level of consciousness to have a choice of participating in all identities. She wrote:

Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantla, a Nahuatl word meaning tierra entre medio. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries (p. 1).

She saw the multiple identities women inhabit as pliant, mutable, renewable, and enduring (Anzaldúa, 2002a). There is a constant battle between identities as inconsistencies in one culture as they clash with values in another. Anzaldúa (1999) was aware that resistance to oppression has to happen, but it cannot become “a way of life” (p. 78) as one must move from a position of constant turmoil and conflict to a position that allows one to inhabit all of the contradictory identities or choose where to engage. The mestiza consciousness allows Chicanas to accept these inconsistencies and find a different truth. The move towards *conocimiento* or understanding would come in the “form of spiritual inquiry, conocimiento reached via creative acts—writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism—both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as site of creativity (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 542).

A comparison of Anzaldúa's theories with Freire's yields interesting and dynamic similarities. The notion of spiritual transformation as the key to changing the consciousness of people struggling with oppressive living conditions elevates the critique of individual, group, and state relationships above the technical or legislative. Anzaldúa (2002b) challenged the notion that spirituality is a "devalued form of knowledge" (p. 4), and she believes it should be "elevated it to the same space occupied by science and rationality" (p. 4). Freire (1998) added, "What makes men and women ethical is their capacity to 'spiritualize' the world, to make it beautiful or ugly" (p. 53). Freire (1970) saw the struggle of individuals for justice as a search for completeness as they are "unfinished" (p. 72), and Anzaldúa (1999) wrote of the need for Chicana women to reach *conocimiento* or an understanding of who they are, as they struggle with *desconocimiento*.

Anzaldúa and Freire hold at the center of their theories possibility, as opposed to impossibility. All is possible through finding a new and different consciousness that will not reproduce flawed power relations. For Anzaldúa, Chicanas would not be transformed through appropriating the guise of white women or men in this society. Likewise, Freire spoke of the peasant who gains in position and recreates the oppressive relationships they had suffered. Both theorists further challenge their readers to move beyond ideas based around a universal or operationalized definition of justice. With hope and love as central tenets for Freire and Anzaldúa the challenge becomes transforming society by a spiritual and material transformation of the individual.

Similarities exist between Anzaldúa and Freire, but it would be simplistic to assume their theories were the same. Anzaldúa (1999) saw “language as a male discourse” (p. 54), and although Freire taught critical literacy, his early writings would have been seen as problematic because women were not ever mentioned as part of the problem or solution; in fact, he saw conscientization as a way for “men to enter the historical process as responsible subjects” (Freire, 1970, p. 20) without a mention of others. In Freire’s writings society would have seemed completely inhabited by men, since his writings seemed directed at the behaviors and lives of men. From his writings one can assume that Freire lacked a clear critique of the gendered effects of the role of men and women in creating inequality. Where Freire saw a critical consciousness based on an understanding of how economic mechanisms had silenced and controlled groups of people, Anzaldúa was able to articulate other power relationships that have profoundly affected the reproduction of inequality. She wrote, “Males make the rules and laws, women transmit them” (Anzaldúa 1997, p.16). Anzaldúa (2002b) was able to articulate and situate the power of gendered roles within oppressive cultural identities. Her writings strengthened the concept that human beings are simultaneously inhabiting complex and nuanced existences where essential identities are more than limiting. They are devastating if they are accepted without a critical deconstruction. A new consciousness emerged from Anzaldúa’s (2002b) writings urging women and men to find spiritual and coalitional approaches to transforming the world.

Differential Consciousness

We are ready for change.

Let us link hands and hearts
Together find a path through dark woods
Step through the doorways between two worlds
Leaving huellas for others to follow,
Build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes our
'home'
si se puede, que asi sea, so be it, estamos listas, vámonos.

Now let us shift. (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 576)

Chela Sandoval (2000) amplified the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and presented another alternative to a critical or mestiza consciousness. This oppositional consciousness came from the interactions and struggles of women of color with the hegemonic forces of American ideology. According to Sandoval (2000), these interactions have caused academia and American society to change as new discourses have been transformed by “voices of subordinated peoples” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 8). From the outset of her writings, Sandoval refuses to accept a viewpoint of deficit in regards to the struggle of marginalized people. From the beginning of her work, *The Methodology of the Oppressed*, there was a resistance to past attitudes that advanced notions that white, academic America was able to leave the battles unscathed or fundamentally unchanged by interactions with the shared realities of the *other* that contradicted ideological presentations of the goodness of being white or male. Sandoval (2000) believes that citizens must challenge American ideology by learning:

...to identify, develop, and control the means of ideology, that is, marshal the knowledge necessary to ‘break with ideology’ while at the same time *also*

speaking in, and from within, ideology, is an idea that lays the philosophical foundation enabling us to make the vital connections between the seemingly disparate social and political aims that drive, yet ultimately, divide social movements from within (p. 44).

This concept is reminiscent of Patricia Hill-Collins (2000/2009) “outsider within” (p. 13) where a woman of color’s position within society allows her to experience her own world while being able to step behind the “veil” (DuBois, 1903/2003, p. 3) and participate in a separate reality. Anzaldúa’s (1999) influence can be felt in this description of a “third” or alternative identity, which allows a subjugated person to move into a new space that can access the privilege of participation without losing one’s original identity. This new consciousness that allows for the simultaneous tenancy in various realities in order to have a strategic advantage in fighting oppressive conditions is called a “differential consciousness” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 44). Audre Lorde, as cited in Sandoval (2001), characterized the ability to move in and out of contradictory identities as a strength. She stated:

each and every, all tactical positionings are recognized as ‘a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativities spark like a dialectic. Only within that interdependency,’ each ideological position ‘acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate,’ along with ‘the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. (p. 60)

This new way of working toward change, or “differential consciousness” (Sandoval 2000, p. 63), allows for women to strategically move within groups that have

oppositional goals and not be destroyed by the contradiction. These “principled conversions” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 62) occur in order to ensure there is a movement towards new and just participation in society. In Mexican history the role of a woman that is able to strategically use her identities to move between groups has been seen as a *traición* or treasonous, yet a differential consciousness gives permission and validates what women must do to survive the violence of oppressive situations (Anzaldúa, 1999; Sandoval, 2000). According to Sandoval (2000), the differential consciousness is the culminating or linking consciousness of four other “modes” (p. 56) of oppositional consciousnesses.

Sandoval (2000) identified four types of oppositional consciousness women have possessed in the past and includes a new fifth “mode”(p. 56):

1. The equal rights (“liberal” and or “integrationist”) mode, which is based in the belief that all humans are created equal and deserve to be treated the same within the societal structures available.
2. The revolutionary (“socialist” and /or “insurgent”) mode, where justice for the disenfranchised cannot be achieved within the structure of society; in this mode there needs to be a fundamental shift in the social order.
3. The supremacist (or “cultural-nationalist”) mode, where the present systems are seen as inferior to another group’s perception of how the world should be; the supremacists believe they are morally superior to others and would provide a better society when in power.

4. The separatist mode, whereby a group has had enough of the present order. One no longer wants to integrate with society, or enter a revolution to change the present order; in this mode one just wants to separate and be with their own kind.
5. The newest mode of oppositional consciousness is the differential (or “womanist,” “mestiza,” “sister-outsider,” “third force,” “U.S. third world feminist...it has generated many different names) mode of oppositional consciousness and movement” (p. 58); differential consciousness allows for a woman to move in and out of the four previously stated modes, and use movement as “tactical weaponry for intervening in shifting currents of power.” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 58)

Like Anzaldúa, Sandoval presents differential consciousness as the power to choose where and when women engage in an identity. Sandoval (2000) cited Gayatri Spivak when referring to this activism as “strategic essentialism” (p. 61) or “tactical essentialism” (p. 62). These instances where one is able to live within an apparently contradictory space have to yield advances and changes in the social, material, or psychological condition of the individual woman. These interactions have to be entered into with the intent of occupying certain roles, “as a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism” with “a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak, 2005, p. 13). While ostensibly confusing some who hold loyalty and adherence to one identity as a guiding principle of justice, differential consciousness displaces that idea and helps guide women as they move through the modes of oppositional consciousness and identities. The

movement is not limited by entrenched loyalties and gives women the choice of which form of oppositional consciousness will best serve their needs.

In conjunction with a differential consciousness there is also a “differential oppositional movement” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 82). In order for marginalized people to change their present situation they have at their disposal five technologies or the “methodology of the oppressed” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 62). According to Sandoval (2000), the five technologies are:

1. Semiotics: Semiotics is the ability to recognize constructs of the oppressor’s culture. For women these signs range from shame of the shape of their body to the hue of their skin. The technology of semiotics allows individuals to see the creations that are in place to reify hegemony.
2. Deconstruction: From the development of an ability to recognize the “artifacts” (p. 86) of a repressive society one must then deconstruct their meaning.

The first two technologies are what Sandoval calls “inner” (p. 85) technologies where all action takes place within an individual. For women of color in the United States, an instance of deconstruction is the ability to find the political meaning of language that marginalizes and belittles their experience.

3. Meta-ideologizing: Meta-ideologizing is the process of appropriation and reinterpretation. In this technology oppressed people take control of the signs and artifacts of oppression of and reinvent them with meaning relevant to their reality.

4. Democratics: Democratics is the pursuit of “egalitarian social relations” (p. 83).

The fourth technology activates the movement towards activities in the pursuit of social justice.

5. Differential movement: is the technology, “through which the others, harmonically move.” (p. 84)

The last three outer technologies move from the development of consciousness to praxis where one cannot sit with new (and sometimes old) knowledge without action.

The technologies that Sandoval presented as the methodology of the oppressed represented the movement of consciousness and praxis from a linear understanding of stages to one that is fluid, dynamic, and political. Where American ideology is characterized as a continuum of liberal to conservative, these technologies destroy the mythology that one can only move in a linear fashion from right to left or from one ideological pole to the other. The differential movement serves as a new map that de-centers the myth that the symbols, stories, and realities of American life, that are perceived as natural and democratic, are creations with a purpose and consequence. This researcher believes that Sandoval’s (2000) *The Methodology of the Oppressed* unmistakably mirrors Freire’s (1970) *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; however, Sandoval is able to inject a Chicana feminist approach to consciousness that pays homage to Freire’s critical consciousness while presenting a challenge to how that consciousness was constructed or arrived at in his theories.

Methodology and Methods

We must build on our intuitions and submit them to methodological and rigorous analysis so that our curiosity becomes epistemological (Freire, 1989, p. 48).

Subordinate groups have long had to use alternative ways to create independent self-definitions and self-valuations and to articulate them through our own specialist (Hill-Collins, 2000/2009, p. 270).

Traditional qualitative methodologies are intrinsically androcentric and positivistic (Harding, 2004a). Women of color have fought to have an epistemic foothold in academia, only to have their knowledge claims dismissed for lacking objectivity (Haraway, 2004). Some feminist theorists have felt that academia has misrepresented the reality of being poor, of color, Queer, and/or female. Therefore, for this study a qualitative methodology that privileged the creation of knowledge from the perspective of Chicana/Latina women was chosen. For this reason Standpoint theory, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) were chosen as the best available methodology to represent the voice experience of women of color. Standpoint theory is based on the historical and social location of women's perspective. Because this project was completed with the assistance of Latina women and girls, CRT and LatCrit provided a theoretical lens that centered on race, culture, and gender when evaluating the reality of people of color. LatCrit supports CRT by further focusing issues of race on Latinas in the United States.

Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory is a direct challenge to Eurocentric, male concepts of objectivity. Developing a standpoint from the perspective of oppressed people gives a researcher an “epistemological, political, and scientific advantage” (Harding, 2004a, p. 8) over researchers who fail to account for alternative knowledge claims. A feminist standpoint represents a critique of not only the situation of the oppressed but of the oppressors as well. In terms of a critical perspective on social order, this theory gives a more complete account of the social relations that are not understood by the group in power. To Standpoint theorists, oppressors do not understand their *own* lives because they are unwilling or unable to understand the lives of others upon which their privilege rests. Standpoint theorists emerge from class/Marxist theories of historical materialism where social relationships and certain levels of consciousness are determined by access to the means of production. In this case, as women of color are dispossessed from the material means to participate in society, their knowledge claims are dismissed. Therefore a critique of the material reality of women of color unveils the processes that have marginalized them. Knowledge is socially and historically situated, and cannot be separated from the material reality of privilege. Therefore the value of certain kinds of knowledge can be traced to the privileging of hegemonic ideologies that maintain the material separation of different groups. In the United States these groups are separated by race and gender, and knowledge claims by marginalized groups are devalued in comparison to other forms of knowledge that may shed truth about their privilege.

Standpoint theory is political. Theorists who present a particular standpoint do not discount the fact that their perspective has a political agenda. On the contrary, it is the fact that standpoint theorists understand that it is political to make a knowledge claim that gives their perspective power. Harding wrote (2004a), “Political engagement rather than dispassionate neutrality, was necessary to gain access to the means to do research” (Harding, 2004a, p. 6). So why should standpoint researchers disregard how politics affected their right to make epistemic claims? According to standpoint theorists, the more one argues that they are neutral and objective, the more likely they are to maintain the present social order. “Political struggle develops insights” (p. 7) that render a more complete understanding of oppression.

By privileging the perspective of oppressed groups the knowledge created will yield a better understanding of inequality. Granting epistemic privilege to indigenous or oppressed peoples’ modes of knowledge reveals narratives that do not represent how academia packages their product. Standpoint theory is developed from the knowledge of oppressed peoples and for oppressed peoples; this means that “data” comes in the form of stories and allegories. For academics that have been trained in a certain manner there is resistance to accepting a less formal presentation of information. Harding (2004a) writes, “Philosophers and science theorists do not take kindly to being asked to think that such a ‘folk philosophy’ or ‘folk science’ has something to teach them” (Harding, 2004a, p. 3).

The challenge to Standpoint theory is that it is perceived as relativist and unscientific, because it supposedly lacks objectivity. Harding (2004a) wrote, “Some

critics ask if standpoint theory's focus on the importance of the experience of women and other oppressed groups ensures that it has abandoned the epistemological uses of the concepts of truth, objectivity, and good method" (p. 7). Standpoint theorists respond to this critique by stating that the data produced through the development of a standpoint possesses a "strong objectivity" (Harding, 2004b, p. 138) that proceeds from gathering information that is actually closer to the truth of oppression, than the theoretical musings of privileged individuals who are making claims from positions of power without actually understanding the lives they are writing about.

Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from legal studies about the role of race on juridical decisions, and has been applied to understanding the role of race in politics and education. According to CRT theorists, an explanation for educational inequity cannot be adequately understood with either class or gender as the primary modes of analysis (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The intersectionality of race with gender and class occurs, but gender theorists and class theorists have not been able to satisfactorily theorize race, and therefore have been unable to locate its importance when deconstructing the unequal treatment of people of color (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Critical Race Theory is based on six tenets:

1. CRT recognizes that racism has become normalized, pervasive, and a permanent part of American society.
2. CRT challenges claims of objectivity, neutrality, color-blindness, and merit by

majoritarian society and academia.

3. CRT challenges the notion of ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law and education.
4. CRT insists on the recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color when analyzing the law and society.
5. CRT is an interdisciplinary pursuit that will use political, economic, social theories to situate the role of race in inequality.
6. CRT works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression. (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lynn & Parker, 2006)

Following the six tenets of CRT during research can yield a critical account of how race has affected educational policy. Like Standpoint theorists, Critical Race theorists challenge the impartiality of present research and develop their analysis by using more than one discipline to present an alternative perspective based on the realities of people of color.

Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) theory extends the application of the aforementioned six tenets and adds the following four functions:

1. LatCrit addresses the production of knowledge specific to Latinas/os in the United States.
2. LatCrit works towards the advancement of transformation.
3. LatCrit understands the expansion and connection of oppressed peoples' struggle.

4. LatCrit will cultivate community and coalition with others (Fernandez, 2002).

The methods that emerge from these theoretical perspectives of Standpoint theory, CRT, and LatCrit are qualitative, and challenge the epistemic claims of positivist research. The critique of a white-supremacist academy and society are presented through the use of methods based in the narratives of the people affected by the inequality. The arguments are made through the use of counter-stories, which challenge master narratives of race and ethnicity, indigenous forms of expression (allegory, myth, fable, song, poem), critical portraiture that uses the perspective of people of color to reinterpret educational interactions, and the development of social, historical, and cultural standpoints privileging the perspective of oppressed groups (Chapman, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Duncan, 2002a; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 2006; Lynn, Yosso, Solorzano, & Parker, 2002; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002b; Taliaferro Baszile, 2008). These methods help frame and present the knowledge and perspectives of oppressed people, devoid of some of the restrictions of established academic practices.

The Practice of Teachers

Teachers are the practitioners of a liberatory pedagogy. Whether they are entrenched in the “banking” system of education where they are depositing facts or attempting to present a questioning curriculum, it is the individual teacher that will be the vessel for the transmission of ideologies. To Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/2000) there was no escaping the symbolic violence of the imposition of pedagogical authority by the

teacher. Teachers then have to become aware of their role in the “production” (Apple, 1995) and “reproduction” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/2000) of knowledge, identity, and culture. The ideology present in the hidden curriculum of American schools has not missed teachers (Bartolomé, 2004). It is therefore argued by critical theorists, that in order for any liberatory pedagogical endeavor to be effective, it must begin with individual teacher’s “political clarity” (Bartolomé, 2003; Freire, 2005, p. 14). Freire (2005) wrote, “The power of the dominant ideology is always domesticating, and when we are touched and deformed by it we become ambiguous and indecisive” (p. 11). For teachers in urban settings who have struggled with the “domesticating” nature of public education, the development of their conscientization and that of their students has resonated because of critical dialogue grounded in their material and spiritual reality (Acosta, 2007; Arce, 2004; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003; Watts et al., 2002; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Freire (1998) represented a voice for educators who still believe in the possibility of transformation and justice through schools. While derided as utopian, the pedagogical journey that unveils itself for progressive educators is fraught with the hope of an improved reality for disenfranchised children and marginalized teachers (Freire, 1992/2009). His theories are only a starting point. As feminist theorists point out, the road to liberation is not the same for everyone (Anzaldúa, 2002a; Harding, 2004a). The social location of oppression calls for a different understanding of accomplishing change beyond an adjustment to the temporary material reality of disenfranchised individuals and communities.

Freire (1970) understood that liberation was more than a technical issue. The process of liberating oppressed people extended to the realm of the spiritual. The liberation of the corporal comes from the liberation of the spiritual. It is in some sense the romanticized revolutionary thinking that presents something outside of us as being more important than ourselves. Yet it is the thinking of most parents and critical teachers. It is a collective consciousness that understands that while some will have it better than others in the short run, in the long run one will lose if oppression continues to produce new oppressors. Schools trying to find a technical solution to the unequal treatment and outcomes of their endeavors in curricular solutions have failed to grasp that transformation only occurs with the humanization of the oppressed students, and humanization is not found in a textbook (Giroux, 2001). Freire (1997) wrote, “One has to believe that if men and women created the ugly world that we are denouncing, then men and women can create a world that is less discriminatory and more humane” (p. 314). This study examined how some Latina educators used alternative spaces in an attempt to humanize students through critical exercises that will enable Latina students to critically question the available roles for women in the United States.

Summary

The literature supported the effectiveness of conscientization at changing the material reality of marginalized students. By understanding their positionality, disenfranchised students can resist oppressive practices. Critical pedagogy has effectively been able to deconstruct how schools have perpetrated the oppression while

also providing a place for newfound knowledge to help liberate students. Yet, there has been little support for the use of alternative or informal spaces in developing critical consciousness. This study focused on the interactions between teachers and students in spaces outside of curricular control.

Freire is perceived as the father of critical pedagogy. Many other educators have used his constructs to engage students in activities that help them develop a critical consciousness. However, there has been a critique of Freire by feminists including Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore. Their critique of a universal oppression has created a discourse where the nature of said oppression is called into question. Unfortunately, many of the feminists in academia fail to account for their own limitations in regards to identifying their own privilege or oppressive practices. This has led to a defense of Freire by feminists of color such as bell hooks and a revisiting of issues about whom exactly has the power to define conscientization.

Black feminists and Chicana feminists have presented an additional critique of Freire, but also of how academia “studies” oppressed groups. Patricia Hill-Collins and Sandra Harding have presented a critique of conscientization that is socially, historically, and culturally located. Additionally, Standpoint theory has emerged as an alternative methodology to the traditional means of study employed by established academia. Chicana feminists like Gloria Anzaldúa and Chela Sandoval have additionally presented a perspective on consciousness that further challenges the notion that a singular, easily identifiable, consciousness exists.

The methodologies that best supported the research question were CRT, LatCrit, and Standpoint theory. Chapter III will explain how these methodologies, along with qualitative methods yielded data to answer how Latina teachers used alternative spaces to develop a critical consciousness in their students.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise. (Angelou, 1978/1986, p. 154)

Introduction

This qualitative study examined how some Latina teachers at Anzaldúa Middle School (AMS) were able to transform an after-school club, lunchtime meetings, and a daylong conference into opportunities for Latina students to reexamine their role and position in their family, culture, and American society, and develop a critical awareness or consciousness. Latinas face many challenges within American public schools. They are a marginalized group that has struggled to overcome the effects of practices that have created entrenched cycles of poverty and educational failure (Gandara and Contreras 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). Educators have labored to find an approach to educating children of color that delivers societal change through academic success (Apple, 1995; hooks, 2010). Unfortunately for Latina/o students many of the approaches employed by public schools are dehumanizing as schools fail to account for economic realities and students' cultural values (Valenzuela, 1999).

Some educators have gravitated toward the work of Paulo Freire and other critical pedagogues. Freire's work has been used by educators in the United States to inform their practice and engage students in critical activities. Teachers in economically disadvantaged communities have found Freire's emancipatory message meaningful as

conditions in urban schools have deteriorated. Schools in poor neighborhoods have become politically contested terrain where a curriculum that stresses results on standardized tests has forced educators to find informal spaces to develop a critical consciousness in their students. Freire (1970) wrote of the liberatory possibilities of *conscientização* or conscientization for people who have learned how to identify oppression and “critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation” (p. 32). Teachers at AMS want to create a new situation for their students so they created an after-school club to help adolescent Latinas critically recognize the factors that affect their lives.

This study examined the alternative physical and emotional spaces created within AMS by Latina teachers for female students. According to Gutierrez (2008), informal educational spaces are defined as all of the opportunities aside from curriculum where teachers have interactions with their students. Conscientization can help female students process and interpret their positionality within their family, school, and American society. The researcher contends that the activities created by Latina teachers at AMS challenged the young women of the Girls Only Club (GOC) in a safe environment that fostered conditions that allowed students to feel accepted and heard. Thus began the process of transforming their realities by engaging in dialogue, praxis, reflection, and eventually leading to conscientization.

Through the use of traditional methods of data gathering including observations, informal conversations, and interviews, the researcher was able to employ critical methodologies to answer the research question: How do Latina teachers use informal

educational spaces to create opportunities for students to develop a critical consciousness?

Research Design

It was imperative that the voices of the participants in this study were conveyed in a manner that would give a proper presentation to their unique perspective. Historically the voices of people of color, and particularly women of color, have been excluded and derided as meaningless by the majority of academia (Haraway, 2004; Harding, 2004a; Hartsock, 1998; Hill-Collins, 2000/2009; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). This has been especially true of quantitative methodologies that have failed to capture the complexity and richness of the experiences of women of color. For this reason, this study was conducted using critical qualitative methodologies and methods.

Qualitative research methods are based in the lived realities of the participants and therefore are better suited to gather, interpret, and present the experiences of the women in this study. Marginalized groups depend on a methodology that can capture the nuances of their struggle and this is best accomplished through the use of methodologies and methods that are sensitive to data rich narratives (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Critical qualitative methodologies and methods were employed in this particular study because:

Traditionally conducted social science research has silenced many groups marginalized and oppressed in society by making them the passive object of inquiry. Those espousing critical perspective have developed research strategies

that are openly ideological, empowering, and have democratizing goals (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 4).

CRT, LatCrit, and Standpoint theory were used to interpret the gathered data. Findings were presented using counter-story telling, a method that has been used in educational research by CRT and LatCrit (Chapman, 2007; Fernandez, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). These critical theories guided data collection. The data was then used to create a standpoint specific to the lives of the participants in the study. The standpoint was then used to guide the presentation of the counter-stories (See Figure 1).

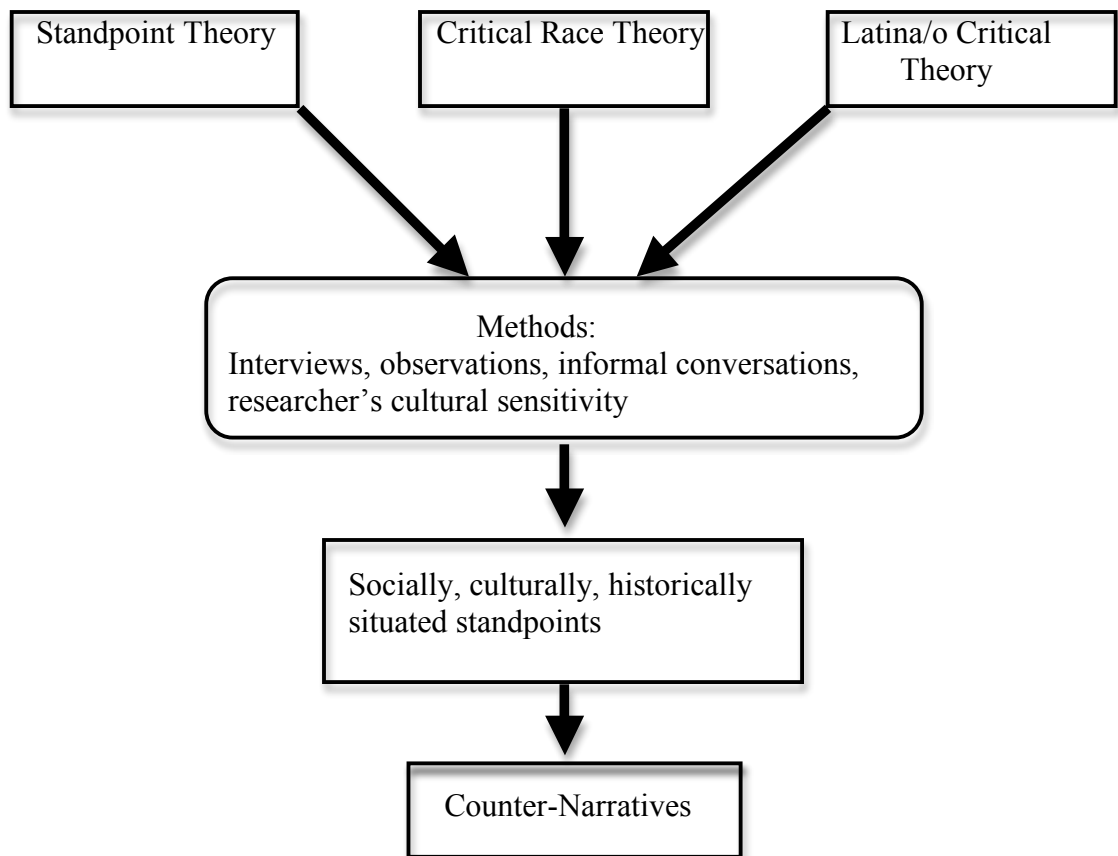


Figure. 1: Methods and methodologies

Counter-stories, or counter-narratives, as a method, begin with the collected data and create an alternative explanation to the master-narrative that has been invented to marginalize people of color (Cruz, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Gathering of the data, interpreting the information, and presenting the findings were done using qualitative methods and methodologies because other research methods would not adequately answer the research question.

Research Question

There is one research question guiding this qualitative study:

How do Latina teachers use informal educational spaces to create opportunities for Latina students to develop a critical consciousness?

Site Selection

This study was conducted at Anzaldúa Middle School (AMS). AMS was selected for this qualitative research study because it holds a yearly conference for adolescent girls and their mothers, and has an after-school club. This club is called the GOC. At this site a group of girls from the local high school have formed a sister club named Club Athena that comes and participates with the AMS Girls Only Club. The researcher is employed at the school and was granted access to conduct research by the participating teachers and students.

AMS is a large middle school in Southern California with over 2,000 students. It is divided into a sixth grade school and a seventh/eighth grade school with each side having its own principal. This middle school was once the local high school. Two small charter high schools accommodate approximately 800 high school students from the

more than 2300 that are of high school age. AMS is considered a segregated school in an ethnically and economically segregated neighborhood (Orfield & Lee, 2005). According to the AMS 2008 School Accountability Report Card (SARC), 81% of AMS students qualify for either free or reduced lunch. The student body consists of 96% Latina/o students, and over 85% are English language learners (ELL) and receive instruction in English Language Development (ELD). Over half of the faculty and over 75% of the classified staff are Latino/a. This number of certificated Latinas/os working at this site is much higher than Los Angeles County's percentage of teachers (Southern California Consortium on Research in Education, 2006). The participants in the study are from AMS and one of the local charter high schools.

AMS has a yearly conference for young women to attend called Latinas In Action (LIA); this translates into Latina women in action. LIA began five years ago as an idea of four female employees at AMS. The conference initially was for eighth grade female students only, but has grown to include seventh grade students as well. The 2009 conference was the first to include students' mothers as part of the activities. As of 2010 over 700 attendees had attended the conference in the preceding five years.

The conference is comprised of a full day of activities and workshops for seventh and eighth grade female students and their mothers; the workshops range from Yoga to domestic violence. The purpose of the conference is to increase awareness among "at-risk" female adolescents, and empower them to become their own advocates. The conference is organized by female teachers at AMS, volunteers, administrators, and staff.

Volunteers and presenters come from the community and many of the local agencies servicing young women in the greater Los Angeles area.

The conference has been effective at informing teachers, parents, and students of some of the difficulties that female adolescents face by raising awareness among female students. However, for many of the participants this once a year event has not given the teachers and students enough time to continue to work toward maintaining this awareness. As a result some of the teachers involved with LIA created the GOC, for female students and teachers to discuss issues ranging from body image to access to higher education. In addition to conference participants, other girls have been identified by the organizing teachers and invited to participate in the GOC. Although teachers coordinate the agendas and locations for the gatherings, it is the high school students from one of the local charter high schools who frequently execute the meetings. These high school students have participated in past conferences. Their presence creates a community of women and adolescents, which includes participants from most, if not all, conferences.

Participants

All participants in the study were from AMS and Anzaldúa Polytechnic Academy (APA). The participants in the study were all female and Latina. The teachers ranged in ages from 29 to 38 and the students from 10 to 17 years of age. Two middle school teachers and approximately eight students in two focus groups were interviewed.

The researcher secured permission from the principal and sponsoring teachers to enter the research space (see appendix A). The teachers were selected for this study

because they had taken it upon themselves to create a club on campus that identified and mentored girls deemed in need of attention above and beyond academics. The female students participating in the focus groups were self-selected from the GOC and Club Athena. A presentation was given to the whole group and those students that returned permission slips were interviewed.

The researcher personally contacted the teachers participating in the research study. Ms. Hernandez and Ms. Vasquez were the teachers that planned and calendared the dates for all meetings. There were approximately 50 girls in the club consisting of middle school and high school students. Permission to be observed and interviewed was requested by the researcher (see appendix A). The two participating teachers then identified and contacted any students who wished to participate in the study. The researcher secured informed consent forms from parents and students prior to the formation of the focus groups (see appendix B). The purpose of the study and research question was shared with participants, and they were given an opportunity to withdraw. The researcher explained to all participants they would be taking part in a study examining how Latina teachers were working with Latina students in spaces outside of the classroom, and how their participation in the after-school club had affected their lives. Of specific interest was whether and how participation in the GOC had changed the way they viewed themselves, the world, school, and family.

Entry

Permission to enter and conduct research was granted by the principal of AMS (see appendix C). Entry to the research site was facilitated through the development of

relationships by the researcher with the participants as a volunteer, friend, colleague, and teacher. The LIA conference and GOC is offered only to girls. Being male, observations and access to the LIA conference for the researcher was limited to the planning meetings, conversations with presenters/volunteers, and the opening and closing ceremonies. However, for the after-school activities, the researcher was granted access to all sessions and planning meetings of the GOC. The principal of the school, the students in the club, and the participating teachers granted the researcher entry into the research setting.

Ethical Considerations

Findings for the study are presented through counter-stories. Counter-stories present alternatives to the master narrative through the creation of stories to demonstrate a collective experience (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002b). Participants were made aware of the purpose of the study. In addition, an example of a counter-story was shared by the researcher in order for them to hear how their interviews and observations would be used to create a *mélange* of experiences to form a single narrative. When pertinent experiences were identified, the researcher again asked for permission from the participants to share a particular or specific experience. The participants were reassured that although the experience may be specific to a single person, it would be attributed to a composite representation.

Being a teacher to some of the student participants and a colleague to the participating teachers, the researcher made clear from the beginning of the research process that participation was voluntary. This statement was reiterated throughout the

project and the participants were given the opportunity to decline further involvement at different junctures. After permission was granted to enter the research space by the administrator and participating teachers, the students were asked for permission by the teachers and researcher to attend the GOC meetings. The girls unanimously granted permission. If the topic of a meeting was regarding a subject that may have made the students uncomfortable by the presence of the researcher, they were asked again for permission. Students had the right to exclude the researcher from observing any activity that may have made them feel uncomfortable and yet they did not. However, the researcher was playfully threatened by one student about sharing any information from the meeting, “Don’t say nothing to anybody Mr. Martin, we know where you teach!”

Prior to the interview process participants were made aware that interviews would be recorded and transcribed using false names. Students were told that participation in the project would neither help nor hurt their grades. Participants had the choice of opting out of any interview or interview questions. During the interview process the students were reassured their participation in the focus groups in no way was connected to grades, and their statements would be confidential and attributed in the writings through the use of pseudonyms to a composite character created as a combination of all of the girls that had been interviewed. Likewise, teachers’ statements were not shared with administrators and would also be attributed in the dissertation through a pseudonym. Participants were continuously reminded they had the right not to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable. Some declined to answer, but most shared freely.

They were also reminded they could withdraw from the research project at any time, but they did not withdraw.

Interview transcripts were made accessible to participants and were told they could add or delete any statement to help clarify their intent or meaning. This was vital to the project because the researcher wanted to gather information as close to the implied meaning as possible.

Data Collection Methods

Data for this study was collected in three ways. First, through observations in the field conducted during the meetings of the GOC, which occurred monthly between September 2010 and November 2010. Second, interviews of the participating teachers and two focus groups of students were carried out by the researcher. Teachers were formally interviewed three times during the research window and participated in many informal conversations regarding the topic throughout the year. The students participated in two different focus groups that convened only once. The first focus group consisted of five middle-school students from the GOC and occurred in November of 2010. The second focus group was comprised of four high-school seniors from the local charter school and also took place in November 2010. All interviews and focus groups were audio taped to ensure accuracy of all statements. Lastly, a document review of formal and informal artifacts assisted the researcher in triangulating findings from observations and interviews.

Observations occurred in two settings. The first was in the sponsoring teacher's classroom after school. The second setting was at the yearly LIA conference.

All semi-structured interviews took place in each participating teacher's classroom. The teacher's interviews focused on three areas of interest: their background, their educational experiences, and the GOC.

The documents reviewed for the research consisted of public records from school and district publications. Formal documents consisted of questionnaires created by the teachers for GOC participants sharing their opinions on the meetings. Informal documents including handouts, poems, teacher journals, and student-created work were also reviewed.

Interviews

The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanation (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 1). The majority of the data for this study was gathered through the use of formal, semi structured interviews. Interviews present the best approximation of a participant's feelings or opinions about a given phenomena (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Hatch (2002) wrote, "Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures that participants make to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds" (p. 91).

Interviews provide the most meaningful information in developing the particular standpoint and counter-story. Interviews for this research were formal and semi-structured in that they did follow a set of scripted questions, but were initially led by the researcher (Hatch, 2002). Initial questions were about the role of the GOC in their lives and background demographic questions. However, additional questions came in response

to information that was provided by the participant. As more interviews with teachers occurred, themes emerged and were examined in order to provide insight or direction for future interviews and questions.

Participating teachers were interviewed three times over a three-month period (September 2010 to November 2010). The participants were asked introductory, open-ended questions that elicited stories or narrative. As themes developed the interviews formed emerging patterns.

The interviews were divided into three sections: First, the teachers were asked about general demographic information about themselves and their family. Second, they were asked about their own educational experiences and the role of schools in their lives and their motivation for starting an after-school club for girls. Lastly, questions were asked about the choice of themes for each meeting and the desired outcome of each exercise. The initial questions led toward additional questions tailored to each participant's particular experiences.

Each teacher was interviewed three times over this period. In addition, two focus group sessions of students were held. One focus group was composed of five middle school students and the other of four high school students. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Any recorded audio and/or video were examined only by the researcher and used only to transcribe narratives and responses. Once the interviews were transcribed, the audio recordings were erased. All participants under the age of 18 had signed permission forms on file indicating informed consent on their part and the part of their parents.

Observations and Field Notes

Marshall and Rossman (1999) define observations as, “the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting” (p. 107). For the purposes of this study, the majority of the observations took place in one classroom at AMS. During the observations the researcher sat quietly to the side and did not participate in any of the proceedings within the meetings. Observation of meetings occurred during the research window of September 2010 to November 2010. The club met monthly on Fridays from 2:45 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., for a total of four observations.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) recommended beginning with a holistic approach to noting the behaviors exhibited by participants, then moving toward a more specific focus as themes emerged. The researcher used the field notes to create interview questions as themes emerged from the meetings. Field notes were written after meetings because it was apparent that writing during the meeting was a distraction. Students kept looking over to see what was being written every time the researcher wrote a note in his notebook. One student finally asked, “What do you think you can learn from us?” I responded that I wanted to observe how the teachers planned the meetings and how I could learn to be a better teacher. Notes were written in a notebook. The notebook also contained all handouts given by the teachers to the students. There were also copies of student poems and questionnaires that were given to the researcher by the participating teachers.

Document Review

Written documents were analyzed using content analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Content analysis is a “method for describing and interpreting the artifacts of a society or social group” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 117). The artifacts were studied in order to support the emergent themes. Content analysis allowed the researcher to access forms of communication between students and teachers of the GOC in an unobtrusive manner.

The documents reviewed for the research consisted of public records including the School Accountability Report Card (SARC). Formal documents consisted of questionnaires given by the participating teachers of the GOC to gauge opinions about the effectiveness of their participation. Informal documents consisted of meeting handouts, poems, song lyrics, teacher journals, and student-created artwork. Students also produced various projects during the year, and the researcher had access to some of the artifacts created by the students.

Emergent Themes

As interviews and observations proceeded, themes emerged. Marshall and Rossman (1999) described how themes are generated in qualitative research. They wrote, “The process of category generation involved noting patterns evident in the setting and expressed by participants. As categories of meanings emerge, the researcher searches for those that have internal convergence and external divergence” (p. 154). According to the authors these themes must be consistent while being distinct from one another. The emergent themes in this study were labeled using “analyst-constructed typologies”

(Patton, 1990, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999) as the researcher imposed the labels for each theme.

During interviews, observations, and informal conversations, there emerged some expected and unexpected findings. Findings consisted of three expected themes, one unexpected major theme, and three subthemes. The major theme was the existence of a matrix of connection. The three subthemes were; first, how crisis and trauma shaped each participant's matrix of connection; second, how majoritarian practices affect a Latina's "brown body" (Cruz, 2001) and how they play out as point of connection; and lastly, the role of the fathers in the participants' lives and their connections to other women. The themes and subthemes were shared with the study's participants for added validity.

Coding

Once themes were generated, recordings of each interview were transcribed and printed. These transcripts were read and reread to find statements or descriptions that supported the emergent themes. Each statement was underlined according to the theme being analyzed. Each theme was given a code according to a key word that described the findings in this study, such as connection, praxis, dialogue, transformation, body, father, or trauma (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Saldaña (2009) described this method of coding as "descriptive" or "topic" (p. 70) coding. Once the statements were coded, new documents were created in a digital format that contained statements to evidence each theme. The new documents consisted of supporting statements for each emergent theme and were used to develop the counter-stories in chapter four.

Ensuring Credibility and Validity

Through the use of the literature, observations, conversations, formal interviews, and the researcher's cultural background, a standpoint emerged to help answer the research question. The standpoint was used to help guide the presentation of the counter-stories. Counter-narratives were then developed using the experiences of the participants. Standpoint theorists would argue that any knowledge garnered through the development of a standpoint is in fact more valid and reliable (Haraway, 2004; Harding 2004b). By "starting off thought" (Harding, 2004b, p. 128) or inquiry from the position of Latina teachers and students, as opposed to the generally accepted methodologies that posit a male, Eurocentric ideal as the epitome of science, this research presented the voice of the participants with less interference than those from traditional methodologies that have devalued the experience of marginalized people.

Knowledge from a developed standpoint better describes the positionality of oppressed people because it possesses a "strong objectivity" (Haraway, 2004, p. 129) developed through the rigorous and demanding task of understanding and presenting a particular standpoint. Having been a teacher for 15 years, the professional experience of the researcher was used to give some context to the educational settings and experiences used in the study. Even by traditional standards of validity and reliability in qualitative studies, critical theorists have argued that findings elicited from the development of a standpoint present better science. This is due to the process of collecting narratives in order to materialize a standpoint, as any information elicited was gathered through an intimate process of interview and observation that produced renderings more closely

connected to the realities of the participants (Harding, 2004b, Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Being a bilingual and biliterate Chicano, the researcher used his personal experience and “theoretical sensitivity” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 476) to develop questions as interviews proceeded.

Reflexivity

The researcher is a bilingual, biliterate, first-generation, Chicano male who was raised in the same type of neighborhood and attended schools similar to the one used in the study. As such, a certain level of expertise on oppression and privilege based on class and race was developed from the life experience of the researcher. The situated knowledge of the researcher was used as the construct through which to interpret past research on Latinas/os and education. This resulted in a failure, or a blind spot, that caused the researcher to ignore the privilege of being male. In the same way that mainstream science does not understand the standpoint of oppressed people and has devalued their experience, being unaware of the benefits of male privilege can obfuscate the role of gender in oppression. In a study where it is pivotal to understand how gender and power interact, there was a need for the researcher to be aware of said privilege.

The participating teachers, who were colleagues and friends, helped the researcher to see some of the effects of privilege not readily apparent. Through many informal conversations regarding culture, language, gender, class, race, *machismo*, power dynamics, etc...many fruitful insights were developed that allowed the researcher to have a regular reality check that formed and instructed the research and the person. Their

participation became instruction for the researcher, as their generosity informed the man as well as the project.

Feedback to Participants

Member-checking assisted the researcher in making inferences from interviews and observation as participants were able to comment, change, or delete any data that was not consistent with their intended meaning (Hatch, 2002). Member-checking is a method used by researchers to include participants while examining data to insure reliability. The use of counter-narratives as a method depends on the accurate representation of experiences and effect. In order for the researcher to generate meaningful and critical counter-stories, reliance on the participants was needed to help guide the research through a feedback loop where emergent themes and findings were discussed with them as the counter-narratives were created. While this was an added burden on the participants, without a constant reevaluation of meaning, opportunities for misinterpretation could have developed. Participants were given access to all transcripts from their interviews and had opportunities to enhance, change, or delete responses they felt did not accurately reflect what they were trying to convey. The participating teachers were instrumental in the creation of the counter-stories. Their input was invaluable as they gave feedback on the “voice” being used in the counter-stories. Working at the same site allowed the researcher to share the findings as they emerged. Prior to final submission of the dissertation, participants had an opportunity to read and comment on the counter-narratives in Chapter IV of the research project.

Data Analysis Methodology

Solorzano and Yosso (2002b) identified three kinds of counter-stories or counter-narratives. There are personal stories, or narratives, that are biographical and rely on the voice of the researcher to analyze and challenge the status quo. The second type of counter-story is called “other people’s stories” (p. 33) and use the narratives of any marginalized group, shared through observation, interview, or conversation, as the basis of analysis. Lastly, composite stories or narratives are formed from bits and pieces of information, affect, experience, etc... that have been gathered throughout the life of the researcher as well as the research process for a study. For this study, the researcher used the third type of narrative to analyze and present the findings. Derrick A. Bell Jr. (2000) most eloquently wrote of the “invention” (p. 71) of identity, history, and reality when stories are created and distributed as knowledge and the use of counter-inventions or narratives as means of resistance.

The creation of the counter-story becomes the methodology for the analysis of collected data (Delgado, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002b). The physical act of creating a counter-story necessitates that raw data or narratives be examined and reexamined for the emergent themes and experiences that will bring about an accounting of reality based in the perspective of the “outgroup” (Delgado, 2000, p. 60). As the counter-story is composed, the creation of an alternative explanation for phenomena is formed through continuous repartee between the master narratives and those of the marginalized. The created reality that has gone generally unchallenged is now examined as unnatural and

contrived (Bell Jr., 2000). Delgado (2000) wrote, “stories create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understandings, and meanings” (p. 60).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002a) realized their counter-stories by analyzing various sources of data. They determined that the process of developing a counter-narrative necessitated collecting data through traditional qualitative sources, such as interviews and observation. Also, previous literature (both from the majoritarian and critical perspectives) yielded direction and insights on how to approach the topic. The professional experience of the researcher also contributed a particular expertise that informed the counter-story. For example, the research conducted for this study was situated in a school setting with middle school teachers and students. The researcher has been a middle-school teacher for 13 years and has taught at the research site for 12 years. This experience allowed the researcher to possess specific knowledge that assisted him in identifying pertinent themes and topics. Lastly, the personal experience or “theoretical sensitivity” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 476) of the researcher was also used to determine the emergent and pertinent experiences and narratives that were included in the counter-stories. The research was about Latinas. Being a Latino, the researcher could use insights based in culture, economic, and racial experiences to identify meaningful forms of knowledge that resonated (Delgado-Bernal & Villapando, 2002).

The cultural intuition of the researcher became a strength, not a limitation, in the analysis and formation of counter-stories (Delgado-Bernal & Villapando, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002a). The use of counter-narratives to examine data allowed for a

voice generally not heard in academia to come to the foreground and displace popular notions about what is accepted as natural or commonplace.

Methodology

Because I, a *mestiza*,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan
simultáneamente.
(Anzaldúa, 1997, pg. 75-76)

Standpoint Theory

Anzaldúa's (1997) poetry speaks to the social forces that constantly push and pull Latinas as they negotiate their reality within the United States. In order to capture the complex and nuanced intersecting forces that form the Latina identity, a critical methodological lens that did not have epistemological limits on what is considered meaningful or valid knowledge was necessary (Denner, 2001; hooks, 1994). Standpoint theory was employed to guide the research and data collection, as the strength of this particular methodology was derived from being grounded in the unique experience of people marginalized by their ethnicity or gender in the United States (Duncan, 2005; Harding, 2004; Heilman, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002b). Though many qualitative methodologies could have been selected, Standpoint theory in particular serves the purpose of helping to understand and develop a perspective that is socially and historically situated in the material realities of the participants. Traditional research designs start from the perspective of the researcher or predetermined theoretical

constructs. However, Standpoint theory begins the research process, or starts off thought, from the perspective of the people being studied. The basic assumption that knowledge has to be garnered or developed through a positivist male scientific process has come into question by Standpoint theorists (Haraway, 2004; Harding, 2004a; Hartsock, 1998). What has been considered women's "folk knowledge" (Harding, 2004a, p. 3), and not valued in the past, is presented as an epistemological challenge to a Eurocentric male perspective of knowledge production.

Standpoint theorists have asserted that stories and narratives, which have been derided as unscientific or incapable of possessing epistemic worth in the objective world of social science, are not only as meaningful as accepted data, but are more so because this knowledge is created and presented without the artifice of impartial objectivity (Harding, 2004). As Marshall and Rossman (1999) asserted, a methodology that embraces an emancipatory or democratic approach does not disqualify the gathered data as meaningless. The stories are the data, and research shows that the stories convey a wealth of information regarding the opinions and feelings of the participants (Hatch, 2002; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The creation of a standpoint can be achieved through the use of traditional methods including interviews, observation, and document review. The difference between Standpoint and other methodologies is the interpretation and presentation of the data. Data gathered through traditional qualitative methods yielded insights that helped shape the counter-stories used in the presentation of the data. The data used to create the Standpoint, which guided the

counter-stories, represented the experiences of Latinas in Lincoln City participating in the after school clubs at the middle school.

Standpoint theory privileges the voice of the oppressed (Haraway, 2004). The vast majority of research elevates the voice of the academician above others. The effects of university researchers' defining the meaning of phenomena has been that epistemic privilege is granted to someone who has come into the reality of another, with preconceived notions as to the nature of knowledge and its creation. Standpoint theorists have viewed the voice of women, who are marginalized and seen as inconsequential by majoritarian society, as representing the source for the most accurate rendition of their reality, but also of those above in the social hierarchy (Hill-Collins, 2009/2000). It is argued by Hill-Collins (2009/2000) that it is the "outsider within" (p. 13) who experiences not only their own reality, but also has access to a unique perspective on power as they are sometimes seen as invisible by a society that devalues their existence. This invisibility allows women of color to be perceived as non-threatening and releases white men and women to speak and act as if they are alone. Thus, the "invisible" is privy to the uncensored of the privileged.

Sandra Harding presented Standpoint theory as an "organic epistemology" (2004, p.3), one that emerges from oppressed people in need of presenting their unique perspective. Though initially developed as a Black feminist theory, the development of a standpoint has emerged in other oppressed groups as a means of presenting and valuing their experiences (Martinez, 2005). Development of a Standpoint is achieved through an examination of "class, gender, race, or imperialism in the world around us to observe

how different ‘locations’ in such relations tend to generate distinctive accounts of nature and social relations” (Harding, 2004, p. 257). Through observation and interview the researcher was able to compose a Standpoint that examined the reasons for the need to develop a critical consciousness in Latina girls as well as a rationale for teachers to address this need outside of the regular school day.

Latinas who work with adolescent girls possess a socially situated perspective on how power is manifested in their school, and the participants are uniquely able to critique the social processes that account for the need for a “third space” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 148) in order to engage in discussions surrounding inequity and justice. The GOC was determined to be a place where teachers were identifying and connecting with Latina girls that were in need of support and direction.

Standpoint theory best serves the examination of how identity, consciousness, and knowledge were produced at AMS. The premise of developing a Standpoint was that the narratives provided by Latina teachers and students indicated the underlying determinants of marginalization that cannot be explained solely by race, class, gender, culture, or sexuality, but by a complex web of all of these. Hill-Collins (2009/2000) wrote, “In the United States, such domination has occurred through schools, housing, employment, government, and other social institutions that regulate the actual patterns of intersecting oppression...” (p. 246). Oppression can be explained as a matrix composed of all these aspects of the participant’s existence.

Researchers have sometimes fallen into the trap of essentializing the experience of women of color, yet some critics like Hill-Collins have been able to deconstruct a

binary vision of oppression and move past explanations based on a “dichotomous oppositional difference” (2004, p.110) toward a more complete and complex “matrix of domination” (2009/2000, p. 246) situated in the many factors of particular experiences. Standpoint theory gives space for race, class, gender, sexuality, and other possibilities for understanding oppression to emerge.

In order to transform oppressive situations, Freire (1970) saw the development of a critical consciousness as a necessity for liberation. Standpoint theory works hand in hand with notions surrounding critical consciousness, in that it is dependent on women critically examining the social and political forces that perpetuate oppression (Hartsock, 1998). Since transformation is critical to the development of a critical consciousness, examining the actions, words, and stories of the women participating in the research is best represented through a methodology that can capture the development of ideas surrounding oppression (Hatch, 2002; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

According to Standpoint theorists, in order to understand the causes of oppression:

‘implicitly it is insisted that feminists’ concerns could not be restricted to what are usually regarded as only social or political issues, but instead must be focused on every aspect of natural and social orders, including the very standards for what counts as knowledge, objectivity, rationality, and good scientific method.

(Harding, 2004, p. 2)

By eschewing the premise that research is objective and embracing the reality of a distinctly political research lens, developing a standpoint directly challenges traditional notions of validity and reliability in the social sciences (Haraway, 2004). While this departure from accepted scientific norms is problematic under traditional (e.g. Eurocentric male) forms of science, it frees the researcher from the constraints that have delegitimized the creation of knowledge by those known as the “subaltern” (Spivak, 2005, p. 475) or the powerless and voiceless. This researcher believed the young women should be described as subaltern, as they were geographically isolated in a segregated community and through inadequate schooling did not have access to the hegemonic discourse.

Standpoint theory is a useful methodology because it emerges and extends from a feminist Marxist critique of the role of women in society (Hartsock, 1998). A feminist Marxist critique allows for a more complete contextual presentation of the research, as feminist Marxists have been able to deconstruct how assigned roles around gender have affected the material reality of women in society. However, a Marxist analysis of the conditions causing the subjugation of people is not sufficient. The trilogy of class, race, and gender are used to explain the oppression and marginalization of women, yet these constructs cannot stand alone in explaining the persistence of inequity (Chapman, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Hill-Collins, 2000/2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McLaren, 2005; Sandoval, 2000).

Past research has concentrated on race, class, or ethnicity, along with gender, to situate the causes for oppression. Standpoint theory posits that struggle creates a

particular kind of knowledge and ties this “epistemic privilege” (Harding, 2004, p. 9) to a critical awareness of a group’s positionality in society (Harding, 2004; Hill-Collins, 2000/2009). Though CRT and LatCrit are included in the study for their methods, it must be noted that they contribute to the development of a Standpoint while having some limitations alone. Although CRT and LatCrit theories are intertwined with many overlapping tenets, they posit the centrality of race and racism in the oppression of people of color. In order to develop an effective standpoint the research must move beyond centering race or ethnicity to a more fluid explanation of a socially situated set of oppressive conditions. The methods must be tailored to the material reality of the women in the study.

Presentation of Findings

“...for the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

(Lorde, 2007/1984, p. 110)

Counter-stories or narratives, were used to present the praxis of Latina teachers and their students. Duncan (2005) wrote that counter-narratives “provide powerful counter-points to challenge the existing narratives that shape how we understand the post-Civil Rights schooling experiences and outcomes of students of colour” (p. 101). Counter stories and narratives offered the most appropriate means of presenting the unique standpoint of the Latina teachers and students in this study. Counter-narratives pose an inherent challenge to how accepted reality is constructed (Chapman, 2007; Delgado, 2000; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Duncan, 2005; Heilman, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002b). Delgado (2000) wrote, “stories, parables,

chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset—the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourses take place” (p. 61). The use of a narrative to describe the realities faced by women allowed the researcher to present “a ... Women’s situation in the context of her...setting and encourages the reader to acknowledge both her complexity and her humanity” (Heilman, 1998, p. 184). Stories were the newspaper, the history books, and the bible for Latinas/os as the transfer of knowledge, socialization, and politicization, occurred through *cuentos* (Anzaldúa, 1999; Marsiglia & Holleran, 1999).

Social justice is at the core of Standpoint, CRT and LatCrit theories. Therefore, the use of counter-storytelling also served four purposes or functions (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002b). First, counter-stories made accessible the knowledge and experiences of others struggling with injustice in marginalized communities. Second, the use of stories in the voice of real people demystified an academic investigation to groups that were usually excluded from participating in the discourse. Third, counter-stories provided a critique in the voice of those who truly mattered. Lastly, like Americans seeing the attack dogs let loose on Civil Rights demonstrators in the 1960’s, perceptions shifted and reality through the images projected on the television, counter stories presented evidence provided by real people with real experiences that challenged popular beliefs of the existence of the varied and insidious forms of oppression in schools.

Solorzano and Yosso (2001) posited that counter-stories had to include vital elements in order for them to be meaningful. The counter-stories had to emerge from

narratives not wrapped in academic language or from data in impersonal reports, but from the people experiencing the injustice. The power of a counter-narrative is that as the stories are shared they provide insight and “possibility” to teachers and students suffering under oppressive school situations (Solorzano and Yosso, 2001, p.475). These stories can be used to build community with other people suffering under similar conditions by communicating and exposing shared realities that create a connection to others. Additionally, the stories can provide a template to challenge the present and create an alternative to the master narrative and reality that is presented to oppressed groups as normal (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002a). The counter-narratives created by the researcher, teachers, and students for this study loosely followed Solorzano and Yosso’s (2002b) criterion for developing counter-stories.

Summary

Latinas face serious challenges in the near future. Schools are trying to find effective ways to increase their academic success. The literature proposed that conscientization may help gird marginalized students from the destructive forces that affect their education. Latina teachers at AMS felt that curriculum was not enough to change the present situation for adolescent girls. They were trying to break cycles of failure through activities in informal spaces at their school site. The critical methodologies of CRT, LatCrit, and Standpoint were the best available means of gathering, interpreting and explaining the conditions of Latinas at AMS. Data presented

as counter-narratives gave an alternative account of the difficulties faced by some adolescent Latinas in Lincoln City.

CHAPTER IV: COUNTER-STORIES

“...you are unique, you are not here by accident. Love yourself.” (Teacher)

Introduction

This chapter presents three counter-stories that were composed from interviews, observations, and informal conversations. These alternative narratives will present a standpoint that questions and reinterprets master narratives that have diminished the worth of Latinas in the school system. The findings answer the question: How do Latina teachers use informal educational spaces to create opportunities for Latina students to develop a critical consciousness? Each of the narratives is a composite of experiences shared with the researcher during the interview process, observation, and/or informal conversation.

The three narratives cannot be parsed to find a singular justification or one particular theme that can reduce the findings into a palatable explanation for resisting oppression. The research process revealed the highly entangled milieu of successes, stressors, and pressures that Latinas face every day as they navigate the commingled streams of the public and the private, the American school system, the American cultural arena, and their culture of origin. The spaces provided/created by Latina teachers demonstrate the power of emotion, sympathy, and affection beyond the curricular day to affect the lives of girls and young women.

The three counter-narratives in this chapter represent the varying, and at times contradictory, lived experiences of the participants. The first is an account of a typical week for a young Latina in Lincoln City, as she related in the first person her history,

experiences, and feelings. The second narrative represents a meeting of the Girls Only Club and Club Athena as they tackled challenges presented by boys, school, family, and/or society. The final counter-narrative is presented as a written transcript of a digital media in the form of a blog. This blog conveys the challenge for a girl to find acceptance from her father, her peers, and other women as she struggled with esteem issues regarding her body.

The Counter-Stories

A Week in the Life of a Lincoln City Girl

The first counter-story is based on interviews with a specific teacher and student. This narrative questioned the statistical representation of young urban Latinas as they struggle to succeed in the American school system. This story is the description of a typical week for one of the participants in Club Athena and the Girls Only Club. It is based on the experiences of one particular student and teacher. This is the story of a young woman who was aware of the stereotypes of Latinas growing up in poor or working class neighborhoods. She was aware of the statistics detailing teen pregnancy and many of the factors that lead to dropping out of school. Yet she is defiant, not falling in the trap of deficiency that has been created by a narrative of her trajectory within American society. She did not submit, regardless of the compounding factors that have shaped and affected her experience.

When I interviewed the student upon whom Violeta is based, she shared that she had a 4.2 grade point average. She was a strong, together, young woman who had defined her near future. Her narrative stood in stark contrast to the popular belief that

young Latinas are incapable of surmounting the obstacles placed before them by entrenched systemic inequity. Violeta repeatedly told me that she was powerful. Like Freire (1970), she defined power in some ways as the possession of agency to make choices regarding her life. Unlike Freire (1970), and reminiscent of Anzaldúa (1999) Violeta has accepted inconsistency or contradiction as part of life. She adjusts and proceeds. Critical consciousness for Violeta took the form of maneuvering through larger or macro institutional mechanisms that were created to control her, while trying to understand and defeat micro level obstacles like finding success in school.

One would think that her reality was an aberration but of the four young women interviewed, each and every one had been accepted to either a University of California school or to a prestigious private university. All of the women had scholarships. There was an awareness of their position in this society and they shared that it was because of the expectation of failure that they worked as hard as they did. Many times the interviewees would repeat how comforting it was to have role models and mentors that shared their experiences as young Latinas growing up in difficult economic circumstances. The women represented the victory of possibility over negativity, even when faced with dire scholastic, domestic, and economic circumstances. The interviews revealed that these girls attributed much of their success to the connections they had made with mentors and other female students. They succeeded in spite of the educational system, not because of it.

Violeta. My name is Violeta. You could say that I am a typical girl from the neighborhood that I live in. I live in Lincoln City. I have lived here my whole life. It

has a reputation for gangs, drugs, and poor people. It has earned it, but I think people get the wrong idea because there are no white people that live here. I take that back, we did have one family when I was in middle school. They moved away. I think people assume that it is all bad because there are only Latinos, some Blacks, and a few Tongans. But in truth, it's not that bad. I have lived in the same building for as long as I can remember, and have friends from all the way back in kindergarten.

If you describe my life with statistics I probably look like I don't have a chance to be anything in this life. I am a *Mexicana*, a Latina. I am 17 years old and have an older brother and two younger sisters. I am being raised by a single mom, who doesn't have a diploma. Blah, Blah, Blah. The list goes on. I go to a charter school in the middle of a poor neighborhood. My parents were born in Mexico but have worked here most of their lives. They did not finish school in Mexico and started working as soon as they got here. You probably think I'm going to end up pregnant, or a drop out, but it just goes to show how little people really know about the real me, and my goals in life.

My father lived with us until I was eight years old. I really don't know where he lives now, but I have heard that it's somewhere like Utah or Iowa or some place like that. He had some family there and got a job in one of those cities far away. I don't really care. There's not much to say except that he hit my mom, so there are no regrets about him leaving. He did not hit us as much, it was mostly yelling. My mom took most of the abuse from him. I used to think that she was stupid for letting him hit her, but I know now that she was only protecting us from him. When he left I was relieved, but it still messed up my family though. My older brother started drinking some time after my

father left. He is 20, and he is an alcoholic. There are some pictures of my dad in the house, but I try not to spend too much time thinking about him. That would give him power over me, even from far away. Someday I will think more about what happened, but right now there is still too much going on in my life to get dragged into something I can't change.

I am not the oldest, but I am the oldest girl. In Mexico, this means that I have a lot of responsibility in the house, but this is Lincoln City and some things I guess don't change. I take care of my family. I knew from the time I was five or six that it would be up to me to keep things in order. At first it was because my mom and dad were fighting and then because I just had to, because my mom works so much. My brother isn't really any help. When he has work, he works, but mostly he drinks. Most of the time I can deal with him because he just goes to sleep on the couch and leaves us alone. He was my dad's favorite and it really hurt him the most when he left us. As long as he stays out of the way and doesn't make more work for me, I will be fine.

I guess I have always been a grown up. Even before I had actually grown up. I have come to respect *mi mamá* (my mom) over the years. I didn't at first. I don't know if I could work as much as she does. I see her sometimes in the morning and she hasn't changed out of her uniform. She has only taken off her shoes. She works at a hotel near the airport. She cleans rooms. She always tells me, "*¡Estudia para que no trabajes como burra!*" (Study so you don't have to work like a donkey), and I believe her. All I know is that I want to have a choice in how my life will be. I know my mom doesn't have much choice, but to work whatever she can get. My education is the way I will

control my future. School has always been the place where I have found some peace. Ever since I was a little girl I behaved in school. The teachers liked me because I always did my homework and never caused problems in the class. I never wanted to add more problems for my mom, so I have always tried my best in school. I didn't want too much attention on me when I was younger. I actually like coming to school, but high school's coming to an end.

My day begins at five in the morning, this way I don't have to fight with anybody for the bathroom. My school has uniforms so at least I don't have to worry too much about what I have to wear. I just have to make sure that it is clean. After my shower, I have about an hour to finish any leftover homework before I get breakfast for my sisters. I have an AP class, and there is always so much homework to get us ready for the test. My mom doesn't get home until 2:30 in the morning, so I have to get them ready. My mom is usually asleep in the morning. She has her own room in the apartment. This makes it easier to not disturb her. Sometimes on her night off, one of the girls will sleep with her and keep her company. Me and the girls all share the other bedroom, and my brother, Memo, sleeps on the couch.

The good thing is that I live close to my school so it only takes me about ten minutes to walk there. The girls actually have to walk farther, but Rosie, my 13 year-old sister can drop off my baby sister at her school so my mom doesn't have to worry about them walking by themselves. Magdalena or Maggie is not really a baby, she is 11, but she is the youngest. My friend Sandra picks me up about 7:45 so we can walk to school together. I have been friends with Sandra since middle school. She is the kind of friend

I know will always be down for me. There is nothing I don't tell her. Don't think that it is always great and fantastic, we've had fights, but she is more like a sister than a friend. She knows the things that could hurt me the most and I know the things that could hurt her so we have to trust each other. We even applied to the same colleges. We were so happy when both of our names came up in the lottery for placement at the charter school. Only 100 kids out of 500 get into the school because it is so small. We have two classes together. There aren't too many choices at the school, but we have Literature and Calculus together. Don't feel too surprised some girls actually like and *get* math. The walk to school isn't too bad. We know most of the *Cholos* (gang members). They used to go to school with us or they know my brother so they don't mess with us when we walk by.

We don't have a lot of time in the morning before class starts, but there is always some boy that wants to copy my homework. *Huevones* (lazy). They need to quit playing video games and do their work. You get study hall in the afternoon if you miss a homework, so there is always someone who is desperate to copy last night's work to avoid staying after school. Depending on which teacher you get, they keep you until your work is done or they keep you longer. It sucks, they keep you here until four in the afternoon sometimes.

Most of my classes are pretty alright, but my favorite is my Literature class with Ms. Sanchez. She is kinda young and she has us read different types of Literature, most of it from people of color or about people of color. I think the discussions are the reason I like the class so much. You really get to see how people really are when they are angry

and forget to stay quiet and they say what they really think and are afraid to tell other people. Ms. Sanchez is good at asking that question that makes you take a stand. I listen to all of the arguments before I jump in. I used to be timid. I would never share in class. I could remember thinking of an answer, and hearing another student say the same thing that I was thinking, and the teacher would be all like, "That's an excellent answer, Francisco!" I think back and remember how stupid I was to not let the teachers or my classmates know how much knowledge I had inside of me.

My attitude started changing when I joined Club Athena. The Club was started by some of the female teachers here at school. I went because Sandra wanted to join a club when we got to high school. I liked the club right away because it was only for girls, and I learned that Athena was the goddess of wisdom, civilization, and strength. I always felt like I was a strong person, so the name of the Club made me think of powerful women. The way we, I should say they because I just listened at first like usual, talked the first meeting made feel comfortable. Just being in the club made me feel like I was a part of something different than just school. This is where I met Ms. Sanchez, before I ever had her for a class.

I remember the first Club meeting we had. Ms. Sanchez read a poem from Marianne Williamson and there were some of the lines that just stopped me. The poem said, "Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure." (Williamson, 1992, p. 190) I knew what she meant. I felt that fear. Ms. Sanchez continued with the poem, "There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so other people won't feel insecure about you." (p. 190) This was exactly the feeling I had when I would think of an answer in class

and stay quiet. It was like I didn't want anybody to know that I was smart. Like this was something bad. I didn't want to be seen as a school-girl so I shut my mouth. But, the line that really affected me was, "...as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same." (p. 191) I couldn't stop thinking about my sisters. I have been going to the Club for the last three years. I don't stay quiet any more. I know that I am powerful. I know that I possess strength inside of me that few people can understand.

Anyway, Lit class is my sixth period, so I get to go home. I usually go straight home except for Friday, because that's when we have Club. Club has become a place where I have been able to let other people see the real me. There are some girls that are my friends and others who I really don't like, don't know, or hang out with. What is interesting is that even girls that I do not like share the same problems that I have. I am not part of the popular crowd because I only hang out with Sandra and a couple of really good friends, but at Club there is respect even for the people I really don't like outside of the group. I have been surprised, because even the girls that are *chismosas* (gossips) outside of Club keep what we say private. You would think that a bunch of high school girls in a room together would be one giant cat-fight, but it is nothing like that. The teachers treat you with respect so you listen. The topics we talk about keep you from worrying about the superficial things. We all are from the same neighborhood, we are all Latinas, and we struggle with some of the same problems. Because we are *Mexicanas*, *Guatemaltecas*, *Salvadoreñas*, we were brought up a certain way where we can't really talk to our mothers about certain things. In the Club we are able to talk and get advice

about things that would embarrass our mothers. There is no shame because I know that I am not alone.

I like the Club because it has changed the way I look at growing up in Lincoln City. The teachers tell us every meeting that we are not accidents, that we are powerful, that we have the world in our hands and we can make the life we imagine. I see now that living with just my mom, growing up with less money than others or in an apartment instead of a house, does not define who I am. I am powerful, because every experience that would break most people has made me strong. What I treasure the most about all of the Club activities is that I have been able to realize that I always had this power within myself.

The teachers in Club Athena understand what it is like to be a woman, and especially a Latina growing up in Lincoln City. We are very proud of our culture, even when boys are treated better than girls. I understand this. I saw this when I was younger. The truth is that *I* keep my family together. The “weaker” girl is the one that takes care of the house. My mom works more than most men. She is strong. She works and works and does not complain. She just asks us to go farther than she has. I am powerful. I am powerful because I am a woman. I am powerful because I am a *Mexicana*. I have come to understand that I cannot keep this bottled inside where no one can feel what I feel. I think that one of the real gifts that the teachers have given us is that they have forced us to face our fears, to reflect about who we are and what we want to do with our lives.

Last year we started going to the middle school to have meetings with the younger girls. Their club is called the Girls Only Club (GOC). They meet every month and we

plan meetings together with their teachers. I am a “big sis” to two girls. Once a month we sit down at their meeting and we just talk. I write them letters during the month, and they write us thank you cards. I see myself in the girls. When I was in middle school, this club did not exist. All I know is that if I had been able to talk about what I was feeling in middle school, I would have enjoyed school even more. These girls in GOC are going to be so far ahead of where I was at their age. They will not be afraid of teachers. They will speak up in class and not stay silent. They are already learning about their power.

One of our meetings every year is about feminine hygiene. The schools try to help in science class, but the classes are mixed boys and girls, so it is still embarrassing to ask some questions, and having male teachers trying to teach you about tampons. No thank you. No matter how nice a teacher is, having a man talking about something they can never understand is hard to take. At the hygiene meeting the teachers talked about how they wished they would have had somebody to talk to in high school, because for some of them it wasn't until college where they learned about things from roommates and friends. We laughed because one teacher described how her college roommate, who she had just met showed her how to use a tampon. It's not funny but that day we saw how knowledge could be shared all the way down from adults, high school girls, to the middle school girls. We all wished that we would have had someone to talk to sooner. The adults wanted someone in high school. I wanted someone in middle school.

In the end we ended the discussion really talking about silence. The teachers were silent as young girls, and it took a long time to learn things that all women should

know about their bodies from the time their body begins to change. We talked about how culturally we are asked to sit quietly in the kitchen during parties separate from the men. It was a good discussion, but I wanted to add something. I shared that the same silence that we learn keeps women from speaking up when they are getting hit. This started a new discussion about high school boys hitting their girlfriends. I didn't care if people knew about my mom being hit. Ms. Sanchez knows about my history, I wasn't going to keep quiet. That would make me a hypocrite. These are the moments when I really love the Club. The discussion could have been left to talking about tampons and deodorant, like most of the school talks we are given, but it was about something meaningful. These talks are how we begin to become stronger. We are never asked to think about challenging what we know is wrong, and all it takes is to not staying silent when something is wrong. I know that it will sometimes get me in trouble, or at least looked at funny by other people, but I don't care. I will not keep quiet to make other people feel comfortable.

When I see some of my teachers I see myself. The teachers in Club Athena, the teachers in GOC they look like me, they grew up in this neighborhood, or at least in one just like mine. I know that they have family in Mexico and that some of their people don't have papers. It has been so important to be able to talk to them. They have been available to talk to me at any time. I really like Ms. Sanchez especially. She has been the teacher that has taught me to be proud of who I am, and where I come from. She has taught me that being a woman in the United States, *una mujer Latina, Mexicana* is a powerful thing.

But she just started as a regular teacher. It wasn't until I got to know her that I understood why I liked being in her class. If I hadn't gone to Club I would never have gotten to know her. One day during my sophomore year, I came after school to talk to her. I was really upset. My brother had thrown up in the living room, and I had to clean it up before I left for school. I did not think this was fair. My mom was already at work and I had almost no time to get breakfast for my sisters, finish my homework and clean up. The whole day had been very stressful. I kept feeling like I was behind on time. I went to Ms. Sanchez's room. I was only going to ask her about homework because I had been distracted when she had explained how to write it, but she could tell I was upset.

We started talking. She already knew a little about my life from Club Athena, and she asked if I was all right. I guess I finally broke down a little and told her everything that had happened in the morning, about *mí mamá* (My mother), about my dad. She listened for a long time as I let it out. She handed me a tissue, gave me a hug, and sat me down. She looked into my face and told me about how she had dealt with an abusive father her whole life. I didn't believe her at first. I thought she was just saying that to act like she was all understanding, but I could tell that she was tearing up like me. I knew from conversations in Club that she had bought her own house and had just got back from a trip to Costa Rica. I knew she had a master's degree, and she was only 29 years old. To me her life looked perfect. She told me about having to hide from her father when she was real little and then having to stand between her dad and her younger sister as she got older. I still couldn't believe it. I asked her why she wasn't messed up? I felt messed up most of the time. She told me how everybody is messed up in their own way. It's what

you do with what you got that matters. She told me about the day she had stood up to her father. He had been threatening everybody and yelling at her mom. She thought that he was going to get violent. She told me that she was just little bit older than I was at the time. She had started her junior year of high school. As her father came into the living room, she saw that he had a belt in his hand. She was sick and tired of it, so she stood in front of him. She told him if she touched anybody with the belt she would call the cops. She told him that if he ever wanted to have a relationship with his daughters he had to stop. She shared with me that she was terrified and angry, but she always had known that she had power. She told me how she stood there with her fist balled up and tears in her eyes, but that her voice was strong when she finally told him enough. She yelled at him again, that if he ever hit anybody she would call the police and make sure that he went straight to jail, and she would tell everybody they knew about what kind of man he was. She swore to him that as soon as she could leave the house she would leave and never speak to him or come back. Ms. Sanchez told me how that day changed her life. She had always known she was strong, and this day she proved it to her father. When Ms. Sanchez got accepted to college she *told* her father she was going, she didn't ask. Her story made me feel strong. Like anything is possible.

I sat there and looked at Ms. Sanchez for a long time. I asked if he left the house after that? She told me how her father and mother still lived together, but he had never hit anybody in the house again. Her mother and her sister had learned from her standing up, and they began to stand up for themselves. She had forgiven her father, but had not forgotten what her life was like when she was younger. The strange thing is that when

she and her sister graduated from college and became successful he wanted to be part of their lives. She laughed because now it sometimes seems like he is afraid of her, because he knows that she has more education than him and grew into a strong independent woman.

I told her how my father had left our family. But that I understood how it felt to know that I would always be the responsible one, even when I was just five or six years old. I knew I had to take care of my sisters, my mom, and even my brother. She told me that I was already stronger than most people. Very few could ever understand how hard all of this was and still be successful. She told me that life did not end in high school and that I had my whole life before me, and it was my choice to stay stuck or move forward. Since then I have always trusted Ms. Sanchez, because she made me see teachers as no different than me. Even some of the teachers who are strict don't scare me, I remember what she said about everybody being messed up in their own way, and I speak to them about what I need or don't understand. I don't stay quiet.

My day usually ends with me going home and helping my mom clean up the apartment, making dinner and helping my sisters with their homework. My mom leaves for work at four so we get to see her for a little while before she has to catch the bus. I get a few hours to finish my homework after dinner. I know that this sounds like it is unfair or that I don't have a chance, but to tell you the truth this is my family, and I accept the responsibility because I know that I have to help my sisters down the right path. Ms. Sanchez always tells me that I have to speak in positive sentences, and that I have to take ownership of my decisions. I have been accepted to UC Irvine and will start this summer

in the EOP bridge program. I can't wait for the fall. I have enough financial aid and scholarship money to live on campus, but I will live at home. I want to help my family even though I have a choice to leave. In four years I will graduate from UCI and begin medical school. I will become a pediatrician. I will graduate, and I will be successful because I am powerful, and I am not an accident.

What It Feels Like For A Girl

The second counter-story is based on a series of conversations that occurred during one of the club's meetings and deals with the identification and deciphering of the master narrative that has removed some of the power Latina women and girls have in deciding the parameters of their roles within their family and how their labor is valued and acknowledged.

The following counter-story is composed of experiences and exchanges that occurred within the club meetings during the research window. The GOC has a meeting at least once a month. The meetings are held after school on Friday afternoons. The school has an early release Friday every month, so the meetings tend to extend from two in the afternoon until five. The physical space for the meetings is in one of the participating teacher's classroom. The emotional space that is created however, quickly begins to take on distinct characteristics that separate what occurs within the walls from the pressure of curriculum or test driven stress. All of the meetings begin with food and conversation. As girls trickle in and they begin to group together around tables. They eat and laugh. They are clearly comfortable. The teachers usually share a snack with the girls at a table or two, asking them general questions about their day. The first part of the

meeting is usually facilitated by the middle school teachers with only the middle school girls, and the latter discussions include the high school students. The high school students arrive later due to a later release from school.

Both teachers move from table to table at each meeting in order to take a few minutes to talk individually with as many of the girls as possible. The teachers shared with the researcher they feel concerned that with a larger group some of the closeness needed to build rapport and trust might be lost. From what was observed, they are doing an outstanding job of connecting to the young women that have joined the GOC. In the Club, spaces that have been created and nurtured by the teachers serve to replace feelings of fear or pressure for some of the girls. The girls seemed genuinely comfortable speaking to authority figures as equals, which is not what is observed in a regular class space. The teachers are equally comfortable letting go of authority. This dynamic allows for the girls to trust that if they say or do something that may be construed as out of bounds in an academic setting, they will not be excluded from participation in the club.

This dynamic was very different from the classroom space where the authority of the teacher, the adult, created the acceptable roles for children, especially for Latina girls to demonstrate. The usual demure and acquiescent girls that have been observed in the researcher's class were outspoken and firm in their viewpoint and perspectives during the GOC. The teachers behave more like partners in the endeavor of helping young women become comfortable with who they are. Many times teachers said to a student, "You have taught me something new. I had not looked at the issue in that way!" The observed

facial response by students to a teacher speaking to them in this manner showed clear satisfaction at being valued.

The meeting space was fiercely protected by the girls and teachers. As if to prove the point, on the first day of observations one of the girls looked at the researcher and said, “Where’s your wig? You know to be in this room you have to be a girl. IT’S GIRLS ONLY CLUB! You don’t look like a girl. So you have to wear a wig. I will let you slide this time, *por que me caes bien* (Only because I like you). And you are lucky we don’t make you wear make up!” This student clearly had no fear of the authority of a male teacher. In this space the researcher was the outsider. During each observation she indicated to the researcher, “I see you forgot your wig. Haven’t you learned? What are you going to learn without it?”

The meeting times were sacred and all other activities were second to the club’s activities. The researcher had already decided that permission not only had to be granted by the teachers and administrator of the school, but also from the students. After this initial exchange it became apparent, research ethics aside, they wanted to be recognized as creators and defenders of this space. When the researcher asked permission to observe and hopefully interview them as part of a panel discussion, one of the girls raised her hand and said, “So, if I say no to you being here, will you really leave?” the researcher answered, “Yes.” She replied, “But, what about your schoolwork? Won’t you get in trouble?” The researcher shared with the group the work could be done with interviews of the teachers and some volunteers from the Club, but to really understand the power of the Club it would be helpful to be able to sit in quietly and observe. The

researcher promised not to intervene, and that notes would be taken. Another of the girls said to the researcher, "*Más te vale!*" loosely translated, you better or else.

A few months after the researcher had been observing the meetings from a corner of the room, a group of students walked into the classroom looking for someone in the after-school program. They had been told that they could use the room after school. The girl that had earlier in the year asked me to wear a wig said, "Stop. This is Girls Only Club!" One of the boys in the group looked over at me pointed and said, "So what is he doing here?" She replied, "Don't worry about him, he's a girl. He just forgot his wig." She looked over at the researcher and said, "Ain't that right Mr. Martin?" It took a moment to regroup and not start laughing, the researcher replied, "That's right." The researcher was acceptable as long as he was not a distraction. To this student, the physical space was specifically for the Girl's Only Club. The researcher was tolerated because he was not seen as a threat to her control. This particular student made it clear throughout the year that decisions would be made by those in the Club. Once when the researcher was being offered a cookie, she looked over to the student offering the snack and said, "Make sure all of the girls get theirs first." While the presence of the researcher was accepted by the teachers and tolerated by the students, even defended at times, there were also moments where role delineation was revisited by the students as if to say, "In here, we come first." This reaction could have been due to the fact that the researcher was a teacher at the school, but more than likely it was due to his gender.

Many times the participating teachers were surprised by the line of reasoning that was followed by the students as it differed significantly from what they had envisioned as

the direction of the planned conversations. Teachers, during the meetings, never placed any constraints on students other than one of mutual respect. In order to participate in the conversations, one must never keep another from feeling like their words, feelings, or experiences were not valued. They did not have to agree, and there were times when teachers had to assert their roles as authority, but it was done to maintain the general atmosphere of acceptance and respect.

The process of empowering the students begins with a reappraisal of practices that were already felt as wrong by the girls but lacked the language, space or forum to discuss the meaning and outcomes of ascribed roles and expectations. Teachers and students shared with the researcher during the interview process that the direction of learning flowed in both ways, with the girls challenging the teachers' thinking as they processed situations together.

Club Meeting: Cub Athena and The GOC

Ms. Hernandez: Buenas tardes señoritas. Good afternoon. Come on in! There are cookies and juice on the table. Help yourself. Just watch out because Ms.

Vasquez bought her favorite chocolate cookies and I don't know if she wants to share.

The girls start laughing as Ms. Vasquez makes a face and picks up the bag of cookies and acts like she is going to hide them.

Rocio: That's mean Ms. Vasquez! Just for that, *vas a ver* (you will see) I am gonna eat all of them!

The sound in the room is lively but not loud. Distinct conversations could be heard over the sound of chairs sliding and backpack zippers. At one of the tables Ms. Hernandez sits down next to a girl that runs in out of breath at the beginning of the meeting time.

Ms. Hernandez: Everything okay? How was your day, Sandra?

Sandra: It was okay Ms. Hernandez.

Ms. Hernandez: Just okay?

Sandra: Yeah, I got detention.

Ms. Hernandez: Why?

Sandra: I didn't do my homework?

Ms. Hernandez: You are so smart! What happened? I know it wasn't because it was too hard for you. You are one of the brightest girls I know.

Sandra: Naw, it wasn't that it was too hard, I just didn't have time. I had to watch my little brother and then help clean up after dinner. I didn't have enough time to do Language Arts, Math, and Social Studies. It's okay. It was only 15 minutes. I just don't like being late to Club.

Ms. Hernandez: Don't worry *Mija* (term of endearment: my daughter). We haven't started. What could you do to find the time? Is there anything I can do to help you?

Sandra: I just don't think it is fair that I have to help clean up and do laundry, and my brother doesn't. He doesn't even get good grades!

Ms. Hernandez: Why do you think it is not fair?

Sandra: So just because I am a girl, I have to work for them? No! But, my mom asks me and I feel bad letting her do everything.

Ms. Hernandez: So what can you do about this?

Sandra: I don't know I have to think about it. I see my dad lets my brother just play his PS3 and I have to ask permission to use the internet for homework. He treats him different. I can't even go outside and talk to my friends, and my brother just gets up and skates until it is dark and it's okay with my dad. My mom doesn't even say anything.

Ms. Hernandez: I want you to share today. We are going to talk about what is expected of us and how our work is valued. Will you share what you told me? Maybe together we can help to find a solution. I bet there are others who are also feeling like you.

Sandra: Do you really want me to?

Ms. Hernandez: Only if you want. I would not want you to feel embarrassed. I just know that you have a lot to share and it would help others. I don't want you to do it for me, I want you to share for yourself. Okay?

Sandra: I'll think about it. I don't want to promise.

Ms. Hernandez: That's fine. Did you get a snack? Get some juice and cookies; we have time.

Ms. Vasquez: All right Ladies! Let's get into two circles. One on the inside and one on the outside. Make sure you are facing someone. Ms. Hernandez, do we have an even number? Will you join Ms. Hernandez to make it even?

The students arrange themselves in concentric circles. One group is facing the other.

Ms. Vasquez: Let's start with affirmations. I want you to tell the person in front of you one thing you like about yourself.

Rocio: I like my eyes because they are green.

Ms. Hernandez: I like that I am a loyal person.

Rocio: Why didn't you say something about your body?

Ms. Hernandez: Because what is important to me is that the people I love know that I will always support them, and that I would never betray my friends.

Rocio: I hadn't thought about it like that.

Ms. Vasquez: Okay, now take three steps to the left, and share with your new partner something different that you like about yourself! No repeats!

Rocio: I like that I can keep a secret, and I am a good friend.

Blanca looks at her for a second, bites her lip while thinking of an answer, and responds a few seconds later.

Blanca: I like that I am a helpful person. I always help my mom, my friends, and my teachers.

Rocio: I liked your answer.

Ms. Vasquez: Okay ladies lets stay in the circle for a minute and just listen to what I am about to share with you. I was reading an article about the power of positive thinking. Now I need a volunteer to come up to the front.

Many of the girls raise their hands to participate. Ms. Vasquez picks Blanca.

Ms. Vasquez: Okay Blanca I want you to think of something that makes you very happy. I want you to think about positive thoughts. I want you to think about how powerful you are. Okay?

Blanca: What do you mean positive thoughts?

Ms. Vasquez: Like what in your life gives you happiness. You don't have to say it out loud, you just have to really concentrate on that thought.

Blanca: Alright Ms. Vasquez. I'll try my best.

Ms. Vasquez: Now I want you to put your hands up in front of you with your palms up. Ms. Vasquez demonstrates standing still with the palms of her hands facing up towards the sky. Blanca mimics her exactly.

Ms. Vasquez: Excellent. Now I am going to push down on your hands with my hands, and I want you to resist.

Ms. Vasquez pushes on the palms of Blanca's hands and she is clearly struggling to move them. Blanca smiles because she is able to resist the force of the teacher's hands.

Ms. Vasquez: Now I want you to think about negative thoughts. I want you to think about something that has made you sad. I want you to concentrate. Again you

don't have to tell me what you are thinking. I know that this is private. Close your eyes and think about those negative thoughts.

Blanca closes her eyes for a second and then opens them, looks at Ms. Vasquez and nods.

Ms. Vasquez: Are you ready?

Blanca: Yeah.

Ms. Vasquez: Put your hands up, and I am going to try and push your hands again.

Okay?

Blanca puts her hands before her in the same manner that she had done it before. Ms. Vasquez begins to press on the palm of her hands, and there is clearly less resistance as Ms. Vasquez easily pushes her hands down. Blanca looks confused. She looks suspiciously at the teacher and turns to look at the rest of the group.

Ms. Vasquez: So what happened?

Rocio: Aw! You pushed harder the second time!

Ms. Vasquez: I promise I didn't. Why do you think I was able to push Blanca around?

Blanca: Because when you are thinking bad things you are weaker.

Ms. Vasquez: The reason we are doing this activity is because I was reading an article that measured people's strength and they found that when people were first asked to have negative thoughts before an activity they ran slower, lifted less weight, and did poorly on a simple math test. You are so right Blanca, you found out the same thing that scientist had found out. That negative thoughts actually affect our bodies. But more importantly they also found out that when people first

thought of something positive, they actually did better in every activity. Thank you so much for helping out. But before you sit down, I want you to concentrate on something wonderful again. I don't want you to feel badly the rest of the meeting.

Ms. Hernandez: Ms. Vasquez and myself both read the article about how having positive thoughts actually affected how much strength a person has. Why do you think it was important to do this activity?

Sandra: Because, sometimes we have negative thoughts.

Ms. Hernandez: Where do you think those thoughts come from?

Rocio: I know that sometimes they come from the people around us.

Ms. Hernandez and Ms. Vasquez: Yes!

Ms. Hernandez: Sometimes those thoughts are placed in our minds by others. If we keep thinking about them they make us weaker.

Rocio: What do you do if it's someone in your family that puts those thoughts in your mind?

Ms. Hernandez: What do you mean Rocio?

Rocio: I mean sometimes my mom calls me *burra* (donkey) if I do something wrong. I hate it but she is my mom. I love her. She laughs sometimes like it is a joke but it hurts me to be called that.

Ms. Hernandez: Do you think you are dumb?

Rocio: I don't know sometimes. I am not as smart as my older sister. She always gets good grades, and my mom says, "*Mira*, (look) why don't you get grades like your sister?" so I feel like I am not the "smart one" in the family.

Ms. Hernandez: I know it is hard because it is your parents telling you these things, but you can't let anybody make you feel like you are not an incredible person. I know you are brilliant. You are not your sister. You have to keep telling yourself that you are smart. That you are your own person, and that you are powerful. I always tell you that you are not an accident. You are here for a reason. What happens if you spend all day thinking about negative things? What do you think will happen if you keep telling yourself that you are strong and smart? Do you think you will keep having these thoughts?

Rocio: I guess you begin to believe them. But, it is weird to sit here and say to myself, "*I am wonderful, I am powerful...*" I don't talk to myself like that.

Rocio says this sentence in a mocking voice. Ms. Hernandez looks at her at her and smiles.

Ms. Hernandez: You make fun of it, but why is it so easy for you to say and believe that you are a *burra*? You didn't think about it that way, did you? Why is it so easy to tell ourselves that the negative is true and not accept the all of the positive we possess? Maybe we should spend some time thinking about the good that we have inside instead of always trying to believe the negative. Don't worry though. Everybody struggles with this idea. I have been teaching for a while and

sometimes I get observed, and I concentrate on the things I need to work on and it is almost like I don't hear the good things the principal says. I only hear the negative. It's like we are afraid to admit that we are good, or strong, smart. I know that I do a good job but sometimes I get stuck on the negative, instead of accepting the praise.

Blanca: Sometimes it's hard to feel better about yourself when you are treated differently than somebody else. I always feel like we are treated differently than boys by our parents and our teachers. It's like a reminder that you are not as important as somebody else. It gets old.

Ms. Hernandez: You make a great point. We have to think about how others around us affect how we see ourselves, and if we should believe them. We can see from the first activity that we are affected by words and thoughts. Have you ever heard that old saying sticks and stones will break your bones, but words will never hurt you? Words do hurt and they last a long time when it is someone we love that is saying them. Thank you, Blanca for sharing this perspective, because it will help us transition into the next activity. It is related to what we are talking about here. We are going to talk about how the way people speak to us affects how we feel about being a girl in this society. Rocio, I want you to think about what we started here in this activity, because we will talk about it some more in a few minutes and I am going to need you to help me understand and find solutions to

how we can change this way of thinking. Can we wait a few minutes until Club Athena gets here?

The students look at Ms. Hernandez and nod in the affirmative.

Ms. Vasquez: We are going to start as soon as our big sisters arrive.

The high school girls begin to file into the classroom, the middle school girls jump up and run over to hug their “big sis” and there is a small recess as the young women of Club Athena get a few minutes to talk and eat with their mentees. There is genuine affection on the part of both groups. The young girls look up to the young women who possess a confidence when they walk into the room. The young women from Club Athena are not dismissive of their little sisters. They are curious and ask questions about, school, their family, and boys. The sound of conversation increases as the group begins to grow and double in size. There are, however, a few of the middle school girls who look a bit dejected. They are upset because their big sister was absent or unable to come to the meeting. One can tell that the middle school students look forward to spending time with their older friends. Student who do not have a partner are quickly paired with a Club Athena student who may not have a little sister or is new to the club. All girls eventually find a partner to talk with. In the meantime the teachers from both groups get together to discuss the agenda for the remainder of the meeting.

Ms. Vasquez: *Señoritas!* Ladies. Can I have your attention please?! Welcome big sisters.

Welcome Club Athena teachers. Before we begin I want to play a song for you.

Ms. Sanchez and Ms. Hernandez will pass out the lyrics or words to the song.

Read them, listen to the music and we are going to talk about what the words mean. Make sure you are sitting at a table with two GOC girls and two Club Athena girls. I really like this song. It is by Madonna, and it's called "What It Feels Like For A Girl". I really want you to reflect on the words, and think if any part of the song related to part of you life. Are we ready?

Ms. Vasquez reaches the laptop and the music begins to play. As the song starts, all of the group members intently look upon the lyrics. Some smile as they read, others look like they are concentrating on the meaning of the words.

What It Feels Like For A Girl
written by Madonna and Guy Sigsworth
produced by Madonna, Guy Sigsworth and Mark "Spike" Stent
Track 8, Time: 4:43

(Spoken:)

Girls can wear jeans
And cut their hair short
Wear shirts and boots
'Cause it's OK to be a boy
But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading
'Cause you think that being a girl is degrading
But secretly you'd love to know what it's like
Wouldn't you
What it feels like for a girl

Silky smooth
Lips as sweet as candy, baby
Tight blue jeans
Skin that shows in patches

Strong inside but you don't know it
Good little girls they never show it
When you open up your mouth to speak
Could you be a little weak

Chorus:

Do you know what it feels like for a girl
Do you know what it feels like in this world
For a girl

Hair that twirls on finger tips so gently, baby
Hands that rest on jutting hips repenting

Hurt that's not supposed to show
And tears that fall when no one knows
When you're trying hard to be your best
Could you be a little less

(chorus)

(chorus, prefixing 3rd line with "What it feels like")

Strong inside but you don't know it
Good little girls they never show it
When you open up your mouth to speak
Could you be a little weak

(chorus, repeats)

In this world
Do you know
Do you know
Do you know what it feels like for a girl

What it feels like in this world (Madonna & Sigsworth, 2000)

The song ends and the girls begin to talk to the members of their table. The teachers go around from table to table kneeling down to hear the conversations. Occasionally, one of the teachers can be overheard telling a student to make sure that they share their opinion. The whole process takes about five minutes, as groups begin to finish their discussion.

Ms. Hernandez: Okay so does anybody have any thoughts about the lyrics of this song?

Veronica: I think it is about the double standard about how girls and boys are supposed to act. Like, I can wear pants or “cowboy boots” and it would be fine but if a boy were to wear some girl’s clothes he would be called gay.

Ms. Hernandez: Very good answer. Thank you for starting the discussion. Does anybody agree or disagree with what Vero said?

Blanca: I agree. I think that boys are allowed to be who they are without being told what to wear. I know my mom and dad didn’t let me wear pants until I was in school, and I am still not allowed to cut my hair short. It’s not fair.

Violeta: I kind of feel sorry for the boys.

Ms. Vasquez: Why is that? I don’t understand?

Violeta: Well if you look at it differently. We have more choices when it comes to expressing ourselves. We can be emotional, we can be tough, we can be affectionate. They are stuck only being what they think it means to be a boy. They don’t have a choice because if they are different they get treated really badly. If they are gay, they get talked about and beat up, so they act the only way they know how. I don’t know if that make sense? But I feel sorry for them. We have more choice.

Ms. Vasquez: Violeta, I want to thank you. I had truly never thought about it that way. You have taught me something new. I never would have thought about the boys being restricted. To me I always think that boys have had more privileges than girls. The way you describe this problem makes me see how I never had thought

about them being restricted by their roles. What a great insight. I guess if this song is about being empowered, what I hear you say is that we already have power? At least to make certain choices about how we express ourselves.

Violeta: Well yeah, but that doesn't mean that we have more power than boys in society. They still get away with more and have more power in certain ways, but we have more power than we think.

Fabiola: But if you read the words, it is almost like they are afraid of us. Like we intimidate them. We need to be a little "weak" or a little "less" so they can handle us. Why should we have to be less than who we are to make them happy? I don't feel like I have to act like a "lady" so that they don't feel uncomfortable. Hell Naw!

The group laughs as Fabiola crosses her arms and sits back in her seat as she delivers the lines.

Ms. Vasquez: You ladies are amazing. I was really thinking more about how our roles are defined by our families or others, but you are making me think in new ways. I am so proud to be a part of this group with you.

Ms. Vasquez has tears in her eyes as she relates this opinion to the group. There is sincerity in her voice and the students respond to her show of emotion by leaning forward and increasing participation in the discussion. All of the whispered side conversations stop as all of the young women become involved in the discussion.

Sandra: But what if it is your dad that tells you to be that way? What if your parents make you dress a certain way or act a certain way? It's easy for teachers to say, I will stand up to my family, but it's hard when your dad is telling you have to be a certain way.

Ms. Hernandez: I don't think we want you to be in a fight with your parents. We just want you to think about what's inside of you and be able to make choices about who you want to be or what you want to do as you grow. It's never this or that, all or nothing. We just want you to begin to think about what you have inside of you already. But, you are brave, to speak up and share how you feel when it sounds like you are contradicting what everybody else may be feeling but is afraid to say. You already have what it takes to make the choices inside of you! Like the lyrics, "Strong inside but you don't know it." We want you to feel powerful. That is why we talk about these topics. Just don't ever feel like you don't have a choice.

Ms. Vasquez: Does anybody have anything else to share?

Violeta: I like the line, "Hurt that is not supposed to show, And tears that fall when no one knows, When you are trying hard to be your best could you be a little less." I guess I don't really like it, but I understand what it is trying to say. For me its okay for girls to cry at movies, or at weddings, but not about being treated badly. Then you are supposed to be strong and not embarrass anybody if you feel pain.

Even though it is acceptable for girls to cry, it's never acceptable if it was a boy that made you cry.

Ms. Hernandez: Wow. Again you are bringing up ideas that we had not even discussed when we picked this song for the meeting. What an incredible insight. Why do you think that it is okay to cry sometimes and not others?

Violeta: I think it goes back to what Fabiola said earlier about not making boys or men feel uncomfortable. In this case they do not want to feel like they made a girl cry. But they make us cry all the time. They just don't want anybody to know about it.

The discussion begins to be led by the high school students. Their answers possess a sophistication that the middle schools students have not been able to verbalize. However, the level of thought given to answers by the middle school girls increases as the students listen. Their responses rise above the superficial "boys get treated better" to an analysis of why there is a difference in treatment. The participants begin to deconstruct the purpose of women's roles aloud in a free form discussion. The teachers are clearly pleased with the tangent that the activity has created and is now being followed. The excitement is palpable as the conversation becomes about a topic that is rarely broached within traditional classroom time. A large part of the group is enthusiastic to be able to participate in a discussion of a subject that is usually not discussed at home either. However there are some that look a bit uncomfortable at the direction of the conversation.

Ms. Hernandez: Incredible responses. How then do we take what we see in the roles we are supposed to take and apply this knowledge to other parts of our lives? Why is it that women have to behave in a way that doesn't scare or make others feel uncomfortable?

Sandra: Maybe that is a way of controlling us.

Ms. Hernandez: What do you mean?

Sandra: Well if we act in a way that we are quiet, and we do what they always tell us to do and not complain to their faces, then they can always tell us what to do, because after a while we act that way without anybody having to tell us. It's like we're being trained to stay quiet. And if you talk back then you get in trouble in school. But if you talk back to your mom or dad then they call you a *mal criada* or a *mal educada* (someone who has no training). And then you get in real trouble.

Many of the girls nod in agreement. The teachers have a surprised look as this activity has developed beyond a discussion of traditional expectations of young women to a deeper discussion of the implications of learned roles. They are having a difficult time moving to the next activity as the present discussion is capturing the attention of the group.

Violeta: So how do we tell our families about how we feel without disrespecting them? I mean I love my parents even though I don't agree with some of their old-school

ways of thinking. We still have to be family even if we disagree. I have to live with them!

Ms. Vasquez: It's hard because it really is different for everybody. I have always had a good relationship with my parents. My mom has always had a job, so she spoke up about the way she was going to be treated. She was always a good role model for me. She showed me that a woman could make her own money and take care of her family. She treated me and my brother the same, so I always felt that I had the same respect as my brother. But, being the oldest also gave me more responsibility than my brother. Because I was the oldest, and I knew English better than my parents, I was always asked to help when translating letters and paying bills, so I always felt like I was valuable to my family. For me it was like my parents were adjusting to living in the United States as I was growing up here, so they were learning a different way of looking at the world. It was always interesting when we visited Mexico because it was hard for them sometimes, because they had gotten used to living in the United States.

There are some things that sometimes come up with my mom, but we have always been able to talk about them without it turning into a giant fight. We won't always agree on how things should be, especially now that I am out of the house and married. I have my own house now and make my own decisions. But, I also know that this wasn't the same experience for many of my friends, whose parents expected them to act and behave in traditional ways, even though they

lived in Lincoln City, California. I know for them it has been a challenge their whole life, but they have found a way to combine their new lives here, and the traditions of their culture. Remember it doesn't have to be exactly like the person sitting next to you, and it never has to be all or nothing. The truth is that you already have inside of you what you need to deal with your parents. With respect many things can be accomplished. If you can't talk to your parents, then you always have friends and teachers that you can talk to. We can always figure this out together.

Blanca: Ms. Vasquez, what do you mean when you say it doesn't have to be all or nothing? I don't get it.

Ms. Vasquez: I guess what I mean is that if you can't change the way your father or mother treat you, it doesn't mean that you have failed. They are going to have ideas and *costumbres* (customs, ways of being) that are very different from the way you are experiencing life. It doesn't make you a bad daughter if you don't follow exactly what your mom or dad say. They still have a lot of wisdom and you should listen to them because they have lived longer than you, but that doesn't mean you can't have feelings about how right or wrong something feels. Eventually you are going to have to make those difficult decisions about how you want your life to be, so don't feel like you have to figure it out now, you still got time.

Ms. Hernandez: I see that we only have a little time left, so with your permission ,we should begin to move into the final part of the meeting and see if we can make connections to what we have just talked about. I am going to show you a cartoon and I want you to have a discussion in your group about what you think it means; then we will discuss is as a large group.

Ms. Hernandez and Ms. Vasquez project a cartoon with an alternative interpretation of the Prince Charming and Cinderella fairy tale. As soon as the cartoon is projected there is giggling in the classroom.



Figure 2. Maxine Cartoon. Story of Cinderella

Ms. Vasquez: Okay ladies, what do you see? What is the message of this cartoon?

Blanca: That's funny, Cinderella tricks the prince to clean up the house!

Fabiola: That's the way it should be! He looks all happy going home with his wife and then all of a sudden he has to take care of the floors. Too funny.

Violeta: But, it goes to show it is only funny because we don't expect that to happen.

What would happen if your mom told your dad to clean the floors. Would this really happen? I don't know but I think it would be dangerous to try and make the husband do the housework. Even though they need to help more.

Ms. Hernandez: What do you mean by dangerous?

Violeta: I think there are some men who think that we are their slaves and we should do all of the housework, even if we work outside of the house too. I think it is dangerous because some men are all *machista* (chauvanist) and will hit you if you don't do what they tell you. It's connected to what we talked about earlier, about how we are trained to not speak up or fight back. We get trained to serve them even though we know on the inside that it is not fair. We do it anyway because they tell us that this is the way it has always been, that this work is women's work. I don't care what anybody says. I don't see a boy broom and a different girl broom. They work the same for both.

Fabiola: Ah! You're so serious all the time! It's just a cartoon.

Rocio: I have seen my dad yell at my mom if his clothes isn't washed or the food isn't ready on time. I agree with Violeta.

Ms Hernandez: Fabiola, we need to respect everybody's opinions. We always talk about how others make us feel like we have to be silent, we shouldn't make each other feel like we can't share what we feel.

Fabiola: Sorry Violeta, it's just that sometimes it gets so serious when we are talking about something like a cartoon. I guess I didn't react to it like you. I don't want to shut you up. I should have explained better.

Violeta: It's okay. It's just not that funny to me because, to me this is a fairy tale, and reality is that you go home and clean. Even if you are Cinderella.

Ms. Vasquez: Thank you for apologizing Fabiola. We have to remember that every body in the club is unique, and that means that there will be things that are different for each of us. Let's just remember that this space is sacred. When we share what we feel, we should not be afraid. Even you, Fabiola. I think you are right. It does get serious sometimes. Don't worry we'll have Ms. Hernandez dance to the Madonna song to cheer you up.

The group laughs and for a moment and there is a break in the discussion.

Ms. Vasquez: But, can you acknowledge what Violeta is saying about the cartoon?

Fabiola: You know I do agree with what you said (looking at Violeta). I see what you mean about how we are controlled by our parents because we are girls. You know this right?

Violeta: It's just that I take all this serious.

Ms. Hernandez: So are we okay? Again we appreciate your honesty and courage to speak your minds. We really are so impressed with the discussion. You are so insightful for your age. I don't think I thought about these topics with as much clarity as I see in all of you until I was much older, and even now you teach me

new ways of seeing old problems. Thank you. Not to be too serious or anything. Don't worry I won't start dancing. We are running short on time so we have to move part of this activity until the next meeting. I do want us to think about something for next time. I am going to be giving you a chart to keep track of how much work each person in your home does. Now you don't have to say anything to anybody. I don't want you to confront your brother because of how much work he does. I just want you to keep track so we can have something to talk about at next meeting.

Sandra: Oh man, Ms. Hernandez I'm done. This is too easy. The boys don't do nothing. At least in my house my mom and me always do all of the work. My brother doesn't have to do the same amount of work as me. It's not fair. If we are supposed to be all weak, then why do we have to do all of the work?

It is apparent that Sandra has been holding this in for the meeting. And again the girls let out a laugh at her reaction.

Ms. Hernandez: What do you think would happen if you talked to your dad about fairness? Do you think he would be mad?

Sandra: My dad never hits me or my mom, so I don't think he would be all violent, but I am scared to go against him.

Ms. Vasquez: You don't have to go against him or you mom. Have you thought about just talking to him?

Sandra: I wouldn't know how to say it or what to say.

Ms. Vasquez: Well let's practice. We will do a role play. I will be your father. I want you to think about what you would say to your dad. Actually, why don't we all take a minute and think about how you would approach a parent or a teacher. Think of the words you would use. Think of the way you want to be spoken to and practice using the same respectful tone. You should never be afraid of expressing your feelings to anybody. It's not your fault if they can't handle it. If you are respectful and calm then it's up to them to respond. Remember to use I statements, because if you start... You this, or you that, what will happen?

Blanca: They will get all defensive, and they will not listen to your point.

Ms. Hernandez: Excellent! Now Sandra, start with an "I" statement about what you would tell your dad.

Sandra: You know this would be in Spanish?

Ms. Hernandez: I know, go ahead, Sandra *no dilates* (do not hesitate or stall).

Sandra: Okay. *Apá*, I want to talk to you. I feel like me and mom do a lot of the work for the whole family. I was wondering if we could talk about sharing the work between all of us since we are a family? I think this would be fair because me and my brother both go to school, and both you and mom both work. So, we should share the work.

Ms. Hernandez: That was fantastic! You were great. You used I statements. Your arguments were good. I liked that you made sure that it did not sound like an attack, and you talked about fairness and family. I couldn't have done it any

better. It sounded outstanding. Do you think you will be able to talk to your dad about the housework?

Sandra: I don't know. I guess I will try *cuando anda de buenas* (when he is in a good mood). It's not that easy.

Ms. Hernandez: You are so right. Please don't feel like you have to go home and do this immediately. Ladies we just have to have the words to speak to people. You cannot be intimidated by words. Every great speech has been practiced. My first year teaching I think I rehearsed almost everything that I was going to say in class, because I was nervous and in some ways intimidated by my students. I even practiced the jokes because I wanted my students to feel comfortable. I bet you didn't know that? Sometimes the people that you are afraid of are just as afraid of you. We have power. We just don't ever get a chance to try it out. Over the years, I have learned that I do not have to practice as much anymore, because I learned how to communicate with my classes without feeling like I didn't know what to say. If you practice the words then when you need them they will be there. If you never practice what you are going to say, how can you expect to remember when you are nervous? The same goes for your family or your teachers. You cannot assume something without trying. Just have the words ready. If you need help then all you have to do is ask one of us for help and we will sit with you until we can figure it out. You will know when the time is right. It's not always the same for everybody. I didn't learn until I was much older how

to approach people with power, because I thought that I had no power. You have as much of a right to your voice as anyone else. You are powerful. This strength is already inside each and every one of you.

Ms. Vasquez: Okay Señoritas, it is 5:20 and we are over time, but I would like to once again thank the ladies of Club Athena for making our discussions so powerful. Please remember that you are not an accident. You are here for a reason. And that reason is to change the world. *¡Nos vemos!* (We will see each other again)

The meeting ends and big sisters and little sisters hug and say goodbyes. The girls file out and cell phones come out to make sure that rides are outside.

Ms. Hernandez: Does everybody have a ride or walking partner? If you do not, we can give you a ride in about a half an hour. *Adios Señoritas.*

Soon the room is empty and Ms. Hernandez and Ms. Vasquez sit down and debrief the meeting.

Ms. Vasquez: Wow, did you expect the level of discussion we got today? Oh my god, it was fantastic. Violeta's comments blew me away. I really had not thought of the lyrics in the way she had interpreted. She is so sharp. You know she is going to Stanford?

Ms. Hernandez: I heard. She will do great things. We have to keep an eye on her to make sure she doesn't get homesick. It is incredible how they find a way to teach us something every time. We have to make sure that we connect more explicitly how a woman's role in the house is tied to how work is divided for next week. I

also think we should start talking about domestic violence. You can see that some of the girls were already in that space when we were talking about the song. I want us to be prepared to really address it.

Ms. Vasquez: Are you okay? I really got emotional a couple of times, I thought I was going to need a tissue.

Ms. Hernandez: I'm fine! I was going to ask you the same thing!

Ms. Vasquez: It can get so personal so fast. I know what Fabiola means about how serious it can get sometimes.

Ms. Hernandez: It's because it *is* serious for them, for us. But, do you see how engaged they are in the discussion? Even the quiet ones are glued to what each other is saying. They will learn from seeing the older girls speak up. You know we still struggle with some of the same things these girls do? We just have learned to cope better. Well if we are going to do domestic violence, do you think we should invite Carmen (school counselor)? You know she will stay if we ask her. She is good people.

Ms. Vasquez: You know I still have that connection from the MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund) that came to speak at the conference about preventing domestic violence. She had materials in Spanish. She can present it that way we can sit with the students in the group and be a part of the small group discussions.

Ms. Hernandez: Do it! That's such a great resource. Do you want to meet next week?

Ms. Vasquez: Let's meet Tuesday at lunch.

The teachers agree to meet and wish each other a good weekend.

Elizabeth's Body

During the research it became apparent that any notion of emancipation for many of the Latinas in the clubs, began with regaining control of their physical form. To the researcher, the fundamental struggle for the women in this study was the repossession and acceptance of their body. Repeatedly heard and observed during the research, was the recurring theme of finding beauty from within and self-acceptance. There was alienation by many from their own worth because they felt as if they lacked *something*. The difficulty in specifically naming this deficiency was that this *something* shifted depending with whom you spoke. For some, that *something* was that they were too big, for others too thin, for some their skin was too brown, for others they were not brown enough, for some they were too “dumb” or too smart. Tall or short, thick or thin, brown or white, black or blue, what became apparent to this male researcher was the constant barrage of messages that reinforced notions of deficiency and diminished a young Latina's worth. The opportunity for conversation that occurred in the spaces provided by the teachers delved into these contradictions and how they were used to keep young women from fulfilling their potential.

Some alternative spaces were beyond the physical walls of a school site. In this case, Elizabeth's struggles with accepting her body and regaining control of her life occurred outside of a classroom altogether, in cyber-space. Her experience led her to

look for strength in a community that extended beyond the school, the city and even the country where she lived. With the encouragement of a teacher she created a blog for girls fighting against eating disorders. In the process she connected with others facing the challenge of accepting their bodies. Cindy Cruz (2001) calls for the centralization of the brown body in the creation of new knowledge. In the case of Elizabeth's counter-story, focusing on her brown body reconnected her to a new knowledge of self and to the larger cultural understanding of what it means to be a woman.

The student on which Elizabeth is based is an incredible, intelligent, and composed young woman. Many of the thoughts and words used to craft this counter-story came from our interview and her Blog. Her struggles were not academic. For this young Latina it began with finding approval from her father. She looked for approval and attention through an extreme form of control in the form of anorexia and bulimia. Ultimately she was able to defeat this challenge and moved on to sharing her experiences and talents with her community and the world. She plans to attend a private liberal college within California and pursue her goal of becoming a writer.

“Don't let the world decide whether you need to kill yourself, or let them kill yourself for their approval. Live your life based on what the heart and soul desires; the only key to happiness other than humility.” (Elizabeth, 2010)

The Blog. Elizabeth's Blog: This website and blog is for all of the people that are struggling with acceptance.

September 15th, 2009

To all my friends welcome to my new project. This is my blog. Where I will share my incredible wisdom with all of you. You will finally get to see the real me. To the few people that even know that this site exists...read if you care.

Well, we've been in school for two weeks. I feel like I am going crazy. This morning when I took my shower giant clumps of hair where in my hands. I am 89 pounds and I am dizzy most of the time from lack of calories. I still feel fat. I am beginning this blog because I am tired of living this way. I passed out in class. So my teachers found out that something was wrong. I convinced my parents it was because of the heat and the stress of senior year. It looks like they bought it. But my school counselor didn't buy it. I promised her that I would go to counseling once a week. Great, one more thing I have to do. One of the "suggestions" was to have a journal. I have decided to make mine online and hope that other people can read this and join in the fun.

September 17th, 2009

Elizabeth, I know how you feel. Be strong. You will get better. I have struggled with anorexia since I was twelve. I am 18 now and have been able to find some peace with the help of family and friends. Do you have anybody helping you? Have you told anybody what you are doing? - Carmen

September 17th, 2009

I haven't really shared with anybody. I am afraid to tell my parents. They are the reason I feel this way. Ever since I was a little girl I have been compared to my cousins. "Why aren't you skinny like her? Eat some fruit you are getting too big. *Gordis* (fatty) go outside and play, etc... My nickname is GORDIS, even when I weighed 108 pounds! I have always been *la gordita*. I remember asking my dad for dance lessons and he says to me "Mija, dance class is for skinny girls. We'll put you in soccer like your brother, so you can run around." I have always wanted to be good enough for my dad, so I joined

AYSO. I was really good at soccer. My dad always thought I was trying to be better than my brother, and he liked that it motivated my brother to be better. “Look at your sister! You are getting beat by a girl!” I was doing it to lose weight; I didn’t care about how my brother was doing.

I am ashamed at what I do to control my weight, but on one of my worst days, when I was throwing up and dizzy, my dad says to me “*te vez muy bien, mija* (you look really good, my daughter). How do I talk to them when I only get their praise when I am suffering? I get good grades. They don’t praise me! They tell me I am supposed to get good grades, “You don’t get a prize for doing what you are supposed to do!”

I know I have had anorexia. I am not stupid. I want to be a doctor, so I know all about the different kinds of eating disorders. I know that what I have now is bulimia, because I binge then I throw up. This doesn’t change the fact that I feel in power. I feel like I have power over my parents, because they can’t make me eat. No matter what they say or do I have that power. I almost like that they get so angry when I don’t eat, but I feel in control. But, it is so bad right now that I feel like I am in hell.

September 21st, 2009

You have to tell someone. You will be surprised about how many people are in your shoes, and would be there for you. You are not alone in this struggle. -Maria

September 22nd, 2009

I don’t know, anymore. My counselor has made me join a club on campus called Club Athena. It sounds lame, but I have to go to at least three meetings. We’ll see how it goes. There are a few girls that I know that go there. It’s supposed to be only for girls.

September 24th, 2009

I just came back from Club Athena. It was a lot better than I expected. The teacher whose class I was in when I passed out helps run the club. The topic this week you

guessed it. Body image. I felt like the whole group was looking at me. We talked about what a woman is supposed to look like. They talked about the media. The usual. How magazines and movies and commercials are making us feel like we have to be white, with blue eyes, tall and skinny. I am Brown, 5'1 with brown eyes and brown hair. Of course I feel like I will never be like the girls they show on TV or in the magazines. One teacher, Ms. Gonzalez joked, "**They** don't even look like what we see!" and everyone laughed. The one thing I did like was a presentation by one of the girls on how the internet can be used to find the truth. One of the things she showed was all of the times magazines have been caught putting other people's faces on skinnier bodies. She showed how Oprah's face got put on another body. Then she showed some before and after pictures where the models were photoshopped to look skinnier. Then one of the girls talked about having anorexia. That she had even been put in the hospital and forced fed when she was younger. I felt everything she said, about shame and control. I know about the effects of the media, but for me it has to do more with being a good daughter. I want to be the kind of daughter that my parents will be proud of. Right now I feel like if I don't look a certain way I am an embarrassment for them. Anyway, I gave the girl in the club the address to this blog so I hope she will read this.

September 27th, 2009

Hi Elizabeth and welcome to Club Athena. You are in the right spot. I hope we can talk in person more. Don't be shy. We are all here for you. You should tell your parents. They love you no matter what. Sometimes you think that they will turn their backs on you, but they will be the ones that will help you the most. If they don't then it's still not your fault. The truth is that most parents are ignorant about how much things they say hurt us. They might actually think they are trying to help you, and don't realize how they hurt you. And if you think it's a secret, you would be surprised how many of the teachers have already figured out what is going on. Don't be afraid to ask for help. I hope we can talk before the next meeting- Socorro

October 3rd, 2009

Thanks Socorro. And I want to thank you and a certain teacher for talking to me. I found out that one of my teachers has had bulimia almost all of her life. She has a counselor that she still goes to. She says no one should suffer in silence or alone, because life is too short and precious. I think I agree with her. She makes me feel like I may be able to start changing some of the things I am doing. I hope she reads the blog.

October 4th, 2009

I am really scared. This is the fourth month that I haven't had a period. I don't know what is wrong with me. I am so tired of sticking to my exercise schedule, counting each calorie. I feel like crap. My heart goes fast then slow. Sometimes it beats so hard I am afraid everybody is going to hear it. I can even see it beating through my chest. I am tired and depressed all of the time. I don't want my senior year to be like this. Sorry, bad day ☹.

October 5th, 2009

Elizabeth you are a beautiful person. You have to believe that you are beautiful for the right reasons. Don't ever be ashamed of who you are. I don't care if you tell people about me having bulimia. I will not stay silent. It is because we suffer in silence that nothing changes. I have grown to understand that I am a good person who is doing good in this world. I will not be defined by food, or what ever others feel about how I should look. What makes you beautiful isn't how skinny you are, I know you may not believe this, but it truly is what you possess inside of you that makes you a beautiful young woman. I want you to meet me and Socorro for lunch tomorrow. Don't get stressed. It is no pressure. I just want to sit with you and talk. Meet me in my room. -Ms. V.

October 12th, 2009

I have been having lunch with Ms Valdivia. and Socorro for a week. The first two days I didn't eat anything. I told them I wasn't hungry, but that was a lie. I am always hungry.

But they are so worried about me that I promised I would eat some grapes and would not exercise for a day. I promised I would do this. We talked about control or better yet feeling out of control. Ms. V. made the point about how much control do you have if you can't stay conscious during class or control the rhythm of my own heart. I can't even control my period. What control do I really have? Since then I have gained 1 pound. I am at 91 pounds. I still see myself like I am fat. I know that this is not a lot of weight but I am short. I have made a promise to eat more calories. I will see how long I can take it.

October 14th, 2009

You are beautiful and strong. You are powerful. If you can control yourself and not eat, and you can control extreme amounts of exercise, you can be powerful enough to get better. You are strong. You are loved. You have people that believe in you. –Socorro

October 20th, 2009

I have been to two Club Athena meetings. At the last meeting I shared the address for this blog to the whole group. They have really made me feel welcome. I feel like I can share my stories there. Ms. Valdivia sat next to me during this meeting. We talked about being a Latina in the United States. It was about what does it mean to be a woman. It was so fun to take my mind off of food. I am still eating with Ms. V and Socorro, and we have a few other girls who are getting together to talk. The talks have been good for me. There are so many girls who feel like they are not good enough the way they are. It has really opened my eyes. I am really enjoying making new friends. They don't make me feel bad. The way we talk, I know they aren't talking behind my back.

It has really made me think about what is the "perfect" woman. I don't know what it means to be perfect. For my family a woman should be thin. She should have long hair, and should always dress up to go out. My parents are from Mexico and they always worry about what everybody is going to say about the way we look, like they could tell

what kind of person you are by the shape of your body or the type of your clothes. Sometimes I want to yell at them, "We don't live in Mexico anymore! We live in the ghetto! Lincoln City is ghetto! What do they think people are going to say?"

Anyway, I have gained another pound. I begin to feel out of control as soon as I see the scale move up. But, I have promised the people around me that I would try. I am feeling stronger. I am not as dizzy anymore in class. I also started taking a vitamin. It doesn't have any calories, so I don't stress too much. I'll write again soon.

October 24th, 2009

It is weird how in your family you have to be thin to be considered a good looking woman. I am skinny. I have always been skinny. I think I will always be skinny. Since I was in middle school my mom and all of my *tías* (aunts) have said to me and my sister, "A real woman has curves!" I am always told I look like boy. I get asked when I am going to grow my chest. It is embarrassing. They push food to *make* me gain weight. I guess I wanted to tell you that the image of what is a "woman" isn't just the idea of a *flaquita* (skinny girl). It seems like our parents are so stuck on appearances, that they don't realize how much they hurt us with their comments. Be strong. You will get better. Do not let them run your life with hurtful words. –Griselda

November 5th, 2009

Thank you Griselda for your post. I am realizing how much pressure is on us to be perfect. And perfect is different for everybody. Maybe there is no such thing as perfect. I understand now that for some reason the people who love us don't ever ask us what we think. They think that they know what is best for us, without realizing that they have old ideas of what it means to be a Latina in the United States. In the Club (Athena) we have talked about how those old ideas kept many women from going to school. What surprised me is that there are parents who want some of the girls to work after high school. I am beginning to see my parents a little differently. They have hurt me, but they

also have always stressed school. They have told me that I was going to be a doctor longer than they have made me feel fat.

The people that have come up to me since reading the blog is surprising. There are always some @#\$% up boys that have found out about the site and they come up to me during school and wave chips and candybars in front of me and say messed up things like, "That uniform makes your ass look fat!" Do you believe these *pendejos* (idiots)? What has made me strong is that I have surrounded myself with people that protect me from these types of people. They give me confidence. I read the first entries and I think what was I thinking? I was so sad. I was depressed. I don't feel sad anymore. I feel hopeful. One of my friends from Club Athena is on the school paper. She has decided to do an article on me and this blog. She feels it is time to let more people know. I asked Ms. V. what she thought, and she agreed with my friend. I guess it is not a secret anymore. But it is better to have it all out in the open. I should not be afraid of what people know. I can't control what they think of me, but I can control how I live my life. I am still gaining weight and I am up to almost 100 pounds for the first time in a year. I feel more confident and strong as the days go on.

November 12th, 2009

We haven't seen you at lunch. Where are you? We miss you? -Socorro

November 15th, 2009

Elizabeth, can we talk soon? You keep avoiding me and I am concerned about you. I don't want to corner you in class, but I will if you don't come by to talk. Please, come talk to me. I want to make sure you are alright. -Ms. V.

November 25th, 2009

It has been a bad couple of weeks. I have been staying home sick on the days I have Ms. V's class. I am ashamed to see her. I don't know if I am ready to talk yet. Two weeks

ago my dad asked me if I was hungry, I said no, and he said, "Good so you won't gain any weight." How can I let him control me like that? I got real sad. I have been throwing up again after dinner and exercising for an hour and have lost the weight I had gained over the last few weeks. At least I feel some control over my life again.

The problem is that I feel completely tired, and my eyes have dark circles under them, the skin on my hands is dry and ashy, my teeth hurt and my gums bleed, my hair is blah, and I vomit acid a little bit out of nowhere. It's great. It really is --. I cry every day now... I don't know why. I stay in my room and make excuses to not go out. I can't enjoy myself. Even when I go on "dates," I don't enjoy any of it; the hugs, compliments, I don't even kiss because I feel like I'm not good enough to be kissed. I'm scared of being alone forever because of this. I feel like giving up because I'm throwing up again. However, I can't give up because now I have Socorro and Ms. V. who are counting on me and if I fall, it's like they fall. I can't let that happen because they have backed me up. I have to be strong and start again. I am sorry for avoiding you Ms. V., I will come by this week. Just give me some days to figure things out.

November 25th, 2009

I want to help you. Please come by. We will do whatever it takes to make sure you are safe and healthy. We will help you anyway that we can. -Ms. Valdivia

November 25th, 2009

Liz! We love you! Everything will be okay. We got your back. I understand how you feel. You have people on your side. Please come to Ms. V.'s room tomorrow.

November 26th, 2009

Elizabeth. I wanted you to know how brave I think you are. I know you don't feel like it right now, but I would never have the guts to ask for help, or share my pain with so many people. What you are doing will help others. You will show others how to be brave. We are here for you. Keep fighting. -Maria

December 19th 2009

Hey everybody. I know it has been a long time since I wrote. I started going back to talk with Ms. V. and I have been doing better. We just had our last Club meeting before Christmas break. The whole group hugged me and basically had an intervention ☺. Thanks. That's not embarrassing. J.K. I appreciate what everybody said and I feel like I belong. I have gained four pounds in the last four weeks. Along with Ms. V. we have set a target weight of 105 pounds for when we get back from vacation. Socorro, thank you for hanging out with me over the break; I think of you like a sister. We are family now. I feel supported and loved. Without your help I don't know if I could have made it. Tun...tun...tun...I have decided to talk to my parents over vacation. I think it is time. I feel like I have to do this or I will always be walking around like a stranger in my own house. My dad needs to know how much he hurts me.

December 20th, 2009

You will be fine. You will see they will love you no matter what. -Griselda

January 15th, 2010

I am back! I reached my goal of 105 pounds. My back no longer looks like a skeleton. My skin is better, and I have more energy. I finally confronted my parents right before Christmas. I started crying even before I even opened my mouth, but I said what I had to say and they sat there and listened. My dad crossed his arms and made a face from his chair. My mom cried for a long time. I know she knew I was hurting, but did not know what to say or do. She's old school, tries not to shake things up too much in the house. My father could not admit that he was wrong for saying those hurtful things. He kept saying that I was too sensitive, and that he was only looking out for ME! He wanted me to be thin and healthy. Was he blind! My hair was falling out! Whatever. He said, that he didn't want me to be teased like he was when he was a kid. He didn't want me to be treated badly by other people because I was a *gorda*. I told him that his words made me

feel worse than any comment from any stupid boy or girl. He is my father, and I remember everything. What is nothing to him is the world to me. He still would not accept it. I just think it is hard for men to admit when they have hurt us. Maybe he thinks he is less of a man if he admits he was wrong. I didn't tell them about this site. I am not ready for them to be able to use my words against me. Maybe when I feel better, I will let them read this blog.

After all of the talking at least my dad has changed a little. He hasn't apologized or anything, but he hasn't made any comments about my weight or body since I confronted him and we all cried together. I feel like something changed forever when I told my parents. I finally felt like I was in control. I told them how I felt because I was strong enough to challenge him. I have to believe that I am beautiful. I know that I can be strong when I have to stand up for myself. I am not perfect, but I don't have to be. I just have to be true to who I am. I have to be proud of who I am.

Socorro and I have decided to change this blog into a full website with information about all types of eating disorders. This website will be dedicated to all the beautiful people with souls that are trying to break free from this suicidal spell. I have found that eating disorders affect female, male, straight, gay, rich, poor, black, white, brown and blue. This has to stop.

The newspaper article has come out. My picture was right on the front. The title read. "Student shares how website saved her life." I know the title is all dramatic, but this is the best I have felt over the last few years. The response from all of the students at my school has been great. For every person that had something bad to say, there were 20 who said they had learned something about eating disorders. I never showed the paper to my family. This is mine. I feel so much stronger now that there are no secrets. Everybody knows, and all I care about is helping those who are suffering in silence.

May 10th, 2010

Wow! It has been a long time since I have written in the blog section. But as you can see we now have: mind, body, spirit, videos, music, movies, our stories, other peoples' stories, and help sections. We have a pretty complete website that has been read worldwide. Yes, worldwide! We have been read in Australia and England. Thanks to friends on Myspace we have had so many people view the site that we have spent most of the time answering email.

Socorro and I want to thank all of the young women who have shared their advice in making this website. You have helped save my life. I am 115 pounds. I am strong and healthy. I have been accepted to Harvey Mudd College. I have decided that it was my father's dream for me to be a doctor, not mine. I want to be a writer, so that is what I will be. I have learned to love expressing myself in words, and have seen the power of not staying silent. To all of my friends that walked with me through the fire, you are like angels sent from god.

To M. V. and the women of Club Athena, we are not accidents. Let your light shine. Remain strong. To you I dedicate this quote from Ghandi, "You can chain me, you can torture me, you can even destroy this body, but you will never imprison my mind". I finally feel like my spirit is free.

Take care for now,

Liz

=] <3 xx

Summary

The three counter-stories presented in this chapter were formed with the voices of the women and girls that participated in this endeavor. The presentation of the data is

consistent with prior use of counter-narratives in that it provides an alternative reality that is not captured in traditional academia (Delgado, 2000; Fernandez, 2002; Marsiglia & Holleran, 1999; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002a). The counter-stories were developed from a socially and culturally specific standpoint. While the stories may be located and limited to the Latinas of Lincoln City, some of the emotions and experiences cut across gender, ethnicity, and/or class. The Latinas in this alternative school space revealed a gendered conscientization that challenged the traditional definition espoused by critical pedagogues.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Is the GOC political? I think it is. I think everything I do is political. You know, what I wear. What I buy. What I don't buy. What I eat. What I don't eat. What I say. Everything. I come from that idea. I come from that. That idea is very clear to me. I come from that school of thought that everything is political. Like you say you have no thoughts about that? Well, saying that, you do! This idea of "I'm neutral"? No. I don't buy into that. (Teacher)

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the practice of Latina teachers and their use of alternative physical spaces to engage Latina students in activities that helped develop a critical consciousness. This was accomplished by elevating the voice of Latinas through the use of qualitative feminist methodologies. The study reevaluated Freire's (1970) perspectives on conscientization through the use of critical feminist methodologies. The research was guided by a single question: How do Latina teachers use informal spaces to create opportunities for students to develop a critical consciousness?

This chapter provides a review of the methodologies used in the study and addresses the following: a discussion of the expected and unexpected findings from the research and how some of them correlate with the literature reviewed in Chapter II; implications for educators and teacher preparation programs; and recommendations for further study.

Methodology

Many times the voices of groups on the periphery are dismissed as meaningless and derided as useless for scholarship (Brady, 1994; Darder, 2006; Duncan, 2002b; Hill-Collins, 2000/2009). This study was about a group of Latinas at a public school, within a segregated community, in an economically disadvantaged city. The literature characterized them as a systematically marginalized group (Anzaldúa, 1999; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). However, the same literature also detailed the resiliency and power of women who struggled with oppression and find strength in a life of contradiction (Anzaldúa, 2002a; Cruz, 2001; Sandoval, 2000). The conflict that exists within the lives of many Latinas is a challenge for traditional methodologies that diminish the deeper meaning of the conflict and relegate their experiences as useless because of an inconsistency to produce a uniform, thus quantifiable, pattern (Harding, 2004a, Hill-Collins, 2000/2009). This reduces the value of the Latina voice to the mainstream academia because it is not the voice of male academia or white feminism.

For this reason, the researcher used critical qualitative methodologies in order to represent the voice of Latina women and girls in a meaningful manner. Through the use of critical and feminist methodologies including Standpoint, CRT, and LatCrit, an alternative account of how some Latinas navigate their experience within an American school emerged. Their stories challenged the expectations for young women in similar situations. The findings emerging from this small study and limited sample provided data to create counter-stories reflecting the unique experience of Latinas in Lincoln City schools. Furthermore, these counter-narratives possessed a “strong objectivity” because

the voices shaping the stories come from a socially, culturally, and economically situated standpoint presented by the participants of this study (Harding, 2004b).

The majority of the data was gathered through the use of formal, semi-structured interviews and observations. Interviews provided the most meaningful information in developing a particular standpoint and counter-story, as the interviews present the best approximation of a participant's feelings or opinions about a given phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Hatch (2002) writes, "Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures that participants make to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds" (p. 91). The counter-stories in this dissertation were composed using data collected through traditional qualitative methods including the interview process, informal discussions, observations, and the researcher's cultural sensitivity. The information gathered was used to define a standpoint that was socially located and particular to the Latina girls and women of the GOC and Club Athena. The standpoint was then used to craft a series of three counter-stories using data from the perspective of the participants (Delgado, 2000; Harding, 2004a; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Findings

Latina teachers at AMS created alternative spaces for girls to develop a critical consciousness. Freire's (1970) definition of conscientization, "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality" (p.19), was insufficient to explain how women at this research site were working towards a critical consciousness. In addition to understanding social,

political, and economic oppression, teachers and students also worked to understand the insidiousness of emotional oppression. While consistent in spirit with Freire (1970), the teachers and students of the GOC and Club Athena advanced a rendering of *conscientização* that understood the power of social, political and economic clarity, yet also elevated the development of emotional strength on par with the others.

Findings from this study are divided into two categories. The first is composed of the expected findings that substantiated the presence of dialogue, praxis, and reflection and supported aspects of Freire's perspectives. These findings were consistent with contemporary studies done by researchers across disciplines on critical consciousness. The second section is composed of unexpected findings that were not found during the literature review. It was the unexpected results that most surprised and fundamentally altered the way the researcher viewed Freire, conscientization, and the feminist approach to critiquing critical pedagogy. The unexpected findings were rooted in the strength of the affective space to foster a gendered critical consciousness. The themes in this study emerged from answering the single research question regarding the use of alternative spaces by Latina teachers to develop a critical consciousness among Latina girls.

Expected Findings

The expected themes were organized in no particular order of importance. They are listed in the order they emerged to the researcher during analysis. The first theme described in this chapter focuses on the role of a community of Latinas and how shared experiences are used to create a space for girls within their school. This theme was supported by findings in the works of Acosta (2007), Osijama (2007), and Revilla

Tijerina (2004). Second, a Lincoln City Latina feminism emerged that mirrored the work of Anzaldúa (2002a) and Sandoval (2000), by accepting the contradictions in Latinas lives created by navigating disparate worlds. A third theme identified how critical consciousness was developed through activation of the cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains through dialogue, praxis, and reflection. This last finding referenced the work of Freire, (1970) Osijama (2007), Revilla Tijerina (2004), and Sakamoto & Pitner (2005), and supported a traditional perspective towards the development of a critical consciousness.

[My connection] it's authentic because of my experience, a similar experience rooted in these girls' lives. I come from [the same place], I mean, Lincoln City, Watts it is the same thing! You know? It's the same thing. I don't see it differently. (Teacher)

Theme I: Strength in a community of women. A theme that emerged during observations was the presence and importance of a community of women as creators of a safe and empowering space. This finding was consistent with the experiences of other participants in endeavors that formed a critical consciousness among the members of the group (Camarota, 2007; Cruz, 2001; Kaplan et al., 2009; Osijama, 2007; Revilla Tijerina, 2004; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). However, only Revilla Tijerina's (2004) research dedicated itself to the observation of a community of Latina women. This is important because according to some research, communities of women like the one created by the Latinas in this study, are able to actualize spaces that foster an atmosphere of reduced competition and increased tolerance (Hartsock, 1998; Hill-Collins, 2000/2009;

Revilla Tijerina, 2004). Sympathy and empathy were the building blocks of the studied community of young women. Through a connection to other more experienced Latinas, the younger women of the GOC and Club Athena found acceptance and affirmation. The atmosphere in this space was key in the development of a critical consciousness.

When asked what she saw in the girls, and how she was connected to the students she served, Ms. Hernandez shared:

Themes. Universal things that connect us, you know? I mean, when I say it's the same thing, it's the struggle of our families, families wanting more for their kids, etc. Even as messed up as my house was on many levels, my mom always told my sister and I since the beginning, and I remember her saying, 'You're going to college.' My mom had no clue what that was. She didn't have the capital to negotiate the entrance due. All I knew was that I was going, and somehow I was going to get there. You know what I mean? So all of the things that are the same to me, parents wanting more for their kids, the struggles of poor, and working class families are very real. This sense of community.

Many of the girls interviewed shared that it was comforting to see a person that looked like them, spoke like them, and had experienced similar challenges and success in life.

When asked about the importance of the teachers in the GOC and Club Athena being Latinas, one student shared "They look like me, they talk like me, I know they think about the same things I do." Comments like this were spoken on many occasions. It was apparent by the attentiveness of the girls during conversations that they responded well to the teachers having shared their experiences. The Asian-American college students in

Osijama's (2007) study eloquently described how they felt a kinship with people they had never met as soon as they heard their histories and realized they were not alone. When Ms. Hernandez was asked to describe herself and if she felt that how she self-identified was meaningful for her students, she said:

I identify [with them]... I come from Mexican parents. [I am] Mexican. I was born here, but culturally I identify as Chicana, which is more the political [identity] – which is not what you hear a lot. It's not the norm anymore. But I do identify with Latina too because I think there's more of a global connection with other women who weren't necessarily of Mexican descent. I think there's value in that but at the same time I think it's important to assert the different pieces in the cultural landscape, you know? We're not all the same. And we're not supposed to be the same. We've talked about this, if you grow up in Lincoln City, South Side, it's different than growing up in East LA. So it's important to say I'm Latina. We're all a sisterhood or brotherhood in that sense. But at the same time, this has been my experience and this is what I choose to identify as X, Y, and Z. But with the Girls Only Club, I see myself in the girls, in my students. I see myself in them because of their experiences, we've lived it. I hear them and what they're talking about at home. 'My dad this' or 'My mom said this, Ms. Hernandez' or 'We went to this place.' And I'm just listening like okay we come from the same place.

When asked to elaborate on why identification with the students motivated her to work to create a space for girls, she continued:

So when I [decided to create the club], knowing that in the sixth grade that this space did not exist for me at all. It was hard for me. Middle school was really hard, and high school and so on. And I never spoke. I *never* spoke! I was a silent seventh grader. I was a silent sixth grader in the formal classroom. Now, did I resist? And did I question? Of course. Because I remember not buying into certain things. I was never a follower I remember that. Because when people were going this way, you felt the pressure. But I never bought into it. But I never could speak either. So I guess it was like, ‘Okay, I know I’m not going to go that way, but I really can’t be myself 100%?’ You know? Or say what I really think.

Later in the interview, she shared.

Honestly? I think, I just, it’s still very clear to me what it was like to be them. And I didn’t have that support. I had my mom who whenever she wanted to squeeze in some *tiempo* (time) she would. And then my cousins and the rest of the 6th grade girls, or my middle school friends were in the same boat that I was! So we were feeding each other whatever – I don’t know –Myths!

For Ms. Hernandez and other teachers working with the girls, they saw the need for a critical yet safe place for girls to question. It was interesting to hear that resistance and questioning had always been part of the participating teachers’ lives. They just did not have a community that supported them. The GOC became, for some of the teachers in this study, a space that did not exist for them as children. This space allowed the teachers, along with the students, to create a narrative that was very different than the one

they had experienced at home and a more profound questioning than what a classroom space allowed.

The GOC is organized around the belief that all of the participants can find a common ground through shared experiences. This reliance on empathy and sympathy lies in the affective domain, and is crucial for the connection the girls feel to the club and its sponsors. The cognitive domain is also engaged as students deconstruct the shared experiences. The behavioral domain is where there begins to be a difference with the literature. In the GOC much of the behavior or praxis is turned inward. The work, the labor, of the participants is not to dismantle the public mechanisms of oppression, but the internalized behaviors and attitudes that keep the young Latinas in this group from being fully realized.

The role of a community based on shared experiences, whether they be organized by gender, ethnicity, or interest was apparent in the responses of participants from both clubs. This correlated with the findings of Osijama (2007) and Revilla Tijerina (2004) regarding the need for a safe space for people to meet and share their experiences. In Freire's (1970) terms, this community facilitated dialogue and reflection on their shared realities. In the words of Sakamoto and Pitner (2005), this community stimulated dialogue that allowed for the development of a critical consciousness through the affective, cognitive and behavioral domains.

Theme II: Color on color feminism. It became apparent as the study progressed that the “feminism” or *Muxerismo* that was exhibited by the women of the GOC was very much in line with Anzaldúa (2002b), Cruz (2001), and Sandoval (2000). There existed a uniquely Chicana and/or Latina feminism that was dissimilar to mainstream white feminism, which theorists like Luke and Gore (1992a) represent, and even to Black feminists like Hill-Collins (2000/2009) or, Harding (2004). Luke and Gore (1992a), while immensely influential in articulating a critique of purported liberatory enterprises, were still decidedly focused in the world of academia (hooks, 1984/2000; Sandoval, 2000). Like many of the majoritarian feminists, they exist in the world of theory. There is a disconnect between the language of the academy and the real world struggle to change realities for marginalized women. Luke and Gore (1992a) wrote how, “[post-structuralism] highlights the complicity of all discourses of disciplinary power and so shatters any illusions of innocence held by self-proclaimed emancipatory discourse” (p. 9), yet they do not present a critique that adequately presents a pedagogy that can deal with the realities of women of color in the United States. Furthermore, a theoretical exercise is only useful in theory and fails in practice, if the message never reaches the people affected or is impractical (hooks, 1984/2000).

Hill-Collins (2000/2009) and Harding (2004b) write from a very powerful perspective that sheds much light on the socially located factors that have affected Black women in the United States. There is a theoretical approach that centers the voice of the marginalized and begins to bridge the gap between the realities of all women of color and academia (Harding, 2004a). Black feminists put forward a critique that illuminates the

various socially located factors that create environments that are dispiriting, and allows for the reality of women to be understood beyond a theoretical understanding of oppression (Hill-Collins 2000/2009). Yet the experiences of the Latinas in this study are best understood through the work of other Latinas.

Anzaldúa (2002b) capably depicted this tension between what is felt by, and what is expected of Latinas. She described her culture as a turtle shell that she carries with her. As she encounters new experiences and challenges, Anzaldúa's culture influences, but does not define her new identity. This perspective is learned over lifetimes of being fiercely independent, yet also subservient at times (Anzaldúa, 2002b). Latinas in the United States constantly inhabit different worlds (Cruz, 2001). For example, during a meeting of the GOC there was apprehension on the part of a student when trying to define her role in her traditionally Mexican family. She felt that she was right to feel angry at the unequal treatment of her and her brother, yet did not want to upset her parents.

Latinas are *Mexicanas*, Chicanas, feminists, teachers, partners, women, daughters, wives, students, lovers, etc. These roles sometimes demand that women embody contradictory attributes in order to be aligned with each identity. Chela Sandoval described how these positions have developed in U.S. third world women, a differential consciousness. According to Sandoval (2000) a differential consciousness has been developed because of an existence by Latinas in a constant state of oppression. These conditions have constantly placed women of color in positions where movements through aspects of their identities have been necessary for their survival. For example, *Mexicanas*

have traditionally been taught to put the family first, yet as feminists this causes conflict with some of the ideals espoused by mainstream feminism (Denner & Guzman, 2006). This conflict has been problematic for Latinas, as groups expect loyalty to their perspectives. Latinas, especially, face a rejection of their independence from a patriarchal culture while simultaneously facing rejection by other women in the struggle for fair treatment and for maintaining aspects of their culture. Anzaldúa (1999) best described how Latinas must take what is good about their culture and leave behind all aspects that are oppressive for women. The feminism of Anzaldúa (1999) and Sandoval (2000) embraced the contradictions and refuted the concept of the existence of an essential, clearly defined Chicana identity. The women of the GOC were able to negotiate this contradictory reality by understanding the phenomena when addressing the girls in the club. They know exactly how difficult it is to balance the need to be treated better while maintaining a respectful relationship with their family. Their critical consciousness was more akin to Sandoval's (2000) differential consciousness than Freire's (1970) *conscientização*.

There was a constant struggle by participants to identify, name, and appropriate language that diminished their ability to make choices. Ms. Hernandez shared some of the messages she heard growing up, and also heard from her students. She continued, [My parents would tell me], 'You're the oldest.' You know? 'Don't talk back' 'No, you're supposed to take care of your little sister.' Or, I'm trying to think more of – or, 'You're not supposed to talk back to me. No, that's a good girl.' You know? Culturally, my god, there's a lot of stuff. There's a lot of stuff!

The concept of what defined a “good girl” was deconstructed during meetings and students would question how being good equated to being quiet. The students and teachers discussed how some of these messages silenced them from expressing their voice. Ms. Hernandez continued,

You know there’s a lot to be said for them being able to say what they think. And we just listen to them. Because I don’t think those spaces exist. At home, in school. Where they can just be. And say, their voice. Especially with the song, ‘The good girl is quiet. Don’t be loud. Don’t say that.’ Those messages, we’re drinking that in, they’re in the water. So, to counter that and give girls a space where they hear a different message, ‘No, we want to listen to you. What do you think about that?’ and we just listen. It doesn’t exist. It doesn’t exist.

The approaches most valued by the teachers of the GOC aligned with Sandoval’s (2000) technologies for the resistance of oppression. Sandoval (2000) laid out semiotics, deconstruction, and meta-idealizing as a means of understanding and fighting oppression. The participants of this study mirrored Sandoval’s methodologies without a conscious effort to do so. There was an awareness of how language is used by those in power to separate one from one’s true self. One teacher shared how she identified oppressive practices by identifying and naming them stating, “that’s powerful to name it and say it even if you have to fake it until you believe. That’s powerful. Whenever we speak, or do, there’s power. It affects the chain of events.” Once the language was identified it was broken down to understand why it was used, and how it affected the power dynamics between people. For example, teachers took words like “*bien educada*”

(well educated) and would deconstruct the meanings and implications. Being *bien educada* meant more than being well educated. It meant to be docile and quiet. Students would then reflect on how this idea affected their behaviors. Finally, the symbols and language presented as normal were questioned and new understandings were created that better served the Latinas in this study. One teacher described how she warned students to question even an exchange that could be seen as normal. She shared:

That's when I get like 'I want you to know you can do it. I want you to see it coming.' Because I give them examples ... You know you're going to have a counselor that's going to tell you, 'Oh don't take that class because you don't want to go to that school.' Just know that that's a red flag. And what that counselor's trying to say is you can't do this. They're deciding for you. Why do they get to decide? You decide for you! You have all the options at the table, then you decide. Don't have someone else decide for you.

Students were encouraged to challenge instances where others would usurp their ability to make choices for themselves. In addition to understanding the language of power, girls would need to be able to prepare themselves to identify and withstand practices that would keep them from being successful. One teacher shared how she prepared her students,

We tell them that the hammer is coming. So in our critical conscious lesson we tell them, 'The hammer is there. Be ready. Call it out.' When you see it coming, 'Aw, that's the hammer.' So you name it. You don't give it power. That's what that is. Got it! Okay, I know what to do. I know what it is.

The unique feminism that was observed in this study, while spiritually in-line with Anzaldúa (2002b), in practice was more in-line with the work of Sandoval (2000) and bell hooks (1984/2000). Though bell hooks is not a Latina, she stressed the importance of language and education in understanding your place and trajectory in society. Specifically, hooks' (1984/2000) perspective of the practical application of a liberatory theory, and the role of education in the emancipation of women, aligns with the teachers' practice. hooks (1984/2000) advocates for the necessity of basic literacy as a primary tenet of the feminist agenda. She wrote, "The political importance of literacy is still under-stressed in feminist's movements today even though the printed material has become the sole medium for the expression of theory" (hooks, 1984/2000, p. 109). In addition to literacy, hooks wrote of the need to include men in the struggle for the just treatment of women. hooks (1984/2000) believed that liberation should not be solely "women's work" (p. 69), and though the GOC was limited to girl participants, the work of changing unjust practices or language carried over to the co-ed classes.

For the teachers of the GOC fell in line in their practice with hooks, perspective on literacy. Ms. Hernandez shared an experience she had outside of the club that illustrated how girls had accepted the language of power. During her interviews she mentioned how she had noticed adults at school treating students differently according to gender, and how the difference affected the children's treatment of each other. When asked about how the different treatment of children according to gender manifested itself, Ms. Hernandez continued by sharing a moment she had shared with one of her classes:

I know that even this week in class, I was hearing the kids saying – the boys, and then the girls started mimicking them – ‘Ladies first.’ But they were referring to the boys. ‘Ladies first.’ And so I was like, ‘Okay.’ I let them come in and sit down. And then we had this 20-minute conversation about language. And at first they were looking at me like, ‘Ohhh busted!’ And they were kind of smirking like they wanted to crack up because I started using the homophobic language they use like ‘fruity.’ Well, I didn’t use ‘fruity.’ I used—What’s the one they use? That’s so ‘gay.’ So then I started just talking. Just talking, just talking. And I said, ‘Look. There’s power in language. There’s power in what you say. Words can hurt. And words can uplift you, you know?’ And I said, ‘When you guys use that language what are you saying? What are you trying to say about being male?’ And so I went on and on and on. And then all of a sudden all of the hands started flying around the room, which I thought was great. Because then they had stories and they had their take on things. So then I put a chart on the board and I said, ‘Look there’s personal power.’ And I put like a circle and I said, ‘You have power.’ And then I wrote down what they were sharing. So when I hear that language, to me, I don’t like it and this is why. I’m going to tell you why. Because it’s going against people’s own sense of who they are and you’re trying to bring them down. So then somehow it turned into their feeling disrespected by words used by teachers. The tone, like that they’re silent. So one kid Martin, Martin is very vocal, said, ‘I need help, can you help me with some words to

use?’ I said, ‘Okay. I’m going to give you some statements, ‘I’ statements. Don’t say ‘You, you, you!’ Say ‘I.’ ‘I felt hurt because...’ But you have a right as a human being to stand up for yourself. To be assertive. Assertive was one of the words I used, and personal power. But it was fascinating to me how once we started talking about them then *las manos* (hands went up). Initially it was, ‘Oh Ms. So and so, and Ms. This did that, and Ms. *Fulana* (Jane Doe) said that.’ But then I said, ‘Look, I’m just going to have a conversation.’ And then they were like, ‘Okay, got it.’ But I feel I need to create the space where we do more of that sort of stuff in here. Because that really alters their own interactions with each other. But I thought that this was one of those moments. It wasn’t in my planner! It was like, I’m going to address it because it’s right there and I cannot not say anything. And they responded. And in that moment I thought, ‘How am I going to go with this?’ And I thought, okay personal power, be assertive. You know, this is what you can do. But it’s interesting. It’s kind of like, the kids model for each other how to treat each other—your mom was your model for being a woman. Same with my mom and her mom. We can go generations. It’s the same with the kids saying that stuff. They’re not getting that on their own. That’s being modeled to them. It’s being shown to them and they’re just repeating it you know? The little pecking order. Because then the girls started doing it! It was like instantaneous! All the girls. And I was like, ‘Oh no, no, no!’ Let’s talk about it. So it’s not what we say right? It is but it isn’t. It’s like what do we do?

She related this story to illustrate how questioning the use of language became the vehicle to question how students were treating each other. To Ms. Hernandez, educating the boys to their privilege was as necessary as assisting girls in recognizing their acceptance of unjust practices.

During observations and interviews, the researcher noticed that understanding the meanings and purpose of language was stressed by the teachers in the group. It could have been because they were language arts teachers, but the researcher felt that it was due to the fact that all of the participants were second language learners. The role of language and a traditional culture in the lives of Latinas is where there is a split between other critical feminists and the type of feminism that was practiced by the teachers of the GOC. The role of language becomes more meaningful as one tries to deconstruct deeper meanings not only from what is to be understood on a practical level, but also in terms of disempowering language that is used like a code. For the teachers of the GOC, the struggle was to identify why some words meant more than what was said. One teacher shared how she became aware of other meanings as she went through school, “I guess that’s what I’m saying is, it’s not that you weren’t being spoken to in school. It’s that what was being spoken to you wasn’t jiving with what you were feeling.” The young women in this study struggled not only to understand English, but then how English is used to separate and diminish one’s worth.

Theme III: Dialogue, praxis, and reflection. An expected finding that correlated with the literature was the activation of the cognitive, behavioral, and affective

domains through dialogue, praxis, and reflection (Freire, 1970; Osijama, 2007). The findings could not be categorized as stand-alone themes because it was difficult to disaggregate the observations as clear-cut evidence of any particular discrete behavior. Dialogue, many times, necessitated that the participants reflect *while* engaged in conversation or action. Activities generally had all three of the processes for conscientization in progress simultaneously. The literature supported that these processes happen in an iterative cycle, but the order and occurrence of each theme was at times simultaneous and difficult for the researcher to present events as evidence of only one theme (Freire, 1970). Sakamoto and Pitner's (2005) reconceptualization of Freire's (1970) stages, in the form of activation of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains, was a more accurate representation of what occurred during meetings. The teachers and students in the GOC were able to create a critical yet safe environment where a critical consciousness could emerge through dialogue and reflection. Freire (1970) defined praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 75). This definition assumes that change begins in the public domains of politics and economics. For the participants in this study, praxis took the form of personal work that centered on the girls shedding the accumulated messages that made them feel incomplete or deficient. Liberatory practice took the form of activities that would develop their ability to question what they perceived as unfair treatment. The overlap of emotion, thought, and work during activities was observed as the participants moved from one domain to the other as questions and comments arose.

As a precondition for dialogue, praxis, and reflection, a space that made all of the participants feel safe and welcome needed to exist. The members of the GOC and students from Club Athena created an atmosphere where there was conversation and a suspension of judgment. Similar to the research done on Asian American student clubs (Osijama, 2007), *Muxeristas* (Revilla Tijerina, 2004), Young Warriors, (Watts et al., 2002), Raza Womyn (Revilla Tijerina, 2004), and *Club Amigas* (Kaplan, et al., 2009), the GOC was able to transform a classroom space into a safe place where marginalized students could meet within educational institutions. This particular environment allowed for critical dialogue that motivated students and teachers alike to reflect on their actions. The environment created in the GOC was dissimilar from the classroom space, in that questioning the motivation of adults, the purpose of school, and cultural norms were all supported. The girls were constantly reminded that their lives and voice had meaning and that this space was safe for them to express their feelings without fear of repercussions. Ms. Hernandez spoke about the environment in the GOC:

I think it is because it's an alternative space. And if we can have girls be able to think, and be okay with who they are, have them feel like 'what I'm thinking, feeling, going through, is me.' No judgment. Where is that provided for girls in the formal, normal way of doing things? It's not. It's the opposite. It's everything around us. It's, be quiet. Or, if we do want you to say something, it has to look like this or be like this. I never thought about it in terms of [the club

being] a form of resistance. But it's an alternative space that exists that isn't normal. Normal. Whatever that is, right? Because, that's created too.

When asked about the effects of having older high school girls present during the club activities, Ms. Hernandez continued:

[When I hear some of the responses by the older girls] I'm like, 'Whoa!' But I don't think in the big, whole group dynamic it changes anything for the girls, I think it's harder for our girls (middle school age). But then they've also blown me away [with their responses to questions]. Other times I'm like, oh I totally underestimated the situation, or thought this, but it was really that. What I was telling Ms. Vasquez was, that we need to do a follow-up with them. Where it [the activity] is hands-on, based. Where it's more driven by their voice than our voice. Let's give them a situation or some activity, I don't know what, we were just talking, kind of debriefing where we can really see their thinking, their feeling about certain things we brought up today. You know? Because of gender roles—we learn, who decides what is this? Who gets to decide? And we accept it, because it's the *norm*. And I think that we're only scratching the surface, not to diminish what we're doing. But in the space that we do have, I've seen girls say, 'Whoa, I never thought about it that way.' Or, 'That's new to me.' Or, 'My ideas have changed.' You know? And that! When your thinking is altered in some way or when you're exposed to something new, that's life changing because it all

starts there. The heart and the mind, we need to get there. And we don't have that space in the school day to do that at all. At all.

Including the high school girls in the dialogue allowed for the club to have a wide span of life experiences to draw from when shaping activities and reflection. The range of ages and experiences affected the sophistication of the praxis of each individual. It would be a mistake to think that the learning was unidirectional. The teachers and high school students learned as much from the middle school girls as they learned from the older participants. As was shared with the researcher, there were life experiences that some of the younger girls brought to the club that had never been experienced by the adult women. This gave them an expertise or perspective that enriched the conversation and shaped the work that would be done to change oppressive situations. This is one of the reasons a space needed to be created.

Teachers saw the need for this space because within the school day, unless a teacher made a conscious effort to change the way they operate, girls would be left without an opportunity to voice what they knew or what they felt. The cognitive domain was activated by dialogue that was critical of the way students are treated. Ms.

Hernandez shared:

[Are boys and girls treated differently?] Oh, very different! Because we are different people with different experiences. Different genders. You know I think there can be common things that kids encounter, but we experience things differently and we're treated differently. We're not treated the same. Whether

it's adults or even girls with boys or boys with girls. Or girls amongst girls, boys amongst boys. There's a different dynamic. So what I've seen in my classroom, and I've seen it, I can have a really strong girl that has opinions, but I've seen girls act up. I've seen girls tame their tongue. I've seen girls not want to appear smart or appear to have something to say, so they'll tone it down if it's around this group of girls or the boys. Or the boy they like. I've seen it happen.

Whereas I can interact with the girls, just myself with them, or in another situation or space, and I can see the difference! And I'm like, 'Okay, what is happening?' And knowing that in the classroom, the voice of girls...it's [ignored]. I try to tell my kids, 'Okay, I'm going to go back and forth. Girl, boy, girl, boy.' Why? Because, it has to be equal in terms of airtime for participation. Because studies show that teachers call more on boys than they do girls. So, it's just an awareness of what is not superficial. Now, to have an alternative space where it's just girls, you can take them to other places, or their guard is let down a little bit because I guess that sense of judgment is gone, at least from the boys.

The teachers of the GOC provided a space for the development of a critical consciousness through activation of the cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains. They presented an approach that engaged marginalized students and encouraged them to question their present reality. Their efforts illustrate an alternative to the demeaning, dehumanizing, rote curriculum that is being implemented in poor, black, brown, public schools.

Summary of Expected Findings

The findings supported and correlated with the work of Freire (1970) and others in regard to the necessary conditions that needed to be in place to create a space for people to develop a critical consciousness (Acosta, 2007; Osijama, 2007; Revilla Tijerina, 2004). The GOC provided a safe, welcoming environment that not only tolerated questioning, but also encouraged it as a means of connecting with others in the club. Dialogue, praxis, and reflection were consistent practices by the participants in the club. Similar to the findings in the work of Watts, Pratt, and Abdul-Adil, Revilla-Tijerina, Osijama, and Acosta, the participating teachers engaged their students in activities that challenged their understandings.

Likewise, the work done by Anzaldúa and Sandoval could be identified in the behaviors and attitudes of the students and teachers. The feminisms that were exhibited embraced the intellectual and spiritual development of the participants. Practices reminiscent of Sandoval's politicized understanding of how language can be used to liberate and oppress could be identified in the club activities. Like Anzaldúa, a spiritual development was necessary for conscientization.

Unexpected Findings

Hill-Collins (2009) has written about a matrix of domination that identifies and explains the practices that oppress women of color. In the matrix of domination there are several socially, culturally, and historically located practices that persist to marginalize disempowered groups. These factors change as the social location of each

group varies. As a theoretical construct it is an incredibly powerful analytical tool through which to identify and describe the intersection and fluidity of the forces that oppress women of color. The substance of the matrix of domination illuminated the limitations of Freire's path to conscientization. Freire's work centered around a critical awareness of how economic and political forces had created cultures of oppression whereby marginalized groups felt that they were responsible in part for their material conditions. Their liberation depended on conscientization and transformation from an object controlled by economic and political forces, to a freethinking subject and participant. Hill-Collins illustrated how situated factors, not limited to the economy or politics, were creating oppressive environments and challenged Freire's notion of the universality of oppression.

Taking a cue from the work of Hill-Collins, the researcher observed that the participants of this limited study used socially and culturally located histories and experiences to develop a gendered critical consciousness. The researcher proposes that the form of conscientization occurring in the GOC is gendered because it was not only limited to an appeal for a rational or intellectual understanding of oppression, but was also a valuation of the affective response to domination. The unexpected findings revealed an approach at AMS to conscientization that directly challenged Freirian *conscientização* by employing a gendered method of dialogue, praxis, and reflection. Conscientization in the GOC was developed through both an affective and intellectual connection between students and teachers. The relationships were developed through a

matrix of connection. This matrix is a multidimensional response to the one-dimensional model for conscientization presented by Freire. Critical pedagogues compartmentalized the heart from the mind because the intellectual arena was where the performance of male power is exhibited. The affective domain was subsumed under the intellectual because it was perceived as feminine, therefore inferior. The teachers in this study felt it was more important to connect with the girls in the club than to simply feed them information about the plight of Latina adolescents in Los Angeles. Ms. Hernandez shared during an informal conversation, “They have to trust us first, it’s so important that they feel safe.” She was able to articulate how the girls would be more amenable to participating in difficult conversations if they felt connected and understood.

Participants in the study used the development of both an intellectual and affective connection to reframe the effects of domination. A matrix of oppression identified the external forces acting on Latinas that limited their possibilities to fully participate in public society. Using a matrix of connection showed how the women of this study counteracted some of the oppressive factors they faced everyday. A connection through both the intellectual and affective domains was how oppression was resisted and fought by the participants of the GOC. The private or feminine space became the arena where critical consciousness was developed as Latinas of the GOC turned inward for strength as they fought against marginalization in the public space. The matrix of connection was both intellectual and affective but the effect was material.

The remainder of this section is organized in the following manner. The existence of a matrix of connection is the main unexpected finding. This matrix was influenced by three emergent subthemes: first, how crisis or trauma was reframed as a point of connection and a source of new knowledge; second, how the body was a repository of pain and also the source of new understandings; third, how the Latinas in this study struggled with the role of their fathers in forming their motivations and behaviors; and lastly, a summary of unexpected findings.

“Trust makes interactions easy.” (Lount, 2010, p. 420)

Theme I: The matrix of connection. A matrix of connection is composed of the multitude of experiences that form an individual and is used to bridge spaces between people. Like the matrix of domination, it is located historically, socially, and culturally in the lives of each person. It is fluid and dynamic. Each matrix is composed of both affective and intellectual understanding that help each participant identify others sharing similar life experiences. Teachers in the GOC used a matrix of connection to find community with their students in order to help them develop a critical consciousness. They used the totality of their experiences to tailor a unique connection to each of the girls in their club. This connection is then used to guide them through the process of conscientization.

In psychology, schemata are used to describe structures that hold information about a word or an idea (Behr, 2009; Lount, 2010). All of the connected ideas or experiences are attached to this word or idea to create meaning. Research has shown that

affect is connected within a schema to enrich meaning and understanding (Behr, 2010). In language learning the schemata are used to help identify and learn concepts as meanings are attached through lived experiences. The schema changes as both affect and information shape meaning over time. Wilson and Ryan, as cited in Behr (2010), called these fluid structures schemes and stated, “They include the components of cognition, affect, motivation, and behavior in relationships” (p. 49). The matrix of connection is likewise composed of many multidimensional schemata that are tied to each other (Figure 3). This particular matrix was created with the help of Ms. Vasquez. While somewhat crude and incomplete, Figure 1 represents some of the possible locations for dialogue. It was composed of her feelings and experiences regarding the three important points of connection that emerged during the research. Schema can hold both intellectual and affective information. The matrix of connection is similar to a schema in that it changes and adjusts as new knowledge in the form of information or affect becomes attached to the centered experience. The centered experience is fixed long enough to make a connection, then shifts as more information surfaces during dialogue.

The teachers of the GOC used their personal narratives as a means of developing a connection with their students. Their dialogue differed from a Freirian approach in that the questions guided them in understanding what each other knew and how they felt. Questions and stories were used to unearth shared patterns in the lives of both the children and the adults. Teachers asked a series of questions every time they were around the students: “How are you?” “How do you feel?” “How was your day?” “What did you

do last night?” “How many brothers and sisters do you have?” “Do you get along?” “Do you share a room?” “How does that make you feel?” Over time the questioning was used to fill the schemata with information about the life of each student in the club.

The schemata were then used as a guide to measure the approaches that these teachers would take. Teachers shifted and re-centered their experiences as they figured which of these resonated with their students. The process of questioning was teacher-led at the beginning, but eventually students were questioning their teachers as well.

Students returned questions: “Where are you from?” “Are you Mexican?” “Where do you live?” “Why do you teach?” “Why do you care?” As students presented themselves they also changed how teachers saw this picture of them. The resulting conversations shaped how each matrix would shift to present points of connection. Like schemata are adjusted as new meanings are created, revelations from dialogue and reflection were integrated into the matrix to either create more points of connection or identify contested areas. See Figure 3.

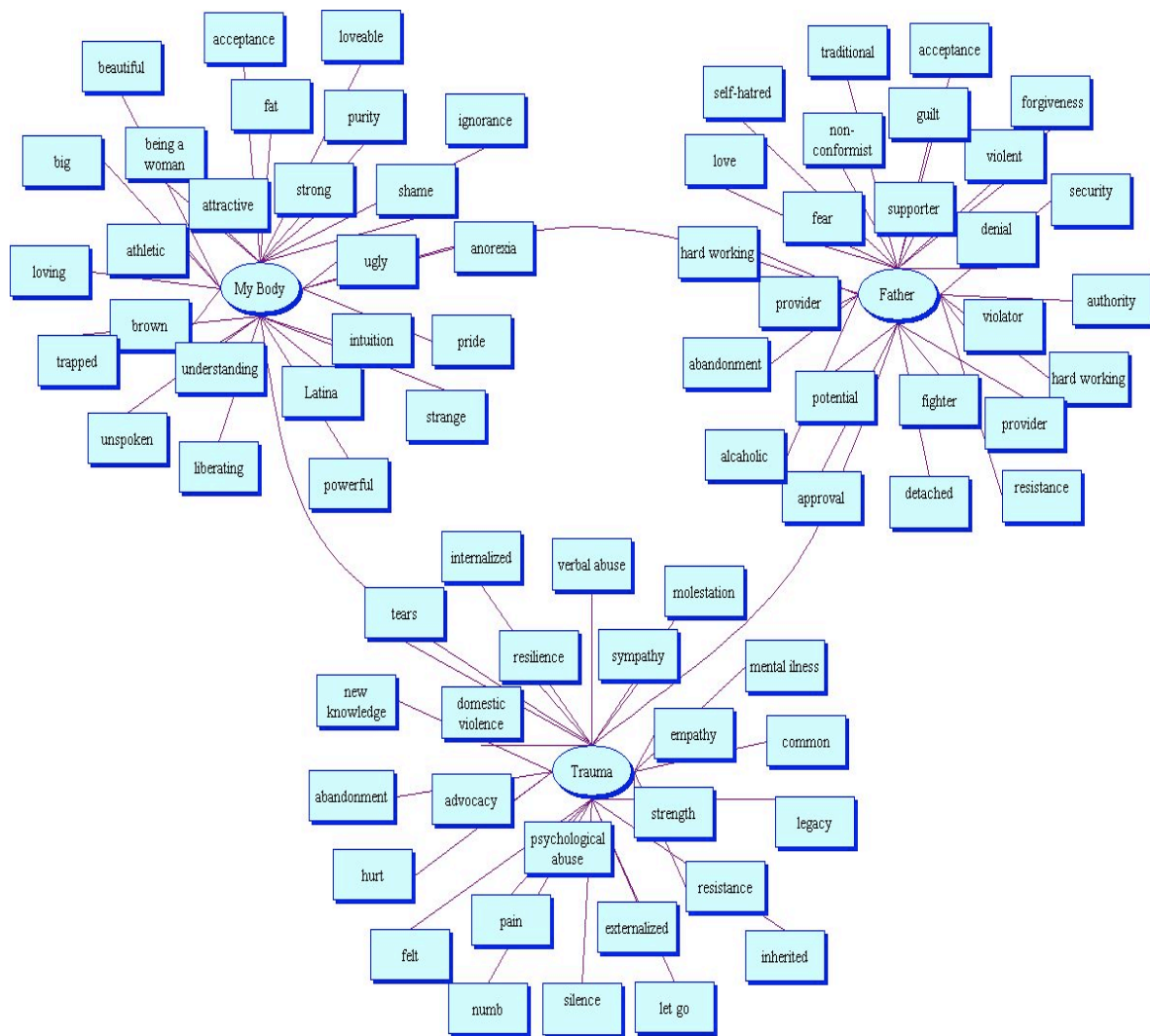


Figure 3. Sample Matrix of Connection

Teachers in this study accessed their own experiences in order to find commonalities with the girls that came to the club. There were multiple points of connection between teachers and students. However, points of connection varied according to the needs of each participant. For some participants the point of connection was a common ethnicity. One student interviewed shared it was comforting to look over and see teachers “that looked like me.” For others it was experiences that were not specific to any shared cultural background, but more grounded in gender. A student shared how it was really important that teachers understood that “It’s sometimes hard to be a girl.” Students and teachers centered the most easily identifiable points of connection first. Over time the participants demanded more meaningful connections that began with teachers revealing deeper, sometimes traumatic, events in their lives, such as a history of abuse, or struggles with body issues. These were the moments when all participants were most engaged in the dialogue surrounding a particular subject. It was the most painful and intimate experiences that cemented the connection between teachers and the students who came to the club with the greatest needs.

An affective connection is what was most valued by the teachers because it led to an intellectual discourse regarding the origination and purpose of said feelings. To the teachers of the GOC this connection led to building trust, which led to a willingness to risk on the part of the students. However, not all students needed the same level of attention. Ms. Vasquez many times would say “fairness does not mean sameness” and she interacted differently with each student depending on their needs. These negotiations differed among the girls as each presented her own set of important experiences. There

were girls in the club that needed more attention than others. These students would come to the classroom at lunchtime and spend extra time with the teachers. On days when there were no meetings some students would stay after school and help around the classroom just to continue the questioning process. These interactions further revealed to both teacher and student the important experiences that formed each.

For example, in Violeta's counter-story she connected initially with Ms. Vasquez because they had shared some parts of their lives during a club Athena meeting, but it was similar life experiences dealing with abusive fathers that solidified their connection. Additionally, they were also both Latinas, first-generation Mexican-American, educated in public schools, and from poor neighborhoods. The facet of her matrix that Ms. Vasquez presented to Violeta was replete with experiences that she would recognize, and Ms. Vasquez shared the accompanying affect that only a person who has lived through this type of life experience could understand. In return, Violeta shifted her matrix to accommodate as many points of connection as she could tolerate in order to build community with Ms. Vasquez. These moments revealed for the students and teachers, that what occurred to them in this society was not an accident. Their intuition was affirmed by the stories others shared. They were not alone. If others were experiencing the same troubles, tribulations, and triumphs, then strength was gained from not feeling isolated.

The researcher observed how the girls and the teachers searched for the right combination as they spent time together. Sometimes the students pushed back because they did not share the feeling about a certain experience. There were experiences that

were contested because each person processed at a different rate. For some, the shared experiences may never fit neatly or perfectly. The connection only opens the door to dialogue. It does not ensure that there will always be complete agreement. Some students had never experienced abuse, were not Mexican-American, or first generation, and yet the teachers were able to show their skill by shifting and re-centering the experience that was most meaningful for these students. Teachers would then share stories about being a daughter, the oldest, or growing up overweight. When a student did push back, they immediately reorganized their approach by asking questions. The girls would answer and the teachers would search through their histories to find the moments that would be meaningful to the student. Teachers in this study, as their ideas were contested by their interactions with students, would reflect and their matrix of connection would grow to accommodate new knowledge in the form of both information and affect.

Each matrix exists in constant interaction with others. Change comes from interactions with people who share meaningful connections. The teachers of the GOC centered a facet of their matrix that was meaningful to the girls in order to find a unique emotional connection with each of them. There was a seamless transition between these facets of their identities that was reminiscent of the strategic essentialism that was described by Spivak (2005), Sandoval (2000), and Anzaldúa (2002b). Strategic essentialism occurs when a woman simultaneously embodies contradictory aspects of her personality in order to position herself advantageously within an androcentric culture.

This perspective empowers women by giving them a choice in how they engage in an androcentric society. The teachers in the GOC did not use a strategic essentialism

to gain an advantage over their students. Teachers gauged what their students needed the most and centered on that aspect of their identity so the student felt understood and safe. Some students needed more support than others. This movement by the teachers through areas of their identity was not deployed in a reactive manner. It was used as a proactive means of finding community or kinship with their students.

It was apparent to the researcher that this pattern of questioning and community building by the teachers was never done as a planned method of creating connections. Their actions were immediate and effective, even at times reactionary. Earlier the researcher cited the concept of schemes of information to illustrate the interconnection of cognition and affect. Behr (2009) wrote, “These schemes are complex structures that organize experience whilst remaining outside awareness” (p. 49). The teachers’ actions seemed instinctual, but their behavior and their praxis was influenced by these meaning-structures that composed the matrix of connection.

During the research process some substantial life experiences repeatedly emerged among participants. All of the women and girls who participated in this study were special and unique, yet being a Latina in the United states meant that they shared in the effects of some of the practices of domination of an androcentric, American society, and home culture. The emerging experiences were the most significant points of connection between students and teachers. Interviews revealed three aspects of the teachers’ and students’ lives that surfaced and shaped their matrix of connection. These realities became the substance of their matrix, and the subthemes that emerged to define the matrix of connection for some of the teachers and students. First to emerge were the

effects of trauma on the lives of the girls and women of the study. Many of the participants had suffered, survived, and flourished despite having lived through traumatic life experiences. Second, participants focused on their bodies. Acceptance and understanding of their “brown body” (Cruz, 2001) led to discussions regarding how myths and perceptions have been used to oppress Latinas, as well as how their bodies can be used as a means of understanding and creating new knowledge that challenges the purpose of the majoritarian myths. Third, and central to many of the participants’ perceptions of oppression, was their relationship to their father.

trau•ma: **noun** \ 'trau'-mə, 'tro'-\ :a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury.

re-sil-i-en-cy **noun** \- ri- 'zil-yən(t)-sē\ :an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

ad-vo-ca-cy **noun** \ 'ad-və-kə-sē\ :the act or process of advocating or supporting a cause or proposal.

You need to know that you are beautiful and you need to take care of yourself, and not allow people to hurt you, and be confident in who you are... then you can go out and help others (Teacher).

Schizophrenia was my enemy, and now I am at peace with an illness I thought would steal my mother from me. Illness is now a pathway to embracing life. A crisis is a moment of growth. Schizophrenia has opened the door to inner peace and connecting with my mother. For over five generations the women in my family have not had a mother figure. Today, I enjoy each day with my mom

and embrace her beyond an illness. We are feeling our own pain and learning to build a life we can learn to fully be present in (Teacher).

Subtheme I: Trauma, resiliency, and advocacy within the matrix of connection.

The researcher was surprised at the role that trauma played in the participants' lives. For most of the women who took part in the study, the root of their motivation for being advocates for others was the survival of a trauma. The ability to overcome traumatic events during their childhood helped form their perception of education, teaching, and the world. The participating teachers' most painful histories became the most powerful points of connection. They shared with the researcher that, while difficult, their experiences were remembered as instructive instead of destructive events. The resiliency needed to survive and thrive in spite of difficult times produced in teachers, at this site, a tenacity of purpose and an unwavering belief in possibility. The teachers possessed hopes that were grounded in their realities and accomplishments. When teachers opened up and shared their experiences with the girls in the club, their survival of a traumatic experience became a way of showing them that they were not alone and that anything was possible.

The trauma that the participants endured took many forms depending on who was being interviewed. Some sort of violence or hardship was present in three of the four teachers interviewed. Among the students it was harder to gauge because not all of the students seemed comfortable sharing, yet three of four high school participants and one of four middle school participants shared some sort of traumatic experience they had endured. For some, the violence or hardship was at the hands or words of men. Teachers

of the GOC were best able to articulate how trauma had shaped their perceptions of education. They shared how their teachers had become mentors and schools had become a sort of refuge or sanctuary.

One line of questioning asked the teachers to relate how and why they became a teacher. For some they connected their experiences as the reason they entered the field of education. The following excerpt is from an interview with Ms. Garcia as she shared with the researcher some of her experiences growing up:

Researcher: How did you know you wanted to be a teacher? Is this something you wanted, or is it something that happened after college?

Mrs. Garcia: No, No way it wasn't [luck]; it was knowing what you wanted I think, part of it was, like knowing one day I was going to be a teacher. Some kids know they are going to be a doctor I have always known I wanted to be a teacher, when I graduated high school I could pinpoint that that's what I was going to be. Because of my father and the way he was.

Researcher: How was he? Your father.

Mrs. Garcia: Very like, he was abusive, and *mi mamá no hacía nada* (my mother did not do anything). Because she was beaten, and it was like part of that domestic violence cycle. I know that now, that's where I lived, I lived in violence

Researcher: Was there any resistance?

Mrs. Garcia: Yeah that's resilience.

Researcher: I will call it resistance, because it was more than resilience. How did things change?

Mrs. Garcia: [I just said]; I'm going to move out of this house, and I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do this [points to her fingers] and I kept at it. I knew what I was going to do.

For Mrs. Garcia she always knew that she was going to teach. She saw in education the ability to nurture and connect with others:

Oh yeah. My mom said when we had kids or families over, I must have been like two, "*Agarraba una servilleta y los limpiaba*" (I would get a napkin and I would clean them) I would clean them. To clean them so they would not be dirty. Since I was a kid, I would be on the phone [pretending] to talk to other kids. I was always the teacher since I was little. I was always the teacher.

She continued and shared how she saw working with Latina girls as important:

The meeting is more than just, love yourself. It's never been about being grateful about these other things and learning about these other things. It's just understanding that some of these kids are living in some terrible conditions, and some serious violence. So I think it is about *cuidate* (be careful), take care of yourself. And the message is to rise up. We are going to get together as a committee and decide the message. Because it was like, domestic violence, hygiene, yoga, express yourself, it was about take care of yourself first.

For Mrs. Garcia her experience led to advocacy for children. She identified deeply with her culture because she has lived in Mexico, yet she saw promise of advocating for women beyond just ethnicity. She stated,

Why do we have to culturalize it or racialize it...why can't it just be about women? It should be all *mujeres porque todas estamos en lo mismo...Al fin de cuenta...*(in the end, because we, all women, are in the same situation) peel us all back *y somos los mismos* (and we are all the same).

For Mrs. Garcia the violence of her upbringing was a catalyst for the protection of all who are in danger. As a Latina working in a segregated school she worked for the protection of Latinas. Yet, she connected to the struggles of all women. During a conversation she shared that she believed that most women had experienced some deep pain. It was just that it was not talked about. Her comments supported the belief that her empathy was how she connected, not only to students, but to a larger struggle.

The traumas that some of the women in this study endured were not always physical. Ms. Benitez shared her experiences growing up to reveal how dealing with her mother's mental illness created a connection to the human condition of others in pain. She shared her story with the researcher:

Researcher: What was your childhood like?

Ms. Benitez: I say that at ten years old I saw myself as very strong, and I have this image in my head of what I was like. My mom was a big instrument in me being able to see others and my human connection. I actually grew up going to mental wards a lot. And I recall at ten, my mother was institutionalized at University Hospital in Lincoln City. And you have your visitor's days. We'd always go and, it's a time where you know you take your loved ones something and you're with them, and you're trying to create a family space amongst everything else. I

remember, we were sitting there and there was another patient and I always tell my sister... [begins to cry]

Researcher: I'm sorry you're crying.

Ms. Benitez: No, no, no. It's a good thing [laughs]. I remember there was a patient next to us and we noticed that no one would ever come visit her, and we would always bring her something. We would always bring my mom food so we would always bring her food. But I remember I would tell my sister, I remember the look in her eyes, and I made myself a promise that I would never be disconnected from another human being. So, my mom has a lot to do with, I think her struggle, through understanding you know some people in the medical world would say... She had schizophrenia, she had chronic schizophrenia, which is funny, but that really opened the doors to me being able to see people at a higher level and then trying to strive to do that work, to build a consciousness. I think that was like the beginning of it for me. So I see it as a real big gift.

Ms Benitez connected with the young women of Lincoln City because she had grown up there. Her compassion stemmed from the resiliency she developed as she navigated the difficulties in her childhood. School also became the place where she was brought out of herself. She shared:

I know my aunt who did raise me is the one who stood out a lot in the aspect of seeing that value in education. She might have not have been able to push me to go to school. I was very fortunate in my elementary experience from third grade on to bump into teachers that refused to allow me to become invisible, because I

wanted to become invisible. So they really tapped into trying to push me to be active in my class in participating. So I remember Ms. Marquez in the third grade and Mrs. Wilson in the fourth and fifth. So I had those little pushes. That really helped me get out of my bubble, because in Jr. High I was very much the type of child that didn't say much. I spoke through my work. I wouldn't even look at the person in front of me. I would completely try, 100% effort, to try to invisibleize myself. That really changed with Ms. Wilson.

Ms. Benitez was then asked to explain what helped her move out from the shadows to be seen by others.

[School] that was the space that did it for me. I think I was very blessed to have bumped into the role model and the space. School was that space [where I felt visible], since elementary. Because I remember in elementary showing up at seven A.M. and being on a little chair, and having these teachers open their doors and say 'You can help me.'

Ms. Benitez centered her struggles so they could be used to create connection. Instead of feeling like she was separated from the world because of the circumstances she faced, Ms. Benitez framed her experiences as a way of understanding others' humanity. She understood that everybody needed to find a connection to others.

The reinvented narratives created by the teachers took the most troubling aspects of their lives and reinterpreted them into the foundations of their practice. The stories shared of mental and physical trauma were not relayed as excuses for shortcomings or as outs for failure, quite the opposite. Each history was remembered as necessary for the

development of the person they became. A matrix of domination created the dire situations that some faced, yet it was through connection that they were able to neutralize the power of many of the factors in the matrix.

An encasing I am choosing to now embrace. Scared of looking in the mirror to see or truly see my mind and body must connect, ever changing, growing, and embracing my inner voice and the home to my instincts. The body is my armor I carry each day and exude my presence of who I am in the Universe. I am learning not to hate my body because I fight with the world and must remember I can define my body for myself (Teacher).

Subtheme II: The body as the keeper and creator of knowledge in the matrix of connection. Many of the activities in the GOC were about the female body. Issues around the body were the vehicles through which shared experiences were revealed. For some of the participants the brown body of the Latinas was the receiver of violence, where histories were remembered, and also where new knowledge was created. Understanding the violence that occurs to the female body, the brown body, was the first step in understanding the situated factors that made up the matrix of domination for Latinas and also where shared experiences used to make connections (Hill-Collins, 2009).

For the women who participated in the activities understanding how the body is used against them as a mechanism of control became a primary means of encouraging dialogue and reflection. The women challenged the domination of the Latina body through a contestation of the process of “invention” (Cruz, 2001, p. 657) of their identity.

A master narrative has been used to invent the discourse of how a Latina is supposed to look and act. A new narrative needed to be created that embraced the brown body in all of its representations. Therefore, identifying the messages that diminished the self-worth of young Latinas, and understanding how they are used to alienate them from their own experiences, was the center of many activities. For many of the young women of the GOC and Club Athena, understanding how their brown body was defined within the American school system, majoritarian culture, and the cultural heritage of each was the beginning of their emancipatory practice.

Elizabeth was one of the high school students interviewed. She was very clear about how her body became central to her interactions with her friends, family, and school. Elizabeth was a highly successful student who did not need academic support to be perceived as successful. She already had begun to see how symbols and language are used to marginalize. She wrote in her blog:

From age one we are taught how to look. How our bodies should look, how our faces should look. We see pretty pictures of supermodels and play with perfect little dolls. 90% of young girls in the US are more afraid of gaining weight than of war, getting cancer, or losing their parents. We aren't selfish, we aren't shallow, just AFRAID. Afraid of losing control of the one thing that belongs only to us, and solely to us, our bodies.

Latinas face pressure about their body not only from majoritarian culture, but also from their culture of origin. Many of the club meetings focused on developing an

understanding of their body. Activities ranged from the basic maintenance and health to the power of perception in limiting success and happiness.

Ms. Hernandez and Ms. Vasquez also repeatedly alluded to the memories that are held in the body. Ms. Hernandez would speak about how the memories of events were carried in the body of Latinas. She believed that a family's legacy was recorded in the body and expressed in behavior. To the teachers of the GOC, releasing these memories and replacing them with different and positive understandings would change the legacy of negative experiences.

The teachers of GOC would many times ask the girls in the club to be attentive to and trust their feelings and instincts. Their body would tell them if something was right or wrong. This is very similar to the "*conocimiento*" or (understanding) that Anzaldúa, (2002a, p. 542) believed is needed to navigate problematic realities. She wrote, "Conocimiento comes from opening all of your senses, consciously inhabiting your body and decoding the symptoms" (p. 542). She continued,

Attention is multileveled and includes your surroundings, bodily sensations and responses, intuitive takes, emotional reactions to other people and theirs to you, and most important, the images your imagination creates—images connecting all tiers of information and their data (p. 542).

For Anzaldúa and the women of this study, intuition was a necessary tool in negotiating the contradictory signals that Latinas get about who they should be and how they should act. Ms. Hernandez shared during an interview how she felt the need to be constantly

aware of what her intuition was telling her because of the distracters that can interfere with knowing what is important:

[Do you need to be constantly aware?] Yes! And to be successful you have to have this! Everything is an end result. It's like, the end? When is that? You know what I mean? It's like, I wake up every morning, thank you God. *Gracias a dios*. And you go on your way. It's like, I'm trying to pay attention to what really matters. Because there's a lot of B.S., a lot of things that really don't matter. But that are presented like to you like it's the end of the world. I'm like, 'No, no, no.'

The body was more than a collector of memories; it was seen as a producer of knowledge that was based in the emotional aptitude and was developed through experiencing hardships and triumphs. This emotional knowledge guided the behavior of some participants. For the Latinas in this study, understanding their own body became an important point of connection. While many of the participants shared aspects of their matrix, it was their self-perception as it related to their body that produced immediate access for dialogue.

Subtheme III: The importance of the father in the matrix of connection. The researcher was surprised to find how fathers affected the development of a critical consciousness in the participants. The only mention of the father during the literature review was to describe the patrimonial system in the world or to use Father to describe maleness or androcentric beliefs (Weiler, 1994). While the mother figure was a role model for some, in this group of participants an underlying sentiment could be discerned from their descriptions of instances where injustice was first felt or understood. This may

be another blind spot that the researcher possesses because of his maleness, but it became clear that fathers, for some Latinas, are the first embodiment of oppression that many girls experience. During the interviews some participants shared how it was their father that caused them the most pain and also the obstacle that needed to be hurdled on the way to feeling free.

Students were clear about who was the first person they saw as being unfair. The discussion among the middle school panel centered around the behavior of fathers. They spoke of experiencing different treatment at home between sons and daughters. The high school group at some point reduced the discussion about unjust behaviors to their father's treatment. Elizabeth shared that "no words can describe the pain" she felt from her father's criticism. Surprisingly, the teachers also expressed how the role their fathers played in their lives had deeply affected how they felt about women's roles in a family and society.

From the discussion the researcher gathered that some of the most important moments in the adult women's lives were related to standing up to their fathers, gaining their father's approval, finding their love, or ultimately proving their worth to them. Ms. Hernandez shared a story about her father that illustrated the moment she began to question and defy male domination, in the form of her father's demands:

I think I was pissed off that it was a certain way. Because my dad was very much an iron fist kind of a father. I started resisting at 15. That's when I started saying, 'No, it doesn't have to be the way you say it has to be.' And so I think that paved the way for my sister, because I know she has told me. She goes, 'I know you

were the one that put yourself in front to say, No, it doesn't have to be this way.' Because I knew it wasn't right, you know? I knew it wasn't right. I knew it wasn't right. This sense of control or, don't move out of your box. Stay in your box unless I let you. No. I knew that wasn't right. And I think at that age I knew. No, I want my own job. I remember he didn't let me! I wanted to go work at fifteen. He's like, 'No, you're too young.' And I knew that getting a job was a form of independence because I had my own money. So my mom was the one to take me to get the work permit. She was like, 'Okay, I'll take you.' And so I think that was big step for me. Being able to leave the house on the weekends.

She continued later in the interview:

I could shut him up. I could be the one to say, 'Here.' I felt [powerful]. In the way I perceived things. And even now as an adult, it's different now. My dad, I think within the last ten years, he wants to be closer to my sister and I. And he's made efforts. And I think maybe ten years ago, maybe a little longer and I thought, 'Okay, this is it. I'm done. I know I'm done.' And I think something happened. I had a couple of uncles die at that time. It's funny. I'm trying to analyze my dad. And then he sees my grandfather who's still alive, his father. And who's a very... (She searches for words) he says, 'My dad doesn't trust his own shadow.' He trusts none of his kids. He always thinks they're out to get him in some way. Like it's really sad. It's really sad when you think of it. But I told my dad once, 'Well, you're just like him!' And he got so offended! That was just recently, that was within like, five years ago! He was like, '¡No es cierto!' (that is

not true). I said, ‘Really?’ But I think he’s going through his own reflection of things that have happened in his life. With his family even. I said, ‘Dad, what matters is what your children think of you at the end of the day.’ That’s how I look at it. What your family—because my dad is very charming—but it’s like what do we think here? So, I think over the course of years I don’t know I see the difference. He wants to talk with us more. Before, there was nothing. It was like *nada* (nothing). Just walls, and walls, and walls. And me, feeling like the defender of my mother and my sister. Even to this day I still have that. I feel like I’m the one that defends.

For Ms. Vasquez, it was being able to speak on equal footing with her father. She described how her behavior was perceived as disrespectful because she chose to have a voice that differed from their expectations. Ms. Vasquez relayed an interaction she had with her father recently and how even as an adult she still had to assert her voice in order to be understood:

[In] my upbringing, my mom just handled business. She didn’t really speak up for herself, she just made sure the family was taken care of. Everything and everybody was nourished. As a middle schooler I was super quiet. I was not assertive. I was introverted, and then some. And it doesn’t come until high school, college that I start saying, ‘Wait a minute.’ And even now, my dad is like *¡No me grites!* (do not yell at me) And I’m like, ‘Dad, be sure of what you say. I’m not yelling at you. I’m just being very frank and clear with you.’ *‘Si quieres,*

te grito de a de veras' (If you want I will show you what yelling really sounds like). Not to be instigating, but I can show you how I yell!

For many of the women interviewed, the father was the creator of havoc and violence, but also seen as the person to be pleased; they saw their mother as a role model that showed them how to be women and helped guide them. Yet, being able to be perceived as unafraid or successful in their father's eyes was an important milestone.

Ultimately, how gender was played out in interactions with their fathers was pushed to the center. A memory Ms. Hernandez shared epitomized this break from accepting a difference in treatment and how her questioning of why being a man gave her father the right to decide, helped her change the way she interacted with others:

I think for me it was totally questioning the roles of gender. Like the roles of 'Man' or 'Woman.' Because for me, even though I think my dad ruled, my mom was there. But, when he was there I would question. 'Well, why do you get to say?' and he would push back because I wouldn't stay quiet. I think the older I got the more assertive my voice became. I always felt I couldn't talk to anyone about it. My mom? No. I didn't have aunts that came to my side. I didn't have that. *They* didn't challenge what was going on. Talking to them now, they'll say it. 'I don't understand?' *¡No entiendo!* (I don't understand) You know? Now! But now my aunts are 60. But being 30 or 25 or whatever, it was like, that's just how it was. You know?

Latinas face the challenge of exerting their voices in American society at the expense of cultural beliefs that place the woman below the man. The hurdles Latinas face with their

fathers were exacerbated by the cultural pressure to be *decente y bien criada* (decent, subdued and well raised). Eventually, questioning their fathers as well as American popular perceptions, developed in them a way of critically assessing other forms of injustice. Within the matrix of connection navigating the relationship, or lack thereof, with their father was another easily identifiable point of connection that led to dialogue and reflection.

Summary of Unexpected Findings

The existence of a matrix of connection, represents a challenge to the way conscientization and resistance have been presented in the literature. A gendered critical consciousness calls into question the need for transformation. Transformation, as presented by Freire (1970) and others, implicitly takes the subject and presents it in the light of deficiency. If transformation is necessary for the movement from object to subject (Freire, 1970), then that means that the original material is somehow lacking. The physical and emotional violence that many of the women in this study experienced would characterize them as somehow damaged according the master-narrative, yet upon reflection many of the participants saw their traumatic experiences as painful but instructive moments in their lives. To many of the teachers, each experience or reality that could have been interpreted as a failure or deficiency was in fact a source of new understanding, the substance of who they were, and how they connected to others. These life experiences that formed their matrix of connection prepared them to accept the students as they were; beings that are on a path to becoming their true selves. In this limited study, teachers and students alike were incomplete, but not lacking. Unlike Freire

(1970), who saw the path to completeness in transformation, the women of this study are only incomplete because the future still holds new experiences for them.

Freire's (1970) view of transformation is bound by an androcentric understanding of economic positionality. For the teachers and students participating in the GOC and Club Athena, liberatory practice began with an affective connection to other women. By building trust in the relationships they shared, students and teachers were able to demystify the practices that have been used to marginalize women from their own physical being. The Latinas of the GOC and Club Athena reinterpreted their person as a vehicle for understanding, not as a deficient vessel in need of metamorphosis. For many of the young women in the study transformation was replaced by a connection to other Latinas and an affirmation of their being. What the teachers of the GOC gave to their students, what they imparted, what they shared, was not a new, better identity, it was acceptance of and appreciation of what they already possessed. A message that was repeated throughout the process was, "You are powerful. You are beautiful. You are not an accident. You exist for a reason." The students did not transform as much as they blossomed.

The teachers provided a mirror and space to examine what was already present. The metaphor became a physical manifestation as girls were once asked to create a mirror to remind themselves of what already existed inside. Ms. Hernandez shared,

They decorated their mirror and then they sealed it so that they could eventually take it—the goal was to hang it somewhere in your room and every time you look

at it to remind yourself that beauty lies in you. Not just physically, but inside of you. You know we even talked about, ‘Keep this. Hang it in your dorm room in college. Remember what you were like in 6th grade and knew yourself, because there’s only one of you.’

During interviews the participating teachers shared what they believed their role was in the process of conscientization. Ms. Hernandez explained how she perceived her students:

I think for me, *I don't* come from the mentality that I'm meant to save these girls. And I'm the end all to the be all. I'm a little step along their journey, just like my teachers have been for me, and the teachers that have been my teachers in the truest sense of the word. They were there for me. In my seventh grade year it was Mr. Montclair. And I remember him fondly to this day because of what he gave us, or opened up for us—and I think for the girls in the club, and for all my students, I'm just a step along your way. Now, I'm going to try to be very honest, be real, try to make you think, because that's my biggest thing. I tell them ‘Don't accept what *I'm* even giving,’ you know? I ask them, ‘What do you think about it?’ Because ultimately we're all powerful people. But we don't learn that [in schools]. We learn the opposite. We learn that we're not powerful. We learn all that is taught to us, but it isn't true. And I still have to grapple with some things myself! It's not like, ‘Oh it's done! It's done! *¡Basta!* (stop, enough) You've arrived!’ Hell no! It's like no, it's a process.

From observations and conversations, a very different presentation of critical consciousness emerged. As stated earlier, Freire (1970) defined *conscientização* or conscientization as, “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality” (p.19). For critical pedagogues, this is still the spirit of what it means to be fully engaged in one’s own existence (Darder, 2006; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Giroux, 2001; McClaren & Jaramillo, 2006). The Latinas in this study presented a view of conscientization that extended beyond the limited explanation of the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. Theirs was a liberation through connection.

While a Freirian approach is absolutely necessary in understanding the matrix of historically and socially located practices that have created and maintained the present order, we are all not oppressed equally. In order to change, space must be created for other perspectives that have equal weight. Duncan-Andrade and Morell (2008) wrote, “Critical pedagogues, drawing on social and critical educational theory and cultural studies, examine schools in their historical context and as part of an existing social and political fabric that characterizes the dominant society” (p. 23). However, the emotional space has been relegated to a second or third tier of importance. It is deemed less important because it is perceived as a feminine space that does not have the power to create institutional change. The participants of this study placed the emotional domain on par with the intellectual. They employed a matrix of connection to create new

understandings and developed a gendered conscientization that focused on the immediate power of harnessing the personal, in addition to the public, in order to create change.

Even some of the displays of resistance on the part of the students were in the affective domain. The researcher has named this Lincoln City resistance. Different types of resistance are described in education literature. Transformational resistance changes the lives of people who are engaged in struggle. This concept is based on the experiences of Chicano students during the school strikes that occurred in Los Angeles (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). The resistance displayed by some of the girls from Lincoln City was not transformational, in that it did not alter their reality or transform their existence (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), but it was effective in challenging the master narrative regarding Latinas. Willis (1981) wrote about a resistance by economically disadvantaged lads in England to becoming part of the working class. Many times this resistance took the form of self-defeating behavior. What the young women of this study exhibited was not necessarily the type of blind resistance of the working class lads. According to Giroux (2001), people have to be aware and actively involved in the struggle for social justice to be truly resisting. Lincoln City resistance did not conform to this definition either; it did however provide an insight into a type of resistance that challenged preconceptions.

While conducting interviews, the researcher noticed that some of the participants enjoyed trying to surprise him with information that went counter to mainstream expectations of Latina adolescents. They relished breaking stereotypes. This was evident

with the older girls from Club Athena. They seemed to examine the response of the researcher when they shared their enrollment in advanced placement classes, grade point average, or college choices. They searched for facial cues on the part of the researcher that would indicate surprise as they spoke of their success. They enjoyed being the embodiment of a counter narrative. For example, during the interview of the focus group comprised of high school students, there was a pause after each one shared the college they were going to attend. The student upon which Violeta was based especially paused after she relayed each of her accomplishments. It seemed she was waiting to see the reaction she received. While the participants never explicitly connected their behavior to resistance, subsequent conversations with Latina teachers at this site indicated that this theme had merit, as they also witnessed similar behavior.

Ms. Vasquez shared how participation in the GOC helped girls develop the courage to speak out and resist what they felt was wrong. During one interview she shared:

And if girls can feel and stand and say, ‘You know what? I’m not going to go along with that.’ Or, ‘I don’t agree with that.’ Just them being able to say something contrary to what is being presented, goes a long way. Because you’re not buying into it, or at least you’re not cowing down to what is there.

The researcher believes that the confidence learned through the activities in the clubs manifested themselves through a particular type of resistance observed in some of the participants of the study.

The students' responses during the interview were more akin to a micro-resistance, to a series of micro-aggressions that they faced on a regular basis (Solorzano, 1998). Violeta, in particular, really enjoyed the reaction her stories elicited in the researcher. She sported a mischievous grin when relaying information that she felt was contrary to what was expected. It felt as though she knew something that others did not understand. Even being marginalized by not fitting a majoritarian ideal, she maintained a certainty of purpose and took pleasure in the inconsistencies that set her apart from the master narrative, and made failures of traditional roles or stereotypes.

Ultimately, a gendered conscientization and resistance by the Latinas in the study was not diminished in power because they occurred in the personal spaces. An emotional connection propelled the participants towards understanding how marginalizing practices in the public space affected their emotions in the public space.

Implications for Educators and Teacher Preparation Programs

Based on the findings implications and recommendations for educators and teacher preparation programs may be made. First, the power of a safe classroom; second, creating an environment for learning; third, the classroom is not a factory; and fourth, moving beyond the curriculum.

The Safe Classroom

Having taught for 15 years in racially and economically segregated communities, the researcher has seen the educational pendulum swing back and forth at the political whim of non-educators. The researcher has observed and experienced in his classroom the implications of creating a safe and welcoming environment for children. The result

of a safe environment is a willingness by students to travel down the path of learning even when there is a risk of not being completely successful. This willingness to be vulnerable produces opportunities to grow and create knowledge beyond the books.

As Latina/o students face an educational environment that attempts to extract more “performance” by providing fewer opportunities to learn, teachers must look beyond the curriculum to themselves and the points of connections with each student in order to help create the safe environment. When a teacher shares who they really are, students are allowed to access histories that can resonate with their own experiences. This can build rapport and connect seemingly different people.

Creating Affective Learning Environments

The subtractive mode of taking away the arts, social studies, and the sciences in poor schools leaves many students without opportunities to expand their frames of reference and learn to question. The participants of this study were effective at creating environments for learning because of their willingness to reveal their humanity. The authority that is needed to implement the rote curriculum that is expected at schools that service children of color separates the educator from their humanity and in the process dehumanizes the children in their charge. There is a violence that exists in the manner in which students are treated in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/2000). In this instance, Freire’s (1970) critique is the most effective. According to Freire (1970) students are in search of becoming the subject as opposed to the object. Unfortunately, at some public schools, teachers find themselves objectified as

well, as they are detached from the humanness that is the most powerful means of connection with students.

The Classroom as a Factory

Educators need to remember the classroom is not a factory and students are not products. The only value one adds to them is by enriching what is already present. The participants of this study remind teachers to never look at a student as a deficient commodity that needs to be transformed through their efforts. If anything, teachers should be privileged to be able to share in the experience of witnessing and guiding their development. By refusing to treat students as objects, educators will see the richness of experiences they bring.

Beyond the Curriculum

Teacher preparation programs must move beyond simple curricular solutions to the emotional. Teachers must be as adept at connecting with students through the emotional domain as they are at preparing students academically through the cognitive domain. Teacher education programs many times shy away from dealing with race, class, and gender because they are difficult conversations to have. By concentrating on specific core subject methods and curriculum development teachers develop an expertise that separates them from students and reduces their risk of failure as they enter a classroom. However, as any teacher who has walked into a new classroom knows, a lesson can only get one so far before having to deal with the realities of thirty human beings with rich experiences.

Universities must elevate the emotional to the same level as the intellectual. Teachers are deemed as deficient in the same manner as their students, yet they already possess most of the necessary experiences for a deeper connection with them. Teacher education programs must go beyond relying on the methods fetish (a reliance on curricular solution to all problems) to develop within teachers an emotional intelligence that will make the experience for marginalized students more meaningful.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The findings in this study uncover the need to understand the emotionalized intellectual spaces that exist in schools. The following recommendations would extend the research to understand how this process affects all students:

1. A study that measures the academic impact of participation in a club similar to the Girls Only Club or Club Athena.
2. A comparative study of other marginalized groups within many public schools such as African-American or Gay students.
3. A longitudinal study of the educational trajectory of Latina students participating in clubs such as the Girls only Club and Club Athena.
4. An action research project within a school site where the development of conscientization is deliberately planned.
5. A comparative study with Latino males in all male clubs.
6. A comparative study with European-American females participating in an all girls club.

Gandara and Contreras (2009) have shown how the economic well being of this country is tied directly to how its largest group is educated and included into the larger discussion of the future of the United States. Latinas/os in urban settings facing ever more segregated conditions will be a central concern for state and city governments experiencing shifting demographics. Future research must include the voices of the marginalized. As this country becomes entrenched in unemotional accounting of each of its teachers and students, the emotional space, which can dominate the cognitive energies of children, needs to be examined. Without understanding how and what students feel, moving towards a test score as opposed to a narrative will leave much of the truly meaningful data unexamined.

Conclusion

bell hooks best described the meaning of the work of Freire to this researcher. His work is like the water of life for people of color that are thirsty for explanations and answers for their marginalization. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is still one of many necessary starting points for educators who work for students of color in the United States. Students and teachers need conscientization if the present situation is to change. However, the concept of critical consciousness, as perceived by the researcher, changed dramatically throughout the process of completing this study.

It is apparent that the notion of conscientization presented by Freire (1970) and other critical theorists is a decidedly male construct. It is a male construct, as presented in the literature, because evidence for conscientization is to be found in domains that are controlled by men. For Freire and others, including McLaren, Giroux, Kincheloe, and

Shorr, the transformation that is experienced through the process of conscientization is to be expressly witnessed in the public spheres of education, economics, and politics, whereas the affective or emotional domains are reduced to the private and female space. The feminine space has been pushed to the private arena and has somehow been separated from the intersecting forces that define power. By relegating the emotional domain to the private or female domain, any power in this area is delegitimized as irrational. Yet, any paradigm shift in politics, education, or economics elicits passionate, emotional, sometimes irrational, reactions on the part of purportedly rational beings. The women and girls of this limited study have shown that it is the affective response to the practices of domination that lead the development of conscientization.

The observations and comments heard throughout the research process represented the unearthing of a consciousness that was decidedly enmeshed in the private arena of the body and identity. The “transformation” that was observed by the researcher did not adhere neatly to the critical pedagogue’s notion of economic self-awareness or political empowerment. Though division of labor was discussed in conversations and meetings, and an awareness of the political and economic forces that define the lives of Latinas in urban centers was discussed and deconstructed, the strength of the Girls Only Club was the empowerment of women at the most basic level. Where Freire (1970) perceives humanity to be an awareness or conscientization of the political and economic mechanisms of oppression and alienation, participants in the GOC began with an awareness of the control of their own bodies, what it means to be a woman in the United States, their position in their family, and cultural identity.

The participants de-centered essentialist views of how a Latina is supposed to react, respond, and/or behave in the face of oppressive situations. What was displayed was an existence that acknowledged and reconciled the sometimes diametrically opposed perspectives of their traditional culture and that of American society. The conflict between a culture of origin that stresses a collective approach to daily existence and the primacy of the individual in American culture was navigated by the young women by embodying roles that diminished the power of the obstacles placed before them.

The women who helped form the research project found community and affirmation by creating their own space within a public school that stressed the devaluation of parts of their identity. Their space lacked the judgment that girls were somehow not ready to be the best person they could be. Accepting contradiction in their lives, Latinas in this study resisted their present circumstance and began to control their future trajectory. Through consistent and constant affirmation, the unswerving message the girls received and the teachers truly believed was that they already possessed all that was necessary to be powerful and complete.

In closing, the Latinas in this study embodied many of the theories that were cited in the literature review. Yet they did all of this with having read few, if any, of the theorists. The students and teachers may not have used the vocabulary of academia but the spirit of conscientization, resistance, advocacy, and resilience was apparent in their actions. Latinas are the fastest growing group of students in the United States, and schools must find a way to better serve them and their families. Ms. Vasquez said it best,

“I think what people want, what kids want is ‘HEAR ME. I have a place in this classroom, in this world, I want to be heard!’”

APPENDIX A: Permission to Interview and Observe

Ms. Gloria Hernandez
Girls Only Club
Anzaldúa Middle School (AMS)
1103 S. Washington Blvd.
Lincoln City, Ca, 90757

Dear Madam,

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership for Social Justice program at Loyola Marymount University. I am seeking your assistance and permission with the independent research for my dissertation, which is focused on Latina teachers working with Latina students in after-school clubs.

My research project will involve interviewing some teachers, as well as interviewing small groups of students from the Girls Only Club between September 1, 2010 and November 20, 2010. The questions will focus on how participation in the after school club has affected how teachers look at students, and students feel about school. In addition, various school data currently available (including demographic information, etc.) will be reviewed. Observations of the teachers and students will also be conducted at Anzaldúa Middle School.

The plan includes meeting formally with some high school students from Anzaldúa Politechnic Academy (APA) one time as part of a focus group; the interview will take approximately one hour. This interview will be tape recorded to ensure transcription accuracy. All responses will be held strictly confidential, and no names will be attached to information audio-taped or written.

Once the data has been collected, it will be analyzed to identify specific themes in relationship to those recommended in the literature. The findings will be available to the district.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call me directly at (310) 695-4042 or contact Dr. Yvette Lapayese at Loyola Marymount University (310) 258-8768.

Thank you for your consideration of my request, and I look forward to your response.
Sincerely,

Salvador Martin, Doctoral Candidate, Loyola Marymount University

Letter of Request to Interview Students (English)

Dear Parents and Students,

My name is Salvador Martin. I am a researcher from the Educational Leadership Program in the Graduate School of Education at Loyola Marymount University. I am working with teachers, and students to conduct interviews about participation in the Girls Only Club.

My research project will involve interviewing the Teachers that organized the club, as well as interviewing small groups of interested students. The questions will focus on how the club has impacted their views of school and teachers. Your daughter will be part of a group of students discussing what they have learned in the club. This interview should last approximately one hour and will be tape recorded to ensure accuracy. All responses will be held strictly confidential, and no names will be attached to information audio-taped or written. Your daughters participation in this interview is completely voluntary.

If you are interested in participating in the interview, please return the bottom portion of this letter to your teacher before September 20th, 2010. I will send you another letter with the date, time, and location. Thank you very much for your time. I look forward working with you during the interview.

If you have any questions, please call me directly at (310) 850-7757, or Dr. Yvette Lapayese of Loyola Marymount University at (310) 258-8768.

Sincerely,

Salvador Martin

Please return this to your child's teacher by September 20th, 2010.

I give my child permission to be part of the study.

Parent's Name: _____

Parent's Signature: _____

Child's Name: _____

Child's Signature: _____

Teacher's Name: _____

Telephone number: _____

Letter of Request to Interview Students (Spanish)
Carta de Interés para los Estudiantes en Participar en la Entrevista

Estimados padres,

Mi nombre es Salvador Martin. Soy maestro e investigador del Programa de Liderazgo Educativo en la Escuela de Postgraduados de Estudios Educativos en la Universidad de Loyola Marymount. Estoy trabajando con el director, los maestros, y los estudiantes de la escuela para llevar a cabo una entrevista con estudiantes interesados en participar en esta actividad. Estoy estudiando el efecto de la participación en el Club Girls Only.

Mi proyecto incluirá entrevistas con maestros y estudiantes. Las preguntas durante las entrevistas con varios grupos tienen que ver con el efecto de la participación en el Club Girls Only. La entrevista con el grupo de estudiantes será una hora. La participación de su hija en esta entrevista es voluntario.

Si su hija está interesada en participar en la entrevista, por favor regresa la parte de abajo con su información al maestro de su hijo antes del 20 de Septiembre del 2010. Mandaré otra carta a usted con la fecha, hora, y lugar. Gracias por su atención. Espero trabajar con ustedes durante la entrevista.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta, puede llamar a mi directamente al teléfono (310) 850-7757, a Dra. Yvette Lapayese de la Universidad de Loyola Marymount (310) 258-8768.

Atentamente,

Salvador Martin

Favor de regresar esta parte de la carta al maestro de su hijo antes del 20 de Septiembre del 2010.

Yo doy permiso a mi hijo para participar en la entrevista.

Nombre de padres: _____

Firma de padres: _____

Nombre de su hija/o: _____

Firma del hijo/o: _____

Nombre del maestro de su hijo/o: _____

Número telefónico: _____

APPENDIX B: Permission to do Research by Principal

Ms. Martha Gonzalez
Principal

Anzaldúa Middle School (AMS)
1103 S. Washington Blvd.
Lincoln City, Ca, 90757

Dear Madam,

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership for Social Justice program at Loyola Marymount University. I am seeking your assistance and permission with the independent research for my dissertation, which is focused on Latina teachers working with Latina students in after-school clubs.

My research project will involve interviewing some teachers, as well as interviewing small groups of students from the school between September 1, 2010 and November 20, 2010. The questions will focus on how participation in the after school club has affected how teachers look at students, and students feel about school. In addition, various school data currently available (including demographic information, etc.) will be reviewed. Observations of the teachers and students will also be conducted. The plan includes meeting formally with teachers three times; each interview will take approximately one hour, and meeting once with students as part of a focus group. These interviews will be tape recorded to ensure transcription accuracy. All responses will be held strictly confidential, and no names will be attached to any information audio-taped or written.

Once the data has been collected, it will be analyzed to identify specific themes in relationship to those recommended in the literature. The findings will be available to the district.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call me directly at (310) 695-4042 or contact Dr. Yvette Lapayese at Loyola Marymount University (310) 258-8768.

Thank you for your consideration of my request, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Salvador Martin, Doctoral Candidate, Loyola Marymount University

APPENDIX C: Permission to Interview Teachers and Students

Dear Teachers,

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership for Social Justice program at Loyola Marymount University. I am seeking your assistance research for my dissertation, which is focused on how Latina teachers work with Latina students outside of the classroom.

My research project will involve interviewing the teachers involved in the Girls Only Club, as well as interviewing small groups of students. The questions will focus on how the club has impacted their views of school and their teachers. The teachers will be interviewed three times. The students will be interviewed once as part of a group. These interviews should last approximately one hour and will be tape recorded to ensure accuracy. All responses will be held strictly confidential, and no names will be attached to information audio-taped or written. Your participation in this interview is voluntary.

Once the data has been collected, it will be analyzed to identify specific themes in relationship to those recommended in the literature. The findings will be available to the teachers and the district.

If you are interested in participating, please return the bottom portion of this letter by September 1, 2010. I will contact you with the date, time, and location. Thank you for your consideration of my request, and I look forward to your response.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call me directly at (310) 850-7757 or contact Dr. Yvette Lapayese at Loyola Marymount University (310) 258-8768.

Thank you for your consideration of my request, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Salvador Martin, Doctoral Candidate, Loyola Marymount University

Please return this portion by September 1, 2010.

Name : _____

Signature: _____

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