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**LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL CHANGE:
LEARNING FROM LATINA/CHICANA ACTIVIST EDUCATORS**

by

MARCIA VENEGAS-GARCÍA

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
University of San Diego

January, 2011

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ABSTRACT

An examination of the literature in the field of Leadership Studies exposes a void in understanding activism as leadership among Latinas/Chicanas. The contemporary theories of scholars including James MacGregor Burns (1978) and Joseph C. Rost (1993) suggest there may be shared qualities between specific concepts of leadership and the everyday working practices of Latina/Chicana activist educators. Yet, academics within the field of Leadership Studies have little knowledge of this relationship or the unique ways in which Latina/Chicana educators engage as leaders, activists and agents for change, specifically in educational communities. Research into women's studies, ethnic studies, and Chicana feminist studies alert us to the complex and important role that social context and the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity/race, and class play in the development of these educators' leadership styles.

This qualitative research project uses a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) to: (a) reveal Latinas/Chicanas' perspective of activism and its relationship to leadership; (b) understand how their perceptions and actions are influenced by gender, ethnicity/race, and class; and, (c) expose the influence of cultural, social, and educational context in shaping their activism and leadership. In-depth interviews were conducted with seven Latinas/Chicanas from various educational settings in San Diego County. Patterns and themes emerging from rich interview data were examined to construct an analysis of the meaning and relevance of activism in their lives and to discover how their activism was related to contemporary views of leadership.

Findings show how the activist identity of the Latinas/Chicanas in this study was the result of a process of individual development that was shaped by circumstances resulting from their social location, support from familial and community mentors/models, significant life events, and educational experiences. Their heightened and evolving consciousness and social justice identity fueled their activism and leadership. The stories of their experiences demonstrate a theory of action that emphasizes a transformational and socially responsible leadership style – one that is focused on advocacy for students without privilege and status and closely tied to the social issues of their community.

DEDICATION

To my parents who inspired in me a love of life-long learning,
my grandparents for their unconditional love and stories about my Mexican roots,
all of my family and friends for their support,
and
to the Latina/Chicanas activist educators who participated in this research project
and who so generously shared their stories with me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
COPYRIGHT.....	ii
SIGNATURE.....	iii
IRB CLEARANCE.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Dispelling Myths.....	3
Educational Institutions As Context.....	5
Why Latinas/Chicanas.....	6
Ethnographic Reflexivity.....	6
Foundations for the Study.....	7
Social Justice Landscape.....	8
Purpose of the Study.....	9
Inquiry Process.....	10
Terms/Labels.....	10
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
Leadership: Definitional Challenges and Relational Aspects.....	13
Latinas/Chicanas' Activism and Leadership.....	19
Intersectionality: Gender, Ethnicity/Race, and Class.....	23
Educational Inequities.....	26
Summary.....	26
3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	28
Research Design.....	28

Grounded Theory.....	29
Chicana Feminist Theory and Critical Inquiry.....	30
Research Questions.....	30
Research Participants.....	31
Context/Sites of Inquiry.....	33
Data Collection.....	34
Data Analysis.....	36
Delimitations and Limitations.....	40
Significance of the Study.....	42
Summary.....	43
4. RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	44
Organization of the Chapter.....	44
Participants' Background Experiences.....	45
Family Influences.....	46
Educational Institutions As Sites of Struggle.....	51
Educational Institutions As Sites of Possibilities.....	54
Significant Events.....	58
Developing Theories of Action.....	63
Activist Educators in Professional Contexts.....	66
Professional Contexts: The High School.....	67
Professional Contexts: The Community College.....	71
Professional Contexts: The Four-Year University.....	76
Re(defining) Leadership: Activism As Leadership.....	81
Summary.....	88
5. DISCUSSION.....	90
Interpretation of the Findings.....	91
Toward a Theory of Latina/Chicana Activism and Leadership.....	91

Further Research: Developing a Grounded Theory.....	98
Implications for Policy.....	98
Conclusion.....	99
References.....	101
Appendix	
A. Research Participants Consent Form.....	106
B. Interview Guide.....	109

Chapter 1

Introduction

I came to the profession as a political act. ...So it really was a political activism kind of motivation that came from that place of seeing an injustice and wanting to be a part of a countering force—countering all those negative influences and presenting possibilities for a different kind of a future, different kind of a life. —Rowena

It was amazing, kind of this transition thing that happened without my even knowing it. Everything I was reading, it was an evolution for me to get to that place. —Esther

You can be an activist but not moving toward social justice. That's why I say social justice activist. ...I'm talking about envisioning a world where people's humanity remains intact. It's obviously not genocide, hatred, and intimidation. ...I care about how people treat people. —Fabiola

These quotes are excerpts of longer narratives shared by three of the Latinas/Chicanas in this study that provide a glimpse into their perspectives of themselves as evolving educators, activists, and leaders. Through the stories they shared about their life experiences for this research project, their motivations and inspirations for their theories of action come to light. Thus, a space for dialogue about the relationship between what they do in practice as activist educators and contemporary theories of leadership becomes possible. This research project contributes to the field of leadership studies and other fields of study such as Chicana feminist studies, Chicana/o studies, ethnic studies, and women's studies because it provides an in-depth qualitative analysis of the lives of Latina/Chicana activist educators and holds the potential for conversations across academic disciplines.

Typically, the experiences of Latina/Chicana activists have been significantly absent within the academic and research literature relating to concepts and theories of leadership. Moreover, historical exclusion of the experiences of women within the academic field of leadership studies has prevented close examinations and investigations

into the working class communities where Latinas/Chicanas are often socially and professionally located (Hurtado, 2003). Theories and constructs in leadership studies have been traditionally dominated by male paradigms and business paradigms and primarily focused on high profile leaders concerned with middle and upper class-related issues and less concerned with concepts from a variety of contexts that are inclusive of women in general, and Latinas/Chicanas in particular (Harvard Business Review, 1998; Heifitz, 2001).

A limitation of the existing literature is that leadership scholars engaged in conversations about leadership have often come from schools of business and/or are primarily concerned with organizational theories and constructing management models for the study of leadership. While useful for individuals interested in the dynamics within corporate or business contexts (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Shafritz, & Ott, 2001; Schein, 2004), they are less useful to those who study leadership as a process in settings outside of business, such as leadership within marginalized communities, or the lower profile leadership of those in the educational setting.

Activism and leadership from marginalized communities are currently absent in mainstream conversations about leadership. This study aims to address this gap in the research by examining the activist experiences of seven Latinas/Chicanas. Academic research and scholarship that brings the activist experiences of Latinas/Chicanas into the realm of leadership brings with it a potential for making visible concerns and struggles from a Latina/Chicana perspective. Their activist experiences as a marginalized group of women necessitate a more inclusive meaning of leadership that adds to our understanding of leadership in general.

Dispelling Myths

There is sufficient literature to support the idea that Latinas/Chicanas take up roles as activists within their communities (Calderón & Zamora, 1990; Cordova, Cantú, Cardenas, Garcia, Sierra, 1986; Martinez, 2008; Mirandé and Enriquez, 1979; Ortiz, 2007; Ruiz, 1990). The experiences of Latinas/Chicanas who mobilize their communities and act as agents to effect change is usually described as community-based activism and examined within fields outside of leadership and education such as anthropology, women's studies, and Chicana feminist studies (Gutiérrez, Meléndez, & Noyola, 2007; Méndez-Negrete, 2002; Pardo, 1991; Zavella, 1987). Community-based or grassroots activism in these studies use a socio-cultural lens that considers social movements and critical ideologies and are largely ignored by leadership scholars. As a result this knowledge has not yet contributed to our current understanding of leadership, even though leadership studies is considered an interdisciplinary field.

Unfortunately, myths are perpetuated that generalize and characterize Latinas/Chicanas as “silent” and “passive” women. Other stereotypes suggest that they are neither suited for nor engaged in leadership—a profile exacerbated by the ideal of womanhood often found within Latina/o/Chicana/o communities themselves and further perpetuated by textbooks and the media (Hurtado, 2003; Martinez, 1995; Niemann, 2002). Only recently has literature begun to appear that studies leadership qualitatively within the context of the social communities in which working class Latinas/Chicanas live (Cota-Cárdenas, 2002; Méndez-Negrete, 2002; Pardo, 1991; Rodriguez, 2002; Rose, 2002). However, none of these studies explicitly examine Latinas/Chicanas as activists or investigate the relationship between their activism and what has been typically considered

leadership. In addition, the role of Latina/Chicana activism within the educational setting has been ignored. While these few studies give us a glimpse into the experiences of Latinas/Chicanas as activists, they are outside mainstream conversations within education and lacking any critique related to the concepts and theories within the literature in leadership studies.

Consequently, the detailed experiences of Latinas/Chicanas as activists remain unacknowledged and invisible within the study of leadership despite the overwhelming evidence of a long history of collective struggle and activism (Gutiérrez, Meléndez, & Noyola, 2007; Martinez, 2008). Research suggests that Latinas/Chicanas have agitated for change and been successful in improving social conditions within their sphere of influence in a variety of settings (Mendez-Negrete, 2002; Pardo, 1991; Zavella, 1987).

Latina/Chicana activism that is found within historical narratives (Mirandé and Enriquez, 1979) and highly descriptive ethnographic studies in fields such as anthropology, women's studies, and Chicana feminist studies detail grassroots community activism (Pardo, 1991) and demonstrate that Latinas/Chicanas have engaged as activists as a colonized ethnic/racial group in ways that practically express concepts and theories of leadership as defined by some contemporary leadership scholars prominent in the field. Bringing activism to the forefront makes an analysis of the relationship between activism as praxis (process of acting or reframing actions based on knowledge gained from life experiences) and theories of leadership possible and provides an opportunity for a more accurate understanding of the experiences of Latinas/Chicanas as leaders. Such an analysis provides the potential for the deconstruction of the multi-faceted social realities that Latinas/Chicanas face as they respond to socio-political marginality in their living and

working environments, realities that are inherently complicated by the intersection of gender, ethnicity/race, and class.

Educational Institutions As Context

Educational institutions as the context for specific sites of inquiry proved critical to this examination since they are places of struggle as well as places of opportunities for change. Latinas/Chicanas are found in this environment advocating for Latinas/os who comprise the fastest growing ethnic group in the country and who are considered by some researchers as being in an education crisis through the entire K-16 educational pipeline (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Yosso, 2006). In California Latinas/os make up about 48% of students in public schools, the majority of whom are U. S. native-born, and failing at alarming rates (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). In an environment that continues to neglect the educational needs of this population, agency and activism occur as a response to institutionalized policies and practices that historically privilege some groups over others and that challenge the success of Latina/o students in school.

Past policies and reforms have proven inadequate for the educational needs of this community. Knowledge acquired from sources at the level of engagement in ways that reframe the discussion, placing Latinas/Chicanas activist educators at the center, can prove helpful. Their lived experiences as those who struggle both to critically analyze and challenge oppressive institutions and to imagine and create more just and inclusive alternatives become central to the discussion (Yosso, 2006). Latinas/Chicanas as activist educators engage in their work as progressive and change-driving agents, using their positions and influence as a conduit to social justice and school change by creating caring

and/or emancipatory spaces for students, parents, teachers, and other constituents within the school setting (Marshall & Oliva, 2006).

Why Latinas/Chicanas

Little has been written about how Latinas/Chicanas come to identify themselves as activists, nor how they negotiate their activist identities in an educational environment. As professionals seeking change, these Latinas/Chicanas are recognized as activist educators by some of their academic peers who are involved in similar work, but mainstream academic conversations in leadership and in education are seemingly unaware and ignore this untapped resource and the potential for opportunities to learn from the insights of these women.

The absence of women's voices in Leadership Studies in general and exclusion of Latinas/Chicanas in particular leaves an immeasurable void, open to many misconceptions, negative assumptions, and stereotypes about who is or can be a leader. Addressing that void by focusing on the activism of Latina/Chicana educators could significantly add to the conversation about leadership and counter negative misconceptions about their goals and accomplishments. Any information gained at the level of encounter can also contribute to the persisting educational struggles of the growing population of Latinas/os.

Ethnographic Reflexivity

Many questions surfaced from my own experiences about leadership and what it meant for me as a Latina/Chicana that often left me in a quandary. I wanted an academic vocabulary to legitimize my feelings of passion and anger, conflict and doubt, and I

needed to learn more about how leadership worked for females in a socially marginalized position. One of my ways to deal with my own questions about leadership and myself as a Latina/Chicana was to engage in asking other Latinas/Chicanas about what they do as activists and educators and how and why they do it. In doing so I would discover in what ways their actions were related to contemporary theories in leadership.

The work of women's causes and the courage and commitment of low-profile women leaders who champion for the underclass has long been of interest to me. In my many academic experiences, I noticed that their experiences were seldom written about, researched, or discussed. As a doctoral student and researcher I saw the opportunity to demystify my own actions as a leader and to learn more about Latina/Chicana educators known for their activism through my own empirical study. This study, then, evolved from a desire to understand more about the leadership of women in general to understanding how contemporary theories in leadership were related to the activism of Latina/Chicana educators. As the study evolved and their voices consumed my thoughts, I not only gained a better understanding of the role of activism in their lives as educational professionals and leaders and myself as a Latina/Chicana, I also began to understand the implications for education.

Foundations for the Study

Two previous projects became the initial foundations for this study: the first project is that of Gutiérrez, Meléndez, and Noyola (2007) who compiled ethnographies and oral histories of twenty-eight Latinas/Chicanas they recognized as grassroots political activists in Texas from the 1960s to the present; and, the second project is the bio-

ethnographic work on raced, classed, and gendered leadership studied in various contexts by Méndez-Negrete (2002) with thirteen Latinas/Chicanas in northern California. These projects were the first, to my knowledge, to challenge myths and assumptions about Latina/Chicana stereotypes as passive victims of oppressive circumstances and that brought their leadership to the foreground. These projects made visible and gave voice to the relatively scarce scholarship on the role of Latinas/Chicanas in shaping their own lives through their activist leadership experiences. Additionally, the social justice work of Marshall and Oliva (2006) and Marshall and Anderson (2010) also influenced this study since they conceptualized social justice and activism within the context of educational institutions.

Social Justice Landscape

During the research process and writing of these chapters, books such as *Leadership for Social Justice: Making Revolutions in Education and Activist Educators*, Marshall and Oliva (2006) and *Activist Educators: Breaking Past Limits*, Marshall and Anderson (2009) came to my awareness. These authors brought social justice into the educational landscape, and they illustrated the connections between administrative leadership and activism in schools. There were also two methods texts that came to my attention and were useful in thinking about the rationale for the study. The first was the newly published comprehensive *Handbook of Latinos in Education: Theories, Research, and Practice*, Murillo, Villenas, Galván, Muñoz, Martinez, & Machado-Casas (2010) that provided a closer look at educational issues for Latinos on a national scale. The second was the *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008) that made me think more deeply about decolonizing inquiry, and

borderland-*mestizaje* feminism. These two texts gave me additional insight into current research methodologies, and helped me to understand the importance of developing a qualitative research project using a grounded theory approach.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the relationship between activism among Latina/Chicana educators and contemporary theories of leadership, particularly as defined by Burns (1978) and Rost (1993). These scholars understood leadership as a process involving leaders and followers to purposefully create social change that is morally responsible as measured by intention and the satisfaction of human needs and expectations. Further, the study was intended to shed light into the ways gender, ethnicity/race, and class shape leaders' activism, something not addressed by Burns (1978) and Rost (1993). The critically important role of education provides the professional context for this research because it can reveal how it is possible to be a social justice activist and agitate for change and, at the same time, remain an educator and leader within educational institutions. This project focused specifically on activism within educational institutions in the uniquely dynamic border region of southern California and brought Latinas/Chicanas to the center of inquiry. Using the contemporary literatures from leadership studies as well as Chicana feminist studies, ethnic studies, and women's/feminist studies together with a critical inquiry lens for critique provided a space for marginalized voices that operate at the level of everyday acts to challenge stereotypes and contribute to theory and pedagogy in the production of knowledge (Hurtado, 2003; Mohanty, 2003).

Inquiry Process

A grounded theory approach was chosen as a methodology to inquire into the activist experiences of Latina/Chicana educators from various educational contexts. Through in-depth interviews this study examined how they engaged as agents of change and how gender, ethnicity/race, and class influenced their activism. Examining Latina/Chicana perspectives of activism including their pedagogies, struggles, and accomplishments gave insight into the conceptual and practical connections between activism and leadership and provided a more inclusive and expanded notion of leadership. The study also served to advance discussions about discriminatory perceptions and practices within educational institutions. My interest in a closer examination into their everyday lives on the ground provided the opportunity to make visible the ways that these women engaged as activists, educators, and leaders, and allowed me to delve into the underlying philosophical foundations that motivated their activism and informed their theories of action.

Terms/Labels

Activism is meant here as change coming from actions that emerge from a social consciousness and a need to address ethical, moral, or human rights issues, and includes actions by Latinas/Chicanas that emerge from their oppressed contexts as women, as well as members of a group outside of the political and social mainstream. This meaning comes primarily from the responses of research participants in this study.

Writing and researching about this ethnic subgroup presents special challenges. Many ethnic labels are used to describe persons of Mexican origin in the United States

with no consensus among scholars as to the most correct or most appropriate term.

Latina/o is currently the most commonly used term on the West Coast and associated with people of Latin American heritage that includes those of Mexican descent (Torre & Pesquera, 1993). In the social science literature, *Chicana/o* typically refers to women and/or men of Mexican descent most often indigenous to and residing in the United States, a term popularized in the late 1960's during the Chicano Movement as a political statement affirming the need to struggle against the historical oppression of people of Mexican descent residing in the United States. A *Chicana* is generally thought of as a contemporary Mexican-American female whose life is rooted to a Mexican culture and ancestry that includes Mexican indigenous values and traditions. *Chicanas* embrace their hybridity as *mestizas*, a combination of Spanish-European and Mexican-Native heritage. The term *Chicana* implies one who understands the history of discrimination endured by Mexican-American people in the United States and "racialized others," and one who advocates for herself and the ethnic collective who are often the struggling poor. Though different by geographic background Latinas/os/Chicanas/os are bound by a shared language and cultural heritage (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). The term *Hispanic* is a government-imposed identifier most often used by the U. S. Census to identify all Spanish-speaking populations in the United States commonly used in data sets.

"Ethnicity/race" is used in academic literature and is used here since Latinas/Chicanas often self-identify as *mestizas* and/or biracial and, like other women of color, are subjected to racial discrimination.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This review of literature provided an overall framework to better understand the relationship of activism to leadership among Latinas/Chicanas in educational environments. The review includes an examination of several academic fields of study such as leadership studies, women's/feminist studies, ethnic studies, Chicana feminist studies, and literature related to social justice in education in order to expose the complex and important role that social context and the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity/race, and class play in the development of Latinas/Chicanas' leadership styles. The interdisciplinary approach proved useful in providing opportunities for examining activism in relation to contemporary theories of leadership within existing communities where Latinas/Chicanas were socially and professionally located.

This review was organized in five separate sections. The first section, "Leadership: Definitional Challenges and Relational Aspects" focused on the central tenets of various types of leadership, including transformational, moral, and intellectual leadership that considered leadership to be a complex social process, and that challenged the hierarchical, managerial, or industrial paradigms of leadership (Burns, 1978; Rost, 1993; Sorenson, 2005). Additionally, this significant literature on leadership provided a base point from which to begin a more inclusive discussion about leadership.

The second section, "Latinas/Chicanas' Activism and Leadership" highlighted descriptive ethnographic studies (Pardo, 1991) and biographic studies (Gutiérrez, Meléndez, & Noyola, 2007; Méndez-Negrete, 2002) that demonstrated the activist experiences of Latinas/Chicanas as potentially unique forms of leadership inspired by

their awareness of oppression and injustice and a consciousness that lead to collective and/or collaborative action (Hurtado, 2003). Working with ethnographic and biographic studies (Gutiérrez, Meléndez, & Noyola, 2007; Méndez-Negrete, 2002; Pardo, 1991) provided a critical context for analysis and exposed the challenges inherent in considering a complex and more inclusive view of leadership. Reviewing studies that detailed the experiences of Latinas/Chicanas as activists placed these women at the center of examination and provided an opportunity for a better understanding of their motivations, struggles, and accomplishments. This work offered a chance to see to what extent their theories and actions were related to concepts associated with contemporary theories of leadership (Burns, 1978; Rost, 1993), as well as the impact of context and culture on leadership for women (Klenke, 1996).

The third section, “Gender, Ethnicity/Race, and Class” argues for the necessity to consider gender, ethnicity/race, and class as inextricably interconnected aspects of lived experiences of Latinas/Chicanas as documented by Chicana feminist researchers and others (Gutiérrez, Meléndez, & Noyola, 2007; Hurtado, 2003; Zinn, 2002).

The fourth section, “Educational Inequities” turns to current literature on historical problems and troublesome trends in education for Latinas/os, and also recent studies that focus on arguments for social justice within education. The chapter concludes with a fifth section that is a “Summary”.

Leadership: Definitional Challenges and Relational Aspects

Studying leadership has much to do with how leadership is defined. Defining leadership was challenging since leadership studies is a relatively new field of academic study, one that continues to evolve, and a field that comes from a variety of academic

disciplines. According to Rost (1993) there was little scholarly discourse about leadership across disciplines, few critiques by scholars on the definitions of leadership, and no criteria to evaluate definitions of leadership. Some scholars in the field accepted that there were many definitions of leadership and “definitional ambiguity” as something that behavioral and social scientists had to work around. At the same time, scholars recognized that the lack of consensus encouraged a culture of “definitional permissiveness” (Rost, 1993). This permissiveness, however, provided an opportunity for more inclusive scholarly discourse and the potential for exploring the importance of context and of gender, class, and ethnicity in academic conversations in the study of leadership.

Though not its sole architect, Pulitzer-prize winning scholar James MacGregor Burns (1978) was credited with establishing leadership studies as an academic field, a field that evolved from his interest in history, sociology, and political science. Sorenson (2005) considered Burn’s (1978) research on leadership to be a seminal work in that it included three significant contributions: 1) an interdisciplinary examination of leadership; 2) a considered theory of leadership; and 3) the emergence of leadership studies. Burns (1978) theorized a relationship between leaders and followers as key to understanding leadership and change. Drawing upon his experiences with presidents and social movement leaders, he defined leadership as a complex and interactive social process between leaders, followers, and groups, and occurring at all levels within organizations and communities. In his definition of leadership, Burns moved away from studying leaders as individuals and instead emphasized the interrelationship between

leaders and followers engaged in a process with a common purpose with the potential for more inclusion, and considerate of local, regional, and cultural influences.

Burns (1978) described leadership as a response to the authentic needs and values of leaders and followers that lead to social change. He insisted that leadership depend upon responsive followers in a process involving collective activity and requiring reciprocal trust with common motives, a shared purpose, and a sense of social responsibility. Burns emphasized collective purpose and change as aspects that united leaders and followers as they engaged in a common enterprise, became dependent on one another, and shared the results of planned change together. For Burns a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converted followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents was a transformational mode of leadership. According to Burns, leadership could occur powerfully in the day-to-day pursuit of collective goals, mutual motives, and in the achievement of intended change referring particularly to the lower profile activities of parents, teachers, preachers, and politicians.

Rost (1993) examined and described the study of leadership as having been dominated by great man theories, psychological trait theories, behavioral theories, situation theory, excellence theory, and, like Burns (1978) criticized the managerial emphasis of such theories. Rost's (1993) intellectual history included a comprehensive analysis of 221 definitions of leadership, and writes, "...neither scholars nor the practitioners have been able to define leadership with precision, accuracy, and conciseness so that people are able to label it correctly when they see it happening or when they engage in it" (Rost, 1993, p. 6). Rost (1993) advanced Burns (1978) argument for a transformational definition of leadership by describing it as, "an influence relationship

between leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (Rost, 1993, p. 102).

Rost (1993) encouraged a move away from a study of leadership focused on peripheral traits, personality characteristics, style, management, and effectiveness, calling it an “industrial paradigm,” and instead emphasized an approach to the study of leadership that, like Burns (1978) was relational between leaders and followers and, thus, transformational. This shift away from a primarily individualized and “industrial paradigm” of leadership to one that emphasizes the nature and processes of leadership and the relationships of leaders to their followers (Burns, 1978; Rost, 1993) helped to understand leadership that is rooted in the social issues of the community and the actions that come from this understanding of leadership.

Like Burns (1978) and Rost (1993) Hollander and Offerman (1990) more closely examined the relationship between leaders and followers, emphasizing the role of followers in the leadership process and the notion of the sharing of power. From their organizational research they concluded that all forms of participation embody the idea that followers influence their environment to varying degrees depending on the context and that participation was valued for fulfilling human psychological needs. Hollander and Offermann (1990) support their concept of leadership adding that while leaders command greater attention and influence and serve vital functions such as planners and problem solvers or adjudicators of conflict, they cannot accomplish change alone. Followers can take an active role with the potential for leadership, and their perceptions and expectations influence and affect the process of leadership. Hollander and Offerman (1990) suggested there was much to be studied in the area of informal and upward

influence within organizations and “much to be learned about leadership from an understanding of leaders as both initiators and targets of influence” (Hollander and Offerman, 1990, p. 186).

Although Burns (1978), Rost (1993), and Hollander and Offerman (1990) are helpful in elaborating a definition of leadership that emphasized the relational aspects of a process for change that involve leaders and their followers, their research does not necessarily represent the experiences of women or those from ethnic groups. Glaringly absent from their discussions were any explicit references to context in regard to gender, ethnicity, or class. In contrast, the research of Klenke (1996) represented a scholarly examination by a woman about women in leadership emphasizing the ways in which leadership manifests differently depending on context and culture. In her book, *Women and Leadership: A Contextual Perspective*, Klenke examined the pervasive role of gender as a contextual and cultural variable that was interdependent with leadership-followership. Klenke (1996) took issue with Rost’s (1991) need for a universal definition of leadership arguing that a definition was unnecessary to achieving a complete understanding of leadership since traditionally definitions excluded the female half of the population. Klenke used the metaphor of a prism to demonstrate that leadership was seen differently when viewed through different lenses emphasizing context as the critical framework for building leadership models. However, Klenke’s (1996) research failed to examine the experiences of Latina/Chicana activists as leaders in any detail or to explore leadership designed for the underclass or common good. Compelling in Klenke’s research was her contention that non-positional leaders in educational and research settings used a particular leadership style to affect social change that was characterized by collaboration,

sharing, listening to and empowering others, and accomplishing changes through collective effort—a style that is not necessarily recognized as an effective leadership style in a business or corporate context. Such a model is helpful, however, in understanding leadership in the context of activists working for change within their local communities and, certainly, in educational settings.

If the essence of leadership is as Burns (1978) and Rost (1993) have described that include understanding human behavior, situations, environmental stress, and having an understanding of critical data and information to create change, then the relational and transformational models they proposed together with the contextual approaches that include culture and gender proposed by Klenke (1996) seem relevant as a starting point to begin to study a relationship between leadership and activism among Latinas/Chicanas. They do not, however, go far enough. Since existing profiles of leadership have not yet included the experiences of Latinas/Chicanas who are responding to inequities and injustices within their communities, understanding leadership that takes gender, ethnicity/race, and class into account as intersecting social issues can be better understood when viewed through the lens of Latina/Chicana activism.

Latinas/Chicanas' Activism and Leadership

A review of the literature on Latinas/Chicanas brought to the forefront a long history of their participation as activists, predating and occurring during the women's movement, the Chicano movement, and the movement of people of color (Blea, 1992; Del Castillo, 1980; Martinez, 2008). Additionally, there were labor activists such as Dolores Huerta and Emma Tenayuca who provided leadership to counter social injustices in farming and industrial environments (Calderón & Zamora, 1990; Mirandé and

Enriquez, 1979; Rose, 2002; Zavella, 1987). Research existed about grassroots community activism (Pardo, 1991); however, this research did not address concepts and theories from literature on leadership and no explicit connection between activism and leadership was evident. The research of Mendez-Negrete (2002), and Gutiérrez, Meléndez, & Noyola, (2007) offered a more comprehensive literature that included aspects of gender, ethnicity, and class and began to make the connection between activism as it was related to leadership. However, this work does not delve systematically into the literature on leadership.

Research made evident that Latinas/Chicanas experience and practice leadership differently than privileged groups of women or their male counterparts, particularly because their leadership was often closely connected to their engagement as agents for change in contexts where gender, ethnicity, and class played a significant role (Gutiérrez, Meléndez, & Noyola, 2007; Mendez-Negrete, 2002; Pardo, 1991). According to these studies Latinas/Chicanas used collective strategies to drive action. Although not always on the front lines, the strategies were woven into their everyday lives as an integral and anticipated aspect for improving the quality of life in their communities. Pardo (1991) affirms the importance of considering gender, ethnicity, and class, and shared similar conclusions in regards to activism as it evolved or was created within local communities in order to improve the necessary conditions of life. Pardo collected the life stories of Mexican-American women from Los Angeles who developed strategies for collective action that empowered movement from household to neighborhood to state resources. These women developed skills for community building that bridged a social distance between neighbors to achieve a common goal for addressing inadequate community

infrastructure and to improve conditions in their neighborhoods. Pardo's study illustrated how community work connected the private and public spheres and how women's collective work created additional community resources: (1) by supplementing books and equipment for their children's schools; (2) by communicating community needs to state and city representatives who allocated resources for recreation centers; and (3) by community mobilization. In her study, activism evolved from the needs of the community and leadership skills developed from engagement in real life encounters. Faith-based organizations played a key role in developing a community identity and provided space and encouragement that helped the activist community to flourish. Most of the women in Pardo's study were involved as parish volunteers in fund-raising, some persisting for as many as forty years to achieve their goals.

Méndez-Negrete (2002) demonstrated the ways that Latinas/Chicanas carried out their activist agendas using thirteen socio-historical ethnobiographies she collected and analyzed from 1992-1994. Méndez-Negrete explored the ways that this group of women internalized, understood, and negotiated interactions, and analyzed how their experiences served to illustrate a reflective awareness of their social location. She suggested that women in her study used a relational strategy to implement social change agendas and described the strategy as processes or activities that anchor relationships with others, regardless of ideology, leadership style, position, or issue. Méndez-Negrete suggested that these women accomplished change through or because of their relationships with others, using common ground as the foundation. She concluded that the leadership of Latinas/Chicanas in her study was about acting out a philosophy that created change to benefit the common good over the good of the individual. Taking a stance and acting on

issues that had a negative impact on others was part of their active involvement in creating and bringing about change. Listening, observing, keeping an eye on the overall process, with the flexibility to modify if necessary, were key aspects of their abilities as leaders.

Latina/Chicana activists in the Méndez-Negrete (2002) study provided manifestations and definitions of leadership grounded in a sound understanding of community needs. Participants in this study, without exception, expressed their belief that their leadership approach placed priority on what benefited the most people and that they preferred to work collaboratively rather than independently. One of the study participants, Enedina, an educational activist and community organizer, was quoted as saying that leadership means to “do what one can *para cambiar las cosas* (to change things) ... *pa’ mejorar* (to improve) people ... *es para mejoramos todos* (its so all of us improve),” (p. 243). A second participant in the study, Bela, past political activist, vice-mayor, and current president of a Board of Supervisors expressed, “Leadership is being able to be out there, not as a stand-alone person, but as a person who can work to meet common objectives with groups of people,” (p. 243). For Bela leadership originated within a shared vision for the common good of all involved.

In the Méndez-Negrete (2002) study participants engaged in a relational process of interaction, where each individual was accepted as an integral part of the leadership process. Those in leadership had a responsibility for “taking charge or being willing to lead in certain events, situations, or incidents,” (p. 243) according to Jesse, a third participant, mental health activist and founder of an institute for the study of the family.

Those who participated in the grassroots efforts took up new roles and developed new capabilities to achieve a shared goal through their collective power.

The Latinas/Chicanas in the Méndez-Negrete (2002) study learned to negotiate the nuances of power from the position of “Other,” having internalized messages of race, class, and gender informed by cultural markers. Participants in her study identified as ethnic women with a traditional Mexican culture that provided an arena to negotiate the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and class. Four women in this study situated themselves within feminist ideologies and claimed feminist values as the foundation for their activism and leadership. Mesina confronted race and class issues in her interactions with middle-class white feminists in the workplace and recognized that her struggle for Chicana feminist rights was different because it was grounded in structure rather than individual rights to equality. Messina’s ethnicity and class-consciousness also informed her activism. Amada identified as a Chicana, but not a feminist because of its negative connotations for her. She emphasized that she believed in people’s rights and explained that her struggles extended beyond gender. Latinas/Chicanas in the Méndez-Negrete study were required to make sense of their gender identity and determine how it informed their activism, while accounting for their ethnicity, and social locations. Through them we learn that gender, ethnicity, class and cultural experiences shape activism and leadership among Latinas/Chicanas differently from historical models of traditionally privileged leadership.

Gutiérrez, Meléndez, and Noyola (2007) validated and reinforced notions of activism and leadership coming from discrimination, civil injustices, and human rights abuses in the published mini-ethnographies contained in *Chicanas In Charge: Texas*

Women in the Public Arena. This study provided an example of twenty-five Chicanas from 1964 to the present who evolved as informal community grassroots activists and later became leaders with formal authority in the public arena. Using ethnography and oral history as methodological approaches, the women who self-identified as primarily *Chicana* were asked to describe their family, early childhood and political work in videotaped interviews. The oral history data provided information about social justice activism from a Latina/Chicana perspective. These women were politically engaged from various geographic regions of the state of Texas. Those interviewed spanned a range of ages, educational attainment, marital status, and category of public office.

Intersectionality: Gender, Ethnicity/Race, and Class

Some researchers and scholars in leadership studies who focused on gender differences did not take into account ethnicity and class, according to Gutiérrez, Meléndez, and Noyola (2007). Latinas/Chicanas have long opposed such a narrow view and agitated for the inclusion of the intersection of ethnicity and class in gender analyses of leadership. Gutiérrez, Meléndez, and Noyola tell us that Marta Cotera, a prominent Chicana scholar who pioneered the documentation of Mexican American women so that curricula could be developed for and about Latinas/Chicanas, explored the racist and sexist forms of oppression and added the burden of class on Latinas/Chicanas. Gutiérrez, Meléndez, and Noyola suggested that in any discussion about Chicana leadership while sexism was presumed to have been a necessary hurdle to overcome, the burden of class discrimination must be accounted for as well.

In the Gutiérrez, Meléndez, and Noyola (2007) study, what was most evident from the participants' stories were the many direct and explicit encounters with racism

and an acute awareness of educational oppression that inspired their activism. What was also evident from their stories was pride in ethnic identity and the tenacity and enduring courage that came from continual struggle. Their stories supported the idea that Latinas/Chicanas have a history of activism and leadership and a capacity for dealing with ongoing challenges, from organizing strikes and assisting in their communities to running for political office. In this study, Latinas/Chicanas entered the political arena primarily to assist in their community as well as for the conventional motivations that drive women to serve in political office, some who paid a high price as the firsts. Participants in the study focused on interdependence and collectivism in their leadership style, and utilized a less rigid, less formal style of leadership with much less emphasis on hierarchy than more traditional models.

Hurtado (2003) adds to our understanding of the complexities of gender, ethnicity, and class in her research with a diverse group of Latinas/Chicanas between the ages of twenty to thirty whom she considered as leaders of the next generation. Hurtado situated her study in a Chicana feminist framework that placed Latinas/Chicanas lived experiences at the center of analysis, and addressed the specificities of the Mexican-descent experience in the United States, although she acknowledged the *mezcla* (mixing) of different ethnic and racial groups that has always existed in Chicano communities. Hurtado focused attention on the importance of understanding that in order to study the lived experiences of this group of women, one must be knowledgeable about the influence of the linguistic, historical, and cultural contexts in which they live and work, and understand how those influences motivate and inspire their actions. She utilized what Chicana feminists wrote about their experiences to theorize the interconnections

between what was experienced and what was theorized and found that the primary sources for theorizing about social change were everyday interactions with representatives of repressive institutions designed to control and oppress communities of color.

Hurtado (2003) argued that common working-class origins and the persistence of racism fueled much of Latinas'/Chicanas' activism and scholarship. All of the respondents in her study acknowledged how their lives were affected by the fact that they were women, marked by their color, and influenced by their class backgrounds. The researcher found that in their encounters Latinas/Chicanas proposed strategies that were context-dependent and largely the result of lessons from their daily lives, speaking out against what did not fit into their historical and social experience. Some respondents participated in political organizations, electoral politics, and church-related activism to bring about social change. Other Latinas/Chicanas in Hurtado's study with heightened political awareness reconnected to their culture, communities, language, and professional passions but not without the ongoing contradictions in determining whether or when gender or ethnicity was their highest priority.

Existing social structures situate Latinas/Chicanas in marginalized positions and encourage group identity; however, no comparative data has yet been made available on the acquisition of identity by Latinas/Chicanas (Zinn, 2002). Privileges that come with power and status that include having representative voices in government, industry, education, financing and health systems are unavailable to many Latinas/Chicanas. Additionally, the gains of mainstream feminists have not been the gains of Latinas/Chicanas. Rather, feminist research has focused on middle-class gender issues

and is devoid of an understanding about the critical and complex intersection of gender, ethnicity/race, and class and, thus, ignores and excludes Latina/Chicana issues.

Educational Inequities

Three current texts related to the education of Latinas/os informed the study. The first is the work of Yosso (2006) who used critical race theory as a frame for examining the Chicana/Chicano educational pipeline, from elementary through graduate school that refocused attention to historical patterns of institutional neglect and invoked the potential for imagining scenarios for success. Second is the compilation of studies from Marshall and Oliva (2006) who demonstrated the effects of exclusionary practices that recreate inequity in schools. They suggested that activists within the school setting possess strategies and a strong sense of responsibility to use schools as spaces to eliminate economic, social, and political injustice, and that leaders needed to have a thorough understanding of race, gender, class and other areas of difference and how it impacts learning in order to succeed. Third is the recent publication of *The Latino Education Crisis*, Gándara & Contreras (2009) that reinforced continued inequities within educational systems that underserve Latinas/os, most of whom are born in the United States but who continue to fail. Important to their study is the reliance on data of Mexican-origin students conducted in California, and the potential for many shared social and educational obstacles among other Latina/o groups.

Summary

This chapter reviewed some of the contemporary literature in Leadership Studies that considered leadership to be relational process between leaders and followers, one that was socially and morally responsible and that challenged hierarchical, managerial, and

industrial paradigms of leadership (Burns, 1978; Rost, 1993). Klenke's gendered framework offered a female perspective of leadership to challenge the historically male dominated field of Leadership Studies and highlighted the importance of cultural context. A review of some of the literature in academic fields such as ethnic studies and Chicana feminist studies brought the complex experiences of Latinas/Chicanas as activists into the conversation to enable a broader and more inclusive discussion about leadership that considered gender, ethnicity/race, and class as interconnected imperatives. These studies laid the foundation for considering the relationship between activism and leadership among Latinas/Chicanas for this research project.

In the next chapter the research design including the methods and methodology for inquiry used to delve into the lived experiences of Latinas/Chicanas is described in detail in order to better understand the relationship between contemporary theories of leadership and activism among this group of women.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

This study was designed to understand the ways Latina/Chicana educators' activism is related to contemporary theories of leadership, particularly leadership as described by Burns (1978) and Rost (1993). Looking beyond popular and charismatic models of leadership that privilege white males in positions of power, this empirical study brings Latinas/Chicanas to the center of inquiry and analyzes the relevance of gender, ethnicity/race, and class in shaping their ideologies and theories of action. The project focused on Latina/Chicana educators' perceptions of their experiences as agents of change, drawing from their practical experiences as professionals. It examined their evolution as activists and the foundational principles that inform their pedagogies and practices as leaders. The study inquired into their views of leadership and activism and the relationship between the two. It also shed light into institutionalized obstacles and political challenges that motivated Latinas/os toward advocacy and social action.

Research Design

Qualitative research was chosen as a method to delve more deeply into the lived experiences of this small group of Latina/Chicana research participants. This type of research is often used by feminist researchers as a methodological orientation to examine gender issues because of its ability to explore change in attitudes and beliefs over time, and its ability to offer flexibility and depth for developing understanding and discovering new ideas (Demos & Segal, 1994; Lather, 2004; Patton, 2002).

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory as a methodological approach was chosen as an emergent and interpretive tool because it is primarily inductive and without predetermined hypotheses. It allowed the knowledge of those often excluded, in this case Latina/Chicana activist educators, to be brought to the forefront through an inquiry process that explored their lived experiences in their formal positions within educational institutions. A grounded theory approach allowed me to examine Latinas/Chicanas' perspectives at the level of engagement and the phenomenon of activism and leadership and its relationship to gender, ethnicity/race, and class. Developing theories to interpret emergent phenomena using this approach held the potential for discovery. In addition, such research generated possibilities and also posed dilemmas. Constructing and analyzing theories grounded in the data offered opportunities for exploring ideas through an iterative back and forth process of writing, reflecting, and revisiting data (Charmaz, 2006). It also allowed me, as the researcher, to reflect on and heighten my own understanding of myself as Latina/Chicana educator.

Chicana Feminist Theory and Critical Inquiry

Chicana feminist theory and critical inquiry provided a philosophical framework, offered a defining lens, and provided important conceptual tools by which to examine the complexities of Latinas/os positions in society and in systems within U. S. education. Chicana feminist theory recognized Latinas' diverse ways of knowing and the importance of their experiential knowledge as well as how that knowledge informed theory and practice (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). Chicana feminist thought also recognized a consciousness coming from the intersection of multiple systems of oppression that

include gender, ethnicity/race, and class, all of which stem from a history of colonization. It recognized the examination of lived experiences as sites to obtain knowledge (Garcia, 1997; Hurtado, 2003). This epistemology, developed by scholars of color and drawn from intellectual traditions such as ethnic studies, avoided binary forms of thinking and promoted a theory of agency and praxis committed to social justice (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Critical inquiry emphasized the importance of addressing societal problems and brought the problems of a marginalized group to light. Critical research documented how oppression had been experienced and viewed method and methodology as inextricably tied to issues of power. It attended to the means individuals engage with to become empowered and gave voice to the accomplishments of groups of individuals typically ignored (Lather, 2004). A critical approach to research implied an intention to move knowledge to action and, in this case, the intention was to generate knowledge about Latina/Chicana activist educators, a marginalized group, to advance causes of social justice by giving voice to their struggles and accomplishments (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Lather, 2004).

Research Questions

My research was designed to answer the following primary research question: In what ways is Latina/Chicana activism within educational institutions related to theories and concepts of leadership?

The following sub-questions were also explored:

- How is Latina/Chicana activism similar to traditional/transformational understandings of leadership?
- In what ways does educational context shape activism?
- How is activism defined by Latina/Chicana activist-educators and how is it manifested?
- In what ways does gender, ethnicity/race, and class shape activism?
- What strategies do Latinas/Chicanas employ as they attempt to effect change and do these strategies intersect with contemporary theories of leadership?

Research Participants

A list of twelve potential participants was developed over a period of eight months. During that time I contacted professors from several universities to ask for recommendations that resulted in many sources for contacts. I also had first hand contact with potential participants who participated at various conferences and other professional gatherings in San Diego where activists or others who knew activists were known to convene. My role as Research Assistant in the Ethnic Studies Department at the University of San Diego gave me access to Latina/Chicana faculty on campus who knew of activists in the region. The San Diego County Latino Concilio for Higher Education, an organization that convenes Latinas/os/Chicanas/os from most major universities in the county in order to share issues and events particular to the Latina/o community, provided a point of contact to meet Latina/Chicana activists. Additionally, members of my doctoral committee recommended candidates for participation and once some participants were identified, they recommended others resulting in an informal type of snowball

sampling. My criteria demanded that all Latinas/Chicanas be employed either full or part time by a public or private K-16 educational institution within the county of San Diego.

From a list of twelve Latinas/Chicanas, seven educators agreed to participate in this study. These women were invited to participate upon recommendation of two or more of their academic peers who recognized their history as agents of change, their involvement as advocates for students, and/or their activism for equity and human rights. Professional peers were those who were also identified as Latinas/os/Chicanas/os and/or who had reputations as researchers and/or held positions as academics. In some cases, they belonged to the same advocacy groups.

I met most, though not all, of the seven participants at least once prior to the interview and introduced myself and my research work to them at that initial meeting in order to ascertain whether or not they would be willing participants and available to be interviewed over the course of the study time frame. They were generally receptive, and I made the decision to organize my selection to respondents who brought varying levels of educational experiences in order to better understand whether their experiences were similar across institutions. The women were chosen from the northernmost to the southernmost points of San Diego County and from varied educational contexts. As a result, the seven respondents represented two high schools, two community colleges, and two universities.

My intention was to strive to understand and discover the roots of their motivation and commitment toward social justice activism, their challenges within educational institutions as professionals, the strategies they used to move their social justice agendas

through their respective educational systems, and how their theories and actions were related to contemporary theories of leadership. Participants' responses revealed a plethora of personal stories regarding their educational experiences, challenges as well as opportunities together with experiences of marginalization and how these experiences informed their ideologies and motivated activism.

Context/Sites of Inquiry

Choosing participants from a variety of educational institutions afforded the opportunity to understand how activism was influenced by context. These women worked within institutions to change and reform policies that would benefit other Latinas/Chicanas. Latina/Chicana perspectives' about leadership that was situated in educational institutions and included elements of social justice and social action offered the potential for a more inclusive and insightful discussion about issues of equity in education.

Educational institutions as sites of inquiry cannot be separated from the broader social context within the U. S. border county of San Diego, historically embedded with its own particular set of cultural tensions and political implications. Latinas/os within this landscape are the fastest growing ethnic group in the region and are often negatively impacted educationally (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Yosso, 2005). It is not unusual for Latinas/Chicanas and others to be found there advocating for educational equity (López, González, & Fierro, 2006; San Miguel, Jr. & Donato, 2010). In an environment that continued to neglect the needs of this population and/or to engage in reforms and policies that are not effective, acquiring knowledge from sources on the ground at the level of

engagement, that is, from insiders engaged in everyday advocacy such as Latina/Chicana activist educators, seemed a critical imperative and worthy endeavor. Latinas/Chicanas in this research study had been successful in negotiating the system for themselves as students and leaders and were knowledgeable about what worked for them and what did not. These women were situated in formal positions of authority as educators working within educational systems to create opportunities and develop structures for the success of Latina/o students and others who were underserved.

Data Collection

An invitation to those Latinas/Chicanas recommended by their peers to participate in the study was made by email where the names of referring peers was included together with general information about the research project. A concerted effort was made to explain why this study was important as a potential contribution to the literature in leadership studies. These emails were often followed up by a phone call and/or a second email that was more personalized with a request for a response to confirm a willingness to participate. Initial and follow up contacts were important in developing a foundational level of trust. Seven participants responded and agreed to participate voluntarily, and a time for interview was scheduled.

Initially, participants were asked for forty-five minutes of interview time; however, all interviews exceeded well over one hour and provided opportunities for probing for additional information and clarification. As a result, a second scheduled interview was not necessary. All interviews were transcribed and coded by me. Every effort was made to protect the identity of the participants by keeping their names and

their affiliate institutions anonymous so as not to endanger their positions or their research projects. All participants were given pseudo names for confidentiality. I was the only person who had access to the data files. All data were stored in a locked file cabinet and will be kept a minimum of five years.

All study participants were provided consent forms (see Appendix A) prior to the interview session where an opportunity was provided for them to ask questions about the study. I retained one signed copy, and one signed copy was given to each participant to keep. At that time participants were made aware that they could decline to answer or reframe a question, or to withdraw from the study at any time. At the scheduled interview session, participants were reminded that they had been recommended for participation in this study by at least two of their academic peers who viewed them as educators and activists. Interviews were held either in their official office space or other campus space, or in their home or mine, wherever participants felt comfortable in sharing their personal experiences and/or politically sensitive information and where the space was conducive to recording. Interviews were conducted at locations and at times convenient for participants, mostly within their communities.

An Interview Guide (see Appendix B) was used in all interviews to focus the interview conversation, but not to impede the natural progression of the narrative as participants shared their experiences. Topics for guiding interview conversations included descriptions of educational contexts and workplace environments, philosophical underpinnings for actions as educators, and the meaning and definition of activism and leadership. Many stories underlying social justice ideologies and theories of action were generated from the interview questions. Often participants' responses to my open-ended

questions led to stories about significant events in respondents' past that inspired activism and shaped notions of leadership. Their stories are discussed in Chapter 4.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from the audio-recorded interviews with the seven Latina/Chicana activist educators lasted from one to one and one-half hours and provided highly descriptive and detailed narratives. During the interview sessions participants spoke relatively freely about their identity formation as activists and their beliefs and values, often providing their interpretations of their experiences. During the interview I probed for the root of foundational principles and ideologies, asking how/where/when their ideas and values were formed. Probes created opportunities to deepen their reflection and often prompted additional narratives about other significant events in their lives.

Their narratives were transcribed and used as the primary unit of analysis to help address my research questions. All respondents described their work environment and critical events that occurred in their lives that they believed were pertinent to their activism. I analyzed each account in relationship to my interview guide and my research questions. Participants presented many unexpected responses, and new patterns and themes emerged with each interview and with each successive level of analysis. Stories that initially seemed unrelated to the questions later became important to developing patterns and themes. Patterns and themes were constructed based on data coming from their perspectives and my interpretative analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Transcribing individual interviews opened the prospect to review and reconsider narratives in light of the social conditions and landscape surrounding events that might be pertinent to this study. For example, participants described activist involvement in events of immigration injustices and reform. Listening to participants' retrospective accounts of trials in their lives during the transcription process without visual distractions and the pressures of the interview moment, offered an occasion to explore and examine words, phrases, and ideas that initially seemed unimportant or unrelated to my research questions. With each succeeding transcription, new concepts and patterns began to emerge as their social situations and their ongoing experience with education converged to expose an evolving consciousness and transformation of identity. Participant's individual accounts of events involving discrimination and bias and their subsequent decisions to take action became important in the process of thinking about patterns.

Emerging concepts were formed from multiple readings of events described in individual transcriptions and through continual comparisons of them. I conducted a careful analysis of the often subtle and frequently explicit meanings of participants' words and the conditions they described to explain the important events in their lives. I searched for ways to interpret the data in light of my research questions and developed a visual graphic with biographical information and some characteristics of each participant in an effort to see if there were commonalities beyond their gender and ethnicity. For example, in looking at the number of years they worked, I was able to construct some general descriptive statements that would accurately represent the entire group. This was challenging since they varied greatly in background experience, age, and work experience.

Each transcript was analyzed individually for patterns and themes followed by a comparison to other participants in the study (Creswell, 2003). Interview data was used to conduct line-by-line and focused coding and to distill qualities of experiences for successive levels of analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Coding was based on my research questions and done in several stages beginning with line-by-line coding at the conclusion of each transcription to look more closely at the data. I looked for implicit and nuanced meanings and developed ideas and concepts from participants' stories.

Comparison of narrative segments took on new meanings and new themes emerged. During this part of the analysis there were many shifts in thinking and changes over the time of the analysis. Some narrative segments seemed important to consider from the outset because they directly responded to research questions and were coded as possible major analytical themes. Other interview segments offered more subtle information about participants' life stories that initially seemed unrelated and not immediately relevant, however, I coded these points as well. Their frequency and consistency across transcriptions became apparent and exposed the complexity and meaning that they gave to their experiences.

My analysis of the overt and subtle details of their stories caused a more nuanced understanding of their lives. Analysis of transcriptions provided insight into understanding Latinas/Chicanas' perspectives of their agency, advocacy, and/or activism and its relationship to leadership. In each narrative there seemed to be social conditions and a series of circumstances that built upon each other together with personal choices that led to their evolving identities as activists and their developing ideologies. Building

theory from the details of their lives required a return to the original recordings and transcribed interview data for further study to uncover new possibilities and connections.

I kept memos in journals and on note pads, about the data collection and data analysis that included codes, themes, relationships, impressions, and other thoughts that occurred about the data collection process. This helped me to advance codes and develop themes toward theory development. Memos were also helpful in documenting events in which participants were observed teaching or leading outside of interview times. Often, memos were written immediately following an interview to capture impressions and thoughts about my perceptions of what was said and not said that might be lost later. At times memos presented a contradiction or conflict in my thinking necessitating a review of transcripts and data check.

Memos also included my thoughts on supplementary sources of data. These data sources included: (1) one observation of a participant “in action” teaching a communications course and conversations with several of her students about why they were taking the course and what they thought about it; (2) an observation of a presentation lead by one of the participants during a graduate student project relating to social action in the community; and, (3) participation in an all-day leadership development event for Latina/Chicana activists hosted by another of the participants in this study. I also wrote memos on the historical documents of the advocacy organizations and published grant reports that participants had been involved in creating. Comparisons between this supplementary data and transcriptions from the interviews motivated additional analysis about their interests and actions and produced new ideas.

Interpretations emerged from my analysis of the stories they told regarding their life events from early school years to their current experiences. Their stories revealed an awareness of a consciousness and orientation toward social justice that occurred as a developmental/evolutionary process over time. Reviewing and analyzing data in a back and forth and constant comparison pattern took an inordinate amount of time. Periodic references to the research question and purpose of the study interspersed with several attempts at organizing the data helped to focus my thinking. Deep reflection on processes that conceptualized relationships between individuals and concepts helped to construct theoretical possibilities.

Delimitations and Limitations

Insider-outsider perspectives both have their advantages and disadvantages and can be used to analyze participants' narrative texts in a number of ways (Rosaldo, 1993). As a researcher my role was that of an insider as well an outsider but never a completely detached observer since I identify as a Latina/Chicana educator, but am not considered by my peers to be an activist. As a former teacher and teacher educator, I am invested in learning about how concepts of social justice activism develop and how that informs the actions of Latinas/Chicanas in their professional roles as educators. I am cognizant that my analysis favors ways of knowing and kinds of knowledge that are particularly grounded in Chicana feminist theory, that is, that they are woman-centered, and culturally/ethnically and class sensitive. Every attempt was made to maintain participants' voices and perspectives at the center of analysis; however, though different in many ways, the interpretive nature of this study and theoretical renderings cannot be separated from my own experiences as a Latina/Chicana.

Choosing which narratives to exemplify the points made by participants and how to discuss them sometimes posed a problem. The evolutionary nature of participants' process toward social justice activism, and how it was rooted in each individual's unique collective experience made it difficult to deconstruct and edit their narratives for fear of losing the essence of the theme participants were trying to convey. To ensure the completeness of their thoughts, I often felt compelled to include lengthy sections of narrative.

While building a relationship with my participants was initially a concern, developing trust was less of an issue than originally anticipated. Respondents told stories and events that were detailed, descriptive, and surprisingly candid, sometimes presenting an ethical dilemma about what to make public. Extreme care was taken to honor and respect the trust that was given, particularly when conversations turned to topics that were intimately detailed about personal traumas or politically sensitive issues that might negatively impact them. During the interviews, misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and my assumptions were always a possibility, so I seized the opportunity during interviews to probe for clarification or additional information and asked if I could follow up by email in the event that additional questions arose. When questions arose I referred back to the audiotapes.

Scheduling time for interviews was difficult since these women were involved in many community events that consumed their time after work and on weekends. A concerted effort was made to accommodate their schedules and to travel to locations convenient for them where they were willing to meet for interviews. This meant driving to the southernmost and northernmost areas of the county that at times took over an hour.

The self-reported information in this study is limited to a segment of the professional lives of Latinas/Chicanas at this particular time and in this particular place. This sample of seven women is small and not generalizable to other Latinas/Chicanas. While it is possible that another researcher may have interpreted the findings in this research differently, the findings and conclusions I draw here are intended to make meaning solely of the activism and leadership of these seven women. The study may, however, provide some insight by which to conduct further studies of other groups who are involved in activism and how that might be related to leadership.

Significance of the Study

This research study advanced the developing literature in Leadership Studies by broadening existing definitions with a more inclusive understanding of leadership, one that took into account gender, ethnicity/race, and class as intersecting and socially constructed categories of analysis. The study provided an opportunity for building knowledge from the everyday acts of Latina/Chicana activist educators bridging theory and practice with implications for practice and policy. The project challenged stereotypes and assumptions and broke with past paradigms of leadership by broadening the meaning of existing definitions of leadership through an understanding of activism and how it related to leadership. Documenting their experiences established Latinas/Chicanas as initiators and active agents of change in their varied institutions within educational institutions. Making their issues visible provided a view of activism as leadership as a response inspired by moral outrage at educational inequities and disenfranchisement toward a model of leadership that focused on social justice and the success of students as a core value. Models of leadership grounded in the educational

struggles of the community provided insight from the perspective of the oppressed that held the potential to contribute to enlightened and supportive educational policy—one that prioritized the development and institutionalization of infrastructures that could lead to better success for the growing Latina/o student population along the entire educational pipeline.

Summary

In this chapter the rationale and process for the qualitative research design and grounded theory were described in detail. The choice of the design centered on the importance of bringing the research participants to the center of inquiry to document their stories. Their experiences were used to analyze the relevance of gender, ethnicity/race, and class in their activism and the potential relationship to their leadership in their professional lives.

In the next chapter findings from the research project were described and examined.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

In this study, I analyzed the professional experiences of seven Latina/Chicana educators who are recognized by their peers and others in their communities as agents of change, advocates, and activists. My goal was to begin to construct a grounded theory about the relationship between activism and leadership in educational contexts. The theory that I constructed would focus, among other things, on the role that gender, ethnicity/race, and class play in both activist and leadership activities.

This study laid the foundation for constructing an inductive theory grounded in data that was generated in narrative form. The Latinas/Chicanas in this study, in fact, told richly detailed stories of courage and perseverance in the face of continual struggle, and, in the process of telling their stories, revealed how their personal backgrounds and experiences were tied to their actions, their praxis and their pedagogies as professionals. They identified pivotal educational experiences that involved mentors, role models, and inspirational individuals, as well as other opportunities for learning and growth. The research participants explained how the individuals they encountered and their own experiences had served as catalysts for action and, at times, as the impetus for critical reflection and a deepened understanding of their social situation.

Organization of the Chapter

Given the overarching goal of constructing a grounded theory, the narrative data have been restructured around themes that tend to cut across individual stories, and these themes have been used to organize this chapter. The initial theme is Participants' Background Experiences. Then the focus shifts to Educational Institutions As Sites of

Struggle and Educational Institutions As Sites For Opportunities, followed by Significant Life Events, Developing Theories of Action, and Activist Educators in Professional Contexts. Finally, this chapter concludes with a section entitled (Re)defining Leadership: Activism As Leadership.

Participants' Background Experiences

The Latina/Chicana participants in this study varied in age, location, and position, but all attained advanced academic degrees. In addition, all had held more than one professional position within educational contexts throughout San Diego County over a time span of from fifteen to more than thirty years.

Rowena and Carmen were high school principals within the largest urban school district in the county; Nancee was a community college counselor and Esther was a community college instructor; Fabiola was an instructor at a public four-year university, and Anna and Laura, respectively, were project directors, one at a four-year public university, and one at a private graduate-degree granting university. In addition to their primary positions, some participants in the study coordinated large multi-year grants.

All of the professionals worked in institutions that served large numbers of Latinas/os. All but one of the higher education participants, for example, worked in colleges and universities that were officially designated as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)¹, and the two high school principals in the study worked in schools that primarily

¹ Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) are defined as colleges, universities or systems/districts where total Hispanic enrollment constitutes a minimum of 25% of the total enrollment of undergraduate and graduate level (including professional schools) full- and part-time for-credit students reported in the fall prior to membership year. The program provides grants to assist HSI's to expand educational opportunities for, and

served Latinas/os. These students were designated as poor, as measured by eligibility for free and reduced lunch programs.

Though the students each of the participants worked with were similar, the institutions in which they worked tended to differ. Those who were high school principals undoubtedly functioned with different constraints than their activist educator counterparts in higher education. The participants in this study who worked in high schools, for example, were assigned to the schools in which they worked; the higher education participants had a greater degree of choice about where they would work. Finally, it is also important to note that all seven of the participants in this study worked in border communities in the San Diego-Tijuana region, a county with a unique set of political tensions that often negatively impact the Latina/o community. The geographical context, undoubtedly, had an impact on how the participants responded as activist educators and engaged as leaders.

Family Influences

In all the cases, one way or another, families influenced each participant's transformation into activist/leader. Belonging to a marginalized ethnic group often complicated Latinas/Chicanas' experiences; further complications were the struggles created by the fact that the participants in this study were all female and grew up in extremely poor and/or working class communities. Their interaction with family

members helped them make sense of their situations and laid a foundation for transcending difficult situations throughout their lives.

Their experiences in familial contexts included first hand stories of migration, activism within their historical family narratives, and maternal advice or *dichos* intended to provide guidance for them to help them deal with disappointing situations. All of these experiences were rooted in the Mexican culture and situated them as part of a group outside of the politically dominant, mainstream society.

To be sure, participants' experiences varied, with some who came from families who had been in the region for several generations, and others from families that had arrived in the U. S. only during their middle or high school years. Some told of gaining strength from their mothers who became their models of courage, and others talked about their fathers or remembered narratives of other family members who embraced ideals of social justice and who motivated them to do the same. The commonality was that all seemed to be strongly influenced by family. This influence helped them develop a heightened sense of social awareness and responsibility for those who were marginalized or struggling in their communities.

Anna is an excellent case-in-point in this regard. Anna's childhood migration experience of leaving Mexico and entering what she viewed as a politically hostile environment in the U. S. left an indelible mark on her and shaped her attitudes and dispositions toward migration and the pressures that were always present within the struggling working class Mexican community of which she was a part. With her courageous mother as a determined "feminist" model and head of their all-female

household, she and her six sisters managed to survive and graduate from college, breaking the stereotype of Latinas as passive, docile, and uninterested in education. This background positioned Anna as an advocate for the Latina/o community later on.

Anna, who at the time of the interview was serving as the interim director of a Latino Research Center at a public university stated:

I am first generation, a female, working-class [woman]. It is real for me. I arrived from Michoacan when I was twelve and grew up right here, down the street from the university in a little barrio in a two-bedroom apartment with six sisters and my mom. So my mom was a single parent. She was the first female in that village to leave the community to come to the United States. She had the self-determination and the work ethic, definitely a feminist before other women were feminist. I was never told, no, you can't do that because you're a girl, or you shouldn't. We are all college graduates. It was my mom and six of us, and so for us this notion of comparing our experiences to what we saw in the local community, we were just the outcast in every sense. People were coming to her [mother] all the time and saying they were really sorry she ended up with all these girls. At that time the number of Mexican families were just a handful and we all knew each other. All of our parents worked at the same factories. So we sort of created our own sense of community. So by the time I got to high school I had a good understanding of where I fit in the local community. The politics of my own migration was a source of that awakening, the raising of my political consciousness.

Like Anna, Laura, an administrator charged with promoting diversity at a private university, also had a single mother who was her model of tenacity. As her mentor, her mother provided Laura with an ongoing philosophy about struggle through her sayings or *dichos* that enabled her to overcome the obstacles she faced in school and later in her professional encounters. Yosso, (2005) has described advice in this form as an aspect of “aspirational capital” that is provided through storytelling or family counsel and intended as a means to maintain hopes and dreams. It is also a navigational tool in the face of structured inequality. In the following excerpt from my interview with Laura she reveals

her ability to persist in her aspirations for an education and shows how her professional goals came from her mother's *dichos*.

I think it was more how I was raised, having a very social mother with all the *dichos*, that things happen for a reason and that you have to be willing to go with the flow. My mom is always saying, *Tan fácil que te caegas, qué tan pronto te levantas*, how hard you fall down, how quickly you get up. So it's up to you to decide whether you are going to stay here in a sad place or get your feet going.

Like Anna and Laura, Esther, a community college English instructor and professional development coordinator, also demonstrated that she had “aspirational capital” that was developed from her early struggles coming from a poor family. Her courage and strength fed her determination to learn. Although her mother eventually abandoned her, she was motivated, like Anna, by her mother's expectations of her to acquire an education. Her love of reading came from shared reading experiences with her mother and the support of the local library that laid the groundwork for her love of literature. Both led to her professional choice to become an English Instructor later in her life. Literature opened a world of knowledge that later led to more discovery about herself as part of a broader struggle. Here is Esther in her own words:

I always loved reading all my life. One of the things my mother did do for me when I was a little girl, before she got really bad, was take us to the library. We would walk to the library and the librarian would say, “ You can take as many books as you want,” [which meant] as many as they would let us and that we could carry all the way home. My mom would take books too and she would read and my little brother would read. And she would say, “It's free.” And we were very poor so we would spend all morning in the library picking out which books we wanted and then would carry them home. Half way home was the park and she would sit us down under a tree and she would go to the little market that was there at that time and she would buy a watermelon and cut the watermelon up and we would sit under the tree and read books and eat watermelon. And that was like the normal thing for us to do. It felt like an amazing outing to us. So my mother's passion for books really helped me to be who I am today.

Unlike Esther and the other participants, Fabiola's experience was not that of such severe impoverishment; it was not one of great privilege either, however. Still, she spoke of being embedded in a family that promoted an awareness of an extensive family history and a connection to local community members. This sense of connection to the issues of the wider Latino community and their involvement in the Chicano movement together with her family narratives of struggle and resistance and an ethic of service and care contributed to her interest in social justice activism. All of this, according to Fabiola, could be traced back to her parents;

My parents have been in Logan Heights since the turn of the last century. My father's family immigrated here in 1914. My father was a union organizer, and I come from a family, cousins and others who have been about service. I grew up on family narratives about the Mexican Revolution. Stories about how they were treated when they worked in Kansas on the railroads. My father always saying, 'we have to take care of each other,' and my uncle telling his kids too that your role at work is to take care of your co-worker. Old time Mexican families are interconnected. Families from National City and Barrio Logan are all intermixed. So I have a lot of connections in the community that were major parts of the "*movimiento*."

Anna's, Esther's, Laura's, and Fabiola's stories about the role of family in shaping their commitment to activism may have been a bit more dramatic than the stories told by the remaining three participants, but all of the participants, in one way or another, indicated that family members had influenced them greatly. First-hand experiences with family members inspired hope, and historical family narratives often helped mold a personal strength and ethnic identity for these women that included a sense of belonging to a historical and/or collective struggle. These experiences and family narratives, in turn, laid a foundation for social awareness and empathy for others.

Part of this family-generated social awareness was a sense of being marginalized and being a part of marginalized groups. This sense of marginalization was later reinforced by the participants' experience in educational institutions, a theme discussed in the next section.

Educational Institutions As Sites of Struggle

One of the factors that the participants indicated explicitly shaped their professional lives and, more specifically, their activism was the participants' early experience with educational marginalization as students in U. S. schools. Their struggles with poverty, racism, negative stereotypes and attitudes about being immigrant students and second language learners were exacerbated by an absence of educational role models, mentors and support structures for staying in school. These women were situated socially outside the dominant culture and power structure and endured the stigmas of poverty and discrimination in school. They became critically aware, as previous research has pointed out, of their social location and the weight of a history of colonization and oppression (Córdova, 1999; Griswold del Castillo, 2007; Mignolo, 2000; Villenas & Foley, 2002).

Anna recalled her first days in a California junior high school as an immigrant student and how quickly she became aware of race and class issues that she did not know how to explain. These experiences compelled her to understand the larger scope of what was happening and subsequently identify with a broader collective Chicana/o struggle.

You know I was an immigrant kid, so I arrived here when I was twelve years old and I experienced many issues that I did not know how to explain. Why other kids in school were calling me a "wetback" or a "beaner" when I was the only Mexican kid in the classroom in sixth grade. I didn't know what that was all about and so it took some time for me to contextualize what I was experiencing and place in a broader struggle what had been going on much

longer than I had been around the U. S. So I really began to identify with other Chicanos.

Anna goes on to say that she was “baptized early” into a world of collective intolerance and bias. She explained how her first experience with explicit inequity occurred as a result of a politically motivated anti-immigrant incident when she was the MEChA President. While still in high school, an incident similar to the Lemon Grove Incident² of the 1930’s occurred and challenged her to lead as an advocate in a public sphere.

The one incident that stands out for me and has always been really meaningful is one time when I was the MEChA President at our high school,... and I got a request from one of the local parents to let me know that the school district was actually considering bussing some of the kids from a local elementary school that has historically been the Mexican school here in the city. So, they said, there is a petition right now that is being considered by the school board to bus kids because of overcrowding to a brand new school that was just opening up, in a more middle class neighborhood. Well, this situation just blew out of proportion. It became an extremely controversial issue because when parents in the community around the new school found out that they were going to be bussing kids...they went to the school board. There are a lot of newspaper articles that I have gone back to look at. But they said absolutely not, we will not let our kids go to school with those Mexican kids. This should be our neighborhood school. They are going to lower the standard of education, sort of like the Lemon Grove Incident. So here I am at fifteen or sixteen years old in this position where I have to speak at the school board meeting. I was like well what do I say, what are the issues and I remember talking to our advisor and figuring out how to present MEChA’s position. But we showed up and there were a hundred Anglo parents that showed up, and we had organized and brought a lot of Latino parents to be there. So it was a very well-attended meeting. But what we were hearing was like the rhetoric from the 1920’s and 30’s like Mexicans are just lowering the standards of education, they are a criminal element. They are going to bring gangs, you know, all these social stereotypes were coming back again. As I

² The Lemon Grove Incident was one of the earliest court cases concerning school desegregation in the Southwest significant because the Mexican community took action against school officials and won the case establishing the rights of their children to equal education despite local, regional and national sentiment that favored the actual deportation of the Mexican population in the U. S. This court case predates Brown vs. Topeka School Board. Additional information can be found in the Journal of San Diego History, Spring 1986 or at www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/86spring/lemongrove.htm.

remember, I got up to speak, I precisely brought up the Lemon Grove case and I talked about it and I remember there was total silence. People didn't know what to say. And I remember kind of thinking, 'is this the kind of society that we want to go back to instead of moving forward and understanding where people are coming from?' and the fact that this is our community. We need to understand why immigrants are here. Not everyone is an immigrant. There are families that have been here for a long time and have contributed. So I was baptized early.

Similarly, Rowena, an urban high school principal, talked about schooling as challenging. As a second language learner, she characterized her experience as one of ongoing struggle, something she later used to inform her praxis as an educator. She spoke about her experiences in transferring to school in the U. S. as a bilingual, but not biliterate student, and struggling to succeed academically. She recognized the notion of difference and negative assumptions about speaking Spanish.

I was raised in Tijuana. I was always very certain that I was Mexican. But then in attending school in the United States and interacting and going to college, you're immediately confronted with the notion that you are different. You don't write English well. You speak with an accent. And I was extremely fortunate because I grew up in a bilingual household. I grew up speaking English and Spanish. But I didn't read English and I didn't write. I was literate in Spanish. At that time we didn't have English as a Second Language at the community college level. So I really, really struggled. I can't tell you how many times I failed English 101. They made assumptions about language. So that was one of my challenges as a student.

Rowena added that, additionally, she struggled in school because her mother did not speak English and could not guide her because she lacked the experience of school and was outside of the school culture.

My mom didn't go to school. My mom doesn't speak English. My mom didn't know how to guide me and I really struggled to figure out what I wanted to do and how to do it.

Carmen, an urban high school principal, pointed to educational experiences to explain her orientation and commitment to activism but suggested that it was a lack of

role models in school that was what inspired her to take up the responsibility for speaking out and to take action. She later advocated to secure role models for others because she had felt marginalized and unrecognized in school. Here she explains some of the roots that shaped her identity and the activist role she enthusiastically assumed.

I went through high school through the ninth grade [in the U. S.]. I came from Mexico and moved into the ninth grade [stayed] until the twelfth grade in a public school and I had no Latino role models. I went to [names university] and I had maybe one Chileno that was my teacher. There were people who didn't look like me, teaching me Latin American literature. You know, it wasn't until I got to Guadalajara and studied with [names university] and I understood that identity was major. In that case I am very vocal about it [the importance of identity] and I won't step down in my beliefs.

Educational experiences such as the ones described above had a profound effect on the participants in this study. Although educational institutions were sites of struggle, that struggle heightened social awareness that strengthened identities and gave impetus to social responsibility and action.

In the following section it becomes obvious that these Latinas/Chicanas took advantage of the opportunities that education provided by persisting and acquiring the knowledge necessary for advancing academically, building their leadership skills, and developing confidence and courage.

Educational Institutions As Sites of Possibilities

Within the educational landscape participants learned that being a Latina/Chicana meant struggle and sometimes failure as a student, but also that educational institutions provided opportunities for learning and transformation. While marginalization continued as part of their experience as Latinas from working class backgrounds, some participants indicated that they found refuge, hope, and support structures to continue their education

despite inequities in the school setting. Whatever the circumstances, the lessons learned and in particular the people they encountered in those educational settings helped them to develop a hunger for learning, inspire an evolving identity, and develop a sense of advocacy. Described here are some of the examples of opportunities within educational institutions provided by research participants.

Esther described her living condition as poor. Abandoned by her mother as a child and responsible for the care for her younger brother, she found refuge in the school setting and spoke in positive ways about school as a safe and a validating space. School provided a needed structure at a critical point in her life and was an important supportive environment while she was trying to survive and fulfill her mother's wishes for her education. Inspired by her mother's advice, she recognized the value of education and focused her energy on trying to excel in her studies. This orientation toward learning and doing something constructive for herself carried throughout her professional life as an educator. She came to understand later as an adult about the inequities of the educational setting that she had found so hopeful and others found so constraining.

My mother was a single parent. She ended up leaving my brother and I when I was twelve and my brother was eleven. So we lived alone in a little adobe type house with dirt floors. What we would do was to go to school every day. I was in junior high by then. We would go to lunch at school and take seconds in our pockets for dinner or we had a really good way to hang out with our friends where we knew the mom's would feed us. In that small town everybody knew everybody's business. In that area I was one of many children going through very similar situations. Otherwise, I think I would have been the worst case. But school was the only place I felt safe and that gave me structure, and I'm in the Honors Society and I'm getting straight A's and I'm excelling and the reason I know I was excelling was because I felt safe, and that was one place where I could focus all my energy and know that I was going to be doing something constructive for myself. And I ended up being one of the only Chicanas in the Honor Society, one of the first to be inducted.

Anna also found educational support through the services of the California Migrant Education Program—a program that helped her to learn English and provided her access to other educational opportunities. Her participation in that program also helped her to understand her position in the community. She explained, “There were a few support programs like Migrant Education that helped all of us. They really paid attention to students that needed help learning the language. I was one of them.”

Though challenging in terms of bias and racial epithets, educational opportunity was also there for Anna in the form of a high school U. S. History class that was taught from a Chicano Studies perspective. This class helped her to see herself as part of a larger collective struggle. This high school experience was important as an early experience since it helped her to become aware of human rights violations both in her community and in other parts of the world. These uncommon educational experiences along with many others fostered her strong identity as a Chicana engaged in the Chicano movement.

I was reading all kinds of books about Latin America when I was in high school. I had exposure through one of my high school teachers who was bringing extra videos at that time to class and really exposing us to what was going on in Central America in terms of human rights efforts in Argentina, in Chile at that time, so not a common high school educational experience particularly in this part of the county. So that is what really shaped how I began to see myself as part of this sort of Chicano struggle and part of that Chicano movement.

Research suggests that Anna’s experience was as motivating as it was unusual (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010; Sleeter, 1996). Unfortunately, most Latinas/os do not have the opportunity to learn about themselves as part of a larger history and collective struggle until they reach university or graduate level work.

Recruited to the university and faced with financial hardship and the stresses of a first generation college student, Nancee, now a Puente Program Counselor and Coordinator of the Student Transfer Center at a community college, found opportunity and support in community with others from the university organization of MEChA. It was this organization where she found an interest in educational equity and developed as a leader. Her participation in that organization fed her interest in politics and provided a space for her to connect with others with similar interests. Eventually she came to identify strongly as a political activist in her community and later became an advocate for Latina/o students in a more formal role in the community college setting.

I know exactly what that [first generation college student] means because I was a first generation college student. So they are going to stick close to home [for financial reasons]. In school I was in MEChA. It [activism] just grows. I was involved in the walkouts in [she names school] back in 1968 and followed what was going on in L. A., and I was one of the leaders. It was the same thing, seeing issues in education, here we were a majority-minority school and we had no teachers of color.

Teachers within educational institutions can make the difference in a student's life by denying or providing opportunities. Fabiola found both kinds of teachers. She was described by her high school teachers as an underachiever, and later nudged by a professor into teaching, something she had not considered as a profession.

Teachers had told me I was an underachiever [referring to high school years]. I remember thinking I was smarter than everybody else, but I used to dumb down my answers in order to be accepted by the [peer] group. I flunked so many classes. I had to go to Continuation School and beg them to pass me. So I spent a couple of years doing my thing at a community college and then I went to the university. In community college something happened to me. At the beginning of my senior year [at four-year university] I realized I wanted to be an academic. I realized that this was the place I wanted to be and I got accepted into the Masters Program and I was shoved, pushed by this professor to take a teaching associates position. I didn't want to be a teacher. And the

first day I fell in love. I was walking around in euphoria. From that day forward there's no question that's what I was meant to do.

Due to the support of a university professor, Fabiola was set on a professional path that helped her to find meaning in teaching and develop the ability to engage students in critical educational practices.

As these participants have made clear, education and educational institutions represented both sites of struggle as well as places for opportunities and learning. Whether inequitable and unjust places, or places that provided support, the influence education had on their lives was undeniable. It gave these Latinas/Chicanas the motivation to persist through the system through a process of achieving a greater understanding of themselves and finally, in developing their sense of purpose that was directly tied to their ethnic identity as Latinas/Chicanas.

In the next section, I examined the specific events that four of the participants in my study described as playing a significant role in their development as activists and educators.

Significant Events

Latinas/Chicanas in this study shared stories of life events that were significant and had a lasting influence on shaping their identities and clarifying their sense of purpose. These events informed their foundational principles and professional decisions. Sometimes they involved activist models or family mentors; at other times they were more broadly described as experiences with particular struggles that occurred over time. In some cases it was a contact with Chicano educators, coupled with their own research in the educational process that led them to think about themselves as activists and leaders,

and to reflect on the inequities within the Latina/o community. In all cases, however, in addition to their background experiences, the addition of a significant interaction with an event or struggle drove them to think deeper about social justice and to make a stronger commitment to action.

When asked about a significant event in her life Fabiola spoke about how she came to embrace participatory democracy as a pedagogy for teaching, leading and as a way to live. The event was initiated as part of an educational inquiry for a Master's degree and centered on her two-week experience in the jungle with the Zapatista National Liberation Army. This experience resonated with her family narratives and historical memory and profoundly changed her way of thinking. She recalled the event itself in the course of our discussion:

I know the origin of my involvement with participatory democracy. [It was] when I wrote my master's thesis on the revolutionary new technology, which was the internet and that the Zapatista National Liberation Army/Zapatistas were using this. I woke up to the NPR news I think on Sunday about this rag tag group of revolutionaries. My historical memory and family narratives about Emiliano Zapata and the revolution and that kind of thing, I was immediately drawn. I ended up doing my Master's thesis and getting invited to an international conference in the middle of the jungle in Mexico in 1996 after I had graduated. And now I account for my life in two parts, before Chiapas (BC) and after Chiapas, because I think that was the thing that changed me profoundly.

Likewise, Carmen experienced an event in graduate school where a Chicano professor, the first with whom she could identify, inspired her to voice her thoughts and concerns whenever the opportunity presented itself. She observed that in school groups Latinos/Chicanos did not take up leadership roles and were absent from critical conversations. This event heightened her critical awareness about the lack of voice for Latinos/Chicanos and empowered her to speak out, later leading to her commitment and

engagement as an activist and leader both in the educational setting and in the community.

I was barely starting my credential at Cal State, Los Angeles, and I had a professor named Professor B. R., and he told me if you don't speak up, no one is going to do it for you, we [Chicanos] don't have anyone. And he was my first Chicano professor all the way through graduate school. I had to wait for the first person who I could identify (with). And he said, "Sister, you gotta go out and do it." That year I came back to my university and then became a bilingual instructor, but I remember that year at Cal State, L. A. we would do groups and he told me, if you notice, every time there are groups, it is always someone else other than a Latino taking the leadership. It's never the Latino, so we have to be those people. 'Hey, I'll speak for our group'. And I started doing that. I noticed that he was right. Where's the voice of the Chicanos? Where's the voice of the women? Where's the voice of the Latina? And that was 1991. And so I knew I had a lot of work to do.

The particular interaction between Carmen and her professor encouraged Carmen to assume a sense of responsibility and commitment to speak out when it came to educational injustices, particularly those of language or race issues. Carmen pointed to this event as helping her to clarify her sense of purpose and as the factor that played a significant role in her activism: "So any time I saw some injustices, I would speak up and I would get my hand slapped and I would get written up."

Carmen felt justified in her actions because of a new sense of responsibility as a Latina/Chicana activist. Like Carmen, Nancee recognized unfairness early in her life and developed a strong sense of responsibility that she says came from indignation and fear. She recalled two events as significant to her political awareness and the shaping of her political activism. The first came from a family narrative where her grandfather and his family were deported to Mexico for organizing mine workers.

It probably has something to do with—it's in the blood because of one of my grandfathers. My grandparents came from Mexico and settled in Phoenix and that's where they had their family. The local sheriff came to their front door

and knocked on it, and said, if you don't leave now/today, we will officially move you out tomorrow. And what happened is that they unofficially got deported to Mexico because my grandfather was involved in organizing mine workers. And so, of course, the company was not happy with him so they sent the local sheriff. So I'm thinking maybe its a little bit in the blood [that explains activist identity].

The second event occurred when a mentor introduced Nancee to the political process, a process that she says demonstrated to her the potential power of the people. This seemed critical to Nancee since she observed her community to be poor, sometimes treated unjustly, and powerless to make changes.

But also when I was growing up I remember being in elementary school and seeing things that seemed so unfair, and then when I was fifteen years old, we lived in a poorer part of town that was a very diverse community (lots of Blacks and Latinos and some older white retired who were still living in the community), a fairly poor community. There was one African American guy who was upset at the fact that we were not getting any services in our area. No street work; no nothing. We had potholes. So what he did was he decided to draw up a petition requesting that our congressperson address some of our concerns, and basically he recruited me because I was bilingual. There were a lot of people who I needed to explain what the problems were and my mom let me because she trusted him and knew that he meant to do good. And so sure enough we got petitions. He took them to the city council and they actually started doing things. So I saw the power of the people. Many years later he became a councilman himself. And so he was my first mentor especially in the social-political arena. And even though we ended up having our differences as time went by, we never lost respect or love for each other.

For Nancee this event triggered a political awakening about how to use the political process to improve people's lives and greatly influenced her later decisions as a political activist.

Anna pointed to a specific event that occurred during high school that placed her in direct contact with Chicana/o activists, fueling her desire to learn more about the Chicano struggle and fostering a deeper understanding of the meaning of her collective identity.

You know, my background is not traditional. I really came of age as part of the Chicana generation. What that means is that as a student in high school I was exposed to Chicano activists. I was invited to participate to go and support a hunger strike that was going on at UCLA, and support it in defense of the preservation of the Chicano Studies Department. So that was my initial exposure to education, to what other Chicanos, Chicanas were doing who were already at a university and thinking why it was important for them to go on an eight-day hunger strike to preserve this space on campus, to preserve that department, to preserve the fact that Chicano Studies needed to exist and was under threat. For me it was a big experience that really has formed my own intellectual framework in general. I have been involved in activism of various sorts from the beginning. The fact that I was introduced to U. S. History from a Chicano Studies framework, reading Rodolfo Acuña when I was in high school, meeting Gomez Quiñones, a political science professor at UCLA, and then just learning about other forms of activist efforts that were going on in schools, students organizing in East L. A. or the ongoing struggle for labor rights through the United Farm Workers through the efforts of Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez, the efforts of others in Denver, Colorado like Rodolfo “Corky” González organizing youth and starting up a Chicano school and doing all this stuff. And then being connected since I was in high school to local efforts going on through Chicano Park, the whole art movement in that area and so as a young student seeing that this was going on all over the place, that it wasn’t isolated and that there was a purpose for that kind of organizing and movement really touched me in different ways but probably the most important way was that it really piqued my intellectual curiosity and I wanted to learn more. I wanted to understand why there was this struggle.

These examples of significant events that involved mentors and models of activism in combination with early experiences as marginalized Latinas struggling with poverty, language, and/or racial bias strengthened Latinas/Chicanas determination to advocate for themselves and others and further motivated their leanings toward social activism.

In the next section I discussed philosophical underpinnings and the theories of action of three participants who expressed at length their evolutionary process toward activism.

Developing Theories of Action

It is clear that although these Latinas/Chicanas had a variety of experiences, their early family influences, social location, education, and significant life events shaped their foundational principles and activism. Theories of action evolved from these life experiences, but here too I found a wide variation. Their theories ranged from critical pedagogy, participatory democracy, and Marxism to a *mestiza* understanding of the meaning of diversity and moral responsibility coming from the study of contemporary history and political events. Developing theories can be found embedded in other narrative segments, however, three of their stories and commentaries included here reveal how their theories of action were formed.

Esther made visible her shifts in thinking (prodded by a colleague from the Civil Rights Movement) as she transitioned from an instructor in Cosmetology following a more traditional curriculum to designing a more principled curriculum as an instructor of English. As a result of exposure to a range of divergent ideologies and her own research that included Paolo Freire's work on critical pedagogy and the work of Cuban novelist Alejandro Carpentier, she became a critical and more radicalized social thinker. Some of Carpentier's major themes included: the hybridization of cultures or *mestizaje*, contrasts between black and white ethnicities, and identity confusion.

It was amazing, kind of this transition thing that happened without my even knowing it. Everything that I was reading, it was an evolution for me to get to that place. A couple of things: a woman got hired full time. She was an African American and came out of the Civil Rights Movement and she came into that Cosmetology Department and made some changes, you know. She starting saying we're not teaching this and we're not teaching that, how many African Americans do we have here? She really started creating some change in the curriculum, and how we did things. Being along that struggle with her,

being at her right side, backing her up 100%, struggling against some of the institutional racism and other things that were going on. Following my literature thing, my degree is in Comparative Literatures in English and Spanish, so I started studying Paolo Freire. My thesis was on comparing *mestizaje mentesaj* looking at Alejo Carpentiere's, *El Reino de este mundo*, which is about the Haitian revolt and looking at José Vasconcellos', *La raza cósmica*, and this idea of *mestisaje* and where it comes from and those kinds of things. So that was informing me as well. So then I'm looking at these ideas of colonization and where they take place and then looking at the hair and where the different products are developed and what kind. So it wasn't a fluke. When you look at where chemical relaxer comes from and who used it first, it was the slaves that developed that to make their hair straight. They had lost their combs that they used to do those beautiful braids that they would do back in Africa. They used to carve these beautiful combs that we later adopted during the Civil Rights Movement as Afro combs that come from that history. So where did the chemical relaxer come from? Why did they start doing that? Especially the house slaves who now had hair that was not as tight, so all you had to do was to put a little bit of lye in it that would burn your scalp, but it would straighten your hair so that you could look a little bit more like the oppressor. So I started doing that research and presenting it to my students and having my students conduct that research and how we view ourselves through our hair. So I'm starting to teach this stuff and being so passionate about it and writing about it. Then I really wanted to move over to the English Department because I wanted to have more time to study, research more, read more. And I did. It has been a really beautiful experience.

Esther's critical thinking about curriculum and instruction clearly moved to a deeper, more intentional and purposeful level—one that influenced her philosophical foundations toward social action.

When thinking about theories of action, Laura also pointed to her understanding of diversity that involved a realization of the power of inclusiveness and coalition-building and how that clarity of purpose continually informed her leadership and activism. She talked about how being a *mestiza* provided her insight into the diversity within Latina/o ethnic groups and how that related to her larger concept of globalization.

One of the things that I have learned is the whole diversity piece, and how Latinas in my experience tend to be much more open and giving and inclusive in our leadership or activist approaches. I've learned that if we are clear about

our coalition-building and expectations of each other, we are able to make further strides in moving an agenda rather than working in isolation. I think for a long time Chicanos and Latinos were comfortable just doing their own thing, their own pickets; their own protests. I think now we've gotten more sophisticated and know that the more diversity we have at the table, the stronger our voice and agenda will be. Because we are *mestizos* we get the whole blending of people. We get the whole globalization because we are a product of it. We get it because we are a blend. We've always been blending. So we understand when we go to our family gatherings that we are going to have the *blankito* (the lighter skinned one), the *morenito* (the brown-skinned one), the *prietito* (the darker-skinner one)—that we come in all shapes and colors.

Like Laura, when asked about a philosophy that informed her theories of action, Nancee responded with a strong sense of moral responsibility to the local community. Clearly a courageous activist, she commented on how history seemed to repeat itself and how the struggle for justice never ended. She indicated that in light of the increase in the Latina/o population she would take every opportunity to educate Latinas/os in all of its forms in order for them to have a bigger voice. Her work is guided by the philosophy captured in these ten two-letter words: *If it is to be, it is up to me*.

Nancee explained further:

It's [philosophy] the ten little words to live by. If it is to be, it is up to me. So you ask me what is my philosophy and that is what it is. I just look at history and I see that things seem to repeat themselves particularly if nobody says anything or nobody does anything about it. And sometimes you do something about it and it helps for a little while and then starts to go backwards like Proposition 209, 187. It's like what happened to all the work that we did? But that's when you realize, man, we just have to work harder. And you know what, our population is getting bigger and we should have a bigger voice, and it's just a matter of having to educate. I will take any opportunity to educate no matter who it is, no matter whether it is one of my students, or whether it's an administrator that is trying to put some obstacles out there or whether it's the Anglo majority population. I don't have fear of putting myself out there.

Participants' responses varied widely in terms of their theories of action from critical pedagogy (Freire, 1993), to *mestizaje* consciousness, to moral responsibility

captured in ten little words. In all three cases, participants used their theories to guide their advocacy and activism. Held in common was the drive to elevate educational experiences for those within their influence.

In the following section, activist-educators talked about their work in their professional contexts and illustrated the connections between their background experiences, their theories of action, and practical applications.

Activist Educators in Professional Contexts

In this study educational institutions provided the context for Latinas/Chicanas to fulfill their sense of responsibility and commitment to identify issues that negatively impact Latinas/os. They learned to advocate for educational equity and access to higher education for Latina/o students and other marginalized groups, and/or they wished to advance educational practices in a more multifaceted and complex, socially critical and just way as described by some border theorists (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). These Latinas/Chicanas as professional educators engaged as advocates, activists, and leaders in varying educational contexts, some focused on countering negative attitudes that they remembered from their earlier experiences as students and that still existed in educational institutions, and others empowered with knowledge and sense of social responsibility that they imparted to their students regarding their communities and inequities in the larger society. The activism and leadership demonstrated in their varied professional contexts appeared to be an outgrowth of their familial and educational experiences and the significant events that many of them could point to that motivated a strong sense of justice and moral responsibility. All participants spoke of a process characterized as the

development of a heightened awareness of their evolving identities as Latinas/Chicanas with a strong commitment to social justice that manifested as activism and advocacy leadership (Anderson, 2009).

The following personal accounts made visible Latinas/Chicanas' foundational principles, approaches and strategies that they engaged in as educators in their professional roles. This section was organized by professional context to acknowledge the unique cultural functions specific to each of the environments and the ways in which these environments constrain or otherwise impact Latinas/Chicanas advocacy and agency.

Professional Contexts: The High School

After over a thirty-year history with the large urban district that included five years as a principal of a large urban high school prior to her current assignment, Rowena expressed her strong commitment to advocacy for educationally disadvantaged Latinos as well as other marginalized groups. Drawing on her recollection of her early experiences as a Spanish-English bilingual student struggling through the educational system, she emphasized that the student population at her newly assigned school were those she made a commitment to serve long ago. Although disturbed by the arbitrary position change she was pressured to accept, she interpreted district policy as an opportunity to meet the needs of her students. A self-identified leader and activist motivated by injustice, Rowena described her path as an educator as “a political act” focused on countering negative influences against Latinas/os.

In the thirty-one years that I have worked in this district, twenty-eight of those years have been in schools that are predominantly Latino, African American,

immigrant, urban, and poor student populations. So those are the students I made a commitment to serve. I think that says something about philosophically where I stand and what my work is about. I came to the profession as a political act. I made a decision to pursue my teaching credential because I felt that Latino students could benefit from someone who could talk to them, who could connect with them, who could share the experience of being a Latina in the United States, someone who developed a consciousness and saw the injustices that Latino people and people of color have suffered historically in the United States. So it really was a political activism kind of motivation that came from that place of seeing an injustice and wanting to be a part of the countering force—countering all those negative influences and presenting possibilities for a different kind of a future, different kind of a life. This is an easy place for me to be as far as feeling grounded, and feeling this is a student population that I want to serve. I don't have a problem with my passion and my commitment for serving this population. Part of my role as a leader is to bring an issue into our context and make it relevant, and not be literal.

Like Rowena, Carmen was assigned to a similar school setting in the same district professing a similar commitment to serve Latinas/os and the underclass. With fifteen years of experience as a Spanish bilingual teacher, and some time as a vice-principal in her previous assignment, she had been assigned as first time principal to the school only two weeks before the beginning of the new academic year. Though the school had been designated by the district as failing, Carmen recognized that being a progressive Latina would be advantageous to her efforts because she presented a relevant model that reinforced the Latina/o identity for students and the community. She also felt privileged by knowing more than one language. She was aware that the school may be in existence for only one more year but was willing to take the responsibility, accepting that she would be working far beyond her job description for any hope of success.

Carmen spoke about the opportunity this educational context provided her in optimistic terms with a tremendous amount of energy and hope despite the daunting task in front of her to effect change for low income Latina/o students.

This is my first year as Principal. I have twenty-three teachers and about 500 students. I would say that 93% are Latinos. We are in a program where every student gets a free lunch (free and reduced lunch program). There is documentation that says that they do want to collapse the schools. I have a year to prove that I can be effective. I think that I am bringing a new perspective, I imagine, a Latino perspective, a woman's perspective, progressive. I am also bringing something more relevant to the population. So the students are connecting right away. So I am excited. Even if they close it (the school), I have one year to improve Latino achievement and trying to close the famous gap that has not been closed for so many years (she laughs). I think as a Latina I'm going to be much more effective than another person that does not have that identity with the students. I'm glad I'm Latina and I can do that. You don't have to be a Latina, but I feel like Sonia Sotomayor, identity is big; it's big for me.

Carmen planned to counter negative attitudes toward students and the lack of structural support with high expectations for her students and teachers. Carmen noted that things at the school had been "kind of stagnant" and she was there to make some changes to benefit Latina/o kids.

I want my teachers to be great. Good teaching will give great results. What I want teachers to look at are the strengths that exist within our students. I notice teachers don't talk to each other, don't say 'hello.' I mean it is culture shock. I don't think people see with the lens of critical race. That lens has been shut. They don't want to look at the race issue and see the benefit of it.

Given her background as a bilingual teacher and her commitment as a social justice advocate Carmen recognized a need for leading educational change by looking at race, seeing what can be learned through dialogue about difference, and embedding it into the culture of the school to benefit all students. Undaunted by comments that challenged her work, but nevertheless given a forum to attend to issues of social justice, Carmen assumed a proactive stance in favor of her students, their parents, and speaking Spanish.

I was hired two weeks prior to the opening of school and in one of the meetings when we get to the new arrival center discussion, it seems like nobody wanted to take it [leadership for the New Arrival Center]. So I notice

this resistance to dealing with the ESL issue, language, and I'm a bilingual teacher. This has been my specialty. So I said, "I'll take it." And the other principals are saying, "Are you serious?" And so when I find out who my teachers are, both of the teachers are non-bilingual. One just barely got a contract. They are giving me the newest teachers and not prepared to know another language. No Spanish (she acts surprised). Some of the students only speak Spanish, some speak some English. My first question to the Director of Second Language was to ask why none of the teachers are bilingual? The response was: that was not a criteria. That just hit me again like a bat. So that gives me red flags all of the time. Of course, this week my priority is looking at the [new arrival] Center and how we can make it a little bit better. They promised me that the next one (teacher) would be bilingual. I don't know. So that's the first question I ask in the big meetings. And I'm bringing it back because one principal got upset or uncomfortable because I was pushing the whole Spanish issue. You know the whole thing about, 'we are in America where you have to speak English.' But yet we have to communicate with the parents. We've got to communicate with the students. So I think this a great opportunity for me to try to put things that can be in place with a twist that is pro-bilingual, that is pro-student, that is pro-parent and start working for that.

In the face of so many obstacles Carmen persisted in her determination to make a difference for her students, encourage pride in their identity, and improve self-esteem that could lead to the improvement of students' academic performance. She was explicit in her language and her actions to involve parents in the educational process, fulfilling her promise to herself to be an advocate for the Latina/o community and to voice a pro-active ideology.

I've seen it when you have the participation of parents, you go far. Those are the things that I really am always conscious of—what's going to make things change for the better. If it means I take the leadership of that, then I take the leadership. And sometimes people say it is kind of suicidal, but I don't care. I'm going to do it. You know, I'm going to make a difference. If I'm smart and I can lend some expertise, I'll do it, especially when it's the underdog—*son los del abajo*. And definitely when it has to do with language or race issues, I definitely will step up to make that change.

Despite the constraints of the school district and the many challenges within individual school cultures these two principals persisted in their commitments to serve the Latina/o community and other struggling students as well, countering negative views

and practices and presenting a positive role model. The K-12 educational setting gave these women leaders the opportunity to persevere in their activism to establish a more caring environment, to recreate their school's vision, and to negotiate challenges to equity.

Professional Context: The Community College

Two of the Latinas/Chicanas who participated in this study worked at community colleges. Both embraced the mission of their particular individual institution—organizations that claimed to provide educational access to the general population—though they expressed concern that budget projections and state economic conditions would put a strain on that mission. Both community colleges far exceeded the minimum 25% Latino population for designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) to qualify for HSI-specific grants. The majority of students who attended these community colleges came from the local community high schools and lived in the community, as did the two Latinas in this study.

For Esther the professional environment of the community college responded to her enthusiasm and energy by providing her opportunities for advancement and campus-wide collaborative efforts. It seemed the ideal context for her to advocate for students. She came to her current position through other positions at the same community college and with a strong desire for new knowledge and a dedication to help others learn. A first generation college graduate with a love of reading, at the time of this interview she was a full-time faculty member in the English Department who also taught one course in the Chicano Studies Department. She had just completed five years working as the

Professional Development Coordinator of a Title V grant designated specifically for Hispanic Serving Institutions, an advocacy project targeted for the success and retention of Latinos, and one that influenced the entire culture of the campus.

Esther spoke proudly about her leadership role, the institutional success of the grant, and the way it had positively impacted the school climate and students' access and success rates. The institutional shift to improve conditions for Latina/o students on campus that occurred was the result of a collective vision enabled by site administrators and sanctioned by board members.

As the Professional Development Coordinator for the [Title V] grant I did a lot of research around student retention and success. I also shared that research and brought lots of folks in to speak with our faculty so that we could become more effective in retaining students in the classroom. We focus specifically on Latino students but because of the work that we are doing, we found that it was affecting everybody that was involved, which was our intention anyway. Because it was an institutional grant, we wanted to change the way the institution does business. At the institutional level we define student success as degrees for Latino students and increase in transfers. And we met all of that. As a matter of fact, we were one of the top campuses as far as completely changing our success rates. Many of the campuses/colleges in California and other parts of the U. S. come to study what we did. So it was very successful.

Esther elaborated on two successes of the learning communities she helped to develop at her community college as a result of the implementation of the Title V grant. One success was in professional development, and the other was in student access and transfer strategies.

The learning communities were one of the success strategies. ... I do provide professional development for people who want to start the learning community process in their institutions. We actually have been working on what we want our faculty to be able to do and to learn before they step foot into the classroom, and be very careful about that because it is really damaging when they come in there and they have never worked in this type of environment before. We want to be able to provide our faculty with as much

support as we can in mentoring before they even step foot in the classroom—our brand new faculty, full time, adjunct, everybody. The second component is to educate them in cultural competency. We actually have student access and success techniques using the pedagogy we see works through this research.

Esther spoke about her leadership in campus-wide efforts and her success with Latina/o students. She also discussed plans to develop a research center to help other institutions with pedagogy and practices, particularly for sending institutions where students are transferring to complete their undergraduate education.

So we are also going to be educating our staff on board. We have a committee that will develop the teaching and learning center to provide a place where people can come and do research at our institution and also a place where all of us can come together to learn here in this city and county. We have a location we are working on already. If we have student success with our Latino students, actually graduating them and transferring them, we need sending institutions that also know this pedagogy. Lots of times we send them there, and they are completely isolated, and we start losing them at that level. We don't want that, so we are trying to create those bridges to other educators and administrators. As part of that teaching and learning center, we have faculty, we have classified staff, classified supervisors, managers, and administrators connecting across this whole thing so that we can work as a team. So I think we actually have a unique situation at our community college district because we have a lot of collaboration from the chancellor and the trustees all the way across the board, and we include our students in this, by the way.

Esther felt she had found the perfect setting to accomplish her interconnected professional and advocacy goals and she was proud of the outcome of the Title V grant implementation and plans for the future. Additionally, she maintained contact with her students when they transferred to four-year institutions to complete their undergraduate degrees, motivating and helping them to advocate for themselves and for others on their campuses. She had come a long way in her education since her struggles as an abandoned twelve-year old in New Mexico.

Nancee was also a first-generation college graduate, a MEChA activist and leader who came to her community college campus as a second-career professional. This campus was also designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with about 70% Latinos. A master's degree in counseling resulted in her position as counselor, instructor, and Coordinator of the Student Transfer Center. To her position as coordinator she brought her experiences and knowledge of the political workings of her community and the alliances she had formed as a political activist. She loved her work and was recognized by her peers and administrators as a staunch advocate for students individually and collectively.

Nancee spoke about her connections to the community and the necessity to be an advocate for students, a role for which she had been preparing for most of her life.

We get the majority of students from the local community schools in this area for economic reasons. So they are going to stick close to home. I love working with students and I'm in a place where I know all the players from all the other community colleges. It's people from the community that make the job easier for me. I have access to information. It's advocacy, and the students really depend on us because they don't have a voice. And, of course, then we become a burr on the side of the institution.

Helping students gain a voice and advocating for their education was part of her job description and Nancee engaged in the work with enthusiasm. The security of a tenured faculty position offered by this professional setting provided a distinct advantage in helping her negotiate within the system and accomplish her activist goals. At the time of this interview she was concerned about decreasing access for her students at four-year institutions and thinking about rallying the broader community over this issue as she had done before as a recognized member of the community and political activist. For her,

being an advocate for students on campus and political activist in the community were related issues.

I just refuse to let the so-called powers-that-be ruin it for students. Both my husband and I have basically been working our entire lives around social service and social justice kinds of issues. So what is nice about my position is that I am a tenured faculty member. So they cannot fire me that easily. So pretty much I have to say that when it comes to work, even though the work I do outside is related, I can say what I want and as long as I am not disrespectful, I can get things done.

Nancee's protocol for accomplishing her social justice goals within the community college always began with informing her dean and other counselors about an educational issue before taking the issue to an advocacy/political community organization. She talked about spending time researching and accessing information from many sources, organizing information, and formally presenting it to the board. She believed that building coalitions was much more effective than working alone.

[In the workplace] I always share concerns with my dean first. We'll talk about it [an issue] during our weekly counseling meetings. I'll bring up an issue. We'll discuss it to see if it warrants more action. South Bay Forum [an organization that she co-founded] was originally formed to address a lot of the educational issues through the political process through elections. We try to encourage and nurture potential candidates for office, and we have been very successful. And then you can tap into that later on. As far as advocating for students on what needs to be done, I am really good at accessing information and plus all the human resources I have out there, all the networks that I have, pretty much I can get reports, research that has been done, and then I'll take that research and put it together and do a PowerPoint and I'll present the problem to the board with my dean's permission. It works best when you reach out to other groups. If you try to do things on your own, it is not as effective and it takes too long. The more people you can engage from other organizations to see what you are saying and they agree with what you are saying and you can get them to collaborate with you. You go as a group, it's a lot stronger.

The community college context, particularly at Hispanic-Serving Institutions, seemed the most advantageous choice for both Esther and Nancee since the context

enabled them to connect their educational advocacy agendas for Latinas/os to the requirements of their professional positions.

Professional Context: The Four-year University

Latina/Chicana activist educators in four-year, higher education institutions deliberately chose their institutions because it provided the flexibility for them to navigate and negotiate their assigned work within a social justice and advocacy agenda. These women thoughtfully selected professional work places that were accepting and encouraging, and they avoided or removed themselves from those work contexts that were philosophically hostile to their social activist principles.

Laura, for example, struggled at several higher educational institutions before settling into her current university position, realizing the importance of working in a supportive environment and one that understood her commitment to social justice and advocacy for Latinas/os. This position allowed her to combine her personal passions with her professional goals in regard to civic engagement. As Director for Latino Achievement, her job was to recruit, retain, and graduate Latino students which was high on her personal agenda, and to increase the Latino student body in order for the university to move closer to becoming a Hispanic-serving institution. At the time of her interview she was close to achieving that goal. Like several of the other participants, she dedicated herself to maintaining strong ties with the community as part of her professional and personal commitment.

So it's a great place for me because I can still support my diversity goals that I love and am passionate about. So a lot of our work is to engage the students in connection with the campus so there is a sense of community. I will still be able to focus on a very specific agenda for Latino students. I am able to do

civic engagement focused on Latinos and still play an active role with the campus-wide effort whether its hate crimes or diversity training or engaging staff into the campus culture working with students of color.

Laura perceived her role as a change agent as one who sought out strengths in students and provided them with moral support.

I think if anything I've been a good cheerleader for students and really helped them to see their potential. I've always found strength in that in terms of a change agent—for me to be able to do that really makes me feel good that I am able to help someone, lift them up, not tear them down.

As a Latina/Chicana Laura understood the struggles of obtaining a higher education and, with others in similar circumstances, extended support through the process of developing a group network specifically for Latinas to address school issues, work tensions, and relationships. Such encouragement also developed activism and leadership in others.

The university Latina activist group, it's a place to grow and to be empowered and lifted—to be able to have a voice so that you can create change wherever you go. The organization was built to develop as [a] change agent. I carry that through everything that I do. It [organization] was evolutionary. It all started with a couple of people in my living room just talking about we need something else for us and as more of us came together, we gave it shape. One was sharing the struggle of staying in school. So it became a support group for many of us—the family away from home—that the struggle was part of our growth and part of our opportunity to continue growing. For whatever reason I'm seen as the leader of the group. There are nine founding members, but I am the one who has been most active and stayed connected and so the one they know most.

Laura knew well the struggles of Latinas in educational institutions and felt strongly about being able to organize around advocacy for them. She took pride in the grassroots beginnings of the Latina activist groups now organizing and nurturing activism and leadership on three university campuses.

Anna also talked about advocating for the marginalized Latina/o community where she had grown up. She had come full circle to the actual location where she had lived as a newly-arrived immigrant with her mother and six sisters. At the time of this interview Anna was the Interim Director of the Center for Latino Research, an organization focused on identifying Latino issues in the northern area of the county. She had been part of the center for over five years prior to her appointment as Interim Director and spoke about how important it was for the Center to be connected to the campus community while maintaining a focus on the needs of the local community. She spoke about the history of the Center, how it was established through a congressional allocation ten years prior and still developing under her leadership.

So we eventually had a transition in leadership, had a new director come on board and one of our priorities was to integrate the Center into the university affairs and to move back on campus physically because we have always felt that research that goes on that is needed in the community is a contribution that the university needs to make to our local service community. We felt that being physically removed made it difficult for faculty to understand how they could link up to the services that the center could provide or to engage students because they would actually have to drive off campus to look for us. So as soon as the library opened in 2004, we were able to come back on campus. So we have been here ever since. It's not common for this type of research entity to be on a state university campus, but we have been able to make the case that it is important to build bridges to local community agencies. We have a new nursing school here on campus, and, of course, we prepare teachers, and so we felt that it was important to link with the professional schools with every faculty member that may be interested in doing research on Latinos.

Anna was firmly grounded in the community but clearly understood the goals of the university. She spoke about shifting the focus for research to a more applied and community-based approach in the local-social context and engaging the university to address the research needs. She took the lead in identifying research topics and finding

funding to provide the opportunity to build a connection to the university. Her leadership was recognized and she was asked to take the position as Interim Director.

And as one of my priorities for the Center when I first came on board, the Center itself was essentially a traditional social science research center and I think that's great, but what I felt that was really needed was a more applied and community-based approach to identifying research needs, and then in engaging the university in addressing those research needs. So I began to identify research topics, areas, funding that could allow us the opportunity to expand and to actually begin to bridge that connection to the university by building partnerships with health care providers in the area to really become our community partners on any health-related topic, or with the local school districts and schools so that we could have partners out there interested in education in case we needed to study any the areas in the educational pipeline. When the former director moved on to a new position, this position became vacant, and I was asked to assume the leadership as Interim, and because of budget cuts, the Interim is still on-going, making it difficult to really fill that commitment.

Anna described the vision of the Center and perceived her work as rooted in the community, working in collaboration with them and responding to their requests for information.

All the work we do at the Center is intended to help identify resources to create information and to provide technical support and assistance to utilize that information. So with any research project, the framework needs to begin with the understanding that we are working in collaboration with local communities. So we are not a research center isolated in a lab at an ivory tower. We really see our work in connection with and deeply rooted in the local-social context. So we actually respond to local inquiries for information to a large extent.

Anna often took the initiative to find ways to support the Center's sustaining research and development. Her unwavering dedication had inspired others to help the Center to grow and sustain itself through the writing of grants even in difficult financial times. Anna recognized the importance of a national focus and had already started making connections with people in other states.

We have taken the initiative to sustain ourselves so we do all our own grant development. We've built all of our partnerships during the last five years. We are a 100% self-sustaining research center here on campus. We have ten full time staff/researchers at the Center, dozens of collaborations with faculty, not only here, but at other universities. Because of my contacts from graduate school and old professors, we have been able to link up with the Inter University Program for Latino Research at the national level. So we have colleagues in *Nuevo México* and *Tejas*, New York—lots of different places doing similar work. Definitely the work for the next five years is really linking up the work of the Center to a research framework and network that truly would encompass a national scope.

With grant support, Anna had managed to sustain the Center and help it to grow, implementing a master vision of how a research center could support the needs of the Latina/o community in keeping with the goals of the university and move that vision to a broader national conversation.

Fabiola, a long time activist with a strong belief in *zapatismo* moved to the same area of the county as Anna and recognized there was much social activist work to be done and no social advocacy groups to do it. After taking a position at a four-year university where she felt a level of comfort, she constructed all of her coursework to stimulate critical thinking and critique around social justice giving students an active voice in class that I observed first hand. She defined social justice as: "...making sure the world is a more equitable place for everyone."

Fabiola spoke about herself as an activist-scholar and the challenges she faced in that role having been told explicitly that in some academic programs activists were not welcomed.

The academy does not respect activist scholars. I have landed in a really good place where my colleagues are progressive and/or liberal. Some now value what I do and even share a social ethic. If you ask me about things that I respect in terms of changing the world, I care about how people treat people.

You can't talk about social justice on the ground and not live according to your stated values.

Regardless of the professional context and the various forms described, the Latina/Chicana educator-activists in this study had well-internalized advocacy frameworks for social justice that were shaped by interwoven experiences with family, family narratives, mentors and role models, and educational events in their lives that informed their everyday actions in their professional work. In all cases their activist and leadership visions were deeply grounded in equity, justice, and the needs of the community. The university setting like the community college context provided the Latinas/Chicanas in those particular environments opportunities for agency within their professional roles.

In the next section, I discussed how the participants in this study expressed their understanding of leadership, its relationship to activism, and the extent to which activism was interpreted as leadership.

(Re)defining Leadership: Activism as Leadership

In response to my interview questions, the concept of leadership was often assumed to mean that which was historically traditional, patriarchal and hierarchical. Consequently, the Latinas/Chicanas in this study often resisted conversations about leadership. Several of the responses regarding the meaning of leadership brought about a discussion that was more about what they thought leadership was not. Some of them worked to create a philosophical distance from the traditional notions of leadership. In some instances, participants gave examples that provided alternative and atypical models of leadership to demonstrate what leadership should or could be. Noticeably they felt a

need to (re)define leadership so that it worked ethically and practically for them. Leadership was primarily tied to social justice and responsive to the needs of the community.

Rowena gave her definition of leadership as an ability to facilitate learning and commented about what it meant to be a leader of potential leaders as it pertained to her high school students learning about the meaning of leadership. She explained how important it was to consider ways that leadership could be tied to social justice and taking action in your community, one of her foundational principles for activism.

To me leadership is the ability to guide and facilitate learning –adult learning and student learning. I’m looking at leadership in the larger context. I’m looking for preparing leaders for the real serious work that needs to be done. Not that ASB and student leadership is not important for preparing students for leadership positions, but I feel the more serious conversation is about how you translate that into action in your community. How you translate your work as a leader in your school to a leader in your community?

Carmen defined leadership as having the necessary skills and willingness to bring about a change for the good of students, teachers, or whoever else might be involved within the leader’s sphere of influence. She described it as an ability to motivate others with a clear sense of purpose, and a desire to benevolently develop the best in others. She credited her father as her model for the human factor in her way of thinking. Carmen’s membership in the community and her understanding of the links between her high school and the community informed her actions as a leader. She believed that when necessary, a leader should possess the courage to take action expeditiously and not allow obstacles or failures to cause discouragement.

[A leader is] someone that has the skills to bring about change in any place, and good change [she emphasizes]. Those skills include how to motivate people, how to bring the best from people, how to train them, develop them,

how to bring purpose to the people to make changes. At the end of the day you feel like you've accomplished the day without humiliating anyone. And it's all about how you deal with the group of people you are working with, how you treat them. I think I have a lot of those skills. My father was a great leader and I think I've inherited a lot of his way of thinking, and throughout my years as a leader even as a teacher, there was always that human aspect or human factor that I'm always conscious of. As a leader also having those tough conversations and not being afraid to say what you really have to say. ... as a leader you need to take action right away. So as a leader you've got to be more aware than just a regular person and willing to bring about change and just keep going forward even with barriers, even with all these obstacles that you don't get down with little failures.

Laura spoke about her dedication to civic engagement and, when defining leadership, touched on the concept of followership as a necessary component of leadership.

You know, I have given my entire life to civic engagement. What I learned is that people are comfortable when they think they have a good leader. They are more comfortable with being a good follower and they are okay with taking directions. They don't mind being told what to do. In every group you need leaders and followers and supporters.

Laura explained that leadership was following through and fulfilling a promise. In her eyes, failing to complete a task was failing not only yourself but also your community.

But I am uncomfortable when someone who says I'll step up and then they step down because you expected them to come through to fulfill those expectations. And maybe those were not as clear as you thought. And so I learned that not every body works at the same level. For me [leadership] would be that you are responsible for completing a task. You owned it. You did what you said you would do, because you don't just fail yourself, you fail your community. And I think it is important to know when you can and cannot take on a responsibility.

When asked about her thoughts on a definition of leadership, Fabiola referred back to her experience with the Zapatistas with some concrete examples coming from that experience. For her leadership was more fluid than fixed involving different people

at different points in time. She rejected charismatic and popular notions of leadership and provided her vision of what leadership can be from a feminist perspective with women being just as involved as men.

Zapatista Liberation Army of this century have a philosophy called zapatismo. ... the movement sparked something that is still very alive and well. Young people here are still inspired by the notion of zapatismo. Zapatismo is the notion that everyone is a leader, the complete antithesis of charismatic leadership which is a problem because media only understands charismatic leadership. The subcomandante Marcos was thrown up to the popular press. "Todos somos Marcos." We are all Marcos. We are all leaders. When there is one billion Marcoses then we can affect change. It's about feminism. Women were just as prominent in leadership as men, and still are. So I spent two weeks in the jungle being immersed in this notion of a new world order. Capitalistic notions of 'me first' can no longer be. What happens in Chiapas affects me here. It's just a philosophy of understanding that there is not one leader, but we are all leaders. People who organize have to be working to the point where they are no longer there. In other words you have to build an organization where people don't even know that you are building it. If you should die or get killed or whatever the case may be, that organization will continue to go. I consider myself as adhering to zapatismo. Zapatistas would say you need to go home and clean up your stuff in your own backyard. Check your ego.

A self-identified activist, Fabiola elaborated on the difficulties of working against hierarchical models of leadership when engaged as an activist and change agent. She highlighted the difficulties of keeping one's ego in check given the charismatic leadership models we embrace as a culture and she discussed the need to be specific about the purpose of activism, differentiating it as specifically social justice activism.

People have been trained that there is a hierarchy and they find it hard to rethink about their own role in change within organizations. Leadership is based on a good leader when the followers think they did it themselves. The Lao Tzu quote³ goes something like that. The challenge for me and maybe for

³ "A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves." – Lao Tzu, Chinese contemporary of Confucius, sixth century B. C.
www.quotesandpoem.com/quotes/author/laotzu/31429

anyone who is honest is the constant interrogation of ego and power—my need for recognition, difficult to do in a culture that follows charismatic models. Ku Klux Klan people see themselves as activists. You can be an activist but not moving toward social justice. That's why I say social justice activist. When I talk about social justice I'm talking about envisioning a world where people's humanity remains intact. It's obviously not genocide, hatred, and intimidation.

Fabiola believed there was a relationship between leadership and activism, but with two conditions: the continued checking of ego, and a practice-what-you-preach approach. She felt the term "leadership" had connotations implying an egoistic and hierarchical model, too limiting for her, suggesting her ideal of leadership to be conceptually something like *zapatismo* that revolved around social justice activism. She thought it critical to inquire into new forms of activism and leadership in the form of activist scholarship in the academy because she believed existing models of leadership to be unsustainable.

I think activism is related to leadership given Lao Tsu's definition of leadership if the activist is actively interrogating their own ego. There are lots of activists who stand in front of microphones. There are some that seem to be leaders, but just talking heads. For me, your means are as important as your ends. So if you are an activist talking about social justice and you treat women shitty in your organization, I don't consider you a leader. You might be an activist of a sort, but not a leader. Zapatismo in part is based in indigenous cosmology. Traditionalists poo-poo this because it decentralizes them, delegitimizes them. Those [traditional] ideas are dead because it's not sustainable anymore. It is important to legitimate new waves of activism in the academy and this new understanding of leadership. I don't even think we have the correct language for what's happening now because leadership itself becomes so limiting. Embedded in that term is hierarchy. The "I know better than you."

Carmen talked about the relationship between leadership and activism. The lines between leadership and activism were overlapping for her, as were her school community

and expanded community. She centered her activism in the community for information on issues concerning language, culture, immigration, and the arts, and used that information as a leader at her assigned school in trying to bring about positive change as she countered hatred and injustice. She spoke about the connections between voicing her concerns and activism and how that can inspire leadership.

I think in order to be a good leader you have to be an activist. I think activism is what brings about leadership. I think as a teacher I realized that our voice was really important but was not being heard. And so I think that was the whole thing of being active. That you have that voice and it's out there and it's a positive and it's going to make changes. And I think that's what really drove me to being active in the community and take leadership roles back and forth. You know what's going on, and you know what's good and you know what's right, and you know what's bad and what we need to change. And as a leader you have to know that. So why not start in the community and I think that's what worked for me. I became an activist on issues of immigration, issues of education, issues of language, issues of culture, and issues of murals. And after many years of teaching, this is my twenty years as an educator and it's only my third year as an administrator. So I feel like I have all these power tools and I'm ready and I'm equipped. Well, with activism you are in constant motion looking for a fair place that has opportunities for every single person. You fight for it! I mean everyday within your job, within your community or wherever you are. We live in this society that's full of hatred. You see all this injustice. So I think if you really take an active role and be action-oriented, and not just go to meetings, actually saying this is what I am going to do and we're going to make a change, then go ahead and do it.

Carmen provided an example from one of her first days as a principal as to how to “be in action” involving the broader community to counter negative perceptions and to build pride in the Latina/o identity.

Our first day of school I asked the mariachi from our campus if they could end the day with the mariachi outside. A lot of kids stayed around and they were singing beautiful, *El Rey*, and it was wonderful and I'm standing there like how much better can this be? That's being in action. You want to promote something at the end of the day. And for all those kids that walk there, either white or black or Asian or Latino, they know that something that's important is my culture and identity and how beautiful it is, because if you look around everywhere else we Latinos are always portrayed as something very negative.

So my role and this is part of my activism is trying to find those jewels in the community and bring them to school.

Unlike the responses of others, Laura differentiated between activism and leadership and described distinctly different purposes for each. According to her, leaders were those charged with tasks to be accomplished, and activists were those who probed the situation to move a vision forward. She felt knowing when to let go and not let ego get in the way was important for activists. Laura comments on the gender tension between Chicanas and Chicanos in the Chicano Movement as an example of an ego-driven situation.

I don't think activism and leadership are the same thing. There are leaders who are good problem-solvers in terms of getting the task done. They bring the group together, here is the project, here is the agenda. They don't think beyond the process. They just have one goal in mind. I think activists think long term—before and after. They do a little history about how did we get here. They think about the present conditions and how we can move this and have some consistency long term. Activists are continually evolving and changing with the times and growing. We need to be strategic about how we do things for the betterment of the community and not get stuck on my personal ego or my own personal agenda at the expense of progress. I think that is a challenge for some activists. They don't know when to let go. They take it to heart. It's just so personal and deep. So I think there is a need for leadership to get some task done and I think that an activist flows in and out to make sure things still move its vision. So its like activists ask the questions why did we start this? What's our goal, moving it along. A leader is the one that gets that task done. So you need to complement those two, but at the same time you can't have a personal agenda hold up progress which I think in the Chicano Movement what happened with the men. It's like we knew the women were doing the cooking, typing the agenda, but never the speakers.

Laura saw leadership and activism as distinctly different in purpose and her response seemed to have much to do with her encounters with leadership as the patriarchal exercise of others and not connected with her own identity as an activist and a leader. She had not taken into account her own leadership role within a Latina/Chicana activist group that I had observed the week after her interview with me.

Nor had she taken into account the activism she brought to her professional role as director of a program for Latinas/os that she had explained in an earlier segment.

Other Latina/Chicana participants in the study described activism as an integral and interconnected part of leadership. At times, the boundaries of activism and leadership explained were blurred. Most had never thought of leadership and activism in relationship to one another before I asked, and they struggled to articulate how they thought the two might be related. Overall, the participants referred back to their early experiences with activism by providing narratives that were rooted in their community. Additionally, some of the women in the study commented about a preference to engage in activist work with other women either because of having to deal with sexist comments by men or because males in those contexts seemed to function with a different set of principles that too often meant dominating the dialogue or taking center stage or redirecting the conversation away from the intended purpose.

Summary

The seven Latina/Chicanas educators in this study were characterized as progressive women with a clear sense of purpose, having strong affiliations to their communities and lifelong commitments to social justice. Their stories revealed an evolutionary process related to their social location in the development of an activist consciousness that laid the foundation for their theories of action as educators. Advocacy for Latina/o students and others who were marginalized was central to their agency in their professional roles. While their perspectives of activism and leadership were somewhat varied, they all accepted activism as a condition of moral responsibility and social justice in practice, and they readily acknowledged themselves as activists.

However, the term “leadership” was problematic since, for most respondents, it represented patriarchy, hierarchy, and, in general there was a strong resistance to being associated with the term. Some of the respondents found it necessary to redefine the term in ways that countered the traditional and more popular views in order to express more accurately their underlying principles for action that were centered on an ethic of care (Noddings, 2003).

In the next chapter I discussed further what I learned from the responses of Latina/Chicana activist educators, suggested future research in the context of developing a grounded theory, and offered implications of the research for policy.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to understand in what ways, if any, Latina/Chicana activism within educational institutions might be viewed as leadership, particularly the contemporary theories of leadership as defined by Burns (1978) and Rost (1993). Although these scholars studied high profile male leaders, they theorized leadership to be a relational and reciprocal process between leaders and followers intent on actualizing social change that was morally responsible. Their leadership theories about change, transformation, and moral foundations provided a critical beginning point for a more diverse academic conversation about the meaning of leadership that included the perspectives of Latina/Chicana activists in educational settings—perspectives that inherently included socially constructed issues of gender, ethnicity/race, and class. Life experiences informed the philosophical underpinnings of these Latinas/Chicanas' toward social justice ideals and shaped their theories of action and manifestations of leadership.

The qualitative research design used in this project offered the flexibility to study the complex life experiences of seven Latinas/Chicanas within the context of their professional lives without the constraints of predetermined categories of analysis. This design provided the ability to develop understandings, discover new ideas, and examine change in attitudes and beliefs over time. Transcriptions from in-depth interviews became the primary unit of analysis. An inductive grounded theory approach without hypotheses allowed for research participants' perspectives of their experiences to be analyzed systematically to develop patterns and themes. Comparisons of these patterns

and themes were used to test emerging concepts and to lay the foundations for generating theory.

Interpretation of the Findings

The perspectives provided by the Latinas/Chicanas in this study exposed some of the causes and motivations for their activism and leadership in the field of education. Findings showed how their activist identity and leadership resulted from their individual development that was shaped by circumstances resulting from their heightened awareness of their social location and life experiences in gendered, ethnic/racial, and class positions. Their marginalized treatment was offset by familial narratives of resistance and persistence that gave them inspiration and courage. Educational structures of support, coupled with interactions with professors who provided them knowledge about their oppressive history, as well as broader ongoing struggles for equity motivated their agency and acted as countering forces to their biased experiences as marginalized students. These experiences added to events that they recalled as significant to their lives as activists influenced their desire to serve Latina/o and other groups of marginalized students and to choose high schools, community colleges, and universities as sites for their agency and leadership.

Toward a Theory of Latina/Chicana Activism and Leadership

Through analysis of the factors stated in the previous section, I developed a theoretical frame that provided important knowledge distinguishing the research participants' values, beliefs, and choices to become activists and educators from other Latinas and other groups of women who do not make similar choices. A brief review of

their family influences, educational experiences, and other significant experiences that they describe as most meaningful in their lives led to the development of a theory to frame my speculations on their decisions to become activists, educators, and leaders.

In the face of intersecting and ongoing struggles, family influences provided important life values, inspired hope, helped women develop resilience, and heightened their consciousness about being outside of the mainstream. Family experiences strengthened their understanding of and relationship to the broader Chicano community and the broader Chicano struggle. Interactions with their single mothers gave these women models of self-sufficiency and developed in them a capability to survive the most dire of circumstances. Anna's recollection of her migration as a young person from Mexico with her six sisters and her mother, whom she described as a courageous and determined "feminist" model, and then entering a hostile environment in the U. S. was described as "a source of awakening" and a raising of political consciousness.

In some cases mothers provided counsel in the form of *dichos* or sayings as aspirational capital to maintain hopes and dreams and to provide advice and guidance in dealing with difficult and disappointing situations. These *dichos*, Laura told us, helped her in persisting and achieving her educational goals. From their mothers, most of these Latinas/Chicanas were inspired to pursue an education, and they developed a work ethic that embraced a sense of service and ethic of care for others. Additionally, historical family narratives of community organizing, resistance, and activism rooted in the Mexican experience laid a foundation for resilience and persistence to counter negative social circumstances.

This analysis acknowledges a larger historical context of influence, namely, the Chicano Civil Rights Movement or El Movimiento that was both political and cultural—where there emerged an awareness of a collective history of resistance and a desire for closer identification. Additionally, the politically charged San Diego-Tijuana region, where the participants in this study lived and worked, continues to be consistently rife with racial tension over Mexicans who are undocumented workers. This tension negatively impacts many persons of Mexican descent and continues to create instances where they confront discrimination directly or indirectly for reminding them of what it means to be outside of the mainstream.

For the women in this study, educational institutions were not only sites of struggle as well as sites for opportunities, but they were sites of constraint and contexts for shaping activist identity. Both negative and positive kinds of experiences informed these Latinas/Chicanas and influenced them to work toward social justice activism in their professional lives as educators. Most of these women indicated that their activism was motivated by their experiences with marginalization, lack of social and cultural capital, and struggles in U. S. schools. These experiences strengthened their collective Chicana/o identity and their desire to agitate for change. The negative experiences motivated these Latinas/Chicanas toward positions where they could create a more academically-supportive and caring climate for students who were struggling with the same stigmas of poverty, immigrant status, and language that they had experienced. One example of this was Rowena, a Spanish bilingual speaker who characterized her high school and college educational experiences as an ongoing struggle and one that she later used to inform her praxis as an activist educator. As professionals within educational

institutions these Latina/Chicana activist educators saw potential to counter bias and discrimination for Latinas/os and other marginalized groups of students and served as models for successfully navigating through the educational system.

The encounters of most of these women with Chicano university professors and their engagement in educational and university support structures such as the Migrant Education and MEChA programs motivated and inspired their activism and leadership. Anna spoke about learning English through the Migrant Education Program, her encounters with Chicano professors, and the collective struggle coming from the Chicano Movement during her high school years. She described how those experiences shaped her own ideology and principles for action. These were principles she implemented in her position as the high school President of MEChA, a role that catapulted her into an activist leadership situation early on as she negotiated a contentious anti-immigrant and explicit discrimination incident. She described herself as related to the incident as being “baptized early” into the world of collective intolerance.

Activist and leadership development occurred simultaneously through involvement with activist organizations in educational settings. For Nancee financial hardship and the stresses of being a first generation college student led her to MEChA where she found support in community with others and where she developed as a leader in a newly found interest in educational equity. She continued to develop as an activist through her participation in school walkouts and the political upheaval in Los Angeles over inequitable issues in education. Her participation included advocating for teachers of color to better represent students in highly diversely populated schools.

Carmen told of her leadership role as a high school principal, coming from her activist beginnings, her realization of the lack of Latina/o role models in education, and the many occasions that existed that created opportunities for her to speak out over contentious issues. Voicing her concerns and ideas whenever she had the opportunity was a result of her interactions with a Chicano professor in a university course. He brought to her awareness that too often Latinas/os remained silent in meetings or group settings. He instilled in her a sense of responsibility to speak out regarding the many issues of the larger Latina/o community that included educational injustices.

Educational contexts were places to learn, reflect, and grow as students with the potential for identity development, personal transformation, and for elevating interests in advocacy for others. These were places for educational opportunities and support even though the struggles associated with marginalization, bias, and negative assumptions continued to be part of the ongoing educational experiences of these women. Esther expressed how she found refuge and felt safe in school and excelled in her studies despite the inequities in her school setting and her personal struggles with poverty and abandonment. Anna found an opportunity to learn English through the Migrant Education Program. She learned more about the meaning of her social location through a U. S. History class taught from a Chicano Studies perspective, a class that helped her to become aware of human rights violations in her community and in Latin America. Interaction with activists while in high school during a tumultuous time with the Chicano Studies Program at the University of California, Los Angeles heightened her activist and educational interests. Anna's uncommon educational experiences fostered her strong

identity as a Chicana engaged in the collective struggle of the Chicano Movement and strong desire to learn more through the educational process.

Teachers and professors have the power to denigrate or motivate. In high school teachers labeled Fabiola as an underachiever and she played out their expectations. However, when she returned to school after engaging in positions in real estate and other business enterprises, her transformation to become an educator began. “Something happened to me,” she said, when she attended community college. She knew by the beginning of her senior year at the university that she wanted to become an academic. At the university she found a professor who encouraged her to go into teaching: “From that day forward, there was no question that’s what I was meant to do.” The support of a professor set Fabiola on a path that helped her find meaning in teaching by engaging her students in critical educational practices.

These women make clear that their experiences in education were both problematic as sites of struggle and rewarding as sites of opportunities. The influence education had on their lives and the potential it could have on others’ lives provided them insight, from both negative and positive experiences, and helped them become knowledgeable as activist educators and leaders in addressing the needs of Latina/o students and other students currently struggling through the educational system.

First-hand encounters with worldviews outside of dominant and mainstream views as a result of being born and raised in households that embrace two cultures, exposure to human rights issues, *zapatismo*, and academic study to interrogate divergent ideologies fueled these activist educators’ leanings and shaped their meanings of

education and leadership. Having been raised in Tijuana and attending school in Mexico and the U. S. Rowena said, “I was always very certain that I was Mexican. But then in attending school in the United States and interacting and going to college, you immediately know you are different.” Anna told about reading books about Latin America and human rights efforts in Central America, Argentina, and Chile. Fabiola spoke about embracing participatory democracy as pedagogy for teaching, leading, and as a way to live as a result of her two-week interaction in the jungle with the Zapatista National Liberation Army “that changed me profoundly.” In addition to influences by a colleague from the Civil Rights Movement, Esther became a more critical and radicalized social thinker as a result of her study of the works of Cuban novelist Alejandro Carpentier whose literary themes included the hybridization of cultures or *mestizaje*, contrasts between black and white ethnicities, and identity confusion.

In sum, the leadership these Latina/Chicana activist educators demonstrated in their varying professional contexts came from the totality of their experiences and their choices as socially responsible members of society. Their background and sequence of interactions, arguably, informed their theories of action and the foundational principles that focused and centered on the needs of students and/or their communities. Their purpose and intentions were clear in their commitment to act as agents of change to provide educational access for students, to help make students academically successful and to become critical thinkers using principles and practices that were complex, socially just, and taken from a variety of perspectives. These sources included critical pedagogy, participatory democracy, history and political events, such as the Civil Rights Movement and Chicano Movement, and *mestiza* understandings of diversity that embraced

inclusiveness and coalition-building. These principles influenced their everyday choices and decisions, and they shaped how these women interacted with those with whom they came into contact.

Further Research: Developing a Grounded Theory

Grounded theory research is built on a series of successive studies about the same phenomena in different contexts or with a different group of people. In this study, what was central to all Latinas/Chicanas was how their activism emerged and was fostered by their social and educational experiences, and how those experiences influenced and shaped their leadership as activists and educators. While this study can be considered a basis for developing a substantive theory, further studies might include examples of Latinas/Chicanas who are activist educators of a different generation or who are located in another geographical area. Delving more deeply into institutional boundaries on activist educators and the ways in which these structural constraints influence their activism and leadership could add another aspect for comparison and amended to the theory.

Implications for Policy

This study offers practical implications for instructors, educators, and administrators in educational contexts or anyone interested in social justice or equity issues of Latinas/os in education. It prompts and supports an argument for having university faculty members who are females of color, who are grounded in a multiplicity of experiences of struggle, who are closely tied to the community, and who embrace empathic and caring views for the underclass. Their inclusion holds the potential for

diversifying conversations about leadership, bringing new knowledge and new questions to the academic and scholarship table.

Conclusion

This study currently fills a void in conversations about leadership by giving voice to Latinas/Chicanas engaged as activist educators and as leaders in low-profile contexts. On a theoretical level, this study extends and diversifies conversations about leadership as female and social justice-centered rather than male and business-centered and presents new possibilities for academic conversations from knowledge acquired from engagement in the social issues of their working class communities. It also holds the potential for more equitable educational outcomes for Latinas/os/Chicanas/os and other groups who continue to be marginalized and are struggling through the educational system.

The research adds to the limited empirical research on the everyday actions of Latina/Chicana activist educators within educational institutions with the potential to inform interdisciplinary fields of study such as leadership studies, ethnic studies, Chicana/o studies, women's studies or any others concerned with leadership and the intersections of gender, ethnicity/race, and class. Theorizing about leadership and engaging in leadership from an insider's perspective was important because it offered insights from knowledge acquired from everyday acts on the ground.

The leadership goals and styles of this group of Latinas/Chicanas differed from the typical patriarchal models that were often portrayed as examples of leadership and were more difficult to discern because of their low-profile, working class nature. The leadership styles of these women manifested with less ego and absent of goals for power

for themselves. They were concerned about professional career paths primarily as a means for affecting meaningful change to help students and were less interested in advancement into leadership positions that might constrain their abilities to engage in their students' agency and agitate for change. These women were skilled at creating political and other alliances in many sectors of their communities, dispelling myths about their capabilities and competence as leaders.

These Latina/Chicana activists engaged as educators where Latinas/os and other marginalized groups existed. To these contexts they brought knowledge and insights acquired from their personal experiences as members of a similar marginalized group. Within their professional roles there was the potential for a greater degree of success because these women responded with an intimate understanding of the social circumstances of the marginalized groups in their charge as well as an understanding of the culture and constraints of the educational institutions where they held professional positions. They distinctly presented themselves with an ethic of care and goals for the empowerment of others.

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Appendix A
Research Participants Consent Form

Research Participant Consent Form

Marcia Venegas-García is a doctoral candidate in Leadership Studies at the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research project she is conducting for the purpose of exploring Latinas/Chicanas perspective of the phenomenon of activism and its relationship to leadership. The project will examine how you engage as an agent of change within your educational institution.

The project will involve at least two interviews of approximately 45 minutes each that asks questions about agency and advocacy and whether gender, ethnicity/race, and class shape your actions. The interviews will include some questions about you, such as your professional position and how you identify ethnically. The interview will take place at a time and place convenient for you. Participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to answer any question and/or quit at any time. Should you choose to quit, no one will be upset with you and your information will be destroyed right away. If you decide to quit, nothing about your position will change.

The information you give will be analyzed and studied in a manner that protects your identity. That means that a code number will be used and that your real name will not appear on any of the study materials. All information you provide will remain confidential and locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years before being destroyed.

There may be a risk that interviews may make you feel tired. Sometimes people feel anxious or sad when talking or reflecting during the interview sessions. If you would

like to talk to someone about your feelings, you can call the San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339. Remember, you can stop the interview at any time for any reason.

The benefit to participating will be in knowing that you have contributed to theory and pedagogy in the production of knowledge, expanding notions of leadership, and helping educators learn how to better understand their students. Your participation will give you access to the findings of the study.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact Marcia Venegas-García at (760) 730-3378 or Dr. Lea Hubbard at the University of San Diego at (619) 260-7818.

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant (Printed)

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix B
Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Begin with a brief statement of the focus of the research with reference to peer recommendation(s). Provide consent form and clarify questions that may surface. Invite a casual conversational style.

1. Educational Contexts

- Describe your workplace (physical space, demographics, politics).
- What is your position in this context? (How did you acquire the position? How long have you been in this position? Have you held other positions? Why did you choose a career in education?)
- Are there activities you are engaged with in your position in education that you would characterize as activities designed to stimulate or construct change?

2. Educators as activists.

- What philosophy/philosophical underpinnings do you bring to your position as educator? In what ways does your philosophy inform your theories of action?
- Are you involved in groups, organizations, or movements? Are they local, national, international? Describe your involvement. Do you consider yourself as having a leadership role within these organizations? Explain?
- In what ways do you get involved and/or take a stand in your workplace? What do you care about deeply that prompts you to take action in your workplace? What choices do you make? (May be related to the extended community or a group in the community.) Describe your actions. What processes/pedagogies and strategies do you use? Are your actions related in any way to your gender, ethnicity/race, or class?

- What challenges to do you face as an educator and activist in your workplace?
Can you describe in detail particular incidences/actions of individuals?
- Are there occasions of particular importance/significance to you in relation to your work as an educator and/or agent of change. Has there been a defining moment in your experience that caused you to take action?

3. Leadership

- How do you define activism? How do you define leadership? Some people think that activism is related to leadership. Do you think activism is related to leadership? Explain? (Probe).
- Are particular skills or body of knowledge necessary to be an educator and/or activist? What are they?
- In what ways does gender, ethnicity/race, or class inform your activism and/or leadership?

4. Any additional comments that you would like to make.

5. Can you suggest others I should contact who are educator-activists?

6. Best way to contact you in the future.