Pláticas Liberadoras: Testimonios of Chicana/o Elders en la Comunidad de San Diego

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PLÁTICAS LIBERADORAS:
TESTIMONIOS OF CHICANA/O ELDERS EN LA COMUNIDAD DE SAN DIEGO

by

Gabriel Núñez-Soria

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

Doctor of Philosophy

July 2023

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TITLE OF DISSERTATION: PLÁTICAS LIBERADORAS: TESTIMONIOS OF CHICANA/O ELDERS EN LA COMUNIDAD DE SAN DIEGO

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ABSTRACT

There is robust scholarship inquiring about many facets of critical consciousness (CC), most of which is centered around working with teens, youth, and educators. This study explored development of CC through testimonios of the lived experiences of eight Chicana/o elders in San Diego County. All eight of these elders participated in the Chicana/o movement during the late 1960s and early 1970s and carried these experiences with them into the present moment. Development of CC, the contextualized understandings of historical, social, and systemic aspects of our collective struggle against oppression through dialogue, reflection, and action, is a fundamental aspect of liberatory learning, which is the dismantling and disruption of subtractive, deficit, and banking models of schooling (Acosta, 2007; Alfaro, 2019; Cammarota, 2016; Diemer et al., 2016; Espinoza-Gonzalez et al., 2014; Freire, 1970/2018; Kohli et al., 2019; Núñez, 1994; Sulé et al., 2021; Valenzuela, 1999). As part of the Civil Rights movement, the Chicana/o movement centers the development of CC in the vessels of subjectivities and identities figured, conceptualized, and enacted in collective and localized contexts and realities (Alarcón, 1990; Holland et al., 2001; Téllez, 2022; Urrieta, 2007). Chicana/o identity and subjectivity, although tied to ethnicity, is a conscious choice that involves embracing CC, community activism, and liberatory learning (Alarcón, 1990; Espinoza, 2018; Urrieta, 2007). This study centered the principles of embracing holistic, relational, and collective onto-epistemologies (i.e., Indigenous methodologies), incorporated the foci of love and praxis (i.e., critical pedagogy), and uplifted the community cultural wealth of our elders’ embodied lived experiences (i.e., Chicana/x feminista epistemologies; abuelita epistemologies) as seen through their counternarratives (i.e., critical race theory) in response to systemic racism and heteropatriarchy (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Freire, 1970/2018; Gonzales, 2015; Kovach, 2021 Núñez, 1994;
Using the methodology of testimonios and methods of pláticas (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Flores Carmona et al., 2021), this study embraced a collaborative synthesis of testimonios of Chicana/o elders in the San Diego community, which contributes to a better understanding of the collective development of CC and its applications to liberatory learning and community activism.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my father and mother, René Núñez and Caroline Moran, and to all the elders in my community who have lived their lives in service of others, in service of their family, community, and the promotion of social justice.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my study partners, the elders who collaborated with me on this study. Without them, and their openness and support, this study would not exist. They are Clarisa Torres Rojas, Gonzalo Rojas, Norma Mena Cazares, Roger Cazares, Linda LeGerrette, Carlos LeGerrette, Teresa Pascual Valladolid, and David John Valladolid. I acknowledge my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Sarina Molina, who saw me, heard me, and created space for my holistic growth and expression throughout this process. I acknowledge my dissertation committee members, Dr. Veronica G. Garza, and Dr. Roberto D. Hernandez, who guided me and helped me throughout this journey.

Sandra Minerva Nuñez-Soria, my partner, companion, and the love of my life, made it possible for me to embark on this journey and supported me through thick and thin over these last four years of work. I would also like to acknowledge my sons, trailblazing gentleman and scholars, Adrian Concepcion Dedman, Miguel Ehecatl Amado Nuñez-Soria, and Emmanuel Rene Tepeyollotl Nuñez-Soria for always checking in on me and lifting my spirits. I also want to acknowledge my mother, Caroline Moran, and my brother Ricardo Patrick Nunez-Moran, for their love and support.

I am grateful for Daniel Mader, a lifelong friend, and stellar human being, for helping me to do initial edits of my first full draft. I also want to thank Suzanne Baker and Michael Bliss, of Heartful Editing, for their detailed responsive editing.

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I also owe embarking on this doctoral journey to Dra. Maria Nieto-Senour who consistently pushed me to reach greater and greater heights in my education. Without the inspiration and support of Dra. Antonia Darder I would not have ventured down this path either. I give thanks to the support and guidance provided by Dr. Alberto Ochoa and Dr. Isidro Ortiz. I would also like to thank Dr. Ricardo Medina, whose long phone calls and ongoing love and support helped sustain me through this process.

Key to my resilience and continued ability to come back to the thinking, reading, writing, and dialoguing that was needed to complete this journey were the many interactions and supports provided by my classmates in the University of San Diego Education for Social Justice program, my fellow students and challenging Ph.D. students, which I will dub the Collaborative Collective. And of course, our Super Group, without whose love and friendship I would have quit multiple times over.

I also want to acknowledge and express immense gratitude to all my family and spiritual community who have supported me through this process and throughout my life.
ORDER OF PAGES

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... iv

ORDER OF PAGES .............................................................................................................. ix

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................. xiv

LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................................................................. xv

PREFACE: SITUATING MYSELF IN THE STUDY ................................................................. 1

La Semilla: The Beginning ................................................................................................. 3

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................. 6

Historical Context of U.S. Genocide, Racism, and Oppressive Schooling ....................... 6

Negative Impacts of Racism in Schooling ........................................................................ 10

Purpose of Study ................................................................................................................ 12

Research Questions .......................................................................................................... 13

Logistics and Potential Limitations of the Study ............................................................. 16

Significance ....................................................................................................................... 17

Definitions of Terms ......................................................................................................... 19

CHAPTER 2: CHICANA/E/O INDIGENOUS-EPISTEMOLOGIES, THEORETICAL

FRAMEWORK, AND LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................... 24

Indigenous Onto-Epistemologies ..................................................................................... 24

Mexikota Conceptualized ................................................................................................. 25

Borderlands Nepantla Consciousness .............................................................................. 30

Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................... 32

Humanizing Pedagogies .................................................................................................. 33

Tenets of the Chicana/x/o Movement ............................................................................. 35
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decolonizing</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic, Relational, Collective</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Conversational Narrative Inquiry</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimonios</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study-Partners: Elder Participants</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for Invitation</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics of Elders</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Consent and Considerations</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pláticas</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Pláticas: Member-Checks</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation Process</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimonios and Grounded Theory</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity, Art, and Iteration</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answerability</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Research Methodology</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: TESTIMONIOS</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight Testimonios of Critical Consciousness Development</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clarisa and Gonzalo ........................................................................................................................................... 114
Norma and Roger .................................................................................................................................................. 153
Linda and Carlos ..................................................................................................................................................... 201
Teresa and David .................................................................................................................................................... 239
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................................ 280

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS ........................................................................................................................................ 282
Research Question 1 .................................................................................................................................................. 284
Elders’ Narratives of CC Development .................................................................................................................. 285
Research Question 2: ................................................................................................................................................ 293
Maletas de Community Cultural Wealth ................................................................................................................. 293
Supportive Relationships: Access, CC, and Connection ........................................................................................ 305
Gatekeeping, Subtractive Schooling, and Deficit Thinking ..................................................................................... 315
Research Question 3 ................................................................................................................................................ 324
Organizing, History, Love, Listening, and Action ..................................................................................................... 324
Chapter Summary ..................................................................................................................................................... 331

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION ................................................. 334
Summary of the Findings........................................................................................................................................... 334
Discussion and Implications .................................................................................................................................. 335
CC: Complicating Elements of Development and Enactment.................................................................................. 337
Molcajete (Molcaxitl) – Chicana/o Subjective Identity as a Vessel for CC ....................................................... 341
A Collective Response to Trauma – CC as a Form of Collective Resistance and Resilience .................................. 350
Connecting, Belonging, and Sustaining – Core Relationships in Community Building .... 353
Limitations of the Study .............................................................. 355
Recommendations ........................................................................ 356
Potential Practical Application ..................................................... 358
Potential Future Research ............................................................ 361
Final Thoughts ........................................................................... 365
REFERENCES ............................................................................. 367
APPENDIX A René Núñez, Memorial Bookmark .............................. 395
APPENDIX B Pláticas Conversational Interview Instrument ............... 397
APPENDIX C Trustworthiness Response Rates ............................... 400
APPENDIX D Code Book ............................................................... 407
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Comparing Narrative Inquiry, Testimonios, and Indigenous Methodologies ............. 83
Table 2. Demographics of Elders........................................................................................................ 89
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Mexikota ........................................................................................................ 26
Figure 2. Medicine Wheel ............................................................................................ 27
Figure 3. Celtic Tree of Life ....................................................................................... 29
Figure 4. Conceptual Framework: Humanizing Pedagogies ..................................... 34
PREFACE: SITUATING MYSELF IN THE STUDY

Mitakuye oyaasin,¹ in lak’ech, cualli tonalli, nochtin nomecayotzin, good day and greetings to all my relatives and relations. My name is Gabriel “Shaggy” Ramon Moran Núñez-Soria, son of Caroline Moran and René Núñez. My mother Caroline is the daughter of Marilyn Fish and Steven Moran, whose ancestors are from Scotland, Ireland, and England, land of the Celts. My father René is the son of Maria Dolores Rodriguez, born in Cacalotan, Mexico, land of the Tepehuan, Acaze and Totorame, and Pedro Núñez, born in La Paz, Mexico, land of the Cochimi and Guycura. My Indigenous Chicano identity is at the foundation of my ontology, epistemology, rationale, inspiration, and methodology in conducting the study. I, like so many other Chicanas/es/os², am on a journey of re-indigenization (Medina, 2014). This journey has led to my family’s connection to various Indigenous and Chicana communities in the southwest which have supported our process of connection and reconnection to our ancestral roots on turtle island.

I wrote this dissertation as a guest in unceded Kumeyaay land, in San Diego, California. I give thanks to the Kumeyaay people, past, present, and future, for their stewardship of their ancestral lands, where they have walked for time immemorial, and for their ongoing sharing of their language, culture, medicine, and knowledge. I also ask permission of my Kumeyaay relatives, and their ancestors, to conduct this research. As Chicanas/es/os, many of us, having been stripped of our physical lineages and connections to the land of our Indigenous ancestors on Turtle Island by colonial violence, long for a connection to our ancestral and spiritual roots on

¹ I did not italicize words that originate outside of the English language following the practices of scholars like Bhattacharya (2021), “Gloria Anzaldúa, Lubna Chaudhry, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty . . . in order to disrupt the Otherness of anglocentricity” (p. 87).

² I used various endings to Chicana and Latina, including Chicanx, Chicane, and Chicano at various times to support the inclusion of all our relatives who identify as gender non-binary and all other forms of gender identity, and to honor the elders and community members who identify with the endings of -a and -o, such as Latina/o and Chicana/o.
this continent. In San Diego, our Chicana/e/o community owes a great deal of gratitude to our local Kumeyaay community. I would like to thank Uncle Nick Elliott, of the Manzanita band of Kumeyaay, (who has returned home to rest), and his family, for his love, mentorship, and providing his support to myself and our Chicana/e/o community. He, along with other Kumeyaay leaders, introduced many of us to the sweat lodge and sundance ceremony conducted through Kumeyaay, Lakota, and inter-tribal cultural lenses. I would also like to thank the Maldonado and Nelson families, and all of my Sundance family and relatives at the Casa Blanca, Red Stone, Running Deer Sundance, who have been a part of my personal and spiritual journey toward understanding my place in the world. I would also like to acknowledge and give thanks to my familia de danza Coatlicue Cemilitzli, to Eva Sandoval, Endi, and maestro Guillermo Aranda, for all their love and teaching. The experiences in these ceremonial communities and spaces are a consistent reawakening and rekindling of our spiritual, communal, and collective calls to love and action, to the support and uplifting of our children and community through ceremony, service, and sacrifice. It is to these ceremonies, practices, and community spaces I owe my understanding of myself, my community, and our Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

I am called upon to reach out to the elders in my community, of my father and mother’s generation, elders of el movimiento Chicana/o de San Diego, to ask them to share their wisdom, knowledge, and lived experiences of education, schooling, and community activism and service. Although I formulated this dissertation to speak to the academic community, I also spoke to my Chicana community, both inside and outside of the academy. This study is a calling to increase

3 This intertribal sundance took place at the Manzanita Kumeyaay reservation from 1998-2001. After this many of us continued to participate with the same sundance family in Arizona, supported by Edmund and Stan Nelson, of the Pima nation.
our understanding of our community’s ways of being and knowing, our narratives, stories, knowledges, and histories.

La Semilla: The Beginning

My journey in education and social justice starts with my family. My mother and father met at a United Farm Workers (UFW) union event. Without the UFW and the Chicana/o movement, I would not exist. My father and mother, through their gregarious and curious natures and through their love and presence, have instilled in me a curiosity and love of learning and justice. After seeing the injustices experienced by working class people in California in the late 1960s and 1970s, my mother dropped out of college to organize with the UFW. She eventually returned to college and earned her AA in nursing and worked as a nurse ever since. Her persistent call for justice, and her warmth, love, and caring for people, has instilled me with these same values. My father, René Núñez, who passed away over 17 years ago, dedicated his life to transforming educational and school spaces to be more welcoming and empowering for communities systematically and historically excluded from full access to quality education.

My journey of understanding social justice, of developing my own Chicano critical consciousness (CC), led me to this dissertation study. The study focused on uplifting the voices, narratives, and knowledge of the Chicana/o community of San Diego, but it did so with the goal of being inclusive to the many marginalized and historically oppressed populations and communities in the United States and the world. I was inspired by Fred Hampton’s Rainbow Coalition, by the call of critical studies and pedagogies, to look at all forms of oppression enacted by settler colonialism and Western hegemonies as calls for our united fight and struggle to liberate, emancipate, and empower all members of our communities. Kelley’s (2016) call to

4 I used we, us, and ours throughout this dissertation to center Indigenous onto-epistemologies.
love al” in movements and actions of liberation reiterated social justice work was rooted in these
loving practices, love in action through deep study, critique, and struggle for collective
transformation, the praxis of love, study, struggle. This study took shape with these aims of
liberation, of emancipatory, decolonizing, and transformative action centered in the Chicana/e/o
community and radiating into all communities.

After my father’s passing, a semillita de maíz\(^5\) was planted. I started to notice more and
more how Chicana/e/o educators and people I met would tell me stories about how instrumental
my father, his classes, and facilitated dialogues were in inspiring and awakening an awareness of
their identity and political presence in the world as Chicana/e/o people—an awakening of their
CC. These stories frequently come as people meet me and realize I am the son of Rene Nuñez.
As I heard stories of his influence on the Chicana community, his persistence in creating
dialogue through his role as a scholar activist, I wondered how he developed his own CC and
Chicano identity. His peers shared with me he credited the Free Speech Movement of the 1960s
and his educational experiences at UCLA, after having traveled through Europe in the army, for
the awakening of his CC, political identity, and subjectivities. This inquiry was inspired by my
father’s story and the stories of the many people I have met who were touched by him and the
Civil Rights and Chicana/o Movements. This semillita was instrumental in inspiring and feeding
the purpose and direction of this dissertation study, a semilla of familial connection to the
Chicana/o movement, specifically in San Diego. The Chicana/o movement arose in response to
the racism experienced by Latina/e/o (predominantly of Mexican, Puertorriqueña/o, and Central
American descent) youth and community, the focus of this study highlighted the value,

\(^5\) Little corn seed
knowledge, and wisdom in the lived experiences of Chicana/o elders in the San Diego, many of whom have enriched my life through their friendship and mentorship.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Historical Context of U.S. Genocide, Racism, and Oppressive Schooling

Let me be a free man, free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to talk, think and act for myself - and I will obey every law or submit to the penalty. - [Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt] Chief Joseph of Nez Perce. (Means, 1995, p. xi)

Without the influence and input of Native American civilizations (especially the Haudenosaunee), the ideal of freedom central to the United States’s identity as a nation, would not exist as the bastion of democracy and hope in the world it contends to be (Mann, 2005). Contrary to popular depictions and descriptions of the American continents as wild barren lands at the time of European contact in the 15th and 16th century, the Americas were widely manicured, densely populated continents with over a 100 million inhabitants. They were populated with countless civilizations, cultures, languages, philosophies, technologies, sciences, agriculture, and architecture. At the time of Cortez’s contact with Mesoamerican people in the valley of Mexico, the triple alliance, led by the Mexico in Tenochtitlan (present-day Mexico City), was the most densely populated region in the world (Mann, 2005; Stannard, 1992). Cortez and his men were amazed and bewildered by Tenochtitlan’s canals, cleanliness, markets, and organized bustle. Tenochtitlan’s markets contained items from the tundra of North America and the southern tip of South America, organized in various sectors, managed by an administrative body, not unlike the Federal Department of Agriculture, who maintained standards of measurement, quality, and genuineness (Stannard, 1992). There are more examples of dense social and economic congregations of people, civilizations, in other parts of the Americas including throughout what is now North America (Mann, 2005).
We should not measure civilizations’ impact on the earth through Euro-centric eyes, nor through the concepts of linear progression put forth by the Western concept of modernity (Smith, 2012). However, as educators we should note how the omission of accurate and positive portrayals of the histories of people of color and their civilizations and contributions to human culture is a symptom of white supremacy. Closer examinations and explorations of the civilizations and peoples of the Americas are missing from U.S. practices of education and schooling, both prior to colonialism, in more recent history, and the present (Plough, 2022). Examinations of school textbooks, both historical and contemporary, demonstrate omissions of substantial reckonings with the institution and history of slavery, anti-Blackness, and structural racism (Goldstein, 2020; Greenlee, 2019; R. Klein, 2021a). Wolf (1992) provided numerous accounts and evidence highlighting the lack of accurate and positive portrayal of people of color in textbooks, and the use of the language of white superiority potentially leading to the internalization of these deficit theories in students of color.

The contradictions between the U.S. ideals of freedom and liberty and the “American Dream” are purported to represent, and the historically racist, oppressive, and genocidal nature of U.S. practices, policies and institutions have created a false consciousness, a master narrative of white superiority leading to the ideology of victim-blaming and cultural deficiencies (Ryan, 1971). George Washington is regarded as the nation’s founding father, a man who could tell no lie. However, he was a slave owner and killer of Indigenous people. As president of the United States, he was nicknamed “Village Destroyer” by the Seneca people because of the total annihilation of settlements under his orders (Stannard, 1992); he compared Native Americans to wolves, stating they were both beasts of prey, simply differing in shape (Drinnon, 1997). This comparison of Native people to beasts is no accident; it is part of the ideology of white
supremacy, to dehumanize and oppress people of color. It is the primary strategy for creating social and economic conditions ripe for colonial, capitalist, and industrial exploitation.

The “discovery” of the “savage” Indian inspired a strategy of “erase and replace,” first to physically erase Native people, to gain access to land and resources, and later to erase Native culture and then replace it with Western culture (Drinnon, 1997). Similar purposeful strategies were and still are used in the perpetuation of anti-Black imagery, language, and ideologies to demean and dehumanize Black people (Baldwin, 1963; Du Bois, 1903; hooks, 1992). Understanding this shift from overt dehumanization to more subversive ideologies is crucial to combating the modern ideology of “blaming the victim” (Ryan, 1971), and to seeing the continued adoption and development of “double-consciousness” and biculturality as survival strategies in the white dominant social order (Du Bois, 1903; Núñez, 1994). These ideologies of cultural deficiency, the practice of “blaming the victim,” and the false consciousness perpetuated by white supremacy arise repeatedly in U.S. and Western institutions and are especially prominent in our educational institutions.

Universal education did not start with the goal of educating all persons equally but was conceived and enacted as a weapon with colonial and economic goals to further the exploitation of working-class people. Thomas Jefferson, one of the first provocateurs of public education in the early U.S. government, ultimately envisioned public education to “rake a few geniuses from the muck” (Infobase, 2000). Anderson (1988) indicated Jefferson knew the potential power of education, for he believed “if a nation wanted to be ignorant and free, he argued, it expected the impossible;” yet, “Virginia’s peace, prosperity, and ‘civilization’ depended . . . on the containment and repression of literate culture among its enslaved populations” (p. 1). The planters and landowners in the south acted on this knowledge for years, making literacy illegal
for slaves, punishable by lashes, mutilation, and worse (Anderson, 1988). Anderson described the tension between schooling to democratize, empower, and liberate and to subjugate, exploit, and demean existed side-by-side in institutions of education in the United States. In communities of color, people have had to organize and fight against racist educational policies and practices to claim the benefits of the ideals of freedom and liberty the U.S. claims to promote; and time after time, parents and communities of color did just this—fight for their access to quality education. The narrative of “blaming the victim” paints parents and communities of color as lacking in valuing education (Ryan, 1971), a lacking that is wholly ahistorical and false (Núñez, 1994; Toldson, 2019; Wollenberg, 1975).

For centuries, the colonial project of schooling has purposefully devalued, dehumanized, and presented as deficits the cultures, languages, and bodies of people of color. Valenzuela (1999) demonstrated it is our culture, language, and knowledge under attack in the subtractive setting of U.S. education. The attack on nondominant forms of knowledge, culture, and language is a fundamental aspect of U.S. education. Communities of color in the United States have historically resisted the dehumanization of U.S. schooling and struggled for more equitable access to quality education and rights.

Multiple legal cases have been filed by members of Asian, Black, Latinx, and Native communities calling for access to quality education, many by mothers demanding these rights for their children (Wollenberg, 1975). American Indian survivors of forced boarding schools employed varied strategies to resist acculturation and fortify their cultural and linguistic identities (Lomawaima, 1994). Black communities have historically and consistently placed education at the forefront, with Black literacy societies during the 1800s paving the way for universal education in the south, raising community funds to build schools and maintain access
during the Jim Crow era, and spearheading the fight against “separate but equal” laws and practices as well as both de jure and de facto racial segregation (Anderson, 1988; Muhammad, 2020; Ryan, 1971).

A multiethnic coalition of students, professors, scholars, and activists, led by the Black Student Union and the Third-World Liberation Front, led a student strike in 1968–1969 at San Francisco State University leading to the first adoption of ethnic studies in any U.S. educational institution (Delgado Bernal, 1997, 1998; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Tingtiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). Latina/e/o students, parents, and community members have historically and consistently fought for educational rights (Ruiz et al., 1996; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998); Chicana/e/o⁶ students and community members led the East Los Angeles Blowouts of 1968 demanding language and educational rights (Delgado Bernal, 1997, 1998). These are examples of our calls as people of color to be treated like human beings rather than objects in an economic equation to maximize exploitation and profit for the rich and powerful (Black, 2016; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Tikly, 2016).

**Negative Impacts of Racism in Schooling**

The differentiation of humans by race is a social construction with no biological basis, “[t]herefore, any differences that occur are a sign that racial stratification of opportunity has occurred socially and historically (Battey, 2013, p. 334). For many youths of color, schooling’s racist assault on their identities, cultures, and beings leads to disengagement from formal schooling and education (Valenzuela, 1999), with at least 20% of high school youth disengaging at some point during K–12 schooling (America’s Promise Alliance, 2014; McFarland et al.,

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⁶ I used various endings to Chicana and Latina, including Chicanx, Chicane, and Chicano at various times to support the inclusion of all our relatives who identify as gender non-binary and all other forms of gender identity, and to honor the elders and community members who identify with the endings of -a and -o, such as Latina/o and Chicana/o.
This disengagement has disproportionately more negative impacts on students of color such as lower graduation rates, lack of access to quality educational opportunities, and higher rates of exposure to over-policed communities due to their being pushed out of school (Losen & Martinez, 2013; Muhammad, 2015; Rumberger, 2011; Siegrist et al., 2010; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

For vulnerable disengaged youth, pushout factors such as negative school climate and culture and a lack of caring teacher relationships are factors of subtractive school settings devaluing the culture and language of the Chicana/Latina community and their conceptualizations of education resulting in a lack of social and academic capital and opportunities (Haskie-Mendoza et al., 2018; Luna & Revilla, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999). The vast racial and socioeconomic disparities in educational outcomes such as opportunity gaps, disproportionate suspension, expulsion and drop-out rates, and lack of representation in higher education) for vulnerable youth still fuel the school-to-prison-pipeline (Berlak, 2005; de Brey et al., 2019; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Lynch, 2014; Martinez, 2015; Muhammad, 2015).

Since 1972, the suspension rates for Latina/o youth have increased by 2 times and 3 times for Black youth, leading to far higher rates of incarceration and high school “drop-out” rates for both populations (Martinez, 2015). High school disengagement is exacerbated by suspensions and incarceration which have compounding correlations with each other. When students are pushed out of school by elements of subtractive schooling, which include punitive discipline and suspensions, they are then more likely to experience contact with policing and incarceration. Experiences of incarceration increase student disengagement with schooling and this cycle of punitive school discipline and incarceration can turn into a negative cycle where each element increases the occurrence and likelihood of the other.
Purpose of Study

This study invited Chicana/o elders, from in the San Diego community, to share their lived experiences of schooling, education, community service, and political activism for us to collectively synthesize testimonios of their lived experiences. Through this intimate inquiry the elders and I explored the elders’ experiences of family, education, and society with the goal to engage with the realities of their lived experiences to help us better understand how they developed their critical consciousness (CC). With the backdrop of the Chicana/o movement, I invited these Chicana/o elders to share how they understand their own testimonio (i.e., their lived experiences) to shed light on the processes of CC development and social justice action.

I am drawn to the LatCrit Chicana feminista critical qualitative methodologies of Testimonios that center lived and embodied experiences of the storyteller as they construct counternarratives as expressions of their individual and collective struggle against oppressive factors in their lives and realities (Burciaga, 2017; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Gonzales, 2015; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). Just as ethnic studies exist to empower students of color as a form of decolonial resistance to racist Euro-centric practices and systems, Testimonios exist to empower scholars of color in opposition to racist Euro-centric research methodologies (Huber, 2009). The method of pláticas (i.e., conversations), especially when informed by abuelita epistemologies (Gonzales, 2015), focuses our attention on the knowledge, wisdom, and deep understanding arising from more informal conversations, especially with our abuelitas and abuelitos (our elders; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Flores Carmona et al., 2021). Bhattacharya (2017) compelled critical qualitative methodologists to question and explain how power is controlled, distributed, and employed to its overall function in society and scientific inquiry. She called on us to not only address our positionality as it relates
to our work, but to bring our whole selves into our work—to reflect on where we stand in context to the work and what motivates us to do this work (Bhattacharya, 2017). Testimonios fit well in this context of counternarratives (Burciaga, 2017; Huber, 2009; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012), allowing for us (i.e., the elders and I) to focus on relationships, reciprocity, and mutuality, employing an Indigenous lens in a holistic, organic, and humanizing manner in the research process (Kovach, 2010; Lessard et al., 2021). Testimonio driven analysis of whole narratives and stories, of the counternarratives to the subtractive master narrative of deficit thinking and oppression, was the first process of analysis applied to the stories from the pláticas with our elders. Subsequent analysis processes of heuristic grounded-theory coding and collaborative member-check procedures were also employed as part of the three stages of Testimonio analysis process (Huber & Villanueva, 2019; Moustakas, 1990).

There were three main goals for this study: (a) to provide context and insight into the factors supporting the development of CC and social justice action in Chicana/e/o communities, (b) collectively synthesize testimonios of local Chicana/e/o elders from the San Diego region as both oral histories and educational tools to promote critical literacy and engage youth in educational settings (e.g., ethnic and Chicana/x/o studies), and (c) potentially illuminate future research and the practical application of the study of relationships, authentic care, CC development, and social justice action in educational settings.

**Research Questions**

This was a very personal inquiry, an expression of parrhesia, of my truth, and the truth of my community, inextricably bound up in “how we live, who we claim to be, and how we come to know” (Kuntz, 2015, p. 12). Human inquiry cannot be neutral or objective; any attempt at this not only obscures the dynamics of power and our ability to transform our material reality, but
also maintains the dominant power hierarchies of oppression. For a long time, I have wanted to interview my father’s contemporaries, to better understand their expressions of parrhesia. Chicana/e/o educators and people I meet tell me stories about how instrumental he, his classes, and facilitated dialogues were in inspiring and awakening CC in them—many times these stories come as people meet me and realize I am his son. My father passed away over 15 years ago and I have often wondered how he developed his own CC and Chicano identity. I have heard from his peers that he credited the Free Speech Movement of the 1960s and his educational experiences at UCLA, after having traveled through Europe in the army, for his awakening of CC and political identity. This inquiry is inspired by my father’s story and the stories of the people I have met who have been touched by him and the Civil Rights and Chicano Movements.

My father, Rene Núñez, was instrumental in the planning and facilitation of the meeting of scholars, students, activists, and community members in Santa Barbara, California, in 1969, leading to the drafting of El Plan de Santa Barbara, a document assisting the institutionalization of Chicana/o studies and El Movimiento Estudiantil de Aztlán (MEChA; Carmona, 2019). I grew up instilled with a Chicano identity, having it formed as part of my consciousness. For my father’s generation, to call oneself Chicana/o was a conscious choice, an expression of self-determination, an adoption of a CC to embrace a social justice awareness and responsibility to act in support of the betterment of our Chicana/o community, and world at large.

I have wondered how my father and his colleagues developed their Chicana/o identities and CC. I searched through literature for an answer, and I encountered a specific gap. There has been quite a bit of research on the formation of CC in Chicana/e/o student and teacher communities over the last 20–30 years (Alfaro, 2019; Cammarota, 2016; Cerezo et al., 2013; Espinoza-Gonzalez et al., 2014; Pewewardy et al., 2018; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015); there
has been very little inquiry regarding the development of CC of Chicana/o participants in the Chicana/o movement. The empirical research conducted with Chicana/e/o populations, regarding the Chicana/o movement, tends to focus on the regions of Los Angeles, Texas, and Arizona (Delgado Bernal, 1997, 1998; Gómez, 2018; Riley & Brown, 2006). Research focused on the development of CC with Chicana/e/o elders in San Diego, who experienced the Chicana/o movement directly, is extremely scarce, if existing at all. In considering this potential inquiry for my PhD thesis, I reached out to Antonia Darder, a critical educator and protégé of Paulo Freire, about this potential path of inquiry. In our Zoom meeting, she expressed enthusiastic support of this focus, these questions, and the potential group of elders whom I mentioned I would start to reach out to for participation in the study (personal communication, April 23, 2021). I also consulted with Dr. Alberto Ochoa who was supportive of this line of inquiry as well (personal communication, February 15, 2022). Coupled with my own personal inquiry about the development of CC of my father and mother’s generation, I committed to this inquiry into the lived experiences of Chicana/o elders in the San Diego community, with a focus on the development of their CC and social justice activism.

In the preliminary stages of the inquiry, I asked David Valladolid, my padrino (i.e., godfather) and participant in the study, about his personal experience with education and how it related to his development of CC. His narrative demonstrated the centrality of his experience in the Chicano movement and the importance of Chicano studies to his developing understanding of the social and power dynamics of racism and sexism at play in his life, especially in reflecting on aspects of his life he was not previously aware were colored by racism. It also struck me how the pivotal relationships in his life shaped his opportunities and access to education and the development of his critical literacy and consciousness. His testimonio inspired me to inquire with
more of my elders in the Chicana community, who have lived through the Chicano movement, about their experiences in education, the formations of their political identities, subjectivities, and CC, and what they saw as critical in creating and maintaining more access to social justice experiences and environments for their communities.

The primary goal of this inquiry was to ask our elders to help us understand how CC formed for them and how they used this consciousness in their lives, as part of their lived experiences and enactments of social and political action, as they define these terms and actions. Through testimonios methodologies the elders and I answered the following questions:

1. What factors shaped and affected the development of critical consciousness for the elders?
2. What role did/do relationships (familial, community, and institutional) play in the elders’ access to higher education and the development of their critical consciousness?
3. What is the elders’ vision for the continuation and support of social justice and critical consciousness development?

**Logistics and Potential Limitations of the Study**

This study began with the engagement with elders in my community, many of them colleagues of my father; all of them involved in some element(s) of the Chicano movement, including education, community activism, and politics. The selection of participants is based on an Indigenous understanding of valuing the wisdom and knowledge of my elders and my community, as well as leaning into my own familial and communal connections to elders in the Chicana community of San Diego, California. I used a mixture of purposive and convenience sampling techniques and engaged in plática (dialogue/conversation) with eight elders, in pairs, to
stimulate and cultivate collective forms of storytelling, narrative, and knowledge creation/sharing.

My closeness to this inquiry has benefits and could create potential blind spots. I reflected consistently on developing my awareness of how personal attachments and relationships impacted conversations and simultaneously created an intimate environment for deep dialogue. I also considered how these relationships could potentially blind me to questions I may not think to ask due to being too close to the subject and participant, or even getting distracted with dialogue not pertinent to the research inquiry. I had to also be careful to create as much parity in factors of identity, especially in gender; as a man; I needed to check my male privilege and ensure I am reaching out to elders representing as many aspects of the Chicana community as possible. I referenced probing open-ended questions and to be clear with my desire to listen deeply, not to find the answers I was looking for, but to be present with the elders and listen with an open mind and loving heart. I had to be clear with my plática (i.e., interview) protocols to avoid assuming I understood what the participants were expressing, and to increase my chances of taking opportunities to ask clarifying and probing questions based on the goals of the study. I used analytical memoing and journaling to contend with assumptions and my own creation of meaning that arose as I reviewed transcripts. I revisited my memos and journals often to check on my meaning making, especially to inform my member-check plática with each of the pairs of elders.

**Significance**

This study builds on my father’s, the elders’, and many other Chicana/e/o scholars’ work in articulating the ideals and themes of the Chicano movement. This study values the wisdom and knowledge of Chicana/e/o elders in communities of San Diego and southern California,
centering their narratives, knowledge, and wisdom. This study was constructed to have significance, value, and meaning for the San Diego Chicana community, our community, elders, families, and children by uplifting the community wealth and knowledge of our elders. Centering the testimonios of the elders who participated and contributed to this study is the primary way I uplift the community cultural wealth (CCW) of the Chicana/e/o community of San Diego. My goal was to acknowledge and honor the beauty and power of the narratives and lives of the elders who participated in this study, focusing on the communion and connection arising from the sharing of our individual and collective hearts, minds, and spirits. By focusing on the relational and collective elements in the development of CC, and political and social subjectivities and identities, this study aims to cultivate, revitalize, and sustain Chicana/e/o cultural forms and potentially humanizing practices in educational and community organizations and institutions.

Chicana/o studies, like other constituent elements of ethnic studies, is a call to action for the Latina/e/o community in the United States to determine their own political identities through the development of CC and an embrace of organic intellectualism. Understanding how the generation of Chicana/o elders experienced the movement was instrumental in the fight for self-determination for our communities is a crucial component to sustaining our fight for our political, material, educational, and spiritual rights. It is the goal of this study to better understand the experiences of Chicana/o elders in San Diego, involved in the Chicano/a movement, and their development of CC.

The results of this study may also provide the knowledge and wisdom of these elders which could be potentially employed to develop capacities and understandings of CC and liberatory learning in response to subtractive, deficit, and banking models of schooling. Focusing on the self-determination steps elders took in choosing to conceptualize and enact Chicana/e/o
CC and subjectivities and asking them to share what they see as critical to sustaining community activism and social justice work, may give us hints into the manners in which we can continue to sustain such long-term commitment.

**Definitions of Terms**

*Abuelita epistemologies* focus on Indigenous values, the relational and collective notions of bien educado, kinship models, and In Lak’ech, to center the respect and reverence for elders (and children; Gonzales, 2015). Historically, these Indigenous cultural values, knowledge, and wisdom have been targeted for subtraction from Indigenous and Latina/x/ communities. However, through cultivation of divisive rifts between children and their older kin, Abuelita epistemologies aim to reinvigorate these kinship and community connections (Gonzales, 2015). These grandmother epistemologies uplift pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) as a decolonial act of naming and renaming our knowledge and world (Freire, 1970/2018; Smith, 2012 as an act of revitalizing our connection to our roots through the embrace of our elders’ knowledge and wisdom (Gonzales, 2015).

*Chicana/e/x/o* is a subjective identity chosen by those who tend to also identify as Mexican, Latina/e/x/o, and/or Indigenous. Chicana/e/x/o is more than simply an ethnic identity, it is a conscious subjective embrace of the historical, political, and spiritual struggle for self-determination and conscientization in response to the oppressive structures of Western hegemony and colonialism. As Ramon “Chunky” Sanchez stated, “Well to me, Chicano is not necessarily someone that was born in a certain place but rather a state of mind and a state of heart.”. Alarcón (1990) stated:

The name Chicana is not a name that women (or men) are born to or with, as is often the case with ‘Mexican, but rather it is consciously and critically assumed and serves as point
of redparture for dismantling historical conjunctures of crisis, confusion, political and ideological conflict and contradictions. (p. 250)

**Counternarratives** (or counterstories) are the narratives of people and communities historically marginalized and oppressed by the dominant Western social order, which run counter to the master narrative to subvert, dismantle, and transform conditions of exploitation and oppression (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). Counternarratives give voice to the struggle for social justice and human rights, voice to those diminished, demeaned, and devalued.

**Critical consciousness (CC)** is based on Freire’s (1970/2018) notion of conscientização (i.e., conscientization), the contextualized understanding and analysis of historical, social, and political aspects of our collective struggle against oppression, which informs the need to act in opposition to these oppressive forces. It is an integral component of liberatory learning.

**Decolonization**, as Dei and Jaimungal (2018) articulated:

Is about mind, body, soul, and spirit . . . about developing and sharpening our thinking processes and pursuing politics for transformative change . . . about breaking with dominant practices and resisting subordination in all of its forms . . . about the ability to define one’s own agenda for a new future, and to relate our endeavors to a collective future. (p. 1)

In the context of this study, adopting Indigenous onto-epistemologies and methodologies are a form of decolonization, listening to and valuing the knowledge of our elders as knowledge-keepers is a fundamentally anticolonial stance. The very actions of the elders themselves, acts of self-determination of their Chicana/o identities and subjectivities, acts of CC development as forms of resistance to the subordination they experienced, and in their actions to create a more just world, are all forms of decolonization in action (Rios Lezama, 2018). Reclaiming these
Indigenous forms of knowledge through the synthesis of this study is a form of decolonization as Chicana/o people. Knowing our ancestors’ knowledge and wisdom is invaluable in our struggle to be heard and seen, our resilience and thriving is powerful and beautiful, and we have agency to speak and teach our resistance to the subordination we have experienced, are all forms of decolonization (McKenna, 2018).

**Dialogue**, as based on the work of Freire (1970/2018), is a fundamental element of liberatory learning, and the construction of counternarratives in the testimonios research tradition. Critical qualitative methodologies, such as testimonios and pláticas, serve as an invitation to true communication, to dialogue, to the exertion of agency in naming our world in opposition to the racist, sexist, and classist (i.e., heteronormative, ableist, cisgendered) norms perpetuated by dominant colonial Western culture and social order.

**Liberatory learning** is a concept, process, and practice through which education can be a form of liberation from oppressive conditions through dialogue, praxis, and the development of CC. Testimonios and counternarratives serve as messages of liberation through collective reflection and praxis contributing to healing spaces and experiences (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Huber & Cueva, 2012).

**Maletas de community cultural wealth (CCW)** is a combination of two asset-based theories. Núñez (1994) used the metaphor of a maleta (i.e., briefcase) to describe the many assets children of color brought with them from their homes and communities into schools; abstract knowledge like amor (love), cooperación (cooperation), and respeto (respect), and also more concrete academic assets like el abecedario (the alphabet), los colores (colors), and los numeros (numbers). CCW is Yosso’s (2005) articulation of similar cultural assets students of color bring with them into higher education settings. Her list of cultural wealth includes aspirational,
familial, linguistic, navigational, social, and resistance. The goal of this melding of these two theories into one metaphor, as an asset-based understanding of cultural wealth, is to avoid obscuring the various forms of capital while honoring the interrelated nature in which the elders carried, experienced, and applied them in their lives.

Pláticas is methodologies applicable to a testimonios methodology, focus on pláticas (i.e., conversations and dialogue) in informal, personal, familial, and community settings applicable to academic and intellectual contexts (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Pláticas methodologies embody five principles: (a) Chicana/x/Latina/x feminista (and other critical) theories to center the voices of marginalized, racialized, and otherwise oppressed communities; (b) empowers participants as coconstructors of knowledge; (c) holistically connects everyday lived experiences to the research process; (d) provides a potential space for spiritual healing, self-discovery, and self-determination; and (e) requires relational reciprocity, vulnerability, and researcher reflexivity.

Onto-epistemology represents the interconnected relationship between ways of being and knowing. As human beings our epistemologies (i.e., ways of knowing) cannot be separated from our ontology (i.e., ways of being); this is especially true in Indigenous contexts and paradigms. To understand a person’s, or community’s, way of knowing (i.e., epistemology), we must acknowledge and understand the person’s, or community’s, way of being (i.e., ontology), the collective, holistic, and relational connections between the two.

Scholar activist is a term denoting the inherently political nature of education and scholarship, with a specific reference to the adoption of Chicana/x/o educator and scholar identities with the goal of raising CC, collectively and individually, to teach for social justice and
give back to the community (Montano & Burstein, 2006; Saldaña, 2013; Urrieta, 2007; Urrieta & Méndez Benavídez, 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2021).

**Study-partners** is a more empowering term referring to the participants in this research study. I borrowed this term from Motha’s (2006) dissertation research, during which she focused on centering the voices, agency, and participatory power of the four teachers who partnered with her, rather than seeing them as either passive or secondary to the research process. I used the term “study-partner” in place of “participant.”

**Testimonios** (testimonials) describes decolonizing methodologies, methods, and research products centering lived experiences of communities of color by focusing on the generative counternarratives of communities of color, giving voice to movements and struggles for social justice and human rights (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Fueled and inspired by Chicana feminista epistemologies, testimonios takes back the narratives and stories of our communities, families, and homes, centering participants and study-partners as the creators and holders of knowledge, wisdom, and cultural wealth (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012).
CHAPTER 2: CHICANA/E/O\textsuperscript{7} INDIGENOUS-EPISTEMOLOGIES, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, AND LITERATURE REVIEW

King (1963) stated, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” (para. 4). King’s words ring true now as they did in 1963, and they represent a call for connection, empathy, and reciprocity. One of the concepts reflecting a similar call is In lak’ech, a Mayan concept of interconnectedness, a driving force of compassion, love, and connection (Rodriguez, 2017). The concept and practice of In lack’ech can help us connect to our sacred purpose and in turn be more loving and kinder to each other (Medina, 2014; Tello, 2018). The onto-epistemologies, theories, and practices informing my call to humanize our processes, practices, and experiences in education and schooling are ones based in love and care, on the primacy of building strong relationships as means to collectively create educational spaces holistically honoring and valuing the culture, language, thoughts, voices, and assets of our students, families, and communities. Before we dive into the academic theories driving the analysis and theoretical lenses of this study, first I present the formation and articulation of my own Chicano Indigenous onto-epistemology, my ways of being and knowing.

**Indigenous Onto-Epistemologies**

Battiste (2002) stated, “Whether or not it has been acknowledged by the Eurocentric mainstream, Indigenous knowledge has always existed. The recognition and intellectual activation of Indigenous knowledge today is an act of empowerment by Indigenous people,” (p. 4). Pico (2019), former chairperson of the Viejas band of Kumeyaay Indians, stated the

\textsuperscript{7} I used various endings to Chicana and Latina, including Chicanx, Chicane, and Chicano at various times to support the inclusion of all our relatives who identify as gender non-binary and all other forms of gender identity, and to honor the elders and community members who identify with the endings of -a and -o, such as Latina/o and Chicana/o.
difference between Western ways of being and Indigenous ones is the difference between our perspectives and reference points, between the Western focus on “I, me, and mine” and the Indigenous focus on “we, us, and ours.” Indigenous onto-epistemologies center around the communal nature of relationships, acknowledging and embracing our interconnectedness, not only with all other human beings and living forms of life, but with everything in the universe (Blackstock, 2011, 2019). These conceptualizations, theories, and practices of interconnection and communal identity formation are dependent on our relationships in and among our families and communities, and our relationship with all things (Battiste, 2002; Blackstock, 2011, 2019; Medina, 2014; Tello, 2018). In this section are Indigenous symbols and conceptualizations of interconnectedness centering understandings of collective, cyclical, holistic, and relational onto-epistemologies, ways of being and knowing. These ways of being and knowing are universal to not only humankind but to all things in our universe. I present these onto-epistemological frameworks, symbols, and understandings to introduce and present cornerstones of my own sense of being and knowing.

As an Indigenous Chicano scholar, I look to my Indigenous roots for the foundation of my onto-epistemologies which drove my relational engagement with this research study—with my study-partners, the Chicana/e/o elders, their narratives, and the knowledge and wisdom contained in their stories and lives.

**Mexikota Conceptualized**

Figure 1, titled Mexikota, is Hector Villegas’s creation.\(^8\) At the center of the image is a version of In lak’Ech, “you are my other me.” The heart is edged by quetzal feathers, a bird native to Mesoamerica, and the periphery of the image is a form of the medicine wheel, the four

\(^8\) Hector Villegas was a friend, artist, educator, and long-time resident of Barrio Logan.
colors: black, red, yellow, and white. The term Mexikota is a derivative mixture of Mexica, some of the origin people of Mexico, and Lakota. Villegas envisioned this image out of our collective experience as urban Chicanos connected, through local Kumeyaay elder Uncle Nick Elliott, to the sweat lodge and sundance ceremony conducted through Kumeyaay, Lakota, and inter-tribal cultural lenses. At the edges of each of the colors of the medicine wheel I have written in the various meanings I have learned can be associated with each of the four directions and colors.

**Figure 1**

*Mexikota*

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9 This intertribal Sundance took place in San Diego County at the Manzanita reservation from 1998-2001, and then we continued to participate with the same Sundance family in Arizona. The Sundance ceremony in North America is primarily conducted through Lakota traditions; one elder, Indio Maldonado, a member of the Yaqui Nation, spoke about his understanding of the Sundance ceremony having origins in Mexico as well.
Lavallée (2009) explained, through her Indigenous research framework, the medicine wheel (see Figure 2) found in many different North American Indigenous nations is a symbol, physical construction, and a conceptual framework for understanding our world.

**Figure 2**

*Medicine Wheel*

Lavallée (2009) stated:

The circle represents infinite life, whereas the four quadrants can represent teachings such as the four races: black, white, yellow, and red. The teaching here is that all races are equal, all are related, and all are interconnected. The story of one cannot be understood outside of the story of the whole. Another teaching of the medicine wheel
concerns health and well-being. Health is the balance between the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual: the four quadrants of the medicine wheel. (p. 24)

Seeing Lavallée’s (2009) focus on health and wellness in relation to the medicine wheel can remind us it is through a balance of all four quadrants that wellness and health can be optimized. It is also a reminder of the imperative to include all four of these aspects of our human reality (i.e., physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual) to fully engage in an Indigenous (i.e., human) research methodology and process. Other symbolic connections made through the four quadrants of the medicine wheel are youth, elder, female, and male. One can also view the medicine wheel as representing different people of the world connected and unified through this symbol of life. In all these ways the medicine wheel can be a symbol of relational accountability and connection to all things, internal and external.

Indigenous conceptualizations of interconnectedness, balance, and collectivity exist throughout the world. The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu explained Ubuntu, a Southern African concept of interconnectedness as being, “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours” (Ngomane, 2020, p. 13). Another expression of our shared interconnection is in Kapwa, a Filipina/o/e conceptualization of shared identity of sharing our inner selves with others in our community (Desai, 2016; Enriquez, 1992). Many Indigenous symbols of interconnectedness and cycles of life are articulated in circular forms, such as the medicine wheel (see Figure 2) and the Celtic Tree of Life (see Figure 3). One element of my own lineage I have little knowledge of are my Celtic roots from the Scottish and Irish ancestry on my mother’s side of the family. The Celtic Tree of Life is an Indigenous European construct helping us see and embrace the universal cycle of life.
These Indigenous expressions of reality focus on three key aspects of our human experience: holism, relationality, and collectivism. Chapter 3 describes how all three of these aspects of our humanity are critical to Indigenous onto-epistemologies and methodologies. The conceptual framework of this study centered on these three aspects. They are the core of my own understanding and interactions in our world—this study strives to enact transformation and praxis holistically, relationally, and collectively.

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**Borderlands Nepantla Consciousness**

Returning to the construct of In lak’ech (i.e., you are my other me), where I find much needed solace in the embrace of our many dualities, nuances, and the complexities arising from the internalized effects of colonization and oppression. In Lak’ech is a construct that can help to heal the wounds arising from the continual struggle between colonizer and colonized, oppressor and oppressed, that can exist in the nepantla borderlands consciousness, in the complexities and contradictions, in the reflexive aspects of our beings and communities. In Lak’ech can help remind us of the beauty in interconnection, the strength in the relationships between the dualities defining so much of our lives, and the power of cross-pollination and life from an inclusive embrace of the nepantla borderlands consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987/2012).

To make ourselves whole, we must move away from binary understandings, away from Western convergent thinking models that look for ever more detailed and specialized (i.e., left-brain; McGilchrist, 2019) modalities of understanding, to more divergent holistic Indigenous conceptualizations and interpretations of our world and reality (Anzaldúa, 1987/2012; Blackstock, 2011, 2019). This does not mean we should abandon all Eurocentric concepts and methods but rather we stop putting them on pedestals of superiority. Instead, we can look to create new life from the nepantla (the in-between), with a focus on the Indigenous forms of knowledge in the facets of our ancestral heritage. A key element of nepantla borderlands consciousness, as Anzaldúa (1987/2012) described it, is embrace of ambiguity, contradiction, messiness, and plurality, all of which are necessary elements of holistic humanizing qualitative research studies, especially ones intending to be guided by Indigenous methodologies but are still required to be couched and presented in dominant Western academic forums, discourse, and institutions, such as this research study. The “something else” she speaks of could be our
development of critical consciousness (CC), a consciousness understanding the colonial capitalist project as one of dehumanization, not based on Indigenous European practices—unless bastardized beyond recognition—but on greed, selfishness, and the ongoing plunder of the bodies, minds, and spirits of all oppressed populations (Anzaldúa, 1987/2012). Anzaldúa (1987/2012) continued:

The work of mestiza [nepantla] consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (p. 80)

I envision and use nepantla borderlands consciousness as a creation of new tools, borne from a dismantling of the “master’s tools,” and combination of these and the tools of our ancestors, tools of spirituality, of holistic understanding and science. This new consciousness is borne out of the struggle for liberation, out of the freedom dreaming even in a colonized capitalist society (Kelley, 2003; Love, 2019). Lorde (1984) articulated the power of finding the differences and contradictions in ourselves and bringing them up to the surface as the means through which we can connect and act toward freedom collectively:

In a world of possibility for us all, our personal visions help lay the groundwork for political action. The failure of academic feminists to recognize difference as a crucial
strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower. (p. 112)

Defining, naming, developing, and curating our critical nepantla borderlands consciousness can help us empower ourselves personally, communally, spiritually, and politically.

**Theoretical Framework**

We forge our perspectives and understandings of the world through our discourse and our engagement with our physical reality, ultimately interacting with, shaping, and understanding our onto-epistemologies with the power and creativity of our language, culture, and humanity. Marginalized communities, Indigenous communities, have been stripped of our sense of capability to fully express our humanity and creativity—pushed away from our connection to our power and praxis by dominant Western ideologies. As pervasive as the dominant hegemony of modern Western culture may seem it is not solely determined by our physical and political realities, but is also dependent on cultural work, on the power of language, and the connection to the minds and hearts of the populations it works to gain power over, exploitation of, and resources through.

Foucault (1977) argued we can create our own knowledge through connecting old forgotten ‘erudite’ knowledge and localized ‘disqualified’ knowledge. Foucault (1977) stated:

I believe that what this essentially local character of criticism indicates in reality is an autonomous, non-centralized kind of theoretical production, one that is to say whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought. (p. 81)

People have been conducting their own cultural work and creating their own knowledge since human beings have existed. Ultimately, the power to create knowledge and legitimize it as qualified and valid is in each of our hands—through our interactions with our world, with the
ontologies and epistemologies shaping how we exist in and understand our world, through the language we are given and create and choose to use, we ultimately have the ability to act in our world to create knowledge. These actions can, if we choose, be “an insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 1977, p. 81).

**Humanizing Pedagogies**

The conceptual framework of humanizing pedagogies represents a fusion of Indigenous and Chicana/e/o onto-epistemologies and critical praxis and theory. Three concentric circles visually represent the framework (see Figure 4). The framework is a culmination of my work in the PhD in Education for Social Justice program of the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of San Diego. The goal of this framework is to see all educational interactions as potentially humanizing and liberatory. The center of the circle is based on my understanding of Indigenous onto-epistemologies—my understanding of how we, as human beings, come to be and know in the world. The second circle contains the four domains of our overall health represented in the medicine wheel: spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental. Each of these aspects of our holistic humanity is connected with an action or theory of action that was expressed by the elders who participated in this study. Although they do not strictly align with each of the four holistic elements of our humanity (i.e., spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental), they can be understood to align more with one than the others; spiritual self-determination, physical organizing, emotional love and authentic care, and mental organic intellectualism. The constructs in the third outermost concentric circle are fundamental aspects of the onto-epistemological and theoretical lenses I applied in this study.
Ultimately, my goal in conducting research is to help the communities I serve more effectively envision their own tools of inquiry, literacy, and liberatory learning to decolonize their minds, bodies, and spirits (Lorde, 1984; Smith, 2012; Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2012). The theories presented in this section ultimately call on us, as critical educators, to join those who we hope to serve in renaming our world, in supporting our communities of scholars and students in expressing their self-determination and developing their CC to better serve their communities as organic intellectuals.
Tenets of the Chicana/x/o Movement

The Chicana/e/o movement was born from the collective consciousness and struggle of Chicana people and communities and aimed at collectively constructing counternarratives to dismantle the master narrative of division, devaluation, and destruction of Chicana culture. The tenets of the Chicano movement are threefold: (a) self-determination, (b) critical pedagogy and higher education, and (c) organic intellectualism (i.e., community service and collaboration; Chicano Coordinating Committee for Higher Education, 1969; Núñez, 1996). Self-determination is the first tenet of Chicanismo, the belief every person has the right and the ability to determine for themselves who they are, how to name and create their worldview and identity, and what their purpose in life is. In renaming and retheorizing self-determination, Medina (2014) articulated this tenet of Chicanismo, as sacred purpose, with a detail and nuance striking a chord in my mind, body, and spirit. In a critical pedagogy paradigm, self-determination is also a reference to dialogue and praxis, to reflection, critical thinking, and action, which are crucial to our full human expression of creativity and agency and a foundation of CC (Freire, 1970).

The second tenet of Chicanismo is the development of CC as a part of creating more equitable access to quality higher education as well as a myriad of other social, material, and political resources and institutions. The goal of education from a Chicana perspective is to connect our communities with our history and roots, and battle stereotypes, distorted history, and the onslaught of oppressive policies and ideologies (Chicano Coordinating Committee for Higher Education, 1969; Núñez, 1996; Núñez & Contreras, 1992). This connection to Indigenous roots is an expression of agency in educational environments and in many communities can be viewed as new ways of approaching education. hooks (2003) stated, “Educators who have dared to study and learn new ways of thinking and teaching so that the work we do does not reinforce systems
of domination, of imperialism, racism, sexism, or class elitism have created a pedagogy of hope” (p. xiv).

The third tenet of Chicanismo is organic intellectualism, scholarship, and intellectual pursuit not for the benefit of the individual but instead for the benefit of the community and the people, for the oppressed and the marginalized; or as Gramsci might put it, cultural work to combat capitalism and the Western hegemony arising out of our physical and political reality (Entwistle, 2009). It is important to note how organic intellectualism draws from the Indigenous notion of interconnectedness, the liberation of everyone tied to the liberation of the community (Acuña, 1988; Núñez, 1996). In a Chicana onto-epistemology, the point of education is not to be separated from our community but to pursue education and critical thought to facilitate the empowerment and capacity building in our communities to fight against the hegemony of Western domination, to create our own knowledge and power, and to reclaim our history and the Indigenous wisdom and knowledge in our communities.

These three tenets of Chicana/e/o onto-epistemology and praxis weave throughout this study; they inform how I perceive, understand, and act in the world. Therefore, they were an integral part of how I interpret and help to make meaning out of the gift of story and knowledge bestowed upon me by the elders who participated in the pláticas leading to the testimonios, the data, of this study.

Love

Love is a fundamentally necessary component of humanizing pedagogies. I define love as the action of empowerment to facilitate the enacting of our sacred purpose, of our full potential. Love is the nurturing of spiritual growth requiring care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, and honest open communication (hooks, 2001).
To nurture and love is a choice and to commit to this choice of love requires we engage in relationships, be vulnerable to build trust and connect with others. The choice to love another, to nurture their personal, academic, and spiritual growth can create social justice (hooks, 2001) and with this choice we can establish strong supportive relationships through which we can empower each other to determine for ourselves our path toward our conscientização (i.e., CC) and our sacred purpose (Medina, 2014). Cornel West reminded us, “Justice is what love looks like in public” (Big Think, 2017, minute 2:36). Love is also an essential component of positive supportive relationships.

**Authentic Care**

Authentic care, as posited by Valenzuela (1999), is founded on the notion “sustained reciprocal relationships between teachers and students are the basis for all learning” (p. 61). Profound relatedness and relationships can create the connectedness humans need to participate fully in deep meaningful learning, to lower affective filters, to extend trust, and to allow the experience of vulnerability and authentic connection. Valenzuela indicated students, people, simply want to be respected as whole human beings. Like Freire, Valenzuela ties the deep honoring and humanizing of students to the valuing of students’ culture regarding their perceived otherness, difference, and power in educational settings. Valenzuela implored us to examine and disrupt deficit models and systems that see the “otherness” and differences our students bring as weaknesses for traditional schooling to assimilate out of them. Authentic care calls on us to transform these deficit systems, by creating caring curriculum and instruction employed through supportive reciprocal relationships, to empower the culture, language, and assets our students bring with them from their homes, families, and communities. In this manner, we see authentic care as a critical vehicle for embracing supportive, positive relationships with our students to
uplift their knowledge and voice. Authentic care is a vehicle to empower students’ worldviews as integral to our learning experience, integral to generating the themes by which we, students with teachers, collaboratively developed our CC.

**Critical Pedagogy**

To create our own knowledge, to reconnect to and reclaim our ancestral and communal wisdom and capacity for CC development, we must enter communal dialogue. Freire (1970) stated, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). As humans, we name our world through language, and then act on the world based on this naming, and thus transform our world creatively, through dialogue and praxis. Praxis is the foundational act and process of critical pedagogy, education and literacy development focused on facilitating the potential for liberation through the development of CC (i.e., conscientização or conscientization). Freire (1970) stated, “The term conscientização refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35). Freire sees learning to read the world rather than simply reading the word to combat oppressive banking forms of industrial education.

Conscientization operates in direct opposition to false consciousness, internalized oppressive ideologies, or master narratives, through reflection on the relationship of our consciousness and lived experiences to our observations of historical facts, with the purpose of taking action to transform our material, economic, social, and political realities. As Freire stated with conviction, developing the conditions for true-dialogue and the development of conscientization requires profound love.

Freire (1970) stated:
Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence. It would be a contradiction in terms if dialogue—loving, humble, and full of faith—did not produce this climate of mutual trust, which leads the dialoguers into ever closer partnership in the naming of the world. (p. 91)

Dialogue and praxis require commitment to connection, to the inclusion of learning participants as full actors in the educational process, not as objects in a banking system or traditional factory model of schooling. Freire (1970) stated:

In contrast with the antidialogical and non-communicative ‘deposits’ of the banking method of education, the program content of the problem-posing method—dialogical par excellence—is constituted and organized by the students’ view of the world, where their own generative themes are found. (p. 109)

Praxis requires a commitment to creating trusting environments, to collaboratively work on our development of CC to transform and humanize our educational experiences.

Embracing the temporality of our existence is what makes praxis, true dialogue, a transformative process. Freire (1970) criticized hegemonic thinking (i.e., naive thinking) as having a need to conform to a well-behaved present moment determined by a steadfast accommodation to a normalized version of reality. Freire referred to Furter’s idea of clutching to guaranteed space as part of naive thinking negating or avoiding the temporality of the present moment which does not allow for the power of transformation and liberation.10 Here praxis, or true communication as Freire might call it, can be seen to embody a dynamic relationship with presence and our experience of the present moment, and with this praxis, this communion and

10 Surrendering to the temporality of the present moment is a central theme in Indigenous epistemologies and ceremonies, mindfulness, and meditation practices both secular and Buddhist, and a key feature of self-reflection.
collaboration, this experiencing of our present, with this action of liberation, we can increase our sense of hope in the possibility of positive healing outcomes. Ultimately, critical pedagogy, and the pursuit of CC, operates in direct opposition to hierarchical banking forms of education and sees the teacher and student not as in a hierarchical power relationship, but as partners, as one and the same, both teacher–student and student–teacher, learning together to better understand their place in the world and the potential actions used to transform their shared realities.

**Banking Education**

The banking concept of education, upheld through a hierarchical teacher–student power dynamic, perpetuates deficit models of understanding and characterization of marginalized people and communities. The banking concept of schooling is one of the primary ideological systems supporting the assimilation and acculturation of youth in Western institutions of schooling (Freire, 1970). Freire (1970) articulated the banking concept of education as students as passive, malleable vessels receptive to the dominant knowledge teachers impart. Some of the practices and conceptualizations perpetuating the oppositional roles of teachers and students, in the banking concept of education, which “mirror oppressive society as a whole” are: teachers teach, students are taught; the teacher knows, the student does not; the teacher talks, the students listen; the teacher doles out discipline, the students receive discipline; structures, expectations, and systems of compliance are designed by the school, carried out by the teacher, and students must comply; the teacher choices the curriculum, the student have to comply and work with it without choice; the teacher obscures the authority to create and impart knowledge with their own institutional authority, which is set in opposition to the freedom of the student; “the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects” (Freire, 1970/2018, p. 73). Through these unequal hierarchical power dynamics between teacher and student, the banking
concept of education supports the oppression of students, and contributes to the cultivation of a passive, or false, consciousness in oppressed youth. Conscientization, or CC, exists in opposition to this false thinking, to the banking system of education, and to oppression (Freire, 1970).

Historically, there are examples of assimilation and acculturation of youth and communities of color through banking models of schooling meant to erase youth culture and replace it with the dominant white Western culture. One example is the federally run boarding schools, where Native children were taken from their homes and community forcibly acculturated, brutalized, and killed (Lomawaima, 1994). General Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Industrial Training School, the first of the federally run boarding schools, did not hide the intent of this education to “kill the Indian, save the man” (Lomawaima, 1994, p. 145). These dynamics of devaluation of youth and community culture, language, and knowledge represent elements of systemic racism and oppression present in U.S. education (Núñez, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2005).

The history of U.S. education is fraught with racist and oppressive systems, policies, and practices implementing subtractive exclusionary forms of education; racist schooling structures have been, and remain, present throughout the history of U.S. schooling (Anderson, 1988; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998; Smith, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999; Wollenberg, 1975). Addressing the historical, systemic, and exclusionary nature of institutional racism and overall oppression of youth in our educational systems is of critical importance in creating humanizing pedagogies and educational structures and practices and moving toward liberatory learning spaces. Asset based responses uplift the value, voice, and human agency of students and communities of color, such as community cultural wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005), culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies (Alim et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim,
2014), and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2018), are some of the scholarly and practical responses to the dehumanization faced in banking models of education.

**Maletas, CCW, and Funds of Knowledge**

Núñez (1994) used the metaphor of a maleta, a briefcase, to describe the cultural wealth and tools every child brings from their home. As children arrive for their 1st day of school in kindergarten, the white children can bring their briefcases of cultural tools into the classroom, but the Chicanitas/os/es must leave their maletas outside of the classroom—sitting at their empty desks, looking around at the children whose cultural assets are valued in the classroom setting.

Núñez (1994) stated:

> The education of bicultural children must validate the teaching of the home and begin the child’s education with the values, the customs, and the specific knowledge that they bring to school from their homes, as necessary conditions for developing conceptual and bicultural competence. (p. 278)

Moll et al.’s (1992) concept of funds of knowledge, acknowledging families have an abundance of knowledge often unrecognized by our schools, is like this notion of bicultural education focusing more on class differences than race. Yosso (2005) articulated the valuing of CCW as deeper explorations of the nature of different manifestations of the cultural wealth in communities of color. Yosso (2005) stated:

> CRT [critical race theory] shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged. (p. 1)
Creating educational environments that value rather than dismiss the culture of communities of color requires development of an acute awareness of the racist oppressive history of devaluation and dehumanization of communities of color.

The empowerment of students in educational settings requires creation and maintenance of authentic partnerships with the parents and communities of our students. My father, with the help of the parents at Sherman elementary school, used a maleta (i.e., briefcase) as a metaphor for understanding the way the assets, the language and culture, of Chicana/o/e students were devalued by the schooling systems (Núñez, 1994). Imagine every child has a little maleta filled, as they grow and learn, with all the cultural, linguistic, intellectual, and social assets of their family and community. Núñez (1994) explained:

The things the parents placed in the maleta ranged from abstract items such as amor (love), cooperación (cooperation), and respeto (respect) to educational lessons such as el abecedario (the alphabet), los colores (colors), and los numeros (numbers) . . . So, all the white kids brought their suitcases in with them on the first day of class, the bicultural children had to leave their maletas outside the classroom. (p. 274)

Núñez’s (1994) maleta metaphor—imaginary suitcases of cultural and linguistic tools carried by youth of color into school settings—illuminated the deficit model of education and subtractive schooling as the exclusion of the culture and language of marginalized youth, families, and communities. Like Núñez’s maleta metaphor, Moll et al.’s (1992) funds of knowledge concept acknowledged families have an abundance of knowledge, related to primarily differences in class and socioeconomic status, often unrecognized by schooling systems.
Yosso (2005) articulated a similar concept with her conceptualization of CCW. Although CCW can include multiple potential elements, Yosso focused on six primary aspects: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance. Yosso (2005) stated:

CRT [critical race theory] shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged. (p. 1)

Yosso’s (2005) work embraced transgressive knowledge through an application of CRT to “reenvision the margins as places empowered by transformative resistance” (p. 70). Yosso (2005) stated, “CRT is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses” (p. 70).

In this study, these theories of cultural wealth and bicultural maletas have been principal lenses through which the testimonios of the Chicana/x/o elders were viewed—where and how did they employ elements of cultural wealth? What forms of CCW do they employ, how, and to what end? How do they express the cultural wealth and knowledge of their family and community? Were they aware of their own maletas? If yes, when, and how did they become aware, and how did they employ the tools held in them?

**Critical Race Theory**

Yosso’s work in CCW is informed by her reading and incorporation of critical race theory (CRT). For this study to fully embrace the experiences of Chicana/o elders and our community, it was important to keep CRT in mind throughout the study process, to be open to
any counternarratives in the stories and shared lived experiences of the elders. CRT questions the foundations of dominant Eurocentric paradigms and liberalism with an aim at dismantling the structural and systemic manners in which ideologies, policies, institutions, and systems of racism and oppression operate to maintain power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano, 1997). CRT arose out of a movement of activists and scholars working to better understand and transform the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano, 1997, 2021). Articulation of CRT also emerged in response to the deliberate shift of overtly racist rhetoric to covert, implicit rhetoric. One example of this shift is the juxtaposition of the overtly racist speech of George Wallace’s 1963 gubernatorial11 inaugural address. He stated, “I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say, segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever” (Pearson, 1998, para. 4), and the subtler racist dog whistles of Nixon’s campaigns—“war on drugs” and “tough on crime”—which were simply a justification for the continuation of racist oppressive policies against predominantly Black, Latina, and Indigenous communities (Ryan, 1971). Solórzano (1997, 2021) re theorized CRT, originally a legal theory, to apply it to educational spaces. Ultimately, CRT is an interdisciplinary theory noting the function and structure of racism, of anti-Blackness and white supremacy, as it operates to oppress intersectionality across populations and communities (Solórzano, 1997).

CRT rests on three primary tenets: (a) racism is normal, ordinary, the usual way society conducts itself, not an anomaly or aberration; (b) white supremacy (i.e., racism) serves important purposes, and provides privileges and benefits, physical/material, social, and psychological to white ruling class and members of society; (c) the “social construction” theory of race states race

11 According to Pearson (1998), George Wallace was “known as the embodiment of resistance to the civil rights movement” (par. 1) Wallace’s political career was founded on his opposition to the rights of Black people and his support of expanding states’ rights (Pearson, 1998).
is not a biologically defined concept, but rather, socially created and maintained (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The “voice-of-color” theory, which exists in a complicated relationship with antiessentialism, proposes BIPOC scholars (i.e., Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian) can communicate concepts and narratives unique to experiences of racialization, notions their white counterparts may be less likely to understand and articulate (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) provide a plethora of examples of the perpetuation of racism, dispelling any notion we live in a postracial era with racism extinguished. Some of the disparities and inequities affecting racialized populations include (a) Black and Latinx people are more often rejected for jobs, loans, and apartments than similarly qualified white applicants; (b) Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people are overrepresented in prison populations; (c) chief executive officers, surgeons, senators, and university presidents are almost entirely employed by white people; (d) and poverty is disproportionately experienced by Black, Latinx, and Indigenous populations. CRT is acutely interested in the intersection of race, class, and gender—in the examining, understanding, and transforming of the relationship between racism and oppressive economic policies, practices, and realities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). CRT is also a fundamental aspect of the testimonios methodology of research and informed this study’s conceptualization and analysis of race, gender, class, sexuality, and all forms of oppression and subjugation.

Inspired by and like CRT, LatCrit implores us to welcome the intersectional, multidimensional, and interdisciplinary nature of struggles against subordination and oppression (Gonzalez et al., 2009. LatCrit provides a rich context for understanding Latinx experiences of subordination and oppression. LatCrit is an especially fitting, as a theoretical off-shoot of CRT,
to help guide this study due to the many ways it has been employed as a means to honor the embodiment of Latinx lived experiences to determine holistic, relational, and collective paths to guide continued scholarship and educational work toward liberatory learning and research (Cruz, 2012; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Flores Carmona et al., 2021; Gonzales, 2015; Huber, 2009; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Yosso, 2005). I used both CRT and LatCrit as fundamental theoretical lenses to better understand and conceptualize the contexts and ramifications of the lived experiences shared in the elders’ testimonios.

**Abuelita Epistemologies and Pedagogies of the Home**

Abuelita epistemologies focus on Indigenous values, the relational and collective notions of bien educado, kinship models, and In Lak’ech, to center the respect and reverence for elders (and children; Gonzales, 2015). Where historically these Indigenous cultural values, knowledge, and wisdom have been targeted for subtraction from Indigenous and Latina/e/x/o communities, through cultivation of divisive rifts between children and their older kin, Abuelita epistemologies aim to reinvigorate these kinship and community connections. These grandmother epistemologies uplift pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) as a decolonial act of naming and renaming our knowledge and world (Freire, 1970/2018; Smith, 2012) as an act of revitalizing our connection to our roots through the embrace of our elders’ knowledge and wisdom (Gonzales, 2015). Pedagogies of the home describe how Chicana students draw on their biculturalism, bilingualism, commitment to community, and spiritualities originating in their communities and homes, as means to help students better survive, navigate, and succeed in educational settings (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Both theories of knowledge creation rely on our embrace of the lived experiences of our families and homes, of our ancestors and elders, to uplift the knowledge and expertise that lies in our communities. These theories, as Foucault (1977)
indicated, uplift subjugated knowledges and, when employed as part of scholarly work, such as this study, can help the academy to see in spaces it does not normally look for knowledge and wisdom, for evidence of the human potential and brilliance in our Chicana communities.

**Humanizing Pedagogies: A Way Into Liberatory and Emancipatory Education**

Humanizing pedagogies can be enacted and employed as part of liberatory learning, to increase our ability to see the world clearly, to develop our CC connecting our individual and collective lived experiences to our historical, political, and material realities. Liberatory learning must help students understand the connections of the racist and oppressive beliefs of inherited deficiencies of intelligence and moral character found in our nation’s institutions and educational systems (Du Bois, 1903; Encyclopedia Britannica, 1911; Fass, 1980; Riis, 1890; Terman, 1916) to the more modern, subversive ideologies of blaming the victim, cultural deficiency, and the myth of meritocracy (Appiah, 2018; Reich, 2019; Ryan, 1971). Connecting the historical racist ideologies and practices of white supremacy and genocide to the more modern ideologies of cultural deficiency and the rhetoric of blaming-the-victim can help to combat the false consciousnesses perpetuated by systemic racism in U.S. educational systems. Here the role of CRT and LatCrit, to keep front and center the role of racism, coupled with critical pedagogy and CC development, are critical elements of humanizing pedagogies.

Our interconnectedness, our sacred purpose (Medina, 2014), the relationships and bonds we have with our family, community, culture, and spirituality are crucial to our understanding of our place in the world and our ability to be in relationship with others. The relationships and the attachments we form with our caregivers are how we come to understand our existence and belonging in the world, how we grow and learn, and how we are harmed and healed (van der Kolk, 2014). Research has also demonstrated the crucial role relationships play in both the
disengagement (Lichtenstein, 1993; McDermott et al., 2019) and reengagement of students (Iachini et al., 2013; Luna & Revilla, 2013; Orpinas & Raczynski, 2016) as well as in school connectedness and academic success (Davis, 2006; Kiefer et al., 2015; McNeely & Falci, 2004). Ultimately, relationships constitute the basis for which we understand the world, the basis through which we connect to our community’s culture and knowledge. The research demonstrating the importance of relationships, especially during our childhood, further demonstrate the power of embracing CCW (Yosso, 2005), bicultural maletas (Núñez, 1994), pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001), and Abuelita epistemologies (Gonzales, 2015), all theoretical frameworks uplifting the knowledge, wisdom, and wealth of our homes, communities, and culture as Chicana people.

Humanizing our pedagogies, our practices of education, by centering and valuing the cultural wealth of the youth and communities we serve as educators, is crucial to combating systemic racism (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Núñez, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2005). Creating liberatory educational spaces requires educators to embrace and value the cultural capital and lived experiences of the students and communities we serve through empowering practices and dynamics calling on the development of collective CC (Alim et al., 2017; Freire, 1970/2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Núñez, 1994). Our ability as educators to enact liberatory spaces relies on multiple factors, including love, reflection, praxis, and our ability to create and maintain reciprocal relationships with the students, and the communities, we serve (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2001; Palmer, 1980; Valenzuela, 1999). Creating liberatory learning spaces requires educators focus on cultivating relationships between students and teachers, between schools and communities and homes, to support the cocreation, sustentation, and revitalization of conditions

**Literature Review**

**Double Consciousness and Second Sight**

Double consciousness arises out of the rejection of deficit models of culture, of the dehumanizing hegemonic ideologies of white supremacy, patriarchy, and classism. Members of marginalized communities develop a double consciousness born out of the duality of the intermingled ideologies—one sense of self created by the narrative and culture of the marginalized people fighting and struggling to maintain their humanity, a narrative of strength, beauty, and perseverance—and the other a consciousness and awareness of the dominant master narrative that aims to subordinate and devalue marginalized people and their culture (Du Bois, 1903). Du Bois (1903) coined the term “second sight” in describing the double consciousness that becomes a powerful lens through which marginalized communities can see our society has not lived up to or met its ideals of democracy, liberty, and justice for all (Cammarota, 2016). This second sight does not automatically lead to CC and the transformative action required of critical action—it requires nurturing, development, and facilitation of dialogue toward action.

**CC**

The development of CC to pierce the veil of Eurocentric history, deficit-based ideologies, and white supremacy is a fundamental aspect of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2018). CC, conscientização, or “conscientization” (Graham as cited in Kovach, 2010/2021, p. 196) is based on Freire’s (1970/2018) notion of reading the world rather than simply the word; CC arises from contextualized understandings of historical, social, and political aspects of our collective struggle against oppression. Freire (1970) and Watts et al. (2011) articulated CC as having three main
components, critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action, that usually work in a linear fashion – critical reflection inspiring political efficacy which in turn inspires critical action. While this linear development, formulation, and enactment of CC can be seen within empirical research, this study provides evidence of the messy, nuanced, and complicated non-linearity of CC development and enactment.

Arguing for the imperative of supporting CC development in educational settings, especially in support of marginalized youth populations, Watts et al. (2011) based their construction of CC on Freire’s work and note it is like the constructs, in the realms of youth civic engagement and education, of sociopolitical development, transformative education, and empowerment theory. Watts et al. described the three components of CC as (a) critical reflection (i.e., analysis of social and political conditions and rejection of inequities), (b) political efficacy (i.e., the belief in an ability to enact social and political change), and (c) critical action (i.e., individual or collective political activism and action to enact change). Critical reflection is the analysis of social, political, and historical inequities and disparities, and a rejection of societal, economic, racial/ethnic, and gender inequities as impairing people’s agency and well-being. Political efficacy is the belief in the ability to enact social and/or political change, and potentially the compulsion or commitment to create this type of change. Critical action refers to social/political activism and action (broadly perceived) taken to improve the conditions of oppression and inequity experienced by individuals and communities.

Watts et al. (2011), as many scholars of CC, focused on the application of CC and critical pedagogy in educational settings to increase youth access to social justice and human rights. In this focus, Watts et al. posed questions about the relationship between these three constituent elements of CC development (i.e., critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action),
pushing research and scholarship to grapple with the complex non-linear relationship between the three. Though it makes sense critical reflection might be necessary to develop political efficacy, which might necessarily precede critical action, the research does not always bear out this linear causal relationship between the three (Heberle et al., 2020; Pillen et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2011). A sense of agency might also be necessary to engage in critical action and CC development. Simply understanding sociopolitical, historical, and material inequities might not be enough to engage in critical action or reflection (Watts et al., 2011), ultimately begging the question, from where does one’s compulsion, desire, or drive to act originate and arise?

A plethora of empirical work exists exploring the many aspects, functions, and applications of CC in educational and community settings. Teaching, education, and scholarship cannot be apolitical nor ahistorical acts, thus all teaching and learning takes on political, social, and historical ramifications (Freire, 1970/2018; Kuntz, 2015; Núñez, 1996; Solórzano, 2021). Alfaro (2019) applied this notion by insisting for dual language bilingual programs to effectively serve bilingual learners—whom these programs are supposedly designed to serve—teachers must be empowered to engage in development of their own ideological clarity in service of the CC necessary to create equitable education environments. According to Alfaro, CC is the result of self-reflective process to bring clarity to the ideological contradictions of the deficit, subtractive, and banking models of education at play in our schooling systems, so educators can create clarity around their role in empowering students through liberatory learning. Without the act of deep reflection toward ideological clarity, educators perpetuate the subtractive models aimed at erasing the culture and language of students, whom the traditional hierarchical system expects to comply and conform to the dominant Western norms (Alfaro, 2019; Freire, 1970/2018; Núñez, 1994). Cervantes-Soon et al. (2017) called on two-way immersion programs
to make CC development the fourth pillar of two-way immersion programs and implement CC development with students, teachers, and families. CC is the ability to see oppressive structures and be able to dismantle them, to empower youth, educators, and communities to stand up to injustice and transform educational and social systems (Alfaro, 2019; Cammarota, 2016; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017; Freire, 1970/2018).

The development of CC in educational settings empowers students (and community members) in their fight for social justice through applications of problem-posing reflective and action oriented processes, such as journaling, literature analysis, community activism and participation, ethnic studies, relationship-building (Acosta, 2007; Cammarota, 2016; Diemer et al., 2016; Espinoza-Gonzalez et al., 2014; Sulé et al., 2021). Many studies provide evidence for the efficacy of CC development in educational settings to increase critical hope and social justice through youth and community engagement in critical dialogue and reflection (Acosta, 2007; Cammarota, 2016; Diemer et al., 2016; Espinoza-Gonzalez et al., 2014; Sulé et al., 2021; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). CC development contributes positively to youth and community development, especially for marginalized populations, in a multitude of ways, including, but not limited to, increased academic and educational achievement, outcomes, and attainment (Cammarota, 2007; Diemer et al., 2016; El-Amin et al., 2017; Seider et al., 2020), improved career experiences and occupational attainment (Rapa et al., 2018), and higher levels of voting and community and political engagement (Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Heberle et al., 2020; Pillen et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2021).

Many varied factors from outside of educational settings have been shown to contribute to the development of CC. Kohli et al. (2019) illustrated how women educators of color bring with them, to the educational field, from their home and community, already developed notions
and practices of CC. These women have long standing commitments to the betterment and empowerment of their communities, commitments reflected in their choices to enter education to create opportunities for liberatory learning and the development of CC and hope for the youth they serve (Kohli et al., 2019). Many sensibilities, commitments, and values of social justice and community activism are expressed by the elders (participants) and run parallel to the literature and articulation of educator, teacher, and scholar activist.

Returning to Watts et al.’s (2011) study, their research focused on investigating the effectiveness of quantitative measurements of CC in youth populations, especially focusing on the relationship of critical reflection and action. They push the field of CC research to explore the effects of political efficacy to better understand how this construct increases youth action in response to critical reflection. Their definition of political efficacy is “the perceived capacity to effect social and political change via individual and/or collective activism” (Watts et al., 2011, p. 50). Researchers have taken them up on this call and analyzed related questions, using quantitative measures of CC, to better understand the relationships between critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. Diemer and Rapa’s (2016) conclusions supported the connection of perceptions and experiences of oppression with increased political and critical action while also demonstrating various levels of political efficacy led to various kinds of actions taken. They failed to demonstrate a strong connection between political efficacy, or agency, and critical reflection and action, a connection that, according to these researchers, is a fundamental aspect of CC theory and development (Diemer & Rapa, 2016). Diemer et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis on various quantitative measurements of CC, and, like Diemer and Rapa (2016), noted there is still more research needed to further the understanding of the “ontogenesis of CC . . . the movement from a critical acceptance of the status quo to critical and liberating action to
redress societal inequities” (p. 219). These scholars implore researchers to ask more questions about the development of CC especially focused on understanding the relationship between the three elements of CC: critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action (Diemer et al., 2016; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Watts et al., 2011).

Though the body of literature articulating the development of CC is ample, there is a need for more research, especially employing qualitative methods, to help us better understand various aspects of CC development, such as the role of peer and parent influence and interactions (Diemer et al. 2006; Heberle et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2011). Most of the research regarding the development of CC centers on either adolescent or educators and service provider populations (Heberle et al., 2020; Pillen et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2011). There is little research with older populations regarding the development of CC (Gómez, 2018).

**Chicana/x/o Subjectivity and Identity Formation**

The term Chicana/Chicano, potentially based on an Indigenous manner of saying Mexican, can possibly be traced to uses in the 1920s by Mexican immigrants in the Southwest, and definitely has roots in the pachuco Zoot-suit culture of the 1940s where it was adopted and regularly used as an identifier of counterculture and rebellion against the dominant white rule (Irizarry & Garcia, 2021). Chicana/x/o identity and subjectivities, although tied to ethnicity, are a conscious choice, which involves embracing CC, community activism, and liberatory learning (Alarcón, 1990; Espinoza, 2018; Urrieta, 2007). My father, René Nunez, repeatedly told me Chicana/o identity was a consciousness, a way of seeing ourselves positioned politically in the world and aiming to combat racism and oppression by dedicating ourselves to making positive transformation in our communities. Ramon “Chunky” Sanchez, in Espinoza’s movie, *Singing Our Way to Freedom*, explained Chicana/o identity is “a state of mind and a state of heart” and
exploring his Chicano identity helped him put the puzzle of his life together, to “put our conscience together, our minds together, our souls, our spirits” (Espinoza, 2018, min. 20:00-21:00).

Urrieta (2007) drew on Holland et al.’s (2001) work of figured worlds to describe the nuances of identity formation not as an individual process, but a collective one. Figured worlds are the local spaces where we figure out who we are and what we do, always figuring out our identity and subjectivity in the world through both conceptual and procedural processes (Holland et al., 2001). Conceptually we are figuring out what we believe, individually and collectively, and then procedurally we act out on these beliefs in our communities—much like a dialogical praxis, our inner beliefs and outer actions work in constant flux as we form our identity in this moving relationship. This is like the relationship of theory and practice, the individual and the collective, the many dualities seen in dialogical relationships in In Lak’ech and Yin and Yang.

Using this theory of identity formation conceptually and procedurally in figured worlds (i.e., everyone as a figure in a collective space, figuring out who we are and what we do) can help us to see identity formation as more than simply a given, but a choice and set of actions in response to material, political, and social realities. Subjectivities, the manners in which we understand and act on our lived experiences and identities, are responses to power hierarchies and dynamics. “Brown is beautiful” would not be necessary except for responding to the centuries of racism denoting and connoting brown and black as ugly and “less than” (Roberto Hernandez, personal conversation, June 8, 2022). Some questions Hernandez and I considered in relation to moving understandings of subjectivities in Chicana spaces were: How do we rework how we are seen into a form of identity centered on mobilization against the subjugation caused by the white gaze of the dominant social order? How do responses to subjectivity, our own
subjectivities, create a space for mobilization? How do we ground ourselves in self-determinative ways in the face of racist narratives and portrayals?

Devon Peña noted, in responding to Michelle Téllez’s work, the very existence of narratives, identities, and subjectivities in opposition to oppression are acts and consciousnesses of resistance (Téllez, 2022). Peña described how Téllez provided portrayals of collective forms of autonomy, place-making, and reclaiming of spaces, institutions of collective action representing “organic intellectuals serving social movements” as “engaged social movement activists” through their self-determined subjectivities and consciousnesses (Téllez, 2022, min. 32:45-33:15).

I asked the elders in this study to share the role of their own formations of political subjectivity, how they understand their development of Chicana/o(ness) and CC in relation to their social-political-material lived experiences and conditions. I asked them to share how these subjectivities, their lived experiences and figured concepts and actions, influenced and affected the work they did and do throughout their lives in community service, education, and activism.

Ethnic and Chicana/x/o Studies

Unfortunately, there is still a dire need to fight for ethnic studies to create educational spaces that authentically value, honor, and center the community and cultural wealth of communities of color to combat the continued use of racist Euro-centric educational curriculum (Noah, 2021; Oliver, 2020; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). Currently, 26 state legislatures have introduced or passed bills and/or taken other steps to restrict the teaching of CRT and limit the manner in which topics racism, sexism, and/or anything that might make a White cisgendered straight man uncomfortable all in the name of “equality” and “justice” (Kendi, 2021; Schwartz, 2021; Pendharker, 2021). The Texas senate
has passed a bill removing requirements to teach women’s suffrage and the civil rights movement in their K–12 curriculum (Nichols, 2021). Ethnic studies and liberatory education are needed as much now as ever in our nation.

The goals of ethnic studies, like Chicano/a/e studies, are to create spaces where students of color can see themselves represented positively in history and to create educational environments that center, value, and empower students’ culture, community, and agency to promote holistic wellness with our communities (Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). Employing critical and community responsive pedagogies, with its foundational elements of relationships, relevance, and responsibility, ethnic studies is an empowering and humanizing vehicle to nurture educational environments and communities helping youth in all communities, and especially communities of color, develop deeper forms of CC. As educators embracing ethnic studies have known for decades, ethnic studies, when designed and taught well, centers and values the cultural wealth of our communities of color (Yosso, 2005) and positively impacts students’ (of all ethnic backgrounds) academic engagement and performance, rates of graduation, sense of self-efficacy, critical thinking, and levels of democratic dialogue and outcomes (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020).

For education to serve a liberatory role, helping youth to further develop their CC to combat the false consciousness of systemic racism and oppression, we must be open to forming authentic relationships in educational settings. When we focus on relationships first, on making sure students know how much we care, prior to worrying about how much we might know (Kohl & Kozol, 1995), we improve the interconnectivity between our students, communities, and educational institutions. Relationships between educators and students play a primary role in this empowering process, establishing effective connections with students’ communities, and
students’ school connectedness and academic success (Davis, 2006; Iachini et al., 2013; Kiefer et al., 2015; Lichtenstein, 1993; Luna & Revilla, 2013; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Muhammad, 2020; Orpinas & Raczynski, 2016; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021).

**Relationships and Educational Engagement**

Human relationships are fundamental to our understanding of the world and our ability to learn, grow, and heal (van der Kolk, 2014). The formation and maintenance of reciprocal, caring, positive relationships is fundamental to empowering educational settings, especially if educators hope to increase social justice of historically underserved and marginalized students with culturally relevant, responsive, revitalizing, and sustaining pedagogies and practices (Freire, 1970; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021; Valenzuela, 1999). Community responsive pedagogy, an extension of ethnic studies and culturally sustaining pedagogies, relies on the development of relationships, community building, and CC to promote community wellness as the primary outcome of our educational institutions (Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). Relationships take center stage in educational systems as a primary factor in student engagement and disengagement from schooling.

Student disengagement from public schooling, especially from high school, is due to a complex cluster of factors (Hynes & America’s Promise Alliance, 2014), not usually a single event, but instead a result of long-term conditions and situations, at times punctuated with an acute event (or set of events; Bell, 1990; Bickerstaff, 2010; Butchart, 1986; Colomy & Granfield, 2010; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Hynes & America’s Promise Alliance, 2014; Iachini et al., 2013; Lichtenstein, 1993; Loomis, 2011; Luna & Revilla, 2013; McDermott et al., 2019; Pollard, 2004; Stevens-Jacobi, 1979). The “Don’t Call Them Dropouts” report (Hynes & America’s Promise
Alliance, 2014) conducted an exploratory sequential mixed-methods study, consisting of group interviews in 16 cities with 212 youths 18–25 years old, which informed the creation and administration of an online survey of over 2,900 students (1,942 who had disengaged from high school, and 1,023 who had graduated). Hynes & America’s Promise Alliance’s (2014) four major findings are in alignment with the major themes in the literature: (a) disengagement is due to a complex cluster of factors, (b) toxic environments have a huge impact on student disengagement, (c) youth are yearning for supportive connections, and (d) youth disengaging from high school demonstrate resilience and require more support and guidance.

Many of the studies I encountered, both qualitative and mixed-methods studies, presented the narratives and themes of student disengagement (Bell, 1990; Bickerstaff, 2010; Butchart, 1986; Colomy & Granfield, 2010; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Iachini et al., 2013; Lichtenstein, 1993; Loomis, 2011; McDermott et al., 2019; Pollard, 2004; Stevens-Jacobi, 1979) agreed with the findings of the Hynes and America’s Promise Alliance’s (2014) report that student disengagement is due to a complex “cluster of factors,” which can be split into two categories: (a) push-out, factors in a school’s culture and practices pushing students out; and (b) pull-out, factors outside of school pulling students away. Some of the pull-out factors include toxic traumatic external environments, violence in the home and community, homeless and housing instability, incarceration, other forms of state involvement, and outside factors requiring youth to exit school to take care of loved ones and/or work to support their families (Hynes & America’s Promise Alliance, 2014; Iachini et al., 2013; McDermott et al., 2019; Pollard, 2004). The push-out factors include: negative school climates and experiences, lack of supportive adult relationships both in and out of school, large uncaring school environments, lack of flexibility in instruction, curriculum, and school structure, and irrelevance and lack of meaningful engagement.
with academic endeavors (Butchart, 1986; Colomy & Granfield, 2010; Hynes & America’s Promise Alliance, 2014; Iachini et al., 2013; Lichtenstein, 1993; Luna & Revilla, 2013; McDermott et al., 2019; Pollard, 2004).

Loomis (2011) referred to the same push-out factors leading to disengagement, especially focusing on the effects of negative school culture and lack of positive, caring, supportive teacher/staff relationships. Orpinas and Raczynski (2016) indicated how students having a negative experience with school climate were much more likely to leave school. These pushout factors, negative school climate/culture, and lack of caring teacher relationships, are examples of factors of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999), where marginalized students’ strengths are viewed as deficits, where expressions of their lived experiences are not accepted in the classroom but instead are rejected by teachers who students perceive as apathetic, uncaring, and even racist (Luna & Revilla, 2013). Students in these toxic subtractive school settings do not feel their culture is valued, but instead feel it is perceived by teachers and the educational setting as negative and deficient (Luna & Revilla, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999). These are examples of school settings lacking both authentic care and the development of critical hope, which can cause vulnerable students to disengage and leave school.

Some of the crucial factors helping to reengage disengaged youth include stronger more positive teacher–student relationships, smaller more intimate school environments, positive more caring teacher–student interaction, flexible schedules, and more individualized instruction and planning (Iachini et al., 2013). Iachini et al. (2013) indicated facilitators of successful reengagement of youth are direct corollaries to the barriers to engagement at the schools from which many of these students disengaged in the first place. One of the most salient factors in effectively reengaging youth, found in almost all of the empirical work, was the development,
presence, and nurturing of strong, caring relationships between teachers and students to promote student engagement and academic outcomes (Bell, 1990; Bickerstaff, 2010; Colomy & Granfield, 2010; Flores, 2017; Hynes & America’s Promise Alliance, 2014; Iachini et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2016; Lichtenstein, 1993; Loomis, 2011; Luna & Revilla, 2013; Orpinas & Raczynski, 2016; Pollard, 2004). The research indicated the importance of quality caring relationships in the reengagement of disengaged students.

Developing high-quality supportive caring relationships between staff and students in educational settings is one of the most important factors contributing to and determine students’ successful academic engagement and achievement, connectedness to educational settings, and reduction of students’ risky health behaviors (Davis, 2006; Kiefer et al., 2015; McNeely & Falci, 2004). Caring supportive teacher–student relationships play a crucial role in shaping school climate which has an integral role on supportive or disrupting student connectedness and engagement in educational settings (Orpinas & Raczynski, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999). Davis (2006) and McNeely and Falci (2004) demonstrated the quality of teacher relationships, as perceived by students, has a crucial impact (both positive and negative) on the academic learning and performance of students. Davis articulated how impactful students’ perceptions of their relationships with teachers are on their perceptions and engagement with the academic work tied to each teacher. Even neutral perceptions of relationships have negative impacts on student academic engagement and achievement (Davis, 2006). Whereas, when students rate their relationship with a teacher as good, when they feel a teacher cares for them, the academic work in the teacher’s class is perceived as more personally meaningful, engaging and fun by the students. Kiefer et al. (2015) confirmed sometimes all it takes is one caring adult in an educational setting to help reengage a youth with positive outcomes.
Testimonios del Movimiento Chicana/o

Although there have been many publications dedicated to the recounting and meaning-making of the Chicana/e/o Movement and the activists and elders who made this movement possible (García, 2015; Mariscal, 2005), very few have the central focus on the narratives and testimonios of elders in the Chicana community in San Diego, California. San Diego is part of a modern binational metropolitan region which includes Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, who shares a 24-kilometer border with San Diego. More than 50 million people cross the Tijuana-San Diego border every year (Young, 2016). San Diego has also become one of the most diverse places, culturally and ethnically, in the nation, with 40.8% of the city’s population speaking a language other than English (Olsen et al., 2021).

There are many examples of powerful scholarship highlighting Chicana testimonios in San Diego, such as Sánchez and Lopez (2017), but the vast majority are focused on contemporary Chicana settings. There is also much literature focused on the analysis and understanding of the development of CC, especially in contemporary educational settings as it pertains to the empowerment and liberation of youth of color (Cammarota, 2016; Cerezo et al., 2013; Espinoza-Gonzalez et al., 2014; Pewewardy et al., 2018; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). However, these studies are not focused on the development of CC in the population of elders who experienced the Civil Rights and Chicana/o movement. There are also well-developed biographical narratives and histories written about Chicana/e/o leaders, educators, and organizers in the San Diego area, even specifically regarding some of the elders who chose to participate in this study (Garcia, 2021; Olsen et al., 2021; Sanchez & Lopez, 2017). These histories and biographies served as fertile material for preliminary and supportive understanding of the history, roles, and careers of the elders.
The addressed gap is gathering, curating, and synthesizing the testimonios and counternarratives of elders from in the Chicana/e/x/o community of San Diego regarding their experiences of education, development of CC, and engagement in social justice activism and organizing. The study aimed to provide a space for collective reflection and praxis to contribute to understandings, theories, and practices of liberatory learning. The goal of this study is to also provide insight into the factors concerning educational engagement effective in empowering the participants’ access to education and their development of CC.

**The Chicana/e/o Responses to Oppressive U.S. Schooling**

Rage Against the Machine (1992) wrote, “Yes, I know my enemies, they’re the teachers who taught me to fight me, compromise, conformity, assimilation, submission, ignorance, hypocrisy, brutality, the elite. All of which are American dreams” (4:14-4:32). The self-determination of Chicana/x/o students (and community) to liberate themselves from subtractive, destructive, and exclusionary schooling practices are evident in the East Los Angeles Blowouts of 1968 and the student strike of 1967–68 at the University of San Francisco (Delgado Bernal, 1997, 1998; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). These movements of Chicana/x/o people, communities, and actions represent a response to oppressive U.S. school settings, practices, and policies. One fundamental aspect of the Chicana/x/o movement were calls for a redefinition and transformation of educational spaces in response to the warped oppressive heteropatriarchal and racist system of U.S. schooling. Before delving into the specifics of the Chicana/o/e response to oppressive school settings, a brief overview of the Chicana/o/e movement is necessary.

Although there are many instances of Indigenous, Latina/x/o, and Chicana/x/o resistance and self-determination dating to times long before the 20th century, as well as a plethora of
examples of Latina/x/o and Chicana/x/o fights for educational rights prior to the Civil Rights movement era (Acuña, 1988; Irizarry & Garcia, 2021; Muñoz, 1989; Rodriguez, 1996), this section focuses on the events and movements of the 1960s, 70s, and beyond, to mirror the lived experiences and testimonios of the elders. The Chicana/x/o movement, as part of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, was informed and inspired by the Black Power movement. It can be thought of as multiple movements collectively coalescing through their focus on uplifting and transforming the political, social, and material conditions of predominantly Latina/x/o populations in the southwest United States (Acuña, 1988; García & McCracken, 2021; Irizarry & Garcia, 2021; Muñoz, 1989; Rodriguez, 1996). The Chicana/o movement is composed of many different movements, organizations, and communities of actors intersecting and encompassing struggles around worker, educational, and immigrant rights, antiwar and peace, and dynamics of political power and representation.

As many of our study-partners demonstrate with their testimonios and narratives, Chicana feministas were, and are, foundational to the Chicana/x/o movement, calling to task the sexist heteropatriarchal elements and manifestations of the movement, and its retelling which have historically omitted the narratives and contributions of Chicana women who from its inception led and realized the movement (Delgado Bernal, 1998; García & McCracken, 2021; Irizarry & Garcia, 2021). The Chicana/x/o movement and identity, like Latinidad, if unexamined can and will produce hierarchical power relations, related to anti-Blackness, anti-Indigenous, neoliberal nationalism, and heteropatriarchy. The Chicana/e/o movement, consciousness, and experience encompass a multitude of intersectional identities and realities to be addressed and unearthed for Chicana/e/o and Latina/e/o movements, consciousness, and identities to live up to their

Many credit the United Farm Workers (UFW) union’s fight for worker rights in the agricultural valley of California as one the primary organizing platforms and series of events starting the Chicana/x/o movement (Acuña, 1988; García & McCracken, 2021; Irizarry & Garcia, 2021; Muñoz, 1989; Rodriguez, 1996). The UFW, in association with the Chicana/x/o movement, owes its existence to a strike started on September 8, 1965. Over 1,000 predominantly Filipino, as well as Chicana/x/o, Black, and European-American, workers, affiliated with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, went on strike against grape growers in Delano, California (Gonzalez, 2013; UFW History, n.d.). The Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, led by Larry Itliong, reached out to the Delano-based National Farm Workers Association of predominantly Latina/o workers, led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, to request assistance with the strike (Gonzalez, 2013; UFW History, n.d.). On September 16, 1965, in the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Delano, California, over 1,200 workers responded with gritos of “Viva la Huelga! Viva la Cause! Viva Cesar Chavez!” and voted unanimously to support the strike (Gonzalez, 2013). The ensuing strike and boycott of grapes throughout the central valley of California inspired the Chicana/x/o generation to assume action in pursuit of social justice and transformation of the social order throughout the southwest—again in parallel with other Civil Rights movement communities through the United States and worldwide.

One major element of the Chicana/o movement was the antiwar movement led by Chicana/x/o community members protesting the cutting of social services to pay for the war in Vietnam and by many Chicana/x/o veterans, who had been drafted and put into direct combat
situations in higher proportions than their white counterparts, returning from the Vietnam War (García & McCracken, 2021; Mariscal, 2005). One of the pivotal events of the Chicana/x/o antiwar movement was the National Chicano Moratorium, held on August 29, 1970, in Los Angeles, California, where more than 20,000 to 30,000 predominantly Latina/e/x/o people gathered peacefully and were brutally attacked by the L.A. sheriff’s department (García & McCracken, 2021; Hernandez, 2020; Huerta, 2020; Mariscal, 2005; Muñoz, 1989; Thurber, n.d.). Three people were killed, including Ruben Salazar, a prominent Chicano journalist. David Valladolid, elder participant, recalls his experience at the event galvanized his resolve in turning his experiences in Vietnam into fuel to fight peacefully for the rights and dignity of Chicana/x/o people from then forward.

The Chicana/x/o movement also emphasized fights for the transformation of schooling and education, both in K–12 and higher education institutions, a fight mirrored in different ethnic and racialized communities during the civil rights movement. The East Los Angeles School Blowouts of 1968, during which more than 10,000 students walked out of school to protest a lack of representation and quality education, make-up another pivotal element of the Chicana/o/x movement regarding K–12 education. As Delgado Bernal (1997) illustrated how many different strategies, strikes, and boycotts were employed at high schools in the Los Angeles area during the first few weeks of March of 1968, as an expression of the Chicana community’s grassroots organizing and leadership to fight for access to quality education. These efforts led to the formation of the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee, an organization supporting the educational needs and aspirations of Chicana/x/o students in Los Angeles.

One fundamental gathering of the Chicana/e/o movement, related to education, was in Santa Barbara, in 1969. My father, René Núñez, was instrumental in the planning and facilitation
of this meeting of scholars, students, activists, and community members leading to the drafting of El Plan de Santa Barbara, a document helping institutionalize Chicana/x/o studies and El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA; Carmona, 2019; Gonzales, 2009; Muñoz, 1989). Chicana/e/o studies, like the many other constituent elements of Ethnic Studies, is a call to action for the Latina/e/o community in the United States to determine their own political identities and subjectivities through the development of CC and an embrace of organic intellectualism (Núñez, 1996). René Núñez’s work in education and Chicana/o Studies centered around addressing the issue of institutional racism, and he used to call his Chicano Studies 100 course “Racism 101.” Núñez’s (1996) articulation of the central tenets of Chicanismo, which in part exist in response (as a counternarrative) to the racist narratives, stated:

- principles of the Chicano Movement: 1) The need for Chicanos to recover their history distorted by biased observations of Chicano reality - that portrayed Mexicans as apolitical, pathetic, and amoral; 2) The need for Chicanos to become trained to challenge the negative views that are part of that biased history. To provide them with the tools to become critical thinkers who can deconstruct the negative portrayals of the Chicano reality and in the process produce their own history; 3) To train Chicanos to give back to their communities. To help them understand that as university students they are the leading intellectuals of their communities – the writers, the artists, the doctors, the engineers, the teachers, the politicians, the community activists and so forth; and 4) To help the students see that they have a choice of two roads to travel as intellectuals. The first is an intellectual in the service of the political/cultural system that produces the biased views of people of color and gender . . . the second is an ‘Organic Intellectual’ in the service of his or her community - an intellectual that dedicates him or herself to work
with and through their communities to help those communities resolve their problems

(René Núñez, memorial bookmark, see Appendix A).

One of the ways we can view the tenet of self-determination is in the call to rewrite the racist histories painting people of color as culturally, biologically, or in any way deficient to whiteness and other Western constructs. One element of this form of self-determination is truth-telling, a foundational element of Ethnic and Chicana/x/o Studies and liberatory learning. Truth-telling involves telling full histories of the colonial and U.S. policies and practices that codified the genocide of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans, and the historical and ongoing project of white supremacy creating and maintaining racist policies, practices, and ideologies presently affecting our communities. Related to truth-telling, is the synthesis and curation of counternarratives to these deficit ones, stories of resistance, strength, and beauty in their telling helping rewrite racist white supremacist histories.

The counternarratives arising from the elders invited to participate in this study may lend themselves to being presented as local oral histories of both the oppression faced by the Chicana community in San Diego, and the resistance, resilience, and powerful beauty of self-determination and CC from the work of these elders. Understanding the manner in which the movement was experienced by the generation of Chicana/e/o (and Latina/e/o) elders who were instrumental in the fight for social justice and access to higher education and institutional resources for our communities, and how they developed their own Chicana/e/o CC and political subjectivities toward transformative action, are crucial components to sustaining our fight for political, material, educational, and spiritual justice. I endeavored to center my study-partners’ value and worth, their abuelita epistemologies, knowledge, and narratives—their counternarratives and stories.
Conclusion

The power of our narratives became strikingly clear to me in listening to David Valladolid, my padrino and one of the study-partners, explain how everything came together for him at the Chicano Moratorium – when seeing the police violence against his community, he recognized the parallels to the violence perpetrated by the U.S. government overseas, against other black and brown bodies, during the Vietnam War. His Chicano CC crystalized, incorporating lessons from his mother’s teachings on compassion, love, and empathy with his experiences in the Vietnam War (after which he swore never to allow the government, or anyone else, determine his path) and the personal and familial experiences of discrimination and racism in the U.S. schooling systems, into acts of service with his community. His narrative demonstrates the centrality of his experience of the Chicana/o movement to his developing understanding of the social political power dynamics of racism and sexism at play in his life. This is especially true in looking back on aspects of his life he was not previously aware were colored by these systems of oppression. These subjectivities, based on his lived experiences, on his concepts of what it means to be Chicano, led him to act in his life to transform political, social, and educational realities with his community. The relationships in his life were pivotal in shaping his opportunities and access to education and the development of his critical literacy and consciousness, and his devotion to community service and action.

The questions I have had about my father and his generation, along with David’s testimonio, have inspired further inquiries of my elders in the Chicana/e/o community. These elders lived through the Chicana/o movement, and they were generous in sharing their experiences in education; the pivotal relationships in their lives; and their formations of their Chicana/o identities, subjectivities, and CC. The primary goal of this study was to ask our elders
to help us understand how CC formed for them, how it influenced their choices around what action and work to take up in their communities and society, and how they sustained community activism throughout their lives as they fought to increase social justice with the goal of the decolonizing liberation of the Chicana/e/o community.
CHAPTER 3: CHICANA/X/O\textsuperscript{12} INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGIES

This chapter provides a summary of the purpose of the study, research questions, and the methodologies informing this study. I also present my positionality, situating myself in the research and connection to Chicana/x/o Indigenous methodologies, paradigms, and ont-epistemologies. The chapter explores Indigenous methodologies and the traditions of Testimonios is the driving methodology of this research study which centers the narratives of the elders who participated. I present a rationale for the selection of the eight elders, data collection techniques, and data analysis processes. The chapter concludes with considerations of the potential limitations of the study, a summary of the chapter, and review of the subsequent chapters of the dissertation.

Study Purpose

There are many published narratives of Chicana/x/o leaders from throughout the Southwest and substantial research exists on the formation and potential power of critical consciousness (CC) in contemporary educational settings. However, there is a dearth of literature focusing on the development of CC in the lives and experiences of Chicana/o elders who experienced the Chicano movement in the San Diego region. The purpose of this study was to collectively synthesize testimonios (i.e., narratives) of Chicana/o elders in the San Diego region with the aim of understanding and unpacking their histories of education and schooling, their development of CC and Chicana/o subjective identity, and the role of relationships in these processes. The goal of this study was to enhance, through the embrace of the knowledge, wisdom, and consejos of our elders—our understanding of the development and facilitation of

\textsuperscript{12} I used various endings to Chicana and Latina, including Chicanx, Chicane, and Chicano at various times to support the inclusion of all our relatives who identify as gender non-binary and all other forms of gender identity, and to honor the elders and community members who identify with the endings of -a and -o, such as Latina/o and Chicana/o.
CC and liberatory learning—to counter subtractive, deficit, and banking models of schooling. As a result of my Chicano Indigenous onto-epistemologies, I embrace the research tradition of Testimonios, a form of Indigenous Chicana methodology based on Chicana feminist epistemologies. Testimonios centers the voice and narratives of the elders as the vital elements of data and knowledge creation (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Kovach, 2021; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

**Positionality: Situating Myself in the Research**

My name is Gabriel Ramon Moran Núñez-Soria, son of Caroline Moran and René Núñez. My mother Caroline is the daughter of Marilyn Fish and Steven Moran, whose ancestors were from Scotland, Ireland, and England, land of the Celts. My father René was the son of Maria Dolores Rodriguez, born in Cacalotan, Mexico, land of the Tepehuan, Acaxee and Totorame, and Pedro Núñez, born in La Paz, Mexico, land of the Cochimi and Guycura. My Indigenous Chicano Celtic identity is at the foundation of my onto-epistemology, rationale, inspiration, and methodology in conducting this study. This study was my answer to a personal, emotional, physical, and spiritual call to reach out to elders in my community, of my father and mother’s generation, Chicana/o elders in San Diego. I invited eight Chicana/o elders to partner in this study, to explore and curate elements of their shared wisdom, knowledge, and lived experiences of education, schooling, and community activism.

This was a very personal inquiry, an expression of parrhesia, of my truth, and the truth of my community, inextricably bound up in “how we live, who we claim to be, and how we come to know” (Kuntz, 2015, p. 12). Human inquiry cannot be neutral or objective; any attempt at this not only obscures the dynamics of power, and our ability to transform our material reality, but also maintains the dominant power hierarchies of oppression. Wilson (2008) agreed in his
presentation of Indigenous research methodologies and methods; he said engaging in research through an Indigenous paradigm is to embrace our whole selves in the process, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, and to avoid any one of these to attempt to objectify the experience is not only disingenuous and potentially dehumanizing, but would also not be in keeping with an Indigenous worldview. Conducting research through Indigenous methodologies is to be accountable to all our relations, to embrace relational accountability and the community in which we facilitate our research study (Wilson, 2008).

The community in which I looked to be held relationally accountable to was the contemporaries of my father and mother’s generation, with whom I have wanted to engage since my father’s passing over 15 years ago in a process of dialogue to better understand their expressions of parrhesia and their journeys as scholar (teacher/community) activists. All eight of the elders who participated in this study had a personal, academic, and/or professional relationship with my father, mother, and family. Although some of the participants in this study were closer to me than others, they were all like family, and they were all part of my personal, familial, and professional Chicana community. This relational closeness is a fundamental element of Indigenous methodologies, as the building of and belonging to community is a necessary component of research through an Indigenous lens (Wilson, 2008).

Both my father and mother were involved in the Chicana/o movement, starting in the late 1960s. My mother withdrew from University of California, San Diego (UCSD) during her undergraduate years to engage with the United Farm Workers Union’s social and political movement, and it was through this engagement she met my father. If it were not for the Chicana/o movement, I would not exist. My mother’s compassion and commitment to the tenets of the Chicana/o movement and to the humanization and decolonization of familial, community,
and public spaces was a foundational element of my upbringing and personality. My father and mother together raised me with a critical Chicana/o Indigenous consciousness. It was through my own Chicano lens that I engaged in this study to find out how the lenses of my elders were formed, curated, and maintained during and since the beginning of the Chicana/o movement.

My closeness to this inquiry had benefits but could also create potential blind spots. I continuously reflected on my personal attachments and relationships with the elders involved as well as the ideas, events, and narratives shared as a part of the study. I reflected on the role our relationships play in creating an intimate environment for deep dialogue. I especially kept this in mind as I decided the follow-up and clarifying questions to ask each set of elders. I had to also be careful to make sure to create as parity in factors of identity, especially regarding gender; as a man, I reflected on my male privilege and perspective during all aspects of the research process. Although I may have felt like I was an insider in the community of elders with whom I interacted as part of this study, I had to also acknowledge I was an outsider regarding their generation. I have done my best to fully commit myself to being a listener of the stories they tell, as it was imperative for me to be open to the nuances and uniqueness of their experiences. During the plática encounters, I did my best to consistently remind myself to reference the probing open-ended questions and reinvigorate my desire to listen deeply, not to find the answers I was looking for, but to be present with the elders and listen with an open mind and loving heart.

Incorporating my own onto-epistemologies as an Indigenous Chicano Celt in the dominant Western academic modalities and structures was difficult for me. I wholeheartedly embraced a call to collective consciousness and action through seeing our defined differences as strengths and a means to empower our colleagues to bridge the gaps between the expectations of
the academy and the Indigenous ways of knowing and being I can feel in my heart, mind, body, and spirit.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were the driving force guiding the purpose and results of this study:

1. What factors shaped and affected the development of critical consciousness for the elders?

2. What role did/do relationships (familial, community, and institutional) play in the elders’ access to higher education and the development of their critical consciousness?

3. What is the elders’ vision for the continuation and support of social justice and critical consciousness development?

**Research Methodologies**

The LatCrit tradition of testimonios was the primary research paradigm of this study, informed by my reading and understanding of Indigenous research methodologies, to center the relational, emotional, collective, and spiritual elements of the research process (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Kovach, 2010, 2021; Lessard et al., 2021; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Smith, 1999/2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002; Wilson, 2008). Bhattacharya (2017) compelled critical qualitative methodologists to question and speak about how power is controlled, distributed, and employed, to its overall function in society and scientific inquiry. She called on us to not only address our positionality as it relates to our work, but also to bring our whole selves into our work—to reflect on where we stand in context to the work and what motivates and compels us to conduct our research (Bhattacharya, 2017). She also called on critical
qualitative researchers to embrace decolonizing methodologies which can empower the ways of being and knowing from in subordinated communities. Both decolonizing and holistic relational approaches to research suggested by Bhattacharya (LMU Library, 2021) reflect in the tradition of Testimonios, which I argue is a form of Indigenous methodology and inquiry.

Processes of decolonization must directly address the need for Native communities to possess the rights of sovereignty and land in material senses, while also directly dismantling the dehumanizing master narrative of deficiency imposed on Indigenous and Chicana communities by the colonial, imperial, and capitalist structures of the dominant Western social order (Patel, 2015). For many in the Chicana community, our direct connections to our Native roots have been severed by colonial violence, genocide, and oppression. Still, we call on the need to reconnect to our Indigenous roots, and to push to dismantle, disrupt, and discard the colonial master narratives we have internalized through centuries of colonial violence and indoctrination. René Núñez articulated a foundational theme of processes for decolonizing and counternarrative construction in the Chicana community as:

the need for Chicanos to become trained to challenge the negative views that are part of that biased history. To provide them with the tools to become critical thinkers who can deconstruct the negative portrayals of the Chicano reality and in the process produce their own history. (René Núñez memorial bookmark, Appendix A)

My embrace of testimonios was driven by this call in CRT, LatCrit, and Chicana/x/o theory to challenge racist histories and deficit narratives through the creation of our own asset-based counternarratives. Although colonization has stripped me of a direct physical/land-based connection to my Indigenous ancestral roots on Turtle Island, as it has for so many of my Indigenous Latina/x/o relatives, as part of my Chicano subjective identity I look to my
Indigenous cultural, spiritual, and ancestral roots on this continent. This serves to connect to and understand Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world—to rehumanize and empower myself to follow my heart, mind, and spirit through more holistic research methodologies and paradigms.

The research tradition of Testimonios centers the narrative of communities of color, especially those of Latina/x/o ancestry, and exists to empower scholars of color in opposition to racist Euro-centric research methodologies (Huber, 2009). I argue Testimonios can be employed as a form of Indigenous inquiry and methodology with Latina and Chicana communities as it embodies and exemplifies a decolonial/anticolonial stance against the dominant social order, using collective holistic relational methodologies to uplift and empower our elders’ lived experiences and counternarratives.

**Indigenous Methodologies**

Indigenous methodologies are based on the ways of being and knowing (i.e., onto-epistemologies) of Indigenous scholars and communities—they are methodologies based on decolonizing acts and assertions of self-determination for Indigenous populations. Based more on holistic rather than dissection analytical techniques, Indigenous methodologies are fundamentally based on our relationships and the relational dynamics with all things (Blackstock, 2011, 2019; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous social science research methodologies focus on the relationships in and among our communities and cultural spaces to center lived experiences of all involved in research endeavors (Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous methodologies are based on the ongoing struggle of Indigenous people throughout the world for their rights to sovereignty, self-determination, and humanity in the face of colonial, imperial, and capitalistic powers, domination, and hegemony (Smith, 1999/2012). Indigenous methodologies
are forms of holistic dialogue embodied through relational dynamics that can transform the homogeneous Eurocentric narratives and ideologies of the academy and thus have a humanizing and positive influence on the manner research affects policy and practice, especially for Indigenous and marginalized communities (Kovach, 2021). Embracing Indigenous methodologies is fundamentally an act of uplifting our humanity as it is formed and reformed collectively.

**Decolonizing**

As Chicana people, we do not have to rely on Eurocentric histories, theories, and methodologies. Critical to the tenet of self-determination as Chicana people and to the embrace of CC and empowered political, historical, and social activism and subjectivities as people of color in a Western dominated world, is our act of resistance to this dominant paradigm—an act of decolonizing our minds, bodies, and spirits. Smith (1999/2012) highlighted the power of history and the decolonial act of Indigenous communities and scholars telling and writing their own history as a form of resistance to the domination of colonialism. Smith argued Indigenous methodologies are fundamentally decolonizing through their existence, and any methodology claiming to be Indigenous must then be decolonizing in nature. Embracing the narratives and stories of my local Chicana/o elders in San Diego was an act of decolonizing this research space, as well as part of my continuous reflexive act of decolonizing my mind, body, and spirit, and helping to support decolonizing practices in my community.

**Holistic, Relational, Collective**

Holism, relationality, and interconnectedness are fundamental to both Indigenous research methodologies and my Chicano Indigenous identity and onto-epistemology. Relationships are the fundamental element constituting Indigenous methodologies. A social
scientist adopting Western positivist paradigms might attempt to make their research choices random and unrelated to their relationships with their community and lived experiences, but Indigenous methodologies start with an acknowledgment and engagement with the relationships as the foundation of human understanding and knowledge creation. Whereas postmodern Western modalities of analysis aim to deconstruct and dissect data, systems, and structures, Indigenous modalities embrace creation and synthesis, and “this synthesis is about building relationships” (Wilson, 2008, p. 121). Indigenous methodologies are founded on the relational interconnectedness with all things, focused on how collective forces play critical roles in the formation of our ontologies in, and epistemologies of, the world (Kovach, 2010; Lessard et al., 2021; Wilson, 2008).

Wilson (2008) explained how using a circle to represent aspects of our reality or construct, in his case the four elements of his model of Indigenous research methodologies (i.e., ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology) allows us to see how these aspects are equal in their role, power, and influence and interrelated (i.e., a change in one affects the others). These various aspects, like people in a community, or elements in a molecule, have emergent properties and power only present when they are whole. Wilson (2008) stated:

Relationality seems to sum up the whole Indigenous research paradigm to me. Just as components of the paradigm are related, the components themselves all have to do with relationships. The ontology and epistemology are based upon a process of relationships that form a mutual reality. The axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining accountability to these relationships. There, that sums up the whole book in one paragraph! An Indigenous research paradigm is relational and maintains relational accountability. Now, let’s see if I can explain this all in the academic style. (pp. 70–71)
Relational accountability is created and maintained through the dialectic of personal and communal aspects of meaning, understanding, and relevance. I hoped to accomplish this, as Kovach (2021) said, by bundling personal meaningfulness with communal relevance. We can see this kind of reciprocal relationship, In lak’ech, in the manners in which we construct knowledge through the relationship between individual and community. Relational accountability, maintained through the engagement and maintenance of authentic relationships with study-partners, is dependent on mutual reciprocity, both elements reflected in the traditions of narrative inquiry and conversational methods.

**Indigenous Conversational Narrative Inquiry**

Indigenous methodologies are rooted in the relationship between living and telling, between ontology (i.e., ways of being), and epistemology (i.e., ways of naming and knowing; Kovach, 2021). Narrative inquiry, when viewed through Indigenous onto-epistemologies (i.e., the interconnection of our ways of being and knowing), is based on the fundamental relationships between the narrator and the listener (Kovach, 2021; Lessard et al., 2021; Wilson, 2008). Self-reflective narrative inquiry, which focuses on the collective relationship and meaning making of all involved in the research process, can align with and be found in Indigenous methodologies and scholarship (Kovach, 2021). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) anchored their interpretations of narrative inquiry by combining Dewey’s (1938) conceptualization of temporal continuums and those of place-based contexts to create a method looking to the multidimensional nature of human experience and expression. Narrative inquiry’s embrace of this unifying relationship of space and time, how a narrative is shaped both by the time it is being told and the time it is reminiscent of, and the setting, the story-teller, and relationships of those
listening to the story, can be employed as a means to deconstruct and decolonize Western notions of time and space, as described by Smith (1999/2012).

When understood through holistic, relational, and collective lenses, lived experiences of both the storyteller and the listener contextualize narratives and stories. Narratives and stories are couched in the context of the story’s original time and place, as well as the time and place of the current telling of the story. Indigenous narrative and conversational research methods acknowledge the storyteller as an active agent in the world, in relationship with the time and space of the narrative being relayed (Kovach, 2010, 2021; Lessard et al., 2021). The power of narrative when viewed as ultimately relational, as integral to understanding the many relationships that make up our realities, is to “braid past, present, and future generations together” (Kovach, 2021, p. 158).

Table 1 highlights how narrative inquiry embraces stories and narratives as the main unit of analysis in qualitative research and makes space for understanding and considering multidimensional aspects of human experience, moving toward a sense of the holistic embodied potential in research (Bhattacharya, 2017; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Through these attributes, narrative inquiry and conversational research methods align well with Indigenous research methodologies as they can allow for a focus on the relationships in communities and the knowledge and wisdom of the storyteller and elders in Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2010, 2021; Lessard et al., 2021). Narrative inquiry focuses on the narrative structure and incorporation of considerations of time and space. Indigenous narrative methodologies involve employing relational reciprocity, intuitive and holistic data collection and analysis, and collective modes of knowledge creation and accountability, which distinguishes them from Western forms of narrative inquiry. I argue use of testimonios is a form of Indigenous methodology that embraces
holistic, embodied, relational, and collective means of inquiry through intuitive Chicana feminista ways of being and knowing.

Table 1

*Comparing Narrative Inquiry, Testimonios, and Indigenous Methodologies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative inquiry</th>
<th>Testimonios as Indigenous methodologies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Story is basic unit of analysis</td>
<td>● Based on Chicana Feminista epistemologies, and Indigenous ontoepistemologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Structure of story becomes basis for analysis</td>
<td>● Counternarratives as fundamental unit and basis of analysis (CRT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Interested in multidimensional aspects of human experience</td>
<td>● Centers lived (embodied) experiences of storytellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Focused on understanding (not necessarily interrogating or deconstructing)</td>
<td>● Centers the voices of Indigenous, marginalized, racialized, and otherwise oppressed communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Empowers participants as coconstructors of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Honors the status of elders as knowledge keepers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Holistic (mind, body, soul), Relational, and Collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Requires relational accountability, reciprocity, vulnerability, and researcher reflexivity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Bhattacharya, 2017; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006

Sources: Cruz, 2012; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Flores Carmona et al., 2021; Gonzales, 2015; Huber, 2009; Kovach, 2021; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Wilson, 2008

**Testimonios**

The testimonios research methodology embraces communal, reflexive, and holistic forms of story-telling and narrative creation and has a decolonizing purpose in presenting collective counternarratives to the master narrative of structural and systemic racism. The methodological
research tradition of testimonios is essentially an Indigenous research methodology. The research tradition of testimonios, born out of Chicana feminista LatCrit traditions, allows scholars to center their own lived experiences (i.e., onto-epistemologies), and those of their communities, rather than those of the dominant culture. Testimonios (i.e., testimonials) describe decolonizing methodologies, methods, and research products (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Testimonios pass narrative inquiry through the lenses of holism, relationality, and collectivism, and add the disruption of power dynamics by critical race theory (CRT). Testimonios center the counternarrative of the lived experiences of communities of color. Counternarratives (or counterstories) are the narratives of those excluded from the dominant social order opposing the master narrative; counternarratives subvert, dismantle, and transform conditions of exploitation and oppression with the goal of creating liberatory academic and educational spaces (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). These counternarratives give voice to movements and struggles for social justice and human rights. Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) stated, “Feminist epistemology influenced Chicanas and empowered them to develop the narrative format as redemption—as takers of the stories, as readers of the narratives, and as creators of the analysis” (p. 526).

Testimonios embodies Kovach’s (2021) notion of braiding together lived experiences of past, present, and potential futures through uplifting the holistic and collective contexts of the storytellers and scholars.

Testimonios represent the collective voices of communities. Although it may only be one person speaking their story, the story is in the context of their community and gives voice to their community’s struggle (Cruz, 2012; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Testimonios empower scholars of color to disrupt the apartheid of knowledge creation in the Western-dominated academia through our own curation and creation of knowledge based on liberatory, communal, and holistic
factors of being and knowing (Huber, 2009). Testimoinos also reflect the Freirian notions of naming and renaming our world (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012) and the Chicana/e/o call to rewrite racist histories with our own counternarratives (Núñez, 1996). By centering the counternarratives of marginalized and oppressed communities of color, Testimonios turn research and scholarship into decolonizing techniques to create liberatory and humanizing spaces.

Testimonios is the driving methodology of this study, with pláticas (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Gonzalez, 2013) as the primary method of data collection. Both of which are informed by Chicana feminista ways of being and knowing and “mirror a sensibility that allows the mind, body, and spirit to be equally valuable sources of knowledge and embrace the engagement of social transformation” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 365). The holistic embrace of our lived human experiences in relation to our collective subjectivities represented in the Testimonios tradition make it an ideal methodology for this study. Embracing the methodology of Testimonios is fundamentally an act of uplifting our humanity as it is formed and reformed collectively in community, and in this study in relationship with the elders.

**Study-Partners: Elder Participants**

As I noted in my definitions section in Chapter 1, I am embracing the term study-partner in referring to the elders who chose to partner with me in this research study (Motha, 2006). I did my best to center my study-partners’ voices, agency, narratives, and participatory power in this research study, just as Motha (2006) did with the four teachers who partnered with her on her dissertation research study, knowing ultimately the study was colored in large part by my own subjectivities and positionality. Although Motha conducted biweekly afternoon tea meetings at her home with the four teachers, I conducted pláticas with pairs of study-partners. I met with each pair of study partners at least twice and provided asynchronous communication of the
narratives and themes generated from our work in between and after each plática. Some meetings were via Zoom, while others were in-person, informal, and in the homes of the elders, like Motha’s afternoon tea gatherings with her study-partners. Respecting the Chicana/o elders who chose to be part of this study, I asked them to partner with me on the study in alignment with Indigenous protocols of respecting elders in my community, and honoring the lived-experiences, wisdom, knowledge, and narratives they carry. I referred to the study-partners (i.e., participants) of this study as elders. This was in line with respecting their role and place in our community as knowledge-keepers.

Lessard et al. (2021) also made clear reciprocity, mutuality, and building trusted connected relationships are key factors for working in research teams with community elders, especially to reach beyond, or to avoid, the esoteric rhetoric often associated with academic research. The trust the elders had in me to conduct this research study arose from the relationships they have had with my family. The elders I reached out to and agreed to be part of this study have invested years of relationship-building with my family in our Chicana/o community. It is these relationships, and our shared community space and reality, where the relational accountability and reciprocity exist allowing for this study to exist.

I provided opportunities for the elders to engage at various times with each step of the research process: data collection, analysis, and synthesis. Collective collaboration honors the relational principles of Indigenous methodologies. I focused on stories arising from the pláticas that reflect the counternarratives of the elders, the testimonios that arose as representations of the lived experiences of the elders and their communities. I implemented the strategies of inquiry with the goal of collaborating with the elders to represent the narratives of their lives, with a focus on their experiences of education, schooling, CC, and the persistence of their engagement
in social justice activism and community work. I do not see this process as one of extraction of
the narrative, nor do I see myself as the creator of these narratives, but rather as a servant to the
collaborative energy of dialogue and as a facilitator of the expression and synthesis of the
testimonio of each of the elders and the collective narratives and themes from this collective
collaborative process. I focused on the holistic, relational, and collective nature of the stories and
lived experiences expressed by the elders, and I did my best to represent these aspects of their
narratives and lived experiences in the synthesis of this study.

Criteria for Invitation

I used a combination of purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling. Purposively, all
elders I invited to the study have experiences connected to the Chicana/o movement, have lived
(or still live) in San Diego, and have persisted in social, community, political, and/or educational
activism and work in the regions of Southern California and San Diego. I also took cues from the
first plática with Teresa and David Valladolid about potential next elders, as they mentioned
Clarisa Rojas by name, the prominent role of labor organizing, specifically the United Farm
Workers Union, and their current involvement in the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs of San Diego.
From this snowball effect, I invited Clarisa Torres Rojas and Gonzalo Rojas and Linda and
Carlos LeGerrette as the next two pairs of elders to the study. I invited the last pair of elders,
Norma Mena Cazares and Roger Cazares, as part of purposeful and convenience methods.
Norma was a life-long educator, and Roger was an organizer. It was convenient they both had
academic, personal, and professional relationships with my father, Rene Nuñez. All eight elders
in this study had previous relationships with my family, knew my father and mother, and knew
me to an extent, some more than others. This relational criterion aligned with my Indigenous
methodology. I was not aiming to conduct an objective positivist study, but rather a relationally connected and accountable set of pláticas in my community.

I asked the elders to participate in pairs, all four pairs being married couples. I requested this group format to promote collective forms of communication, interaction, and conceptualization, as well as recognizing the supportive nature of the close relationships between each couple, which ultimately allowed for dialogue to flow between the pairs of elders in an organic and holistic manner. My goal in having three of us in each conversational session was to invite collective and communal aspects of our lived experiences into the pláticas (Lessard et al., 2021), rather than have them shaped by the couplet of interviewer and interviewee.

All four pairs of elders agreed to participate in married pairs. I asked each pair of elders if they were more comfortable with in-person or virtual settings for the pláticas together, and then I facilitated 1–1.5-hour conversational sessions through the venue and or location of their choosing. Some elders did ask I go to their homes to facilitate the pláticas. Conducting conversations in the homes of elders is culturally appropriate in Chicana Indigenous settings (Medina, 2014), especially considering the established relationships I have with these pairs of elders.

**Demographics of Elders**

As stated in the last section of the chapter, all eight of the elders who participated in this study have had lives and careers centered around Southern California and San Diego in particular. Combined, the elders had over 185 years of service and experience in educational fields and more than 240 years of experience in organizing (i.e., labor, political, community). Table 2 lists the elders’ preferred ethnic identity labels; approximate years of experience in
various fields; and scope of their geographical experiences from where they were born, went to school, and worked in careers and community action and service.

**Table 2**

Demographics of Elders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elders</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Career experience</th>
<th>Geography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarisa</td>
<td>Chicana, Mexican, Latina</td>
<td>Union organizing: 3 years; Education: 36 years; Community organizing: 20+ years</td>
<td>Los Angeles, San Diego, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonzalo</td>
<td>Chicano, Mexicano, Mexican American</td>
<td>Education college counseling: 35 years; Educational and community organizing: 20+ years</td>
<td>Zacatecas, Mexicali, Mexico; Calexico, El Centro, Los Angeles, San Diego, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Chicano, Mestizo, ( \text{and education: MAAC Project 36 years (30 years as CEO): housing, addiction recovery, education, community development} )</td>
<td>Chihuahua, Mexico; San Diego, USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>Chicana, Indigenous</td>
<td>Community organizing: 50+ years; Social service: EDD 15 years; Education: Southwestern College Counselor 28 years</td>
<td>San Diego, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Chicana, Mestiza, Russian</td>
<td>Union and community organizing: 25+ years; Logistics and shipping: 10 years; Real-estate: 5 years; Education advocacy: CC service clubs 22 years</td>
<td>San Diego, North Carolina, La Paz, San Diego, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Chicano, Mestizo, Chinese, Filipino, Spanish</td>
<td>Union and community organizing: 25+ years; Logistics and shipping: 10 years; Education advocacy: CC Service Clubs 22 years</td>
<td>San Diego, Salinas, La Paz, San Diego, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>Chicana, Mexipina, Mestiza, Filipina, Mexicana</td>
<td>Educational counseling EOP: 5 years; Labor organizing and advocacy: 35 years; Educational leadership: 18+ years</td>
<td>Calexico, El Centro, San Diego, USA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethical Consent and Considerations

Because a goal of decolonizing methodologies was to empower study-partners and considering the relational aspects of Indigenous methodologies, the consent process, though following the expected and required IRB process, had consistent dialogue and transparent communication with all the elders who choose to collaborate in this study. All eight elders agreed to have their real names included in this research study and in potential products of the study. I asked the elders if they would be willing to share their real names through this research study due to their prominence and involvement in the Chicana community.

Data Collection

Data are a gift, quite literally. The word data derives from the Latin word datum, which means “something given” (Kovach, 2021, p 155). In an Indigenous methodology, and way of being, gifting and giving are central to relational interactions. Data in the context of Indigenous methodologies are gifts of story to the researcher and the process “living connections animated through the exchange of story” (Kovach, 2021, p 156), which are critical to Indigenous cultural sustainability and transmission. I did my best to honor the stories of the elders as part of our living culture, knowledge, and history as a Chicana/e/o community.

Pláticas

I invited eight elders in married-couple pairs to participate in four plática encounters with me as the principal method of data collection. Pláticas, guided by abuelita epistemologies (Gonzales, 2015), focus our attention on the knowledge, wisdom, and deep understanding arising from more familial and informal learning processes, especially with our abuelitas and abuelitos
(our elders) and coincides nicely with the Testimonios methodology (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Flores Carmona et al., 2021). A focus on pláticas in personal, familial, and community settings applied to the academic and intellectual contexts of this proposed study (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). The method of pláticas embody five principles: (a) Chicana/x/Latina/x feminista (and other critical) theories to center the voices of marginalized, racialized, and otherwise oppressed communities; (b) empowers participants as coconstructors of knowledge; (c) holistically connects everyday lived experiences to the research process; (d) provides a potential space for spiritual healing, self-discovery, and self-determination; and (e) requires relational reciprocity, vulnerability, and researcher reflexivity (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016).

Pláticas as a method of interaction and participation in research is like open-ended semistructured interviews, but centers lived experiences and informal settings and interactions rather than strict or structured interview protocols. Bhattacharya (2017) noted different interview structures can be applied in many ways and it is also possible to employ more than one structure during the same interview process. Although I did enter each plática with a semistructured interview instrument (see Appendix B), I also approached each session as an open-ended conversation, a dialogue, among the three of us (i.e., myself and two elders). A more open-ended conversational tone was employed to encourage open communication of the elders’ lived experiences and the embrace of holistic narratives. I focused on maintaining a reciprocal, collective, and relational environment to empower the elders as the conveyors of knowledge and wisdom (Lessard et al., 2021; Motha, 2006).

The elders shared their educational experiences as well as moments from their lives contributing to their increased sense of CC, Chicana/o identity, and participation in the Chicana/x/o movement and beyond. They also shared how they gained access to educational
resources, how they perceive the role of relationships, and how these relationships and their development of CC contributed to their work, and continued work, in the Chicana community of San Diego and beyond.

The data collection process included the following instruments and modalities: a plática encounter of 1–1.5 hours long and a second 30-minute plática for member checks and deeper dives through probing extension questions. The pláticas were audio-recorded. All audio recordings were transcribed, first with the assistance of Otter.ai, an AI transcription service, followed by multiple rounds of manual transcription to revise the transcripts for accuracy, clarity, and readability. The transcription process is meant to distill the elders’ voices and interactions into narratives of their lived experiences and our interactions in the pláticas.

**Second Pláticas: Member-Checks**

Member-checks allow for greater confirmation of the credibility of narrative generation and themes from the narratives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In Indigenous methodologies, these checks are part of any interaction entailing using, curating, replicating, or reproducing the stories told by a community elder, whether stories about their own lives or otherwise. After I transcribed the initial conversations, started multiple iterations of the coding process, and curated initial long-form narratives for each elder’s story, I shared these transcriptions, narratives, and initial emergent themes with each pair of elders. I also invited each pair of elders to either give feedback via email or to join me for a 30-minute member-check meeting. These member-check meetings allowed for establishment of credibility of the narratives of each elder and initial generative themes, while also allowing each elder to give input on potential revisions, additions, and omissions. I also asked clarifying questions during these 30-minute member-check meetings. These questions were primarily about clarifying details from what the elders shared, but also
allowed for the continued establishment of credibility of the emergent themes and narratives based on the elders’ responses.

**Instruments**

The primary instruments for data collection were (a) the initial set of questions and prompts were expanded from the research questions of the study, to guide the conversations with study-partners during the first pláticas of 1–1.5 hours each; and (b) the second set of questions and prompts were constructed specifically for each set of study-partners. This instrument was constructed based on the first few rounds of coding and generative category and theme production. Questions were generated to elicit deeper dives into areas emergent during the transcription and coding process. Additionally, summaries of the overall narratives from each study-partner were presented prior to the second plática as part of the member check process.

**Participation Process**

After my proposal and IRB were approved, I reached out to potential elders in the Chicana community of San Diego to officially invite them to participate in the study. My plática encounters were facilitated between December 20, 2022, and January 24, 2023. After each plática I transcribed the audio recordings, and through these rounds of transcription and narrative refinement, I started the process of examining the narratives for stories of CC development and counter-story-telling (i.e., narratives in response to the oppressive experiences of the elders). I then conducted various rounds of grounded theory analysis (i.e., initial coding, category elucidation, scanning for emergent themes, and analytical memoing). As explained in more detail in the section on data analysis, I employed a three stage testimonios methodology, using grounded theory coding and data analysis methods, collaborative member-check pláticas, and final stage analysis, to engage with the elder’s testimonios and help to draw out the emergent
themes, patterns, and findings (Charmaz et al., 2018; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Huber & Villanueva, 2019). See Table 3 for the data collection timeline.

**Table 3**

*Data Collection Timeline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial pláticas</td>
<td>December–January 2022–2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial analysis phase: transcription, counter-narrative curation, coding, categories, initial emergent themes, analytical memoing</td>
<td>January–March 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second pláticas: member-checks</td>
<td>March–April 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative data analysis phase</td>
<td>March–May 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final data analysis phase</td>
<td>April–June 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis of conclusions</td>
<td>April–July 2023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

A creative embrace of the messiness and complexities of human understandings, culture, and stories was vital in uplifting decolonizing Indigenous methodologies and their guidance through the various critical qualitative and Indigenous analysis processes I embraced in this study (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kovach, 2021; Law, 2004; Smith, 1999/2012; Wilson, 2008). Looking through the lens of the medicine wheel and In Lak’ech, I have embraced all four modalities of human existence (i.e., physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual), hopefully in ways allowing for evidently opposing forces and ideas (i.e., analytical and holistic) to co-exist in interdependence and interconnectedness. Graham Smith, a Moari scholar, in an interview with Kovach (2021), argued Indigenous scholars need to use any useful methodological and theoretical tools available, including Western ones proving useful. Kovach (2021) provided theoretical and metaphorical examples to conceptualize the use of both Western and Indigenous research tools and lenses, including Bartlett et al.’s (2012) “two-eyed seeing” approach
envisioning one eye seeing through each methodological means—Indigenous and Western. Kovach (2021) also cited Anzaldúa’s (1987/2012) use of nepantla, a Nahuatl concept of in-between spaces, of the confluence of opposing or oppositional forces to create an in-between space. Maybe there is always a need for “two-eyed seeing” when we, as Indigenous scholars, as scholars of color, are operating in the confines of Western academic institutions. To operate in manners fitting the criteria of the academy, we must embrace the nature of our bicultural realities, and to do this without acknowledging, honoring, and centering our Indigenous roots in this academic process is alienating and harmful. To be frank, this academic PhD process has been one of the most difficult academic experiences of my life, and although I understand this should be the case to some degree because PhD is the most advanced degree, I have had a hard time discerning which elements of my struggle have been healthy, and which have been harmful. During this last phase of dissertation writing, I have struggled to fully articulate myself, my spirit, to holistically be present in my work. I have struggled with depression and anxiety, stalling my work during many iterations and instances. I have struggled to find a home in the coding and analysis process, searching through texts and sources, finding time and again references to analytical coding processes did not speak to the intuitive and holistic processes and synthesis I felt called to employ based on my Chicano Indigenous onto-epistemology and embrace of Testimonios methodology and Chicana feminista epistemology. I was worried my analytical process, or at least the articulation of it in these pages, would be judged lacking, insufficient. Hopefully, I drew on Anzaldúa’s (2012) articulation of nepantla space, as she calls on Coyolxauhqui, Mexica moon goddess, to help us conceptualize and bring forth the merging of disparate pieces, the healing of severing wounds, and hopefully the recreation of life, body,
mind, and spirit. Akin, again, to In Lak’ech, we can see these contradictory and oppositional forces coming together, and through their differences and tensions, create new identities, realities, and knowledge.

For this study, I employed Indigenous methodologies of storying and Chicana feminista Testimonios in the synthesis of holistic (counter)narratives of Chicana/o elders, in parallel with a critical theory-driven grounded theory qualitative analysis (Charmaz et al., 2018; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Huber & Villanueva, 2019). In this narrative and counternarrative synthesis, I did my best to embrace wholeness to emphasize principles of focusing on things as they are, as they present themselves, in their entirety. I embraced this idea of wholeness, both as an expression of Indigenous methodologies and to talk-back to “western structures of superiority of knowledge construction” (Bhattacharya, 2021, p. 179) and the superiority of certain methods passed off as acceptable and rigorous (Law, 2004). These two manners of analysis, grounded theory analysis ultimately being a process of breaking data down into smaller parts to find emergent themes and theories, and Indigenous Testimonios analysis of embracing the whole narrative with its own context and potential for meaning, seem to be at odds at times, but I do believe can complement each other, as so many dualities can (e.g., night and day; cold and hot; light and dark; whole and part).

I have attempted to embody and apply an Indigenous Chicana/e/o methodology, inspired by Testimonio, Chicana feminista epistemologies, and nepantla (Anzaldúa, 1987/2012), to embrace shared liminal spaces with the elders, and, through their narratives and voices, be open to the themes emergent from our collaboration. My goal was to embrace Indigenous and Testimonios driven analysis, which embraces holistic and intact (counter)narratives as the units
of analyses. Hopefully, this process is clear in its subsequent presentation and in the final products in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Testimonios and Grounded Theory**

Testimonios fit well in the context of grounded theory construction (Charmaz et al., 2018) allowing for an embrace of counternarratives (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Huber, 2009; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012) and a focus on relationships, reciprocity, and mutuality while employing an Indigenous lens in a holistic, relational, collective, and humanizing manner in the research process (Kovach, 2010, 2021; Lessard et al., 2021). The ultimate goal in employing these critical qualitative methods is to center the Indigenous wisdom and knowledge of the elders as they share the tools they have used to dismantle and decolonize oppression in their lives (Bhattacharya, 2017; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Espinoza-Gonzalez et al., 2014; Huber, 2009; Kuntz, 2015; Lessard et al., 2021; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Smith, 1999/2012; Wilson, 2008).

Grounded theory is a form of analysis based on philosophies of pragmatism and constructivism, which took methods of inductive and abductive reasoning, primarily used in quantitative methods, and applied them to qualitative data sets, creating a wholly new form of research and analysis useful in social justice inquiry (Charmaz et al., 2018). Charmaz et al. (2018) made the case a constructivist inspired version of grounded theory can be used in social justice scholarship, as it “(1) rejects claims of objectivity; (2) locates researchers’ generalizations (3) considers researchers’ and participants’ relative positions and standpoints; (4) emphasizes reflexivity; (5) adopts sensitizing concepts such as inequality, privilege, equity, and oppression; and ( 6) remains alert to variation and difference” (p. 413).
Standard dominant Western paradigms of research and analysis, especially those with positivist leaning methodologies and pressures, are not always equipped to allow for the messiness, nuances, and multitude of social and human realities, as positivist methods are searching for objectivity, constantly looking for singular objective generalizable answers (Law, 2004). Critical theory calls into question the entire premise of Western ideas of objectivity in the social sciences, exposing them as justifications for the dehumanization of people of color, attempting to masquerade as a truth and knowledge beyond criticism (Núñez, 1996). Graham Smith, again in Kovach (2021), articulated how preposterous it is for Western social science to claim objectivity when all research endeavors, and especially colonial ones perpetuating genocide, violence, and exploitation of communities of color, are based on the worldview of the researcher. I have made clear and transparent how I embrace a Chicano Indigenous worldview and rather than attempt to be objective, or to reach for objective truths in social science research, I have employed testimonio methodology and grounded theory analysis as a means to express and employ my onto-epistemic lens, to help synthesize deeper understandings of how to support and develop social justice activism and the development of CC in Chicana/e/o communities and beyond.

One of the main concepts of grounded theory is abductive reasoning, openness to the multitude of possibilities qualitative data presents, with the goal of moving between data and theory (potentially envisioned as a form of praxis), and allowing theories to arise, rather than trying to pin one theory down as the “correct” theory (Charmaz et al., 2018). I have routinely returned to Anzaldúa’s (1987/2012) conceptualization of nepantla and called on the inspiration of Coyolxauhqui and In lak’ech to help me embrace these shared liminal spaces arising during a
grounded theory analysis and especially when focusing on the potential for Indigenous and Western modalities to be operationalized together (Kovach, 2021).

At one extreme, some theorists call for grounded research to forgo construction of a theoretical framework prior to conducting the data collection. Thornberg (2012) disagreed with this extreme form of constructivism, calling instead on informed grounded theory, where our theoretical frameworks are used as our lenses through which we perceive the data and look for phenomena, nuances, and guide our imagining beyond the data as well. The primary lens I have embraced is driven by my Indigenous onto-epistemologies and the qualities of holism, relationality, and collective interconnection. Although I have developed a theoretical framework (i.e., humanizing pedagogies) and a literature review through which to envision and situate this study, I also focused on cultivating and maintaining my openness to emergent themes (and narratives) during and after the iterative processes of data analysis and after synthesis of the elders’ testimonios and findings of the study, informing not only changes, revisions, and additions to my literature review and theoretical framework, but potentially new theories and conceptualizations from the narratives. My goal was to strike a balance between grounded theory-driven qualitative data analysis, which involves dissecting narratives through coding, and Testimonios driven analysis, which embraces whole counternarratives as the units of analyses.

**Creativity, Art, and Iteration**

Saldaña (2021) stated, “There is a lot of art to social science” (p. 20). Saldaña examined the breadth of innovation in our application and use of various modalities in relation to how we apply ourselves to our research and manipulation of data and information to form knowledge. Saldaña, like Bhattacharya (2017), espoused a call to employ our whole authentic selves in our research. This call to employ all our human faculties in our research process resonates with the
holistic and interconnected aspects of my Chicano Indigenous onto-epistemology. Saldaña’s license to apply all my creativity to my dissertation was freeing. My embrace of the potential for liminal-nepantla-spaces is possible through creativity, through an openness to the messiness of our human conditions and realities and to research processes as well. Law (2004) encouraged creativity, encourages an embrace of messiness, complexity, and nuance that may escape conventional standard Western research paradigms and methods. Law contended we can avoid mechanistic automation and expectations of certainty, stability, and universalism by looking at methods and methodology more as a way of being rather than a set of mechanical instructions. Law encouraged entering social science work with happiness, generosity, and creativity. Embracing the nuance of nepantla, the duality and interconnectedness of In Lak’ech, and the holism and collective unification of the medicine wheel are more about my attempt to embody these methods and methodologies of research resonating with my spiritual and cultural ways of being and knowing. These holistic applications are my embrace of creativity and heart-centered practices in generous ways during the data analysis processes.

I also see elements of the notion of Tezcatlipoca, a Mexica philosophy/theoretical framework, a personification of consciousness, darkness, and shadow, represented by a smoking mirror, in my interpretation of the grounded theory coding and analysis processes. According to Saldaña (2021), the codes and the coding process in grounded theory qualitative analysis are informed by the researcher’s own positionality, from our background and community knowledge, and the analysis process is passing the data, the interactions, notes, and experiences through our lens, from our own perspectives on the material, and through our filters of culture, language, and thinking. As cited in Saldaña, O’Connor (2007) creatively described the nuances of how our worldviews and lenses distort and color our perceptions and the coding of data in
qualitative analysis. As an obscured obsidian mirror, Tezcatlipoca represents our consciousness, both as a metaphor of how we see ourselves in each other, like In lak’ech (you are my other me), while also recognizing in our reflections through our own consciousness we distort each other and the reality we see. In this manner, I can see how well Saldaña’s suggestions of an embrace of our positionality fit with my own Chicano Indigenous frameworks of understanding and being. I happily applied his call to embrace our cultural, linguistic, and personal lenses and perspectives to make meaning of the data we collected.

The testimonio and grounded theory analysis processes and research synthesis have not been a linear process, but one encompassing cyclical iterations between (counter)narrative synthesis, coding, categorization, and thematic generation, held together with analytical memo writing (Saldaña, 2021). During this process of cyclical analysis, I have been looking for parallels and differences between narratives, and, although I used the theoretical lenses detailed in my theoretical framework and literature review to search for categories and themes (specifically maletas [Núñez, 1994], CCW [Yosso, 2005], and Watts et al.’s [2011] formulation of the elements of CC), I have done my best to be open to the nuances and complexities integral aspects of our human experiences, constructs, and existences. I did my best to create space to move slowly, employing “the stop” (Law, 2004, p. 9) to be open to the holism and spirit of narratives and stories from outside of my understanding and theoretical lenses. Honestly, this was exceedingly difficult, as I found the timelines, miscommunications, and expectations of the institutional structures of the academy were not open to this holistic creative process. Thankfully, my chair, and my committee have been extremely supportive, and continued to encourage me to take the breaks I needed, and to follow my intuition and holistic creative process.
Processes

I used a testimonio driven data analysis phased process, as described by Huber and Villanueva (2019), which has three main stages of data analysis: preliminary, collaborative, and final. During all three stages of this process I wrote analytical memos, which helped my reflective, creative, and analytic processes. The first stage of analysis involved open coding, during which I employed three types of coding—in vivo, concept, and holistic coding (Saldaña, 2021). I started first with in vivo, or literal coding, as this method honors the voice of the participants as primary to meaning making. I then proceeded with second and third cycles employing concept and holistic coding methods to see beyond simply the literal expressions and into the conceptual and holistic themes. My coding process was more intuitive than explicit throughout most of the cycles. This cycle of coding was valuable in seeing more clearly the formation of new perspectives in the elders’ lives, in relation to their development of CC, and in noting the values, beliefs, and attitudes that stayed consistent, or were reinforced by the values and beliefs they learned and gained from their families, and they carried in their maletas of CCW.

Throughout these cycles of coding I wrote analytic memos, primarily about the various codes, trends, and patterns I was seeing. I also wrote when I got frustrated, confused, or otherwise lost in the breadth and scope of the data. I wrote memos about my own processes, my emotional reactions, and about musings seemingly unrelated to the main codes, categories, and eventually themes arising out of the analysis process. During this stage of analysis, in-between and during the cycles of coding, I reread the transcripts multiple times, immersing myself in the stories, cleaning up verbiage for clarity and readability, and allowing for breaks between reading transcripts to digest the narratives. I conducted this reading and rereading process multiple times
to allow myself to deepen my understanding of each of the pláticas, and the lived experiences and narratives of the elders held in these transcripts.

As the open coding continued, I condensed codes into categories, and, eventually, preliminary themes and relationships between categories, codes, and elders’ stories emerged (Saldaña, 2021). As a part of the subsequent stages of coding, I printed out physical copies of the transcripts and highlighted them based on the emerging categories and themes. I then created a matrix of the categories of codes in a Google sheet. I used the lenses of critical race theory (CRT), CCW (community cultural wealth/maletas), and Indigenous methodologies of holism, relationality, and collectivism, as my filters during these coding, categorizing, memoing, and theming processes. I conducted thematic comparisons with the goal of letting narratives exist intact to speak to the themes and findings of the study holistically (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Kovach, 2021). During this stage, and throughout the data analysis processes of this study, I did my best to embrace holistic and intuitive methods, acknowledging the organic nature of my relationship to the data, ideas, and emergent themes with the goal of uplifting the narratives of the elders (Law, 2004; Moustakas, 1990; Wilson, 2008).

During the second stage of the Testimonio process, I employed a collaborative form of member checks (Huber & Villanueva, 2019), during which I provided each pair of elders with the cleaned-up transcripts of our pláticas, drafts of their synthesized testimonios, and the preliminary emerging themes of the study. I asked the elders how they would like to connect and communicate regarding this material. Some elders asked to meet again in person, others responded asynchronously through email correspondence. I also asked the elders clarifying questions regarding their narratives and lived experiences and asked them to provide their input and interpretation of the emerging themes of the study.
As part of this collaborative stage of the Testimonios analysis process my chair asked me to employ a trustworthiness\textsuperscript{13} instrument. I created a Google form containing 16 quotes from the elders in total, eight codes containing one theme each of which I asked participants to respond with the codes were present in the quotes, and eight quotes with multiple themes. I asked participants to respond with which themes were present in each (see Appendix C). I sent out the form, along with my codebook (see Appendix D) and a brief explanation of the request to my committee members and colleagues of mine in our doctoral program. The responses confirmed with more than 98% accuracy the codes and themes were present in the excerpts of the elders’ testimonios. All participants responded by picking at least one of the same codes in all eight quotes in the first set of quotes; the responses in this first section matched my coding process at a rate of 93%. Seven of eight of the second set of quotes, of which I asked participants to respond with which of the six themes in my codebook were present, had all respondents respond in agreement with at least one of the themes. Only one quote had an 80% response to one of the themes. The responses to the thematic matches, to the second set of quotes, demonstrated how nuanced and complex the testimonios of the elders are. I met with one of my colleagues to discuss this trustworthiness process and he explained after reading the quotes and feeling the power of the narratives the elders shared, he did his best to honor these narratives in his reflective process before responding with which themes were present. He said he could see how many of the themes were present. He did his best to choose themes and codes matching his interpretation of the narratives, as he did not want to devalue them in any way. He acknowledged how nuanced the narratives were and how many of them could be seen or interpreted to contain multiple themes.

\textsuperscript{13} Although trustworthiness was the term used during this process, I am drawn more to the use of “transparency” as a means to demonstrate the process through which I conducted analysis.
This trustworthiness process was a valuable part of the collaborative stage of testimonio analysis. Through this process I made much of my intuitive coding and analysis processes visible through my codebook and the trustworthiness instrument. With the dialogue with my chair and with my doctoral colleague I was able to confirm the nuances I was seeing in the complexity of the themes and the overlap between was an accurate interpretation and portrayal of the testimonios of the elders and the findings of this study. This process helped me to clarify many of the themes and findings and present them with more clarity and transparency in Chapter 5.

The final stage of data analysis involved incorporating the input from the member-check interactions with the elders into the corpus of the data, to embrace a collective and relational synthesis of the testimonios (Huber & Villanueva, 2019). Ultimately, this analysis process culminated in the synthesis of the findings of this study and the eight testimonios of the elders in Chapter 4, which inform the conclusions, recommendations, and implications of the study (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Through the testimonio and grounded theory analysis of the elders’ testimonios, I was able to formulate holistic themes leading to the articulation of the findings of this study.

**Answerability**

Regarding answerability, which is the validity, credibility, and triangulation of data, I am drawn to Patel’s (2015) description of “research being at its core a project of knowledge, is more accurately understood as entities that are not wholly individualistic and ownable projects” but “should be answerable to the referents of learning, knowledge as ontological, and context” (p. 73). Answerability can be understood as collective contributions of knowledge, actions, and agendas explicitly used to dismantle coloniality and create spaces less about “individualism, ranking, and status” (Patel, 2015, p. 73) than they are about transparently expressing collective
and relational ways of knowing and learning. Patel explained answerability in research can be explicit expressions of how knowledge is constructed in conversation with and in response to the knowledge and utterances preceding it and gifted as data as part of the research endeavor.

Patel (2015) explained learning is about transformation, about letting go of solid ground and allowing for the unknown to take hold. This notion of learning reminds me of Freire’s (1970) notion of praxis and true dialogue connected to letting go of assured spaces and embracing the liminal and temporal nature of our existence to reach for new knowledge and ways of being. My father used the metaphor of a balance of scales and asked his students to imagine a scale tipped in one direction and teetering back and forth as it regained balance; in this regaining of balance, we find some of our deepest learning. Patel also acknowledged the holistic nature of learning, a notion well beyond cognition, beyond solely mental capacities and experiences, to lived experiences, to physical, emotional, and spiritual elements of being and knowing. Patel (2015) sees learning as a constant flux between becoming and unbecoming, of constant inquiry through praxis and flux. Knowledge can be viewed in a very similar fashion, as temporal, contextual, and liminal, prioritizing generalizable findings less and searching instead for the specific subjectivities speaking to knowing and being in the moment and place, with the specific people involved in its creation, understanding, and articulation.

The answerability, credibility, and validity of the research findings and synthesis can all tied essentially to relational accountability. In one of the chapters in Wilson (2008), Cora explained the answerability and trustworthiness process she had connected with people she had known for years as part of her research. Her family was part of a community and the elders she connected with were members of the same community (Wilson, 2008). They may not have known her personally, but they knew her through connections, relationships, through the
community. They knew and trusted her family, and she would go on to be part of the same community during and after the research process, creating a sense of lived responsibility and accountability to the community. It was through these same kinds of community relationships that I knew all the elders who agreed to participate in this study. They all knew and trusted my family, as we have been and still are engaged in community activities, settings, and events. Some knew me and my family more intimately than others. In fact, during the middle stages of this study, in between some of the member check meetings, and amid the data analysis and writing stages, I ended up seeing 6 of the 8 elders at two different community events in a day outside of the formal research setting. My answerability and responsibility to my community during and after the completion of this study go well beyond the black and white pages of this written study.

Being answerable to learning means acknowledging, at all instances, the transformation in me because of my engagement with the research, and the potentials for transformation and learning from the collective synthesis of the research products. My answerability to learning, knowledge, and context is founded upon the relational accountability with the eight elders, my dissertation committee, scholars and experts, and community members (inside and outside of the academy) who engage with this study in its forms and presentations. This relational and collective accountability and answerability has been a constant companion to my data analysis process, and so was the acknowledgment of the fleeting, incomplete, and transitive nature of all knowledge, of all being and knowing, including this study and its products. In using relational accountability as the basis of this study, I “must ask how the analysis of these ideas will help to further build relationships. What relationships help to hold the ideas together?” (Wilson, 2008, p. 119).
Limitations of the Research Methodology

This study focused on the narratives of eight Chicana/o elders living in the San Diego region. I used a testimonios methodology and grounded theory analysis process to generate themes and holistic narratives, testimonios, based on what the elders shared. The purpose of this study was not to make broad overarching generalizations about Chicana/x/o populations, but I do hope to help produce deeper understandings of the factors helping create conscientization, with the cultivation of CC. This study is limited to the lives, knowledge, and understandings of myself and the elders who agreed to partner in the study and our collective communities and ancestors who have immeasurably contributed to our worldviews, understandings, and learning processes. I strongly believe the collaborative and collective nature of this study has produced emergent narratives and themes impossible for us to imagine and create individually.

Summary

Chapter 3 restated the purpose of the study and the research questions. I presented my positionality as a Chicano Indigenous scholar, situating myself in the research, to make clear my connection to Chicana/x/o Indigenous methodologies. Chapter 3 explored various articulations and requirements of Indigenous methodologies and the tradition of Testimonios as the primary paradigms of this study. The chapter articulated my desire to center the agency and voice of my study-partners (Motha, 2006), the elders who choose to partner in this study, to honor Indigenous methodologies and protocols in an embrace of the development of relational accountability with these elders. I made clear the rationale for inviting potential elders to participate and collaborate. In this chapter, I described how I perceive data collection as a form of gifting, receiving gifts from the Chicana/o elders from my community. I also connected the data collection and analysis processes to my understanding of embracing the nepantla nature, the in-between, of operating as
an Indigenous scholar in Western institutions and research expectations, and embracing the power and beauty of this duality, the duality of operating with decolonizing methods while also recognizing the value in many Western-derived research methods.

Chapter 4 presents the testimonios of the elders, with the findings and major themes of the study woven throughout them. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study, including the data, narratives, and major themes emerging from this collaborative process. Chapter 6 presents the discussion, implications for practical application, potential further research, and conclusions.
CHAPTER 4: TESTIMONIOS

This chapter provides a brief introduction and summary of the purpose of the study, research questions, and lists of the major themes of the study. The chapter then moves into a presentation of the testimonios of the four pairs of elders, eight in total, who agreed to share their stories with us. As described in the previous chapter, the testimonios gifted to us by these elders were viewed through an Indigenous Chicana/e/o\textsuperscript{14} onto-epistemology, using the research traditions of Testimonios, Pláticas, and Abuelita epistemologies to center the elders’ narratives and stories (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Flores Carmona et al., 2021; Gonzales, 2015). The bulk of this chapter is testimonios of each of the elders, in their own words, so we may bear witness to their lived experiences. The major themes and findings of the study summarized in the next section weave throughout each of the testimonios presented in this chapter. In presenting the data in this long-form narrative format, I embraced a holistic approach by presenting each elder’s testimonio intact, informed by Indigenous methodologies, and contributing to a collage of meaning (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Wilson, 2008). This chapter uses the Indigenous “eye” within the “two-eyed seeing” methodology employed in this study (Kovach, 2021; Bartlett et al., 2012). This chapter serves as an Indigenous presentation of the knowledge shared by the elders in narrative testimonio format to help readers see and feel the holistic, relational, and intuitive way these testimonios contributed the knowledge put forth by this study and so readers can interact with and make their own interpretations of the testimonios themselves (Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008).

\textsuperscript{14} I used various endings to Chicana and Latina, including Chicax, Chicane, and Chicano at various times to support the inclusion of all our relatives who identify as gender non-binary and all other forms of gender identity, and to honor the elders and community members who identify with the endings of -a and -o, such as Latina/o and Chicana/o.
Research Questions

The research questions for this study were based on the confluence of the literature and the acknowledgement of my own personal, familial, and community connection to better understand development of critical consciousness within Chicana/o elders in the region of San Diego, California. The purpose of this study was to inquire with elders in the Chicana community of San Diego who have lived through the Chicano movement. It asked about their lived experiences, the formation of their political identities, subjectivities, and critical consciousness, and what they see as critical in creating and maintaining more access to social justice experiences and environments for their communities. The three questions driving this study were:

1. What factors shaped and affected the development of critical consciousness for the elders?

2. What role did/do relationships (familial, community, and institutional) play in the elders’ access to higher education and the development of their critical consciousness?

3. What is the elders’ vision for the continuation and support of social justice and critical consciousness development?

The major themes in the testimonios of this study, based on the research questions are authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999); critical action, critical reflection, and political efficacy (Watts et al., 2011); gatekeeping (Freire, 1970; Valenzuela, 1999); and Maletas de community cultural wealth (CCW; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Núñez, 1994; Yosso, 2005). For definitions of these themes and their correlation to the codes within each theme please see the codebook in Appendix B. The findings of this study, based on the research questions, fall into three main categories: (a)
factors of critical consciousness (CC) development, (b) the role of relationships, and (c) the elders’ contributions to the continuation and support of social justice and critical consciousness development.

Factors contributing to the elders’ development of CC included their participation in social justice movements, organizations, and spaces in conjunction with their critical reflection connecting their own lived experiences to their participation in critical action. The development of their CC was complex and nuanced and involved various relationships between critical reflection, critical action, and their development and expression of political and social responsibility and drive to make positive changes toward increased social justice.

Relationships impacted the elders’ access to educational opportunities and their development of CC. Supportive relationships with school personnel and family and community members contributed to the elders’ increased access to higher education opportunities and to their attainment and achievement in these settings. Familial, cultural, and community forms of capital and wealth were also present in their lives, according to their testimonios, which contributed to (a) their access to and engagement in educational opportunities, (b) their engagement in social justice spaces and movements, and (c) their overall development of CC. There were also negative experiences with school personnel that led to gatekeeping, exclusion, and experiences of racism, sexism, and oppression for the elders.

The elders shared their understanding of love as action, the importance of listening to increase our ability to have dialogue and create connections, and the powerful role teaching history has for youth of color. Various elders shared diverse ways to understand the role of love, care, and support in educational and community spaces. Elders also shared how they learned to “reach across the table” to communicate across political and social divisions. Furthermore, the
elders shared about how learning critical history through Chicano studies and other ethnic studies courses and spaces impacted their own development of CC and identity, and how important it is for educators and community activists to continue to learn and teach critical history.

**Eight Testimonios of Critical Consciousness Development**

The findings, summarized in the prior section, circulate throughout the testimonios of the eight elders. This more circular format of findings presentation focuses on synthesis rather than on deconstruction (Wilson, 2008). The goal of this presentation style is to center the holistic lived experiences of the elders’ while providing rich context for the analytical and intellectual findings present in this study. The gift of testimonio allows us to see the themes and findings of the study like strands of sinew woven throughout and among the narratives and stories of the elders. This presentation style is more circular in nature and may not align to the linear expectations of Western research findings and writing.

The testimonios of each elder presented bear witness to their narratives, counter-narratives, and stories, first as Chicana/o elders sharing aspects of their lives with us, and secondly, as illustrations of the dynamic findings related to critical consciousness formation, educational access, and social justice action. Although clear themes and patterns can be seen across the testimonios of the elders, unique nuances and details exist throughout each elder’s testimonios. Our process—mine and the elders’—of analysis, dialogue, and synthesis was also dynamic; we each saw aspects of the testimonios, themes, and patterns differently. As part of the second pláticas with each pair of elders, we discussed and dialogued about each of their testimonios and the various stories, events, and themes within them, and I asked the elders to speak to the clarity, validity, and their own resonance with the findings. This dynamism reflects our embrace of the holistic, relational, and collective nature of pláticas within a Chicana
Indigenous methodology of being and knowing. In conducting this research together, we, the elders and I, continued to develop our own critical consciousness through dialogue and through plática.

I hope you, as the reader, find this style of data presentation brings the elders’ stories to life by embracing creation and synthesis, as opposed to dissection and deconstruction (Wilson, 2008). I hope you enjoy the enriching testimonios of the elders as their stories illustrate how relational, collective, and social forces in their lives have dynamically shaped their development of critical consciousness and their continued commitments to social justice.

Clarisa and Gonzalo

Clarisa Torres Rojas was born in Los Angeles to two Mexican parents with vastly different family histories. Clarisa’s maternal grandparents were from Monterey, Mexico, and were among the landed elite whose lands were confiscated and redistributed after the Mexican Revolution of 1910. They moved to New Mexico with her mother, and then eventually to Los Angeles. Clarisa’s paternal grandparents were from Campeche, Mexico, and were educators who supported the revolution. After the turmoil and instability created by the Mexican Revolution, Clarisa’s paternal grandparents moved to Phoenix, Arizona. Eventually her father and his entire family relocated to Los Angeles for employment considerations. Although neither of her parents’ families were Catholic, which was rare for Mexican families at the time, her parents met at a “socio,” an organization of Latinos promoting social activities, through a nondenominational church. Using her father’s veteran’s benefits to qualify for a home loan, Clarisa’s family moved out of East Los Angeles to Montebello and remained there until she was in 10th grade when they moved to Whittier. Clarisa graduated from Whittier High School. Through her father’s guidance, she went on to San Diego State University (SDSU) for her Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree.
Clarisa started to work in the trades and organize with unions. Although she learned a lot through her 3 years of working in electronics factories, she had an allergic reaction to the chemicals used, later determined to be carcinogenic, and had to change careers. Clarisa became a teacher in 1979 and served as a reading specialist for 21 years until 2000. At that time, she was encouraged to apply for regional director of the California Reading and Literature Project (CRLP) at San Diego State University—an intersegmental statewide professional development organization with offices on various university campuses throughout California. Five years later she became the CRLP Co-Executive State Director headquartered at University of California, San Diego (UCSD). She served in this capacity for 15 years.

Gonzalo Rojas was born in Zacatecas, Mexico, shortly before his family (i.e., parents and his mother’s parents—his abuelitos) moved to Mexicali, and then eventually to Calexico due his mother’s U.S. citizenship. Gonzalo graduated from high school in Calexico and with the help of an English teacher, went on to University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) where he earned his BA. Gonzalo attended the National Youth and Liberation Conference in Denver, in March of 1969 and the meeting of the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education in Santa Barbara in April of 1969 where El Plan de Santa Barbara was drafted, the founding document of El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). Juan Gomez Quinones convinced Gonzalo to go to San Diego to help for a few years in 1970 and has continued living in San Diego to this day.

Gonzalo completed his Master of Arts (MA) through the Community Based Block (CBB) program at SDSU. He served as a college administrator at SDSU for over 30 years, for 15 years in the Early Outreach Program (EOP) department and then served for over 15 years as director of the Department of Student Outreach and Recruitment. Gonzalo spearheaded the creation of the
Compact for Success, a program that guarantees acceptance for students in the Sweetwater School District who meet specific requirements, to bolster Latina/e/x/o enrollment at SDSU from within San Diego County. Gonzalo has served on numerous boards, initiated, and participated in numerous protests and demonstrations, including chairing the local committee that organized the 2006 march and protested the antiimmigration laws in 2006, ultimately the largest public march and demonstration in San Diego’s history.

I have known Clarisa and Gonzalo my whole life. They individually met my father long before I was born, both as college students—Clarisa at San Diego State University (SDSU) and Gonzalo at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Clarisa and Gonzalo ended up both living and working in San Diego, California, where they stayed in regular contact with my father and my family. I consider both Clarisa and Gonzalo family, like a tíá and tíó, as I have grown up with them consistently present in my life. Although prior to this research study it had been a few years since I had seen them in person, my mother was in regular contact with Clarisa. Both Clarisa and Gonzalo worked as educators for most of their professional careers. They are both now retired, living in San Diego. I started by asking them to share about their experiences of education and schooling.

**Clarisa: Lifting the Veil of Assimilation**

**Educators and Organizers - Clarisa’s Maleta (Suitcase) de Family Wealth and History.** Clarisa responded to the question about her experiences of education and schooling by sharing first about her family’s relationship to education, politics, and organizing. She stated:

I come from a family of educators, on both sides of my family. My grandmother, on my mother’s side, was a school teacher. My grandfather and grandmother on my dad’s side probably had the most influence. They were educators and political activists in
Campeche, Mexico. My grandfather rose to the level of Secretary of Education in Campeche and later served temporarily as governor. At the time, this was the transition after Porfirio Diaz, when there were like seven or eight presidents that followed within a short time period. My grandfather, while he was in Mexico, befriended Marianna Montessori. He was very interested in Montessori’s work. He corresponded extensively with her, and he translated her work from Italian to Spanish, and raised my two oldest aunts and uncles, a family of six, under her system. Then, the political writing was on the wall and there was a bounty put on his head in another turmoil. So, he wrote to the school department of education in Washington, DC. He wanted to know the best schools in the southwest and they directed him to Phoenix, Arizona. They got on a boat, he was arrested, my grandmother gave away her jewelry, and they let him go. So that’s where he, and his family, his wife [Clarisa’s grandmother] and five of his siblings, relocated to, where he was told the best schools were. He was much older than my grandmother, and he was unable to find work of any kind in the U.S. So, he was recruited to go back to Mexico, and continued working there. He organized and educated many of the rural communities. He was sent to Chiapas. My grandfather was one of Genaro Vasquez Rojas’ teachers, a famous revolutionary. My grandfather ended up staying there and supporting his family from there, in Mexico. Then right when he was about to retire and come back to the states, he developed kidney disease and died.

Clarisa’s family had a rich legacy of formal education in Mexico, contributing to the knowledge and tools in her cultural maleta (suitcase). Clarisa returned to these tools—this cultural, educational, and intellectual community capital—multiple times during her testimonio.
Yet even with this legacy and with the educational capital they held, the racism of the United States was unflinching. Clarisa explained about her dad’s mother. She stated:

She was a renaissance woman. She could talk about anything in English or Spanish. She could talk about literature, music; politics was the heart of her life. You know, she could talk about almost anything, and yet she couldn’t find work in the States. She ended up becoming a housekeeper. It was funny, one of the rich families she worked for in Arizona, they were so impressed by her, she used to brag, that they would let her come through the front door. She didn’t have to come through the servant’s door. And they would give care packages to her family.

As Clarisa stated her grandmother’s experience “was funny,” I found myself wondering what deeper feelings Clarisa and other members of her family had about her family’s experiences of racism and the trauma of having to flee Mexico due to threats of political violence. Clarisa described how her grandmother organized her children to support each other, demonstrating her understanding of the intersectionality of oppression faced by Clarisa’s aunts. She stated:

They [her aunts and uncles] are all doing well in school, and my grandmother pulled them all together and told the boys particularly, she had four boys, two girls, that they were going to have to help their sisters go to college first, because they had two strikes against them. They were Mexican and they were women. This was how my family was thinking in the 1930s and 40s, can you imagine? So, the boys helped my oldest aunt go on to school. She went to community college and to UCLA. She got her Master’s and PhD at the University of Pittsburgh and then [she] ended up a professor at the University of Chicago, and was in the school of social work. [She was] running Benton house, which is one of the first settlement houses in the country. She won the Jane Addams award. It’s
a centennial award that they give. She sort of set the bar pretty high, for all her siblings, right? Politics ran strong in that family. When Kennedy died, you thought someone in the family had died, because everybody gathered that night at the house. When the Civil Rights Movement really got off the ground in the mid-60s, when they were literally hosing down people in Selma and it was captured on television, my dad would sit us down and say, “I need you to watch this. You need to remember this and work to make sure this never happens again.” That was the tone of that family. Whereas on my mother’s side it was a little different. It was more like where can we make money, assimilate as quickly as you can, and survive. And this is significant, because I always felt like I was that cartoon with a little devil in the little angel. My mother’s family was very conservative, in many ways, except when they came to the states. They realized that no matter how much money that they had brought with them, and what businesses they wanted to try, they couldn’t fight the discrimination that existed at the time. So then when the Depression hit all hell broke loose and they were impoverished a decade after they got here and started to live the life of most Mexicans.

Clarisa went on to explain how her aunt’s success in higher education helped influence the rest of her uncles and aunts, and her father, to go on to college as well. Clarisa’s maleta was clearly full of educational and intellectual wealth, knowledge, and tools she should be able to use to access educational resources (Núñez, 1994; Yosso, 2005).

**Montebello, Whittier, and San Diego: Clarisa’s K–12 Experiences.** Clarisa continued her narrative by moving to her own experiences in education and schooling. Clarisa stated:

Well, I go to school, right? And I just assume I’m gonna go to college as did all my cousins, right? There was no question that we were all going to go on. And we were all
political. I mean, our family events, those searing memories were, when Kennedy came and campaigned in East LA, we all went to go watch Kennedy. You know, as he drove the motorcade when he was assassinated, it might as well have been a family member was assassinated, because everybody met at my grandmother’s house that night. And so, I had both strands. I had the idea that I was going to go to college and there was the idea of public service, you know, which was sort of right there and then there was politics.

Clarisa opened her maleta of cultural and familial knowledge, laying out the cultural wealth her family and community had given to her. This pedagogy of the home proved to be valuable for Clarisa in setting the tone for her pursuit of education and community service. Clarisa explained most of her formal school experiences were in the Montebello community of Los Angeles. Clarisa stated:

I [grew up] in Montebello, which was like the Chula Vista of that time. It’s not East LA, it’s your first step out of East LA, but it’s a far step from Orange County and Whittier. It was very multicultural. We had a distinct Japanese, Armenian, Russian, and Mexican population. Your name was either Yasui, Kamaguchi, Fujioka or you were Agajanian, Martirosyan, or Samsonian or you were Dudakov, Domitrov, or Tikhonov, Garcia, or Lopez. And yet those three cultures [Japanese, Armenian, and Russian] all had Saturday school and we didn’t. The Mexicans either went to catechism or they played, it was as simple as that. The other cultures were all very much interested in preserving language and culture, right? And I distinctly remember I couldn’t play with my friends, because they were all at Saturday school.

Clarisa noted the multicultural nature of Montebello, the community she attended school in for much of her life, and the disparity in cultural and linguistic preservation when comparing
her experience as part of the Mexican community to the other ethnic communities in her neighborhood. However, during her sophomore year in high school everything changed for her. She stated:

Well, then when I was a sophomore in high school; my grandmothers came to live with us. And my parents’ house was too small. They were redlined in those days, the communities, this is before the Rumford act. My parents had tried to get into a bigger home in Whittier, and the minute they heard their names, they were not allowed into those homes. And then a development started and it went bankrupt and my parents got into this home right above Whittier College. It was a whole development. The [districts] wouldn’t give me an interdistrict transfer. I had been [going to school] from kindergarten to 10th grade in Montebello, but the district would not let me go back to Montebello, so I had to go to Whittier High for my junior and senior year. That was traumatic, because immediately I felt the low expectations of deficit.

The nasty sting of redlining and of exclusionary housing practices had a direct impact on Clarisa’s life, affecting where her family could live and where she could go to school. Clarisa acknowledged the trauma of the low expectations of deficit thinking and subtractive schooling. She noted, from her perspective now, she started to question the dynamics of the new school experience.

**Fighting for a College Education: Clarisa’s Journey to College.** Clarisa shared early experiences at Whittier High School. She stated:

It didn’t matter that I knew I was going to go to college. I had to fight my way into college track there. I *had to*, literally. My dad had to go down and say, “No, she’s not
going to be a secretary. She’s going to go on to college.” That was my very first encounter with that kind of like, wait, what’s going on? That was my junior year. This was the first memory Clarisa shared of a disruption in her access to education and to what she and her family expected. At her new high school, Whittier, she was placed into a secretarial track of classes. Her father had to tell them, literally, she was not going to be a secretary. What followed was an experience of acute racism and sexism that would stay with her the rest of Clarisa’s life, an experience of being deprived of an opportunity to apply to Stanford University. Clarisa stated:

My senior year, I started applying [to college], and I wanted to go to Stanford. Does that sound familiar? I went to get a letter of recommendation from my biology teacher. He told me outright that, unfortunately, he was worried that I wasn’t bred to compete with the level of students that would be going to Stanford. That two things would happen, I would either marry wealthy and become alienated from my family, or I’d become depressed and suicidal. And he said, “But if you tell me you’re going to go to find a husband, I will do what I can to get you in.” And I had a boyfriend at the time. And I said, “No, I’m not gonna go,” I was so innocent. “No, I’m not gonna go find a husband. I have a boyfriend.” And I didn’t get in. But I vividly remember that conversation. It stuck with me for my entire life.

This was one of many unfortunate instances where one of the elders shared an experience of acute gatekeeping—of a violation of their self-determination and equitable access to higher education—by an educational staff member in their life. This instance was especially ugly as her biology teacher expressed his belief in her inherent academic deficiency and essentialized her identity as a woman as only valuable as a wife to a man. As my wife said, he was a sexist pig.
Fortunately, Clarisa’s family supported her in her application to college and she was able to find acceptance at a university. She stated:

And so, I ended up at San Diego State because my mother, that was the only school she let me, my mother wanted me close. So, it was Cal State LA or UCLA. You know, she wanted me within striking distance. My dad’s the one who pulled me aside and he said, “Look, I think you need to go away and kind of cut the strings here, I don’t want you too far, I don’t want you too close.” So that’s when I applied to San Diego State.

**Lifting the Veil of Assimilation: MEChA and Chicano Studies.** It was during this time in her narrative Clarisa when referred to her interest in politics and how this interest, nurtured by her family’s cultural wealth, aligned well with MEChA. Clarisa started to unpack her journey of critical consciousness formation, citing MEChA and Chicano Studies as two vehicles that helped her reflect on her own lived experience and mindset. She stated:

And I got in [to SDSU] and the rest was just kind of a natural evolution. Because I had, I mean, I was so interested in the politics of that time, that of course MEChA became one of the vehicles for that. The interesting thing is that I didn’t realize how assimilated I was, by language. I didn’t speak Spanish very well. I mean, I spoke the Spanish you learn from your grandmother’s taking care of you see? No Tengo Hambre. Agua, luna, tortilla. Yeah. And you don’t know what you don’t know. So, I kind of had this assumption that all it had to be is you had the will, and that those other experiences I had with my teachers were aberrations. And I credit Chicano Studies for kind of lifting the veil off of those myths.

Clarisa’s use of the word myth resonated with Du Bois’s (1903) notion of second sight and of critical consciousness having the ability to pierce through the veil of a false consciousness—the
myths of and assimilation to the dominant culture. Clarisa started to describe the growth of her critical consciousness and her ability to see some of her past experiences through new lenses, freeing herself from some of the notions of rugged individualism and the “assumption that all it had to be is you had the will.” She saw the oppressive traumatic experiences with her teachers in high school in a new light, not as aberrations, but as part of the normal everyday systems of oppression. Clarisa stated:

    So, the rest was just a natural evolution of those strands in my family. And actually, I’d have to say, I didn’t reach the pinnacle, my grandparents did. My grandfather was Genaro Vasquez’s teacher in Mexico, in Guerrero. He ended up living in the States [but] couldn’t find work comparable to his skill. So, he went back to do organizing, and ended up in parts of Chiapas and Guerrero, organizing peasants and teaching peasants, and ended up, he was just about ready to come home, when he died of kidney failure.

    Clarisa honored her grandfather, noting her family’s cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) in education and organizing, and sharing the passing of her grandfather in Mexico. She also compared her own trajectory in education, maybe professionally, to her grandparents.

    **External Forces Influencing Critical Consciousness Development.** Clarisa used the term “external forces” to name the political and social movements and events of the Civil Rights movement and described the influence these “forces” had on her development of CC. She stated:

    I still credit my grandmother. When I was in sixth grade, my grandmother had all the girls in the family read *The Feminine Mystique*, by Betty Friedan. I can tell you now that people don’t even talk about that book. I didn’t dare talk about it with my MEChista friends because that would have made me even weirder. You know, I was already a little weird. “Oh, you’re from Montebello.” I mean, Gus Chavez used to tease me incessantly.
about “Oh, yeah, you’re from Montebello, huh?” We didn’t say Monte Bello [Spanish accent] we said Montebello, we’re from Montebello [English accent].

Clarisa connected her reading of feminist literature with being weird, in the context of MEChA, and of somehow representing her assimilated nature brought up by others in the community. I wondered what her connection between these two factors was and how she would characterize this weirdness somehow linked to feminist literature. Clarisa moved from here to explain the role of the “Huelga” and the Civil Rights Movement—what she called “external forces”—as a vehicle for expressing her desire to “change the world.” She stated:

Definitely the Huelga, but remember that the macro part of this is that this was all happening in the context of the antiwar movement, the civil rights movement, you know, like [Gonzalo: FlowerPower] I mean, those were the external forces. In fact, I got to become president in my class. I had only been there twice, [first as] vice president. I ran on a Human Rights platform. And the people who, just like today’s election, there was a small Latino community growing in Montebello, and that’s what pulled me over to win the election. Because I was a newcomer, people really didn’t know me very well. And it was all in relation to what was happening externally. We wanted to change the world. And so MEChA to me, and Chicano Studies, was sort of a logical place to go.

Clarisa explained these “external forces”—the farmworkers movement, the Huelga, antiwar, and civil rights movements—played a role in her and her community’s expression of wanting to “change the world.” She even drew connections to when she ran for president of her class at Montebello, crediting her win to adopting a human rights platform and to the growing Latino community in her neighborhood. Clarisa elaborated about her involvement in Chicano studies classes as a tutor with my father. She stated:
I had your dad’s class, I was one of his tutors, and I think the capital I brought, having formal education in my background, gave me a leg up on some things. And I think, you know, your dad would nurture, you know he really, it’s like he looked for the bright eyes. He was very much into student leadership development, trying to pick people to nurture from all backgrounds. I never felt from your father any discomfort or intimidation, or teasing for being who I was. I was very comfortable in my skin around your dad, because he just wanted to push people forward. You know? I think it was external and MEChA and Chicano Studies for me, that was my vehicle, I knew it was going to be something, but it was part of that civil rights effort.

This was the first explicit mention of a mentor in Clarisa’s narrative of education. She noted how she felt comfortable around my father, noting she did not feel intimidated. Her mention of intimidation reminded me of how strong sexism was within the Chicano movement (Delgado Bernal, 1997). According to Clarisa, her experiences with MEChA and Chicano Studies, coupled with the external forces of the Civil Rights movement, were vehicles for her expression and growth of consciousness. She stated:

The Chicano movement and MEChA were really a step into part of the Civil Rights [movement], but in an authentic way, because it was our civil rights. Like I said, my parents couldn’t move into neighborhoods, pre-Rumford Act, pre Prop 14 . . . I can tell you, I can talk about Prop 14, because it was the topic of conversation in our family and extended family. And yet, when I went to MEChA meetings, that history was not something people had at hand, you know, class struggle. My dad and mom, when they grew up with me, [we] moved from Phoenix to LA. My mother wanted to be a secretary. They told her she was too dark. They tracked her into power machines, she went to work
in the factories for a short period of time and then, on her own, went back to community college to learn the things that she needed to go on. She became a Democrat because at that time Roosevelt had the WPA. So, civil service, you had to pass a test, first and foremost had to, you know, it was merit-based. So, she was able to pass a test and become a secretary. But while she was in the factories, they would organize. They both spoke highly of the Jewish community. Because Jewish [folks] were at the forefront of the organizing effort of the unions, at least in LA, and my mother, they would come and hold study groups. My mother said she would go to the groups, she’d walk the picket line and then go to the movies. My dad, on the other hand, actually went to those study groups. That got woven in the notion, I remember my dad had me read a book called the Power Elite, which was one of the very first books I ever read about class, you know. That level of analysis became really vibrant when Chicano studies began to integrate Marx and Engels and dialectical historical materialism. It gave you a richer understanding . . . MEChA became a vehicle for blending all of these differences, not only nationalism, but you know, class struggle, social justice, and the Huelga into things that were ways to concretely express your consciousness [and] allowed you to do things.

The authenticity of MEChA and Chicano studies for Clarisa related directly to her family’s experiences of housing and employment exclusion, to her mother’s experience of racism and colorism, and to her parents’ organizing and intellectual development of understandings of “class struggle.” The weaving of intellectual development, personal reflection, and community and political action allowed for MEChA and Chicano studies to be concrete vehicles for the expression of Clarisa’s critical consciousness. Our dialogue shifted at this point;
thus, Clarisa’s responses to our final elements of the dialogue are presented after Gonzalo’s testimonio, as a dialogue between all three of us.

_Gonzalo: “Awakening . . . My Eyes Opened up!”_

**Deportation, Connection, and Remigration: Gonzalo’s Family History.** Gonzalo was born in Zacatecas, like his father. His mother was born in Texas. She was deported, along with her family, in the 1930s during the Depression. Gonzalo explained:

My mother was actually born in Texas. She, along with the family, of course, were kicked out in one of the deportations back in the 30s. My mom’s family was actually deported twice, once from California and once from Texas. But she was born in Texas, along with one of her brothers, and went back to Mexico, Zacatecas. My dad’s family is from a nearby village in the mountains of Zacatecas. That’s how they ended up meeting and getting married. In the 20s and 30s, up in the mountains, no running water, no electricity, basically subsistence farming, and a little bit of livestock . . . I imagine that it was one of the times when the climate changed and there were a lot of dry spells, a lot of dry years, so many families were coming up to United States. My dad, my mom and my mom’s parents, my abuelitos, they all came up on a train to Mexicali. We spent 1 year there. My mom was cleaning houses in Calexico because, of course, as a U.S. citizen, she had that advantage, that privilege. Then through her we immigrated into Calexico, which is where most of my siblings and I had our early years of education. Also, in my family, my maternal grandfather . . . I tell the story to the kids. He fought for the revolution in Mexico. It was ironic that he, and a couple of his brothers ended up marrying my grandmother, and a couple of her sisters who were, like Clarisa’s mother’s side of the family, and while they weren’t super rich, they had a little bit of land, they were
considered well-to-do. They had people that worked for them and so forth. They were these four women who ended up, after the revolution, marrying revolutionaries from Mexico.

As with Norma’s family’s experience as well, Gonzalo’s family experienced the forced deportations of the 1930s during the events the U.S. government called “repatriations.” Although Gonzalo’s parents may not have met without his mother’s family’s deportation, the upheaval and trauma of these events had to have impacted his family. As Clarisa noted, Gonzalo noted the difference in class status between his mother’s and father’s family. He also noted the privilege his mother had in being a U.S. citizen, starting with her ability to work on the U.S. side of the border and leading to her citizenship status, thereby helping his whole family to move to the United States.

**Growing Up on the Border: Childhood and School Experiences in Calexico.** Gonzalo next focused on his experience crossing the border from Mexico to Calexico. He said:

There’s certainly a lot of people along the border that have had similar experiences. My experience with education was coming from Mexico, you know, actually crossing the border, the year before I started, or 6 months before I started school. I skipped kindergarten because I was already too old for that and I started in first grade. And the one thing that of course, for Latinos, used to be, maybe not as much now, but certainly it was then, was that there were two institutions that you just did not question, that you trusted, you know, with your life and your family, and that was the church and schools. So, if a priest said something, it was, you know, it came from God, and if a teacher said something, it came from knowledge and wisdom, and supposedly, you know, from complete concern for students, right? So, my experience was one of going into the
schools very eager to learn, first the language and then of course the materials, but very much counting on the whole, and I didn’t think of it this way at the time, but counting on everyone that I came across, all the adults in the school, to be looking out for me, you know, teaching me the right things, the good things.

While describing his steadfast belief as a child that teachers would be looking out for him and teaching the “right things, the good things,” Gonzalo noted he “didn’t think of it this way” at the time of his youth, alluding to how these beliefs would be questioned later in his life as part of his development of critical consciousness. He said:

Growing up in Calexico, which was at that time this little pimple of maybe 5,000 people, a walking distance from the border, which had a million Mexicanos, I never, you know, had any sense of feeling alienated or, you know, I mean, the majority of us already even at that time were Mexican, you know, students. So, I felt comfortable with that, I felt like, you know, everything’s fine and everything that’s happening here must be for a good reason. But I did notice, though, that a lot of my friends, that the teachers would sometimes, you know, I don’t know if the word is abuse, but you know, disrespect and make fun of them, maybe go after them when they didn’t turn in an assignment or didn’t answer properly or dismiss them and just put them in a corner and not even pay attention to them. I noticed those things and I just kind of wondered, well, “I guess that’s the way it’s supposed to be,” you know. I was a good student, got good grades, salutatorian and all that kind of stuff, involved in orchestra band, politics, class president all the way up to senior year. So, to me it was . . . these are the things that you do.

Gonzalo noted although he did not feel any personal alienation in the predominantly Mexican community of Calexico, he did notice teachers at his schools mistreated some of his
friends; and at the time, he brushed it off as, “I guess that’s the way it’s supposed to be.”

Gonzalo went on to note how isolated he felt his community was from any notions of the outside world, especially noting he did not feel he had any access to information about current events of the time, including the Civil Rights movement. He said:

We didn’t listen to radio, or read English language papers at all, all our airwave communications were stations from Mexicali. I had no idea that anything was going on in the South, the civil rights movement was never brought up in any of my classes. And of course, it was right at the beginning of it, but still 64 is when I graduated. Between 60 and 64 there was enough going on that had I been anywhere else, I would have been aware of it, but I wasn’t.

**If Not for a Teacher: Gatekeeping Through Inattention.** Before finishing with his recounting of his high school experience, Gonzalo explained how if it was not for his senior English teacher, he may not have even gone on to college, despite all his academic and extracurricular accomplishments. He stated:

Just one last thing I’ll say about school. After being class president, involved in all kinds of extracurricular activities, every activity you could imagine, and scoring almost perfect scores on the SATs, the college counselor not once even called me in or mentioned anything about going to college. It was my senior English teacher who said, “Listen there’s such a thing as college after this.” I had been promised a job at a gas station. I had been working full time since my sophomore year. I would, you know, finish school and go work 8 hours until midnight at the gas station and go home. The guy there had promised me that I could be his manager when I graduated. That’s what I was going to do until this English teacher says, “You know, there are these applications.” And helped me
fill out some applications, and I got scholarships. But that was the level of total
inattention to even those of us who were quote “good students with good grades.” So,
that was my experience [prior to] going into UCLA.

Like Clarisa, and many of the elders in this study, Gonzalo experienced gatekeeping, this
time in the form of inattention. His high school counselor, despite all his accomplishments, did
not once talk to him about applying to college. Without the intervention of his senior English
teacher, Gonzalo explained, he would have most likely ended up as a manager at a local gas
station in Calexico.

**Awakening! - Higher Education, Organizing, and Critical Consciousness.** Gonzalo
went on to describe his experience leaving Calexico, saying it “was at the time this little pimple
of maybe 5,000 people, walking distance from the border,” whereas UCLA was “in the middle of
this huge metropolis.” He said, “[UCLA] was pretty daunting. I was prepared to go to my
classes, you know, I didn’t know what the heck I was gonna do. I had no idea of a major or
anything like that.” He stated:

Then this thing came up. I don’t remember exactly who . . . but somebody approached me
and said, “There’s a MEChA meeting tonight, do you want to come along?” “MEChA
what the . . . ok, I’ll go, I’ll go.” And from then my eyes were open. We started talking
first of all about all the politics going on in LA and hooking up with people and students
that came from East LA. Going out there and beginning to do all the demonstrations and
marches and leafleting and all that kind of stuff . . . I remember my first participation in
anything out in the community was going door to door for the fair housing, the Rumford
Act, and Prop 14 . . . So all of that was going on, but it was still all funneled, the activism
initially, let’s say, the applied thought was for things coming out of MEChA. That was,
again, the focus of understanding what was happening in the communities, where the oppression came from, how it manifested, and what could be done about it. So we became very involved locally, in the politics of East LA, and also in the schools, which led up to the walkout. We used to go to the EICC meetings, you know, that’s probably where I saw your dad the most was at those meetings with Vahac, and organizing the walkouts, and all that stuff. I think as far as seminal activities, it was the political campaigns in the East side, the Fair Housing proposition, and then the Board of Education, you know, going after them for any number of things that were going on the east side . . . At the same time, again, it was, you know, all the free concerts and naked people running around, and all that it was, which was like, “Wow,” you know, “What the hell’s going on here?”

Gonzalo’s testimonio detailed his first social justice actions—“door to door for the fair housing,” “demonstrations and marches and leafleting,” and eventually “led up to the walkout” (referencing the high school walkouts/blowouts in East LA in 1968)—all “funneled” through MEChA. This connected him and the other students to the local political movements and organizing efforts. Gonzalo also noted, like Clarisa’s mention of “external forces,” the overall environment of the various movements, events, and sentiments of the period, questioning, “What the hell’s going on here?” He stated:

It was just like a constant awakening of so much more to this world than I thought. And now a lot of things that I had been kind of wondering about made sense, you know. Why were some of my best friends, you know, went off [to] Vietnam, you know? Why did so many of them come back hooked on drugs and how many, even by then, had already died? And why is it that that’s the population that ends up in that situation? And here I
am at a university looking at a totally different kind of people, and these other people they get to go on to university.

Awakening! Gonzalo named his development of critical consciousness, reflecting on the traumatic, violent experiences of his friends and community, and the juxtaposition of his experiences at the university. I asked Gonzalo what he meant by “different kind of people.” He shared:

I started realizing that it was poor people, for the most part, that ended up fighting the wars, that it was, you know, people without other resources and with less access to education. And so, you know, that became very clear because, as I looked at my friends from Calexico, they were going off to war. The first ones that started coming back in body bags, it was all Latinos, it was all Mexicanos. Most of them again, not necessarily from the, well in Calexico there really wasn’t a higher class, but let’s say not even middle class. It was those friends that I had, we all struggled, you know, we were all from working class backgrounds, recent immigrants for the most part. It became very clear it was all those strata that were feeding the war machine. And, you know, I don’t know if I mentioned it or not, but one of my closest friends ended up dying of substance abuse at a vet center in Colorado, a couple of others were suicides and most of them never really had any opportunity to straighten their life out after they came back.

Through his development of CC, Gonzalo shared his reflections on the violence his community had experienced because of the “war machine” that sent his friends back in body bags. Gonzalo’s critically conscious perspective helped him to connect his community’s experience of violence in the Vietnam War to the economic, social, political, and historical dynamics contributing to his
community’s disproportional experience of this violence (Mariscal, 2005). Gonzalo explained more about his process of CC development. He stated:

Of course, there was enough of, you know, a little pocket of us to begin to question, that’s what organizing affords us, and your dad was already 1 year beyond that, involved in doing his thing and coming in and getting us to participate in some of the programs that he was directing. For me it was a very immediate response to getting the right kind of information, to being aware of what was going on in the rest of the country, all the protests and the reasons for the protests, and beyond that all the struggles that were going on, you know, throughout the world. Again, it didn’t take me long to just, you know, absorb and absorb, and the activism came from there.

Gonzalo noted the collective nature of organizing: the power in getting “the right kind of information” and “beginning to question,” the awareness of these “external forces” from throughout the country, “the reasons for the protests,” “the struggles . . . throughout the world,” and how his absorption of this information fueled his activism. He stated:

And so it was a sense of not only that when I got there, not only were my eyes opened up to, you know, a better understanding of some of those questions that I had even back in high school, but the sense that I could do something about it. Not only could I marvel and say, “Oh, now I understand, how cool.” “No, now I understand, now I have a responsibility to do something about it.”

Gonzalo alluded to his intuitive feelings and thoughts about his friends’ experiences of subtractive schooling in high school, mistreatment by teachers, and how his “eyes opened up” to “a better understanding of those questions” of these schooling processes. Ultimately, he expressed how this awakening and development of critical consciousness did not stop at
awareness and questioning, but involved a responsibility to act on this new understanding, to “do something about it.”

Gonzalo’s testimonio started with his family’s experience of deportation and remigration to Calexico, California. In his testimonio, he described his childhood experiences growing up and going to school in Calexico and experiences of excelling at school but being confused about the mistreatment doled out by teachers to some of his friends and classmates. Gonzalo’s testimonio shows the power of educational staff in their disregard for his educational attainment, and for their support in helping him to see a future he may not have considered. Gonzalo experienced an awakening of his critical consciousness through critical action in the Los Angeles community and critical reflection with his peers in MEChA that helped him to connect his lived experiences of oppression and violence to his new awareness of history and the political climate of U.S. society. Gonzalo’s testimonio ended with him naming not only this new awareness of the conditions of oppression but also his sense of responsibility to take action to change these conditions.

Gonzalo and Clarisa’s testimonios show community organizing in the settings of higher education coupled with the environment of the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s led to a lifting of the veil of assimilation and to an awakening and opening of their eyes to the realities of their lived experiences and those of their families and communities. Fundamental to this critical consciousness formation was a responsibility to continue to act, a responsibility to do something about the conditions and experiences of oppression unveiled to them in their community-driven social justice actions that were all organized through their experiences in higher education at SDSU and UCLA.
Clarisa and Gonzalo: Dialogues

The following two sections of dialogue are presented as part of the collective testimonio, the product of our plática. It is provided for the reader to engage with and to hopefully get a sense of the context and nuance of our interactions. I have not “made” any meaning in this section, nor have I contributed any analysis. This section is provided as a testimonio of our plática. I encourage the reader to engage this section like any work of art, to make their own meaning of the dialogue.

Mama Bear Love, Dialogue, and Organizing. Nearing the end of our first plática, I asked Clarisa and Gonzalo about the role of love and care in social justice. The following section includes our dialogue.

Gabriel: What does love and authentic care mean and look like within education and our movements for social justice, within activism and community service?

Clarisa: Do you mean romantic love?

Gabriel: No, I mean more like bell hooks love, right? Bell hooks is one of the theorists and writers I lean on. She talks about love being an act of supporting somebody’s full development academically, personally, spiritually, but also Freire, he talks about love, right, he talks about a love of humanity, a faith in humanity, right? That this person in front of me can do the things that others may not believe they can do.

Gonzalo: Well, I’ve always, and maybe to a fault, you know, I’ve felt that love has to be part of what drives you, what informs you. One of the first quotes that really struck me was Che’s, right, “The true revolutionary is guided by feelings of love.” And then Paulo Freire, I happen to, when I first came down to San Diego State from UCLA, the very first couple of months, I think it was, soon thereafter, a colleague of mine from LA called and
said, “Hey, listen, Paulo Freire is coming to the United States and is going to be doing a
tour. We have a couple of open days. Have you met enough people in San Diego that you
could, you know, get some meetings and some gatherings together?” And I said,
“Absolutely.” And so through MEChA and the context there, you know, we put the word
out. And, of course, there was an immediate response from the MEChistas, that were . . .
reading . . . Freire. So, I got to drive him around to all the places. I remember, one of my
best memories, however, was when he got a little tired. So, I drove him out to, I don’t
know if it was sunset cliffs or somewhere else. And we just parked there, and for a couple
of hours, just sat in a car, we didn’t say a word, just looking out at the ocean. And I
[thought], “What a peaceful man.” So, in terms of love, I know that we get cynical, we
get away from it, get discouraged at times, but really, there is no other way of doing it. If
you don’t have a full commitment to including that expression of your being, of putting
in love for what you do, love for the ability of all human beings to thrive in some way, to
be able to contribute, to be able to learn and grow. If it doesn’t come out of love, it’s not
worth it. Because if it comes out of personal interest, if it comes out of an idea that you’re
gonna get something for it, other than getting love back, it really doesn’t go far enough, it
doesn’t accomplish anything of real value. I think that it can be part, if nothing else, part
of everything that you do, because when you do it, you are, you know, stimulated, you
are driven by that expression. Putting it into practical terms and making curriculum out of
it, it gets a little harder and then we have, you know, periods like the last years where you
know, love you know, [we] couldn’t find it to hold anywhere, you know, given the
previous national leadership. I mean, it gets very difficult but you know, anything
authentic, anything long lasting, has to be pushed or driven by love.
Clarisa: I’m not there yet. Actually, I’m feeling probably like abused women after being in toxic relationships. After those 4 years [of Trump], I have to tell you, I am not driven by love. I’m driven by anger. And I don’t know what the word is, I want to take off, I want to push back on the abuse, you know, and I’m not alone. And I don’t know if it’s . . . I’ve just internalized it. But I have other women friends who feel the same way, that the toxicity of that constant bullying has, you know, changed our motivation about things. I can appreciate that sentiment, I love my family, I think about Gandhi. I think about the people, you know, historically, who have been driven to do wonderful things by that. Overall, I love Pope Francis, I think he embodies a sense of love, I’m just not there right now. I’m not feeling love, I’m feeling a lot of pissed off. And, I mean, it’s like, I’m fearful. I want to be sure that that closet that this person’s in, stays shut, you know, and I’m angry, and I look around, and I see, you know, the license people are taking to be mean and bully. And, you know, it turns my stomach. So I don’t know what I’m motivated by anymore.

Gonzalo: Wouldn’t you say that the reason that you are so upset about that, I would think, is precisely because it’s the opposite than of what you would like to see, the opposite of love, and then it’s still there, it’s just like I was saying, it becomes so hard, in periods like these, to be able to get people to understand that and act on that, because they’re so busy reacting to the evil that gets unleashed on you, but otherwise, you wouldn’t care. You know, if there wasn’t something better in your mind, then it wouldn’t matter who said to who, who abused whoever.

Clarisa: Maybe a good example would be, and not in the way that she [bell hooks] meant, it’s like a mother of her cubs love. I’m terrified of what this future would be with a
person like this [Trump]. And I will do everything I can to protect our kids from this shit. You know, and that’s, I mean, that’s what’s driving me right now. So, I don’t know, I guess ultimately, it is love but it’s expressed more as a protective, I’m terrified. And I’m not gonna let you near, you know, whether it’s the environment, whether it’s, you know, issues of their personal safety or, you know, all of that just, it’s just ugggh.

Gabriel: I wonder, you know, there’s a lot of talk, like a lot of the theories and things I’m looking at, like Duncan-Andrade, and others, that talk about creating a space where students can bring their rage and can bring their anger, that’s legitimate, that’s righteous, and it’s born, like you said, from that place, I think of love or wanting to protect ourselves in our community. And so I wonder what is that place for anger in education and activism?

Clarisa: Well, it’s real. I mean, just as an abused woman, it’s real. Any abused child, an abused adult, anybody you know. I mean, slaves weren’t gonna love themselves out of slavery. You know what I mean? It’s like, I get a little, I’m a little, what’s the word insensitive to the touch, I call it the touchy feely ish-ness of some stuff, because it was like, when Andres was sick, twas like all he has to do is think good thoughts and it’ll heal his body. And I’m like, “No fucking way!” We’re going to talk to geneticists; there’s something physically real that you have to address. And I think that’s kind of where I’m at. And I know there are a lot of women like me right now, who are righteously pissed off and will do anything to protect this generation from, you know, if we can, from this thing happening again . . . We’ve come too far. I mean, that’s what’s at risk right now, you know, I know it’s not permanent, but the two steps backwards hurt people, and they damage people, and look at the damage that was done. I mean, depression is up, not just
because of COVID, it was 4 years of toxic bullying, and bullshit, and we’ve seen it in
our, I see my nephew’s and my cousin’s, males especially. I’m righteously pissed off.
And you’re [Gonzalo] right. I mean, it’s driven by care. But, if you’re my next-door
neighbor right now, you better keep out of my way, because I’m not going to smile at
you. It may not be the best way to develop dialogue, but I need space. What you’re doing
is, they need to know it’s not okay. What happened? You know? Because if people are
saying, well, you have a right to your opinion, I’m sorry, this is beyond a right to an
opinion. This is like saying we have a right to believe in the ovens and the Holocaust, or
lynchings in the south, I’m sorry, this is not a matter of opinion. This is humanity. And it
will, you are, you know, I will do my best to fight you back on this one. This is not okay.
Gabriel: You are both addressing where we’re at in the world, right now, and so thinking
from there, what do you think is crucial to effective education, political activism, and
community service now, in the present moment? How do you envision activism now?
Like, what’s necessary for that?
Gonzalo: There’s so many different ways, one of the things that I say is that we are, at the
same time that the internet, that social media has become such a destructive force, it
doesn’t take away from all the promise that it began with, and all of the promise that is
still there. I mean, we, us old people, talk about if we had had this when we were
organizing, God that we would have taken over by now, you know, that kind of thing. So
I think that, for me, the best advice or suggestions or strategies that I would propose is
that, in addition to learning [about] yourself, you know, be disciplined enough to explore,
communicate and dialogue, back and forth, give and take, open to all these things. In
your activism, in your actual application of all that knowledge, and all that love, is
organizing, I mean, organizing, this never goes away, because things don’t happen by themselves. We know that the corporate structure, and the military structure, and so many other structures, are organized against us, are organized against people, are organized against people even talking to each other about anything meaningful. So, we have to respond with organizing our own. So, that would be one of the areas where we really need to focus. And I know that many youth, many young people are doing precisely that. It may not seem that way. But I think through that social media, finding spaces where you can seriously talk about . . . that you are willing to move, you’re willing to join in a collective effort to, you know, to fight for your rights, to fight for saving this planet, to fight for everyone having a fair shot at a decent life, all those kinds of things. So, organizing in the current context is a lot more difficult, because there’s so much against it, but it’s also with the tools that are available. It’s, you know, the best way that we can react.

Clarisa: I was listening to a podcast a couple years back, I think it was on Radio Lab. Gonzalo was listening to it, and they had done an actual study, you know, on how to get people to change their minds in a political context. The upshot of it was that what they learned, they surmised, from a number of different studies, is that you have to give people first a chance to tell their story, and then you educate where you can connect that story to a deeper understanding of what’s going on right now that impacts that story. Exactly like what Gonzalo says, give them a vehicle to figure out ways that they can impact their own story, continue, and do it at the macro level. Give them options to make a difference in their lives. To me, the key is the word education, but an education that helps people make these connections to their stories, to the analysis, and to options that they can do to make
themselves feel empowered. It’s like Freire, you basically learn how to impact your own life. In doing so, you impact the community at large. Sometimes you do it simultaneously. Then you layer on all the other things. But I think we’re going to need, you know, people, we’re going to need boots on the ground to talk to people.

Clarisa: And I’m going to end with this little vignette. It’s a true story, but to me it exemplifies what we all have to do as often as we can. So, our heater went out about 2 and a half weeks ago, and it was a kind of an emergency. So, the company said, “I’m sending someone from El Cajon, they live close to you, the next morning.” Well, of course, they sent his picture and they sent a bio, you know, he’s from El Cajon, and he looked like he could have invaded the capitol. He had a bio that read like the people who invaded the Capitol, right? So, I quickly went out to the garage, and I took down all my political magnets, my Obama, my bla bla bla bla bla, because I knew I had a feeling, right. So, I put them in the house. And then he came and opened the door. And so, this reminds me of your dad, too, because your dad would take on anybody, right? So, he’s outside, I’m outside. He’s doing his job. He finishes. He says, “I’m done.” I said, “Well, thank you.” The reason it was urgent is because I’d had the second vaccine, and I had a response like your mother, I had the chills and the fever, bah, bah, bah. He says, “I heard you were sick.” I said, “Well, I had a response to the vaccine.” And he said, “Then what’s the point in getting it if you’re gonna get sick?” And I knew I was smart in taking those magnets down. Yeah. Also, he had no mask. He had a bandana with the blue lives matter, flag, okay, right?

Clarisa: So, you know, I’m saying, “Well,” I said, “I think having a little response is better than being, I don’t play Russian roulette,” I said, “than risking having a
catastrophic response.” He goes, “Well, my mother had COVID. And she’s okay.” And he goes, “You know, people die of the flu.” And I said, and I’ve been practicing this, because this was what I was going to tell my next-door neighbor when we had our conversation. I said, “That’s true. I said, people did die of the flu. They do die of the flu. But do you know that 500,000 people have been lost in combat since 1776. 600,000 people, in that many years, in one year, we lost them, however, never have we ever lost that many people to the flu.” And he was like, “Oh, how many people did we lose in combat?” I said, “This is combat deaths, not casualties. Combat deaths.” So he’s, he’s kind of like backing off, backing off. And then he says to me, no, I said to him, “Remember 911?” He goes, “Yeah.” I said, “We lost 3,000 people. And what did we do? We closed borders. We made people get real IDs. We put people under surveillance, went to war with two countries.” “Security,” I said, and that’s . . .


Clarisa: I said, “And we have people who are opposed to wearing masks?!?”

Gabriel: And at that point when you’re talking to him we’re losing 911 every day.

Clarisa: I said, “So you understand, son, why I feel it’s important to get vaccinated.” And I wasn’t mean, I wasn’t even emotional. But that’s the kind of discussion I think we all need to prepare to have with people who we can. Now he was a captive audience, needed me to put out a survey for him. But you know, those are the things when we talk about storying and education and moving, that I think we’re gonna all have to do . . . We did neighborhood precinct walking this year here in our own neighborhood. So, I think boots on the ground are going to be really important. That’s it.
Gabriel: Well, I appreciate you telling that story. That’s beautiful. Stories are something I’m really leaning on right now and really looking at. I think it’s how we make sense of the world.

Clarisa: Your dad was a master at that. I mean, he could turn his contractor into saying he was the nicest communist.

**Identity, Loud Talking, Study Groups and Activities, and Meeting Rene.** I asked Clarisa and Gonzalo how they identified themselves ethnically.

Clarisa: Well, it’s an evolution. Initially, I was the Mexican neighbor, right? Because no matter who I was with, they were white, they would say, “Oh, this is our little Mexican neighbor.” I never had any doubts that I had Mexican heritage, and I think later it became Mexican American. Then, Chicano and Chicana, I always knew that it was more of a political identity than it was an ethnic one. My mother, and her family, thought it was a pejorative. She would say, “Tell me what does this mean?” She was very comfortable with Mexican American. Now, I feel very comfortable with Latina, and Latina [emphasis on the final a]. I’m not Latin X, I’m Latina.

Gabriel: That’s gonna be an interesting subtext that I’ll be writing about somewhere, right? Because Norma was the same way. She’s like, “that’s fine if other folks want to identify how they want, but I’m Chicana, I’m not Chicanx.” I’ve had other friends of mine, even my age, who were like, “wait a minute, I fought too hard to be Chicano or Latino.” That’s an interesting and sticky dialogue and discourse.

Gonzalo: This dialogue does bring back memories of when we were introducing even Mexican American [as a term], but definitely Chicano and trying to convince people that it was appropriate and more accurate and what it meant and what it reflected. That was a
struggle, trying to get people to understand that. So, I can see that the Latinx people are
going through something similar in their mind. They have something that they are saying
is the next evolution or this is how they see being represented as who they truly are. So I
can understand the passion behind it. But like you said, after all the struggles to become
Chicano and get it accepted using that term, it’s hard to give it up.
Clarisa: Well, and I actually emphasize, I’m a woman, I’m a girl. Now, if I was gender
neutral, or if I was transitioning, or if I identified as another gender, then I understand
that too to use another identifier. I always ask people, when it’s appropriate, what
pronouns do you want to be referred to as? You know, what pronoun would you like us to
use? Then, I tell them that I’ve always struggled with pronouns generally. I feel very
strongly, I am a Latina, and I worked hard to have that identity, absolutely.
Gabriel (I asked Clarisa): Do you identify with Chicana as well?
Clarisa: Yeah. It’s context. It’s like what you teach kids in code switching, there’s certain
contexts where I will say I’m a Chicana. And then there’s certain contexts where I’ll say I
am a Latina. I have college friends who are progressive politically on the left, but they
have no identity politics, and my goal is to communicate with them and not make them
defensive. So, I use the terms that I know aren’t going to build walls. Usually, I use
Latina.
Gonzalo: I think part of the difficulty in that transition, is that when Chicano, Latino,
when those terms were being introduced, it was clearly speaking of social, economic,
political issues. We saw that getting more accepted, both in the community and academia,
we were looking for a way of including male and female, right, so that’s when the Latino
Chicano slash a, you know, all that terminology came about. But I think the more recent,
Latinx, became more difficult, because it was, I think, and I may be wrong, but it was at the same time that it was introducing the notion that it’s not just Mexicanos, but more Latino Americano and including more people and also at the same time dealing with not only male and female, but all the gender identification issues that are so alive right now. It’s a difficult thing to capture all of that and have people understand it, so I understand the difficulty. It’s just that again, it’s hard for me to make one more transition. So I’m sticking with Latino and Chicano.

Gabriel: How would you define Latina and how would you define Chicana?

Clarisa: Pretty simply to me, Latina is an ethnic identity and Chicano is more of a political identity. It sort of subsumes your ethnicity, but gives you a perspective. It’s a statement about struggle and where you came from? My family is still in Mexico City, you know, again, it’s all contextual, I identify as a Mexicana with them, obviously. . . sometimes they’ll ask, “What is this Chicano thing?” I explain, “It is a political statement to identify how you view your oppression in this country and what you are going to do about it.”

Gonzalo: For me, there’s one other thing. As you get older you have all these memories and influences. When I think of myself I pretty much think of myself as Mexicano. The sounds, even the smells that still grab my attention, that still bring a tear to my eye, are the old Corridos and Valses, and música folklórica. The old Cantinflas movies, and Arturo de Cordova. I mean, I’m Mexicano through and through,

Clarisa: I can testify to that [laughter, from all three of us]. And I think that this is a conversation on its own, because in any relationship you have differences, you come from different experiences, different places. In our case, certainly, there are a lot of
common shared values, politically, culturally, etc. But in terms of our particular experiences, they’re different in lots of ways. We didn’t speak Spanish primarily in the house. Spanish was a second language that our grandmothers used, and we learned it receptively. It wasn’t the dominant language in the house. In Gonzalo’s family, that was completely the opposite, right? There are a lot of very clear subtle behaviors, attitudes, and feelings that are associated with that. When I was going through my teacher-prep, there was a class with a linguist, and they were talking about tonality in languages, and how in Asian languages they use more tones, five tones. You can tell when you think about it, when you listen. Spanish is pretty much three tones, English, it’s about four tones. But in all these languages, the highest tone is usually the one of distress, right? He [the linguist] was giving an example of kids in kindergarten who are non-English speakers and when the teachers were all excited and thrilled, “Boys and girls were so excited to see you here, welcome to kindergarten!” They don’t understand the teachers, all they hear is the tone and they’re withdrawing, going, “Oh, shit, where’s the fire? Where’s the fire escape?” Because it affects their whole emotional state. When we first got married, he would consistently, even to this day he will say, “Why are you yelling at me?” “I’m not yelling at you.” He goes, “Yes you are. You’re raising your voice.” I realized that I had assimilated the English tonality. So, where I’m feeling excited, and that’s just my normal. He was like, “Okay, there’s a fire. There’s a friggin’ fire somewhere. And I’m feeling like, there’s just got to be a door to go out.” Those are the things that, I can say, yeah, he’s Mexicano.

Gabriel: I can relate to that. I think my dad, my parents, assimilated me with English as well. Sandra, you know, while she will say that she’s stronger in English now, Spanish is
her first language. She’ll tell me all the time, “Why are you raising your voice?” I attribute some of it to gender. But now that you’re telling me it’s there’s a whole other component that I don’t think I’ve considered, right? Because the gender’s not at play here, it’s the opposite. Right. So, it’s interesting, and my dad was a yeller. I mean, y’all know him. He was always excited and loud, you know? Sandra says, “Did you swallow a microphone when you’re a baby? Like?”

Clarisa: Do you think Rene was a yeller.

Gonzalo: Well, he was passionate.

Clarisa: He was animated, but I don’t see him, I don’t remember him screeching, or you know.

Gabriel: I think it was intensity.

Clarisa: He was animated. There were certain people that were extremely animated. But then you overlap, you know, on top of all of the linguistic things you overlap, that his family, his rural background. I mean, he used to tell me that his father, you don’t share, you’re not open, you’re not communicative. That was what made you vulnerable. So you held a lot close to the chest. And I don’t know if that’s epigenetics, and it gets coded on both male and female at some point, but I see it throughout his family. There’s a real reserve, you know, I mean, in his family, there were seven kids, nine kids, grandkids, siblings, you know. I mean, you could have 50 people in the house, and I’m not exaggerating Gabe, and everybody’s talking at this level [very low calm tone]. Derek, my son-in-law, used to say you go to that house, and you’d feel so relaxed, so serene, because they would listen to you and they would talk like this. There would be four people at my family’s house and you’d think there was a friggin’ rave party going on,
because no one listens. Well, they’re all talking over each other there. So, you know, add that to the mix.

Gabriel: I think it’s really interesting, Clarisa, from our last talk, is how you had such a duality of saying, you know, I’m going to talk about this righteous anger and how I’m not ready to have dialogue, at the same time, then you shared a story about dialogue you had with a stranger. I think we can hold both of those things, it doesn’t have to be an either or, they’re both valid, they’re both real. It shows that even through that anger, you’re like, Alright, fine, I’m gonna make space because this person is going to come to my house, and then you were able to still have that dialogue. So, it speaks to how while we can be protective, and we can listen to those emotions, we can also still try to create spaces, like Carlos and Linda say, like in the union world, reaching across the table, how do we sit down and politically have space so that we can still have dialogue, right? And still have negotiation. So that’s come out pretty clear from a lot of what you all have shared.

I then asked how they met.

Gonzalo: Well, it was through MEChA, I don’t think that we probably would have come across each other otherwise. So, it was in MEChA meetings, and then all the activities that came out of that. We’re both involved with an organization called Casa Hermandad that came out of that immigrant struggle. We actually tied ourselves, there was a group of us about six of us, that came out of San Diego State, that tied ourselves to different degrees to open up a small center for information and immigration. We initially started with Herman Baca, who was part of that movement, as well, and who had [run] the original Casa Hermandad out of his print shop, in National City. All that activity, and, you know, and I mean, we were young, and going through all those changes, as well. We
had both, you know, been in the movement long enough, we started coming closer and closer.

Clarisa: And the study groups, does that echo, I think your mom and dad met at a study group.

Gabriel: Yeah, my mom and dad met at a study group. Norma and Roger met at a picket, they remember meeting at Safeway at a boycott in National City. So it’s just interesting how the movement space is really, you know, something I’m going to be looking at.

Clarisa: I read somewhere, strong marriages share common two or three common core values that sort of become the DNA. You’re either super religious. . . that very religious families tend to, you know, be able to work through things based on that. I think those political principles also give you a base, a perspective and a base. We both wanted families. We both, I think, enjoyed our families. That was something we wanted to create. But I think it was the activities that sort of give you an idea, this is, you know, someone that you can build that kind of unit with.

I then asked how they remember meeting my dad.

Gonzalo: I met your dad at UCLA. I was trying to remember whether he was a student there or not, but when I met him, it was again through MEChA. He came in and he was recruiting students. He was running a project where he would put young Chicanos, Chicanas, and put them through a learning, you know, education process to make them leaders. It included some trips to Washington, DC, maybe Sacramento. So, that’s where I met him. The other memory I have is he was very involved with Educational Issues Coordinating Community [EICC] in LA. That got pretty heated, you know, in terms of the tactics and activities, and the meetings used to take place at Vahac church. There was
one time when, and I don’t know what the issue was, but it came to blows. And who was
right in the middle, is Rene, and this other guy who I never got his name, in an old
cowboy hat, real loud guy, he was getting belligerent and all that, your dad wasn’t going
to take any of that. [laughter] It calmed down pretty quickly, it didn’t get into the news or
anything, but I remember that time, I said, ahh, these meetings can get into some, you
know, street activity, too.
Clarisa: Your dad was really, you know, when people talk about sacrifice, you know, and
making choices about where you go in life. He was a professor, he was already teaching
Mexican-American study. I wasn’t in his class, I was in someone else’s course. Your dad
would divide his salary so he could bring on other people to mentor and to help him, kind
of like assistants. And he approached me about doing that. And I don’t remember why,
because I wasn’t in his class, but it might have been because of our activities through
meetings. And so I did that for a semester with him. And then he was still married to
Anne. And in fact, I was thinking about her the other day, do you? Did you ever meet
her?
Gabriel: Yeah, once or twice.
Clarisa: Anyway, he bought the house on Pershing. Do you know about that house?
Gabriel: Yep.
Clarisa: Yeah. [laughter] And they were still together. It wasn’t the end of their
relationship, I’m pretty sure because, people were establishing collectives. So you know,
we have three or four people living in one home, and we’d share responsibilities. But it
had, it was more meaningful than just your roommates, you know, we’d have house
meetings, we would talk about things, it predated the study groups. And so your dad,
Francisca Rascon, and I moved in to your dad’s house, along with, I forget who the other person was. Then, the friendship developed. It was hilarious, I went to Washington DC with him on a trip. It was the weekend that they had the funeral for Lyndon B. Johnson. We were at the Department of Education and your dad, I mean, he had purple pants on and an orange shirt, and his hair was out to here. And everyone in DC was dressed to the nines, right? Latino, black, whatever, you know, and here was Rene walking down the hall with his little yippy Chicana you know who, you know, I was in my Levi’s bell bottoms, I didn’t even own fancy clothes, you know? I just remember it being such a bizarre experience, but an educational one. He went in there to talk to an old friend of his who was in DC at the time. You know who I’m talking about? He was from East LA City College, and had been sent to DC.

Gonzalo: Shadow. He was a real dark Mexicano. We called him shadow.

Clarisa: You know, your dad was always, and not in any kind of suspicious way, he was just, he was just trying to mentor people. I don’t know if you’ve heard that echoed in other places, but just, you know, he was just a solid human being.

Gabriel: Thank you. Was it Armando Rodriguez? Carlos had him as a teacher.

Gonzalo: Yeah, and he was actually Assistant Secretary of Education or something for a while before he came back to the West Coast.

**Norma and Roger**

Roger Cazares was born in Chihuahua, Mexico and emigrated to the United States in 1945. He graduated from Sweetwater High School, Southwestern College, and then San Diego State University (SDSU). Roger started a banking career but took a “break” to accept a position at the MAAC (Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee on Anti-Poverty) project in 1969, where
he ended up staying for over 36 years working as a job developer, their head of planning, and eventually president and chief executive officer. Roger oversaw the development and implementation of programs and services in the areas of affordable housing, early childhood education, culturally responsive drug and alcohol rehabilitation, adult education and second-language education, community development, youth training programs, and high school alternative education and intervention. Roger was directly involved in the MAAC projects’ headstart programs and community charter high school, which served students in an alternative high school setting. He served on various boards, including as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the California Community Technology Foundation, Union Bank Community Advisory Board, the Council of Foundations, the Paradise Valley Hospital Board of Governors, the National City Chamber of Commerce, Neighborhood Bancorp, and the National Council of La Raza Board of Directors.

Norma Mena Cazares was born in San Diego to parents whose families were from Arizona, Texas, and Chihuahua, Mexico. Norma graduated from Lincoln High School in 1969 and then completed her BA in public administration and an MA in counseling. She worked for 15 years as a case manager at the Employment Development Department supporting community members in finding employment and fighting employers’ exploitation of workers. Norma shifted to a counseling position at Southwestern Community College where she worked for 28 years supporting students in their academic engagement and attainment. Norma founded the South Bay Leadership Symposium, and served on various boards and organizations, including cofounder of South Bay Forum, the Community Advisory Committee for the Chief of Police for the City of Chula Vista, the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project, and UC San Diego Health System CEO’s Community Advisory Council on Inclusion and Diversity (Urias, 2017). Urias
(2017) noted the tremendous mentorship and support Norma provided for her as her college counselor and her advocate. Norma took the time and effort to speak with Urias’s parents to help them support her acceptance and move to UC Berkeley and continued to support Urias beyond her college career. Urias (2017) stated, “As the Puente counselor, Norma has helped countless students of underrepresented backgrounds (primarily Chicano/Latino) to reach their educational goals and transfer to four-year universities” (p. 200). Norma has been involved in community organizing since she was 15 years old, and has continued to be a mentor, advocate, and organizer for social justice and community empowerment.

Norma and Roger, like the other elders, knew my father long before I was born. While I was communicating with him to request and then arrange for his and Norma’s participation in this study, Roger told me, “Your father and I were good friends.” Norma and Roger retold various stories about meeting my father and the trouble he would get into, speaking up and stirring the pot. Norma’s organizing, as seen in her testimonio, started early in her life when she was 15 years old walking precincts and registering people to vote in East San Diego and City Heights. Roger’s history of organizing, like Norma’s, started with his ancestors and his father specifically. Both Norma and Roger, like the other elders of this study, participated in many facets of the Civil Rights movement(s).

**Roger: “Can You Imagine if I Hadn’t Gone Back?”**

**Stories From His Father: A Family Legacy of Organizing.** I started off with Roger by asking him about his early childhood experiences. He responded by telling me about his family’s legacy of labor organizing. Roger stated:

My dad was a copper miner in Chihuahua, Mexico. Unbeknownst to me at that time, I didn’t know this until many years later, but he was a master mason. He got his Master
Mason certification 9 days before I was born. He was an organizer. He saw the injustices that were happening because the copper mines were owned by a Swiss company. They came [to Mexico] and they brought their families with them. They built a little public park for their families and their kids, but no Mexicans were allowed to go to the park. So, we said, “There’s something not right about this story. Here they are in Mexico taking our riches out of the country, and our wealth, and not even letting us use our own park in our own land.” My dad said to another guy, “We need to organize and boycott these guys.” They [the workers] were afraid of losing their jobs, and they didn’t want to organize. So, my dad told them, “Okay, tonight if you support the strike, put a red flag in front of your hut.” They lived in huts. My dad said, “When you get up in the morning, whoever has a red flag in front of their hut they’re supporting a strike.” So, he went out that night with his friend and they put red flags in front of everybody’s huts. So, people got up in the morning and there was support for a strike, so they struck the company. And they [the company] asked, “Well, who’s behind this organization?” And my dad said, “I am.” They said, “Okay, well, what do you need?” He said, “Well first of all, we need some honesty here. You build a park on our land, and you don’t let us use it.” He said, “That’s not right.” He says, “And we need health benefits. We don’t even have a doctor in this village.” And so they agreed.

Roger retold his father’s story, starting by using “we,” owning the story of his family like his own and retelling it from his father’s point of view. From Roger’s tone and his continued reference to his father being the smartest person he ever knew, Roger was proud of his father’s cunning organizing of putting red flags in front of everyone’s huts in order to force a strike. I also noted the mention of injustice at the hands of the Swiss owned mining company, building a
park in Mexico and excluding Mexicans from using the space, extracting resources, and leaving the miners and their families without resources, acceptable housing ("they lived in huts"), or medical care. Roger continued to tell his father’s story. He stated:

And my dad says, “Okay, well let’s let go talk to our people and see if they concur.” So, they met with the workers, and they told them, “You know, this company is weak. They gave in too easily, we need to demand more.” And he says “We need to go talk to President Cardenas to nationalize this company. This company belongs to Mexico, not to Europe.” So, he went with this other guy to meet with Cardenas and he said he was wearing his miner’s outfit, you know, his suspenders, and waiting in the lobby. He says he’s waiting in the lobby, him and his friend, to talk to Cardenas, and he sees all the suits come in, and they’re waiting to go in and meet with the president. And they’re still waiting and he said, “Finally I got a little disturbed, so I said, ‘Hey, wait a minute.’” So he walked right in. He says, “We’ve been waiting here a long time, you haven’t invited us in yet.” And President Cardenas says, “Well, who are you and what do you want?” My dad says, “Well, this is who we are. And we’re representing 10,000 copper mine workers, and they’re getting abused by the Europeans. And we think that you should nationalize this company and keep the wealth in Mexico.” President Cardenas agreed, he nationalized the company. But then they went looking for the organizers behind the union and that was my father and this other dude. So, he had to take off. He had to run because his life was jeopardized. Anyway, he moved, but before they moved I was born there. And most of us were born there. But I think at the time, they only had nine kids, but he moved the whole family to Tijuana. He bought a ranch in Tijuana, and he moved us there to this ranch.
Like some of the elders, Roger’s family had to flee Mexico to escape the threat of violence. Roger’s maleta was filled with the skills and understanding of labor organizing. He stated:

He was a machinist, he was taught by the Masons. And he knew math, because he machined precise parts. And so, they hired him in San Diego, and he used to cross the border, and they transferred him to LA. He didn’t want to leave the family, so he told them, “Leave me in San Diego and let me cross my family and I’ll stay with you. Otherwise, I quit.” So, they gave in to him and they let him do that. So, my dad sold the ranch that he had bought to a customs agent who let them all through, let us all through [laughter]. So that’s how we got to San Ysidro. Then we went to Frontier Homes, which is a huge government housing project in Point Loma, where employees of the federal government can house their families. My two oldest brothers, Carlos and Rene, went to Point Loma high school. My dad saved enough money, and he bought a house in Shelltown, in National City. He was working at NASCO [National Steel and Shipbuilding Company]. At NASCO, a crane fell and hit him and another guy and broke 22 ribs and punctured his lungs, and he wound up in the hospital. They wanted to blame it on him. They said, “We’ll pay for the whole hospital bill but it was your fault.” He said, “No, it was not my fault and I will not give in to your bribes.” I remember going to the hospital when he was recovering from his punctured lungs. He used to blow up paper bags and we used to pop them. I remember that at the hospital. Anyway, I say this often, he’s the smartest man I’ve ever met in my life. When I was at Memorial Junior High School there was a running contest in math from seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. At the graduation they gave you an award for the best math student and this guy, this Chinese
guy, Hai Mei Lee, and I were tied in the math test for these 3 years. And in the final test I beat him because my dad taught me calculus.

Roger’s father put negotiating and calculus into his maleta. In these stories, Roger’s father displayed savvy, such as in his negotiation with NASCO, never seeming to give up or let himself be taken advantage of by others. Although this was the first instance where Roger mentioned how impressed he was with his father’s intelligence, Roger often returned to his father’s influence on him. Roger focused on his family legacy of organizing and his father’s intelligence and worldly understanding of politics, later stating it was his father who had the biggest impact on his development of critical consciousness.

Confidence and Strategy: Elementary Education, Field Work, and Early Childhood.

I next asked Roger if he would share pivotal moments from his K–12 education and experiences in school. He stated:

Okay, well, actually, I think I first started school at Midway Elementary in Point Loma, because we were living in frontier homes, a huge HUD subsidized project, because my dad was a machinist with the Navy at that time, and so, we were eligible to live in a subsidized housing project. Huge, I think there were 4000 units or something. Anyway, that’s why I started at Midway Elementary. I didn’t speak English, and my teacher didn’t speak Spanish, and my name was Rojelio. So, she changed my name to Roger. Okay, and I became Roger, but I am still Rojelio really. They changed my name.

Roger, or Rojelio, expressed one of the first instances of racism he experienced as a youth when his name was changed from Spanish to English—an instance of forced assimilation into the dominant linguistic culture and an acute example of subtractive schooling—and when his home culture was removed and changed in favor of the dominant culture. Clarisa, from the
first set of elders, expressed experiencing linguicide, having lost most of her family’s fluency in Spanish. However, this was done purposefully and directly to Rojelio, and it changed his name for the rest of his life, as now he was predominantly known as Roger. Roger continued:

So, then my dad bought a house, he’d saved some money and he bought a house in Shelltown, 3696 Beta Street. It was beautiful. It was like the countryside, dirt roads and everything. So, then I went to Balboa elementary school. I loved going to school because I worked in the cafeteria, and I got a good meal, good lunch. Then in the fourth grade, there was a teacher whose name was Mrs. Cline. and Mrs. Cline asked me to stay after the class. I did and she says, “Roger, I just want you to know that you’re a leader. I want you to run for the president of the school.” She says, “But you can’t run for president until you’re in the sixth-grade, so in the fourth grade you run for secretary, in the fifth-grade for vice president, and in sixth-grade you run for president.” I took her advice. I went off to the races, and I think I got votes because the kids were jealous because we would come to school like a week after school started because we were up north picking crops. My dad took us all, migrant workers, to pick crops, and so they asked why we were late for school and I said, “We were on an extended camping trip.” I became popular because of that and I got voted in [laughter]. She made a huge difference in my life, Mrs. Cline, she actually was somebody that believed in me, and really set the course for the rest of my life by telling me what she told me, that I was a leader. I actually stayed in touch with her, because many, many years later, I was the chairman of the board of this committee that was in charge of state and federal money and giving it to the DA, the sheriff, the jails; we dispersed that state money. Mrs. Cline called me at home at night, because she knew that I was the chairman of this board. She says, “Is this Roger?” I said,
“Yes, it is.” She says, “Do you know who this is?” I said, “Yes, Mrs. Cline.” I recognized her voice. She said, “Yeah, I know you’re on this board, and you’re going to be dispensing the funds next week. I want you to know that I run a reentry program for women that are in prison and I want you to give us money.” And I said, “How could I deny you? [laughter] You made me a leader.” So, I did, we gave her the money she wanted.

Unlike some other testimonios, Roger does not mention redlining affecting his parents’ ability to buy a house. He did mention his family’s experiences of field work, and how he used to tell his classmates he went on an “extended camping trip” when he would return to a late start in school. Teresa, one of the other elders, had a comparable situation when she explained she too would hide or omit talking about her family’s summer field working trips.

In this section of his testimonio, Roger mentioned how some of his first experiences at his new elementary school, after his family moved into Shelltown, were good ones. He worked in the cafeteria and ate decent food for lunch. He then focused on his first memory of a teacher—Mrs. Cline—supporting him, believing in him, encouraging him to run for school office, and building him up as a leader. Almost all the elders mentioned a school staff member, a teacher, counselor, or administrator they remembered supporting them, believing in them, and knocking down barriers for them. These were examples of authentic care, the opposite of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999). For Roger, as I saw for Carlos, one of the elders in the next pair, his teacher Mrs. Cline encouraged him to run for school office. This encouragement had an extremely positive impact on Roger’s engagement with school, his belief in himself as a leader, and his positive trajectory in life. Supporting positive relationships; displaying authentic care; and instilling belief in students’ capacities for growth, leadership, and learning are critical

I think that I learned a lot of skills as a kid. I was poor and happy. But, you know, we were hard workers. My dad was very intelligent, but he was a very great believer in hard work. He and my mother had 11 children. He used to take us in one car, an old Plymouth, up to Coyote, which is next to San Jose, which is now Silicon Valley, to pick prunes. So, we used to stay there in the prune fields, in tents, in the orchards picking the crops for the farmers. I became ambidextrous that way. So, I learned how to pick with two hands. And I learned politics that way, I like to say, because I learned how to pick from the side and I learned how to pick from the back. And that’s where I learned my politics, behind your back. That’s usually where most of the political negotiations happen when you’re not around. At least when we’re not around. And that taught me a lot about meeting good people, the right people. Both of us had the good fortune of meeting Bert Corona. He’s a good friend and he’s a good teacher. We spent a lot of time with Bert. And I learned a lot from him.

Roger mentioned his father’s intelligence, and then juxtaposed it to his belief in hard work. Roger provided an example of this hard work with his family’s trips to the fields to pick prunes in the summer. Roger’s experience of going for the summer to pick prunes at fields near San Jose, California, was like Teresa Valladolid’s family’s experiences in fieldwork, which she explained in her testimonio. Roger connected his experiences in the fields to political practices of negotiating to the side and behind the back. He mentioned one of his mentors, Bert Corona, who
had a positive influence on him and Norma, during their work in the community organizing for social justice.

**Academic and Political Education: Family Cultural and Intellectual Wealth.** Roger returned to his father and learned from him. Roger stated:

Well, you know, I said it earlier in this conversation. My dad was the smartest man I’ve ever met in my life. I didn’t realize how he was so intelligent globally, global economics, you know, I didn’t know at the time and I didn’t find out until years after he passed away that he was a master mason. He got his masonry certification 9 days after I was born in Mexico, and I still have the certificate over there, his original certificate. He taught me. He taught me a lot. He taught me. . . I remember him telling me one time when I was probably, I don’t know, maybe a teenager, 12 or 13 years old. He said, “Son, if you’re going to get involved in work for peace and justice, be careful because they’ll call you a communist.”

Then Norma asked him, “And what did he tell you when you were in the military, Roger?” Roger responded:

Oh yeah, after I got out. I got drafted right out of Sweetwater High School, and I spent 2 years in the army, mostly in Germany. I was totally indoctrinated, you know, with the military. When I came home, the French were just getting kicked out of Indochina. Michelin Tires was getting run out of Ho Chi Minh. I told my dad, I said, “Papá, son los comunistas, they’re the communists that are doing that.” And he says, “Don’t you believe that for a second?” He says, “What do you think, if you had the concession to sell Hershey bars to 3 billion Chinese? What do you think that’d be worth to you?” He says, “That’s an economic war. It’s not a communist issue. It’s an economic war.” Controlling
the straits to the Chinese market. Same kind of theory your dad taught. Your dad was right on.

Roger cited his father again as the smartest person he ever knew. And this time, it was not just in math, masonry, or mechanical smarts, but geo-political and economic intelligence and perspective. Roger’s testimonio of his father breaking down the politics and economics of the wars in Vietnam demonstrated the knowledge and cultural wealth in his maleta, the building blocks of his own critical consciousness.

**Pushed Out: Experiences of Racism and Exclusion in High School and College.**

Roger went on to discuss his transition from the army to college, starting with the construction of Southwestern community college. He stated:

They were building a new college called Southwestern, and it started at Chula Vista High School. Three o’clock, the high school kids left and the college started. My good friend Cabezón Portillo, he was brilliant; Cabezón was one of the smartest people I’ve ever met in my life. [Norma: Hence Cabezón]. Gilbert Portillo was his name but we called him Cabezón. Anyway, when we were in 10th grade at Sweetwater High School, we used to sit next to each other and we learned this then and we still remember it; I said it at his burial services, “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day, to the last syllables of recorded time; And all our yesterdays have lighted fools, the way of a dusty death. Out, out, brief candle. Life is but a walking shadow.” That’s Macbeth before she committed suicide, Lady Macbeth. We learned that from Mrs. Peace in the 10th grade. [Norma: Steve Peace’s mom]. Steve Peace’s mother. She was a good teacher.
Roger introduced his friend Gilbert “Cabezon” Portillo, whose nickname, Cabezon (big head), was related to how intelligent he was. Roger shared an intimate detail of part of his eulogy to his friend, reciting part of a monologue from Macbeth he and Cabezon learned from Mrs. Peace, another teacher who made a positive impact on Roger. Norma reminded Roger of another educational staff member in his life; unfortunately, this person did not have a positive impact in Roger’s life but was a gatekeeper instead. Norma and Roger dialogued about this person:

Norma, “She was, but not Major Schultz.”
Roger, “Well, when they started a new college, at Southwestern College, he was the counselor. Of all the people they hired from the high school district.”
Norma, “But he was your counselor Sweetwater?”
Roger, “Yeah, yeah.”
Norma, “He’s the one who sent you to the military.”
Roger continued:
Yeah, he’s the one who told me to volunteer for the draft. So, we had to take a test in math and English, to see what level we were at, to see if we could take the prep classes or the college credit courses. So, I scored high enough for the college credit courses in both. He [Major Schultz] said, “But you’ve been gone too long. It’d be better if you took the prep classes.” [Gabriel: And this was after you came back from the army.] Yeah from the army. I’ve been gone too long cuz you got me in the army [laughter]. He said, “Well, you need to take the prep classes to see what level you’re at?”
Norma chimed in, “That had more to do because he was brown and not white.”
Roger responded, “I don’t know what happened.”
Norma again, “Yes.”
Roger continued, “Anyway, I wrote a story at that time, ‘Cassius Clay was changing his name to Muhammad Ali.’”

Norma clarified, “In the prep class.”

Roger continued:

So, I wrote a story about why Cassius Clay got rid of a slave name, and I turned it in. The teacher gave me an F. And she says, “Who did you plagiarize?” [Norma: white teacher, white teacher]. So, man, if they didn’t pay me to go to school, I wouldn’t have gone back, but I was getting the GI Bill. So, I went back. She asked us to do an in class assignment. So I did, and I wrote something about ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny which is a cycle of life. And I turned it in. . . I don’t remember when she called me into her office, but she said, “Do you still have that paper that you wrote about Muhammad Ali.” “Yeah, I have in my briefcase, you gave me an F.” She said, “Let me see it.” So, I handed it to her. She put another line in it and made it an A and then she put a plus, an A plus. She said, “You don’t belong in this class, you belong in the college credit courses.” Can you imagine if I hadn’t gone back?

This was Roger’s first mention of a gatekeeping educational staff member in his testimonio—Major Schultz—who was his high school and then college counselor. Major Schultz put up multiple roadblocks in Roger’s educational path, first suggesting he enlist in the military instead of going to college. Then, even though Roger scored at the college level in his placement exams, Major Schultz suggested he take the remedial “prep” classes—a clear example of a racist deficit mindset projected onto Roger. This suggestion and placement of Roger into remedial classes at Southwestern College landed him in class with a teacher who accused him of plagiarizing an essay he wrote, asking him from where he stole the essay. Roger considered
dropping out of college. If not for the GI Bill funding, he may not have continued. I saw a similar situation in David Valladolid’s educational experience as well, and in his situation, the gatekeeping efforts of the college teacher had dire consequences. It was not until Roger completed an in-class writing assignment could this college English teacher accept Roger was intelligent enough to have written his first paper. This was yet another example of racism and low expectations for Roger. Major Schultz’s suggestion Roger enlist in the Army may have helped him to persist in college in the face of the racism he faced. Due to the GI Bill funding he received, Major Schultz, despite Roger’s college level marks, put Roger in the remedial classes where his intelligence and writing skills were unnecessarily questioned.

At this point in the dialogue, Norma said, “See to me, it’s all about that, to me, that was racism.”

Roger agreed, “Well, yeah”

Norma continued, “That Sergeant whatever, Schultz guy, Captain Schultz, what was he?”

Roger responded, “Major.”

Norma again, “Major Schultz, he was his counselor”

Roger said, “Major Charles Schultz”

Norma continued, “You know, he was his counselor in high school, and minimized his abilities. He gets him in college. . . .”

Roger said, “I used to say, ‘You rise to the level of their expectations.’”

Norma agreed, “You rise to the level of their expectations. Yep.”

Roger and Norma’s echoing of rising to the expectations of the authority figures in their lives reminded me of the Pygmalion effect, originally coined by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), which contends students’ academic performance is heavily influenced by the expectations of
their teachers. I asked, “At the time, how did you understand these things? At the time, were you just kind of trying to get through?”

Norma repeated, “What did you think about all that?”

Roger responded:

Oh, about that? Well, I went back because I was getting paid to go. That’s the reason that me and Cabezon went back. But at the same time, they were building the campus, the new college campus, Southwestern College, there was nothing but tomato fields and farms out there. Anyway, so I told Cabezon, “Let’s go check it out man. They’re building a new college.” And so we went out there, and the sheriffs were out and they pulled us over. They gave us what they call the field citation, which meant if any construction property was stolen from the site, your suspects? [Norma: Yep]. So Cabezon said, “Chale con eso.” He didn’t want to go back.

Norma chimed in, “Like I tell him, can you imagine how many Chicanos, Latinos, Blacks, that they turned off from education? Because that kind of treatment?”

Roger added, “Yeah, that’s why a lot of people of color got their education in prison.”

Norma continued, “You know, not wanting to go through all that.”

I added, “Just like you were saying, Roger, if you didn’t have to, like you wouldn’t have gone back.”

Norma said, “Yeah. Yeah. But they were paying him.”

I continued, “You would have left, because they were pushing you out.”

Norma replied, “Yeah, yeah. Imagine how many did get pushed out?”

Roger continued, “Oh, yeah. I know. I mean, most of my friends, practically all of my friends did get pushed out, including Cabezon. He was brilliant.”
Norma added, “And he never did go, he never went [back].”

Roger said, “He joined the Teamsters. He became a head Teamster, he had a fantastic pension.”

Norma agreed and explained, “Yeah. No, he did well. But what I’m saying is that he didn’t have a choice. The choice was taken away from him.”

Roger stated, “Well, it was taken away from a lot of people.”

It was heartbreaking to hear “practically all” of Roger’s friends got “pushed out”, “including Cabezon.” Roger, Cabezon, and their community’s experiences in schooling, and the punitive environment around Southwestern College, exemplified subtractive schooling and deficit models for students of color (Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2005). Roger went on to talk about the presence of MEChA and MAYA (Mexican-American Youth Association) in the SDSU community, and how they used to request the presence of professors to speak to them about student issues. As I listened, I wondered how Roger connected to these organizations at SDSU at the time when he started there in 1968, and how this may have related to his embodiment of his family’s legacy of political knowledge and organizing. I asked him how he understood the relationship of his development of consciousness, his family’s legacy of organizing, and his own leadership. Roger responded:

At San Diego State [University] they had the fraternities, you know, the jocks. And one of my friends Joe Greener was a member of one of the fraternities and he wanted me to join them. I went to one of their meetings, and they were all Reagan backers. So, I said, “I can’t hang with these people, man.” So, there was a group that had a “boycott grapes” stand. It was SDS, the Students for Democratic Society. I hooked up with them. They were more my people.
Roger’s response demonstrated the importance of his cultural wealth; of the maleta he already carried with him in college; and of his experiences with his family’s legacy of organizing, speaking up, and understanding of geo-politics. Roger responded to my question about the development of consciousness with a story about connecting with people around the grape boycott and around the farmworkers’ movement. As in other testimonios, Roger embodied his own lived experiences and his family’s cultural wealth of community service and social justice to connect to social justice organizations, events, and movement spaces. These factors, maletas de community and familial cultural wealth, and connections with peers and mentors through action in social justice movement spaces continued to synergistically work in tandem across all of the testimonios as integral parts of the development of critical consciousness (CC).

Norma: “Step Up or Shut Up.”

Chicana by Choice: Chicana Identity Is a Philosophical Stance. I started my engagement with Norma by asking her how she identified ethnically and racially. She responded:

I identify as a Chicana primarily, and Indigenous, because that’s who I am, and I took on that identity while in high school. I graduated from high school in 1969. So, I was right in that era of the movimiento and all that. I realized, you know, that’s who I am. So, philosophically, it’s a philosophical condition for me, is not so much the color of my skin, not so much where my parents are from and that, but rather that I can identify with the mission of that identity. And I’ve been that ever since. It’s interesting, because the terms changed with time. The younger ones want you to say, Chicanx, you know, and I’m saying, “That’s okay for you,” I said, “but I’m a Chicana.” It’s an identity that I chose to take on. Particularly, what solidified it for me was being in the United States, being a Mexicana, a Mexican American, like they would call us. We were treated here
like you’re not a real American. So, when I went to Mexico for the first time ever, I was 18 years of age, supposedly to find my roots, you know, kind of thing, and then you go there, and they say, “You’re not Mexican.” So, there you are, right. I go, okay, that makes sense. Keeping this identity, holding on to this identity, because I’m neither “here nor there.” And I choose, nobody’s going to label me, I choose to be a Chicana. You know, so that evolved a little bit over time, I just began to realize that it was more and more, it was just a more meaningful and stronger identity as time went on. And to this day, you know, I’m still very proud when people ask me, “Well, you know, what are you?” I say, “Chicana” I don’t say my Mexicana, Mexican, American, Hispana, it’s always Chicana. Some people look at you like, okay, especially since that term isn’t as common as it used to be during the midst of the movimiento and all that. But, yeah, so that’s, that’s basically when I took that on.

Norma introduced the idea of Chicana identity as a philosophical stance, rather than strictly race and ethnic heritage. She explicitly tied Chicana identity to “the mission” of the identity. Implicitly, other elders made similar connections, noting their sense of responsibility to social justice and their community, their desire to speak up, and fight against the injustices of the world in their communities. Norma explained this connection, weaving together the importance of education, direct action, and community organizing. She stated:

I think, for me, it’s always been, there was a need, because of the lack of voices in our communities, coming from the Latino Chicano communities, realizing that things were not going to change unless you stepped up. Education was something that I was always interested in. I felt that that was an avenue that our gente (people) needed in order to reach their goals and aspirations. And there wasn’t enough of us doing that. You see the
inequities growing up as well. And things weren’t changing. So, I felt like, it’s either step up or shut the you-know-what up. And to this day that’s one of my mottoes. In fact, I used to tell that to my students. You got to step up, don’t just talk about it and not follow through with some action. Either you step up or shut up. Okay? Make room for those that are willing to step up and do the work that needs to be done, because there’s a lot of work to be done. My identity, the choice that I made to identify that way, I saw that it needed action. Not words.

Norma defined her Chicana identity as relating to the mission of seeing inequities in the community and then taking action to do something about them, essentially defining critical consciousness and tying it to her Chicana identity. She also made this decision on her own, as a choice, as an expression of self-determination.

**Direct Action in Southeast: Organizing the Community at 15 Years Old.** Norma went on to explain in detail the inequities in infrastructure in the City Heights and Southeast San Diego communities, as well as the direct actions in creating social and political change she got involved in while she was in high school. She stated:

> Because there’s a lot of people with a lot of words, and you know, nothing happens, nothing changes. I think I learned that when I was 15 years old. At 15 years old, I saw the power of exactly that, either you stepped up or you shut up. I grew up in Barrio Logan, like your dad did, too. But at 10 years old, we moved to southeast San Diego on 42nd and Market Street, primarily an African-American community. I went to Chollas Elementary, Gompers junior high school, and I graduated from Lincoln High School. Lincoln High School, at the time that I was there, was probably 75% to 80% Black. And you know we had similar issues, we had similar concerns. At 15 years of age I was registering people to
vote when I couldn’t vote myself. I did it with my very first, what I would call, political, socially conscious mentor, which was George Stevens. George Stevens, an African American, many years later became a city council member, we’re talking when I was 15. So that was like 1965, 66, And he didn’t become a councilmember until I think the early 1990s. He was a community organizer in that area. He said, “The way we make change in our community is through the vote.” So, I learned that at 15 years of age the importance of the vote and getting our communities registered. . . A lot of the infrastructure in that part of town was nonexistent, basically. Streetlights, roads, everything, you know, they basically disregarded southeast San Diego, to this day there are still issues. . . there was power with the vote and then also with “Oh, shoot, these people are serious!” Because there were petitions gathered as well, from the neighbors, as far as the work that needed to be done. We had been ignored. The pressure was applied, and George Stevens knew how to do it, and he had us behind him. The pressure that was applied affected change. Because they couldn’t deny [it], all you had to do was come to the neighborhood and look and compare it to a neighborhood a little further north of us, especially across what is now the interstate eight. So that was eye opening, and it happened at a young age. It was because I was bilingual. I would speak to the Spanish speaking citizens who never registered to vote, and I’d registered them to vote, you know, and we could see how that affected change. I could see, because we were finally getting some stuff done in our neighborhood. You know, so anyway, it was at that time that I realized, yeah, he’s walking the talk and that’s what you got to do.

Norma described her experience organizing to register people to vote in her community of Southeast San Diego when she was a 15-year-old high school youth as pivotal moments in
development of her Chicana identity and critical consciousness. Norma’s connection of the inequities in her community to the registering of voters and seeing the positive change this made was central to the “mission” of her identity and consciousness as a Chicana: “step up or shut up.” Norma noted her mentor George Stevens as being an example of this direct action for social-political change, of walking the talk, and the connections between the Chicana and Black communities and interests in social justice. There was work needed to improve her community. After acting, she connected the action, seeing the potential for change, and the responsibility to take on this work to her Chicana identity. She also noted her bilingual and bicultural wealth proved useful during her organizing. The theme of her bicultural tools in her maleta of cultural wealth being useful in her community organizing resurfaced later in her testimonio as well. She continued to explain more about how she connected with George Stevens and what it meant to her. She stated:

I feel blessed that my mom, when George Stevens came knocking on our front door, and asked her permission to take me with him around the neighborhood, to help to translate, you know, and to help fill out these forms, that my mother said yes. My mom trusted him. She saw him as a good person that only wanted to do good. You know, and so the fact that my mom arrived at that, how many moms would say yes, especially to a young black male. Right? Think about that. Okay. And she said, yes. And I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. But I knew that he was a good man, because he was doing good things in our neighborhood. I gained so much from it, so much. And I think that experience just opened up that door, that world for me, opened up my mind, my consciousness, and I allowed other experiences and other things that I was seeing come into my mind, you know, and come up with some thoughts that have carried me through
to this day. Lessons that have carried me through to this day. I think, as a disenfranchised community that we still are, that’s what people need to do, is don’t just talk, let’s see some action here. That’s what I’ve been doing all my life to this day. I’ve been retired for 7 years, but I’m still active in the community, still moving things.

Norma credited her mother’s openness to allow her to get involved in community organizing at an early age to helping Norma develop her own openness to ideas and actions around social justice and direct community action and to the development of her critical consciousness. In this example, multiple themes converged relating to the development of critical consciousness: developing awareness of injustice, connection to supportive mentoring relationships, and seeing the potential of direct action to combat oppression. Norma brought the whole concept of the responsibility to act full circle, both mentioning how she used this concept with the students she served in her career (in an earlier excerpt), and still currently in her life relating to community action.

That’s Why You’re an Activist! – A Family History of Organizing and Deportation.
I next asked Norma about her family, education, and schooling experiences. She shared:
Well, very much like Roger with his father, I think my greatest mentors are my parents. My dad was born in Mexico. We have a very similar story [her and Roger]. It was his father. But it was my [paternal] grandfather, basically working in the copper mines of Arizona, during the depression, during the late 20s, into the 30s. They used their butts, they used their assets, worked their asses off, and then supposedly repatriated them out, when the depression was ending and people were coming back into the communities. So, they kicked out the Mexicans and gave the work to the so-called Americans. All of my mom’s siblings, herself and all the siblings were born in Arizona. They got kicked out.
Part of that was because of my dad. My grandfather was also an organizer, to which my mom said, “That’s why you’re an activist! That’s why you’re an organizer, your grandfather was.” Over here, no doubt, the sheriff was in the pocket of the mine owners, whoever they were, and they chased my grandfather out too, because he was trying to organize the copper miners, you know, for better working conditions and better wages. They were being paid less than the white workers that were there.

As we saw in Gonzalo’s testimonio, Norma’s mother, aunts, and uncles were all deported with their parents, even though they were U.S. citizens. Norma described how her family experienced this deportation. She said:

It was not a legal deportation, they didn’t give a shit. They just said you’re out of here, and they got the law in front of you, so what are you gonna do? You’re gonna leave. It certainly was no formal deportation, but when they take away your job, and there’s nothing to go back to, basically they were kicked out, just kicked out. My mom was 10 or 11 years old, she’d been going to school in the English language there in Arizona, in Miami, Arizona. They forbid people from speaking Spanish, back in the day, you know, and even during my time. When she went to school over there, they put her in school in Juarez, Chihuahua, she didn’t have the skills. She had the [oral] language, but not the reading and writing skills for someone her age to be placed properly in her age group. So they ended up finding a family in El Paso. So, for Monday through Friday, my mother and her older brother would be shipped to this family, so she could go to school at an American school, an English speaking school, a public school. Then on the weekends they’d go home [to Juarez]. My mom recalls that she didn’t like it at all because the family wasn’t very nice. Her parents were paying them to house them for school. My
mom did this until she finished eighth grade. Then she dropped out of school, to go to work, to work to help her family.

I asked Norma to clarify, and she explained her mom and her uncle crossed the border every week to go to school in El Paso, and then back home to Juarez on the weekends. Norma responded, “Because she was a U.S. citizen. Remember, she was not deported, it was her parents that were deported. She went with them. What were they going to do? They couldn’t not go with them.” She then continued telling her family’s story. Norma stated:

Then she was able to get into what she called beauty school. I guess they used to take them in pretty young. She became a beautician at a young age. She was cutting hair at a young age. But then, of course later, that’s when she met my dad and she got pregnant, she got kicked out, and they ended up coming to San Diego. My mom immigrated and then my dad did too, when they got married. My mom always wanted to finish school. She did finish school. She got her high school diploma with my older sister. When my older sister got her high school diploma, my mom got her high school diploma that same time through adult school. She did it. She wanted to do it. Then she went on and took secretarial classes. Thank God she did that because when my dad passed away when I was 16, it was the fact that she had accomplished her high school diploma and had taken those career job classes that she was able to secure a really good job with the local 89 which still exists today. The union, yeah, the union local laborers, local 89, she was able to secure a job there. Phil hired her. And she worked there for 25 years. This is why my mom, when I say as a mentor, was able to overcome, despite the gender roles. She was determined. She was determined. Watching her, how could I not continue with my aspirations and my goals. If she could do it, why couldn’t I? But she was strong. She was
a strong person. We were really lucky to have her as our mom, all seven of us. She was cool. Norma clearly saw her mother’s struggle with deportation, schooling, and working to support her family was an asset, a motivator for her own aspirations. Norma explained later her mother had to overcome sexist discrimination in her education and job placement. I saw how impactful her mother’s struggle, hard work, and perseverance was for Norma, especially after her father passed away when she was 16, leaving her mother to support her and her siblings on her own. Norma continued with more of her family’s history. She shared:

So, when they got married, she immigrated with my dad and they moved to San Diego. My dad had family in San Diego. My dad’s mom, my grandmother, had two brothers in San Diego. So that’s how. They became really close family to us, especially their wives. Dario and Salvador were my grandmother’s brothers. My tío Salvador married my tía Ester. My tía Ester, oh my god, she was a savior. My tío Dario married Josefina who my sister is named after. My tía Josefina, she was a godsend too. Those two women are the ones who were able to help my family, my parents, to get established over here [in San Diego]. My mom didn’t know how to cook. Because remember, she started working as soon as she got trained as a beautician, so she never learned how to cook. So they’re the ones that taught her how to cook. They became like our grandparents, because our grandparents were in Mexico. My dad’s mom and dad were in Juarez and my mom’s parents, my grandparents, were in Juarez as well. If it hadn’t been for these two families, I think it would have been a real challenge for my parents. My dad had a sister also in Tijuana, and they were pretty well to do. Her kids all crossed the border, because they were all born in the US, but they never lived in the US. They always lived in Tijuana, but
they all went to school in San Diego, they all graduated from San Diego schools. Yeah, you know. It’s these connections. I never heard that story, about how or why they came to San Diego, my uncle’s.

Norma’s testimonio again demonstrated evidence of her maletas of community and familial wealth, how supportive her tías and tíos were, and how the support of her family was instrumental in helping her parents establish a foundation of support for Norma and her siblings. Norma went on to describe values she learned from her parents. She shared:

My dad was very hardworking, very ethical, very honest. My mom, she was the same, really a good person. They made it real clear about right and wrong and about helping those that were less than. It’s just like his [Roger’s] mom, his mom used to take on some Braceros, you know. My parents would do what they could themselves, they would go to Tijuana and buy produce and buy our food and stuff there. But it was also to share with whomever.

Interestingly, although Norma credited her experiences organizing and the mentorship with George Stevens as being one of the pivotal moments of her crystallization of critical consciousness and Chicana identity, she, like Roger, had a wealth of cultural and familial knowledge around organizing and community involvement. Norma’s characterization of the way the Mexican copper miners and her family were treated by the mine owners and U.S. government clearly demonstrated she believed this treatment was wrong and unjust. She denoted how they had their “asses worked off” and then “supposedly repatriated,” before they were “kicked out.” She noted their jobs in the mines were given to “so-called Americans,” alluding to her mention of how she felt as Chicana she was never accepted as fully American. Although she acknowledged her family was impacted by the mass deportations of Mexican people by the U.S.
government, over half of which were U.S. citizens, she did not dwell on it. She did not talk of trauma or details of hardship that had to have undoubtedly affected her family, as they did so for many millions of others who were forcibly deported during that time—as much as one third of the Mexican population of Los Angeles at the time (Balderrama & Rodriguez, 2006). Although she did not mention this trauma directly, she did get emotional and tear up as she described how impactful her mother’s support and perseverance was for her, about how it helped her aspire to work hard for her own access to educational and social resources, and for community and social improvement.

Valuing Education: Familial Support and Staff Encouragement in Education.

Norma shared about the support and values she received from her family and interactions and experiences of school as a youth. She stated:

All of us, seven brothers and sisters, were all born in San Diego. I’m the only one that has a higher level degree. But that doesn’t mean that they weren’t successful. They’ve all done well, through their work ethic, you know. Retired and things like that, except my little brother, the one you saw pull away in the green and white truck; he’s still working, but he’s younger. We gained their values, their principles and values. I’ve carried that with me, you know, in everything that I’ve ever done. I think that we also pass those same values on to our kids, as well, and hopefully to our grandchildren. But they [Norma’s parents] were my first, they were absolutely my first mentors. . . they believed in us. My mom had an eighth-grade education and my dad had a fourth-grade education, but they always pushed us. They wanted us to go to college, they didn’t know what that meant. They didn’t know what to do, they just said “Get good grades,” you know, that’s
all they would say. So, they kept pushing, you know us to do that as well. And in turn, I
did that with my kids. We did that with our kids. That’s an expectation kind of a thing.

Norma’s maleta of cultural wealth was filled with her parents’ values and principles of
hard work and education. Unlike many of the myths of Chicana (and Latine) homes being
antithetical to education and myths of a deficient culture, Norma’s story, and all the elders in this
study, demonstrated quite the opposite. Although her parents were not fully aware of what was
required from her siblings and her in completing their education, her parents had elevated
expectations of their children and consistently encouraged them to “get good grades” in school.
Norma continued:

I loved school. I truly, truly loved school, even though we didn’t have any brown or
Black teachers, we never did. I never did until finally in sixth grade. But because I loved
learning, I was a pretty good kid, I didn’t get in trouble or anything like that. I got picked
up for kindergarten right away. Whereas my sister, who was a year younger than me, she
wasn’t allowed to [start kindergarten] because they said she didn’t speak enough English.
So, she got delayed in her education. Why wasn’t I? We only spoke Spanish at home. We
watched TV. I think that’s kind of how we learned in the streets, and TV and things like
that. But I lucked out, she didn’t, they held her back. I think we spoke the same level, you
know, kind of a thing. My first teacher of color was in sixth grade at Chollas Elementary
School. Mr. Castillo. It’s funny how you remember your teachers of color. I don’t
remember my white teachers. [Norma: laughter] [Roger: I do] You know, but he was an
inspiration. He inspired me. See. To me that shows that it’s important to have people that
look like the students . . . [Roger: looked like your dad]. Yeah. You know, where they
can make a difference for you. He believed in me, he saw, you know that, “Okay, she’s a
good student.” He encouraged me and things like that. But it wasn’t always like that, but I just managed to stay on the straight and narrow. Then in middle school, at Gompers, Dr. Armando Rodriguez, was the vice principal while he was there. Finally, you see people that look like you and you say, “Wow, he actually looks like me.” That really made a difference because he did try to connect with the students, especially the Latino students. He went on to do some big things in education. I was really lucky there as well.

Although Norma stated she loved school, it was immediately tied to a qualifier—“even though we didn’t have any Black or brown teachers.” In this section of her testimonio, Norma focused on the positive impact teachers of color had on her and her belief in herself. Again, we see the power of teacher’s beliefs and of teachers having positive impacts on our elders and their pathways through schooling. Norma explicitly acknowledged her sister was held back due to her speaking Spanish, even though Norma believed their fluency in English and Spanish was very comparable. This was undoubtedly a traumatic experience for her sister, and for the family. I asked Norma to give more context to her statement of, “But it wasn’t always like that. . .” as this reference to times not like “that” was juxtaposed with the support and encouragement she received from Mr. Castillo. She responded:

It wasn’t like that, particularly when I went to junior high school. I didn’t have a really good experience, I remember in the seventh, I think it was seventh grade. This was at Gompers. Whereas I was a really good math student, through elementary school, and Mr. Castillo recognized that I was good at math, and he encouraged that. When I got to seventh grade, unfortunately, the math teacher that I got, which was a white teacher, male, didn’t recognize that [math] as a possible talent that female students might have. So, he favored the boys. You see, he favored the boys. When it came to class, you’re
raising your hand to answer and instead he’s overlooking you and calling on the boys. So that’s where gender came in. It wasn’t so much, I don’t think it was as much racial, as it was more the gender issues, misogyny. What happens is you get tired of raising your hand and not being called on, and you get discouraged. So, that’s where I remember that I kind of lost interest in math. It was like, “What’s the point?” To this day, I can tell you that math was not my strong subject after that. I got through everything I had to, you know, but with C grades [in math] until I finally took statistics that was more A, because statistics makes sense to me. But I was in honors classes in English and social sciences, when it came to math I was always in a regular class, after seventh grade. That’s what can happen. That’s an example of getting discouraged. You realize, okay, well, maybe that’s not meant for me, you think that, maybe that’s not meant for me. Maybe math is supposed to be for guys only. And I mean, and really to this day, who’s in all the science and engineering and how many women do you see in that?

I stated there were some statistics showing improvement in women’s overall degree attainment, and some improvement in women’s attainment in STEM degrees as well. Norma continued:

It had to become intentional. Okay, an intentional effort. We need to get more women. But that was an example of what happened to us. My experience is an example of how easily females were discouraged. You had to have a certain math level to be able to get into chemistry, you see. It just sabotages everything at an early age. Okay, I’m not going to pursue these levels of math. But then I can’t get into chemistry. I can’t get into physics. So then you’re not going to go down that science route. I was 13 years old, and I’m 71 now. And, finally, it’s becoming more intentional.
Norma’s life was shaped by the sexist exclusionary norms her seventh grade math teacher enacted on with her and other female students in her class. She experienced this exclusion and devaluation of her capacities in math around 58 years ago, and she was still acutely aware of her experience and the impact it had on her and potentially others.

**Critical Consciousness Forming in High School: Involvement in Community Action.**

Norma shared her experiences organizing in high school and the impact these experiences had on her. She stated:

In high school, I was involved in the walkouts 1968 in Los Angeles and it was 69 in San Diego, when we had the walkouts. I was in charge of engaging the Mexicanos that were at Lincoln High School at the time, you know, the Spanish speakers, you know, to engage them and to participate with the rest of us and walk out of school. I was able to do that, thank God, because I was bilingual. I was able to convince them that the reason you’re in EMR [educable mentally retarded] classes is because you speak Spanish. I don’t know if you remember that term, if you’re familiar with that term, educationally mentally retarded. That was a term that was used back then [Roger: educable mentally retarded]. So EMR [Roger: that’s where they would send the Spanish speakers] So their level of education was very substandard. There wasn’t much expected of them. And so, you can imagine how they come out of that. Right? They graduate, supposedly, but you know. They got a good education in Mexico. Their educational levels were higher than they were in the United States, particularly at that time. They were really bright, they were way ahead for grade level. They knew they were receiving substandard education, but they thought that’s just the way it is. That’s the way it’s supposed to be. So, I was able to convince them, no, you deserve more, you deserve better, you shouldn’t be in these low
standard classes that you’re in. The only way we’re going to fix this is if we fix the administration. And we get teachers of color here. We had a couple of teachers of color, they were Black. But there wasn’t enough, you know what I’m saying? There just wasn’t.

Norma’s involvement as a high school organizer in the historic walkouts of 1968–1969 was centered around her bilingual and bicultural ability to communicate with a group of primarily Spanish speaking students who were affected by a pernicious deficit model of schooling were labeled as “educable mentally retarded” and relegated to substandard classes.

Again, as in all the elders’ testimonios, Norma shared another clear example of subtractive schooling. As Norma finished this element in her testimonio, I asked her about her perception and understanding of her development of critical consciousness, of her political and social awareness. She responded:

I think it started, that’s why I like to talk about George Stevens, taking it back to when I was 15 and seeing the impact that one can make by just speaking up, and just critically seeing things, analyzing things, and saying, “Wait a minute.” We were getting books, books that were stamped that they came from Crawford high school, or they came from some other parts of San Diego. They gave us the old books. You know, just things like that. You started seeing the inequities, you know. We had a really good, a smart student body, as well, as far as the associated student body. I still know them. Sharp, most of them were Black but a few of us Latinos. That’s when I also learned the power of collaborating, coming together, working together, instead of against each other. Because then that’s when we were able to set the agenda about what we were going to do. We were able and we followed through with it. Your role is to do this, yes, I want to do that, we need to talk to that population, because they’re being treated like second class
citizens, if not less, you see. It’s interesting, the question that you asked, because it just evolved, I don’t know, you know, I think over time. You know who was there? Carlos Legerette was there, people from the community, activists in the community came to Lincoln to support us. Carlos was there. Ken Msumaji, Sukumu. The gentleman that just passed away, another African American, which that’s another story because there were two Black groups that used to fight each other, but they came together to support us. [Gabriel: and this was for the walkouts?] This was for the walkouts, this was for the walkouts. Yeah. And who else was there? Carlos . . . It was . . . I think I have the list somewhere. I have the story somewhere. [Roger: Black Panther] So it was the Black, Oh, US, yes, thank you. It was the Black Panthers and US, two totally different groups. Both of them had their headquarters on Market Street by where I grew up, you know. But for that time they came, they came together, they came together to support the walkouts. So, we had Latino activists and we had Black activists that came, and they would advise us, you know.

In explaining her development of awareness, community activism, and critical consciousness, Norma focused on awareness of inequities, relationships, and movement spaces and events. She spoke about noticing their older books, marked with the names of other high schools where they had already been used, and noting the disparity. She returned to speaking about George Stevens and the impact he had in life and although she struggled a little bit to articulate when thinking of how her awareness evolved over time, she returned to remembering the people, community activists, and leaders who supported the student walkouts at her high school. She returned to her experiences of the walkouts and the coalition building and collective work in support of the walkouts, even across organizations previously having conflict. Norma’s
articulation of her development of critical consciousness provided a multitude of the factors appearing to be necessary, or at least present, in the formation of critical consciousness: experiences of oppression or inequity, supportive relationships and communities, and movement spaces, events, and organizations.

The Power of Relationships: Mentorship and Advocacy. Norma expressed the impact multiple relationships had on her, including mentorships formed into long-term friendships. Norma explained:

I had another mentor, when I was young, that is still to this day, a really good friend of mine. And you probably know her, Norma Hernandez. Norma was doing some student teaching, or something at Lincoln, when I was in 11th grade. So, she was there during that time. She saw something in me, too. She said, “Well, what I saw was that you used to go to the library, and very few students went to the library. But you did.” But that’s a whole, that’s another story. Just a long story short, many years, you know, we kept in touch, many years later, because she worked with your dad at the Barrio Station, when they opened up the Barrio station. She was one of the principal founders of it too, Norma was, and so, your dad and she worked close together when they were developing it, when they were opening it. But long story short, many, many, many years later, like we’re talking 1968, 69; in 1988 she hired me as a counselor at Southwestern College. [Roger: She became president superintendent] and then she became president superintendent, and then she became a board member President of the Board of Southwestern College. But anyway, so, that’s, look at how long that relationship was. And my relationship with George Stevens was all the way through when he was a city [Roger: Chaka Chaka] his name was Chaka. That was his nickname. Even though we differ, we used to clash when
he was on the city council. We fought, yeah, but he still loved me, and I still loved him. You know, even though we had our differences, and we knew we understood that, you know, it’s okay to have our differences. [Me: healthy conflict]. Yeah, yeah.

As Norma continued, she demonstrated the power of relationships and how critical they were to both her own support as Norma Hernandez was another teacher of color who expressed positive belief in Norma [Casarez], and in the longevity of these relationships over the course of her life, and the movement spaces. She mentioned my father in this excerpt, and referred to George Stevens again, explaining how their relationship evolved over time; although they did not always agree completely, their love for each other continued to keep them connected. The theme of relationships runs across nearly all the various findings—both in support and mentorship—with a connection to movement spaces, organizations, and events, and unfortunately to the gatekeeping experiences of the elders as well. Norma said:

Well, when I was still in high school, I had already decided that I didn’t want to go to college. I assumed I would be going to San Diego City College. An important person in my life was my counselor, who was white. Mr. Short, so that is one white name I do remember, Mr. Short, and he was also the advanced English class teacher and I was in his advanced English class. I don’t know what it was back then. I guess they used to have double roles, or they didn’t have enough money to hire full time counselors or something. So anyway, he knew that I was a good student. But I really wanted to go to San Diego State [University]. That’s where I wanted to go. There was no way my mom, because by then my dad had already passed away, was going to allow the second oldest of girls, when we still had all these younger ones, to leave to go to college. So, I knew that [going to college away from home] wasn’t going to be a possibility. So, I said San Diego State.
Well, back in the day, again, parents didn’t know how to fill out these applications, he helped me, he helped fill out the application forms. He basically did them. Well come to find out, long story short, I got accepted to a couple of UCs, but not in San Diego. I was disappointed that I didn’t hear back from San Diego State. Well, then I said, “Well, I can’t go. I’m going to City College.” Right? So then, one day I get pulled out of my class, get called to the office, and who’s there? Gus Chavez and Jimmy Estrada, okay, from San Diego State. Somehow, they talked the school into looking at records of seniors. They saw my record and they said, “You’ve got good grades. Why didn’t you apply to San Diego State?” I said, “I did apply to San Diego State. I never heard back from you guys.” Then they said, “We don’t have a record of your application to San Diego State.” So, what turned out had happened is my counselor, meaning well, but not understanding the Latino family, and about women, and especially at that time that women didn’t go away for college, especially in a Latino Chicano family. Well, he didn’t have that understanding. So, he thought he was doing me a favor by getting [me] admitted into these big UCs and stuff like that, you see, and he preferred that I left San Diego. And so he never turned in my San Diego State application. This was the first year that EOP was recruiting. I got in [to SDSU] as a late admission through EOP. That’s how I got there. It was Gus Chavez, who, of course became a lifelong friend until he passed, and Jimmy Estrada, who’s been someone that Roger went to school with, grew up with, and he was working with. We’re still in touch with him.

As this passage shows, a potentially well-meaning teacher (and counselor) inadvertently created difficulty in Norma’s life through a lack of cultural/familial understanding. The theme of limited choices for Chicana/Latina women was also shown in this passage. Expectations
concerning proximity to the home, or even not going to college, were a running theme in the testimonios of our Chicana elders. EOP again was present in the college access and admission of one of our elders. Norma continued:

I feel I was blessed to have that experience, that that happened to me, and that I ended up at San Diego State. Because I was able to complete my education. I didn’t do it right away, there were some hiccups in there, um, because I was in an environment that was home. If I would have been, if I would have left, you know, I don’t know how that would have turned out. But it was through my experience at San Diego State, with the Gus Chavez’s of the world, with the Rene Nunez’s of the world. I thank God that there was a time that Chicano studies was starting up because we didn’t know any of that, we never got any of that, when we were in our K through 12. You know, where you discover, “Wow, we have a history.” You know, we have a history, and we have a damn good history, going back all the way to our Indigenous roots. It was an awakening. It really was. Everything was happening in 1969. What didn’t happen in 1969, we went to the moon, the Vietnam War. We had the Anti-Vietnam War movement, we had the gay movement evolving just around that time. 68–69. In that period of time, there were all these movements, you know, the Chicano movement, the Black movement. So many things were going on that it was exciting. It was really exciting. You know, it was like 1000 things going on, and you’re learning, your mind is expanding, your consciousness, you begin to see the world, whether it’s your immediate little area of your world, and then looking at it through the bigger lens. Wow. You start to see the inequities, the injustices, and then you seek them out, you see, you want to read, you want to learn more, you want to read more, you know, and then you start comparing things, you go, “Wait a
minute, wait a minute.” I feel blessed that I went through what I went through, and that I
grew up during that time period. I’m glad that I grew up, that I evolved during that time
period. Because there were just so many lessons to learn, and there were a lot of lessons
that were being offered.

Norma described again the various factors and conditions contributing to her growth of
consciousness with the many movements taking shape and the mentors and people involved in
connecting her, other students, and the community to these movements, to Chicano studies, and
to critical understandings of our histories of oppression and resistance. I asked Norma what these
hiccups were. Norma responded:

Well, the hiccup was I got pregnant in college. In my third year, the beginning of my
third year, I think it was. I went as long as I could, and then I finally had to take a break. I
think my last semester was December of 1972, because I had Leticia in July of 1973.
Yeah. So, I didn’t start the spring semester of ‘73. I finished the fall semester, but I did
not start the spring semester of 1973. I got on welfare and the whole thing, because I
wasn’t married, I refused to get married [laughter]. That’s another story. But the fact that
I even refused to get married tells you a little bit about me, right [laughter]? Then we [she
and Roger] got married in March of 1974. He was not the father of the baby. I had a
boyfriend at that time. I think I had Leticia and then later I had Nicole. So for a couple
years, I didn’t work at all. And then I started working. I worked for EDD for 15 years and
towards the end of my 14th year I went back to school. My son was born in October of
1980. I took an extended leave of absence from EDD, the Employment Development
Department, because I wanted to finish my degree, and I did.
Norma demonstrated her resolve and determination in having her children, refusing the norm of marriage as her only choice, and continuing with both her career and educational attainment. She stated:

It was funny, because everybody said, Norma this is the first time that they’ve ever allowed anybody to take the leave that you took.” Because I was kind of doing it at night, because he [Roger] was helping with the kids, with the two girls, when I was still pregnant, and I was still working. As far as the house was concerned, cooking and stuff like that, he’d come home from work and have to do all that. I started school and then I said I want to finish, I’m close, I want to finish. They [EDD] gave me close to a year, extended leave. I think it goes to show that they valued me. I wanted to get my bachelor’s degree. They also were thinking about promoting me. And I did, I finished my degree, in 81, I think it was 81, when I finished my degree. I finally got my bachelor’s degree. So, that took a long time. It was about 12 years, 12 years later, I finally finished up my degree. But I was determined that I was going to do it, just as my mom made a decision that she wanted to finish her high school diploma. And it took her a while because she used to go to night school. My mom did it with seven kids! You know, why can’t I!? So, I finished it up.

Norma referred to her mother again, setting the example through hard work and attainment of her high school diploma while raising and supporting seven children. This was more evidence of the community cultural wealth Norma had in her maleta, in this case aspirational and social capital (Yosso, 2005). Norma stated:

I didn’t go back for my masters until 1987. I was working for EDD at the time. I got my degree and they stationed me at Southwestern College to help graduates find employment
because that’s what I used to do. While I was there, that’s when I ran into Norma Hernandez again, you know after all these years, and she was a counselor or dean there, I forget what it was. I was stationed at Southwestern College working for EDD with the computer from EDD, a big, old-ass computer. I could access jobs and was talking to students. That’s when the people around the office said, Norma, “You know, you do good with students? Have you ever thought about getting your MA?” And Norma talked to me about it as well. So, I said, “You know what, I like it here. I like this environment.” Even though I had a good job, you know, a really good job. Then I went back and got my masters. And shortly after I got my masters, they hired me right away in the counseling department. You know, so I was very fortunate. EDD had already promoted me to supervisor, I had already been a supervisor for a few years. Once I got my degree they promoted me to supervisor, I used to supervise the unemployment insurance side. I’ve been very lucky, count my blessings. Roger has been really supportive the whole time, because it would have been difficult to do it with the kids. By the time I went through my master’s we had three kids. There’s hiccups. That’s life. And that’s what I would always tell my students, you know, when something would come up, they go, “Oh, man, I have to help my family.” I’d say, “Okay, go help your family. But just keep in mind what your goal is. And come back when you can.” And they do, many of them do. But that’s life. The journeys are different for everybody. Everybody’s journey is different. I was blessed. I feel blessed.

Norma brought her testimonio full circle to her service to the students she served as a counselor at Southwestern College, explaining she would share her own story of perseverance and attainment of education and career even while creating a family with her students when
appropriate. She credited Roger’s support in her and her mentor and friend, Norma Hernandez, who she had originally met in high school. This is another example of community cultural wealth—the navigational and social capital (Yosso, 2005) Norma Cazares had in her maleta, as she navigated the educational career choices before her.

**The Grape Boycott: The UFW, History, and the Power of Direct Action.** Norma explained how the process of awareness of historical inequities led to seeking out specific inequities in their communities and in California, like the Farm Workers rights movement, to understand them and take action to make change in her world. She stated:

> We were involved? We’ve been involved in so many things during the farmworkers battle, during the farm worker strikes, and all that kind of stuff. We were engaged in that, in fact, that’s where we actually met. We were at a [Roger: boycott] a grape boycott. And in front of, in National City somewhere [Roger: Safeway] oh, Safeway in National City. We were both at San Diego State, but we hadn’t really met yet. But we were both there. You know, at the boycott, the protests, we were at a protest [Roger: we were picketing him]. We were picketing Safeway.

> She continued by addressing the importance of teaching history, especially for folks of color, and anyone who planned to work in disenfranchised and impoverished communities by stating:

> I don’t think anybody could be an effective educator, anybody that wants to affect change cannot do it without knowing the histories of the disenfranchised communities that exist, and have existed for a long time. I’m talking about you know, Chicanos, Latinos, Blacks, Native Americans. You have to have that knowledge of history and critically analyze it. Unless you have that knowledge, you’re not going to get to the root, you know, and be
able to provide an opportunity for change, to affect change. Without that kind of basic knowledge. I was a counselor, professor for 30 years, at Southwestern College and part of my counseling was . . . you’re Filipina, you need to take a Filipino culture class. But while you’re at it, you might want to take an ethnic studies class that exposes you to other things. You got to take a Chicano Studies class, you got to take a Black history [class]. I also did Puente. Puente is a program that’s existed for 35 years now. And basically, that started up in Northern California, where did it start off? [Roger: Oakland] Yeah, Oakland. Yes, thank you. And basically, the idea there was to build a bridge, a puente, from the community college to universities, and this was specifically designed for Chicano students. It was through understanding and learning about the culture, the Latino culture, Chicano culture, and the history of it that was required . . . It was to build their writing skills as well, but while they are gaining all this knowledge, at the same time we would teach college success skills, life success skills. So, I did that for a number of years as well. I think we need more Puentes, I really do. We need that because they do great. If they move . . . and they get their degrees in that, then they become those change agents, and then they are mentoring young people [about] the importance of knowing your history, your background, and the contributions that your culture has made to this country, to make it the country that is today, even though it’s still fucked up. There’s still a lot that needs to be [done]. But for you to have that critical consciousness, that’s the only way it’s going to happen. And you gotta keep reading.

Norma again brought her testimonio full circle, connecting her own lived experiences of awareness and critical consciousness development to her work as an educator, mentor, and supporter of other students of color. Norma concluded her testimonio by highlighting how
teaching history in higher education settings can have a tremendous impact on the development of CC, especially for students of color. She also touched on the resources that amplify students’ abilities to transfer from community college to universities, again, with the goal of increasing the development of critical consciousness and the agency in our youth and students to become social justice change agents in their own communities and beyond.

**Norma and Roger: Mentorship, Immigration Rights, Reading, and ROTC**

Themes of mentorship, peer support, and critical action are present within the plática presented in this section. This dialogue centered around Norma and Roger’s relationship and work with Bert Corona, who taught them about immigration law. Bert provided them with a platform and space to conduct services for the community filling out immigration paperwork; notary publics would routinely charge up to $500 to complete. Norma and Roger explained they met many people by providing this service who later would join them for protests and other social justice movement events.

Like the dialogue sections in Clarisa and Gonzalo’s testimonio, this plática represents the nuance and social interaction of our dialogue. I encourage the reader, again, to read this and make their own meaning of our conversation.

Roger: Both of us had the good fortune of meeting Bert Corona. Do you know who Bert Corona is? Well, he was a good friend, and he was a good teacher. We spent a lot of time with Bert. I learned a lot from him, him and his girlfriend. It’s coincidences of life, who you meet down the road?

Gabriel [me]: How did you connect with Bert?

Roger: Herman had Aztec printers, right there in National City and Highland. He gave us a space to start Casa de Justicia. So, Norma and I were volunteers there at Casa de Justicia
and Bert was the head of Hermandad Mexicana, in LA. Bert could turn out 100,000 people overnight for a picket. That’s the power he had. So, he first started coming down to talk to Herman, then, you know, he started talking with us, and we spent a lot of time with them.

Norma: He trained us, Bert trained us on immigration, processing immigration papers and things like that. We became well known. We used to help people that walked in the door, didn’t have to have an appointment, you come first come first serve. What the notario publicos, the notary publics, were charging them a mint, you know, for filling out some simple form. We do it for free. And then we had a jar, basically anybody could, you know, if you wanted to drop a dollar off or whatever, to help us keep this up. So, Bert was the one that trained us, but we got so good at it that we became pretty much the only organization that could get [Roger: labor certifications] labor certifications for people.

Roger: The INS [immigration and naturalization service] found out what we’re doing, because they sent someone undercover.

Norma: They sent somebody undercover.

Roger: FBI. So, one time we had this lady, pretty little blonde woman that. . .

Norma: That was later, let me finish this. So, labor certifications is when you have to prove that the company needs this particular individual [Roger: shortage] if there isn’t anybody else, or there’s a shortage of them that can do his work. So we were able to get a lot of those [Gabriel: how people get visas and things like] Yeah, yeah, and so anyway, so we got really good at our stuff. We used to have the INS binders, regarding the laws and things like that, we’d actually read them. To the point that INS wanted to hire us. [laughter] We said, “No, thank you.” But they knew we were legit. I think they were
relieved that somebody else was doing this work, and it wasn’t just a notario público that
were gouging, ripping people off.

Roger: They would take their original documents and hold them hostage. Yeah, unless
they gave them $500.

Norma: Yeah, it was just ridiculous stuff.

Roger: And people that we know in San Ysidro.

Norma: People that we know, anyway. Then those people became supporters of us, you
know, some of the clients that we had, began to help us, in other entities like protests and
different things, whatever we were involved in. Because they knew that we were fair
people, that we were genuine, and we were there to help, and not to rip them off. Bert
was the one that was instrumental in training us, and he’s the one that brought the
concept to National City, to us in San Diego, because we were doing one-on-ones in San
Diego. Later, he taught an immigration class for San Diego State, which I took. I took his
class. He used to do it out of Barrio Logan, the students had to go to Barrio Logan. He
was one of the first. You think CBB was first? No, he was, [laughter] that would take it
out to the community. We used to do our classroom in Barrio Logan with Bert, you
know, on immigration issues and stuff like that. So I mean, he had his shortcomings too,
but you know, but smart man, very intelligent man. Very intelligent. So anyway, are you
ready for him to move on?

Roger: Well I’m ready for bed.

Gabriel: This is beautiful. I mean. . .

Roger: No, I’m kidding. I can go on and on.

Norma: Oh, yeah, he can definitely go on and on.
Gabriel: If there’s anything else you’d like to add?

Norma: We are both readers. I make sure that I read, I’m reading like, 2 to 2 and a half hours every morning. I get my cup of coffee, I wake up about 7:15, 7:30. About 2, 2 and a half hours a day, just reading online. The e-newspapers, the Chronicle of Higher Education, you know, Voice of San Diego, I read the UT or, LA Times, whatever. Because I feel a void, I feel like I’m missing something, if I don’t know what’s going on, you know, is there anything we need to address? Right now, I’m working on a number of things. YANO, the young people being recruited into the military, through the ROTC programs, that’s bullshit. My alma mater, Lincoln High School, does the ROTC and what the schools have done is they have replaced PE classes with the ROTC, indoctrinating these kids at a really young age. So, that’s part of something your dad was a part of, too, with Roger many, many years ago when it first started off, the San Diego Concilio in higher education, and I’m part of that too. I just suggested it to them, because Isidro Ortiz is involved in that. I said, “We need to make that a priority. We need to address this. Because it is bullshit.” And the thing is, the schools are allowing it, the districts are allowing it, because they don’t have to pay PE teachers.

Gabriel: Oh shit, that is horrible, that is so bad!

Norma: That’s what it is! That’s what it boils down to. The ROTC happily takes over. And the kids don’t even have a choice, they just enroll them.

Gabriel: They don’t have a choice? I always thought ROTC was something students chose to do.

Norma: No, no, no. We’re finding out that they’re just enrolling them instead of PE classes.
Gabriel: Where is this happening?

Norma: Well, I just found out it happened at Lincoln High School, and that’s because one of my nephews works there.

Gabriel: [I was lost for words and stumbled over myself to finally say] “That’s alarming.

Norma: Isn’t that alarming?!?

Gabriel: That’s really, really not cool. How do the school administrators allow that to happen? That’s horrible. I see myself in that role, and I would never allow that to happen, I barely allowed recruiters at my schools.

Norma: Goes to show you what kind of administrators they are. Yeah, we kicked them out at Southwestern College, We kicked out all of the recruiters.”

Gabriel: It’s tough. Working in alternative education, it’s really tough, because there is something to say about how for some young people this might be an option that helps them. It’s so tough for me.

Norma: I totally get it. Because for many of our lower income students that’s their only out. They don’t have an option. That’s it. You go in the military, and Roger went into the military, but he also knew he was going to get the GI Bill. If that’s a way to get the GI Bill to finish my education then that’s the way I’m gonna go. But again, who are the students that have to make that choice?

Gabriel: And that should be a choice! If it isn’t by choice that’s horrible.

Norma: And it should, and it should be a choice, right? So, I suggest that we need to make this one of our priorities for 2023. We have a meeting Friday, I think, and we’re going to talk about what our priorities are going to be.
Linda and Carlos

Linda LeGerrette and Carlos LeGerrette met each other and connected as partners in their teens. As they became romantically connected, Carlos knew he wanted to be close to Linda, and he knew she was going to Mesa Community College. He decided he would do the same. Linda and Carlos both had long careers in community and union organizing, having started organizing with the United Farm Workers (UFW) union as the UFW’s primary organizers for the San Diego region in 1968. At the time of this study, they were both involved in the facilitation of the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs, which they cofounded in 2001.

Linda was born in 1946 in San Diego, the middle of seven children. Her father was born in Russia and her mother in the United States, the sixth generation of her family to be born in the United States after arriving from Mexico (Garcia, 2021; Quintana, 2017). After graduating from high school, Linda worked at Baskin Robbins, and then eventually as the receptionist for dentist Joseph Shiriahi. Shiriahi became a lifelong mentor, friend, and supporter, cosigning with her on her first car loan (Garcia, 2021). Eventually, Linda went back to school at Mesa College, where she connected with the Farm Workers Movement and got involved in the movement and union organizing. Linda and Carlos were both approached by Cesar Chavez (and other leaders of the UFW) to lead the San Diego grape boycott, and eventually to move up to La Paz, the UFW headquarters, to assist Cesar and the UFW leadership, which they did in 1972 and stayed for 5 years. Linda continued to work with the UFW, went on to work with Sol Price (of Price Club) in logistics and shipping and the United Domestic Workers, and to found the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs with Carlos, where she currently served as the Executive Director. Linda also started her own successful realty business with Carlos’s support. Linda had over 35 years of experience in
labor and community organizing, and over 20 years of educational service through the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs.

Carlos was born in 1943 to Joe “Lefty” and Elizabeth LeGerrette, at Paradise Valley Hospital, National City, California (Garcia, 2021). Carlos moved several times in San Diego during his youth: from Logan Heights to a gas station on Sigsbee and National Avenue, then into federal housing projects in Linda Vista, then Azure Housing in the Sports Arena area, and finally, Azure Vista in Ocean Beach. Carlos attended 13 different schools during elementary and secondary school due to all his family’s moves. After his parents’ divorce, Carlos struggled in school, but with the support of his mother and community mentors and teachers, he graduated from high school. Like Linda, Carlos attended Mesa College and got involved with the Farm Workers movement and the UFW. Carlos also took jobs on fishing boats but eventually wanted to settle down, especially once Linda and he had made plans to get married. He was eventually able to secure a job with Firestone Tires in Salinas where he worked for a few years to raise money for their wedding. Carlos continued to organize for the UFW for many years, and connected with Sol Price who became a mentor for him and Linda. Carlos also worked for Jerry Brown from 1975–1983 in community development. Carlos had over 35 years of experience in community and labor organizing, and now more than 20 years in educational service through the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs.

After getting married, as part of their support of the Farm Workers movement and through their organizing at Mesa college, Linda and Carlos began to take trips to Delano to provide supplies to the farm workers. As a result, they were asked to help lead the San Diego Grape boycott. Eventually they moved to work at the UFW headquarters in La Paz, California to assist with UFW leadership. They both lived in La Paz at these headquarters from 1972–1977.
Eventually, they connected with Sol Price who encouraged them to begin work in shipping and logistics. Linda and Carlos were both cofounders of the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs.

Linda and Carlos both met my father decades ago. Carlos met my father when he was an insurance salesperson going door to door, only to find out later he played a key role in hiring Carlos as the director of EOP at San Diego College (now SDSU). Linda was currently in a women’s talking circle with Clarisa, Teresa, and my mother.

**Linda: “I Got My PhD on the Streets.”**

**A Chicana Frame of Mind.** Linda stated:

> When I say how I see myself, I just want to frame what the meaning of Chicano is, or Chicana is to me, it’s a frame of mind. That being said, I’m definitely Chicana. But my roots are different as well. So my mother is Mexican, and Indian, Native, on my mom’s side we’re four generations [in the US]. On my dad’s side, I’m first generation. My dad was born in Russia. So, I have that part of me as well. So I’m Chicana and I’m mestiza, tambien.

Linda’s definition of Chicana identity being a frame of mind resonated with the testimonios of other elders, and with one of the primary perspectives on Chicanismo being a philosophical, political, and conscious stance and choice, rather than strictly tied to a Mexican or Latina/e/x/o ethnicity (Alarcón, 1990; Espinoza, 2018; Urrieta, 2007). Linda’s articulation of the Chicana frame of mind is an important element in understanding the relationship between identity formation and the development of critical consciousness.
**Fond Memories – Familial and Educational Learning and Support.** Linda shared next about her experiences in her family and K–12 education. She stated:

Okay, so I have fond memories of that time of my life, believe it or not, and I think it’s well, I think it’s because of my parents, you know. I had both of my parents, at least at that age of my life, both of my parents were very involved with their children. I was one of seven kids. I’m in the middle. So, there’s three older siblings and three younger siblings. So, I had the benefit of learning from my older siblings, and I also had the responsibility of caring for my younger siblings. That was a cool experience. There were two girls and five boys. So, I learned from my brothers to be very competitive and that remains today. I learned, especially from my oldest brother who has passed away, two of my oldest brothers have passed away, I learned a lot from them too, just in terms of relationships between men and women. I remember that mostly from high school, but from elementary, in our family, my mother was very involved even though she didn’t drive. She was very involved in stuff that we did at school. I would always just sort of bring her home assignments. Like I would tell her, “Mom, they asked for somebody to volunteer to do this.” I said, “I volunteered you.” And she would always do it for me, she’d always do it. I just remember her always doing it. I remember little house parties that we had with our neighbors who we’re still friends with today, the ones that are still alive. I remember doing that, as a young child. I remember loving my teachers. When I was in second and third and fourth grade, I could tell you the names of many of our teachers. I went to Balboa Elementary School in Shelltown. That was the beginning of the love of education for me, because my teachers were so cool. I just remember how wonderful they made us feel and how it was easy to participate, because they welcomed
that. So, in school, it was great. Enrollment was great until it wasn’t, you know, but I thought those elementary school years were great.

Being the middle child of seven, Linda learned lessons about competition and relationships from her brothers. Like some of the other elders, Linda’s mother was very supportive of her education, even though her mother may not have had the means to be as involved as other parents. She could not drive. Like so many of the other elders, Linda shared some of the familial wealth she carried in her maleta. Linda’s primary memories of school centered around how she loved her teachers, who were “so cool.” These teachers, according to Linda, made it “easy to participate” and made her feel “wonderful.” Her experiences in elementary school were the beginning of her love of education. Linda stated:

Starting with grammar school, I have memories of mostly good things. I don’t have any bad experiences that I can remember with any of my teachers. If the [experiences] were bad, they were just mischievous, it was my doing not the teachers. I was a prankster in school. So, I used to prank some of my teachers. But I do have a friend who tells this story. I remember it, but not like he does. He said one time when we were in high school, and I didn’t even know him at the time, he was a year younger than me, I met him sort of as an adult. But as we got to be friends, he said, “I remember one time you walked into Mr. Scheuffler’s room, and you had a test paper in your hand, you took it and you put it up near him. You got a B on the test. And you said, ‘I did better than a B on this test and I demand you give me an A.’ I couldn’t believe that you would just go up and say that to a teacher.” And I thought, I don’t even remember it, but I guess I always felt confident in speaking up for my rights. I think too, because my family was so large, especially with so many boys, you gotta raise your voice to be heard. And I do think that that’s part of not
having anything to do culturally or politically, but just surviving and, you know, getting
heard in the family. So, I think that stemmed from that.

Linda’s belief in her long-standing capacity to speak up for her rights was illustrated in
the story she told about her telling a teacher she believed she deserved a better grade. She
attributed this capacity to having been raised in a household with lots of siblings, especially
brothers, where one had to “raise [their] voice to be heard.” She characterized this capacity not as
political but “just surviving” “getting heard in the family.” We can see this as a form of cultural
wealth, of resistance and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), especially because Linda saw it as a
skill she learned, a capacity she developed. She described:

I remember my teachers in seventh grade, eighth grade, high school, I just had really
good, supportive teachers. Especially in high school. I remember this one teacher. I really
liked him as a teacher, he was a government teacher. It turns out he’s very conservative,
you know, politically, I found out when I started at Mesa College. But he never pushed
his own politics on the class or on me, he just would challenge us all the time. Truth be
known, a lot of people know this already, but when I was in high school, I was a little
conservative, not that I thought I was, but it was more of a social thing to be politically
involved. A lot of my friends were at Claremont High School and Madison High School,
because I went to Claremont when I was in 10th grade, and then they built a new school,
which is Madison. So, I went to 11th and 12th grade at Madison and my friends,
especially my women friends, were all involved in doing things, they were supporting
Barry Goldwater. I remember passing out leaflets for Barry Goldwater. When I think
about that now, I shudder. But then I think, well, there’s always room for learning, right?
So, I think that was a pivotal point in my life. Learning to understand when you’re doing
something political. I thought of it as socializing more at that time than I did about it politically. But then, when I realized the impact it was making around the world, it was a very different mindset. So yeah, that was a good learning lesson for me.

Linda’s characterization of conservatism in this section of her testimonio demonstrated how she presently valued more liberal and progressive political stances. We see another example of a supportive teacher who challenged her and encouraged dialogue even though she found out later he was politically conservative. In the next breath, she told us how she too participated in politically conservative organizing by “passing out leaflets for Barry Goldwater.” We can see how she thought twice before sharing, mentioning she was being recorded, but then noting “it’s true, a lot of people know this already.” She noted how she thought of her activities as more social than political at the time, but when reflecting on it now, she “shudders.” This moment of reflection was “a pivotal point” in her life, thinking about and realizing “the [political] impact” her action “was making around the world” was “a very different mindset” than simply seeing herself as “socializing.” This moment was “a good learning lesson” for her, an expression of her developing critical consciousness. This example was even more poignant because Linda dedicated most of her career to union organizing, which was in direct opposition to Barry Goldwater’s policies and stances.

For Linda and Carlos’ plática, I diverged from the straightforward path, and combined both of their testimonios, as they played off each other’s stories and contexts throughout the platica. I return to Linda’s story soon. First, I include Carlos’s discussion about his early childhood memories.
Carlos: “The Movement Is Love and Respect.”

Chicano and Mestizo – Chinese, Filipino, and Mexican Ancestry. Carlos stated:

We’re both mestizos in that sense. My grandfather was Chinese and Filipino, and I’m half Mexican on my grandmother’s side. My dad was Mexican, and way in the back, you know, we can go to a little small town called Legoretta in northern Spain. So I guess that would be the roots, would go all the way back there. But in turn, soy Chicano, and then if somebody wants to, you know, get into the molecular structure of that, then I would say, oh, yeah I happen to be Chinese and Filipino also.

Carlos, like many of the other elders, identified with the term mestizo, and shared about his family’s many different ethnic and national ancestries—Chinese, Filipino, Spanish, and Mexican. Ultimately, he stated, “soy Chicano” (I am Chicano). Carlos addressed some of his family’s history and spoke first about his great grandparents who had moved to San Diego. He stated:

Neither one of them [great grandparents] had [formal] education. They were uneducated, in the sense that they couldn’t write. It was very, very hard for them to read. But what they did in their lifetime, in Barrio Logan, they would end up being founders, there were a few others too, of Our Lady Guadalupe Church. I mean, to me that was huge, having these two individuals who couldn’t write their names, and here they are, they’re Gualulapanas of the church, going out and being the extended arm of the priest and helping other parishioners who couldn’t come to mass or needed help. They made a huge impression on my life.

Carlos provided evidence in his testimonio of the community cultural wealth he carried with him in his cultural maleta. He credited his great grandparents’ community work as making a “huge
impression” on him. As he noted they were not formally educated, one can see how this was a form of aspirational capital he carried with him in his maleta.

Loss, Trauma, and Bicycles – Early Childhood Memories. Carlos continued sharing about his early childhood memories. Carlos shared:

Well, that’s really something for me [childhood]. I look back and I’ve always wondered why I don’t remember a whole lot growing up, you know, the preelementary school. What I do remember, generally, is issues of pain, of family pain, of a brother dying when I was 5. He was 7, that’s when we lived in the Linda Vista housing project. When we lived in Barrio Logan, right there on 16th and National, I remember my [other] brother getting hit by a car there. He ran out from between two cars and fortunately, you know, he just got knocked down but didn’t get run over. And a few other occasions, my first attempt at riding a bicycle and falling down. But you know, my brothers didn’t think I was falling down. I had five brothers. They thought I had hit the brake to avoid hitting another bicycle that was in front of me. But the real truth was that I fell down, but they thought I hit the brake, so I was a big hero. I was probably like 4 years old at the time. Also remembering, not a specific occasion, you know, always feeling my great grandparents’ presence. They raised my mom. But other than that, there might be a couple other occasions that I would remember, but not many, you know. I’ve always looked back and wondered about that. The burial, the funeral services of my brother, who was 7, I do remember that at Holy Cross Cemetery. But I think that’s probably 80%, 90% of what I can remember.

Carlos’s pain—his family’s pain—in losing his brother who was only 7 years old was the most salient memory he had of his early childhood. Carlos also shared two other memories. One was a
memory of another brother of his being hit by a car, but not seriously hurt. And second, he shared the memory of being dubbed a “hero” when he was maybe 4 years old for avoiding a collision on a bike while he was learning to ride. Carlos had given thought to why these were the only early childhood memories he could remember. My first guess was the pain of losing his brother at such an early age was traumatic for him and his family and may have affected how he remembers the rest of this early portion of his childhood.

School Office and Family Implosion: Elementary and High School Experiences.

Carlos stated:

I guess, you know, starting in elementary school, and all the schools we went to were all Title 1 schools. I don’t think they called them title 1 back then. But it was either the housing projects or Logan Heights, Barrio Logan, where we lived. I think something right happened there when I was small, because by the time I was in third grade, I think it was, I ran for office as a homeroom representative. Now, I have no idea how that would have happened. My dad was a musician, mariachi, and so he was very social, had his own music group and so forth. So, you know, he was always around people and so forth. As I was out there trying to drum up votes, you know, he was trying to drum up money for his group and so forth. My mom was also living, wait let me backup. My great grandparents who raised my mom, they were Guadalupanas at Our Lady of Guadalupe church, and also founders of the church, going back to 1915, 18, something like that. They were Guadalupanas, so they were very social in the community, because they used to visit families or an individual who couldn’t make it to church, they used to take communion over to them, give them communion. So I think, reflecting back, that probably had something to do in terms of, that seemed to be like it was okay [to be social]. So, I ran for
homeroom representative, third grade, or fourth grade, either one of the two. And I won. Then there’s kind of a blank in my mind, but I always had great relationships with the teachers that I had. I’m thinking that maybe they probably pushed me along, saying, look at this little young whippersnapper here, you know, he ran for an office and he’s involved with the school with his class and so forth. Then we moved. We were living in frontier housing then, this was after we had lived in Linda Vista housing. Then after that we moved to frontier housing, and we lived there, probably 4 or 5 years. And then after that we moved to Azure Vista housing. Now Azure Vista housing, that was the plum of all housing projects, because it was right where Sunset View Elementary School is, which is right on the ocean. In terms of a beautiful setting, that was absolutely beautiful. In the fifth grade I ran for vice president of the school, and I had forgotten that we were going to have elections that day. The teacher mentioned to me earlier in the day, he says, “How do you feel?” I go, “Feel about what?” He said, “That you have to give your speech today.” I didn’t practice any speech or anything, but I remembered my speech in the third grade. So, what I did is I gave my third grade speech, but I just kind of tweaked in the fifth grade. I won as vice president of the school. After winning vice president of the school, then I ran for president of the school, became president of the school, plus, you know, safety captain and other things. So I was, you know, the community service boy, I guess, student of the class.

In telling his story of elementary school education, Carlos focused on his experiences running for class and school offices, which was a shared experience with three of the other elders. Although his memories were not exactly clear on what motivated him to run for these positions, he credited his father’s social entrepreneurship as a mariachi band leader and his maternal
grandparents’ community service as Guadalupanas, as founders and representatives of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. He expressed feeling supported by his teachers for the most part, another example of the potential power of teachers to build-up students, rather than tear them down with deficit mindsets. Housing projects were also an important thread in his testimonio, as his family moved between three different housing projects in San Diego during his school-aged years. It was interesting how Carlos saw himself, closing this section naming himself the “community service boy” as community service was an important thread in his testimonio. He stated:

Then, the shit hit the fan, and our family imploded with a divorce. So going from like, A and B student, plus, what I loved to do, I loved getting into the spelling bees. I won spelling bees hands down. It really felt good, the feeling of that, because we were the kids who lived in the housing project down at the bottom of the hill, and, you know, when we would have the spelling contest, that was everybody, so it means the rich kids from the top of the hill, all of us. And I’d win every time and that always felt good. Then it dawned on me, I think the fact that I became president of the school was because those kids on the bottom of the hill, including myself, voted for me. It was like block voting. But I didn’t recognize it or realize it, but I remember thinking I became president because a lot of people, a lot of the students from the housing project voted for me. I would say that’s probably why I won as president. But then the family went through an implosion. I ended up in, from the seventh grade through the 12th grade, it was almost like being in a freefall. Going from A B student, to a D, and sometimes lower, student. Finally, you know, graduating in 1961 from Point Loma High School.

Carlos’ testimonio again turned toward family trauma, this time from the turmoil of the divorce of his parents. He characterized the divorce as a “family implosion,” using the phrase
“the shit hit the fan.” He described himself as “almost like being in a freefall,” and then noted the drop in his grades from As and Bs to Ds and lower, while still noting he graduated from high school. Although his traumatic childhood experiences were clearly present in his testimonio, he did not dwell on them or describe much about his reaction to them in detail. He also noted a learning moment in how when he reflected back on his experiences at Point Loma High School, he saw the dynamics of class, juxtaposing “the rich kids from the top of the hill” with “kids on the bottom of the hill,” including himself. He explained maybe he was voted in as class president because of this class dynamic, and the blocked vote of his classmates who lived in the Azure Vista housing project at the bottom of the hill like him. This was the first expression of his development of CC. Carlos continued with another high school experience. He stated:

I remember, in 12th grade, going into the counselor’s office. And so, he asked me about what my college plans were. [Carlos laughed] And that discussion took about 35 seconds. I didn’t have any plans for it. My mom, you know, she was a single parent, by that time, working hard, she didn’t have much time to get involved with that. Plus, you know, she didn’t have that type of education in terms of having gone to college, and you should go to college, too. So, there was very little direction from the counselor, he kind of shut it down real quick, he goes, “Oh okay, well, here, go on back to your class.” Now, I think back at it, comparing that individual as a counselor in 12th grade, versus Shadow Rodriguez, Armando Rodriguez, in the 10th grade, when I was really, really going through a hard time. Shadow convinced me to stay in school. This 12th grade counselor that I had, he didn’t give a shit if I stayed in school, he said, go on back to your class. Yeah. So, counselors make a huge difference.
This was the first acute instance of gatekeeping, through inattention, shared by Carlos. His counselor made no effort to encourage him to apply for or to consider college as an option after high school graduation. Carlos compared this experience of neglectful inattention to his experience with his 10th grade counselor (i.e., truant officer), Armando “Shadow” Rodriguez, who convinced Carlos to stay in high school and supported Carlos when he was actively experiencing the trauma of the divorce of his parents. This was another example of the support and care of an educator making a positive impact in the life of one of the elders.

*Linda and Carlos: “It Changed Our Life” – Mesa College and the Farm Workers Movement*

This next section shares both Linda’s and Carlos’s dialogue as the collective context of the plática contributes to the testimonios of their engagement with the Farm Workers Movement, how their lives were intertwined, and the development and enactment of their critical consciousness.

**Linda: Learning About Difference – Childhood Experiences in North Carolina.** This next passage from Linda came after Carlos shared about his parents’ divorce. Linda stated:

The respect that we have, I know me personally, for the kids that we’re working with, and the appreciation for who they are and what they do is really important for me. We never know what’s happening at home, if they’re getting supported or not getting supported. And if they’re not getting support, you don’t always know because they don’t tell. Not always does it show itself. So, the respect that I have for kids is monumental, I can’t even believe it. I wanted to say something about the younger part of me too, Gabe, because during my school time, here in San Diego I remember having to leave. My dad was in the Marine Corps. So, our family left California and we drove to North Carolina. My dad was getting shipped out there. Our family kind of picked up our roots and went
out there. I think looking back, that’s kind of like the basis of a lot; even though you
don’t talk about it, you always remember what happens to you, I think when you’re little.
That experience in North Carolina, I think it was like a reality check for things that I
learned about later in life. For instance, when we were driving I remember going through,
I don’t remember what part of Texas, if it was Dallas, or where it was, but I remember as
a family driving in our car. We’re all bunched up in a car, you know, and there was like, I
mean, all my younger brothers and sisters and my aunt and uncle and my mom. For a lot
of the meals that we had we just opened up the cooler, it was peanut butter and jelly
sandwiches or whatever on the road. But we always started out with a good breakfast it
seemed. I remember this one time. I was in third grade. And I remember going to
breakfast. And this woman, I remember this woman. I mean, I totally remember this
woman and she was as nice as she could be at the time. I didn’t realize what was
happening, but we ordered breakfast and I wanted what I was used to eating at home.
When things were good and so I asked for papas, beans, and a tortilla. She said, [Linda
putting on a southern accent] “Well honey, we don’t serve beans here.” She goes, “But I
can give you some grits.” I didn’t know what grits were, even in my young head I
remember thinking I don’t know what grits are, but okay, I’ll try it, you know. So, I tried
grits. I liked them, it was crazy though. Understanding in a child’s mind the feeling of not
everybody thinks like you or has, you know, has your same experiences. I just remember
thinking about this when I was little. Then I remember at the same restaurant going to use
the bathroom and there were signs, “colored” and “white.” I didn’t know where to go. I
knew colored meant Black people. I went back to my mom and I said, “Where do I go?”
And then she said, “Go to the white.” Then you learn about birth certificates and how all that stuff is on those papers when your parents are having babies in those days.

Linda’s respect for the uniqueness of each of the youth she currently worked with in the Cesar Chavez Clubs was shared here just after Carlos shared about his parents’ divorce. Linda connected the context of Carlos’s childhood trauma to the lives of the youth they both currently served in the Cesar Chavez clubs, acknowledging, as educators working with youth, we may not always be aware of what each student is experiencing in their lives. She also shared this just before describing some of her earliest memories of noticing cultural and racial differences during her childhood experiences in the South. She compared not understanding she could not get beans and eating grits for the first time to having to ask her mother which bathroom she should use—the one marked “colored” or the one marked “white”—and essentially being told she was white. At least in that context, there was a stark contrast. Her exposure to cultural differences during her experience in a restaurant seemed so simple, innocent even; and yet, they had a strong impact on her growing awareness of culture and race. This example reminded me of one of my father’s first experiences with segregation. He told me about it many times. He was traveling across the country by bus in the early 1960s. He had just gotten off a bus and entered the bus depot to rest. He sat down and started to get his bearings, and he started to have a strange feeling come over him, like he was being watched. He looked up to see a bunch of white people staring at him from across a wall of glass—the divider between the white and Black side of the bus depot in a Southern state. My father, like me, and like Linda, as she disclosed later in her testimonio, was very light-skinned, and easily passed for white. He looked around and noted the Black folks around him, who were also a little curious about his presence on that side of the depot. He told me he decided to just stay there until his next bus arrived, unwilling to get up and abide by the
racial norms set by the Jim Crow policies. Linda had learned when she was 8 or 9 years old she was white, at least when abiding by the Southern binary of “colored” and “white.” She noted how her childhood mind felt the differences, how she processed and how she remembered these experiences as formative ones in her understanding of cultural differences and diversity. She continued:

Then, moving to North Carolina, I remember that my mom, like I said there was a bunch of us. So, my mom had somebody come every couple of weeks to help in the house with us. I remember her name was Mamie and, as an adult, I went to go look her up when I was at a conference in the south one time. But I remember, as a kid, how hard working Mamie was. And I remember that we weren’t the only household that had a Black person helping in the house, in the home. I remember a lot about that time. There was one family in the apartment building where we lived. It was a young couple. To me, they seemed old, but they were young, I know that now. And they really took a liking to me. They didn’t have kids, and I don’t know if they couldn’t or whatever. But they really took a liking to me when I was still in third grade, just moved into the apartment. The people, like for, I don’t know, maybe 2 years, they took me everywhere. I went to their house. I helped the lady shell peas, she read to me. I just remember that she and her husband took me to places to go with them. Then one day she found out my mom was Mexican. And that ended. And as a little kid, I didn’t understand it. I’m light-completed, my mom’s whiter than you Gabe, you know, she’s still Mexican. But as we learned in history, Mexicans come in all shapes and colors, right? So, my mom was totally white. But I never got an explanation as to why that happened, why that couple stopped spending time with me? I never understood it until later in life. I was hurt as a little girl because I didn’t,
you know, understand. You kind of question yourself, like did I do something? I didn’t realize until later in life what that was all about, you know, and of course my mom didn’t really tell me she would just make excuses. Yeah, as soon as they found out that my mom was Mexican, it was over. And that kind of like, it really stayed with me.

Linda noted how her mother hired a Black woman named Mamie to help her look after her children, and how Linda noticed as a little girl that other families had hired Black folks to work in their homes as well. She visited Mamie while she was on a trip as an adult in the South, which shows how Mamie had a long-lasting impact on Linda from her childhood.

Linda then pivoted to a hurtful experience of racism from her childhood. As shown by other elders, Linda noted how she did not understand why the young couple stopped spending time with her. As a child, she was not aware of the dynamics of racism at play and did not become aware of these dynamics until later in life. This was another reference to her development of CC, as it related to an experience of racialized trauma. During this retelling, Linda also acknowledged her and her mother’s whiteness, their skin tone, and passing for white. Elements of racialization and racism are common themes within the elders testimonios.

**Mesa College, Marriage, and the Farm Workers Movement.** I asked Linda to speak about when she started to become more politically aware and how she remembered her critical consciousness starting to form. She stated:

For me, it was at Mesa College. It was really because of the classes we were taking. We had great professors at Mesa College. They were our political [science] instructor, Mr. Hummus, and I took a class with Mr. Feingold, who was amazing. He just passed away not too long ago, at around 80. And then Gracia Molina de Pick, and she was basically the one who got us started. She got us involved in social stuff. Carlos can tell you about
that. But it was her doing and the way in which she made it interesting for us to get involved by taking action. It was like service, right? So, we collected food and clothing for farm workers because she told us about the striking farm workers in Delano and thought that it would be a good thing if we took supplies. There were all kinds of college students throughout the state of California and they were going to go to Delano on this certain weekend. She thought that it would be a good experience for us. And boy was she right, because I remember that day for sure. That day, that experience, and that whole weekend, it changed our lives.

Many of Linda’s Mesa College professors were supportive of her growth in political and social awareness. Linda was especially keen on sharing about Gracia Molina de Pick, who connected her and Carlos to the Farm Workers Movement centered in Delano, California. She said, “It changed our lives.” This statement echoes other elders’ testimonios, crediting experiences in higher education classes coupled with social justice action as changing their lives, and in this case, connected to a specific professor as well. This example shows themes of authentic care and connecting critical reflection with social justice action, which changed their lives and contributed to their development of critical consciousness.

Carlos contributed:

Well, I think Linda hit it right on the head, that community college, that’s where I think we really cut our teeth, during the experiences that we had there. During my experience before Community College, it wasn’t on my radar screen either. I mean, coming out of high school, I ended up, you know, commercial fishing for albacore. And then I met this fine young lady at a dance, and became aware of who this young lady was, who’s sitting on my left here. That was, I think that had to be 1964, we ended up hanging around with
each other for about 4 years. At that time, we said, well, we got to get married. And so I
took a job up in Salinas, California. With the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. Yeah,
so I got this job with Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. I figured that I would take that
job to get some money so we could get married. I became involved with the union, with
the United Rubber Workers Union. I became a Union Steward. I had to have been 22
years old then. It was a young plant and the majority of the workers there were all mostly
lechugüeros, lettuce workers, who left the fields, because there were jobs there that they
didn’t have to be bent over all day. It’s a lot different work and it was regular pay. Plus,
you know, the thing is that the lettuce workers, they were the most, how can I say, the
most organized workers, because they worked in crews, and you had to be organized to
stay in those crews, because they made their money on piecework. So, you know, if you
were the weak one in the chain, buddy, you’re out of there, because you cost us money.
So those were the type of individuals, the guys that were working at the plant. They were
used to strikes. I mean, my first strike was there. But then, because I was part of the
union, a union officer, or a union staff member, I couldn’t participate in the strike, it was
against the rule of the contracts. They, meaning the workers, knew where I was coming
from even though I couldn’t go out with them on a strike. We’d get together for meetings
and so forth. I began to see how people working together, how we could do things much
better.

This example was Carlos’s first experience with organizing and with the power of
collective action, strikes, and unions. In mentioning the lechugüeros, Carlos explained their
elevated level of organization, and how this resulted in part from the need to be in-sync and to
work efficiently to make more money from their work. It sounded like the elevated level of
organization of the lettuce workers was partially due to the inflexible nature of the lettuce picking industry as well. Carlos continued:

So, after I was there for a little over a year, I came back to San Diego. Then it was like, well, what am I going to do now, now that I’m here, I have to find another job or something, so we could, you know, pull our money together so we could get married. Linda was in school. And I said, “Well, shit, I want to be around Linda.” So, even though I had no reason in my mind to think about going to school, the only reason I went to school is because that’s where Linda was. I figured that if I’m going to be around Linda I have got to be in school. And that was at a time that, now we’re talking about ‘65, ‘66, you know, there’s a lot of stuff going on in the streets. All the civil rights and the war, and everything was going crazy. Gracia had mentioned something about going to be part of this Club Amigos, it was her club. We stayed in that for about 2 or 3 months, it was a charity club really, you know, doing charity work. Where you would do it, you’d leave it, and the work there would be difficult to sustain because it was a mobilizing project versus an organizing project. Linda and I were talking about how there’s gotta be some type of political group, you know, like the Black organizations, these young Black organizations. So we said, well, why don’t we put together an organization, like the Black organizations, a Chicano organization. So there was another Club Amigos at San Diego State, and we had dinner with them in Tijuana, at the Sierra Club or something like that. It was amazing, because at the beginning there were probably maybe 30 students there, in total. There’s about three or four of us who peeled off from everybody else, we got in the corner, and talked about starting a Chicano, or Mexican-American group. The four of us, we stayed together, you know, meeting for a month or so afterwards. We ended up with
an organization on paper called MAYA, Mexican-American Youth Association. We started the first chapter at Mesa College. Then there was an election that took place, and I ended up being elected as president of it. Here, you know, again, it was like working together and pulling people together. That was about the same time, it was 1966, and we got married in 1966.

As in the other testimonios, Carlos noted the external forces of the Civil Rights Movement and the impact it had on his awareness of political action and the potential for change. He noted Linda and he wanted to create another kind of organization, modeled after the Black power student organizations, focusing more on their ethnicity and taking action to support their communities. He also noted how he ended up going to school just to be with Linda. Although this was romantic, it was also important to note this peer support that Carlos attending Mesa College to be close to Linda allowed him to be close to the organizing Gracia and other professors and students who were conducting through the networks at institutions of higher education. Carlos and Linda noted later in their testimonio how Cesar Chavez saw universities and colleges as ideal places to organize and gain support for the farm workers union and movement. Carlos continued:

We were there with an organization on paper, but we didn’t have any members. So we said, well, we got to do something to get some members here, because we’re just talking to ourselves. And so then we hit the campus. And it was easy then to recognize, I mean, to identify Chicanos because there was only a handful of us on the campus. We all got together and got an advisor. That was Mr. Hamas, I think, was the first advisor, Mr. Hamas was the first advisor, and we started the club. Then we would begin getting the members of the club to get involved with food collection and clothing, and a few dollars,
that we would pull together and take a drive and caravan up to Delano. So, we’d go to
Delano, meet at the Filipino hall. We were just doing what we thought we had to do. And
we got pretty good at it. So, little did we know that while we were doing such a great job,
that there were three individuals who were watching us in Delano. Those three
individuals were Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Gilbert Padilla. They asked us if we
would direct the boycott, the grape boycott here in San Diego. Now we’re in about 1968.
We said that we would do it for the summer, and they said, okay. We always said that our
commitment was great but our math was bad, because a summer lasted 13 years
[laughter]. Wait.

Linda laughed also and said, “Yeah. No, go ahead.”

Carlos paused, and said, “No, go on.”

Linda responded, “Okay.”

Carlos then said, “I’ll let you talk.”

Linda said, “Oh, see I hate it when he does.”

Carlos laughed.

Linda continued:

That’s just like, he knows that pisses me off even after 56 years of marriage. “I’ll let you
talk.” [Carlos laughed a bit more] I was just gonna say, our meeting was destiny. It was
supposed to happen because when I was in the eighth grade, way before I met Carlos, I
was flipping through my sister’s middle school, junior high school album and I saw his
picture and I cut it out of her album and she got so pissed off. [Carlos laughed deeply]
And I carried it in my wallet for a year before I met Carlos. So, when I met him, I just,
here’s the picture [Linda held the picture up to see over the Zoom call], *that* was in her
album. I just fell in love with that picture. I just fell in love with his eyebrows. It was like, that’s when rock and roll, what’s the guy’s name that I like, from San Fernando?

Carlos responded, “It was Richie Valens.”

I do not want to gloss over the tension in the dialogue between them in the excerpts. Although Linda did get frustrated with Carlos’s potentially sexist jab at her—he will “let her talk”—he followED up by sharing how she had already had a crush on Carlos even before they officially met, taking out a photo of him to show me over the Zoom call that she cut out of her sister’s yearbook and had in her wallet to this day. We are also witness to their first direct communication with Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Gilbert Padilla of the United Farm Workers Union, a relationship and organization playing a pivotal role in their testimonio and lived experiences.

**Fun, Friendships, and the Farm Workers Movement – Lifelong Core Relationships.**

The dynamics of community and relationship building were quite evident in Linda and Carlos’s testimonios. In this next section, they share about friendships and how important having fun with people in the movement was for them. They shared about the community and the long-lasting relationships and friendships they created through their participation in the movement. These relationships, starting with the experiences they shared in the previous section at Mesa College and extending out into the community through the Farm Workers movement, proved to be long lasting, even lifelong.

Linda continued:

Richie Valens. Yeah. Yeah. That was just my, my thing, you know, so yeah, that was in my wallet for a year before I met him. You see college, you know, that experience, we met people like Burn Sukumo and Kudumu, and Jocho Chazy from the U.S. group, and it
was powerful. I think it was even more powerful once we understood how working together could really make a difference too, in our school. It was fun but it was also a great learning experience about working with other people, as well. I guess I just loved that part. When I met Ken Msamaji, Ken wasn’t a student, but he was around, you know, when we were doing community events.

In this excerpt, Linda named off various community members, most of whom she and Carlos worked with in union organizing and community activism, and many of whom they still interacted with to this day.

Carlos contributed:

Yeah, so doing the grape boycott was really a way to extend the relationships that we had with a lot of individuals. I mean, I look back at it nowadays, and it was a fabulous time in our lives. You know, when you mentioned Gonzalo and Clarissa, your dad, your mom. And many of us, you know and Linda with her círculo, like four, I think four of the women there all came out of San Diego State. It’s great because going from Mesa College, we were one of the first EOP students also at San Diego State, in about 68. And, you know, we came into the EOP program. Then at the same time, I think your dad was involved then with the Junta Directiva. Those were the good old days, because that’s when the administration of the college kind of took a step back and let the Chicanos kind of pave, you know, blaze their own trail, so to speak. And so, with EOP, and I was one of the students, as an EOP student as well as Linda. The Junta Directiva asked me if I would direct the EOP program at San Diego State. And I’m thinking, direct the EOP program? I said, “That’s what those big boys do over there, all that directing stuff.” So, I said that I would, and that I would do it with a caveat of I would do it for a year. And the reason,
philosophically, was that any of us who took an administrative position would take it for one year. And then that 1 year would allow somebody else to come in behind us and do it for another year. So you’d build the leadership, right? I was true to my part. But anyways, so then, you know, directing the EOP program really brought a lot of individuals into, like Clarisa, for example, she worked there you know. I was able to do all these hiring of work-study students. I’m trying to think. . . we had. . .

Linda added, “Chelita, Berlinda, Clarisa, Tere. Did you have Tere?”

Carlos responded:

Yeah, Tere, I think Tere worked there. Victor Nieto, he was assistant EOP director. And then Judo came in after that, George Baca. It was just a great group. With MEChA, when we have a meeting with MEChA, we would have 100, at least 100 students there. Our problem with MEChA was that we didn’t have enough stuff [to do], we weren’t organized well enough to keep everybody involved. I think later on, you know, we’d understand the dynamics of keeping people by having something to do. That was the good thing about the picket line, we always had something to do. And so, that’s where a lot of us met, I didn’t know anybody from National City. But from the picket line, we met Herman Baca, and Charlie Vasquez, and. . . [Linda added, “Luis Natividad.”] Luis Natividad, that’s where all of us met, was on the picket line right there and in front of the Safeway. There was just a lot of individuals, you know, that’s [why] the movement was so great, you know, is the amount of relationships that you could establish with other individuals and these were great relationships, because they were core relationships, you know, people who shared a lot of the same core values that we did. They also did. It wasn’t difficult to strike up a great relationship.
Linda and Carlos noted the many people they had met through the social justice movement spaces of which they were a part, both through EOP and through the Grape Boycott pickets at the Safeway in National City. This was the same Safeway Grape Boycott pickets where Norma and Roger met each other as well. Also noted they mention both Teresa (Pascual Valladolid) and Clarisa (Rojas), both elders who shared their testimonios with us for this study. The community built through these social justice spaces (i.e., events, organizations, and networks) and constituent relationships within these interacting communities and networks were fundamental to the elders’ ongoing experiences in these spaces. As with Norma and Roger’s testimonios, many of the elders founded lifelong relationships and friendships in these social justice movement spaces. Carlos spoke to the strength of these relationships, calling them “core relationships” based on shared “core” values.

**Building Confidence and Capacity – Overcoming Sexism and Racism.** Linda continued by sharing an embarrassing moment. When she was asked by a documentarian producing the film “Chicanos Under 30” what she did, she replied she was like Carlos’s secretary. She saw this experience differently now, with her new perspectives formed through her involvement in the Farm Workers Movement. However, at the time, the experience was perpetuating the gender roles that were part of her double consciousness as a woman raised in our patriarchal U.S. society. She explained:

> No, that was what I felt in my role was [referring to her statement in the film]. All that changed when we went to the farm worker movement. Yeah, all that changed. I will never stop thinking, that was where I got my best education. I mean, we learned a lot of things, you know, in the buildings between the walls. I always tell my friends, I got my PhD on the streets. Working with Cesar Chavez, and the other wonderful people that we
had a chance to meet and work with in those days was a life changing experience in so many different ways. Yeah, that was the difference, that experience made all the difference in the world, and I am so grateful for that. As I say this, I’m reflecting on why we co-founded the Cesar Chavez service clubs. Everything that I’m saying right now is, especially how I felt about myself, you know, as a young woman in those days, is the kind of stuff, the good experiences, and the things we learned, are the kinds of things that I want to teach our kids. It happened before we founded the clubs, it happened during the farm workers time, and we took that experience and shared it with our students. Having little kids understand who they are, to trust who they are, and to be confident with who they are, and to move forward with who they are, with a lot of values intertwined with all those experiences, so that they feel good about themselves as people growing up. And they do, and it works. And so all that to be said, because of our experience with the farm worker movement.

Linda credited the Farm Workers Movement and her experiences organizing and working with Cesar, Dolores, and the UFW as having changed her perspective, changed the way she understood herself as a woman and a Chicana, and given her confidence in her capacity to act with power in the world. Carlos added he believed people contributed their time and labor to the Farm Workers Movement because of their shared beliefs and values, shared values with Cesar, and with the goals of the movement in service to the farm workers themselves. He also noted when these beliefs, values, and people’s capacities were in alignment with what they were being asked to contribute it was fun, saying, “Fun is a big part of what you do, and a lot of individuals, as fun as they were back then, they’re still fun today.” Linda continued:
And we didn’t know they were shared values. I mean, I didn’t know they were shared values at that time, because we were just living it. Cesar had a talent for identifying the kinds of strengths that people had. He sort of assigned them to certain specific jobs or actions. There was a lot to be said for that. When he died and governor Davis signed the Cesar Chavez state holiday in California, we were asked by the Chavez family to represent them in that meeting. It was so amazing to me to think about the 10 values that we teach our kids. There are 10 of them that are named, they have names now, and they had names then, but we didn’t know that’s what we were learning. The value of respect. We have used this in our lives, especially with the people who we don’t see eye to eye with on issues. We teach it to our kids the same way, help someone, teach someone, nonviolence, knowledge is power, all of those values, “sí se puede,” how to sacrifice, all those values that gave us strength as young kids, because we were frickin’ young. Cesar was young. Cesar was what, 33 or something. We were in our 20s and we were kicking ass and taking names, but it didn’t seem like that, we were just doing work. We were on a mission and we believed in the mission. We were given the confidence, by way of getting asked to do something, you know, that Cesar thought we could do. Honestly, that’s what it came down to. For me, I didn’t want to let them down.

The values Linda, Carlos, and so many others learned through organizing and working in the Farm Workers Movement illustrated how she and Carlos operated the Cesar Chavez Clubs now. This was reminiscent of the values elders shared in some of the other testimonios, values they carried with them in their maletas de familial, community, and cultural wealth, and values they learned through their own experiences organizing. Linda explained one of the ways their
confidence and efficacy was built was through Cesar believing in their capacity to engage in specific actions. Linda continued by sharing one such instance. She stated:

You know, I remember one time when we first got to La Paz, I was young, you know, long black hair, and all that stuff. And he [Cesar] wanted me to come back to San Diego and talk to the Labor Council here in San Diego, he wanted them to know a little bit more about the farmworkers and the union, right? Well, I knew enough after having worked on the boycott that the labor council, while supportive, they were different. They were sexist, they were racist. In some of their offices there were pictures of Hollywood nudy shots and stuff. There were those kinds of jokes. Like I’m not offended by making jokes when you’re working with your friends, but when you don’t know somebody, you’re going in for a professional meeting, it’s just not the place for that sort of thing. It was very humiliating in a way, you know, especially when you’re younger, right? Because like, What the fuck is he thinking about? It’s like, I’m here to talk business and there’s this nudie picture up there, right? The experience, Cesar said, and I told him, “Can you give me another assignment? I just don’t want to go do that.” He, in a very nice way, said, “That’s your assignment.” I went and I’m glad that I did because it was a great learning experience. It was a great way to [learn] how to take a situation that you’re very uncomfortable in, and then come out feeling like you’re the victor. What I [also] learned from that was that unions across the state of California, and across the country, were very sexist and were very racist.

Linda, like the other elders, described a moment of learning and of acting through an uncomfortable situation—a potentially traumatic situation—where she had to interact with union leaders in an environment she knew was going to be sexist and racist. Linda described this
situation as a moment of learning to protect herself and to come out a “victor” even through the oppressive conditions. Cesar’s belief in Linda’s capacity, like the supportive beliefs other elders have expressed they experienced from teachers, counselors, mentors, and family members, helped Linda to act in support of the aims of the Farm Workers Movement and build her own confidence, her own efficacy in her ability to enact change, ever “across the table” from those who may do her harm.

**The Union and the Movement – What’s the Difference?**. Linda continued to explain the difference between the Farm Workers Movement and the Farm Workers Union. She stated:

Therein lies the difference between the United Farmworkers Union and the United Farm Workers movement. The union is important. I will always believe in the right for workers to organize, but union leadership, there’s union leadership, and then there’s union leadership. Now the kind of union leadership we did, we had that same with the United Domestic Workers, which is like a sister union to the farm workers. They were real unions run by real people, run by workers, and workers were on the boards and all that stuff. You know, we didn’t go out and spend a lot of money, we didn’t stay in hotels unless there were big conferences. It was just different. For those 6 years that we were living in La Paz, almost 7 years, in the headquarters of the farm worker movement, it was that kind of union. Except for that one experience that I had working with the Labor Council here in San Diego, when we came back home, the whole concept of support that we got from unions back in those days was different. The farm workers were different from the way unions are kind of run today. It’s like any corporation, there are good leaders, and there are shitty leaders, the same with the union leaders. . . Working with the Farm Workers union, it was like nothing there was, it was like magic, it was so strong.
And when there were differences, and there were, and ultimately as you know there was an implosion, when shit hit the fan and people kind of went every which way. But in the beginning, when the rose was in full bloom, that lesson was an incredible lesson to learn in life. It’s been really good for me personally, living my life, and in my personal self and in my political self, and in my social justice self. Dealing with our beautiful little kids, like I said, I learned way more there than I did in the college building, you know, in school. I don’t regret that I didn’t graduate. And I don’t regret that sort of, I kind of do now. I think maybe when I retire I’ll go back. I only have like about 20 units or something to get my degree, and I think I’d like to do that just for my great granddaughter. But at the time that was the school that I chose to go to, the school of the movement.

Linda described how she gained confidence and learned from her time in the Farm Workers Movement and union. She noted a difference between the union, which was like a “corporation,” and the movement, which was like “magic, it was so strong.” She also noted how leadership and institutional structures are different in different organizations and how participatory worker led representation made some unions feel like magic and made them feel stronger than other forms of organization structures. Linda’s whole self was affirmed—her personal, political, and social justice self—within the Farm Workers Movement during this time in her life. She expressed some regret about not having completed her college degree, reflecting about possibly going back to formal schooling, and then closing by affirming she chose to go to the of the movement.
Carlos shared about how Sol Price, like Cesar Chavez, was also a mentor for Linda and him; even though the two of them—Cesar and Sol—were very different in many ways, they had shared values as well. Carlos continued:

Cesar Chavez, he knew what to do with his life. He gave his life for the movement, right? I traveled with Cesar quite a bit. He loved to go to the colleges because that’s where he would do his best recruitment, was to recruit college students. College students could arrive at the headquarters one day and the next day they’re hitchhiking to New York City to be on the boycott in New York City. He said, “Oh, no, they’re really good, because they don’t have much physical baggage with them.” He said, “Sometimes we have to deal with some mental [baggage], leadership issues that they have.” Cesar would be talking with one of the students and the student would say, “I really want to work for the summer with you.” I used to watch Cesar and marvel at how he would be talking to [an] individual. A lot of people would think the United Farmworkers are [just] farm workers in the field. Well, we had a transportation department with 300 cars, we had service centers with probably three or 400 staff. We had medical centers, probably with five, 600 staff, we had the boycott staff. So there were thousands of individuals involved with the movement. So, while Cesar was talking to the individual, his mind was going, where do we slot this individual? And generally, he was pretty right on where. He would say, “We have a perfect place for you. It’s gonna take a lot of commitment. This is something we really want to have done.” He was very, very good at that. People don’t realize that the farmworkers movement wasn’t just farmworkers, it was a whole movement of people.

Carlos added to Linda’s articulation of a difference between the Farm Workers Union and the Farm Workers Movement. He noted how many people were involved in the movement,
how colleges were spaces where the Farm Workers Movement looked to recruit. This matched
the testimonios of many of the other elders who expressed getting involved in the Farm Workers
Movement was one of the first places where they got involved in social justice action. They
connected to this movement through the colleges they attended. Linda added:

Love and respect, when you’re working with people, is such an important aspect of
lifestyle and action taking, especially when a lot of times we’re fighting with people in
power. There’s nothing more powerful than love and respect. And the thing is, Gabe,
most of the workers were Latino, but we had workers from the Middle East, we had poor
white people, we had African American workers, workers from all over. Our sense of
social justice includes many different cultures, because people are people, and the real
discrimination is on color and on status and life economically. Those are the people who
are really always getting shit on, you know, and they’re the people who are least
respected. . . I relate to people based on their values. In my heart I’m Chicana, if
somebody asked me, I’m definitely Chicana and I’m proud of that. That’s part of the
values we teach, be proud of who you are, celebrate your culture and your food and your
language. Let’s teach each other about who we are so we can love and respect each other.
That was a very, very important part of the whole movement to me. I mean, that’s just the
way I am today. You know, I’m always drawn to Latinos, Chicanos, Mexicanos, but that
doesn’t mean we always agree on our politics and on the issues. I mean look at Florida
for God’s sake . . . Back in the day, when there were Chicana nationalists, Chicanos not
understanding that there’s good and bad in every culture, in every race, but in your heart,
you are who you are, and you want to represent that to other people that you’re working
with. That’s something we pass down to our kids too, we don’t say it quite like that. You
learn hate, you’re not born hating something, you learn that. Just like that lady, it makes me think of that lady in North Carolina, she loved me until she found out I was Mexican. Where did that come from? So, that’s my story, and I’m sticking to it.

Love and respect were values that Linda expressed as central to her Chicana identity and culture. Thus, Linda’s sense of being Chicana aligned with her values of love, respect, and social justice; these values are inclusive of other cultures and people, while still allowing her to affirm her own sense of identity and her own subjective reality and lived experiences. Her sense of Chicana was almost like a vessel—a container for her sense of self—which embodied these values of love and respect, of inclusive social justice. There were similar patterns of identity, subjectivity, and values alignment in Teresa and David’s story as well.

Carlos said, “We sure got a lot more out of movement than the movement got from us.”

Linda agreed, “That’s for sure.”

Carlos added, connecting to Linda’s mention of love and respect:

The movement is love and respect. The first contract Cesar wanted from the growers wasn’t so much about how much money they were going to give us, or, you know, concede to, but Cesar’s thing was that we want a contract that’s going to be respectful of the workers. It’s a huge issue. There’s a number of those that happen all the time in the movement, situations like that, issues that come up. Even as a teacher, as you are, and working with these young kids, I’m sure that you learned so much from them in terms of their tenacity. How could they be so strong? Where did they get that from, [Linda, “Resiliency”]. Yeah, the resiliency of the students. So, I mean, we learned a tremendous amount of love and respect through the movement. We still see it every day in our work. It’s a privilege to be able to work, and to still be out there stoking the flames of justice.
Working with our Chavistas and getting them into social justice is part of the legacy of the Farm Workers Movement.

Carlos and Linda acknowledge they have gained and grown from their involvement in the Farm Workers movement. Carlos emphasized the importance of the values of love and respect, even giving an example of how important these were to Cesar and the United Farm Workers union’s first contract with the growers. They both saw their work with youth through the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs as an extension of the Chicano Movement and as “part of the legacy of the Farm Workers Movement.” Linda added:

And even if it’s not social justice that the kids get into, if it’s teaching, or if it’s biochemistry, or if it’s whatever it is, there’s always going to be a very close connection between all of those kids, no matter what field they go into, because of the values they’ve learned as young fourth and fifth graders. . . Our mission statement is so simple Gabe, but it’s what we do. I will always believe in it, to inspire a young kid to believe in themselves and to know they can make a difference. Now, that sounds so fucking simple, but the educational piece of it is so intertwined with the values and we want our kids to go to college, if they want to, we want them to know that they’re capable of going to college if they want to, we have kids going to Japan, Dartmouth, Stanford, Berkeley, community college, they’re going everywhere. . .

Carlos continued:

Putting all the stuff that Linda talked about, getting our Chavistas, arming them with the right amount of confidence and the desire, to know that when they hit adulthood, they can sit down across the table from anyone and be able to reach across. To me, if we do that then I think we’re in good shape. Reaching across isn’t easy. How do we take care of and
teach our Chavistas about ego? First thing I tell them is to leave it at the door. At first they don’t understand that, but later on, I think they begin to understand it. I think we have to do what we can to build that confidence and to build the wherewithal that they feel good about who they are.

According to Linda and Carlos, the primary goal of the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs was to help the youth they serve build confidence in their abilities and capacities to excel academically and create social justice change and to make a positive difference in the world, not simply for their own personal gain, but for the betterment of the community. This is in alignment with the development of CC—the education intertwined with the values of the Farm Workers movement with an aim on critical reflection—to help the students see their own efficacy in creating change in the world and their community, and then acting on that capacity and belief. In the conclusion of their testimonio platica, Linda shared about how one of their former students, who was in graduate school in biology at a UC campus. Although they were interested in pursuing a career in science, they also participated in social justice issues within that field, and within the UC system, having actively participated in the recent graduate student strikes and pickets. Linda also shared about how the Chavistas engaged in community civic action, one instance being to present their support of ethnic studies as a graduation requirement in their school district. These are examples of social justice in action, of CC and praxis in action.

Linda concluded:

The thing is, they all have what it takes, they just don’t know they have what it takes until you turn on a little light. I’m a real believer, I’ve seen too many wonderful cases. One of our social justice kids in San Diego High School, she’s now in grad school, she graduated from Berkeley, full ride. Now she’s going to grad school and she said, “Miss Linda,” she
goes, “I really thought I was gonna get a job in social justice.” She goes, “But I love research, I love science.” I said, “Then do the research and do the science and kick ass there. What can you do there?” What’s important about that job with her background is that she can do that, but she can also have a conversation about social justice. She can bring all of that into her field. And we need that. Someday she’s going to be the one who invents a cure for some god awful virus that we might get in the future. She’s brilliant, this kid. In fact, she sent me pictures of her and another Chavista who are now in grad school and they were on the picket line for the UC system strikes. . . I want somebody who will share social justice issues and work on making things better. I don’t know if you saw this report, but I saw this report where they were talking about how in South Carolina they fired the superintendent of schools. People were there burning books, they were burning books like *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They weren’t going to learn about that stuff in school, classics and stuff. It reminded me of a college student who was doing some volunteer work for us, it was an internship, it was for something she was taking at UCSD, it was years ago . . . I mean, the books today, some of the stuff that we’re teaching to our kids, the curriculum that we’re teaching to our kids is pretty amazing. But not a lot of people are getting these kinds of books in elementary school, which reminds me about this student from UCSD who was interning with us. I can’t remember what the curriculum was, it was ethnic studies . . . She was working with our kids in fifth grade, she goes, “I hadn’t learned this stuff until I got in college.” As a result a few years later, our kids got together, they made a resolution, they took it to the school board and now you have to have a course in ethnic studies before you can graduate. You know, and that happens because kids give a shit, they wanted to, so they took their action step, wrote a
resolution and presented it to the board. Not only did they do that, but they also got the board to make a resolution about mental health. So, at the San Diego Unified School District they are going to add more mental health curriculum in the schools. And, you know, our kids went to the City Council, and they made presentations to the City Council to pass the Climate Action Plan, which they did. But our kids worked really hard and they worked together, and they collaborated with other students at the school, either clubs or just other groups, so that they’re working together. It’s a great model for the big world out there, you know, to see these kids who have different interests in life but become like minded on a social justice issue that they can work on together. And if we worked on it together, there really can be good changes, there have been some good changes made. It’s important.

Within Linda and Carlos’ testimonios, we can see the strands and values of what they learned in the Farm Workers Movement. They focused on how important love and respect were to them and to their continued work in the community with youth through their Cesar Chavez Service Clubs. Through this continued work, Linda and Carlos have striven to pass on the values they learned through the movement to help build up youth’s confidence, self-efficacy, and political efficacy to make social justice changes in the world. Linda and Carlos also focused on sharing about the many core relationships they formed—friendships and mentorships—through their work in the movement, and how many of these relationships continue to be strong and valuable to this day.

**Teresa and David**

Teresa Pascual Valladolid was born in Calexico in 1947, the eldest of six children. Her father, Francisco Pascual, was born in Camiling, Tarlac, Philippines and her mother, Emilia
Pascual, was born in Zacatecas Mexico, and raised in Aguascaliente. Her mother grew up working many different jobs and supported her family’s tiendita (shop), which sold goods to mine workers as they finished their labor. Teresa remembered her mother being very quick with math. She was able to out-calculate her and her siblings, despite having only a third grade education. Her mother was also the treasurer of the Guadalupanas, a catholic community organization. Her mother was sent to work as a housekeeper in Mexicali where she also crossed the border into Calexico to work in the fields, which was where she met Teresa’s father. Teresa’s father had migrated to California as a laborer working different jobs, and finally ended up working in the Imperial Valley where he owned a farm, which helped him avoid getting drafted. Her parents met working in the fields and packing sheds in the Imperial Valley; at this time, most of the field workers were men who migrated without families from the Philippines, India, and Greece (as well as other countries). Many of these men ended up marrying Mexican women; Teresa explained some of her family’s friends were couples like her parents, Filipino men married to Mexican women. Teresa’s parents ended up getting married in New Mexico due to California’s antimiscegenation law disallowing interracial marriage (Garcia, 2021).

Teresa graduated from high school in El Centro and went on to get her BA in Chicano Studies from SDSU. After graduating, she was hired as a Counselor Coordinator for the TRiO Student Support Services Project at SDSU for EOP students. Teresa wanted to make sure peer counselors she supervised through the program understood the political ramifications of education, especially for the underrepresented students the program served (Garcia, 2021). Gus Chavez and Gonzalo Rojas supervised Teresa during the 5 years she worked in this coordinator position. She went on to the Community Based Block (CBB) master’s program at SDSU. After the CBB program Teresa ended up having to choose between two positions, director of EOP for
Grossmont-Cuyamaca Colleges or a union organizer for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). She chose the path of labor organizing which led her to over 30 years of service in this field, working for AFSCME, the United Domestic Workers (UDW), and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU; Valladolid Guzman & Valladolid Taufaasau, 2017). Teresa also worked on the UCLA Labor Council Advisory Board for more than 8 years, before retiring.

Teresa contributed her energy in service of the promotion of social justice for many causes, including farm workers’ rights, women’s rights, immigrant rights, access to education, and voting rights and promotion. She served as part of many organizations and on many boards during her life, including: MANA (Mexican-American Women’s National Association) a National Latina Organization; the League of Women Voters; Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project; Get out the Vote Campaign, San Diego; Center for Migrant Services Board of Directors; the Filipino Immigrant Rights Organization; Chicano/Latino Coalition of Southwestern College; the Association of Chicana Activists (ACHA) at SDSU; the Center for Women Studies and Services; the Liberty Hill Foundation Community Funding Board; and the Latino Vote USA in San Diego (Garcia, 2021; Valladolid Guzman & Valladolid Taufaasau, 2017). Teresa Pascual Valladolid also served as a board member of the Southwestern College Board for 16 years, from 1998–2014.

David John Valladolid was born in 1948 in Oxnard, California to Rita and Genaro “Jerry” Valladolid. David’s maternal great-grandmother was Tongva, from San Gabriel, and lived to be 123 years old. David’s father, Genaro, was born in Zamora, Michoacan, Mexico. During his teens, David’s father got involved with the Cristeros war, a rebellion of Catholic people in the late 1920s against the Mexican government and its implementation of what the
Cristeros saw as anticlerical secularist elements of the constitution of 1917. David’s grandfather, Antonio, and all of David’s uncles participated in the Cristeros movement. Eventually, they had to flee Mexico to avoid violent retaliation from Mexican army officials. David’s family fled to the United States and filed for refugee status. His family ended up spread out throughout the southwest and his father landed in California. His parents met in Oxnard, which was where David was born, and then shortly after moved to Fresno. Unfortunately, his father had a chronic illness he caught during the Cristero war, and, without penicillin, had complications leading to his sudden death at the age of 39. David’s mother, Rita, was left with five young children to raise and support. She ended up moving to San Diego to be closer to her mother’s family, many of whom lived in Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico. David’s mother was able to secure spots at Catholic schools in San Diego and was even able to avoid red-lining and purchase a house in the North Park neighborhood of San Diego.

David graduated from Saint Augustine High School and went on to Mesa College before dropping out due to a dip in his grade point average. He was drafted into the Vietnam War and served 6 months in combat before being twice wounded. After a long recovery, he was able to get reassigned to a base in San Diego. He then secured an early release from military service by enrolling in City College. While attending City College, David contributed his energy walking precincts, phone banking, and leafleting for Peter Chacon’s campaign for California State Assembly, which Chacon won in 1971, becoming the first Latino to serve in the California State Assembly. After attending City College and transferring to SDSU, David graduated from SDSU with his BA in three subject areas: health sciences, child development, and psychology.

David’s career encompassed three main areas: political campaigning and logistics, organizing, and education. In 1975, Auggie Bareño hired David to work for the Department of
Manpower with the county of San Diego, where David recruited companies to provide employment opportunities for people in the community who needed jobs as the department subsidized 6 months of people’s salaries. In 1980, Chacon hired David as his chief of staff, a position David held for 8 years. David then went on to serve Willie Brown for over 6 years while he was speaker of the house, running an office for him in San Diego and spending time in Sacramento. Ken Seaton-Msemaji asked David to help the UDW union as their political director. David also provided service for the State of California’s Department of Fair Employment and Housing and served on the Labor Commission for over 10 years.

In 1996, David was hired by Vahac Mardirosian to serve the Parent Institute of Quality Education (PIQE) and set up more offices to coordinate the program’s growth throughout California. PIQE’s mission is to educate low-income parents in historically underserved communities about the paths to higher education for their children, helping parents effectively prepare and advocate for their children’s access to higher education. When David joined PIQE, about 90% of the parents were from Latino families. David’s goal was to expand their reach to all low-income families. Vahac retired in 2000, and David took over as President and chief executive officer of PIQE. Under David’s direction and leadership, PIQE was eventually delivered in over 18 languages, across 18 states in the United States, and in Mexico City, by applying a best practice model with which they could consult other agencies and organizations to deliver in their communities. By the time David retired from PIQE in 2019, PIQE had graduated over 1,000,000 parents through their program. David has also served on countless boards and supported different organizations promoting social justice throughout his life.

Teresa and David have known my family for many decades. Like the other elders, they knew my parents before I was born, as they both organized in the farmworkers, antiwar, and
Chicano movements along with my father and mother. David met my father at a Tang Soo Do school in San Diego, on 35th and El Cajon Blvd., under the direction of Master Frances. David had already heard some about my father and his involvement in the Chicano movement, and they connected there in the martial arts studio. My father invited David to his classes to speak to his students. They connected and became best friends, David agreeing to be my padrino—my god father. David and Teresa were some of my parents’ best friends. Our families have grown together and we have seen each other on a regular basis to this day.

*Teresa: “There’s Still so Much Work to Be Done.”*

**Happy Childhood: Childhood and Early Education Experiences.** I started by asking Teresa to share about her experiences of education and schooling. She shared about her family and early childhood memories. She stated:

I grew up with a Filipino father and a Mexican mother. We grew up in the outskirts, with an outhouse, and so not a lot. Our family table was just a big board, and our chairs were just big boxes, you know. By our current standards we would have been considered below the poverty line, some might consider us poor. We were happy children, you know, because we had relatives on the Filipino side, and we also had the Mexican side. The great thing about our community is that my dad had friends and relatives nearby. So, on weekends we would get together and kill pigs and goats to eat. One time they killed my baby goat, we had a pet goat, and she was part of the bar-b-q that time. That was one side, and then we would cross to Mexicali, across the border, where my uncles and aunts lived. They’d get together, and my dad would drink tequila with my mom’s only brother, and they’d eat abalone, out of a can, with sliced up lemon. It was delicious. And we helped my uncle build his adobe house, with mud, and that was really interesting. We all
went and helped him. It was the richness of having the Mexicano side and then also having the Filipino side and the cultura and learning about that. My mother knew no English at all, so she was completely monolingual Spanish. My dad had graduated from high school where he was required to learn English and Spanish, and then their dialect they picked up on their own. So he was able to speak his Ilocano, broken Spanish, and English. At home we grew up speaking only Spanish. It wasn’t until we started going to school that we picked up English, and then Spanglish, English and Spanish. We lived right next to a field of crops. The planes would come and fumigate and we didn’t think anything of it at the time. There would be different crops and we’d play in between the rows of crops, and there was a big ditch that we played in and we climbed the trees. That was our playground. It wasn’t until college that I realized, oh god, we were kind of poor, economically. But at the time we felt really rich, because we had richness in our family, in our cultura. We had my Filipino uncles, and my dad’s friends, coming and bringing us crayons and helping us with our English, our ABCs, and our numbers. We would go to Mexico and my uncle would show us all of these pretty pebbles and say that one day he was going to be rich because those were gold nuggets and I believed him. So that was my childhood.

Teresa’s testimonio started with her juxtaposing her family’s apparent poverty with how happy she remembered her and her siblings being, and tied this to the cultural and relational wealth of her family maleta. Her maleta was filled with the cultural wealth of expectations and aspirations of education, the ABCs, English, and the support of her extended family. It was filled with her embrace and learning of her cultura. She stated:
My parents were field workers. My mother, well, when she was young, she was a maid. When she met my dad, they were working in the farms, on the camp lands, and then the packing sheds. Every summer when we were little my dad would go away to Northern California, Central California, to work the tomatoes, the grapes, and as we grew older then we started going as a family. We were working hard, especially as we grew up, and we started helping by working in the fields. Then we started going on our regular summer trips, to Arvin, Bakersfield, and Fresno to work the grape fields and to work on the raisins. That’s when groups of families would get together. We had three or four families like my aunt was married to a Filipino, and all the other families we got close to were Mexicanas married to Filipinos. So, we’d all travel to Fresno, and to us it was a change. It was exciting, we thought it was a big thing, because to us it was a vacation because we got away from the valley, where it was 120 degrees, even though we were going to another 110-degree weather in Fresno, or Arvin, to work in the fields. But it was different, you had all your friends there. We worked during the day really hard, in the 110-degree weather. We’d be in the sand, kneeling on the sand so you could work faster instead of humping over. We would have brown knees from the sand. We used to be really competitive. When we worked in the fields, we’d see who could get the most trays, trays filled with buckets of grapes drying to become raisins. I remember vividly, when we would complain, we’d say, “Daddy, I don’t want to work anymore. It’s too hard. When can we go home?” That’s when he’d say, “That’s why you have to get an education. You have to work at getting a degree so that you don’t have to be working in the fields.” So, that was our first motivation to say, “Yeah, we gotta stay in school.” The weekend is when we celebrated, we would get paid, and that’s when we would all go to the mall that
was in Fresno. El Centro never had a mall. So, at the mall we’d go shopping for our annual clothes. We would go to the movies, sometimes we’d see Filipino movies that my dad would understand, sometimes they’d be English movies. And then we’d always get chop suey, we’d always have Chinese food, with the cousins and the friends. Then we come back and have a bonfire and talk to our cousins and friends and listen to music, to the radio. We’d talk about what was happening in our lives and that kept us together. So to us it was fun.

Teresa’s memories of her family’s field working trips throughout the fields of California to do field work were punctuated by the community of family and friends as consistent elements of these experiences. These trips to work in the fields of northern California, while filled with manual labor, were also experiences of family and community bonding and adventure for her as a youth. Later in her testimonio, Teresa saw the fun and adventure in these trips. However, she understood, even as a child, they may not appear to be as acceptable or fun by her higher-class white classmates. This was another example of aspirational capital from her father’s message about staying in school, getting a degree, and Teresa’s vivid memories of the field work motivating her to stay in school. Teresa continued her testimonio with her experiences in elementary school. She stated:

When we started going to school, unfortunately, we didn’t speak English. We lived out in the country and that was where, there was a really good public school, that was where all the farmer’s kids would go, and they were all white. Since we lived in the outskirts, our district had us going to this all white school, and, on the bright side, it was one of the best schools around. I think there was one other Mexicano family and one Black family in the whole school. This was from first to eighth grade. So, luckily, in a way, it was great. That
was a good education, because we were forced to learn English, like really quickly and really well. Also, the curriculum was really good. We were getting straight As and just learning. So, it was a good education. But reality would hit us. When it was sharing time, like after the summer vacations, everybody would be talking about their ski trips or their trips to Europe or whatever, but we didn’t have anything to report. Our nails were all brown and our knees all sunburned from the sun. There were kids that would look at you, like when we were reporting about what you did in the summer. We didn’t share, because we had been in the fields and our knees were all brown from the sand, the sunny sand. Made us think like, oh, I guess maybe we’re not as wealthy as we thought we were. But anyway, we survived it. The lesson that I’ve learned through the years is the importance of family, the importance of community, of our parents and siblings. So that was great.

Teresa’s characterization of the schools as having good education was directly tied to them being white schools, having only two other families of color. Teresa equated being forced to learn English quickly with good education, also noting the curriculum was good. She also stated she, and her friends or family, “we,” were getting good grades and learning, but “reality would hit”—the reality of racism and classism. Although her memories of taking trips to work with her parents in the field were positive childhood memories, even though they were working hard, her first description of racism and classism—having to hide this part of herself—was clearly a memory that stuck with her. I was struck by how she had to hide her fieldworker heritage, her “knees all brown from the sand, the sunny sand,” like how Roger masked his family’s field working trips as well by calling them “camping trips.” This was technically accurate, as they all did camp along the fields.
“It Changed My life.” – Critical Consciousness Forming in College. Teresa explained how she had planned to stay in Imperial Valley but experiences with her counselor and a friend of hers changed her mind. Teresa stated:

So, my plan was, you know, of course, it was IVC, Imperial Valley College, and then after that, I would get a job. Luckily, that was the year when EOP started, and a [high school] counselor, a white counselor, approached me and said, “Teresa you know, there’s this program. I know you would qualify,” and I was like, “But I don’t want to leave the valley. I don’t want to leave my parents.” And luckily, another friend of mine, her counselor also talked to her, and so then we said, “Okay if you go, then I’ll go.” So, we did, we applied to San Diego State and got in through EOP and grants and loans. We didn’t have to, my parents didn’t have to put any money or anything into it. That was my interest and experience in education, my beginning, that changed my life.

Teresa, like some of the other elders, had a supportive counselor inform her about EOP, scholarships, and applying to schools outside of the Imperial Valley. Teresa also relied on a supportive peer relationship to allow her to push past her fears of leaving home and her parents. She and her friend agreed to support each other in attending school outside of Calexico, an agreement representing collective relational support; what would have happened without this mutual support of each other? Teresa commented:

To go back and pinpoint critical consciousness, for me, I mean, I came from a very protective close-knit family. I didn’t want to go to San Diego State because it was far away from home. But the fact that it was an education, I wanted to honor what my dad and my mom were saying, because they were farm workers who worked in the fields, in the packing sheds, and I wanted to do better than that, because I didn’t want to be in the
field. So, when I came to San Diego State University, it changed my life, that was kind of my first awakening. I was going to classes, I was going to be a business major, I was going to have my own business, and I was going to make money. That’s when I got more involved in MEChA, at the time it was MAYA, the Mexican-American Youth Association. All of the campuses had one, UCLA had UMAS, we had MAYA, others had different names. We wanted to be united. Later, I think it was the next year when it became MEChA. I remember the whole discussion, the arguments, among the Chicanos about, “What do we want to name it?” I was going to classes, Alurista, Gonzalez, and Diana Garcia, would stop me, because we were all in our part of the first EOP group from the valley, the Fresno group. And they would say, “You got to come to the MAYA meetings.” We started going to the meetings. I was kind of like, maybe, not like as you say in Español, tapada, verdad, but just not very conscious. I started getting involved and listening to others talk about their experiences. And then one of my first jobs was a work-study job working at financial aid. I learned the ins and outs, and MECHistas started coming to me. I started doing workshops on the side on how to get a short-term loan, how to make sure the application is filled out correctly, and that motivated me. It felt good to have information that could be useful and share it with people.

Teresa named her experience of CC formation, tying it to her close-knit family and acknowledging the tension between wanting to stay and support her family and abide by her parents’ desire for her, and going away to the University. CC was tied to her college experience—her life changing experiences at SDSU—where she also connected to MEChA and the various Chicana/o organizations forming and reforming at the time of her attendance in college. Teresa noted she would not characterize herself as “tapada,” or ignorant, but she noticed
her consciousness was changing, developing, and growing through her experiences listening to and interacting with her classmates in these Chicana/o organizations and classes.

“We Got to Do Something About This.” – History, Theory, and Critical Reflection. Teresa explained how her experiences in college inspired reflection on her lived experiences and led to a sense of responsibility to act. Teresa stated:

I remember, specifically, we started to see some movies. I think it was one called Soldier Blue [Soldier Blue], it was a movie that was about Native Americans being slaughtered by white soldiers, being beheaded; and I remember crying, and to me it was kind of like, “Oh, my God, we got to get involved. We got to do something about this.” At the time I was a business administration major. I was on probation I think two times, because I wasn’t going to class and not doing my papers, questions about dropping, and they were going to disqualify me. I came back. I had friends that were part of the AS [associated students] counsel, there was an ombudsman, and he would always get us back in. But to me that was kind of like the critical point where I started realizing how we all fit in. The farm workers movement, with Cesar Chavez, was organizing strikes, and they had students and volunteers all over the campuses. I remember the students coming in, some of the volunteers coming in and saying, “Hey, we got farmworkers out there with no union contract working out in the fields.” When this was happening, the farm workers coming to State and talking about the type of work that farm workers had to do, what they had to endure, I could relate to it because I had worked in the fields, I had worked in the summer, even though it was in the summer, I could really relate to that. So, putting all that together, you know, realizing what this country had done to people of color, to Native Americans, the slaughter, that helped me start to put it [all] together. In my case,
because I had experience working in the fields, I had experienced my uncle dying from liver cancer and being an alcoholic, you know, living in the barrio. We lived in the country and then we moved, we finally bought a house [and] lived in the barrio. But you know everybody was into drugs and unfortunately my younger brothers got involved and my cousins got locked up. So, there were all those dynamics that finally I started putting together and realizing that you can’t be silent, you can’t just sit back. And then for a while it was being angry at white people in general and then realizing, “No it’s not just white people, but it’s the system, it’s the government.” Then what really helped us, you know, argue about it and discuss it, was the study groups. Reading dialectical historical materialism, Marxism, Stalinism, and then getting into discussions and arguments. I think it was the critical consciousness and then the activism, like what do you do with it.

Teresa noted during this period of her CC development, her exposure to histories of genocide and racial violence, coupled with farmworker organizing efforts, inspired her to see the need to act on these injustices and where and how she started to understand where she fit into the sociopolitical reality of the time. She connected these new realizations, and the organizing efforts, to her own lived experiences working in the fields. She connected the racist histories to her witnessing her family’s and communities’ struggles with drugs, incarceration, death, and disease. Speaking up and acting was her reaction, her conclusion, and her enactment of CC. It was also noteworthy she mentioned peer support again near the beginning of this section of her testimonio. She started organizing more and going to class less, but her classmates in the Associated Students and the ombudsman went to bat for her and others to help them stay enrolled at SDSU.
Ivory Towers, Pintos, and Students: Collective Community Organizing and Action.

Teresa gave more context about the complexities of subjectivities and experiences in the Chicana community during her youth. She explained:

Then you had, you know, the pintos, Rachel Ortiz, you know, for a while there was this kind of dynamic between like, “Okay, you guys are sitting up in your ivory towers.” You know, she would criticize us. And then there’s all these, you know, professors that, you know, have their PhDs but then they’re just up there. Then we’ve got the pintos, the community people, and then we’ve got the students. So, that’s when we started forming the colectivas, and so it’s like, all kinds of coming together, you know, with a lot of drama and a lot of hurt because it wasn’t easy and unfortunately, we’re still going through a lot of that. But to a lot of us those were the critical moments. Like MEChA, you know, that’s when I remember specifically one of the professors when he was arguing, MEChA UCSD and MEChA SDSU, because people wanted to keep their UMAS or their MAYO, they wanted to have a separate name, and he’s like, “No,” he goes, “You could have MEChA, you know meaning Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan and at the same time MEChA is like the spark, the fire that lights it up.” So, finally people were like, “Yeah!” So yeah, it was some exciting times for a lot of us.

Teresa mentioned how the colectivas—collectives of people from all kinds of walks of life from the community—such as pintos (i.e., who have been incarcerated), students, and professors were difficult to organize, but they were important as critical moments in understanding the dynamics of social and political relations between various aspects of the community. Her recollection showed how Rachel Ortiz challenged the status quo, the order and hierarchy of the “ivory tower.” This challenge that led to the organization of the colectivas was
part of Teresa’s acknowledgement of the ways power works and her burgeoning awareness of these dynamics as part of her development of CC. She acknowledged the struggle in maintaining these collectives, stating it was still difficult today, and the importance of naming the organizations that would help the community and students to organize. She named MEChA as striking a spark and a fire lighting up the student movement. Teresa stated:

I think the activism, the consciousness, and the community service, when we had our colectivas, when we had our centro, you know, we tried to kind of build on that and make sure that this community, was representative of the students and the community, you know, and that’s why when I was at State, when I got hired to be the council coordinator, it was the community that hired me, the Junta Directiva. There was an opening as a counselor, a council coordinator, and Arthur Ayala, who’s also very active MECHista was applying for the same position. I applied and I got interviewed by, I think it was MEChA first, I don’t remember the details other than it was a big group. So it was either just MEChA or MEChA and the Junta Directiva, but I think the Junta Directiva only interviewed the faculty. So, of course, everybody had their friends, and you had the students there, and the community people and the professors, and there was criticism, like “Okay, so it depends on how popular you are?” Actually, there were a lot of Chicanas that said, “No, we want a woman there.” So, I got the position. I became a council coordinator without having any kind of experience in administration or anything. You did what you felt you had to do. Gus Chavez was my supervisor, Gonzalo Rojas was his assistant, they were my supervisors. That was exciting. I did that for about three years.

Teresa acknowledged how important the colectivas were in providing community representation and voice in the university space. This echoes the importance and value of organic
intellectualism and community service, of being beholden to and in service of the community, rather than pursuing intellectual and academic goals simply for personal gain. This valuation of community voice, agency, and service was seen throughout the testimonios of the elders, represented in both of their maletas de community cultural wealth and in the ideals of the Chicana/o movement and identity formation. There was also mention of the Junta Directive again, which was mentioned in at least three of the testimonios as a crucial component of MEChA’s power and influence at SDSU.

Love for Self and Community: The Power of Love, Connection, and Action. Teresa connected love for self with love and action for social change. Teresa explained:

I think first of all, you have to love yourself. Especially now we see so many people that are broken, or even people that have, you know, dedicated their whole lives to the community and then their own family, you know, is either abandoned or left behind. So, before you’re going to do anything that’s going to be of value to the community, I think you have to really love yourself and be in touch with yourself. We all have different roles, whether you’re an educator, whether you’re an organizer, whether you’re in real estate, whatever it is, you know, there has to be some kind of a community connection. One thing that I always try to instill in people, especially people that work with young people, and all the young people that are getting education, is “Don’t forget about your community.” Because there’s still so much work to be done. We recently started with the Chavistas, you know, their annual breakfast. And so it’s beautiful, to be able to see the children, the young people, you know, all the way from elementary school to high schools, doing the Chavista work and being involved in the community. We as parents, and as community people, have to connect with the young people because sometimes we
tend to forget about ensuring that they know about our culture, that they know about our heritage, that they realize where they came from and not be ashamed of being, you know, a certain color, a certain race. That’s one thing I think some of us have missed, connecting and continuing it.

Teresa connected this concept of community service and connection to love, to the act of loving the community, loving ourselves, in all capacities of our labor and work. She connected her past experiences of education and organizing to the present moment, stating there was still much work to be done. She also connected her call for action to her connection to the Chavistas, to the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs led by Linda and Carlos. She also made a call for elders and youth to connect in our communities, to support youth in learning about their history, culture, legacies, and heritage—to be proud of who they are. Teresa commented:

The act of listening is also important, which we don’t do very well. Especially when, you know, when you have these white supremacists, and claiming that they’re, you know, pro America, having their right to speech, and then later they’re saying, “Oh, no, we really didn’t mean that.” I think what we’re finding out is that a lot of people are ignorant, because they’re from a certain mind, and that’s the way they’re thinking. Sometimes you don’t want to talk to somebody just because they’re Republican or because they’re a white supremacist, but what some of us are finding out is that sometimes if we start listening to why it is that they think the way they are, or why they’re talking the way they are, then sometimes you could educate them or open their mind a little bit or figure out that maybe it’s not that they’re just really racist but it’s they just don’t know any better. I know Clarisa has shared with us about some of her neighbors that she actually takes the time to talk to them and listen to them. I think that sometimes we just kind of cut people
off because they don’t think the way we do, and that’s a mistake. I think one of the things that Trump has done is exposed the people that normally wouldn’t come out, to actually talk and verbalize some of their real beliefs. Even though it’s scary at the same time, it’s like, “Hey, we’ve got a challenge and we’ve got to meet that challenge.”

Teresa continued by emphasizing the act and skill of listening, especially when people are in spaces where they do not agree completely, when they do not agree with those with whom they are in communication. Through this dialogue, she was challenging us, as educators and community members, to embrace difficult conversations and to embrace the need to listen and communicate with those who we can now see are in direct opposition to our goals and aims of social justice. This echoed the calls from Linda and Carlos to learn how to sit across the table to engage in dialogue with anyone, especially in social and political spaces where it is difficult to make social justice changes. Teresa stated:

I’ve been listening a lot to Starla Lewis. I love her. She’s always talking about love and she talks about love yourself. We don’t do enough of that. So, when you sent that out, immediately I just thought of loving yourself, you know, so I didn’t even bother to ask you, because that was to me, that was the way I would define it. You have to love yourself before you can love your community or love your brothers and sisters. Because you have to be really comfortable with yourself, with your pluses and minuses. I think getting to our children, to the young people, their future. I love what you guys and Maite [Teresa’s daughter] are trying, doing círculos with the young people and ensuring that they don’t forget where they came from, that they’re proud of their culture. I remember when, you know, I was in MEChA, I was really involved and when my younger sister went through MEChA, it was more of a party. Then Maite too when she tried going to the
MEChA meetings they were more like a party, a party group. I definitely think that, whether it be circulos, whether it’s learning their background, their heritage, their language, we need to expose them [youth] to the world, expose them to people who are different than we are, to Black folks to brown folks, to Native Americans, to people that are disabled, you know, to having respect for other people and other cultures. So, to me, that’s key, getting to the young people, to our children, and then exposing them to the Earth, to what’s happening with elections and voting. That’s a beginning. That’s something crucial with what we have to do.

Teresa returned to love, to the love of self, community, and our relatives. This echoed Gonzalo’s call for love as an act of revolution, for love as an act of maintaining and enacting faith in humanity to grow and learn. Teresa was also speaking to self-reflection and awareness, and connecting these qualities, these actions, to our capacity to act with love in the world. This echoed Freire’s (1970/2018) calls for educators to be reflective and to embrace a faith in and love of humanity. Teresa then connected acting with love to talking circles, to maintaining our connection to our culture and history, and to knowing ourselves and our roots more intimately. Teresa returned to her experiences in MEChA and how she had been hearing from younger generations that some chapters of MEChA were more about socializing than political and community action. Teresa returned to an emphasis of connecting youth to Mother Earth, to their cultural roots, and to diverse communities of people to help them develop their own sense of critical consciousness and place in the world. She stated:

What the Cesar Chavez Clubs are doing is great. They should definitely be in every school, because it is really inspiring every time we go to the functions or watch the videos, you know? You see güeritos, you see African Americans, you see youth of Indian
descent, and all of them, you know, a lot of them speaking Spanish and using the principles of Cesar Chavez and being involved in the community. This last time, they gave us a report of the Chavistas working with the homeless, doing trash pickup or doing food distribution. At such a young age, they’re being exposed to activism. Then you have these kids that are graduating, going to Berkeley, Stanford, whatever it is you’re going to be doing, they’ve got already in their mind instilled that, hey, it’s not just to go for an education, and you’re going to come back and make a lot of money, or go into corporate America, but we have a responsibility to give back to community, to serve our community. When I said Stanford it reminds me, because I remember when your mom shared with me that when you got accepted to Stanford, and I think it was the first year and everybody was going into the ski trips or whatever. Then I think you said something like, “Why did I have to? Why did you have to instill in me activism?” Because you were into that kind of stuff, but you were frustrated. I remember her saying, “Yeah, because he’s kind of frustrated, because the other kids are going into their trips and being, you know, kind of materialistic.” And here you were, you know, with this activist mind. Our men, you know, I’ve talked to Maite a lot about this, we sense that our men are broken. We need to make sure that we, as a community, come together and support each other, you know, with what we can, but unfortunately, there’s a lot of broken people out there.

Teresa finished by praising the Chavista Clubs again for the diversity of the students they have engaged, and the importance of exposing students to community involvement and activism, as well as continuing to pass on the sense of responsibility to serve and give back to our communities. In mentioning Stanford as an option for the Chavista students, she remembered a time my mom told her about one of my own frustrations while I was at Stanford University,
about how I expressed to my mother my frustration with how materialistic my classmates were there. I did not remember a lot of the details of what I told my mother, but Teresa explained I was frustrated I could not simply join them in their materialism; I had learned about political and social dynamics of the world I could not forget or move past. This knowledge instilled in me a responsibility to pursue more than materialistic aims. Teresa advocated for this very mindset in our youth through exposure to and engagement with community service and activism, as it helps to cultivate and develop CC. She stated:

When I was organizing, I remember we’d go to the strawberry fields, and we’d meet with the workers and they were getting paid measly. We talked about the importance of the union and how the union could represent them. And they would say, Yeah, but right now, I’m getting paid more than I would if I were in Mexico. If we organize and they fire us, because that’s what they were doing, once you start seeing a union, all of a sudden they [the owners] just dismiss everybody, or they’d say, we no longer need you. The workers would say to me, “My job is important, because I’m sending money to my family, and I’m getting paid more now, even though it’s only 50 cents, or only $1. At least to have a job?” How do you counter that? I remember, you know, being with Dolores Huerta, we would have priests who were supporting us, and they would go with us to the fields. The workers would get really upset at us, the organizers, because they said, “How dare you bring the priest in.” Because with the priests, they couldn’t argue or anything, they would just sit there and take it in. Then to us, they would tell us the reality that they were facing. But then they would get really upset, because we were bringing in the priests to say, “Hijos, this is the reality.”
Teresa closed out her testimonio with acknowledgement of the contraindications and complications in organizing within communities of exploited and oppressed workers. Dolores Huerta brought in priests to pressure the field workers to join the union, even in the face of retaliation and the potential of losing their jobs, which paid more than what they could earn in Mexico. I also asked Teresa how she identified, and what Chicana meant to her. She responded she was Mexipina, Mestiza, Filipina and Mexicana, and Chicana. She then described what Chicana meant to her by stating, “Chicana is an identity tied to being of Mexican descent, but an activist, active, someone with activism and consciousness, who is proud of who we are with our multicultural backgrounds.”

David: “I Can Never Remain Quiet Again.”

Loss and Advocacy: David’s Early Childhood Experiences. I asked David to share about his early experiences of education and schooling. He started by talking about his family and their story. David stated:

My father was born in Zamora, Michoacan, Mexico. When he was very young, probably in his teens, the Cristero War started in Mexico, when the government shut down the Catholic Church, and the Crusaders were there defending their church. It became one of the bloodiest periods of Mexico’s history. My grandfather, Antonio, and all his children, my dad and all his brothers were all part of the crystal movement. One time they were sitting in front of the plaza in Morelia, and a general came by and recognized them as Cristeros. The general walked over and just started slamming them, cussing at them. My dad’s oldest brother, Ernesto, stood up and knocked the general out. My grandfather got word the next day that all the Valladolidos would be dead in a week. So, he picked up the family and filed refugee status into the U.S. and all of them but one son got into the US.
His son, Rodolfo ended up staying in Tijuana. Rodolfo eventually becomes the head of all immigration from Mexico. My father ended up with the rest of his brothers moving to the US. Some went to Texas, El Paso, others went to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and others went to California. My father was one that came here to California. That’s where he met my mother, in Oxnard. The way he met her was because his sister, Maria, was very sick. My mom was a nurse and my mom would go to their home to take care of my dad’s sister. My dad witnessed her in action as a nurse and fell in love with her. Then they eventually started dating and then they got married. They moved from Oxnard to Fresno. And well, they had four of their children in Oxnard, we were all born in Oxnard, and the last child, Malena, was born in Fresno. When we moved to Fresno, that’s where my dad found out that he had brought an illness from Mexico during the war with the Cristeros. They didn’t have penicillin back in the early 50s. So, he ended up getting some complications, kidney disease, and then he finally ended up with congestive heart failure, and he died. My family, as you know, experienced a lot of difficulties when my father passed away at the age of 39. He left my mom with five babies ages 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6. We stayed there in Fresno in the house that we lived in for about 3 years. Then my grandparents, both my grandfather and his wife, my nanny, had moved to Ensenada [Mexico] because they had bought some land near Ensenada. They were trying to persuade my mom to move to Ensenada. But my mom said, “Genaro wanted his children raised here [in the US].” So then they convinced her to come to San Diego. My aunt Eleanor’s husband, we called her Aunt Baby, her husband Fransisco, Frank, he was from Central California, Stockton, and they had moved down there [to Southern California]. So my uncle Frank came up to Fresno so he would drive us down. He drove the whole
family in a big truck. Everybody got loaded up in the truck and in the cars. We drove down here to San Diego and ended up being raised here in San Diego.

David described his family’s journey to San Diego, from his father’s and family’s involvement in the Cristero wars to his father’s premature death at 39 years old from an illness contracted during his time in the war. Again, as in other testimonios, David showed the importance of support from family members beyond simply the “nuclear” family. This provided an example of evidence of the cultural wealth of familia that David and his family carried with them in their maletas de familial, community, and cultural wealth. David’s father, Genaro, also had a lasting influence on his mother’s decision to keep the family in the United State which landed them in San Diego. David stated:

By that time, we came into San Diego, and my mother went to the priest of our Catholic School, St. John the Evangelist in our community, and told him, I want my children to get a Catholic education. I have five, I can pay you for one. And the priests couldn’t deny that. So, all five of us went to St. John the Evangelist elementary school. It was not a very diverse school, we were probably very few, it was probably like less than 10%, Mexicano/Latino, and there was very little, probably less than 5% African American, and the rest were white students. But it was a very receptive school, even though we had some tensions. My early experiences were with the nuns that taught at that school, they were super supportive and super challenging. I mean, they were always very much wanting us to move forward and challenging us, and then when we finished, when I finished elementary school, my mother went to Saint Augustine and told the priests, “I have three sons, I can pay you for one.” So, all three of us went on to Saints. There the
experience was positive in a lot of ways. It had its challenges. But you know, we made a lot of very special friends.

David’s story started with his family’s connection to the Cristero War and his family fleeing Mexico as part of the conflict. David expressed how losing his father to illness at such a young age had a major impact on him and his family. His mother’s advocacy through strategic action to help her children access education surfaced multiple times in his testimonio, as she was dedicated to helping her children access a Catholic education. Although David found memories of the support from many of the nuns and his peer interactions, in the next section, he shared this was not always the case.

**Pushed Out to Vietnam: The Very Real Consequences of Racism.** David described the racism he experienced as a youth and how one of these experiences led to him being drafted into the Vietnam War. David stated:

The unfortunate thing was the racism of the time. I went up to a priest, Father Sullivan, and asked him, “Why am I not being put in any college prep courses here in my junior and senior years at Saints?” His response to me was, “David, you’re not going to go to college. You’re going to learn to work with your hands.” And that didn’t bother me at all at the time, because all my uncles, all the people close to me, were people that worked in the fields, people that worked in mechanics, people that used their hands. So, I said, “No, no problem.” So, I didn’t take it as racist at the time. I didn’t take it as degrading in any way. But, I had some incredible teachers at Saint Augustine High School, one of them was John Bowman, who taught me how to write, and he was our English teacher, and he made me develop some incredible skills.
David shared one of the first examples of an experience of racism and of oppression that he was not aware of as a youth; however, he was able to critically reflect on and understand this experience in historical and social context after developing his CC. David experienced, like so many of our elders, an experience of racist exclusion and deficit thinking about his potential as a student and person. David also shared one of his experiences of a supportive teacher who showed authentic care and how Mr. Bowman boosted David’s ability and confidence in writing. David stated:

So, when I got out of high school the war in Vietnam was going on. My older brother Jerry was in combat. I was witnessing what it was doing to my dear mother and all the family. So, they all convinced me to go to college, so I could get a deferment. I said, “All right.” So, then I applied at Mesa College and got in at Mesa College and that was my deferment from the military. In my first English class, I was asked to write a paper. I wrote the paper. I showed it to people before I submitted it. They told me, “David, this is publishable.” I said, “Yeah, I had a very good professor at Saints that gave me very strong writing skills.” 3 weeks later I got it back with a C minus. I went up to the professor and said, “Professor, how could you give me a C minus? I showed this paper to people and they told me it was publishable.” She just said, “Well, David, honestly, you could not have written that paper, you stole it. I’m not going to give you a grade for something you didn’t do.” When you’re 18 you don’t do the smartest thing in the world. I quit going to her class. A few months later, a counselor called me in and said, “We’re kicking you out of Mesa College because your grade point average has dropped.” I explained why. The counselor said, “Well, you should have come to us earlier, but you didn’t. So, you’re out.” I said, “You kick me out and I’ll be in the jungles of Vietnam in 6
months.” Six months later, I was in the jungles of Vietnam. I got drafted, sent into infantry training, sent into special weapons training, and then they shipped me off to Vietnam. That was my educational experience as a youth.

Although David did experience one supportive teacher in Mr. Bowman who effectively taught him writing skills, the ultimate effects of the racism David experienced in college drove him into the Vietnam War. David, like Roger experienced, was accused of plagiarism that was not based on any evidence, but on the very fact of him being of Mexican descent and the teacher acting on their deficit expectations of David as a person of color. David reacted negatively to this experience and received little support from the college, which led to him dropping out of school and being drafted into the Vietnam War. This chain of events had drastic life-changing consequences for David.

**Wounded and Recovered: Experiences in the Vietnam War.** The following section includes graphic depictions of injuries due to violence in war. David shared:

I was only there [in Vietnam] less than 6 months because I was wounded twice. In the time I was wounded, they blew my eyes out of my face and blew my eardrums out. And so, they kept me, and Bien Hoa, at the hospital there to do the first surgery to reinstall my eyes and all that. They said, “He can’t move for 30 days.” So, they kept me there for 30 days. Then they shipped me off to Okinawa, Japan, where I spent another 4 and a half months. After the second surgery, the doctor came up and told me, “You’re never gonna see again.” I said, “Oh, Lord, I’m going home blind.” They came back a month later and said, “We can do a third surgery, but no guarantees.” I said, “Well, I got everything to gain, I already lost it.” I had my hearing back by then. So, they did the third surgery. Fortunately, I regained my eyesight. Then they were gonna send me back to Vietnam or
to Korea. They had given me orders when I was in the hospital. After I got out of Okinawa, they transferred me back to San Diego for duty or at a military base. When I was still in Okinawa, I told them I wanted to go home and they kept saying, “Well no, you are going to go back to Vietnam.” Luckily, my mother, who was a nurse, was taking care of the mother of a general. She informed that mother of what had happened to me, saying, “My son was wounded twice. He lost his eyesight and hearing but he’s gotten it back. And now they’re trying to send him back to the war.” So, the general called whoever he had to call after his mother spoke to him. And then I got orders to come back to San Diego.

David shared openly about his horrific experiences in Vietnam, having been wounded by a land mine exploding near him, and losing his hearing and sight, but then healing and recovering both senses. In this example, he again mentioned his mother’s support of David, luckily having access to someone close to a military general and getting a message through to this general. The general helped to have David given orders to come back to a military assignment in San Diego rather than overseas in combat. The next section shows how David’s experiences in Vietnam, having survived the trauma and experienced the controlling nature of the military structure, helped to shape the development of his critical consciousness.

**Waking Up: Getting Out of Vietnam and into the “War” at Home.** David stated:
I think what woke me up is after experiencing Vietnam in combat, and being wounded twice, I came back never again wanting to have someone control my life, someone being able to tell me what to do. So, I decided an education had to be what I needed, what I planned to do. The army offered me an early release if I got a letter of acceptance by at least two or three colleges in the area. So, my brother, Tony, went and talked to Gus
Chavez and Carlos Legerette. They were the ones responsible for getting me a letter of acceptance from San Diego State. Then Antonio went to City College, and went up to the president’s office and explained the situation, “My brother can get out of the army if he gets an acceptance letter.” The president’s office said, “No, we’re not writing those letters.” Then he was walking out of the campus all depressed and he ran into a friend and he told the friend what had happened. My brother’s friend said, “We’ll go see Larry Schwartz, he’ll help you.” So, my brother, Tony, went up to see Professor Larry Schwartz and told him what had happened. Professor Schwartz listened to his whole story about me, having been wounded in Vietnam, being able to get out early, and get into college. Larry told my brother, “Come with me,” and walked my brother over to the president’s office. Dr. Schwartz told the secretary, “Get a pad and pen, we’re going into the president’s office, I’m going to dictate a letter and he’s going to sign it.” And so the President signed the letter and Tony got the letter and was amazed that the guy could make this happen. On the way out he found out that Professor Schwartz was the president of the union for the college, that’s why he had that kind of control. My brother, he got me the letters, and he sent them to me. I got released 3 or 4 months early.

In this section of David’s testimonio, David showed how he received genuine authentic support and care from Dr. Larry Schwartz, facilitated by his brother’s initial advocacy for David. If it was not for Dr. Schwartz’s vocal support for David, in opposition to City College’s initial official institutional refusal to support David with a letter, he may not have returned home from Vietnam at that time, and potentially not at all. In subsequent sections, the impact of Dr. Schwartz’s support of David was clearly seen through multiple actions during the course of
David’s enrollment, attendance, and continuation at City College, and evidence of the power of his relationships in accessing and attaining education. David said:

Still, I was going to get out late, I think maybe 3 or 4 weeks after classes started at City College. Professor Schwartz found this out and put me in his class and then he went around and enrolled me in four other classes. Then he went into each class and recruited students to take copious notes and to tutor me when I got there. So, he had me tutored and presented. When he heard me do presentations against the war in Vietnam, he connected me to Tom Hayden. He said, “I know Tom Hayden from the student democratic society.”

So, he connected me to Tom Hayden. Tom Hayden was responsible for getting me exposed to a lot of different marches and presentations that I made, opposing the war in Vietnam. Then, from there I transferred to San Diego State after doing 2 years at City College, and then I went on to San Diego State and, and I got exposed there to people like your father, Dr. Rene Nunez, and then to Carol Wayman, who taught African American Studies. I was the first Latino to take his class. It was just all that exposure that started connecting me, to pursue an education so that no one could ever dictate to me what my life was going to be like. And that’s what I learned.

David explained Dr. Schwartz not only supported him in returning home from Vietnam and effectively accessing classes at City College, but he also connected him to another professor, Dr. Hayden, who helped David exercise his voice in sharing his experiences as a Vietnam veteran. When he went on to SDSU, David connected with other professors, and noted especially the connection to Chicano and African American studies. David expressed his growing education as a means of empowerment to take back control and power in his life. He stated:
I was back from Vietnam, about a month and my brothers came by my house, Tony and Jerry, and picked me up and put me in the car. I said, “Where are we going?” They said, “Oh, we’re going to L.A.” I said, “What are we going to LA for?” He says, “We’re going to the Chicano moratorium.” I said, “What’s Chicano and what’s the moratorium about?”

So, for the next 2 hours they explained to me the term Chicano, where it came from, and what it was about in terms of the movement. And then they started to tell me that the Chicano moratorium was the first opposition to the war in Vietnam by the Chicano community. As we drove in, we started witnessing police and militaries in all the bank building parking lots. We went, “What’s going on here?” As we landed into the moratorium march, we were at the park, and we arrived there. All of a sudden, the police assaulted the march and they killed three, arrested hundreds. They killed Ruben Salazar, the writer for the LA Times. It was incredible, that experience. I said, “Wait a minute.” I just came out of combat thinking I was coming home, and here I am witnessing and being part of, exposed to a war going on in our own neighborhood. It was very empowering to me to say, “I can never remain quiet again.”

David’s experience of the Chicano Moratorium was a pivotal moment in the development of his CC and Chicano identity. In this part of his testimonio, he connected his experiences in the Vietnam War to the conflict and “war” he saw in his own community as the police brutalized them. David articulated he “can never remain quiet again” and went on to express his notions of critical reflection and connection as part of his development of CC.

Teresa was also present at the Chicano Moratorium but did not know David at the time. Teresa also told her recollection of the Moratorium. She stated:
I was there at the park, we were there with friends. My sister and her friend and my friend, so there were about six of us. We got there, peacefully, we marched in. We watched the dancing, it was very festive, like I said, it was very peaceful. The speeches were talking about the antiwar [movement]. So, then when it all started [the police violence], I think I had gone to the bathroom. We got separated from, you know, the group that I was with, because then all of a sudden we started seeing some of the Brown Berets and some of the people there started building a human chain. It was, like, really eerie because we were trying to figure out what was going on. Then we started seeing the police, the cops. Some of us tried to reconnect, somehow some of us reconnected. So, then we started running and luckily we knew where the car was. So then we went to the car. But in between, there were kids and women running as we were trying to help them. And then from the houses, because we were running by homes, some of the people were helping us. And they’d take out their hoses and we were washing our faces, because our faces were burning from the [tear gas] bombs, the tear gas. That was the first time I’ve ever, and I think the only time, we ever really experienced tear gas. We were all washing our faces and helping other people. Kids were crying. We were looking for each other, and luckily, like I said, at the parking lot we found each other. We got in the car. As we were driving, there were people turning over the police cars, there were cops in every corner with guns. Like a total takeover of the city. Cars were being turned over and they were being burned, the police cars, [people were] breaking windows and going into some of the stores. We were just looking back, and I don’t remember even taking pictures, I don’t remember. Then we put the radio on and of course the radio was reporting on what was going on, on some of the shootings and stuff. So, then we got out of there, drove
home, and started watching it on TV. It was bizarre, scary, threatening. I had never been in something like that. The fact that they were throwing tear gas and shooting. It was really scary. So, that was my experience, and I didn’t even know you at the time, right? [she said to David]. No.

**Connecting the Dots: Racism, War, Love, Respect and Care.** In this section of David’s testimonio, he described how his development of CC was related to his ability to connect his learning from mentors and peers, to his maleta of familial and community wealth from his mother filled with love, care, and respect, to the critical reflection on his past experiences of racism and oppression. David stated:

> My exposure to people like your father, Rene Nunez, and a lot of others, really was incredibly important to me in terms of creating a critical consciousness of understanding the things that were going on, all around. I had grown up in it, you know, we were the first Latino family to move into North Park, and in the 50s when we moved in there, North Park did not allow Latinos, I mean they were prohibited from buying homes in North Park. When my mother was able to start looking to buy a home she was told by a realtor that the only place that Mexicans could live was Logan heights. So, she went into Logan Heights and witnessed the gang activity and the drug activity. She said, “I can’t leave five babies at home alone, and leave [to work] and expect them to be okay.” So, she went to North Park, and they informed her that Mexicans could not buy homes in North Park, it was illegal. And so she was all frustrated. But then she met the Schaeffer family and the Shaffer family, once they found out that she had five children and needed a place, they told her, “Rita, we will sell you our house in North Park. You won’t have to go through a bank or anything that says it’s illegal, we will cover the note.” So, they covered
her, sold her a four bedroom house there in North Park, and carried the mortgage themselves. At that time, it was $11,000. We moved in there. Initially, we were totally rejected by the community. In fact, we saw about three or four homes right around us all start moving out when they saw six Mexicans moving into their neighborhood. We got exposed to incredible amounts of racism. A lot of the young kids after a while would come by our house and yell out a lot of racism. “Dirty wetbacks go back to Mexico! Filthy spics!” My two brothers and I would end up calling them back and get into fights. We’d go out into the street and fight. My poor mother had to witness that all the time. She’d recite the golden rules to us 1000 times, “Treat others how you want them to treat you. Say to others what you want them to say to you.” We would just keep hearing that from her and she would plead with us. We’d go, “But mamá, they’re treating us like animals. They’re calling us all these names.” She’d say, “Because they don’t know you, get to know them.” In time, we began to know and connect with a lot of the young men and women in that community. We became friends and we’re friends to this day, that we bonded with. It has been a difficult path to walk but we made it through. It was learning that hate and discrimination and racism is all something that can be addressed. If you just give an opportunity to open the environment up and get to know people, and get to meet people, and get to respect people. The word respect in Spanish is to look again. So, that’s what we were taught, to look again and to make friends. And we did. It was part of my whole journey, to bond with people from all backgrounds. I commonly tell people, “All people are my people.”

David took us through the impact of his experiences of Chicano studies professors, like my father, on his reflections about his experiences of racism in North Park and his mother’s
ongoing call for respect, love, and care for him and his siblings to work on connection rather than violence. His mother’s calls for him and his brothers to “get to know” their neighbors was similar to some of the elders’ calls for us to listen, reach across the table, and organize throughout our communities and society. David’s mother instilled in him, and his family, a sense of collective togetherness and responsibility to care for and learn to respect each other as human beings. He stated:

You know, I think the biggest mistake we [have] made as human beings was to divide ourselves and to exploit each other. We have to learn how to present ourselves in a way and accept that we’re not always going to be accepted, but just keep building relationships. I have two African American daughters who adopted me as their father. And one Filipina, she heard that they had adopted me, and she asked if I would be her father also. And so, it’s the course of that journey that has been tremendous. He asked me if he could take me around to other colleges, and I said, absolutely. So he scheduled meetings all over San Diego to community colleges and 4-year institutions. We would go and give lectures at classes to the students. At San Diego State one-time students started chanting “Baby Killer!” And Larry Schwartz got all upset and said, “Wait a minute. This man’s here telling you that he opposes the war now and these are the reasons why. So don’t be making those kinds of allegations.” But I could understand it because Vietnam was a very insane place to be. The Vietcong would use the villages as their shields. We would end up getting into a firefight with them. We’d go into those villages after the firefight and we’d find children, women, elders all shot up and dead. What I’ve learned since I got out of the military was that we lost about 60,000 men in Vietnam, 58,000 were killed, 2000 were lost. And hundreds of thousands were wounded. But I found out that
since the war ended in 1975, that there had been over 200,000 suicides by Vietnam veterans. The reality was, that it was very difficult to live with yourself, knowing what you were exposed to. But I was raised by a nurse mother who taught me how to respect and love people. There was a situation in Vietnam, I was in the country for 3 weeks, and I captured a Vietcong. It was right after a firefight, and I found that he was dug under the ground and I pulled him out and he was wounded. I called the officers on my phone. And they said, “Take him out.” I said, “No, sir. He’s not a danger to us.” And they came, and I witnessed them torture him to death in front of me. I lost a lot of respect for these officers.

David’s mother’s care, the care and love in his maleta de familial cultural wealth, was instrumental in his ability to survive in Vietnam and cope with the psychological aftermath. The love and care he carried with him was a vital part of his ability to navigate through the world, a foundation for the formation of his critical consciousness, to see humanity as having intrinsic value and worth. He stated:

The other reality was, my mother taught me to take care of people so much because when she was a nurse, and would go work on the weekends to take care of her patients, I would go with her and the patients would pay me to cut their lawn, take their garbage out and all that. I’d get a little bit of change and I’d give it to my mom, and so but I learned that. It saved me from doing some really atrocious things in Vietnam. There was a situation one time when a bush was moving, and I pointed my weapon to shatter it, and all of a sudden something stopped me. And it turned out it was a Vietnamese woman having a baby, and I walked up to her, she started crying, thinking I was gonna kill her. And I just told her, I nodded my head to her, and I put my back to her, and I sat there. I laid there on the
ground for 2 hours until she had her baby, cut the umbilical cord, and then she bowed down to me and ran off. I told that to a psychologist, when I was going through some therapy, I said, “My dear mother,” and he says, “David, I see your father there.” So, my father, it was the first time in my life, they put my dad, since I was only 4 years old, when he passed, they put my dad in my experience, and told me that he was the one telling me not to fire the weapon. I was very glad, and very blessed that I didn’t fire that weapon because I couldn’t live with myself if I had [killed] a woman with her baby. So those experiences, and again coming back and meeting people that were doing incredible work and bringing change to our community. By change, I mean organizing our community. And so that was what started getting me involved in it and kept me involved in it. I was involved in a lot of different movements.

In this portion of David’s testimonio, without his mother and father’s love and instilling of care in him, he felt that he may have caused even more harm to others during the Vietnam War. David noted the consequences of his ability to act with restraint potentially had significant impacts on his psychological and spiritual well-being moving forward in his life.

**Listening and Organizing – Mentorships, Relationships, Love, and a Better World.**

David moved on to describe the impact of his relationship with Cesar Chavez and the mentorship and learning he received through this relationship. He stated:

I want to share also with you that one of the most influential persons in my life was Cesar Chavez. When I got back from Nam, my brother Tony was working up there with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Movement. Tony took me up there to meet Cesar and Dolores [Huerta], and all the people there. I became bonded with Cesar and I stayed connected to him. In fact, his daughter married Richard Ibarra, who was a friend of mine.
They bought a home right here near us, about four or five blocks from our house. So, every time Cesar was in town Richard would call me and ask if I wanted to stop by. I’d go by his house and we would spend time together and talk. It was just very influential to have somebody that would always be there willing to help. One day Cesar took me aside, this was a while after he had gotten to know me, and he asked, “Can I share something with you?” I said, “Absolutely.” He said, “I see a lot of signs of destruction around you. I can understand with what you’ve been through that you probably have a right to be destructive. But you can always choose to be constructive and help us build a better world.” So, he was giving me some very sound good advice to make sure that I left all the stuff alone that would make it make me go downwards and get things that would have helped me move forward. That was very impactful for me. And to demonstrate what A. Philip Randolph said on the march, as he organized the March on Washington, he said, “You will get what you’re organized to take.” The message was really, “We have to get organized, we have to get disciplined about our things.” And that doesn’t in any way negate the fact that we have to love all the people around us.

David’s relationship with Cesar Chavez echoes other mentorship relationships expressed by some of the elders. He felt listened to, supported, and loved. He also noted how Cesar saw his “destructive” responses to the trauma and oppression he had experienced, and encouraged him to respond in constructive ways, without negating the validity of his experiences. Organizing was a key theme again, organizing as what has been learned and expressed as a key element to work toward social justice action. This was organizing to take power, to create the potential for change, a theme seen throughout all the elders’ testimonios. David stated:
Love is actually the most critical thing we all have to practice. Because even people that may not deserve it, the more you give it, the better chance you have of it coming back. It’s critical that we all look at the world and see the importance of coming together and addressing all the incredible problems that we’re confronting today. I mean, what the Asian Pacific Islanders are going through, it’s just absolutely insane, that they’re being treated the way they’re being treated. And the way Latinos and African Americans have been treated historically. You know, the fact that Native people were slaughtered and genocide occurred in this hemisphere. We have to understand that and know that we have a responsibility for addressing it and for making this a better community and not glorifying our existence or celebrating our past, but at least accepting the reality. You know, people send me emails periodically about how great America is. I tell them, you know, “This is a country that was founded on genocide, it was founded on enslavement, it stole half of Mexico’s territory. It has a spirit of racism and discrimination throughout its history.” We have to address that. We cannot in any way deny, and try to reject the reality of our experience in our history. I think it’s by learning that and accepting that it’s gone on that we can work to build a better society, a better world. One of the biggest mistakes I think humanity made was to build borders and divide itself and then exploit each other. I think the pandemic has actually brought the world together, because we’ve all experienced incredible numbers of deaths. I mean, here, in the United States, over 1 million people have passed due to COVID. We have to start working together and understanding that love is something that can save all of humanity, and the environment. Like many of the elders, David spoke about the power of love, of putting our authentic selves out into the world knowing we may be fully accepted, and then loving those we encounter,
even though so many times we as people have created barriers to divide ourselves and to other each other. This is a love guided by an embrace of history, of the acknowledgement of the genocide and racist violent oppression this country was founded upon, an acknowledgement to help us move forward. In his testimonio, David calls for us to embrace love to bring us together—a love of humanity and the environment—to save humanity. He stated:

Yeah, I think it’s very critically important that we teach our children to look at things in a broader perspective, and not to narrow it down to where they end up not understanding all of it. The more broad the perspective is, the more understanding every student has, of our journeys, of our paths, of our mistakes, as well as the correct things that we’ve all done as human beings, the better chances we have that these young people will grow up in a society where they will understand how critical it is that they be involved, that they be getting organized to make sure that things move in the right direction. I always quote A Philip Randolph, you know, “You will get what you’re organized to take.” And I think the biggest mistake we make often, is, like the Chicano movement when it pretty much fizzled away. Students said, I’m not a Chicano and they left that movement. One time, I was giving a presentation in San Diego State to over five or six hundred high school students that were brought in to learn how to transition their education to college. One student stood up at the end of my presentation and said, “Can I ask you a question?” I said, “Absolutely.” He said, “Why do you people have so many labels, you’re called Hispanic, you’re called Mexican American, you’re called Latino. And now you’ve come up with this word Chicano.” And I said, “Well, the best explanation I can give you is, the Hispanic thinks he or she is part of the pie. The Mexican American and Latino want their proportional share of the pie, and we Chicanos want to change the ingredients of the pie.
"Si se puede." And so, it was pretty much telling them that all of us are the same people, we just have different perspectives and different paths that we’re walking. And so hopefully, the young generation now, and I think we’re witnessing it, we’re witnessing the younger people going to the streets for Black Lives Matter, we’re seeing the younger people of all races. I mean, when you saw the marches on TV, I mean, they’re not just African Americans marching, they’re from all backgrounds, and they’re from all age groups. So, I think the more our young people understand the role that they all must play, so that we can all work to build a better society and a better world, we can do it.

David ended his testimonio with a reaffirmation of his Chicano identity, confirming although he believed we are all one people, as a Chicano he believed in transformation, in change, and in moving our society to a more just and equitable social order. David also acknowledged the size and diversity of the Black Lives Matter movement, citing the biggest social justice demonstrations and protests the world has ever seen. David ended by sharing his hope and belief that the more young people understand the role they can all play in creating a better world and in developing their own CC, the more he believed we can indeed create this better world.

Conclusion

This chapter was a presentation of the testimonios of the eight elders and their stories of lived experiences gifted to us by and viewed through an Indigenous Chicana/e/o lens. This chapter served as a holistic presentation of the relational and collective manners through which the elders understood their lives, experiences, and development of CC and subjective Chicana/o identity. One of the major goals of this chapter was to present the knowledge shared by the elders in a long-form testimonio format for readers to make their own holistic, relational, and intuitive
interpretations and sense (Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). The next chapter summarizes the major themes and findings of the study and then moves into a more Western linear form of analysis of smaller chunks of the elders’ testimonios.
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

The findings of this study are themes that overlap, intersect, and interact with each other in organic, holistic, and circular fashions, as evidenced throughout the testimonios and lives of the elders. These findings are six emerged major themes present throughout the testimonios of the elders. One value in presenting the findings in this linear categorized manner is it allows for conceptual, and potentially theoretical, analysis (Delgado Bernal, 1997).

Organized as themes arising related to each research question, the following research findings were present in the data, the testimonios shared by the Chicana/o15 elders who participated in this study:

- Research Question 1: What factors shaped and affected the development of critical consciousness (CC) for the elders?
  
  o Moments of CC development were accompanied by at least one (and many times both) of two factors: (a) participation in social justice actions/events/organizations/spaces (Chicana/o classes/departments, MEChA, UFW, United Farm Workers movement, organizing for housing rights, antiwar movement) and (b) learning events and/or experiences that inspired reflection and connection with previous lived experiences of oppression, both individually and communally.

  o CC development involves a complex relationship between action and reflection, routinely resulting in the formation of new perspectives and links to the elders’ sense of responsibility to take political/social justice action.

15 I used various endings to Chicana and Latina, including Chicanx, Chicane, and Chicano at various times to support the inclusion of all our relatives who identify as gender non-binary and all other forms of gender identity, and to honor the elders and community members who identify with the endings of -a and -o, such as Latina/o and Chicana/o.
• Research Question 2: What role did/do relationships (familial, community, and institutional) play in the elders’ access to higher education and the development of their critical consciousness?
  o Maletas of community cultural wealth, familial and communal knowledge, culture, and values were pivotal in access to community resources and higher education, development of CC, and continued commitments to community action and social justice.
  o Supportive relationships were key in three ways: connecting elders to the movement spaces and organizations, gaining access to resources (higher education, housing, and others), and capacity building mentorships.
  o Relationships with school staff (e.g., teachers, counselors) were the products of subtractive schooling, based on oppressive deficit mindsets and ideologies, which led to gatekeeping (exclusion from opportunities for higher education) and experiences of racism, sexism, and oppression.

• Research Question 3: What is the elders’ vision for the continuation and support of social justice and critical consciousness development? How do these elders conceptualize and operationalize critical consciousness to promote social justice within educational systems, their communities, and the world?
  o According to the elders, organizing, acting on love and care, teaching and learning about the history of ethnic communities, and listening openly to each other are important elements to support the development of CC and social justice activism.
Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, what factors shaped and affected the development of CC for the elders? The factors contributing to the development of CC in the elders were participation in social justice action and critical reflection, helping the elders link their lived experiences to the social injustices they observed in both their school and home communities. These factors helped to shape the development of the elders’ CC in varied, complex, and nuanced manners. All included critical reflection, critical action, and political awareness. Experiences of oppression, racism, sexism, and other forms of micro- and macro-aggressions were prominent in all the elders’ narratives. These experiences were often understood differently when they first experienced them than when they compared to and reflected upon them later in life with new lenses of social, political, and historical realities. These experiences were painful and harmful. They also served as signposts of the exploitation, exclusion, and oppression the elders, their families, friends, and communities experienced and as flash points for social change and social justice action. In some instances, acute experiences of racialized violence and oppression were instrumental in their formation of CC. In many of the elders’ stories, participation in social justice action, events, and organizations were the catalysts of CC development. This helped them to see their own lived experiences, and those of their communities, through new lenses, helping them to tie their personal lived experiences to meso- and macro-level social and political conditions. These social justice and community improvement actions, events, organizations, and spaces were rich social environments and contexts allowing the elders to experience and understand the collective power to enact social justice change in their communities and the world.


**Elders’ Narratives of CC Development**

Clarisa Torres Rojas explained how redlining and housing exclusion directly impacted her access to her old high school, and how exposure to the lower expectations at Whittier High School became one of her first memories of encountering deficit thinking and subtractive schooling. Clarisa Rojas said, “That was my very first encounter with that kind of like, wait, what’s going on? That was my junior year.” Clarisa questioned the experience she had, questioned the low expectations, and saw her father advocate for her access to quality education. She presented this process as a beginning for herself, as her first time feeling this way about education—something her family had made a priority. It was a legacy in her family, and she expected to have access to and excel at education. Clarisa went on to explain how when she got to college at San Diego State University (SDSU), her interest in politics and education led her to MEChA (El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán) and how even though this was a natural fit for her, she had some major revelations about her own consciousness. Clarisa stated:

I was so interested in the politics of that time, that of course MEChA became one of the vehicles for that. The interesting thing is that I didn’t realize how assimilated I was... and you don’t know what you don’t know. So, I kind of had this assumption that all it had to be is you had the will, and that those other experiences I had with my teachers were aberrations. And I credit Chicano Studies for kind of lifting the veil off of those myths.

Clarisa credited MEChA and Chicano studies for helping to “lift the veil of those myths” of meritocracy, myths of racism, and deficit thinking. Two factors—her participation in social justice organizations like MEChA and her exposure to learning experiences in Chicano Studies—helped her critically reflect on her own lived experiences and beliefs. This participation and reflection contributed to the formation of new perspectives and the continued development
of her CC. Clarisa also articulated how the external forces of the many macro social justice movements while she was in school had an impact on her engagement with the meso and micro level organizing and learning. Clarisa said, “Definitely the Huelga, but remember that the macro part of this is that this was all happening in the context of the antiwar movement, the civil rights movement. Those were the external forces.” Clarisa continued:

The Chicano movement and MEChA was really a step into part of the Civil Rights [movement], but in an authentic way, because it was our civil rights. . . MEChA became a vehicle for blending all of these different things, not only nationalism, but you know, class struggle, social justice, and the Huelga into things that were ways to concretely express your consciousness.

Clarisa’s articulation of the Chicano Movement as “our civil rights” and connection to intersectional class analysis and political action—“the Huelga”—was an articulation of critical reflection as part of not only her individual development of CC, but a collective development of CC as part of a Chicana/o community notion of reflection, consciousness, and action.

Gonzalo Rojas explained his development of CC as having a lot to do with his involvement in the Chicano movement through various actions and venues while he was at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) starting with his introduction to MEChA. Gonzalo stated:

Somebody approached me and said, “There’s a MEChA meeting tonight, do you want to come along?” “MEChA what the. ok, I’ll go, I’ll go.” And from then my eyes were open. We started talking first of all about all the politics going on in LA and hooking up with people and students that came from East LA and also in the schools, which led up to the walkout. . . all the demonstrations and marches and leafleting . . . I remember my first
participation in anything out in the community was going door to door for the fair housing, the Rumford Act, and Prop 14 . . . That was the focus of understanding what was happening in the communities, where the oppression came from, how it manifested, and what could be done about it.

Gonzalo’s first social justice actions included going “door to door for the fair housing act,” “demonstrations and marches and leafleting,” and eventually leading “up to the walkout” (referencing the high school walkouts/blowouts in East LA in 1968). He explained these activities and events were “funneled” through his connection to MEChA. Gonzalo stated:

It was just like a constant awakening of so much more to this world than I thought. And now a lot of things that I had been kind of wondering about made sense, you know. Why were some of my best friends, you know, went off [to] Vietnam? Why did so many of them come back hooked on drugs and how many, even by then, had already died? And why is it that that’s the population that ends up in that situation? And here I am at a university looking at a totally different kind of people, and these other people they get to go on to university . . . For me it was a very immediate response to getting the right kind of information, to being aware of what was going on in the rest of the country, all the protests and the reasons for the protests, and beyond that all the struggles that were going on, you know, throughout the world . . . And so it was a sense of not only that when I got there, not only were my eyes opened up to, you know, a better understanding of some of those questions that I had even back in high school, but the sense that I could do something about it. Not only could I marvel and say, “Oh, now I understand, how cool.” “No, now I understand, now I have a responsibility to do something about it.”
Gonzalo credited his involvement in MEChA through direct action in the community and organizing around housing and education rights with creating a sense of awakening, helping to create an environment for critical reflection and the burgeoning of new perspectives of many experiences from his youth he had been wondering about. Gonzalo also coupled this new awareness with a sense of responsibility to take action to improve conditions for the local community. In this example, political efficacy, a component of CC, existed for Gonzalo as a sense of not only the possibility of making social changes, but also a responsibility to stand up and actively participate in this kind of community action for social justice.

Norma Cazares’s testimonio provided evidence of these same factors of CC development as well—critical reflection connected to social justice action and learning about her history. Norma also connected her sense of responsibility to act to the “mission” of her Chicana identity. She stated:

I identify as a Chicana primarily, and Indigenous. . . it’s a philosophical condition for me, not so much the color of my skin, not so much where my parents are from and that, but rather that I can identify with the mission of that identity. . . You see the inequities growing up as well. And things weren’t changing. So, I felt like, it’s either step up or shut the “you know what” up.

Norma’s testimonio clearly connected her choice to identify as Chicana and Indigenous, to the mission of that identity, to the need to step up and speak up about the inequities and disparities she saw growing up, and the ones needing to be addressed. She explained some of her first experiences of social justice action occurred in high school when she was recruited to register people to vote in her community of Southeast San Diego, and when she helped organize walkouts at Lincoln High School in 1969 to protest their conditions of education. She stated it
was in college, when she was recruited in the first class of Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) to go to SDSU, she really started to put all the pieces together in the formation of her CC. She stated:

It was through my experience at [SDSU], with the Gus Chavez’s of the world, with the Rene Nunez’s of the world. I thank God that there was a time that Chicano studies was starting up because we didn’t know any of that, we never got any of that when we were in our K through 12 . . . where you discover, “Wow, we have a history” . . . we have a damn good history, going back all the way to our Indigenous roots. It was an awakening. It really was . . . In that period of time, there were all these movements, you know, the Chicano movement, the Black movement. So many things were going on that it was exciting. It was really exciting . . . and you’re learning, your mind is expanding, your consciousness, you begin to see the world, whether it’s your immediate little area of your world, and then looking at it through the bigger lens . . . You start to see the inequities, the injustices, and then you seek them out, you see, you want to read, you want to learn more.

Norma described so many of the external elements during that time of her life and how they connected through the various social justice movements. She also highlighted the learning of history, her own history, as having an impact on her “awakening” and all the lessons she learned about the injustices and inequities she started to seek. Norma also mentioned her organizing with the United Farmer Workers (UFW) and connecting all these experiences to those of her early organizing in high school. Norma’s testimonio showed critical reflection and community action, coupled with the learning of history that helped her to put pieces together from her life experiences as part of the development of her CC.
Teresa Pascual Valladolid explained how learning about the history of genocide of Native Americans in her Chicano studies classes, in conjunction with her participation in the direct-action work of the Farm Workers movement, helped her connect all these new experiences and knowledge with her own lived experiences. She stated:

I think it was one called Soldier Blue, it was a movie that was about Native Americans being slaughtered by white soldiers, being beheaded; and I remember crying, and to me it was kind of like, oh, my God, we got to get involved. We got to do something about this. . . that was the critical point where I started realizing how we all fit in. The farm worker movement, with Cesar Chavez, was organizing strikes, and they had students and volunteers all over the campuses. I remember the students coming in, some of the volunteers coming in and saying, “Hey, we got farmworkers out there with no union contract working out in the fields.” I could relate to that because I’ve been doing it too, and to me it was like, “Okay, that’s just the way it is.” . . . Realizing what this country had done to people of color, to Native Americans, the slaughter, that helped me start to put it together. In my case, because I had experience working in the fields, I had experienced my uncle dying from liver cancer and being an alcoholic, you know, living in the barrio . . . everybody was into drugs and unfortunately my younger brothers got involved and my cousins got locked up. So, there were all those dynamics that finally I started putting together and realizing that you can’t be silent, you can’t just sit back.

The pattern is clear. Social justice action alongside intellectual dialogue and learning, especially regarding the theoretical underpinnings of systemic and historical oppression, inspired reflections on lived experiences of oppression, racism, and sexism contributing to development of critical consciousness. This development of CC allowed the elders to form new perspectives
and to see the world through new lenses, and inspired and connected them to their desire, need, and responsibility to take action to make positive changes in their communities and the world.

For David Valladolid, one of the key moments was at a demonstration against the war in Vietnam—the Chicano Moratorium—when he experienced the acute violence perpetrated against the peaceful protesters by the Los Angeles Sheriff’s department deputies. David stated:

The Chicano moratorium was the first opposition to the war in Vietnam by the Chicano community. And so, as we drove in, we started witnessing police and militaries in all the bank building parking lots, we go, “What’s going on here.” And as we landed into the moratorium march, we were at the park, and we arrived there. And all of a sudden, the police assaulted the march and they killed three, arrested hundreds, they killed Ruben Salazar, the writer for the LA Times. It was incredible, that experience, I just said, “Wait a minute.” I just came out of combat thinking I was coming home, and here I am witnessing and being part of, exposed to a war going on in our own neighborhood. It was very empowering to me to say, “I can never remain quiet again.”

David’s testimonio provided clear evidence of the impact direct action coupled with experiences of acute oppression and violence can have on the formation of CC. David also included some dialogue on the formation of his Chicano identity, the first he learned of the possibility of a new Chicano subjectivity, tied to the very notion of social justice and community action. David also explained how exposure to intellectual dialogue in Chicano studies programs and connecting this with his lived experiences of racism helped him to develop his CC. He stated:

My exposure to people like your father, Rene Nuñez, and a lot of others, really was incredibly important to me in terms of creating a critical consciousness of understanding the things that were going on, all around. I had grown up in it, you know, we were the
first Latino family to move into North Park. . . We got exposed to incredible amounts of racism. I mean, the little kids would all run by our house and yell out, “Dirty wetbacks go back to Mexico! Filthy spics!”

Before finishing, David also explained what being Chicano meant for him; he said, “We Chicanos want to change the ingredients of the pie. Si se puede.” This clearly tied his Chicano identity expression to transformation and social change.

In all the participants’ narratives, people (i.e., family, friends, community members), organizations (i.e., MEChA, UFW, SDS), and events (i.e., Chicano Moratorium, La Huelga, Organizing and Canvassing efforts) served as catalysts for the development of their CC. Organizations like MEChA, the UFW, and SDS, and the Chicano/a Studies classes and departments at SDSU and UCLA, were mentioned as being pivotal locations of social justice action and events inspiring the development of critical consciousness.

In these manners, we can see the crucial nature the awakening of CC plays in the participants’ understandings of their own lived experiences of racism, sexism, and oppression. The organizations, events, and collaborative experiences of the Chicana/o Movement played crucial roles in the creation of educational environments where the participants had opportunities to broaden and contextualize their understandings of their experiences and the world. Reflections on past experiences of racial and gendered oppression and connecting their lived experiences to new understandings of the history and politics of the world, coupled with direct interaction with social justice work in their communities and throughout California, helped the elders to develop their CC and new perspectives of the world. Many of the elders also expressed a sense of responsibility to act and get involved and do something about the conditions they were becoming more and more aware of as part of their burgeoning CC. The evidence in the elders’ testimonios
is clear for the presence of critical reflection and critical action as central factors in their
development of CC, along with political efficacy. Some of the elders connected this
responsibility to act to their sense of Chicana/o identity as well. Through these new
consciousnesses and contextualization of their lived experiences and through the processing of
trauma, our participants could express and experience forms of triumph and community healing,
while also fueling their continued community activism.

It is also clear, although I pulled out excerpts of the elders’ testimonios providing context
and evidence for the presence of these factors for CC development, this development was
complex and nuanced. These complex, nuanced, and nonlinear aspects of CC development and
its relationship to the formation of Chicana/o subjectivities and identities are addressed in the
Discussion section of Chapter 6 of this study. Some of this complexity is also related to the
impact of other factors outside of the ones provided, in the development of CC. Some factors
include the role of relationships and the existence of maletas de community cultural wealth
(CCW; Núñez, 1994; Yosso, 2005), both of which follow in sections of this chapter.

Research Question 2:

Research Question 2 asked, what role did/do relationships (familial, community, and
institutional) play in the elders’ access to higher education and the development of their critical
consciousness?

Maletas de Community Cultural Wealth

Maletas of community cultural wealth—familial and communal knowledge, culture, and
values—were pivotal in accessing community resources and higher education, development of
CC, and continued commitments to community service and social justice. The familial and
communal values, knowledge, and culture carried by the elders in their maletas of community
cultural wealth (CCW; Núñez, 1994; Yosso, 2005) were pivotal to their educational engagement, survival in society, involvement in social justice movement spaces, and ultimately, their development of CC. In constructing my theoretical lens for this finding, I combined Yosso’s (2005) constructs of CCW and Núñez’s (1994) metaphorical maletas of cultural/conceptual and academic/concrete familial capital. Like Cunningham (2023), I also adopted Yosso and Garcia’s (2007) concept of cultural capital applied as a kaleidoscope, in which critical race theory is the initial lens of the kaleidoscope. Each form of cultural capital is envisioned as pieces of colored glass through which various combinations of colors can contribute to one’s understanding of cultural wealth and their social applications. Maletas de CCW involves adding in conceptual forms of wealth, like amor, cooperación, y respeto, and academic forms akin to the formulation of linguistic capital in Yosso’s (2005) original theorizing, into the kaleidoscope of community and familial capital and wealth, which can be envisioned to be carried within each elder’s metaphorical maleta (Cunningham, 2023; Yosso & Garcia, 2007; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). I used these theoretical metaphors—the maletas and kaleidoscopes of CCW—to understand the complex and nuanced ways CCW was described, experienced, and acted upon by the elders. In this section, I highlight the ways this wealth, knowledge, and family legacy took shape within the testimonios of the elders.

Many of the elders expressed having aspirations to pursue higher education and noted the support from family members both directly and indirectly in these pursuits; directly through their contribution of academic knowledge and support in accessing educational opportunities and indirectly through their words and actions in life. Teresa explained the richness of her family’s culture and how some of her family members and friends contributed to her academic knowledge as a youth. She stated:
It was the richness of having the Mexicano side and then also having the Filipino side and the cultura and learning about that. My mother knew no English at all, so she was completely monolingual Spanish. My dad had graduated from high school where he was required to learn English and Spanish, and then their dialect they picked up on their own. So he was able to speak his Ilocano, broken Spanish, and English. At home we grew up speaking only Spanish. It wasn’t until we started going to school that we picked up English, and then Spanglish, English and Spanish . . . at the time we felt really rich, because we had richness in our family, in our cultura. We had my Filipino’s uncles, and my dad’s friends, coming and bringing us crayons and helping us with our English, our ABCs, and our numbers.

Teresa had linguistic capital, and specific academic topics taught directly to her by family members and friends of the family, during her childhood. She explained how her father told her about the importance of pursuing her education. Teresa stated:

I remember vividly, when we would complain, we’d say, “Daddy, I don’t want to work anymore. It’s too hard. When can we go home?” That’s when he’d say, “That’s why you have to get an education. You have to work at getting a degree so that you don’t have to be working in the fields.” So that was our first motivation to say, “Yeah, we gotta stay in school.”

Teresa’s vivid memory of her father telling her she needed to get an education to get away from the work in the fields was a clear example of aspirational capital, especially in the sense of her parents encouraging her to break away from their profession to pursue a different career trajectory (Yosso, 2005). Teresa then acknowledged the impact her father’s words and desire for her to pursue an education had on her. She stated:
To go back and pinpoint critical consciousness, for me, I mean, I came from a very protective close-knit family. I didn’t want to go to San Diego State because it was far away from home. But the fact that it was an education, I wanted to honor what my dad and my mom were saying, because they were farm workers who worked in the fields, in the packing sheds, and I wanted to do better than that, because I didn’t want to be in the field. So, when I came to San Diego State University, it changed my life, that was kind of my first awakening.

Teresa drew on her father’s message about pursuing an education to avoid having to work in the fields and connected her adoption of this aspirational capital to her exposure to the community experiences at SDSU, leading to her “first awakening” and “chang[ing] her life.” By pursuing and attaining higher education, Teresa, like some of the other elders, lived her parents’ hopes and dreams of breaking away from the strenuous manual labor of the fields.

For some of the elders, the cultural capital in their maletas was related to legacies of aspirational capital, aspirations and notions of pursuing higher education, and of organizing and activism. Clarisa’s testimonio contained evidence of both explicit forms of aspirational capital and academic knowledge and implicit forms of legacy and modeling. Clarisa shared she had long legacies of education and activism, especially on her father’s side of the family. She stated:

I come from a family of educators, on both sides of my family. My grandmother, on my mother’s side, was a schoolteacher. My grandfather and grandmother on my dad’s side probably had the most influence. They were educators and political activists, in Campeche, Mexico. My grandfather rose to the level of Secretary of Education in Campeche and later, temporarily, governor . . . My grandfather, while he was in Mexico, befriended Marianna Montessori. He was very interested in Montessori’s work, he had a
lot of correspondence with her and he translated her work from Italian to Spanish, and raised my two oldest aunts and uncles, a family of six, under her system.

These legacies are clear examples of cultural wealth and capital—examples and models of educational attainment and community and social justice action and commitment. Clarisa expressed another example she learned about in her family. She stated:

My grandmother pulled them [her children] all together and told the boys particularly, she had four boys, two girls, that they were going to have to help their sisters go to college first, because they had two strikes against them. They were Mexican and they were women. This was how my family was thinking in the 1930s and 40s, can you imagine? So, the boys helped my oldest aunt go on to school. She went to community college and to UCLA. She got her master’s and PhD at the University of Pittsburgh and then [she] ended up a professor at the University of Chicago, and was in the school of social work.

For Clarisa, not only was there a high bar in educational and professional pursuit in her family, but also explicit acknowledgment of the dynamics of power, of racism and sexism, of intersectionality. Clarisa also experienced explicit expressions of aspirational, navigational, and resistance capital from her family. She shared:

I just assume I’m gonna go to college as did all my cousins, right? There was no question that we were all going to go on. And we were all political. I mean, our family events, those searing memories were, when Kennedy came and campaigned in East LA, we all went to go watch Kennedy. You know, as he drove the motorcade when he was assassinated, it might as well have been a family member was assassinated, because everybody met at my grandmother’s house that night. When the Civil Rights Movement
really got off the ground in the mid 60s, when they were literally hosing down people in Selma and it was captured on television, my dad would sit us down and say, “I need you to watch this. You need to remember this and work to make sure this never happens again.” That was the tone of that family . . . And so, I had both strands. I had the idea that I was going to go to college and there was the idea of public service . . . and then there was politics.

Clarisa’s father explicitly instructed his children, including Clarisa, about the Civil Rights Movement, encouraging them to pursue efforts in promoting social justice, passing on the legacy of social justice, teaching, and action Clarisa’s father learned from his mother. Clarisa also had more experiences of explicit teaching of intellectual and political capital in her childhood and early adolescent experiences, both from her father and her grandmother who had her and some of her other family members read various texts. She stated:

I still credit my grandmother. When I was in sixth grade, my grandmother had all the girls in the family read The Feminine Mystique, by Betty Friedan. I can tell you now that people don’t even talk about that book . . . I remember my dad had me read a book called the Power Elite, which was one of the very first books I ever read about class.

Clarisa’s many examples of explicit teaching of aspirational and resistance capital and examples of the legacies of community service and political organizing were reflected in some of the other elders’ testimonios as well.

Other elders had similar examples of legacies of community service and explicit lessons from their parents as well, like Roger, who told a whole story about his father’s organizing efforts to stand up to Swiss industrialists who were mistreating his fellow workers in the copper mines in Mexico. Roger shared:
He [his father] said, “There’s something not right about this story. Here they are in Mexico taking our riches out of the country, and our wealth, and not even letting us use our own park in our own land. We need to organize and boycott these guys.” Anyway, they [the other workers] were afraid of losing their jobs, and they didn’t want to organize. So, my dad told them, “Okay, well tonight everybody, when you get up in the morning, everybody that has a red flag in front of their hut, because there were huts, you’re supporting a strike.” So, he went out that night with his friend and they put red flags in front of everybody’s huts. So, people got up in the morning and there was support for a strike, so they struck the company . . . He says, “Well first of all, we need some honesty here. You build a park in our land, and you don’t let us use it.” He said, “That’s not right.” He says, “And we need health benefits. We don’t even have a doctor in this village.”

Roger’s family legacy of organizing and pursuit of community improvement was also highlighted by his father’s direct influence and teaching of geopolitical awareness. Roger shared:

I remember him [his father] telling me one time when I was probably, I don’t know, maybe a teenager, 12 or 13 years old. He said, “Son, if you’re going to get involved in work for peace and justice, be careful because they’ll call you a communist.”

Then, later in Roger’s life when he returned from serving in the Army, he remembered having a conversation with his father about U.S. corporate interests in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Roger stated:

I told my dad, I said, “Papá, son los comunistas, they’re the communists that are doing that.” And he says, “Don’t you believe that for a second?” He says, “What do you think, that if you had the concession to sell Hershey bars to 3 billion Chinese? What do you
think that’d be worth to you?” He says, “That’s an economic war. It’s not a communist issue. It’s an economic war.”

Roger’s father shared his geopolitical understanding of the world and the dynamics of power and war with Roger. Roger also said his father taught him calculus, and other intellectual and academic knowledge directly. These were examples of aspirational, resistance, and family community cultural wealth Roger carried in his cultural maleta.

Like Roger, Carlos also noted his family’s legacy of community organizing and support. Carlos shared:

Neither one of them [great grandparents] had [formal education], they were uneducated, in the sense that they couldn’t write, it was very very hard for them to read. But what they did in their lifetime, in Barrio Logan, they would end up being founders, there were a few others too, of Our Lady Guadalupe Church. I mean, to me that was huge, having these two individuals who couldn’t write their names, and here they are, they’re Gualalupanas of the church, going out and being the extended arm of the priest and helping other parishioners who couldn’t come to mass. They made a huge impression on my life.

For Carlos, his great grandparents’ ability to be directly involved in community support and development, despite their lack of formal education, was inspiring for him in his ongoing aspirations and in his community involvement. Carlos also credited his father’s career in mariachi as having an impact on Carlos’ pursuit of politics and organizing. Carlos shared:

By the time I was in third grade, I think it was, I ran for office as a homeroom representative. Now, I have no idea how that would have happened. My dad was a musician, mariachi, and so he was very social, had his own music group and so forth. So,
you know, he was always around people and so forth. As I was out there trying to drum up votes, you know, he was trying to drum up money for his group. . .

Carlos described what he thought of as a transfer of skills or understandings, from his father’s sociability and organizing, to his own political and community organizing, in addition to his great grandparents’ legacy of community involvement. Again, these were clear examples of CCW in his maleta.

For Norma, the connection of her mother’s struggle and her own were not so much about a direct lesson or explicit message, but an acknowledgment of resilience and determination inspiring her to pursue her own goals and aspirations. Norma noted how her mother’s struggle in providing for Norma and her siblings after her father’s death and her mother’s perseverance through her own life inspired and motivated Norma to pursue her educational, career, and family endeavors. She stated:

This is why my mom, when I say as a mentor, was able to overcome, despite the gender roles. She was determined. She was determined. Watching her, how could I not continue with my aspirations and my goals. If she could do it, why couldn’t I? But she was strong. She was a strong person. We were really lucky to have her as our mom, all seven of us.

She was cool.

Norma got emotional as she described how lucky she and her siblings were in having their mother’s presence in their lives. Norma had an example of resilience in the face of racist and sexist adversity, a part of her own story of determination in the pursuit of her own endeavors in life. Norma expressed having strands of organizing and activism in her family legacy as well. She stated:
All of my mom’s siblings, and herself, were born in Arizona. They [her grandfather’s family] got kicked out [deported] because he [her grandfather] was trying to organize the copper miners, you know, for better working conditions and better wages. . . my grandfather was also an organizer, which my mom said, “That’s why you’re an activist! That’s why you’re an organizer, your grandfather was.”

Norma also explained her parents explicitly supported her educational attainment, even if they were not always sure exactly how to do so. She explained:

We gained their [Norma’s parents’] values, their principles and values. I’ve carried that with me, you know, in everything that I’ve ever done. . . they were absolutely my first mentors. . . they believed in us. My mom had an eighth-grade education and my dad had a fourth-grade education, but they always pushed us. They wanted us to go to college, they didn’t know what that meant. They didn’t know what to do, they just said “Get good grades,” you know, that’s all they would say.

Norma’s parents provided her and her siblings with aspirational capital, coupled with values and principles. Norma’s maleta was filled with her parents’ hopes and dreams of something beyond what they knew and lived, filled with familial and cultural wealth.

David’s maleta on the other hand, while not filled with explicit messages about his pursuit of education, was filled with experiential expressions of his mother’s love and care as a nurse, her explicit messages about respecting others, and with the results of her actions in supporting her children’s direct access to education. David described his mother’s support of his family’s education. He stated:

My mother went to the priest of our Catholic School, St. John the Evangelist in our community, and told him, “I want my children to get a Catholic education. I have five, I
can pay you for one.” And the priests couldn’t deny that. So, all five of us went to St. John the Evangelist elementary school . . . when I finished elementary school, my mother went to Saint Augustine and told the priests, “I have three sons, I can pay you for one.”

So, all three of us went on to Saints. There the experience was positive in a lot of ways. It had its challenges. But you know, we made a lot of very special friends.

David experienced his mother’s aspirational capital not in explicit messages to pursue education, or in her teaching him academic topics, but in her actions by finding a way to provide him and his siblings access to a Catholic education. He described his family’s experience as the first Mexicans to move into North Park. David stated:

We got exposed to incredible amounts of racism. A lot of the young kids after a while would come by our house and yell out a lot of racism. “Dirty wetbacks go back to Mexico! Filthy spics!” My two brothers and I would end up calling them back and get into fights. . . My poor mother had to witness that all the time. She’d recite the golden rules to us 1000 times, “Treat others how you want them to treat you. Say to others what you want them to say to you” . . . We’d go, “But mamá, they’re treating us like animals. They’re calling us all these names.” She’d say, “Because they don’t know you, get to know them.” In time we began to know and connect with a lot of the young men and women in that community. We became friends and we’re friends to this day. We bonded.

David learned from his mother, and through his experiences in North Park, he could learn through connection and heal through building relationships. He learned respect and communication and built long lasting relationships through his mother’s calling for him to look again and to treat others with respect. These relationships are an example of Yosso’s (2005)
construct of social capital. David also credited his mother with teaching him about love and care.

He stated:

The other reality was, my mother taught me to take care of people so much because when she was a nurse and would go work on the weekends to take care of her patients, I would go with her and the patients would pay me to cut their lawn, take their garbage out and all that. I’d get a little bit of change and I’d give it to my mom, and so but I learned that. It saved me from doing some really atrocious things in Vietnam.

These are examples of the CCW David carried in his maleta, gifted from his mother through their experiences together. David shared two instances where his focus on care and love he learned from his mother helped him to avoid causing harm to others in Vietnam, and in his opinion, saved him from experiencing the potential repercussions of his own violent actions.

David’s maleta de CCW was filled with his mother’s love and care, with her actions of education support and aspiration, and with her navigational capital in accessing educational institutions.

From Norma, Carlos, and Roger’s family legacies of organizing to Clarisa’s family legacy of education and organizing, to David’s mother’s messages of love and respect, and Teresa and Norma’s parents’ support of their educational pursuits, the maletas de CCW carried by the elders were filled with cultural wealth and knowledge positively supporting their access to and attainment of education. The elders’ testimonios demonstrated how their maletas de CCW were full of familial and communal knowledge, culture, and values. Family legacies played a key role in the cultural wealth transmitted to the elders through the actions of their ancestors—modeling, implicit and explicit messages of educational pursuit, organizing, and community involvement. Family legacies of involvement in both education and organizing were important to the elders and connected to their own pursuits of both higher education and community
involvement. It is clear in the elders’ expressions of this cultural and familial wealth were pivotal in their access to community resources and higher education, their development of CC, and their continued commitments to community service and social justice.

**Supportive Relationships: Access, CC, and Connection**

Supportive relationships were key in three ways: connecting elders to the movement spaces and organizations, gaining access to resources (i.e., higher education, housing, and others), and as capacity and community building connections. All of the elders shared examples of how important their supportive relationships were with peers; mentors; teachers, professors, counselors; and organizations and programs (e.g., MEChA, EOP, UFW, Chicana/o studies) in gaining and maintaining their access to higher education; helping expose them to new ideas, history, and opportunities for activism; and ultimately, contributing to their development of CC. Supportive teachers, counselors, and/or professors were present in all the elders’ testimonios.

**Supportive Teachers in K–12**

Roger shared how one of his elementary school teachers encouraged him to run for school office. He stated:

Then in the fourth grade. . . Mrs. Cline asked me to stay after the class. I did and she says, “Roger, I just want you to know that you’re a leader. I want you to run for the president of the school.” She says, “But you can’t run for president until you’re in the sixth-grade, so in the fourth grade you run for secretary, in the fifth-grade for vice president, and in sixth-grade you run for president.” I took her advice. . . She made a huge difference in my life, Mrs. Cline, she actually was somebody that believed in me, and really set the course for the rest of my life by telling me that I was a leader.
For Roger, the care and support the teacher demonstrated was pivotal in the support he felt and
the belief the teacher expressed in his ability as a leader. This led to him engaging in the school
elections and his experience of success in winning these elections.

Carlos also felt supported by one of his teachers. In the 10th grade, after his parents had
divorced and he was going through a rough time, he felt that support. Carlos stated, “Shadow
Rodriguez, Armando Rodriguez, in the 10th grade, when I was really, really going through a
hard time. Shadow convinced me to stay in school.” Carlos credited Mr. Rodriguez for helping
him stay enrolled in high school, without which he may not have graduated. Linda had incredibly
supportive and welcoming teachers throughout her schooling experience. Linda stated:

> I remember loving my teachers. When I was in second and third and fourth grade, I could
tell you the names of many of our teachers. I went to Balboa Elementary School in
Shelltown. That was the beginning of the love of education for me, because my teachers
were so cool. I just remember how wonderful they made us feel and how it was easy to
participate, because they welcomed that.

Linda connected how she felt in class to how the teachers she had encouraged participation and
provided support. Although Linda did not express anything about the ethnic or racial background
of the teachers she experienced as supportive, Norma did.

For Norma, teachers and administrators of color stood out to her, both in their explicit
couragement of her as a scholar and in the implicit messages she received by seeing
representatives of her ethnicity and culture as educators and leaders. She stated:

> My first teacher of color was in sixth grade at Chollas Elementary School. Mr. Castillo.
It’s funny how you remember your teachers of color. I don’t remember my white
teachers. [laughter] You know, but he was an inspiration. He inspired me. See. To me
that shows that it’s important to have people that look like the students, you know, where they can make a difference for you. He believed in me. He encouraged me.

Norma credited some of her teachers of color with making a significant difference for her, not only in their expressions of care and support, but also in the modeling they provided through their achievement and role in education. The excerpts of the elders’ testimonios are examples of the power of support and care from educators in the elders’ lives. This support could be conceptualized as authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999)—educators and school staff providing support and encouragement the elders felt and credited with their ongoing positive relationships with education.

**Authentic Care and Support in Higher Education Access and Opportunity**

Many elders experienced support in their pursuit and attainment of higher education from teachers and educators in their K–12 schools and from colleges and universities. For Gonzalo, his senior English teacher encouraged him to apply to college. He stated:

> It was my senior English teacher who said, “Listen there’s such a thing as college after this.” I had been promised a job at a gas station. I had been working full time since my sophomore year. I would, you know, finish school and go work 8 hours until midnight at the gas station and go home. The guy there had promised me that I could be his manager when I graduated. That’s what I was going to do until this English teacher says, “You know, there are these applications.” And helped me fill out some applications, and I got scholarships.

Without Gonzalo’s senior English teacher’s suggestion to fill out college applications, Gonzalo may simply have continued working at his local gas station, with his sights on becoming a manager. The next section on gatekeeping shows how Gonzalo’s high school counselor was
extremely inattentive, even though Gonzalo had particularly good grades and extracurricular activities.

For Teresa, it was a combination of her high school counselor’s suggestion, the support she and her friend provided for each other, and the involvement of EOP at SDSU, helping her gain access to a 4-year university. Teresa explained:

So, my plan was, you know, of course, it was IVC, Imperial Valley College, and then after that, I would get a job. Luckily, that was the year when EOP started, and a [high school] counselor, a white counselor, approached me and said, “Teresa you know, there’s this program. I know you would qualify,” and I was like, “But I don’t want to leave the valley. I don’t want to leave my parents.” And luckily, another friend of mine, her counselor also talked to her, and so then we said, “Okay if you go, then I’ll go.” So, we did, we applied to San Diego State and got in through EOP and grants and loans.

This excerpt of Teresa’s testimonio demonstrated how intertwined all the factors of support were within her life. Through the care of her school counselor, the peer support (i.e., social capital) of her friend, and the institutional access provided through the EOP program, Teresa gained access to higher education and followed through in her attendance.

Norma was also supported by the EOP program at SDSU; however, for her, they had to come to her high school to find her. She explained:

One day I get pulled out of my class, get called to the office, and who’s there? Gus Chavez and Jimmy Estrada, okay, from San Diego State. Somehow, they talked the school into looking at records of seniors. They saw my record and they said, “You’ve got good grades. Why didn’t you apply to San Diego State?” I said, “I did apply to San Diego State. I never heard back from you guys.” Then they said, “We don’t have a record of
your application to San Diego State.” . . . This was the first year that EOP was recruiting. I
got in [to SDSU] as a late admission through EOP. That’s how I got there.
The next section on gatekeeping detailed how Norma’s counselor decided not to submit her
application to SDSU. Luckily for Norma, Gus Chavez and Jimmy Estrada started to search high
school records for students who would be a good fit for the EOP program, and they came across
Norma’s record at Lincoln High School. Gus and Jimmy, through the EOP program, provided
Norma an opportunity to go to college in San Diego, where she could still support her family,
while also pursuing her higher education. For some elders, authentic care and supportive
relationships could be seen to occur while they were in college.

In David’s case, although there were a few examples, the most striking example of
authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999) and support was from Dr. Larry Schwartz. While still serving
in the army, David communicated home to explain that if he could get two college acceptance
letters he would be able to come home early from the war. His brother, Antonio, had secured
one letter already, and was going to City College to get a second. David explained:

Antonio went to City College and went up to the president’s office and explained the
situation, “My brother can get out of the army if he gets an acceptance letter.” The
president’s office said, “No, we’re not writing those letters.” Then he was walking out of
the campus all depressed and he ran into a friend, and he told the friend what had
happened. My brother’s friend said, “We’ll go see Larry Schwartz, he’ll help you.” So,
my brother, Tony, went up to see Professor Larry Schwartz and told him what had
happened. Professor Schwartz listened to his whole story about me, having been
wounded in Vietnam, being able to get out early, and get into college. Larry told my
brother, “Come with me,” and walked my brother over to the president’s office. Dr.
Schwartz told the secretary, “Get a pad and pen, we’re going into the president’s office, I’m going to dictate a letter and he’s going to sign it.” And so, the President signed the letter and Tony got the letter and was amazed that the guy could make this happen. On the way out he found out that Professor Schwartz was the president of the union for the college, that’s why he had that kind of control. My brother, he got me the letters, and he sent them to me. I got released 3 or 4 months early.

Dr. Schwartz’s actions of advocacy and support made it possible for David to have an early discharge from the military and return home after being wounded twice in Vietnam. Dr. Schwartz most likely leveraged the collective power of the faculty union he represented to get Tony and David’s requested letter signed by the president of the college. Dr. Schwartz went on to provide even more support for David. David stated:

I was going to get out late, I think maybe 3 or 4 weeks after classes started at City College. Professor Schwartz found this out and put me in his class and then he went around and enrolled me in four other classes. Then he went into each class and recruited students to take copious notes and to tutor me when I got there. So, he had me tutored and presented. When he heard me do presentations against the war in Vietnam, he connected me to Tom Hayden. He said, “I know Tom Hayden from the student democratic society.”

Tom Hayden was responsible for getting me exposed to a lot of different marches and presentations that I made, opposing the war in Vietnam. Then from there I transferred to San Diego State after doing 2 years at City College. At San Diego State I got exposed to people like your father, Dr. Rene Nunez, and then to Carol Wayman, who taught African American Studies. I was the first Latino to take his class. It was just all that exposure that
started connecting me, to pursue an education so that no one could ever dictate to me what my life was going to be like.

Dr. Schwartz provided authentic care and support, going out of his way to help David have a successful semester. Dr. Schwartz also connected David to opportunities for him to express his voice through his opposition to the war in Vietnam. David connected these experiences with his transfer to SDSU and his exposure to Chicano and African American studies classes, to his awakening understanding of agency and education, and his development of CC. In the excerpts presented, school personnel used the institutional authority granted to them by their positions as educators and leaders to express authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999) for the elders during their educational journeys.

Mentors and Peers

Many of the elders shared other important types of relationships with mentors and peers. Mentors were in their families, educational institutions, and community. Norma shared her parents were her first mentors, and then went on to share about her connection and relationships with George Stevens, who knocked on her family’s front door when Norma was 15 years old. George asked her mother if Norma could join him and the other community mentors going into the City Heights community to register voters, to amplify their voice to ask for the resources and infrastructure sorely missing in their community. Norma’s mother agreed and allowed her to organize with Mr. Stevens. Norma stated:

At 15 years of age, I was registering people to vote when I couldn’t vote myself. I did it with my very first, what I would call, political, socially conscious mentor, which was George Stevens . . . He was a community organizer in that area. He said, “The way we make change in our community is through the vote.” So, I learned that at 15 years of age
the importance of the vote and getting our communities registered. . . A lot of the infrastructure in that part of town was nonexistent. Streetlights, roads, everything. They basically disregarded southeast San Diego, to this day there are still issues. . . there was power with the vote and then also with “Oh, shoot, these people are serious!” Because there were petitions gathered as well . . . We had been ignored. The pressure was applied, and George Stevens knew how to do it, and he had us behind him. The pressure that was applied affected change . . . So that was eye-opening, and it happened at a young age . . . You know, so anyway, it was at that time that I realized, yeah, he’s walking the talk and that’s what you got to do.

Norma credited her experience and ongoing mentorship relationship with George Stevens as setting the foundation for her development of CC. Norma said the experience “was eye-opening, and it happened at a young age.” This supportive mentorship relationship coupled with community organizing and direct action contributed to Norma’s critical reflection and political efficacy.

Roger and Norma both mentioned two other mentors—Bert Corona and Norma Hernandez—both with whom they long-standing relationships well into adulthood. Roger and Norma credit these mentorship relationships for not only exposing them to social justice action, but also as important to their careers in community organizing and education.

Cesar Chavez was a mentor for three of our elders, Carlos, David, and Linda. For David, Cesar listened and gave consejos during long talks. David explained:

One of the most influential persons in my life was Cesar Chavez. When I got back from Nam, my brother Tony was working up there with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Movement. Tony took me up there to meet Cesar and Dolores [Huerta], and all
the people there. I became bonded with Cesar, and I stayed connected to him. In fact, his
daughter married Richard Ibarra, who was a friend of mine. They bought a home right
here near us, about four or five blocks from our house. So, every time Cesar was in town
Richard would call me and ask if I wanted to stop by. I’d go by his house, and we would
spend time together and talk. It was just very influential to have somebody that would
always be there willing to help. One day Cesar took me aside, this was a while after he
had gotten to know me, and he asked, “Can I share something with you?” I said,
“Absolutely.” He said, “I see a lot of signs of destruction around you. I can understand
with what you’ve been through that you probably have a right to be destructive. But you
can always choose to be constructive and help us build a better world.” He was giving me
some very sound good advice to make sure that I left all the stuff alone that would make
me go downwards and get things that would have helped me move forward. That was
very impactful for me.

David felt bonded to and supported by Cesar Chavez and felt the support Cesar expressed helped
him move forward in his life during times when he was overwhelmed by his negative
experiences in Vietnam. Linda explained one of her experiences with Cesar when she stated:

We were frickin’ young. Cesar was young. Cesar was what, 33 or something. We were in
our 20s and we were kicking ass and taking names, but it didn’t seem like that, we were
just doing work. We were on a mission, and we believed in the mission. We were given
the confidence, by way of getting asked to do something, you know, that Cesar thought
we could do. Honestly, that’s what it came down to. For me, I didn’t want to let them
down . . . I knew enough after having worked on the boycott that the labor council, while
supportive, they were different. They were sexist, they were racist . . . I told him, “Can
you give me another assignment? I just don’t want to go do that.” He, in a very nice way, said, “That’s your assignment.” I went and I’m glad that I did because it was a great learning experience. It was a great way to [learn] how to take a situation that you’re very uncomfortable in, and then come out feeling like you’re the victor. What I [also] learned from that was that unions across the state of California and across the country were very sexist and were very racist.

Linda described the support she felt in Cesar’s belief in her ability to overcome obstacles, even in the face of racist and sexist adversity, and the political efficacy from her reflection on the actions she took. The mentorship, from her perspective, provided her with political and personal efficacy, with a sense of capacity to organize and communicate in all circumstances. This mentorship was an integral aspect of her relationship to the social justice movement space and her learning within it, learning she brings with her throughout her life.

Gonzalo mentioned a similar relationship he had with Paulo Freire, as Gonzalo would serve as his guide and liaison when he came to visit and speak in San Diego. Gonzalo shared after spending some time with Dr. Freire, Gonzalo thought, “What a peaceful man.” Gonzalo’s time with Dr. Freire reminded him of the importance of fully committing to love being the driving force of our social justice actions. Gonzalo said, “Love for the ability of all human beings to thrive in some way, to be able to contribute, to be able to learn and grow” was necessary for social justice action. Although this section focused on mentorship relationships with people outside of the elders’ immediate family, it contains similar themes (e.g., love, care, respect, hard work, and support for educational access) to the those provided in previous section on maletas de CCW, where Clarisa, David, Norma, and Roger mentioned how their parents were their first and most influential mentors. These mentorships, both through community spaces and family, were
clearly impactful in both the elders’ access to and attainment of higher education and to their development of CC.

**Summary**

Through their testimonios, the elders expressed how pivotal school personnel and programs were in their access to education, and ultimately in their development of CC. EOP was critical to Teresa’s and Norma’s access to higher education, without which neither may have attended SDSU. In the section detailing the factors of CC development within the elders’ testimonios, many of the elders described how important MEChA and Chicana/o and Ethnic Studies was in engaging and exposing them to both social justice movement spaces and to the intellectual and academic dialogue and discourse helping to shape their development of critical consciousness. Without access to institutions of higher education, the elders might never have encountered these organizations and thus may not have connected with these organizing and social justice action opportunities.

Without the supportive relationships of school personnel and without the connections through community organizing and university organizations and departments, it is hard to imagine what the elders’ experiences would have looked like. The relationships shared in the elders’ testimonios were fundamental to their experiences in education and social justice movements, and to their development of CC. Relationships were key components of the elders’ connections to education, the building of their belief in themselves as scholars and leaders, and ultimately as part of their development of critical consciousness.

**Gatekeeping, Subtractive Schooling, and Deficit Thinking**

Relationships with school staff (e.g., teachers, counselors) were the products of subtractive schooling based on deficit mindsets and ideologies, which led to gatekeeping (i.e.,
exclusion from opportunities for higher education) and experiences of racism, sexism, and oppression. School staff held power in the elders’ lives, either serving to open doors, as in the case of Teresa’s counselor encouraging her to go to college, or close doors, such as Clarisa’s biology teacher’s response to her request for a letter of recommendation for Stanford University. This section includes examples of gatekeeping through implicit inattention, disregard, and tracking and through explicit racist and sexist messages and actions. These are examples of subtractive schooling practices based on ideologies of deficit thinking that devalue, dismiss, and violate the academic, professional, and personal value of students of color (Valenzuela, 1999).

In many of these cases, the elders expressed these experiences and added some of their present perspective, explaining they did not always understand how to interpret these experiences at the time of their occurrence, and in many cases, they did not recognize the inherent racism, sexism, and classism present in them. This reflection alludes to their development of CC, some of these events being counterpoints to their rising consciousness in retrospect took on new meanings within historical, social, and political contexts. Gonzalo’s example pointed to this very notion of not knowing how to pinpoint the feelings he was having at the time of his schooling experience. This excerpt was preceded by his mention of how he had been raised to unquestioningly trust teachers and priests. Gonzalo explained:

I felt like, you know, everything’s fine and everything that’s happening here must be for a good reason. But I did notice, though, that a lot of my friends, that the teachers would sometimes, you know, I don’t know if the word is abuse, but you know, disrespect and make fun of them, maybe go after them when they didn’t turn in an assignment or didn’t answer properly or dismiss them and just put them in a corner and not even pay attention
to them. I noticed those things and I just kind of wondered, well, “I guess that’s the way it’s supposed to be,” you know?

In the earlier section on the factors of CC development when he explained his burgeoning development of CC in response to critical reflection and action, Gonzalo started to unpack these experiences and reflect on them with his new lens of CC, and to recognize how harmful and racist these teachers’ actions were toward his classmates in Calexico.

**Inattention, Disregard, and Implicit Exclusion**

Gonzalo experienced gatekeeping in the form of inattention from his high school counselor. Gonzalo stated:

> After being class president, involved in all kinds of extracurricular activities, every activity you could imagine, and scoring almost perfect scores on the SATs, the college counselor not once even called me in or mentioned anything about going to college.

Gonzalo noted the inattention and exclusionary neglect of his high school counselor not even calling him in to discuss college options and plans, even though he had good grades, extracurricular activities, and a high SAT score. As I noted in the last section on the role of relationships, his English teacher informed and encouraged him to apply to college, without whom he may not have ever made it to UCLA. This is a clear example of subtractive schooling, which excludes, neglects, and oppresses youth, especially youth of color, based on deficit ideologies of their capabilities.

Carlos noted the disregard with which he was treated by his high school counselor as well. Carlos explained:

> I remember, in 12th grade, going into the counselor’s office. And so, he asked me about what my college plans were. [laughter] And that discussion took about 35 seconds. I
didn’t have any plans for it. My mom, you know, she was a single parent, by that time, working hard, she didn’t have much time to get involved with that. Plus, you know, she didn’t have that type of education in terms of having gone to college, and you should go to college, too. So, there was very little direction from the counselor, he kind of shut it down real quick, he goes, “Oh okay, well, here, go on back to your class.” This 12th grade counselor that I had, he didn’t give a shit if I stayed in school, he said, “Go on back to your class.” Yeah. So, counselors make a huge difference.

As I noted in the last section, and in Chapter 4, Carlos juxtaposed the disregard he experienced from his high school counselor to the care and support he experienced from Armando Rodriguez in 10th grade. Carlos noted the difference between the authentic care he experienced from Mr. Rodriguez and the subtractive schooling he experienced from his high school counselor. Other elders’ experiences, while different, still represented deficit thinking, a lack of belief in their academic, intellectual, and social capacities.

Clarisa experienced her first taste of deficit thinking in practice when she started at Whittier high school during her junior year and they placed her in a track of classes to prepare her to be a secretary. Clarisa described her experience:

I had been [going to school] from kindergarten to 10th grade in Montebello, but the district would not let me go back to Montebello, so I had to go to Whittier High for my junior and senior year. That was traumatic, because immediately I felt the low expectations of deficit [thinking]. . . It didn’t matter that I knew I was going to go to college. I had to fight my way into college track there. I had to literally. My dad had to go down and say, “No, she’s not going to be a secretary. She’s going to go on to college.”
That was my very first encounter with that kind of like, wait, what’s going on? That was my junior year.

Clarisa noted moving schools, away from her community of peers and support—a community she had been connected to since kindergarten—after 10th grade, and the experience of trauma related to experiencing the deficit expectations and tracking at Whittier High School. She was tracked into high school classes meant to limit her to a career as a secretary.

Although Clarisa noted this was her first direct experience with deficit thinking causing her to start to question what was happening in her high school experience, David’s experience of deficit forms of tracking in high school, although clearly racist, did not spark this same inquiry in him at the time. David explained:

The unfortunate thing was the racism of the time. I went up to a priest, Father Sullivan, and asked him, “Why am I not being put in any college prep courses here, in my junior and senior years at Saints?” His response to me was, “David, you’re not going to go to college. You’re going to learn to work with your hands.” And that didn’t bother me at all at the time, because all my uncles, all the people close to me, were people that worked in the fields, people that worked in mechanics, people that used their hands. So I said, “No, no problem.” So, I didn’t take it as racist at the time. I didn’t take it as degrading in any way.

David clearly understood now this experience was a form of racism by tracking him into manual labor through a deficit ideology of his capabilities. However, he had to develop this understanding. At the time of his experience at Saint Augustine High School, he did not interpret the message from the priest as racist or derogatory, but simply saw himself fitting into a model of male manual labor present in his life. His development of CC happened later in his life and
allowed him to reflect on these kinds of experiences of racism and oppression through a new more critical lens.

Norma experienced gatekeeping not in her placement in classes, but in the treatment she received from a teacher in her junior high math class. She stated:

Whereas I was a really good math student, through elementary school, and Mr. Castillo recognized that I was good at math, and he encouraged that. When I got to seventh grade, unfortunately, the math teacher that I got, which was a white teacher, male, didn’t recognize that as a possible talent that female students might have. You see, he favored the boys. When it came to class, you’re raising your hand to answer and instead he’s overlooking you and calling on the boys. So that’s where gender came in. It wasn’t so much, I don’t think it was as much racial, as it was more the gender issues, misogyny. What happens is you get tired of raising your hand and not being called on, and you get discouraged. So, that’s where I remember that I kind of lost interest in math. It was like, “What’s the point?” To this day, I can tell you that math was not my strong subject after that... That’s an example of getting discouraged. You realize, okay, well, maybe that’s not meant for me. Maybe math is supposed to be for guys only.

In this example, the teacher, although not explicitly stating he believed boys were better at or more inclined in math, made his deficit thinking regarding girls’ abilities in math clear with his actions. The examples of gatekeeping were expressed through more implicit manners, through actions and tracking. These excerpts provided unmistakable evidence of deficit mindsets related to the elders’ academic and professional capabilities.
Deficit ideologies were also expressed in explicit manners through interactions with school personnel and the elders. Clarisa explained one of her experiences in high school when she asked her biology teacher for a letter of recommendation. She stated:

My senior year, I started applying [to college], and I wanted to go to Stanford. Does that sound familiar? I went to get a letter of recommendation from my biology teacher. He told me outright that, unfortunately, he was worried that I wasn’t bred to compete with the level of students that would be going to Stanford. That two things would happen, I would either marry wealthy and become alienated from my family, or I’d become depressed and suicidal. He said, “But if you tell me you’re going to go to find a husband, I will do what I can to get you in.” I had a boyfriend at the time. So, I said, “No, I’m not gonna go,” I was so innocent. “No, I’m not gonna go find a husband. I have a boyfriend.” And I didn’t get in. But I vividly remember that conversation. It stuck with me for my entire life.

This interaction with her high school counselor was an example of acute and overt gatekeeping. The counselor’s racist and sexist beliefs of a deficit in her capabilities and resilience, of an essentialization of her gender as a woman as only having value as a wife, was projected onto Clarisa, violating her self-determination and her equitable access to higher education. Noting the trauma of this event was how Clarisa closed this story, stating how she “vividly” remembered and it “stuck with” her for her “entire life.” As noted in Clarisa’s testimonio, her family supported her in pursuit of higher education, and she was accepted into SDSU and able to attend. Although Clarisa experienced this gatekeeping in high school, Roger and David were both accused of plagiarism during their experiences in community college.
Roger described his experience of first having his college counselor dismiss his college level scores on his placement tests and instead insisted Roger take remedial classes, and then he had an English teacher accuse him of plagiarism. He stated:

So, we had to take a test in math and English, to see what level we were at, to see if we could take the prep classes or the college credit courses. So, I scored high enough for the college credit courses in both. He [Major Schultz] said, “But you’ve been gone too long. It’d be better if you took the prep classes.” Yeah from the army. I’ve been gone too long cuz you got me in the army [laughter] . . . I wrote a story [for the English prep class] at that time, “Cassius Clay was changing his name to Muhammad Ali.” . . . A story about why Cassius Clay got rid of a slave name, and I turned it in. The teacher gave me an F. And she says, “Who did you plagiarize?” So, man, if they didn’t pay me to go to school, I wouldn’t have gone back, but I was getting the GI Bill. So, I went back. She asked us to do an in class [writing] assignment. So I did . . . And I turned it in . . . I don’t remember when she called me into her office, but she said, “Do you still have that paper that you wrote about Muhammad Ali.” “Yeah, I have in my briefcase, you gave me an F.” She said, “Let me see it.” So, I handed it to her. She put another line in it and made it an A and then she put a plus, an A plus. She said, “You don’t belong in this class, you belong in the college credit courses.” Can you imagine if I hadn’t gone back?

After being wrongly accused of plagiarism, Roger returned to the English class, but only because of the GI Bill. After telling this story, we talked a bit about how he almost quit school, and how many other students of color get pushed out of education. Roger said, “I know. I mean, most of my friends, practically all of my friends did get pushed out, including Cabezon. He was
brilliant.” Roger’s experience of racist exclusionary gatekeeping was not an anomaly, but rather the norm.

David had a remarkably similar experience when he enrolled at Mesa College right after high school, to avoid the Vietnam draft. David stated:

So, when I got out of high school the war in Vietnam was going on. My older brother Jerry was in combat. I was witnessing what it was doing to my dear mother and all the family. So, they all convinced me to go to college, so I could get a deferment. I said, “All right.” . . . [I] got in at Mesa College and that was my deferment from the military. In my first English class, I was asked to write a paper. I wrote the paper. I showed it to people before I submitted it. They told me, “David, this is publishable.” I said, “Yeah, I had a very good professor at Saints that gave me very strong writing skills.” 3 weeks later I got it back with a C minus. I went up to the professor and said, “Professor, how could you give me a C minus? I showed this paper to people and they told me it was publishable.” She just said, “Well, David, honestly, you could not have written that paper, you stole it. I’m not going to give you a grade for something you didn’t do.”

David subsequently stopped going to the English class, and with his grade falling, he was kicked out of City College by a counselor. The racist accusation of plagiarism and devaluation of David’s academic work and value pushed him out of education, and for David, this had dire consequences. Six months later he was drafted, trained, and shipped off to the jungles of Vietnam. Luckily for David, he survived Vietnam and was able to return home after being wounded twice.

The actions, words, and beliefs of the teachers and counselors represented by the excerpts of the elders’ testimonios in this section were acts of oppression, based on ideological
assumptions of the deficiency of students of color and women that violate the value and worth of the elders. These were examples of the grotesque level of sexism and racism present in the educational institutions attended by the elders and expressed and enacted by authority figures within these institutions. These experiences of racist and sexist gatekeeping stood out to the elders who shared them. They were moments that stuck with them, moments the elders reflected on during the development, formation, and activation of their critical consciousness.

**Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 asked, what is the elders’ vision for the continuation and support of social justice and critical consciousness development? How do these elders conceptualize and operationalize critical consciousness to promote social justice within educational systems, their communities, and the world?

**Organizing, History, Love, Listening, and Action**

Organizing, acting on love, teaching and learning about the history of ethnic communities, listening openly to each other, and ultimately, taking action are important elements to support the development of CC and social justice activism. The elders shared how they came to understand the importance of aspects of social justice activism and community service including the values and actions of love, care, and respect, teaching and learning about the history of ethnic communities, listening to each other openly, and following through with action to make changes in society. They spoke of the importance and power of love and respect and of the values they learned from their parents, families, and communities that were pivotal to their ability to connect to both the movement spaces themselves and the people within these spaces.
Love

Carlos stated:

The movement is love and respect. The first contract Cesar wanted from the growers wasn’t so much about how much money they were going to give us, or, you know, concede to, but Cesar’s thing was that we want a contract that’s going to be respectful of the workers. It’s a huge issue. There’s a number of those that happen all the time in the movement, situations like that, issues that come up. Even as a teacher, as you are, and working with these young kids, I’m sure that you learned so much from them in terms of their tenacity. How could they be so strong? Where did they get that from. Yeah, the resiliency of the students. So, I mean, we learned a tremendous amount of love and respect through the movement.

In this articulation of love and respect, Carlos highlighted the values and actions he shared and learned through the movement and how he and Linda continued to share these values, concepts, and actions through the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs. Linda stated:

I’m reflecting on why we co-founded the Cesar Chavez service clubs . . . It happened before we founded the clubs, it happened during the farm workers time . . . Having little kids understand who they are, and to trust who they are, and to be confident with who they are, and to move forward with who they are, with a lot of values intertwined with all those experiences, so that they feel good about themselves as people growing up . . . Love and respect, when you’re working with people, is such an important [aspect of] lifestyle and action taking, especially when a lot of times [we’re] fighting with people in power. There’s nothing more powerful [than] love and respect . . . That’s part of the values we teach, be proud of who you are, celebrate your culture and your food and your language.
Let’s teach each other about who we are so we can love and respect each other. That was a very, very important part of the whole movement to me.

Linda described how she and Carlos enacted the concepts of love and respect as, not just values, but also actions they learned and practiced in the Farm Workers Movement spaces. Linda and Carlos saw their present work through the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs as a continuation of the Farm Workers Movement by continuing to uplift and act on love and respect.

Other elders also articulated the importance and potential power of love. Gonzalo spoke of the power of love. He said:

I’ve felt that love has to be part of what drives you, what informs you. One of the first quotes that really struck me was Che’s, right, “The true revolutionary is guided by feelings of love.” . . So, in terms of love, I know that we get cynical, we get away from it, get discouraged at times, but really, there is no other way of doing it. If you don’t have a full commitment to including that expression of your being, of putting in love for what you do, love for the ability of all human beings to thrive in some way, to be able to contribute, to be able to learn and grow. If it doesn’t come out of love, it’s not worth it. Because if it comes out of personal interest, if it comes out of an idea that you’re gonna get something for it, other than getting love back, it really doesn’t go far enough.

In this passage, Gonzalo connected love to the act of community service, a theme clearly evidenced in the family legacies and senses of responsibility to act expressed by the elders.

David and Teresa also spoke of love, love of self, and love as the practice of connection and community building. Teresa said:

I think first of all, you have to love yourself. Especially now we see so many people that are broken, or even people that have, you know, dedicated their whole lives to the
community and then their own family is either abandoned or left behind. So, before you’re going to do anything that’s going to be of value to the community, I think you have to really love yourself and be in touch with yourself.

Teresa connected the love of self to work toward wholeness and healing to be of service to one’s community. David added:

Love is actually the most critical thing we all have to practice. Because even people that may not deserve it, the more you give it, the better chance you have of it coming back. It’s critical that we all look at the world and see the importance of coming together and addressing all the incredible problems that we’re confronting today.

David and Teresa saw love as connecting oneself to the community, to help us face the many dilemmas facing our society and world. Love, based on these elders’ statements, is a critical element of social justice and community activism and service.

Teaching and Learning History

Multiple elders spoke of the importance of teaching and learning history, starting first with their own experiences, and then speaking to the importance of continuing this practice. Teresa spoke about how learning about the history of genocide against Native Americans was a pivotal moment in her development of CC, which helped her connect her lived experiences of oppression to historical systems and policies. She said, she thought, “Oh, my God, we got to get involved. We got to do something about this.” Norma echoed this sentiment, talking about how impactful it was for her to learn about Chicana/o history in the Chicano studies classes she took in college, and how that history was not taught in her K–12 setting. She said, “Wow, we have a history . . . and we have a damn good history, going back all the way to our indigenous roots. It was an awakening.” Norma went on to talk, as did so many of the other elders, about how she
knew she had to step up to act on her new knowledge and awakening. Many of the elders spoke about the importance of continuing to teach history now, echoing the data and evidence of the effectiveness of ethnic studies in helping to develop critical consciousness and overall academic improvements for all students, and especially students of color (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). Norma stated:

I don’t think anybody could be an effective educator, anybody that wants to affect change cannot do it without knowing the histories of the disenfranchised communities that exist, and have existed for a long time. I’m talking about you know, Chicanos, Latinos, Blacks, Native Americans. You have to have that knowledge of history and critically analyze it. Unless you have that knowledge, you’re not going to get to the root, you know, and be able to provide an opportunity for change, to affect change.

Norma connected a clear understanding of the history of disenfranchised communities to our ability to reach for the root of oppression and inequity and ultimately to our ability to effectively serve marginalized communities. David elaborated on these histories and connected them to his belief in our need as a society to build connections and unity. David said:

What the Asian Pacific Islanders are going through, it’s just absolutely insane, that they’re being treated the way they’re being treated. And the way Latinos and African Americans have been treated historically. You know, the fact that Native people were slaughtered and genocide occurred in this hemisphere. We have to understand that and know that we have a responsibility for addressing it and for making this a better community and not glorifying our existence or celebrating our past, but at least accepting the reality. People send me emails periodically about how great America is. I tell them, you know, “This is a country that was founded on genocide, it was founded on
enslavement, it stole half of Mexico’s territory. It has a spirit of racism and
discrimination throughout its history.” We have to address that we cannot in any way
deny, and try to reject the reality of our experience in our history. I think it’s by learning
that and accepting that it’s gone on that we can work to build a better society, a better
world. One of the biggest mistakes I think humanity made was to build borders and
divide itself and then exploit each other . . . We have to start working together and
understanding that love is something that can save all of humanity, and the environment.

David connected histories of racial violence and oppression to the exploitation and division in
our society. He brought our attention to our current social conditions related to the COVID-19
global pandemic, and then back to the potential power of love to help humanity and the
environment. This echoed Gonzalo’s consejos about the power of love as a revolutionary act, as
acts helping to create critical consciousness and action.

**Listening Openly to Each Other**

Many elders also spoke about the power of listening, openly listening to each other, and
how important this was during the early periods of the movement and how important it is now
during such politically divisive times in our nation. Teresa stated:

The act of listening is also important, which we don’t do very well. Especially when, you
know, when you have these white supremacist claiming that they’re pro America, having
their right to speech, and then later they’re saying, “Oh, no, we really didn’t mean that.” .
. . Sometimes you don’t want to talk to somebody just because they’re Republican or
because they’re a white supremacist, but what some of us are finding out is that if we
start listening to why it is that they think the way they are, or why they’re talking the way
they are, then sometimes you can educate them or open their mind a little bit . . . ”Hey, we’ve got a challenge and we’ve got to meet that challenge.”

Teresa spoke of the need for us to rise to the challenge of educating and communicating with people of all backgrounds, even when their beliefs and political views may seem ignorant and vile even. Teresa saw this communication and education as a challenge for us in our current political and social climate. Linda and Carlos spoke to this idea as well, to being able to “reach across” the table with anyone and to find a way to communicate, no matter what other people may believe or express. Carlos explained:

Putting all the stuff that Linda talked about, getting our Chavistas . . . to know that when they hit adulthood, they can sit down across the table from anyone and be able to reach across. To me, if we do that then I think we’re in good shape.

Carlos connected the ability to communicate with “anyone” and to “be able to reach across” with people’s confidence, sense of self, and ability to relinquish their ego. Listening and being able to “reach across” the table with anyone who one may need to work with, is not only important for us to be able to educate and communicate with others but also important to our ability to organize in our communities and society at large.

**Organizing and Taking Action**

Organizing was another of the main themes in this finding. The elders spoke of the need to continue to organize and act on our values of social justice, love, and care. They made it clear nothing was given without organizing to take it. Roger stated, “Power is not handed down, power is taken, man. If you’re at the right place, for the right reasons, at the right time, you can kind of coalesce that power into passing the future on to our grandkids.” Gonzalo articulated the importance of organizing. He stated:
In your activism, in your actual application of all that knowledge, and all that love, is organizing, I mean, organizing, this never goes away, because things don’t happen by themselves. We know that the corporate structure, and the military structure, and so many other structures, are organized against us, are organized against people even talking to each other about anything meaningful. So, we have to respond by organizing our own.

David cited A. Philip Randolph, who helped organize the march on Washington in 1963, with his quote, “You will get what you’re organized to take.” The elders shared about the need to organize as well through their stories of activism and community organizing. Ultimately, the elders’ experiences led them to share about the importance of love and respect, of listening openly to learn from each other, and of teaching and learning about our history, while making sure this leads to action, to organizing and stepping up to create and support the social justice action required to make positive changes in our communities.

**Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to describe the manner critical consciousness developed for eight elders in the Chicana community, who lived through the Chicano movement, who have worked and lived within the San Diego area. The inquiry focused on their experiences in education, formations of their political identities, subjectivities, and critical consciousness, and what they see as critical in creating and maintaining more access to social justice experiences and environments for their communities. The three research questions guiding this study were:

1) What dynamics and factors shape and affect the development of critical consciousness?

2) What role do relationships (familial, community, and institutional) play in access to higher education and the development of critical consciousness?
3) What is the relationship between critical consciousness and social justice action and change?

The analysis of the testimonios resulting from the pláticas with these eight elders who participated in this study resulted in six findings. First, moments of CC development, of “awakening,” were accompanied by at least one of three factors: (a) participation in social justice actions/events/organizations; (b) learning events and/or experiences that inspired reflection and connection with previous lived experiences of oppression, both individually and communally; and (c) acute experiences of oppression and/or racial/gendered violence. Second, CC development resulted in the formation of new perspectives that the elders applied to their lived experiences and to their understandings of the material conditions of their communities and other marginalized communities. Third, maletas of CCW—familial and communal knowledge, culture, and values—were pivotal in increasing their access to community resources and higher education, the development of critical consciousness, and their continued commitments to community service and social justice. Fourth, supportive relationships were key in four ways: (a) connecting elders to the movement spaces and organizations, (b) gaining access to resources (higher education, housing, and others), (c) acting as capacity building mentorships, and (d) acting as sustaining connections to movement spaces (peer). Fifth, many relationships with school staff (e.g., teachers, counselors) were the products of subtractive schooling based on oppressive deficit mindsets and ideologies, which led to gatekeeping (i.e., exclusion from opportunities for higher education) and experiences of racism, sexism, and oppression. Sixth, and last, four factors were salient in the support of access to social justice activism and environments for social change: (a) organizing, (b) acting with love and care, (c) teaching and learning about the history of ethnic communities, and (d) listening openly to each other. The next chapter—the
concluding chapter—elaborates on the learning, implications, and opportunities for future research illuminated by this study.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the key findings. Next, this chapter provides a discussion of the implications of these findings as they relate to critical consciousness (CC) formation; identity formation in figured worlds; and trauma, resilience, authentic care, and CC. The implications take into consideration various theories and current literature on CC. I note some limitations of the research study. Following this are recommendations for potential practical application of the research findings and suggestions for potential future research based on this study. Finally, a concluding section ends the chapter.

Summary of the Findings

In examining the findings related to the first research question, it is apparent the development of CC for the elders took place in direct relation to social justice movement spaces and organizations, social justice action, and learning events as well as experiences that inspired reflection and connection with previous lived experiences of oppression, both individually and communally. The development of CC resulted in new perspectives of the world—of their lives and lived experiences—that allowed them to create connections from their own lived experiences to a broader social and political understanding of the dynamics of power and oppression. The elders’ development of CC was a complicated process with varied factors relating reciprocally to each other. Maletas de community cultural wealth (CCW; Núñez, 1994; Yosso, 2005)—their familial, communal, and cultural values and knowledge—contributed to their access to social justice spaces, predominantly facilitated through sites of higher education, and their openness to social justice action and critical consciousness development.

Supportive relationships, often based on authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999), were present throughout the testimonios of the elders. This contributed to the elders’ sense of confidence and
capacity for learning and leadership, their access to higher education, and openness to CC development. Mentorships and peer relationships also played key roles in helping elders access social justice movement spaces and in their development of critical consciousness and capacities for social justice action. Although experiences of oppression based on race, gender, and class were present in all the elders’ stories, they were able to contextualize and understand these experiences as oppressive through their supportive relationships, access to social justice spaces, and the development of their CC. These gatekeeping experiences also served, in many cases, as points of reflection during and after their development of CC. Finally, the elders expounded upon the importance of continued organizing, acting on love, teaching, and learning about the history of ethnic communities and our country’s oppression of these communities, and listening openly to each other to develop broader perspectives, as critical elements to support continued work in social justice and CC development.

Discussion and Implications

The development of CC for the elders who participated in this study, although unique to each participant, had clear patterns across all the testimonios. The development of CC appears to require direct experiences of social action (e.g., protest, organizing). CC development is also assisted by exposure to the history and theory of oppression to understandings of the ways in which oppression and racialized violence have been perpetuated against communities of color. Coupling this exposure to history and intellectual development with activism and organizing for social change allows for participants developing CC to see both the current conditions of oppression and the means to enact change to these conditions. This exposure to intellectual reflection and social activism results in the formation of new perspectives applied to lived
experiences of oppression and marginalization, both in the past and present, and both individually and communally.

One lens through which to see this common phenomenon in the elders’ lives is one of examining how their maletas of CCW contributed to their development of CC, access and attainment of education, and readiness to adopt social justice stances through direct community action, organizing, and activism. The values, beliefs, and attitudes they learned both implicitly and explicitly from their families and communities contributed to their readiness, openness, and willingness to take social justice action. Their experiences of seeing social justice action at work, having direct impacts on marginalized and oppressed communities, contributed to the development of their CC. Cultural, familial, and community values such as love and respect, beliefs in community service, and collective means of support were learned through stories of family heritage of organizing and activism, examples of their parents’ actions and generosity, and the vocal lessons and dichos some of them learned and consistently heard from their parents. The elders’ beliefs in political and social change were not often expressed as an understanding that change was possible. Political efficacy was expressed more often by the elders as a sense of responsibility, a desire to act, and many times coupled with an acute sense of the need to change the conditions of oppression they were becoming more aware of through their development of CC. As Roberto Hernandez put it, “not just ‘si se puede’ pero ‘tenemos que’ (personal conversation, August 2, 2023).

Another salient theme from the elders’ testimonios was their conscious adoption of Chicana/o subjective identities that helped them feel connected to both their sense of belonging

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16 Dichos are sayings or proverbs.
17 I used various endings to Chicana and Latina, including Chicanx, Chicane, and Chicano at various times to support the inclusion of all our relatives who identify as gender non-binary and all other forms of gender identity.
in an authentic social justice movement (through its many constituent elements) and their shared responsibility in community action and service. Their subjective enactment of Chicana/o identities, although uniquely constructed, were also a means to collectively develop shared perspectives on dismantling racists histories and deficit ideologies, and also galvanize their social justice action efforts through a multitude of direct actions, organizing, and establishing intellectual and academic spaces. The adoption of Chicana/o subjective identities and the development of CC were expressed in the context of reflecting on past and present experiences of racism, sexism, and oppression. These experiences, although not always explicitly communicated as hurtful, were clearly elements of historical, familial, and personal trauma the elders expressed as counterpoints to their development of critical consciousness. Their experiences of oppressive trauma played a significant role in the development of their subjective critically conscious perspectives. The relationships between CC, Chicana/o subjectivity, and experiences of trauma are complex and nuanced. The next few sections of this chapter detail some of the salient themes and implications regarding the many ways the elders expressed their development of CC.

**CC: Complicating Elements of Development and Enactment**

The elders’ testimonios clearly demonstrate CC development happens through localized community engagement and organizing (social justice action) coupled with individual, intellectual, and community-driven dialogue (i.e., critical reflection helping to increase understanding of geo-political realities as they relate to the lived experiences of each of the elders and their familial and home communities). The elders’ CC development, as evidenced in their testimonios, is in alignment with the three elements of CC articulated by Watts et al.

and to honor the elders and community members who identify with the endings of -a and -o, such as Latina/o and Chicana/o.
(2011): (a) critical reflection (analysis of social and political conditions and rejection of inequities), (b) political efficacy (the belief in an ability to enact social and political change), and (c) critical action (individual or collective political activism and action to enact change).

The elders’ testimonios indicate clear examples of critical reflection—application of new perspectives on both past and present conditions of oppression and inequity in their lives, families, communities, and society at large. The elders demonstrated their beliefs in political efficacy primarily by acknowledging their belief in a need to act, in an inability to remain silent, and ultimately, in their abilities to be change agents based on their experiences of seeing their actions, and those of their peers and mentors, creating positive changes in the direction of social justice. The elders provided examples of their involvement in political action, activism, and social justice movements and organizations, and the impact this kind of action had on them, their communities, and their development of CC. Although all three elements of Watts et al.’s (2011) construct are present, there are intricacies and complications worth noting in the elders’ testimonios and enactment of CC development.

Watts et al. (2011) described the three elements of CC—critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action—and focus more on the description of CC rather than its processes of development. Watts et al. confirmed Freire (1970) saw critical reflection and critical action as reciprocal elements of CC, working in tandem to increase their mutual efficacy, while generally seeing critical reflection as a precursor to critical action. The evidence in the elders’ testimonios clearly demonstrates these three elements of CC are active factors in not only the enactment and existence of CC but also in its development. Although Watts et al. (2011) and Freire (1970) acknowledged CC development is a nuanced process where each element/factor of development influences the other in a dialogical and cyclical manner, they tended to focus on how critical
reflection precedes political efficacy and action, and stated theoretically political efficacy was a necessary factor in inspiring political/critical action. The evidence in the elders’ testimonios demonstrates these three elements of CC development are not in linear causal relationship with each other, but can occur in various orders, sometimes simultaneously, and affect each other in numerous ways. Although critical reflection may sometimes lead to political efficacy and then to critical action, the action step can be an antecedent to critical reflection and political efficacy in many of the elders’ testimonios.

The order of the three elements of CC presented by Watts et al. (2011)—critical reflection, political efficacy, and political action—is not always the order in which these factors contributed to the development of CC for each of the elders. For some elders, the three factors facilitated the development of CC in precisely the opposite order. For example, Gonzalo participated in organizing for the Rumford Act, saw the potential for political and material change this organizing had, and then reflected on how these actions, coupled with his growing understanding of history and politics through Chicano Studies classes, opened his eyes to the political realities of racism and oppression within the Chicana communities in East Los Angeles (LA) and Calexico. The active organizing—the critical action—inspired his growing belief in political efficacy, which contributed to him critically reflecting on past experiences of racism in his hometown of Calexico. CC development is like many other human phenomena, unbounded by neat linear formulations, but instead exhibited in cyclical, relational, collective, and holistic manners.

Another significant difference between Watts et al.’s (2011) model and what emerged from the elders’ testimonios is in the articulation and conceptualization of political efficacy. Whereas with Watts et al.’s (2011) and Freire’s (1970) definition of political efficacy is the
belief action successfully creates social and political change, the elders did not consistently express this explicit belief. Instead, political efficacy arose more consistently as an implicit belief in the possibility of social and political transformation through explicit beliefs in the commitment, responsibility, and requirement even, to make positive changes in one’s community and society. The elders’ political efficacy was expressed primarily as a belief that political and social change—community service and action—were necessary commitments and responsibilities as members of their familial, community, and academic spaces, and as Chicanas/os. This sense of responsibility arose in numerous ways, some from the example of parents and family legacies of community service, organizing, and political involvement, and some because of critical reflection, connecting current experiences of political action, critical learning, and dialogue to past lived experiences (i.e., individual and communal). Many elders also connected their sense of responsibility to act and to pursue educational and community advancement to lineages of hard work, perseverance, and community and social activism in their families. Communal, societal, and political responsibility was more prevalent in the constructions of these elders than explicit beliefs in efficacy. They expressed their belief in the need, desire, and responsibility to serve their community and to disrupt and combat injustice more than they expressed their belief action could create these changes. Political efficacy in this sense is expressed as an imperative, rather than an option, to act against the oppression experienced by the Chicana/o community of the elders (Hernandez, 2019). Bell (1992) stated the story of Mrs. MacDonald and other organizers in 1950s and 1960s Mississippi, who risk violent physical and economic retaliation not out of an expectation of toppling the white power structure in the south, but as Mrs. MacDonald said, to “harass white folks” (p. xii). By embracing the action itself without expectations of some monumental outcome, organizing and taking action
become triumphant in and of themselves (Bell, 1992). The elders in this study have expressed commitments to organizing, speaking up, and taking action in defiance of oppressive power structures, no matter what their belief in the efficacy of those actions were.

The implication of these nuances and complications is a continued need for scholars and practitioners in critical pedagogy and social justice focused spaces to be aware of, and accepting of, the various ways which CC can and does develop. Although much of the literature and research has rightfully focused on CC development as the practice of facilitating critical reflection to connect youth to their sense of political efficacy to hopefully inspire and instruct critical action (Cammarota, 2016; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017; Diemer et al., 2016; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Espinoza-Gonzalez et al., 2014; Heberle et al., 2020; Pillen et al., 2020; Sulé et al., 2021; Watts et al., 2011), we can also see more collective and community-based applications of the construct of CC can be fruitful in helping youth and community members to embrace the development and enactment of their CC in nonlinear ways. Educators, practitioners, and organizers can also consider the imperative in creating spaces for youth to participate in community social justice action not matter beliefs held about the effectiveness or efficacy of these actions. I discuss the application of these nuances in CC development in the recommendations section later in this chapter.

**Molcajete**\(^{18}\) (Molcaxitl) – Chicana/o Subjective Identity as a Vessel for CC

As I analyzed the findings of the testimonios, I noticed similarities between the constructs of CC and the tenets of Chicana/o identity. I started to wonder about the relationship between CC and the Chicana/o identities of the elders. I wondered about the relationship of the elders’ Chicana/o subjectivity formation and the development of their CC. In some ways, we could look

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\(^{18}\) Molcajete, Spanish word for the Nahuaht molcaxitl and tejolotl, stone tools, a bowl and pestle, used to grind and mix various dry food ingredients.
at Chicana/o subjective identity as a form of CC. Although this is one feasible way to see the relationship between these two social constructs, I think it is too simplistic. Rather, I wonder if the development of CC can be assisted by a subjective vessel in which to develop and flourish.

The evidence has suggested the formation of a Chicana/o subjective identity helped to facilitate the development of CC by providing a vessel, both mental (i.e., conceptual, spiritual, philosophical) and physical (i.e., relationships, organizations, venues, events, spaces), through which to connect elders’ lived experiences to the collective struggle found within the various elements of the Chicana/o movement spaces. As Clarisa voiced, the Chicana/o Movement was our authentic civil rights movement, borne out of inspiration and coalitional collaboration with many of the broader Civil Rights movements (e.g., Black Power, Anti-War, Women’s Rights, Gay Rights). Chicana/e/o subjectivities can be seen as molcajetes for the development and enactment of CC, for the grinding, mixing, intertwining process of praxis, reflection, consciousness development, and action.

Identity Formation and CC Development

CC development and identity formation (in figured worlds) contain both conceptual (i.e., critical reflection, political awareness, and efficacy) and procedural (i.e., political/critical action) components. Urrieta (2007) articulated the nuanced, messy, and subjective process of identity formation through his description of the complex production of Chicana/e/o identity, while using Holland et al.’s (2001) theory of identity formation in figured worlds. In Urrieta’s (2007) retheorizing of this framework of identity formation, the process is not a linear development, but a process of individual and collective struggle, of conceptualization and enactment, and must be understood “through participation in cultural activities that allow them [people] to engage in conceptual and procedural identity production” (p. 121). Urrieta’s (2007) model of identity
formation is a messy and an ongoing process “in flux . . . As such, identity is always a site for self-making, embedded in a collective past and produced in practice through life experiences” (p. 119). This acknowledgement of the nuanced messiness of identity formation can help us be careful to not essentialize or generalize any of these implications, as all these processes are complex unique ongoing processes of identity formation and CC development for the elders.

Still, we can see identity formation is a construction of individual uniqueness in relationship to collective constructs, acted out in both individual and collective actions (Urrieta, 2007). The similarities with this construct of identity production and CC development are striking. The elders’ CC development happened in their own sense of place in the world, as they formed new perspectives of the world, while in direct relationship to the collective social justice struggles and actions in which they themselves participated. At first, I thought this might be demonstrating for us as Chicana/e/o identity production and CC development are essentially the same phenomena. As I reflected on the theories, data, and processes more, I began to think seeing the two phenomena as the same process is too simplistic of an analysis. Instead, I think the evidence in the elders’ testimonios, in this study, suggest identity in the form of Chicana/o subjectivities, are the vessel through which the elders’ CC development took shape. The elders’ conceptualizations and enactments of Chicana/o identities created a space, both individually and collectively, for them to develop their CC more deeply and effectively.

**Self-Determination, Critical Reflection, and Organic Intellectualism**

All the elders identified as Chicana/o, and some also identified with other ethnic and racialized identities. As I articulated in Chapter 2, Chicanismo—or Chicana/o identity—has been seen to have three main tenets: self-determination, critical pedagogy (and higher education), and organic intellectualism (community service and collaboration; Alarcón, 1990; Chicano
Coordinating Commission for Higher Education, 1969; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Núñez, 1996; Núñez & Contreras, 1992). When viewed this way through these three tenets, we can see how the elders’ testimonios provided evidence of the relationship between their Chicana/o identities/subjectivities and their development of CC.

Urrieta’s (2007) study presented very similar conclusions related to how the Mexican American participants chose to identify as Chicana/o. He concluded the Mexican American teachers who participated in his study produced Chicana/o activist educator identities “based on the desire to raise consciousness (teach for social justice pero con ganas) and ‘give back to the [their] community,’” which “became a very important part of this identity” (Urrieta, 2007, p. 117). The elders in this study clearly articulated being Chicana/o is more than simply an identity, it is a choice to identify with a set of values and beliefs, based on a broader sense of responsibility to the Chicana/o community. Norma stated how she can “identify with the mission of that [Chicana] identity” which is more of a “philosophical condition for [her], is not so much the color of [her] skin.” Norma continued, “[M]y identity, the choice that I made to identify that way, I saw that it needed action. Not words.” Norma connected her Chicana identity with the responsibility and need to step up, to take action to improve her community.

At no point did the elders discuss being told what to think or how to identify, but rather they expressed being given opportunities to take action to improve conditions for their communities (and other marginalized communities), and to reflect and think about the history of oppression, and the theories underpinning the intellectual understanding of these histories. Hence, the elders’ choices to assume social justice action and to enact Chicana/o subjectivities were their own choices. This is evidence of the self-determination tenet of the Chicana/o identity, that one has a conscious choice in how they identify and in the production of the meaning of
identity (Alarcón, 1990; Freire, 1970; Núñez, 1994). This choice in naming their world is also a tenet of critical consciousness, as stated by Freire (1970).

The elders also noted the importance of learning about the history of oppression against people of color, and critically reflecting on the relationship of this history to their lived experiences of subordination (of racism, sexism, and classism). This critical analysis of history to unlearn racist biased histories of people of color is another tenet of Chicana/o identity and subjectivity (Núñez, 1996; Núñez & Contreras, 1992; Chicano Coordinating Commission for Higher Education, 1969). In the testimonios of the elders, this reflection is expressed and represented in many ways and routinely tied to mentions of MEChA and Chicano Studies, and the political activism experienced as a part of their actions, involvement, and support of the many movement spaces in which they participated. Chicana/o subjective identity can be understood to purposefully hold space for the critical reflection required for the development of CC in a manner self-determined by each individual and group of Chicana/o actors.

The third tenet of Chicana/o identity is organic intellectualism—the responsibility of the intellectual having reflected critically on the historical material dynamics of power and oppression to give back to their community and act as scholars and activists in service and support of their communities (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Entwistle, 2009; Núñez, 1996; Núñez & Contreras, 1992; Urrieta, 2007). The elders clearly expressed this tenet, repeatedly. For many elders, it was an awakening to the power dynamics of oppression while connecting this new critical perspective to their lived experiences of oppression previously shrouded in the veil of assimilation and magical thinking (Freire, 1970). The elders also explicitly stated their calls for action, that with their newly forming perspectives and Chicana/o subjectivities, they could never stay silent again. The elders made clear that they felt responsible to step up and embrace political
and social justice action to do something about the conditions they had become more acutely aware of through their development of CC.

In their maletas of familial cultural wealth (Núñez, 1996; Yosso, 2005), the elders carried with them a sense of responsibility to community and a valuing of community service, even prior to their more pronounced development of CC and embrace of Chicana/o subjectivities. This cultural wealth of responsibility to community mirrors the work of Kohli et al. (2019) who illustrate how women of color use the values of community service (of organic intellectualism), held within their maletas of community cultural wealth, to support their continued development of CC. These dynamics also speak to the importance of recognizing and centering diverse sociopolitical wisdoms in the lived experiences of the elders, and how this centering can contribute to collective consciousness and ontological healing (Sanchez Carmen et al., 2015) in their adoption of Chicana/o identities and development of their CC. The elders testimonios spoke clearly to their application of these three tenets—self-determination, critical reflection, and dialogue—and organic intellectualism, as part of their embrace, articulation, and enactment of Chicana/o subjectivities and identities. So one may wonder how this lived experience of Chicana/o identity and subjectivity relates to their development of CC.

In adopting Chicana/o identities, the elders elected to begin a conceptual process of identity formation away from one tied solely to an ethnic or racialized identity. Latina/e/x/o racial identity is complex and does not fit neatly into the racialized categories imposed through white supremacy (Urrieta, 2007). Although the inspiration, coalition building, and support with and from the Black power movement was integral to the development of Chicana/o social justice spaces, the elders noted the need for their own authentic space where they could create and act
on the ambiguities and complexities of their lived experiences, a space allowing for them to develop their CC.

**Chicana/o Identity – The Molcajete (Vessel for CC Development)**

I would like to return to the questions Dr. Hernandez and I posed in Chapter 2 regarding the relationships between identity formation and social justice action. How do we re-work how we are seen into a form of identity centered on mobilization against the subjugation caused by the white gaze of the dominant social order? How do responses to subjectivity, our own subjectivities, create a space for mobilization? How do we ground ourselves in self-determinative ways in the face of racist narratives and portrayals?

Although we may not be able to answer all three of these questions with certainty, we can see the relationship between the processes of CC development and Chicana/o identity formation suggests Chicana/o identity served as a molcajete—a vessel—for the elders’ embrace, development, and enactment of CC. The self-determined conceptualization of Chicana/o identity created a molcajete to hold and allow for the processing of history and oppression, to allow for the conceptual (i.e., critical reflection) and procedural (i.e., critical action) to be mixed as part of their mobilization against the subjugation they experienced as a result of the white gaze of the dominant social order. Chicana/o subjectivities, the molcajete for CC development and enactment, helped the elders create their sense of political efficacy in service of their community, all while upholding the ideals, values, and beliefs they brought with them in their maletas de community cultural wealth (Núñez, 1996; Yosso, 2005). In this process of creating a unique container for their development of CC, the elders and their colleagues in the Chicana/o movement also created newly minted identities based on their lived experiences, on their subjectivities, shaped by the very oppressive conditions they organized and acted to change.
Through this new Chicana/o subjectivity, they could mobilize, tangibly act on their political efficacy, and act on the world with their newly forming critical consciousness.

Our subjective experiences—enacted and experienced procedurally, help us to form our concept of identity in this world. Chicana/o subjectivity and identity formation worked as a molcajete for the development of CC for these elders precisely through this process of both conceptual and procedural processes, through their reflection on their lived experiences, coupled with their experiences of social justice action and organizing. Many of our elders had experiences with exclusionary housing practices and field work, families who experienced the deportations and constant movement through the fields each summer, generational experiences of the push and pull of the border, of the U.S. dependence on exploiting Latina/e/x/o people for their labor, of being othered in school settings due to language and perceptions of deficiencies. These shared experiences of oppression, racism, and sexism connect to the collective conceptualization of a Chicana/o identity—one of struggling and fighting against these oppressive forces and of shared commitments to community service and sacrifice.

Lorde (1984/2007) reminded us, as educators and scholars, how to construct discourses of CC as forms of talking back to the institutions and societal norms formed within the vessel of her Blackness and queerness. Identity, our subjective and political experiences of the world, is a locale for the construction of our CC, for the expression of our agency in opposition to subordination. Many oppressed communities collectively conceptualize and enact specific formulations of identities and subjectivities helping to create solidarity around social justice aims and action for the improvement of their communities.

I was recently at a sundance ceremony, a Native ceremony in Arizona. A conversation with one of the brothers there at the ceremony reminded me of how Native, Indian, and
Indigenous identities are formed conceptually and procedurally through ceremony. The man I was talking to was telling me a story about a young man he had invited and connected to the ceremony. This young Native man had come to the ceremony for the first time a year or 2 prior and was emotionally impacted by his experience at the ceremony. My brother from the ceremony explained this young man had never been to Native ceremonies before; he had been living in the city, separated from other Native people and community. During his first visit, the young man noticed all the resources gathered—the piles of wood for the fire burning for the week of ceremony; the structures erected for the ceremony; and the collective effort in putting the community together necessary to support the existence of the ceremony itself. I asked if part of what was so moving for this young man was seeing Native people coming together to create something so beautiful and powerfully Native, authentically Indian. My brother in the ceremony said yes, the young man voiced that very connection to his heritage, to his spiritual and cultural need to belong and be in community, specifically with Native people. This young man’s Native identity, his subjective understanding of and connection to the world, was shaped collectively, and individually; conceptually and procedurally; physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually; and with a purpose of uplifting and providing spiritual sustenance for himself and for Native communities collectively.

I can hear Clarisa saying, again, how the Chicana/o movement was our authentic Civil Rights movement, and I can feel the belonging, the creation of a collective space for the young people in these elders’ generation, to come together to create a Chicana/o space and do Chicana/o things, to develop their critically conscious Chicana/o identities and subjectivities.
A Collective Response to Trauma – CC as a Form of Collective Resistance and Resilience

Many scholars have noted the powerful role that CC can play in increasing the resilience and wellbeing of youth and communities of color (Goodkind et al., 2020; Henderson, 2022; Rocha, 2021). Within some literature on CC, there is also a focus on moving the research lens away from individualistic measures and constructs of CC, resilience, and wellbeing and toward collective ways of being, knowing, and measuring (Goodkind et al., 2020; Sanchez Carmen et al., 2015; Watts et al. 1999; Williams & Richards-Schuster, 2023). This study provides further evidence, in the testimonios of the elders, of the potential power of CC development in response to trauma, both individually and collectively. The elders also expressed their formations of CC as responses to collective experiences and in collective settings.

In all the testimonios of the elders, there was some form of trauma present. The elders experienced traumatic experiences because of racism, sexism, and classism, some expressing historical family traumas with long lasting effects on the family and the elders themselves. The elders, however, saw these experiences of trauma, of oppression and violence, through new eyes, from a new critical perspective, and in many cases expressed these traumas as forms of fuel, counter points to their development of critical consciousness. Norma stated clearly her desire to make social justice change was directly related to the responsibility she felt in resonance with her mother’s diligence in providing a supportive and empowering space for her growth, in the face of her family’s struggles, through deportation and after the loss of Norma’s father when she was in high school. Her eventual conceptualization of a responsibility to act in response to the political and material realities of oppression in her community is an enactment of critical consciousness in response to her family’s and her own experiences of trauma. David also shared an experience of trauma that immediately contributed to his development of CC.
David’s two brothers, Jerry and Anthony, took him to Los Angeles, on August 29th, 1970, to participate in the Chicano Moratorium. Having recently returned home from serving in the U.S. military in the Vietnam War, David was unaware of what Chicano meant, nor of the event itself having been planned. On the trip from San Diego to Los Angeles, David’s brothers explained to him the history of the “the term Chicano, where it came from, and what it was about in terms of the movement.” The Chicano Moratorium was a peaceful march and demonstration planned as a way to voice opposition to the Vietnam War and the disproportionate deaths of Latina/e/x/o men, and other men of color, in the war (García & McCracken, 2021; Hernandez, 2020; Huerta, 2020; Mariscal, 2005; Muñoz, 1989; Thurber, n.d.). Twenty to thirty thousand people, predominantly Latina/e/x/o, assembled for a peaceful march down Whittier Boulevard to Laguna Park, since renamed Ruben Salazar Park, for a gathering and demonstration (Hernandez, 2020). Hernandez noted whole families had shown up and gathered in the park to soak in the ballet folklórico, in what had started as a joyous event. The joy and peace were shattered by the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department deputies, who after responding to a store owner’s call, decided to clear the park with tear gas and baton swings (Hernandez, 2020; Huerta, 2020; Mariscal, 2005; Muñoz, 1989; Thurber, n.d.). David recalled:

And all of a sudden, the police assaulted the march and they killed three, arrested hundreds, they killed Ruben Salazar, the writer for the LA Times. It was incredible, that experience, I just said, “Wait a minute.” I just came out of combat thinking I was coming home, and here I am witnessing and being part of, exposed to a war going on in our own neighborhood. It was very empowering to me to say, “I can never remain quiet again.”

This traumatic experience, of witnessing the violence perpetrated against the Chicana community, against families, after having served in U.S. Army and survived multiple injuries
and traumas in the Vietnam War, was “incredible,” and “empowering” for him, and fueled him to speak up and act on his burgeoning critical consciousness. Although the other elders did not share having responded as immediately to their many traumatic life experiences, they routinely connected the dots and reflected on their experiences of racism, sexism, and classism. The elders explained how these events contributed to their understanding of the need and responsibility to change their material and social conditions and those of their communities. Their critical reflection, during and after critical action, was almost always related and connected to traumatic experiences in their lives.

Many elders also expressed their sense of community responsibility forming in direct connection to their families and their own experiences of oppression and trauma. Norma’s expressions of emotions related to her recollection of how hard her mother worked to create an empowering environment were directly connected to Norma’s sense of responsibility to her family’s legacy and the community at large. Norma’s emotional response was related to her family’s traumatic experiences of being deported during the Great Depression. Norma’s emotional response was a response to feeling, knowing, and seeing how hard her mother fought to return to the United States, to maintain her education and employment, and to hold her family together after Norma’s father passed away. In this sense, Norma’s expressions of CC—of critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action—and her sense of responsibility to her family and community are all resilient responses to her and her family’s experiences of trauma. Norma and David were not alone in these kinds of responses, and most of the critically reflective expressions from the elders arose out of experiences of oppression and trauma, their development and enactment of CC being a direct response to their experiences as an act of resilience and resistance to the very oppression and trauma.
Connecting, Belonging, and Sustaining – Core Relationships in Community Building

The elders’ testimonios demonstrated the importance of supportive relationships in their access and attainment of education and their engagement with social justice movement spaces and the development of their CC. Although many of these relationships were constituted through those in institutional roles, teachers, counselors, or professors, evidence also pointed to the power of both mentorship and friendship within the social justice movement spaces. Many mentorships shared by the elders turned into lifelong relationships in overlapping community circles of political and social action. Elders also shared about how important these relationships, and those forged with their peers, were in continuing to stay connected to higher education and social justice movement spaces. Many peer relationships were formed, some being friendships lasting for decades, in these movement spaces such as the Farm Workers Movement; the many pickets, boycotts, and resource drives’ and the study groups and collective spaces. Carlos described these as “core relationships” based on their shared values of community service and social justice. Many of these shared values were extensions of the values and cultural wealth held within their maletas that were inherited and learned from their parents, families, and communities. The elders expressed the importance of being involved in the Chicana/o movement, and how it represented a united collective voice for their community’s concerns and enactment of power. Peer relationships were also key to the elders’ connection to, and building and sustaining of, social justice communities of actors and organizers. Collective connection to organizations and spaces, action and theory practiced together, gave the elders opportunities for them to develop their critical consciousness, through reflection and dialogue involving theory, lived experiences, and actions.
Evidence of the significant role that supportive relationships play in educational access and attainment has been well documented (Hammond, 2015; Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021; Valenzuela, 1999). Gomez and Cammarota (2022) provided evidence of the role belonging plays in the development of CC among Chacanx youth in school settings. The research body has demonstrated the importance of support and belonging between teachers and students and on the importance of students feeling like they belong to “something bigger than themselves” (Gomez & Cammarota, 2022, p. 352). It appears from the elders’ testimonios and the findings of this study that peer relationships also play a vital role in students’ sense of belonging, connection, and development of CC. Stanton-Salazar and Spina’s (2005) research illustrated how Mexican American teens relied on each other for support through emotionally challenging experiences and circumstances. This study also adds to the evidence body of the importance peer relationships can have in supporting thrivance, resilience, and emotional well-being in marginalized teen populations. In what ways can our educational spaces promote collective supportive peer interaction in conjunction with critical community social justice action? How can we support students in their genuine connection with each other, in sharing their stories, and applying this connection and relationship building to their collective development of CC and potentially identity formation?

According to psychologist and philosopher, Dr. Alison Gopnik, neuroscientists have discussed a burst of plasticity and ability to change and see new perspectives within adolescence (E. Klein, 2021b). According to this science, during our adolescence, we are much more open to exploring and forging new social connections and ideas. It is during these times, as the elders expressed, CC is most apt to form, and the possibilities for applying learned values, lived
experiences, and critical dialogue to forging new subjectivities and ideas is most able to take place within our social structures. Gopnik also spoke to how important it is for the growth of culture so teenagers and young adults can mold the values they have learned from their families and communities into new values applied creatively to create new cultural and social values, structures, and practices. We are most able to apply the familial, cultural, and community values carried in our maletas to our current social settings during these adolescent periods in our lives.

From the elders’ testimonios, we can see when coupled with critical reflection and action, critical consciousness can be one of the results. In considering the impact young people can have when collectively engaging in critical reflection and dialogue, due to their neurological flexibility to consider and create new social and cultural structures and forms, educators can strongly consider the importance of nurturing peer interactions in authentic community and social justice action spaces.

**Limitations of the Study**

Urrieta (2007) stated, “Identity is always a dynamic co-constructed cultural phenomenon. Even when more durable identities are formed, how these identities are understood and how their meanings change over time become life-long processes” (p. 118). It is important we do not essentialize any of the elders, nor any other community members who identify as Chicana/e/x/o, through the implications and conclusions of this study. This study was limited by the very fact it was a qualitative study focused on the testimonios of eight Chicana/o elders in the San Diego region. Although we may be able to draw broader conclusions and recommendations from the synthesis of this study, it is important we maintain the openness and ideal of self-determination for all people’s expressions of their subjectivities and identities. Although I do make claims about how Chicana/o identity was created and acted upon by these eight elders, and make
statements about its capacity as a vessel—a molcajete—for the development of CC, we have to ensure we remain open to particular contextualized enactments of each individual’s and community’s interpretation of their identity for any and all subjective self-determined identities to have this same potential of CC development and enactment.

This study was also limited by the perspectives and lenses of the eight elders, myself, and my committee members, who all participated in and helped to synthesize this study. Although I conducted various member checks, reflective journaling, and memoing, and conferred with colleagues in my PhD program and my committee members to ensure we represent each of these elders’ testimonios authentically, we must acknowledge there are many other perspectives on both the historical elements represented by their testimonios, and on the development of critical consciousness and formation of subjective identities. Although this is a limitation to the overall synthesis and product of this study, it does not devalue the study. The goal of this study was not to synthesize or create a positivistic response to the research questions. The purpose was to unearth the testimonios of each of the elders and their understanding of their own experiences and processes, and to share these findings and insights that arise from them with the academic community and community at large. Please keep these limitations in mind while engaging with this study.

**Recommendations**

The next two sections propose potential practical applications and future research directions based on the findings and conclusions of this study. The elders’ testimonios demonstrate the power of narrative and story to increase understanding in how CC develops and contributes to social justice action. Gonzalo stated, “Give people first a chance to tell their story and then you educate where you can connect that story to a deeper understanding of what’s
going on right now that impacts that story.” Clarisa added, “Exactly like what Gonzalo says, give them a vehicle to figure out ways that they can impact their own story, continue, and do it at the macro level. Give them options to make a difference in their lives. To me, the key is the word education, but an education that helps people make these connections to their stories, to the analysis, and to options that they can do to make themselves feel empowered. It’s like Freire, you basically learn how to impact your own life. In doing so, you impact the community at large. Sometimes you do it simultaneously. Then you layer on all the other things. But I think we’re going to need, you know, people, we’re going to need boots on the ground to talk to people.”

Clarisa and Gonzalo’s statements described the process of intentional CC development, explaining how education can help us connect our own lived experiences—our stories—to current social-political conditions, through understanding how we can impact positive change in our lives and the lives of those around us. Through this connection, action, and impact, not only can we increase our awareness of our place in the world and how our lived experiences are related to the bigger picture of meso- and macro- social and political dynamics, but also experience the ability to contribute to and create positive changes in the social/political conditions of our communities. Clarisa finally stated we are going to need “boots on the ground to talk to people.” Her statements give clear context and relate directly to caring for students through reciprocal supportive relationships, making spaces for them to authentically share their stories, and authentically incorporate community engagement and responsive action into formal educational spaces, programs, and curricula.

The recommendations in the next sections revolve around a few key observations and extensions based on the findings of this study: (a) education for critical consciousness development goes beyond the walls, buildings, and formal structures of schooling and out into
the community and society at large—one way that this can be done is by creating connections between youth and elders; (b) to increase social justice we need to continue to design, promote, and facilitate ethnic studies programs and social justice organizations in high schools, colleges, and universities; (c) CC, community activism, and positive social change can be supported and amplified through organizing, listening, and facilitating dialogue between high school and college campuses and the community and society at large.

**Potential Practical Application**

**Collective Community Action in Education: Connecting Elders and Youth**

Abuelita epistemologies call on us to honor and value the elders’ knowledge and wisdom (Gonzales, 2015). Their testimonios have been analyzed using critical race theory and LatCrit lenses, and an embrace of pedagogies of the home and a valuation of our youth’s maletas de community cultural wealth (CCW). A question that arises with an embrace of these theories as based on the evidence in the elders’ testimonios is how we can bring elders and youth together in educational settings that value, respect, and center their cultural, linguistic, and holistic familial, home, and community experiences.

One way this connection of elders and youth could be implemented is through ethnic studies courses and other critically minded classes aimed at increasing the development of CC, bringing elders with social justice experiences and commitments into their classroom and educational spaces to interact with the youth in these classes. Incorporating interactions and dialogue with elders in social justice focused Youth Participatory Action Research (Haskie-Mendoza et al., 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2018; Voight & Velez, 2018) studies and community action programs could also be another manner to connect youth and elders in dialogue. In these dialogues, it is not only important for youth to hear from the elders in honoring their wisdom and
knowledge, but also important for elders to listen openly to the youth and their articulation of social action, as the elders of this study acknowledged in their consejos and suggestions for continued support of social justice action and CC development. Through these interactions, we can ask ourselves as critical educators, what modes of dialogue, mentorship, and relationship-building and organizing could be facilitated between our elders and youth to help build connection and community. How might these connections and relationships support the extension and execution of more effective development of CC, positive social justice action, and change in our communities?

Another suggestion is to build curriculum around the testimonios of these elders, and other sources of testimonio and narrative history, to increase the ability of youth of color, and other marginalized youth, to see themselves in academic curriculum. How can these testimonios, and other biographical narratives of local civil rights leaders and activists, be used to help teach local histories of resistance and social justice action? The elders noted how impactful it was for them to see their authentic history as a part of their CC development. How can these kinds of testimonios and narratives be used to help students see themselves in their curriculum, schools, and history? What kind of curriculum could be built around these connections between elders and youth, to help increase youth engagement through the acknowledgement of their maletas de community cultural wealth? How might this curriculum help to increase their development of CC?

This study points to the potential effectiveness of ongoing YPAR designed studies and the constituent curricula and practices that arise from these kinds of studies (Haskie-Mendoza et al., 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2018; Voight & Velez, 2018). Although this study did not employ a YPAR design, it does point to the effectiveness of coupling critical reflection and critical action.
The elder’s testimonios point to how pivotal community justice action was in their development of CC. Although this happened in numerous ways for each of the elders, the evidence points to a continued focus on coupling authentic community and social justice action with formal educational and schooling spaces aiming to nurture critical consciousness development. This study encourages us to reflect on how we are connecting our school settings and communities of learners to external community action organizations, events, and spaces. One idea is to work collaboratively with youth and elders through collective youth and elder participatory action research (CYEPAR). Another could involve working solely with elders through elder participatory action research (EPAR).

The elders constructed their Chicana/o identities and CC through their own self-determined action. How can we nurture educational spaces allowing for the self-determinative expression of students’ subjective identities, and the complex relationship between their subjective identity formation and CC development? Educational practices uplift holistic, relational, and collective ways of being and knowing, of interaction and creating to help us to facilitate and nurture our students’ agency. All three of these concepts of organizing our world—holistic, relational, and collective—were present in the testimonios of the elders. Their development of CC was constructed through collective actions speaking holistically to their lived experiences and realities through relationships with people (e.g., staff, mentors, and peers) and the ideas, ideologies, and histories in collective spaces of social justice and community responsive action.

*Increasing CC, Community Action, and Social Change through Dialogue*

The elders called for open dialogue—listening openly to each other—and learning about each other’s cultures, realities, and histories to better love and respect each other. These kinds of
open dialogues centered on learning about diverse cultures, realities, and histories are represented in the pedagogies of Critical Ethnic Studies; the empirical evidence demonstrates these pedagogical practices have many benefits for students of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). This study further supports the need for educators, policy makers, and leaders to push for and support Ethnic Studies programs to be created, implemented, and supported at all levels of our educational systems.

**Potential Future Research**

I have found research regarding the CC formation of elders in social justice movement communities is scarce. Although there has been ample research and writing regarding biographical representations of elders who participated in the Chicana/o movement, and other constituent elements of the Civil Rights Movement, the suggestions are scarcely investigated in scholarly literature.

The elders clearly stated they are not done and they have more work to do. This work looks different for each of the elders: while some are on various boards of nonprofits and educational institutions, others are still leading organizations with social justice aims, and others are still organizing to promote the voice and agency of marginalized and oppressed communities. The elders clearly said the work to be done is to love, teach history, listen openly, and organize. One question that could be examined more closely in future research is how elders within social justice movement spaces and careers have sustained their commitment to these movements and their energy and work in actively staying engaged. Although there has quite a bit of literature both published and in “gray” media spaces attempting to address the longevity and resilience of current activists, educators, and organizers (Cox, 2019; Migrant Clinicians Network, 2021;
Murphy-Shigematsu, 2017; Self-Care and Sustaining Activism, 2019), there has been very little published research on how elders have sustained their own involvement and commitments to social justice action. Another question this study indicates is how some elders leveraged their involvement and knowledge of social justice movement spaces into careers and employment. How did the elders’ engagement in employment opportunities allow them to maintain their commitment to social justice while also providing them with material and economic sustenance for themselves and their families and communities? Although it appears some elders involved in this study were able to do this exact thing—to secure careers within nonprofit, labor, and educational institutions—there is still much more possible research; quantitative research studies that couple employment careers with measures of longevity in social justice commitment and action, could potentially serve to fill this gap.

Some historical events in the San Diego social justice movement, of which there has been little record in the literature, arose during this inquiry. The walkouts at Lincoln High School in 1969 Norma helped organize have only represented in one newspaper article in the San Diego Union Tribune, which focused on the reinstatement of the first Black school administrator in San Diego Unified School District, as a response to the walkouts (Monteagudo & Davis, 2019). The “Junta Directiva” is a subcommittee of MEChA mentioned by several elders as having a significant impact within the institution of San Diego State University (SDSU). The Junta Directiva was a committee formed from within the student-led organization of MEChA granted institutional power to re-interview and make decisions about the hiring and firing of some staff at SDSU in the early 1970s. I wonder what other local historical events have been under researched. Although these are only two examples of potentially significant historical events/organizations that have been under-investigated, my suggestion is by engaging more
elders from within communities of activists, researchers can unearth historically relevant events and organizations worthy of further inquiry and publication.

Another potential area of research this study can point to is research focused on understanding the patterns of CC development related to macro, global, and societal trends and movements. The elders repeatedly spoke to the external forces of the Civil Rights movement(s) and the influence and energy these movements had on their own engagement with the various elements of the Chicana/o movement, which in turn affected their development of CC. Although there has been some research on the ways in which more modern movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM) have influenced youth, their engagement in social justice activism, and development of CC, there is still room for retrospective looks and comparisons of current movements’ influence on the development of CC and those of past generations of activists. Questions that come to mind could be related to investigating how different movements and organizing efforts were similar and different in both their engagement and influence on activists and youth. Researchers could also focus on events like the Chicano Moratorium—and examine their potential impact on the development of CC and the subsequent effects on current youth and community members’ social justice action, organizing, and effectiveness. What are the generational differences in CC development, articulation, and enactment among members of different communities based on their experiences of micro, meso, and macro level events in their lives?

Another potential area of future research is to develop more deeply the notion the methodology of testimonios is a form of Indigenous research methodology. The research tradition of testimonios lends itself to long-form narrative analysis through an Indigenous lens (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Kovach, 2021; Smith, 1999/2012; Wilson, 2008). This
methodology compelled me to consider how I could keep the testimonios of the elders intact rather than dissecting them through Western forms of linear analysis. Although I formed categories and themes from my grounded theory coding processes, I considered how I was going to weave these themes and findings throughout the testimonios, rather than cut up the testimonios into small, decontextualized chunks to weave into the findings. Doing my best to keep the testimonios of the elders intact and whole was difficult. Although we, myself and elders, synthesized each of their testimonios, I had to continue to return to the findings, to the primary themes and patterns, in a cyclical manner. This more holistic synthesis of the analytical process has proved difficult for me to maintain in the confines of the standard expectations of a PhD dissertation. I ended up applying the “two-eyed seeing” method (Bartlett et al., 2012; Kovach, 2021), and created a testimonios chapter keeping the long-form narratives of the elders intact, and a Findings chapter presenting the findings of the study in a more Western linear format. Although this is not a takeaway related to the data and findings of the study, it is a takeaway in relation to the methodological processes and could potentially inform further research into the experiences and methodologies of scholars aiming to employ Indigenous and nontraditional research methods in predominantly white-stream institutions of higher education.

Although I have a long history of enjoying intellectual and academic pursuits and experiences, I found the research stage of my PhD experience to be uniquely challenging. I know this is to be expected of a process considered the pinnacle of academic pursuit. Even so, I found myself struggling with how to express myself within the confines of traditional Western Eurocentric academic boundaries as a Chicano Indigenous scholar. Having to constantly come back to predominantly positivistic frames, such as addressing the problem this study was solving and struggling with how to fit the long-form narratives of testimonios into the neat box of a
“findings” chapter, proved difficult for me, and were anxiety-provoking, even. Although I found my response to what “gap” in the literature my study has filled, I was still struck by how simply asking this question centered the academy rather than the knowledge and experiences of my community.

Although I understand ultimately my study, and the program at the University of San Diego, where I conducted my doctoral studies, will be judged and assessed based on these Eurocentric notions of rigor and intellectualism, I cannot help but wonder what this study would look like if it did not have to fit into these exact parameters. I hope my struggle, and subsequent deferment to the process, can be helpful for others who may stumble across my dissertation in search for some relatability in their own experiences of striving to perform and accomplish their dissertation and doctorate within Western institutions of higher education.

**Final Thoughts**

Throughout this study, from the beginning to the end, I attempted to articulate an Indigenous Chicano perspective and worldview centering the importance of holistic, relational, and collective ways of being and knowing. While doing so, I also attempted to speak to the intricacies and complexities of our dual existence as individuals within collectives, as represented by so many forms of Indigenous wisdom, such as In Lak’ech, Ubuntu, Kapwa, the Medicine Wheel, and the Celtic Tree of Life. Our individuality has meaning in relationship to the collective, and the collective is the sum of the individuals through their actions, words, and thoughts. I have done my best to embrace Abuelita epistemologies (Gonzales, 2015) and maletas de CCW (Nunez, 1994; Yosso, 2005) by honoring familial, cultural, and community legacies and the knowledge and wisdom of our elders. I do this to honor my father’s legacy, my mother’s
living legacy, and the ongoing support and encouragement all my elders, teachers, and mentors have provided me throughout this doctoral process.

The testimonios of the elders show us how CC means seeing our realities with new eyes, awakening to the clear subordination and oppression of societal systems. Their testimonios demonstrate how CC can develop through exposure and participation in critical history and dialogue and can lead to recognizing collectively we have the capacity to transform social, political, and material structures and the responsibility to take action in service of our community. The elders knew they could never be silent again. They had to speak up and step up, and something had to be done to change the conditions of oppression surrounding them and their communities. The elders knew the process of liberation from oppression and subordination was one requiring they organize and act collectively. Their development of CC and social justice actions were also continuations and honoring of their maletas of familial community cultural wealth, and an embrace of their Chicana/o subjectivities.

This doctoral dissertation is an act of resistance in response to the generations of oppression and subordination our communities have experienced. It is an honoring of my family legacy—of the cultural, familial, and community wealth and capital I carry in my maleta. I am honored and grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in the synthesis of this thesis and the testimonios of the elders, giving it life. I put this into the world with the hope it contributes to the ongoing fight against oppression and support the striving and persistent pursuit of actions to promote social justice and liberation for our communities and for all of us who strive to contribute to the collective critical and liberatory consciousness.
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APPENDIX A

René Núñez, Memorial Bookmark

René Nuñez, Ph.D.
1936 – 2006

Professor Emeritus, SDSU, Founding Member of Chicano Studies
Teacher, Scholar, Activist
Cultural Broker
Community Builder
Mentor, Friend, Husband
Father, Elder

Developing Voice, Self-Determination, Critical Analysis, Passion, Research, Critical Consciousness

“Pass along what you’ve learned ... Give back to the community ... Make a Difference!”
June 2006

Thomas G. Philpott, Ph.D.

"There are people who believe that their communities should help themselves resolve their problems."

In the service of this community, it is important to address the underlying social and political issues that contribute to these problems. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The second is an organic approach, focusing on the cultural and social aspects that influence individual and community wellbeing. This includes addressing issues of power, politics, and social justice.

The third is in the service of the people of color and indigenous communities. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The fourth is in the service of the arts, ensuring that the arts are accessible and available to everyone. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The fifth is in the service of the environment, focusing on the impact of human activity on the natural world. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The sixth is in the service of entrepreneurship, focusing on the creation of new businesses and the development of new economic opportunities. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The seventh is in the service of the community, focusing on the needs of the community as a whole. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The eighth is in the service of the arts, focusing on the impact of human activity on the cultural and social aspects that influence individual and community wellbeing. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The ninth is in the service of the environment, focusing on the impact of human activity on the natural world. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The tenth is in the service of the arts, focusing on the creation of new businesses and the development of new economic opportunities. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The eleventh is in the service of the community, focusing on the needs of the community as a whole. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The twelfth is in the service of the arts, focusing on the impact of human activity on the cultural and social aspects that influence individual and community wellbeing. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The thirteenth is in the service of the environment, focusing on the impact of human activity on the natural world. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The fourteenth is in the service of the arts, focusing on the creation of new businesses and the development of new economic opportunities. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The fifteenth is in the service of the community, focusing on the needs of the community as a whole. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The sixteenth is in the service of the arts, focusing on the impact of human activity on the cultural and social aspects that influence individual and community wellbeing. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The seventeenth is in the service of the environment, focusing on the impact of human activity on the natural world. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The eighteenth is in the service of the arts, focusing on the creation of new businesses and the development of new economic opportunities. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The nineteenth is in the service of the community, focusing on the needs of the community as a whole. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.

The twentieth is in the service of the arts, focusing on the impact of human activity on the cultural and social aspects that influence individual and community wellbeing. The community must work to create a society where everyone has access to basic needs, education, and opportunities for personal growth.
### APPENDIX B

Pláticas Conversational Interview Instrument

**PhD Research Study Title:** Pláticas Liberadoras: Testimonios de las abuelas y abuelos de la comunidad Chicana/x/o de San Diego

#### Interview questions (Plática/dialogue prompts)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Home Education</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please start with what you remember of your experience in the home prior to elementary schooling.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What memories do you have of experiences with family members or community members having an impact on your education, knowledge, and/or schooling (advocating, mentoring, supporting you)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please share any pivotal moments and events you remember.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>K12 Education</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please tell me about your experiences of K–12 schooling as a youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What memories do you have of experiences with family members, community members, and/or educators having an impact on your schooling, education, and/or knowledge, (advocating, mentoring, supporting you)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Probing questions (Depending on how participants respond):</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How was your elementary schooling experience?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How was your middle school (junior high) experience?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How was your high school experience?</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Higher Education</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How was your experience in higher education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What memories do you have of experiences with family members, community members, and/or educators having an impact on your higher education schooling, education, and/or knowledge, (advocating, mentoring, supporting you)?</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Retrospective Reflection on Schooling Experiences</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you see this experience now as an adult?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel about your experience as a child?</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Conceptualizations of education and schooling</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the difference between education, learning and schooling?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Pivotal Moments/Events</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tell me about a pivotal event in your life that you remember shaping your understanding of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the world and your role in it.

Please describe each event and your memory of it.

*Probing questions (for each event):*
- Who was at the event?
- How old were you at this time?
- Where was this at?
- During what time period was this? What else was going on in the world?

*Probing questions (after multiple events):*
- How were/are these events connected or related to each other?
- How did you understand and make sense of these event(s) while you were experiencing them?
- How would you interpret this event now in the present moment?

What different events in each of the different aspects (parts) of your schooling experience that stand out to you? Can you please describe them? How did they impact you?

**Care, love, and relationships**
- How would you describe the role of care, love, and relationships in education?
- How is education and the roles of these elements in it, related to social activism?

**Social and Political Activism**
- How did activism, political identity, and/or critical consciousness develop in your life and your mind?

- What aspects of your education and/or schooling contributed and/or shaped this development?

- What role did education, schooling, and social activism play in the development of your identity and understanding of the world and your place in it?

**Educational Work and Service**
- How have you applied your understanding of the world and the social order, your development of identity and consciousness, to your educational work and service?

- In what ways has the educational work and service you have done in your life helped to create more access to educational (and other) resources for members of your community?

- In what ways has your educational work and service contributed to the development of consciousness in those that you work with?
### Crucial to Education and Activism
What do you think is crucial to effective education, activism, and community service?

**Probing Questions:**
In the present moment, what do you think is crucial and important for effective education, activism, and community service?

What should we keep in our hearts and minds as we work toward increasing social justice and equity in our communities, schools, workplaces, and society?

### How do these questions reflect the theoretical perspective of the study?
My questions reflect my alignment with Indigenous epistemologies of narrative inquiry, critical pedagogy, and the ideals of the Chicano movement: self-determination, critical consciousness, and organic intellectualism. My goal is to focus on listening deeply to the life stories of my elders and their experiences in education, holistically, and schooling institutionally and understand the potential role of love, care, and relationships in our understanding of our world and relationships to education, schooling, and community activism and service.
APPENDIX C

Trustworthiness Response Rates

First set of responses matching codes to themes in quotes:

Authentic Care (Supportive Relationships)
5 responses

- Advocacy, encouragement, and/or support: 5 (100%)
- Confidence building: 5 (100%)
- Core relationships: 3 (80%)
- Mentorship: 4 (80%)
- Peer support: 0 (0%)

Critical Action
5 responses

- Chicano/a Moratorium: 1 (20%)
- Housing rights: 3 (80%)
- Social justice movement spaces (actions, events, organizations): 5 (100%)
- UFW & Farm Workers Movement: 0 (0%)
Second set of quotes, requesting that participants match themes to quotes:

Q1 “The Chicano movement and MEChA was really a step into part of the Civil Rights [movement], but in an authentic way, because it was our civil ri...your consciousness [and] allowed you to do things.”
5 responses

- Authentic Care (Supportive Relationships): 1 (20%)
- Critical Action: 3 (60%)
- Critical Reflection: 5 (100%)
- Gatekeeping (Racism, Sexism, Classism): 3 (60%)
- Maletas de CCW (Briefcases of Community Cultural Wealth): 2 (40%)
- Political Efficacy (Responsibility): 2 (40%)

Q2 “I don't remember exactly who...somebody approached me and said, “There’s a MEChA meeting tonight, do you want to come along?” “MEChA what t... it manifested, and what could be done about it.”
5 responses

- Authentic Care (Supportive Relationships): 1 (20%)
- Critical Action: 5 (100%)
- Critical Reflection: 3 (60%)
- Gatekeeping (Racism, Sexism, Classism): 0 (0%)
- Maletas de CCW (Briefcases of Community Cultural Wealth): 2 (40%)
- Political Efficacy (Responsibility): 3 (60%)
Q3 "At 15 years old I saw the power of exactly that, either you stepped up or you shut up...at 10 years old, we moved to southeast San Diego on 42nd ...s walking the talk and that's what you got to do." 5 responses

Q4 "I remember, in 12th grade, going into the counselor's office. And so, he asked me about what my college plans were. [laughter] And that discussion ...lass.' Yeah. So counselors make a huge difference.″ 5 responses
Q5 “I just assume I'm gonna go to college as did all my cousins, right? There was no question that we were all going to go on. And we were all politica...e, wait, what's going on? That was my junior year.”
5 responses

Q6 “The army offered me an early release if I got a letter of acceptance by at least two or three colleges in the area. So, my brother, Tony, went and... tutor me when I got there. So, he had me tutored.”
5 responses
Q7 “We were frickin young. Cesar was young. Cesar was what, 33 or something. We were in our 20s and we were kicking ass and taking names, but it di...the country were very sexist and were very racist.”
5 responses

Q8 “It was the richness of having the Mexicano side and then also having the Filipino side and the cultura and learning about that. My mother knew no...ybe we’re not as wealthy as we thought we were.”
5 responses
APPENDIX D

Code Book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third cycle coding</th>
<th>First and second cycle coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td><strong>Code</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic Care (&amp; CCW: Social, Navigational, Resistance capital)</td>
<td>Advocacy, encouragement, and/or support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting reciprocal relationships provide the basis for understanding, accessing, and learning in educational, community, and familial settings. Supportive relationships are key to belonging and connectedness, and are the antithesis to subtractive schooling (Davis, 2006; Kiefer et al., 2015; McNeely &amp; Falci, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999, p 61; van der Kolk, 2014). Navigational, social, and resistance capital (Yosso, 2005) can be seen to be present in many of these relationships.</td>
<td>Encouragement, support, and advocacy that helps elders pursue and gain access to educational and/or societal resources and institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence building</td>
<td>Experiences from parents, school and/or community members that build the elders confidence in their capacities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core relationships</td>
<td>Relationships that span many years, decades even, based on ongoing supportive relationships and many times shared values of community and social justice service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>Community/educational members that provide support through access to career, educational, and/or community opportunities; usually someone older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third cycle coding</td>
<td>First and second cycle coding</td>
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<td>--------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer supports</td>
<td>Peer interactions that support elders in their access and pursuit of higher education, and in their access to social justice movement spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Action</td>
<td>Social/political activism and action (broadly perceived) taken to improve the conditions of oppression and inequity experienced by individuals and communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicano Moratorium</td>
<td>Attendance/participation at the Chicano Moratorium in 1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing rights</td>
<td>Organizing and events centered around housing rights, including promotion of the Rumford Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social justice movement spaces: actions, events, organizations</td>
<td>Social justice movement spaces include actions, events, organizations, and spaces not necessarily included in the three codes: including MEChA, and other organizations, events, and action; this includes pickets, demonstrations, protests, organizing efforts, leafleting, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| UFW & Farm Workers Movement ("la Huelga") | Actions, events, and movement spaces centered around supporting farm
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third cycle coding</th>
<th>First and second cycle coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reflection</td>
<td>Analysis of social, political, and historical inequities and disparities, and a rejection of societal, economic, racial/ethnic, and/or gender inequities as impairing people’s agency and well-being (Watts et al., 2011). Also includes connections of lived experiences to broader understandings of historical, social, and ongoing oppression and inequities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to critical history</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectual dialogue</td>
<td>Mention of specific dialogue, study groups, Chicano Studies, MEChA, spaces that promoted dialogue regarding dialectical materialism and community development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived experiences</td>
<td>Connecting past lived experiences (personal or familial/communal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gatekeeping (racism, sexism, classism)</td>
<td>Gatekeeping, in hierarchical school structures, is the act of controlling and/or limiting access to educational (or social) opportunities and resources. Subtractive schooling is based on deficit forms of thinking, pushout factors, negative school climate/culture, and lack of caring relationships (Freire, 1970; Valenzuela, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maletas de CCW (Community Cultural Wealth)</td>
<td>These codes are based on the work of Yosso (2005), Núñez (1994), and Delgado Bernal (2002) in presenting cultural, community, and familial wealth as forms of social/cultural capital in educational and societal settings. Yosso and Garcia (2007) conceptualize the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third cycle coding</td>
<td>First and second cycle coding</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>overlap of the forms of CCW acting like a kaleidoscope, making new and different</td>
<td>conditions as parents[conditions as parents]</td>
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<tr>
<td>combinations of capital. I am adding in Núñez’s (1994) maleta metaphor as well,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>to provide a broad sense of the various forms of cultural/familial capital that</td>
<td>Familial</td>
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<td>the elders carried with them in their maletas of CCW. The goal of this theme is</td>
<td>Commitments to community; broad sense of kinship; community history, memory, and cultural</td>
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<tr>
<td>not to obscure the various forms of capital, but to honor their interrelated</td>
<td>intuition (Delgado Bernal, 2002); kinship helps us keep healthy connection to community and</td>
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<tr>
<td>nature in the manner in which the elders experienced and applied them in their</td>
<td>resources; related to the formation of our caring, coping, and providing consciousness, a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lives.</td>
<td>consciousness that is nurtured in and between families; values and concepts of community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>service, love, and respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>Intellectual, social, and academic capital, often acquired through learning more than one</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>language; students of color have multiple language, dialect, and communication skills and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>styles; includes academic knowledge in any and all languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maletas</td>
<td>Academic concepts,</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(academic)</td>
<td>like abecedario, números, y colores (aligns to Linguistic capital in CCW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigational</td>
<td>Skills and knowledge required to navigate institutions, especially institutions not historically created to serve people of color; “academic invulnerability”; resilience to survive and thrive stressful events, and then use these events as knowledge to improve performance &amp; functioning</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Skills and knowledge developed and employed in opposition to systemic oppression; passing on the knowledge of community cultural wealth and capital is an aspect of resistance capital; “legacy of resistance to subordination exhibited by Communities of Color”; includes oppositional behavior, and the knowledge of the structures of oppression and the drive to act to transform these structures (critical consciousness)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Political Efficacy (Responsibility)</td>
<td>Belief in the ability to enact social and/or political change, and the compulsion or commitment to create this type of change (Watts et al., 2011). The overlap between this</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact of actions</td>
<td>Recognition of solidarity and power created through organizing, collective action, and shared values</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theme and resistance and familial capital in Yosso’s (2005) CCW model is worth noting.</td>
<td>actions, and the political and social nature of their actions and interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Code</strong></td>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of responsibility to act</td>
<td>Examples of elders’ sense of responsibility to take action to improve their community and the world in the face of oppression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IRB Clearance

Date: 8-8-2023

IRB #: IRB-2023-16
Title: Testimonies of the elders of the Chicana/o community of San Diego
Creation Date: 9-10-2022
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Gabriel Nunez-Soria
Review Board: USD IRB
Sponsor:

Study History

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Key Study Contacts

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel Nunez-Soria</td>
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