

## *Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research*

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*In this article, Dolores Delgado Bernal outlines a Chicana feminist epistemological framework that is new to the field of educational research. This framework, which draws from the existing work of Chicana feminists, questions the notions of objectivity and a universal foundation of knowledge. A Chicana feminist epistemology is also grounded in the life experiences of Chicanas and involves Chicana research participants in analyzing how their lives are being interpreted, documented, and reported, while acknowledging that many Chicanas lead lives with significantly different opportunity structures than men or White women. As part of this framework, Delgado Bernal also introduces the concept of cultural intuition to name a complex process that acknowledges the unique viewpoints that many Chicana scholars bring to the research process. In the latter half of the article, she illustrates the importance of this framework in educational research by describing an oral history project on Chicana student resistance and activism as seen from this framework. Her conceptual discussion and research example together demonstrate that employing a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research is one means of resisting traditional paradigms that often distort or omit the experiences and knowledge of Chicanas.*

Schools . . . presuppose and legitimate particular forms of history, community, and authority. . . . The question is what and whose history, community, knowledge, and voice prevails? Unless this question is addressed, the issues of what to teach, how to teach, how to engage our students, and how to function as intellectuals becomes removed from the wider principles that inform such issues and practices. (Giroux, 1992, p. 91)

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Epistemological concerns in schools are inseparable from cultural hegemonic domination in educational research. The way educational research is conducted contributes significantly to what happens (or does not happen) in schools. In education, what is taught, how it is taught, who is taught, and whose fault it is when what is taught is not learned are often manifestations of what is considered the legitimate body of knowledge. For Chicanas, this is not merely an epistemological issue, but one of power, ethics, politics, and survival.<sup>1</sup> Employing a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research thus becomes a means to resist epistemological racism (Scheurich & Young, 1997) and to recover untold histories.

In this article, I describe a Chicana epistemological perspective by providing an example of my research, which places Chicanas as central subjects and provides a forum in which Chicanas speak and analyze their stories of school resistance and grassroots leadership. I draw from the strong traditions of Black, Native American, and Chicana feminists in an attempt to articulate a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research that reflects my history and that of the women I write about, a unique history that arises from the social, political, and cultural conditions of Chicanas. Most feminists of color recognize that gender, race, class, and sexual orientation—not gender alone—determine the allocation of power and the nature of any individual's identity, status, and circumstance (Collins, 1986; hooks, 1989; Hurtado, 1989; Pesquera & Segura, 1993). Therefore, "endarkened" feminist epistemologies are crucial, as they speak to the failures of traditional patriarchal and liberal educational scholarship and examine the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality.<sup>2</sup> Endarkened epistemologies in general, and Chicana feminism in particular, inform my perspective.

I first review briefly the failure of traditional mainstream educational scholarship and liberal feminist scholarship to provide a useful paradigm to examine the realities of working-class Chicana students. Second, I outline characteristics of a Chicana feminist epistemology by drawing from the work of Chicana scholars in various disciplines. Next, I use the work of Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990) to describe four sources of what I call "cultural intuition"—that is, the unique viewpoints Chicana scholars bring to the

<sup>1</sup> "Chicana" is a cultural and political identity composed of multiple layers and is often an identity of resistance that we consciously adopt later in life. "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 redeparture for dismantling historical conjunctures of crisis, confusion, political and ideological conflict . . ." (Alarcón, 1990, p. 250). The term Chicana is used to discuss women of Mexican origin and/or women who identify with this label. While many of the issues addressed in this article apply to Chicano males and other Latinas and Latinos, the focus here is on Chicanas.

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia Dillard (1997) proposes that "endarkened feminist ideology described as inherently cultural, positional, political, strategic, relational, and transformative is offered as possible criteria and catalyst for future educational research. In contrast to our common use of the term 'enlightening' as a way of expressing the having of new and important insights, we use the term endarkening to suggest epistemological roots of Black feminist thought which embody a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint" (pp. 3-4). I use endarkened in a similar way, and include not only Black feminist thought, but the feminist thought of all women of color.

research process. In doing so, I provide examples of my own cultural intuition as it relates to my research. In the last sections of this article, I clarify what I mean by a Chicana feminist epistemology and cultural intuition by describing an oral history study that examined a specific example of Chicana students' oppositional behavior as an act of school resistance and grassroots leadership (Delgado Bernal, 1997).<sup>3</sup> I demonstrate how, although not specifically articulated at the time of my study, my research was guided by my own cultural intuition and a Chicana feminist epistemology.

### The Failure of Liberal Educational Scholarship

Gender, ethnic, and class oppression contribute to the unique position of working-class Chicana students, yet liberal educational scholarship has failed to provide a useful paradigm to examine this intersection. For example, theories that attempt to understand how schools replicate the social relationships and attitudes needed to sustain the existing relations in a capitalist society have traditionally focused on White, working-class male students and ignored the role of female students (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The goal of school resistance literature has been to better understand the role of agency in the process of social reproduction; however, most early studies are also grounded in a traditional, patriarchal epistemology that focuses on White working-class males and does not fully explain the resistance of female students (MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1977). Theories of cognitive development (Piaget, 1952, 1954) still espoused in many teacher education and educational psychology programs are normed on the behaviors of White middle-class male students, and ignore or are misapplied to students of any other identities. Historically, traditional mainstream educational scholarship has not addressed the influence of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality on education policy and practice.

Most liberal feminist scholarship has also failed to provide a useful paradigm to examine the gender, ethnic, and class oppression that contribute to the unique positions of working-class Chicana students. Liberal feminist scholarship gives primacy to the domination of patriarchy without seriously addressing how institutional and cultural differences based on sexism, racism, and classism create a different range of choices and options for Chicanas (Zambrana, 1994). Another problematic position of liberal feminist scholarship is the notion that an analysis should begin with the commonalities of women's experience. By only looking at commonalities based on gender and omitting issues of race/ethnicity or class, one may overlook how institutional and cultural structures constrain and enable different groups of women differently. For example, very little is known about the educational

<sup>3</sup> In this study, school resistance was defined as students' acknowledging problems in oppressive educational settings and demanding changes.

mobility of women of color in general, and Chicanas in particular. Until recently, the educational paths of Chicanas were rarely explored. Today there are studies that have investigated the barriers to education experienced by Chicanas (Gándara, 1982; Segura, 1993; Vásquez, 1982), the marginality of Chicanas in higher education (Cuádriz, 1996), and in the college choice and resistance of Chicanas (Talavera-Bustillos, 1998). These studies go beyond the commonalities of women's experience and examine how family backgrounds, school practices, male privilege, and class and ethnic discrimination shape Chicanas' educational experiences and choices. More specifically, Denise Segura (1993) found that teachers' and counselors' actions channeled Chicanas into non-academic programs offering a lower quality of instruction, which restricted their range of life chances and options. Segura and other Chicana scholars address the shortcomings of liberal educational scholarship by embracing a Chicana feminist epistemology that examines Chicanas' experiences in relation to an entire structure of domination. Although it is impossible in this article to describe all the nuances of a Chicana epistemology or its evolution, in the next section I outline some of the defining characteristics of a Chicana feminist epistemology.

### A Chicana Feminist Epistemology

The relationship between methodology and a researcher's epistemological orientation is not always explicit, but is inevitably closely connected. Sandra Harding (1987) makes a distinction between epistemology, methodology, and method that is helpful in defining a Chicana feminist epistemology. "Method" generally only refers to techniques and strategies for collecting data. Although early feminist arguments defended qualitative approaches to studying and understanding women's lives over quantitative approaches, feminists today have reconsidered the false dichotomy of qualitative and quantitative methods (Maynard, 1994). Though quantitative methods are limited, both methods have been used in Chicana feminist research (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 1993; Flores-Ortiz, 1991; Pardo, 1990; Pesquera & Segura, 1990; Soldatenko, 1991), and as numerous educational researchers and feminists have pointed out, both methods have been used to objectify, exploit, and dominate people of color (Fine, 1994; Kelly, Burton, & Regan, 1994; Lather, 1991). A decision of whether to use qualitative or quantitative methods primarily depends on the topic and the research questions asked. Therefore, what becomes crucial in a Chicana feminist epistemology goes beyond quantitative versus qualitative methods, and lies instead in the methodology employed and in whose experiences and realities are accepted as the foundation of knowledge.

Methodology provides both theory and analysis of the research process, how research questions are framed, and the criteria used to evaluate research findings (Harding, 1987). Therefore, a Chicana methodology encom-

passes both the position from which distinctively Chicana research questions might be asked and the political and ethical issues involved in the research process. Liberal feminists have argued that what distinguishes feminist research from other forms of research is "the questions we have asked, the way we locate ourselves within our questions, and the purpose of our work" (Kelly, 1988, p. 6). However, these feminists (as well as mainstream scholars and Chicano male scholars) have too often failed to ask questions that analyze the interrelationships between classism, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression, especially from Chicanas' perspectives. Liberal feminist research has insisted "on its political nature and potential to bring about change in women's lives" (Maynard, 1994, p. 16), yet this research has not addressed the lives of Chicanas.

Instead, it has been Chicana scholars who have challenged the historical and ideological representation of Chicanas, relocated them to a central position in the research, and asked distinctively Chicana feminist research questions, all important characteristics of a Chicana feminist epistemology (e.g., Alarcón et al., 1993; de la Torre & Pesquera, 1993; Flores-Ortiz, 1993; Mora & Del Castillo, 1980; Pérez, 1993; Romero, 1989; Zavella, 1993). By shifting the analysis onto Chicanas and their race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality, scholars are able to address the shortcomings of traditional patriarchal and liberal feminist scholarship (Castañeda, 1993; Castillo, 1995; Pardo, 1998; Pérez, 1993; Ruiz, 1998; Trujillo, 1993), thereby giving voice to Chicana experiences and bringing change to their lives. For example, Yvette Flores-Ortiz (1998) points to the need for and begins the process of creating a Chicana psychology. She points out that "the theory and practice of psychology have subjugated Chicanas by measuring their development, personality, and mental health against a male white upper-class model" (p. 102). Even feminist psychology that challenges patriarchal assumptions subsumes Chicanas under the variable of gender, and leaves them appearing deficient or dysfunctional when compared to White middle-class women. Flores-Ortiz's theoretical framework for a Chicana psychology relocates Chicanas to a central position and is informed by her twenty years as a clinical psychologist and her experience of immigration to the United States. Lara Medina's (1998) research documents the voices of how twenty-two Chicanas learned to substitute "patriarchal religion with their own cultural knowledge, sensibilities, and sense of justice" (p. 190). Her research challenges the spiritual and ideological representation of Chicanas in religion by asking how Chicanas recreate traditional cultural practices and look to non-Western philosophies as part of an ongoing process of spirituality. These and other Chicana scholars embrace and further develop a Chicana feminist epistemology by researching the lives and experiences of Chicanas, and framing their research questions in ways that give voice to these women. Inés Hernández-Avila (1995) speaks candidly about the importance of this kind of scholarship, and though a Chicana feminist epistemology may be unsettling for those operat-

ing within traditional research epistemologies, she affirms its importance in the academy:

When I and other Native American women are central as subjects—as sovereign subjects—we often unsettle, disrupt, and sometimes threaten other people’s, particularly many white people’s, white scholars’, white women feminists’ sense of self as subjects. That may not have been my or our primary motivations, but it is necessarily inherent in Native women’s claiming our right to speak for ourselves. (p. 494)

Epistemology involves the nature, status, and production of knowledge (Harding, 1987). Therefore, a Chicana epistemology must be concerned with the knowledge about Chicanas—about who generates an understanding of their experiences, and how this knowledge is legitimized or not legitimized. It questions objectivity, a universal foundation of knowledge, and the Western dichotomies of mind versus body, subject versus object, objective truth versus subjective emotion, and male versus female. In this sense, a Chicana epistemology maintains connections to indigenous roots by embracing dualities that are necessary and complementary qualities, and by challenging dichotomies that offer opposition without reconciliation. This notion of duality is connected to Leslie Marmon Silko’s (1996) observation of a traditional Native American way of life: “In this universe there is no absolute good or absolute bad; there are only balances and harmonies that ebb and flow” (p. 64).

A Chicana feminist standpoint also acknowledges that most Chicanas lead lives with significantly different opportunity structures than men (including Chicano males) and White women. Patricia Hill Collins (1986) points out that Black feminists (similar to Chicana feminists) rarely describe the behavior of women of color without paying attention to the opportunity structures shaping their lives. Thus, adopting a Chicana feminist epistemology will expose human relationships and experiences that are probably not visible from a traditional patriarchal position or a liberal feminist standpoint. Within this framework, Chicanas become agents of knowledge who participate in intellectual discourse that links experience, research, community, and social change. Adela de la Torre and Beatriz Pesquera (1993) comment on this tradition, which places Chicanas as speaking subjects:

Rooted in the political climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s, our scholarship, like other currents of dissent, is a Chicana critique of cultural, political, and economic conditions in the United States. It is influenced by the tradition of advocacy scholarship, which challenges the claims of objectivity and links research to community concerns and social change. It is driven by a passion to place the Chicana, as speaking subject, at the center of intellectual discourse. (p. 1)

While acknowledging the diversity and complexity of Chicanas’ relationships and experiences, we must also recognize that, as an indigenous/

mestiza-based cultural group, our experiences are different from those of African Americans and Native Americans in the United States. A Chicana feminist epistemology is informed by and shares characteristics of endarkened feminist epistemologies (e.g., examinations of the influence of race, class, gender, and sexuality on opportunity structures), but is different from the "Black Feminist Thought" of Collins (1991) or the inter-tribal discourses of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (1996) and Marmon Silko (1996). A unique characteristic of a Chicana feminist epistemology is that it also validates and addresses experiences that are intertwined with issues of immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and the contradictions of Catholicism. In addition, through the process of naming dynamic identities and diverse cultural/historical experiences, these issues have been studied and written about by numerous Chicana feminists in a much different way than most Chicano male scholars (e.g., Alarcón, 1990; Anzaldúa, 1987; Castillo, 1995; Medina, 1998; Sandoval, 1998; Trujillo, 1998).

For example, concepts such as *mestiza*, *borderlands*, and *Xicanisma* are unique to a Chicana epistemology. A *mestiza* is literally a woman of mixed ancestry, especially of Native American, European, and African backgrounds. However, the term *mestiza* has come to mean a new Chicana consciousness that straddles cultures, races, languages, nations, sexualities, and spiritualities—that is, living with ambivalence while balancing opposing powers. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) states that "the new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures" (p. 79). Within a Chicana feminist epistemology, *borderlands* refers to the geographical, emotional, and/or psychological space occupied by *mestizas*. Anzaldúa believes that those individuals who are marginalized by society and are forced to live on the borderlands of dominant culture develop a sixth sense for survival. Therefore, Chicanas and other marginalized peoples have a strength that comes from their borderland experiences. *Xicanisma*, a term introduced by Ana Castillo (1995), describes Chicana feminisms that are developed from and carried out to "our work place, social gatherings, kitchens, bedrooms, and society in general" (p. 11).

Rather than use an epistemological framework that is based solely on the diverse social histories of other women of color (e.g., Black feminist thought) or the social history of the dominant race (e.g., liberal feminist thought), a Chicana feminist epistemology offers a standpoint that borrows from endarkened feminist epistemologies and is grounded in the unique life experiences of Chicanas. For example, in educational research it is important to remember that Chicana students experience school from multiple dimensions, including their skin color, gender, class, and English-language proficiency. Castillo (1995) reflects on the trauma a Chicana may experience in regard to bilingualism:

She was educated in English and learned it is the only acceptable language in society, but Spanish was the language of her childhood, family, and community. She may not be able to rid herself of an accent; society has denigrated her first language. By the same token, women may also become anxious and self-conscious in later years if they have no or little facility in Spanish. (p. 39)

Bilingualism is often seen as un-American and is considered a deficit and an obstacle to learning. Prohibiting Spanish-language use among Mexican schoolchildren is a social philosophy and a political tool that has been and continues to be used to justify school segregation and to maintain a colonized relationship between Mexicans and the dominant society (Delgado Bernal, in press). In my own research, I learned how Vickie Castro, a Los Angeles Unified School District board member, was physically separated from peers as a young girl because of the devaluation of Spanish:

I do recall my first day of school. And I did not speak English. . . . I just recall being frightened and I recall not knowing what to do and I recall being told to just sit over there in the corner. And there was one other little girl and we were just scared out of our minds. (Castro, 1994, pp. 2, 3)

Historically, many Chicana and Chicano students have been segregated and stigmatized, with their perceived language deficiency used as justification. Students today continue to be segregated based on their limited English proficiency. In June 1998, California voters passed Proposition 227, the English Language Education for Immigrant Children initiative. The initiative does away with all bilingual education and English-language development programs that do not meet its rigid 180-day English-only approach.<sup>4</sup> It promotes stigmatization by allowing local schools "to place in the same classroom English learners of different ages but whose degree of English proficiency is similar."

To ground one's research within the experiences of Chicanas means that we deconstruct the historical devaluation of Spanish, the contradictions of Catholicism, the patriarchal ideology that devalues women, and the scapegoating of immigrants. Indeed, the everyday lives of Chicanas demonstrate that they are often at the center of these struggles against cultural domination, class exploitation, sexism, and racism. A Chicana feminist epistemology is therefore grounded in the rich historical legacy of Chicanas' resistance and translates into a pursuit of social justice in both research and scholarship.

<sup>4</sup> Proposition 227 requires that "all children in California public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English." This requirement counters educational research that demonstrates that English immersion is one of the least effective ways to teach children with limited English proficiency the English language. The proposition also requires local schools to place students in English immersion classrooms for up to one year, based on their degree of English proficiency (Article 2). Parental exception waivers for the English immersion requirement may only be granted to parents who personally visit the school to apply and whose children meet certain requirements, including children who already know English, are over ten years old, or have special needs (Article 3).



A Chicana feminist epistemology that is based on the lives of Chicanas and is dedicated to achieving justice and equality combats what James Joseph Scheurich and Michelle Young (1997) call epistemological racism. As they define it, epistemological racism arises out of the social history and culture of the dominant race and is present in the current range of traditional research epistemologies—positivism to postmodernism and poststructuralism. Traditional research epistemologies reflect and reinforce the social history of the dominant race, which has negative results for people of color in general and students and scholars of color in particular. A Chicana feminist epistemology arises out of a unique social and cultural history, and demonstrates that our experiences as Mexican women are legitimate, appropriate, and effective in designing, conducting, and analyzing educational research. A Chicana cultural standpoint that is located in the interconnected identities of race/ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality and within the historical and contemporary context of oppressions and resistance can also be the foundation for a theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) that many Chicana scholars bring to their research.

#### Four Sources of Cultural Intuition

The disciplines of Black and other ethnic studies and women's studies have opened the way for multiple theoretical and epistemological readings in the fields of educational research. A major contribution of these fields is that feminist and scholars of color (and those of us who identify as both) have argued that members of marginalized groups have unique viewpoints on our own experiences as a whole. (Dillard, 1997, p. 5)

I argue that Chicana researchers have unique viewpoints that can provide us with a perspective I call "cultural intuition." A Chicana researcher's cultural intuition is similar in concept to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) "theoretical sensitivity"—a personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data. Their construct of theoretical sensitivity indicates an understanding of the subtle meanings of data, and that "one can come to the research situation with varying degrees of sensitivity depending on one's previous reading and experience with or relevant to the data" (p. 41). They argue that theoretical sensitivity actually comes from four major sources: one's personal experience, the existing literature, one's professional experience, and the analytical research process itself. Having outlined in the last section important characteristics of a Chicana feminist epistemology, I propose that these four sources contribute to Chicana researchers' cultural intuition and are the foundation of a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research. However, my concept of cultural intuition is different from theoretical sensitivity because it extends one's personal experience to include collective experience and community memory, and points to the importance of participants' engaging in the analysis of

data. In the next sections, I briefly describe the four sources and how each contributes to my cultural intuition as a Chicana researcher. The sources do not include all possibilities, yet they provide a framework that facilitates an understanding of cultural intuition and therefore a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research. My hope is that this framework helps demonstrate what forces shape a Chicana feminist epistemology without limiting the nuances that must be addressed in future work.

### *Personal Experience*

First, one's personal experience represents a very important source of cultural intuition and is derived from the background that we each bring to the research situation. As many feminists contend, the researcher is a subject in her research and her personal history is part of the analytical process (Maynard, 1994; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Through past life experiences, individuals acquire an understanding of certain situations and why and what might happen in a particular setting under certain conditions. This often implicit knowledge helps us to understand events, actions, and words, and to do so more confidently than if one did not bring these particular life experiences into the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For example, my life experiences as a Chicana, a student, and a participant in protest politics such as campus and community demonstrations and boycotts helped me to understand and analyze my data. The oral histories I collected in my study of Chicana student activists (Delgado Bernal, 1997) were not heard as merely random stories, but as testimonies of authority, preemption, and strength that demonstrate women's participation and leadership in school resistance. In other words, my personal experiences provided insight and a cultural intuition from which to draw upon during my research.

However, personal experience does not operate in a vacuum. To extend Strauss and Corbin's (1990) notion of personal experience, I argue that personal experience goes beyond the individual and has lateral ties to family and reverse ties to the past. Personal experience is partially shaped by collective experience and community memory, and as Marmon Silko (1996) states, "an individual's identity will extend from the identity constructed around the family" (p. 52). Through the experiences of ancestors and elders, Chicanas and Chicanos carry knowledge of conquest, loss of land, school and social segregation, labor market stratification, assimilation, and resistance. Community knowledge is taught to youth through legends, *corridos*,<sup>5</sup> storytelling, behavior, and most recently through the scholarship in the field of Chicana and Chicano Studies. As a child, my own family experience included learning through my grandmothers' stories, which were sprinkled with reli-

<sup>5</sup> The *corrido* is a Mexican ballad and is one means of oral tradition in which history and culture are preserved and shared through song. Corridos often tell stories of the struggles and resistance of Mexican people.

gion and mysticism, and my father's stories about the urban challenges of his childhood. As an adult, I began interviewing and recording the stories and knowledge that my family members shared with me. This knowledge that is passed from one generation to the next can help us survive in everyday life by providing an understanding of certain situations and explanations about why things happen under certain conditions. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) discusses the unique knowledge that comes from the intertwining of collective experience and intuition in African American communities:

The development of this understanding is not rational—it comes from “the gut”; it is based on experience and intuition. There is the idea that this suspicion is passed down from the ancestors who teach the next generation the subtle dangers—through act and deed—who instruct their offspring in how to walk through treacherous minefields, who show them jungle posture. (p. 60)

Lawrence-Lightfoot writes of the “ancestral wisdom” that is taught from one generation to the next, and calls it “a powerful piece of our legacy” that is “healthy” and “necessary for survival.” Likewise, Marmon Silko (1996) writes of how the Pueblo people have depended on the collective memory of many generations “to maintain and transmit an entire culture, a worldview complete with proven strategies for survival” (p. 30). For Chicana researchers, ancestral wisdom, community memory, and intuition influence one's own personal experiences. And it is personal experience that provides one source of cultural intuition from which to draw upon during research.

#### *Existing Literature*

Another source of cultural intuition is the existing literature on a topic. Technical literature includes research studies and theoretical or philosophical writings, while nontechnical literature refers to biographies, public documents, personal documents, and cultural studies writings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Having an understanding of this information provides some insight into what is going on with the events and circumstances we are studying. The technical literature may be used to stimulate theoretical sensitivity by providing concepts and relationships that are checked against actual data. For example, in my study of Chicana student activists, my readings of endarkened feminist theories, school resistance theories, and the socio-historical politics of Chicano schooling offered me a particular cultural intuition into the phenomenon I was studying by providing possible ways of approaching and interpreting data. My readings of descriptive materials, such as newspaper articles, also enhanced my cultural intuition by making me sensitive to what to look for in my data and helping me generate interview questions.

#### *Professional Experience*

One's professional experience can be yet another source of cultural intuition. Years of practice in a particular field often provides an insider view of

how things work in that field (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This knowledge, whether explicit or implicit, is taken into the research and helps one to understand differently than if one did not have this experience. My experiences as a bilingual teacher, a teacher educator, and my work with education programs in Latino community-based organizations have all contributed to the way I understand and analyze my data in educational research on Chicana students. Indeed, Strauss and Corbin (1990) would argue that due to my professional experience I can move into the educational environment and gain insight into the lives of Chicana students more quickly than someone who has never worked in a school setting with Chicana students: "The more professional experience, the richer the knowledge base and insight available to draw upon in the research" (p. 42).

### *Analytical Research Process*

Finally, the analytical research process itself provides an additional source of cultural intuition: "Insight and understanding about a phenomenon increase as you interact with your data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 43). This comes from making comparisons, asking additional questions, thinking about what you are hearing and seeing, sorting data, developing a coding scheme, and engaging in concept formation. As one idea leads to another, we are able to look more closely at the data and bring meaning to the research. For example, in my study of Chicana student activists, my increased awareness of concepts, meanings, and relationships were influenced by my interaction with the interview data (e.g., transcribing, reading transcriptions, listening to taped interviews, and coding interviews). In addition, my awareness was also increased by including the women I interviewed in the analytical process of making sense of the data.

Extending Strauss and Corbin's analytical research process, I suggest that including Chicana participants in an interactive process of data analysis contributes to the researcher's cultural intuition. Pizarro (1998) calls for "a new methodological approach to research in Chicana/o communities" (p. 57) that includes participants as equals at all stages of the research. "This requires that researchers and participants deconstruct the epistemology of the participants and use it as the basis for the entire project" (p. 74). In the latter half of this article, I describe in detail how using a focus group strategy allowed me to incorporate the epistemological perspectives of the Chicanas I interviewed. This process allowed me to go beyond a simple feedback loop, and bring meaning to the data based on an interactive process.

Of course, researchers must be careful to not let any of the four sources block them from seeing the obvious or assume everyone's personal and professional experiences are equal to theirs. Early in my research, I learned that the women in my study were very diverse and the life experiences they shared with each other were very different from my own personal experiences. For

example, all eight of these women shared the following similarities: they were second- or third-generation Chicanas, first-generation college students, grew up in working-class neighborhoods on the east side of Los Angeles, and were student activists in 1968. As a third-generation Chicana and first-generation college student, I grew up in the suburbs of Kansas City, was in preschool in 1968, and was not introduced to political activism until my early twenties. Therefore, my personal experiences did not automatically designate me an "insider." I, like any researcher, had to be concerned with how I was approaching and interpreting my subject's stories of activism. As hooks (1989) states, we have to consider the purpose and use of our research:

When we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination. (p. 43)

While I do not argue for an essentialist notion of who is capable of conducting research with various populations based on personal experiences, I do believe that many Chicana scholars achieve a sense of cultural intuition that is different from that of other scholars. Sofía Villenas (1996) indirectly addresses this issue as she examines her own emerging and changing identity as a Chicana researcher. In doing so, she asks what constitutes an insider to a community of research participants and asserts that it is based on "collective experiences and a collective space" at multiple levels, rather than on a singular identity (p. 722). Villenas explains how her practice in the field as a Chicana educational ethnographer cannot be explicated in the same manner as White, middle-class researchers' relationships with their research participants. She therefore argues for a process by which Chicanas "become the subjects and the creators of knowledge" (p. 730), essentially advocating for the use of a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research.

Likewise, Dillard (1997) speaks of cultural intuition in her discussion of theoretical and conceptual standpoints of Black women educational researchers. She poses that the insights from being and living as African American researchers opens up possibilities for the research community to see phenomena in new ways. And she views these standpoints of Black women as achieved rather than inherent in one's singular identity:

While we will argue vehemently that Black women as a cultural group "theorize" and embody extensive life experiences which, while diverse, shape a coherent body, what we advance here is the notion that, in educational research, such theoretical and conceptual standpoints are achieved; they are not inherent in one's race, class, sex, or other identities. (pp. 5-6)

A Chicana researcher's cultural intuition is achieved and can be nurtured through our personal experiences (which are influenced by ancestral wisdom, community memory, and intuition), the literature on and about Chicanas, our professional experiences, and the analytical process we engage in

when we are in a central position of our research and our analysis. Thus, cultural intuition is a complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective, and dynamic.

Having defined cultural intuition and a Chicana feminist epistemology, I now attempt to illustrate what these concepts mean in educational research. In order to provide a concrete example of this conceptual discussion, the next section describes a research project I worked on over several years. As I describe the oral history project, it is important to point out that I only became attentive to my own cultural intuition and the epistemology I brought to the research after I completed the project and had time to reflect on the research process. Though my theoretical framework was shaped by the school resistance theories in the sociology of education literature and interdisciplinary critical feminist theories, my self-reflections have allowed me to (re)interpret my epistemological framework from a Chicana feminist standpoint.<sup>6</sup> I now realize that the way I asked my research questions, designed the methodology, collected the data, and arrived at conclusions was greatly influenced by my cultural intuition. Even where the individual and focus group interviews were held, and my need to include the women in the data analysis process was unknowingly driven by a shared epistemology we all brought to the research. Therefore, it was both my cultural intuition and my epistemological orientation that served to resist dominant epistemologies and recover an ignored history of Chicana students.

### Resistance and Recovery through an Oral History Research Project

In 1968, people witnessed a worldwide rise in student movements in countries such as France, Italy, Mexico, and the United States. In March of that year, over ten thousand students walked out of schools in East Los Angeles to protest the inferior quality of their education. The event, which came to be known as the East L.A. Blowouts, focused national attention on the K-12 schooling of Chicanas and Chicanos and also set a precedent for school boycotts throughout the Southwest (Acuña, 1988). Though their stories are often excluded in written historical accounts, my research demonstrates that Chicanas played crucial leadership roles in these mass demonstrations and were intimately involved in the struggles for educational justice. As an educational researcher and a Chicana, I was interested in the women's voices and

<sup>6</sup> My self-reflections have been greatly influenced by earlier and recent Chicana scholars and writers. Unfortunately, much of the early work by Chicanas is difficult to find and has often gone unrecognized—indicative of the Eurocentric culture of academia. In the 1980s there was a reemergence of Chicana scholarship that not only repositioned class and ethnicity in relationship to gender, but also addressed the many aspects of sexuality. In the last few years the work of several progressive Chicana scholars has been particularly influential in helping me develop an articulation of Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research (Castillo, 1995; de la Torre & Pesquera, 1993; Hurtado, 1996; Pardo, 1998; Ruiz, 1998; Trujillo, 1998).

their unique experiences that had previously been omitted from the diverse accounts of the Blowouts. My historical-sociological case study, informed by my own achieved cultural intuition and a Chicana feminist epistemology, posed the following research question: How does pivoting the analysis onto key Chicana participants provide an alternative history of the 1968 Blowouts? This research question itself is distinctively Chicana, especially when compared to previous research that has examined the Blowouts. Chicano and White males have studied the event from a perspective of protest politics (Puckett, 1971), a spontaneous mass protest (Negrete, 1972), internal colonialism (Muñoz, 1973), the Chicano student movement (Gómez-Quíñones, 1978), and a political and social development of the wider Chicano movement (Rosen, 1973). Indeed, none of their historical accounts locate Chicanas in a central position in the research or address the many factors that restricted or enabled Chicana students to participate. My study, in contrast, examined how women interpret their participation in the Blowouts nearly thirty years later, and how their participation is important to an understanding of transformational resistance, grassroots leadership, and an alternative history of the Blowouts (Delgado Bernal, 1997, 1998).

To gain new perspectives and interpretations of the 1968 Blowouts and Chicana school resistance, my primary methods of data collection were in-depth, semistructured oral history interviews with eight key female participants from the Blowouts, a two-hour semistructured focus group interview, and phone interviews. Following a network sampling procedure (Gándara, 1995), I interviewed eight women who were identified by other female participants or resource individuals as “key participants” or “leaders” in the Blowouts. In scheduling these interviews, I allowed ample time, realizing that the length of each interview would vary. The interviews took place when and where it was most convenient for each woman—in their homes, their mother’s home, or at work. I created an interview protocol with open-ended questions in order to elicit multiple levels of data that would address my research questions (See Appendix 1). Though the interview protocol was used as a guide, I realized that as the women spoke of very personal experiences, a less-structured approach allowed their voices and ways of knowing to come forth. I also asked probing questions to follow up on responses that were unclear or possibly incomplete in order to understand how the women interpreted the reasons and ways in which they participated in the Blowouts.

The oral histories were not merely heard as random stories, but as testimonies of authority, preemption, and strength that demonstrate women’s participation and leadership in school resistance. My life experiences as a Chicana provided a source of cultural intuition that helped me both to listen to and to hear the interviewees. For example, in six of the eight individual interviews, religion was discussed in terms of Catholic values, contradictions of

Catholicism, or spirituality. I understood Rosalinda Méndez González's feelings of disillusionment and betrayal when she passionately talked to me about the contradictions of her Catholic upbringing and the influence it had on her activism. Having been exposed to these contradictions myself, and still identifying as a "cultural Catholic" (Medina, 1998), I heard her story as a very personal one. She remembers:

And then from my Catholic upbringing we were taught about compassion and charity, and how Jesus healed the ill and took care of the poor, and all of that. . . . And I go to college and find out that every religion in the world claims the same thing, that they're all the only true one, and that all of them have committed atrocities in the name of God, in the name of their religion, that the Catholic church tortured people and killed people in the name of God. (Méndez González, 1995, pp. 14, 78)

After conducting individual oral history interviews, I corresponded with each woman twice. The first time I sent a complete copy of the interview transcript with a letter describing their role in the analysis of the data. The following is a portion of that letter:

I've decided to send transcriptions back to the women I've interviewed so that you each have a chance to see my initial interpretation. I believe it's important that you have an opportunity to reflect and respond to what you said in the interview. This will not only strengthen my analysis, but it allows each woman to interact with and "dialogue" with her own interview. The interview transcription with comments and questions in the margins is the one I'd like for you to review. These comments and questions are specific to areas that I'm curious or not quite clear about (that is, other women commented on the same issue, or I've since thought of a related issue). If possible I'd love for you to respond in writing on the transcription and/or a separate page. Please bring this copy and your comments with you to the focus group interview. At that time, we can further address any areas you'd like to elaborate on or additional questions I may have. The second clean copy is for you to hold on to—an interesting keepsake. (see Appendix 2)

Closer to our meeting, I wrote the women informing them where we would be holding the group interview and the agenda for our meeting. Here is a portion of that letter:

Well, the date of our group interview is drawing near and I wanted to send you this update. On Saturday, February 17th we will hold our event in East Los Angeles' Self-Help Graphics from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. Tomás Benitez, assistant director of Self-Help (and Mita Cuaron's husband) was able to secure space for us in the art gallery. The art gallery will be particularly special given the beautiful exhibit, *La Vida Indígena*, and the fact that the interview will be filmed. . . .

The agenda for the actual group interview will follow a semi-structured format. That is, based on your responses in the individual interviews, I will identify a few topics I would like to ask the group to respond to. In addition, I would also like each of you to bring up any blowout-related issues or events that are



particularly interesting to you. . . . I'm not as interested in reconstructing the "Truth" of what happened as I am interested in your individual experiences and their similarities and differences. (see Appendix 3)

When we met for the two-hour focus group, all but one of the women had read and reflected on their transcripts prior to the group meeting, and three of them returned their transcript with responses to my queries actually written in the margins. Their comments ranged from yes/no responses and name spelling corrections to several emotional sentences elaborating on their activism and a paragraph explaining why someone considered herself a leader. The written reflections were of course helpful to my analysis, as they provided me with additional information and clarified specific points from the individual interviews. The impact of the written reflections, however, was small in comparison to the lessons I gained from the subsequent group dialogue. My real interest in conducting a focus group interview was to incorporate the explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that might have been less accessible otherwise (Krueger, 1988).

I now realize that the focus group process seemed natural to me partially because of the cultural intuition I brought to the research project. I was used to my grandmothers' storytelling in which absolute "Truth" was less important to me than hearing and recording their life experiences. It was my familiarity with and respect for ancestral wisdom taught from one generation to the next and a regard for collective knowledge that allowed me to approach the research project with complete respect for each woman's testimony of school resistance. Indeed, the women shared their community knowledge through a form of storytelling in which all the women talked about their resistance by invoking stories about their families, quoting their parents, and mentioning where their parents were born. To make a point about democratic ideals and the right to question authority, Rosalinda contrasted her upbringing and socialization with that of her mother's a generation earlier:

I remember when I was a kid growing up in Texas and going to school and being taught these things about democracy and how different my response was from my mother's response. My mother was born and raised in Mexico, in Chihuahua. And if you spoke up against the government, the next day your body would be found. . . . And she was terrified of standing up for her rights or speaking against any authority figure, and that included teachers. (Focus Group Interview, 1996)

The interaction among the participants also produced new information and differing viewpoints. For instance, several women were reminded of something based on another woman's recollections and made comments such as, "I was listening to Mita talk and I hadn't thought about it till right now . . .". The group interaction also allowed them to compare and contrast their experiences with each other. Three of the women come from politically

progressive families who had been concerned with justice struggles for many years, and one of them stated, "I was born into this family of struggle, protest, rebellion, [and] . . . equal rights." In contrast, the other women spoke of coming from a more "traditional family." Whatever their personal family experiences were, they all agreed that during the time of their activism there was a knowledge or "gospel" in Mexican homes in East Los Angeles that did not question the Church or schoolteachers' absolute authority: "The church, whatever they say and the teachers, whatever they say." The women's interactions were a form of storytelling in which they were able to compare and contrast their memories and experiences. Their group dialogue also provided me with invaluable lessons in relation to the data analysis process.

### Lessons from the Focus Group

Prior to the focus group interview, I sorted data by integrating key themes that emerged from the women's individual oral histories with the existing literature. During the focus group, I presented four themes related to the women's school resistance and asked them to respond to my preliminary interpretations of how these themes shaped their student activism: dual identity, patriotism, dimensions of leadership, and awareness/agency. Presenting my preliminary findings to the women was one way of including their knowledge and a means of avoiding "authenticity of interpretation and description under the guise of authority" (Villenas, 1996, p. 713). Indeed, my cultural intuition and the women's knowledge helped shape my final analysis.

For example, I was originally attempting to interpret the women's behavior within the common duality of "good girl" and "bad girl" discussed and critiqued by a number of Chicana authors (Anzaldúa, 1987; Castillo, 1995; Hurtado, 1996; Trujillo, 1993). These imposed constructions of Chicanas' identity are couched in women's sexuality and in what is perceived as acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The two polarized roles of Virgin Mary and whore exemplify the ultimate "good girl" and "bad girl." Aida Hurtado (1996) states that these are "social locations that are given cultural space to exist" (p. 50). During the individual interviews the women talked about their "good schoolgirl" behavior in terms of being "college-bound," "real straight-laced," "a star student," "head cheerleader," and in the "goody-goody camp." Yet in the same breath they discussed their very bold resistant behavior that was considered "bad activist student" behavior and deviant by most of society. The women wrote articles for community activist newspapers regarding the poor conditions in their schools, stood up to accusations of being communists, provided testimony about the inferior quality of their education to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and were arrested by police and expelled from school because of their activism. Because shifting from "deviant

(and therefore defiant) locations . . . to culturally sanctioned locations is . . . difficult" (Hurtado, 1996, p. 50), I was interested in how they were able to move between these social locations. Therefore, I asked the women how the social, cultural, and sexual realities of their lives were manifested in the duality of "good schoolgirl" and "bad activist student."

The women expressed a belief that my preliminary analysis was slightly off target. In fact, they believed that rather than moving between these two social locations, they were engaging in the same type of behaviors as "good schoolgirls" and as "bad activist students." It was the perceptions of their behaviors that changed. Their good schoolgirl behavior of speaking up in class, asking questions, and offering leadership to sanctioned student organizations was acceptable behavior (and even encouraged). However, when they practiced these same behaviors during the school boycotts, they were perceived as deviant. Their behavior had not changed—others' interpretation of their behavior had. In other words, they helped me to see that their "good schoolgirl" behavior that was so openly rewarded by good grades, student council positions, and respect from teachers was the exact same behavior that was unfairly punished when they used it to protest the inferior quality of their education. Their insight contributed to my reorganization of themes and altered my preliminary analysis.

In another case, the women confirmed my preliminary analysis regarding the complexity of gender's influence on their different dimensions of leadership. For example, during the oral history interviews, women made statements ranging from "Nobody ever said that you couldn't do this because you were a girl" to "I know that the females were not the leaders," and from "Being a female was not an issue, it was just a non-issue" to "I'm sure I knew that there was sexism involved . . . but we probably didn't talk about it." During the focus group interview the influence of gender continued to be perceived in a somewhat nebulous way. The diversity of statements found within interviews, between interviews, and at the focus group interview led me to conclude that there was no one distinct and precise viewpoint on gender's influence. Rather, the women's individual and collective thoughts on gender represent the indeterminate and complex influence of gender within a structure of patriarchy—a system of domination and unequal stratification based on gender.

Including these women in the analytical process of making sense of the data helped shape my research findings and was an important source of my own cultural intuition. Just as importantly, their participation in this process made them not just subjects of research, but also creators of knowledge—an important characteristic of a Chicana feminist epistemology. Thus, contrary to patriarchal historical accounts of the 1968 East L.A. School Blowouts, a Chicana feminist standpoint exposes human relationships and experiences that were previously invisible.

## Conclusion

The issue of subjectivity represents a realization of the fact that who we are, how we act, what we think, and what stories we tell become more intelligible within an epistemological framework that begins by recognizing existing hegemonic histories. . . . [Thus], uncovering and reclaiming of subjugated knowledges is one way to lay claim to alternative histories. (Mohanty, 1994, p. 148)

How educational research is conducted significantly contributes to what and whose history, community, and knowledge is legitimated. A Chicana feminist epistemology addresses the failure of traditional research paradigms that have distorted or omitted the history and knowledge of Chicanas. Though similar endarkened feminist epistemologies exist in specific segments of women's studies and ethnic studies, acknowledging a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research is virtually unprecedented. And yet, a disproportionate number of all Chicana and Chicano Ph.D.s receive their doctoral degrees in the field of education (Solorzano, 1995). Without an articulated Chicana epistemology or an acknowledgment of cultural intuition within the field of education, these scholars are restricted by cultural hegemonic domination in educational research.

Therefore, one of the major contributions of this article is an emerging articulation of a new epistemology in educational research. This epistemology gives license to both Chicana and Chicano education scholars to uncover and reclaim their own subjugated knowledge. It also allows them to place some trust in their own cultural intuition so that they move beyond traditional areas of research situated in existing paradigms that overlook the particular educational experiences of Chicanas or Chicanos. To illustrate this point, consider the experience of Chicano scholar Octavio Villalpando when he conducted his doctoral dissertation research. Villalpando's (1996) investigation yielded very significant quantitative evidence demonstrating that Chicana and Chicano college students benefit substantially from affiliating primarily with other Chicanas and Chicanos during college. These benefits were particularly noteworthy for Chicano students, spanning a range of several important post-college outcomes. Although these are significant findings in the field of higher education, they could not be completely explained by preexisting higher education paradigms. Villalpando's analysis might have been taken further had he been able to access his cultural intuition (Villalpando, personal communication, 1998). A Chicana feminist epistemology gives Chicana and Chicano education scholars some freedom to interpret their research findings outside of existing paradigms, and hopefully develop and propose policies and practices that better meet the needs of Chicanas and Chicanos.

Given the significant and growing Chicana and Chicano student population, particularly in the Southwest, it certainly is not my intent to suggest an end to all educational research on Chicanas that is not conducted by Chicana scholars. Indeed, I hope that others will read this article and think

about their own epistemological framework and that of the Chicana and Chicano communities they research. Borrowing from a Chicana epistemology may help all scholars to raise more appropriate research questions and avoid asking questions based on a cultural deficit model or incorrect stereotypes. Chicana sociologist Mary Pardo (1998) provides an insightful example of a White woman colleague who asked an inappropriate question based on stereotypes rather than the knowledge base of the East Los Angeles Chicanas she was reporting on. During Pardo's research, she and her colleague were having a meal with women from Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA), a group of working-class community activists. Her colleague asked the group how they might mobilize around a hypothetical case of false imprisonment of an alleged youth gang member. Pardo describes why silence engulfed the room:

Her question about the alleged gang member reflected the media assumption that gang activity constituted the most significant problem facing Eastside Los Angeles residents. But the women from MELA were long-time, stable home owners, most of whose children had already graduated from college. They had . . . directed collective efforts at getting summer jobs for youth. . . . Rebuilding a neighborhood park and opposing the prison and toxic-waste incinerator consumed most of their time. (p. 12)

A new epistemological approach in educational research has the potential to avoid these type of inappropriate questions and focus on questions that may expose important school issues and community experiences that are otherwise not visible.

A major tenet of cultural intuition and a Chicana feminist epistemology is the inclusion of Chicana research participants in the analysis of data. This allows Chicana participants—whether they are students, parents, teachers, or school administrators—to be speaking subjects who take part in producing and validating knowledge. A focus group interview is one data collection strategy that helps Chicana scholars and non-Chicana scholars include the epistemology of their research participants in the analysis of data. The example I provide in this article demonstrates how focus groups can be paired with an oral history methodology to include Chicana participants in the interpretation of data. In addition, it seems that focus groups can be effectively used with other qualitative and quantitative research methods and methodologies such as school ethnography, student interviews, survey research, and classroom observations. In the future, we must look for additional strategies that provide opportunities for Chicanas and Chicanos to participate in the construction of knowledge and research that is dedicated to achieving social justice. Hopefully, "an analysis of the Chicana/o experience can . . . assist us in forging a new epistemological approach to academic life and can help us uncover a methodology that is true to and helpful in the struggle of these people as it 'creates' a new knowledge base" (Pizarro, 1998, p. 72).

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## APPENDIX 1

### *Sample of Interview Questions*

1. Do you remember what it was that moved you to initially get involved in the Blowouts?
2. Specifically, in what ways were you involved in the planning and implementation of the Blowouts or its aftermath?
3. Think about your mindset as a high school student (or college student), how aware would you say you were of the school situation and the political issues of the Blowouts?
4. In retrospect, how much do you think your participation in the Blowouts was motivated by an awareness of inequities, a desire to change a dominant schooling structure, the excitement of the movement, and/or something else?
5. With hindsight, what do you think the initial stimulus was for your awareness of school problems? (Were you ever a participant at Camp Hess Kramer?)
6. Do you think there was anything special or different about the reasons or ways that male and female students got involved in the Blowouts?
7. Were you involved in organizing tasks, getting different groups of people to work together, and/or in developing a political consciousness in other students? Can you describe this involvement?
8. How aware or involved were you with any of the community newspapers, such as *La Raza* or *Inside Eastside*? Did you write, edit, distribute, or read any of these newspapers? If yes, how frequently?
9. Would you say you offered some type of leadership? If yes, how would you describe that leadership? If no, can you explain why you don't consider your participation, leadership?
10. In retrospect, did sexism or patriarchy shape your involvement? If so, how? Did it also shape your involvement in a positive (negative) way?
11. Was your awareness of gender inequities a motivation to participate in the Blowouts, or would you say it was more an issue of race, class, or something else?
12. Did your parents (or home life) restrict or encourage your involvement? Can you describe how you were restricted or encouraged? Do you remember the ways in which the involvement of your girlfriends was restricted or encouraged?
13. Did your religious beliefs or those of your family restrict or encourage your participation in any way?
14. Can you talk about the involvement of "Mexicano" or "Spanish Speaking Students" as they were called then?
15. In a lot of social movements there are sometimes sentiments or actions that could be classified as conservative; in your opinion, did you see any

of that in connection with the Blowouts? (that is, During the 1920 and 30's, union movements purposely excluded Mexican and Black workers; the early feminist movements ignored women of color and working class women.)

## APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Cassandra:

I'm glad we connected last week and were able to talk. I'm especially happy that you'll be able to make it to the focus group interview on Saturday, February 17 at Self-Help Graphics. By the end of the month, I should be sending a letter out to everyone that includes the time, agenda, and directions to our meeting. In the meantime, I wanted to send you copies of your interview transcription.

I've decided to send transcriptions back to the women I've interviewed so that you each have a chance to see my initial interpretation. I believe it's important that you have an opportunity to reflect and respond to what you said in the interview. This will not only strengthen my analysis, but it allows each woman to interact with and "dialogue" with her own interview.

The interview transcription with comments and questions in the margins is the one I'd like for you to review. These comments and questions are specific to areas that I'm curious or not quite clear about (that is other women commented on the same issue, or I've since thought of a related issue). If possible I'd love for you to respond in writing on the transcription and/or a separate page. Please bring this copy and your comments with you to the focus group interview. At that time, we can further address any areas you'd like to elaborate on or additional questions I may have. The second clean copy is for you to hold on to—an interesting keepsake.

Finally, as individuals we don't usually read transcriptions of what we've said. And though it can be very interesting, our voices sometime sound different in writing. It's important not to be too concerned with the grammar or specific style of a presentation, as I will edit these in its final form. What I am specifically interested in is the big picture; my research has to do with history and the participation of females in the 1968 East L.A. blowouts. One of the best ways to learn about this topic is through the oral histories of participants. Thanks again for allowing me to learn history from you in this manner.

I look forward to seeing you back in East L.A. on February 17th with the other women I've interviewed. If you have any questions feel free to give me a call.

Abrazos,

### APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Women of the Blowouts:

Well the date of our group interview is drawing near and I wanted to send you this update. On Saturday, February 17th, we will hold our event in East Los Angeles' Self-Help Graphics from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. Tomás Benitez, assistant director of Self-Help (and Mita Cuaron's husband) was able to secure space for us in the art gallery. The art gallery will be particularly special given the beautiful exhibit, *La Vida Indigena*, and the fact that the interview will be filmed.

The following seven women have confirmed their attendance and will make up our interview group: Celeste Baca, Paula Crisostomo, Mita Cuaron, Rosalinda Méndez González, Tanya Luna Mount, Rachael Ochoa Cervera, and Cassandra Zacarias. With such an interesting strong group of women (none of whom were at a loss for words during the individual interviews), I thought it might be a good idea to spend the first 30 minutes socializing and catching up! Some light refreshments will be provided.

The agenda for the actual group interview will follow a semi-structured format. That is, based on your responses in the individual interviews, I will identify a few topics I would like to ask the group to respond to. In addition, I would also like each of you to bring up any blowout-related issues or events that are particularly interesting to you. What makes this different than your individual interviews is the new information, differing viewpoints, and recurring issues that are generated from the group interaction. I'm not as interested in reconstructing the "Truth" of what happened as I am interested in your individual experiences and their similarities and differences.

A small volunteer camera crew led by Xochitl González (Rosalinda's Méndez González's daughter) and Alfredo Heredia (a cousin of Sal Castro's) will be filming the interview. I'm asking that each of you bring any photos, artifacts, or newspaper articles that you may have related to the blowouts. For example, Tanya found a blowout button; Mita has some photos and her mosaic art piece; and Celeste has the 1968 Lincoln Yearbook. If anyone has the picture of Bobby Kennedy with some of the blowout students, I'd really appreciate you digging it up and sharing it with the group. We will have a table set up so that we can actually document on film the items you bring. Finally, most of you have had a chance to review the transcript of your individual interview. Please bring the transcript copy and any additional responses or comments you might have written down.

I look forward to seeing each of you at 4:00 on Saturday, February 17. (Feel free to come early and enjoy the art exhibit.) I have enclosed the address and directions to Self-Help Graphics. If you have any questions feel free to give me a call or an email if you're connected to cyberlandia.

Abrazos,